



Fearless (The Willowdale Village Collection #2)

Author: *M. Sinclair*

Category: Fantasy

Description: I'd made a promise to live my life without fear.

When my parents passed, leaving my siblings and I completely alone in the world, I was broken—thrown down a path of reckless decisions. Seven years later, I was finally gaining solid ground. The bold attitude I'd held for most of my life had been shaken but not shattered.

Except when it came to matters of the heart.

As my mating heat approaches, I'm faced with the daunting task of finding a mate—of choosing one out of the four men that have stolen my heart. Can I even let someone grow close enough to form a mating bond? More so, what if I can't choose between them? My heart tells me that all four of these men belong to me.

Can I be fearless enough to take hold of the happiness right within reach?

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CHAPTER 1

LENA GRAVES

“ I have bad news, Ms. Walters.” The elderly witch straightened up at my serious tone. She was particularly dressed up today, her slim frame outfitted in a dark coat and boots to keep away the spring chill, her hair perfectly curled and her makeup bright and cheery.

“ No , don’t say that.” She scowled, her dark brows pinching together in despair. “I know you have at least one slice of it back there, Lena.”

My eyes went round as I shook my head. It was the only way I’d be able to get away with this.

“I don’t,” I said with a sad sigh, then placed an entire cake box on the counter with a flourish. “ I have an entire cake! The bad news is that you’re going to have to find someone to share it with.”

Ms. Walters barked out a laugh and shook her head. “That nearly ruined my Thursday,” she chided, handing me cash as she took the carrot cake under her arm. The bright teal bow against her dark jacket made me smile. After all, it was my favorite color. “I have the perfect person to share it with. He’s coming over tonight.”

“You don’t say.” I leaned forward on the counter, crossing my arms. “I may have heard that Mr. Adams and you were seeing one another, so I may have put a cookie or two inside the bag as well.”

I had actually included ten cinnamon sugar cookies—Mr. Adams’s favorite—so the two of them were all set for their little date.

“You’re the best,” she responded with a bright smile. “Make sure to close up early today and give yourself a rest; I can feel a storm brewing!”

My nose twitched as she let herself out the door, the scent of ozone thick in the air. Even if I didn’t have the nose I did, I would trust her—witches knew their weather.

“Will do! Have fun on your date!” I called out as the chimes on the door rang, signaling the door closing. With a happy sigh, I put the cash in the register and began to tidy up my shop.

Grabbing a sticky note, I jotted down a reminder to make more carrot cake next week. I wouldn’t have time for another large baking session again until Sunday, but I was already out of half of my inventory. It was really cool that my bakery was successful, but no one prepared you for the amount of time it took to create on such a large scale.

Still, the thought gave me a small thrill. My bakery—Bunny Bites.

I didn’t foresee a time when that wouldn’t be exciting to think about. I may have only been open since Christmas, but the holidays had pushed me into the green—no small task following the investment in the building and the baking supplies. I’d been able to repay my brothers in full—something I was beyond proud of. It had felt nearly as amazing as having something I could call my own. As the youngest of four, that was a rare feeling.

Humming under my breath, I moved around the front of the shop, tidying up the cushions on the two couches and wiping down the coffee tables. Then, after a quick sweep—I’d already cleaned the kitchen when I’d finished baking this morning—I

grabbed the last slice of carrot cake I had left for the day, deciding it would be the perfect late lunch. You would think that since I was surrounded by food all the time I would never be hungry, but with how busy the shop could be, I often forgot to eat.

I'd never forget a piece of carrot cake, though. My shifted side—a bright teal rabbit—would absolutely never let me forgo something so important.

Right as I took the first bite of cake, the bell above the door tinkled, signaling I had a customer. With a happy sigh, I put down my fork and walked to the front, where I found a familiar face.

“Carol!” I said brightly, “I didn’t expect to see you today.” She’d come just yesterday and had walked out with several packages. I knew she was hosting extended family this weekend, so maybe it had to do with that...or her relatives had just eaten everything already. It was totally possible; they were a family of wolf shifters, after all.

“I wish I could blame the bump,” she teased, rubbing her round belly, “but I actually have a request from the eldest this time.”

“Really? That’s big.” I straightened up fully. Carol’s eldest daughter, who was around thirteen, had become notorious for being disagreeable to everything and anything her parents suggested. Even when it was something that would be good for her!

“After dinner yesterday, we finished off the blueberry muffins and she asked if I could get more. I hadn’t even realized she’d had one.” She shrugged. “She never asks for anything, so I figured I’d stop by to grab more.”

“I made two dozen fresh this morning, so you’re in luck,” I said, walking to the refrigerated display and opening a box. Offering her a curious look, I asked, “Do you

want anything?”

She flashed a knowing smile. “Maybe make one of them a pumpkin muffin.”

“Coming right up.” I packaged the six muffins and then slid them across the counter to her. As she reached for her purse, I shook my head.

“Nope. You’re in here every single day; you aren’t paying for them today.”

“I appreciate it, Lena. Seriously,” she offered sweetly. I liked most people in this town, but Carol had become a true friend over the past few months. Still, I couldn’t help but feel like there was a slight distance between us—probably because our lives were so different.

I was still very single, filling my days with baking and living in an apartment above my self-owned business. I loved my life, but it could admittedly be lonely sometimes. Carol, on the other hand, had an idyllic life. She wore a huge diamond ring on her hand, a symbol of her marriage to her high school sweetheart and mate, and had three kids. Four, in only a few months’ time. Her life was a perfect storybook tale, and I found myself a bit sad that I’d yet to find my happily-ever-after when it felt like everyone in this town did.

I placed blame for those feelings squarely on my bunny. Our annual mating heat was coming up, so it was all baby fever and romance, all the time. It could be difficult to handle, as I didn’t exactly have anyone to share that urge with.

My bunny, though, had strong ideas of who she wanted to share it with...

“Hey—” Carol turned from where she was walking out the door. “Heads up, Sheriff Liam and Officer Ari just pulled up. Looks like they aren’t getting out, but...”

“I got them.” I offered her a smile of gratitude as she hurried out the door, rain coming down in big heavy droplets. I smiled at that and grabbed my jacket, checking my appearance in the mirror. My gold eyes looked bright today, reflective of the amount of sleep I managed to get last night, and my teal hair was a bit messy but looked good enough—especially once I pulled a knit hat over it.

I suppose I didn’t have to go out there to see them...but it would be the first time in a while that I’d chosen to actively ignore them. Walking up to the door, I eyed the patrol car a few spaces down from the front of my shop and let out a grumble of annoyance, unable to help myself from grabbing a bag of pre-packaged cookies that sat on a table near the door.

Not that Liam deserved any of my cookies. Maybe Ari, but that was as far as I would go.

Stepping out into the rain, I opened my umbrella and made my way to the patrol car in question, the window almost immediately rolling down. My chest squeezed tight with overwhelming emotion, from desire to vulnerability, and my cheeks heated at Liam’s intense gaze.

I swear, the man was always looking at me like he wanted to...I actually didn’t have a word for it. I did know what it did to my body, though, and why I stayed far away from the broody, and insanely protective wolf shifter.

Liam was the sheriff of our cozy town, and he looked absolutely perfect in his uniform. His 6’4” golden, lean-cut muscular frame was always dressed perfectly to code—not a button out of place. His rich brown hair was cut short on the sides, but it didn’t hide the few streaks of silver I saw there, making him look older than twenty-six in the best way possible. I steeled myself for our interaction, knowing that despite our arguing I always ended up annoyingly turned on. It was unfair that he had such an effect on me.

Especially since the way I'd met him had been less than ideal.

I had been going through a rough phase following my parents' passing and throughout most of high school. I'd just turned eighteen during my senior year when he came into town, having been assigned here temporarily out of the larger station in Galena, our neighboring town.

When a party I was at got busted, I was thrown in the back of his patrol car and brought home to my brothers, where I had to listen to the lecture of a lifetime. In the two years since then, despite being on my very best behavior, Liam hadn't left me alone. I had a feeling he was waiting for me to mess up again.

"Liam," I said loudly to be heard over the pattering of the rain and the rumbling sky above. "Do I need to file for a restraining order?"

His gaze sparked with amusement as he looked down at me, the window of the car hitting higher than where I stood around 5'2"—if that. I knew he needed a big car because he was ridiculously tall, but I still didn't like feeling so freakin' short. "I mean, you could, but I wouldn't be inclined to process the request."

"Because you're a stalker," I teased, stepping up onto the running board and looking past him toward Ari. "Hey, you."

A deep rumble left Liam's chest, and I tried to resist the smile that pulled on my lips. Ari's bright, grass-green eyes sparkled with the same level of amusement and affection I had seen for years—ever since he transferred into our school district freshman year. Now, over six years later, the man was as familiar to me as any family.

Although the feelings I had for him were not familial at all...

“Baby girl, you look well rested,” he said, taking off his cap and running a hand through his strawberry blonde hair before flashing me a smile. “Although, I only know that for sure because I was on patrol last night.”

“And because of that you were watching my apartment to see if lights were on.” I scowled at him and returned my attention to Liam, who was way closer than I expected. “This is what I mean! Both of you are horrible. I don’t even know why I’m giving you these.” I tossed the cookies in the center console, shaking my head. “I mean, seriously—what do you expect to happen? Willowdale has nearly zero crime.”

“Nearly,” Liam rumbled as I rolled my eyes. “Careful, Graves,” he warned, making me smile. I loved when he got all serious and used my last name.

Offering him a cute smirk, I shrugged and slipped down off the SUV’s running board. “If you want to waste your time watching me, you’re more than welcome to!”

My tone was facetious, but I truly didn’t mind. I would never admit to it, but it left me feeling safer than I cared to admit.

Ari had been watching out for me ever since we met in school—and I watched out for him. Or tried to. I was less intimidating than a 6’2” wolf shifter and swimming god, but I managed to keep away all the women that clearly had bad intentions...or just recognized what an amazing man he was. I mean, he was far too nice for his own good! He was emotional, open, loyal, and a total sweetheart. So I obviously had to protect him.

Feeling their eyes on my back, I returned to my bakery and put away the umbrella before shrugging off my jacket. With the weather this bad, there wouldn’t be any customers in the next two hours before closing, so I went ahead and flipped the sign to ‘closed’ and decided to take a look at my books for the week so far. That way I wouldn’t be left with a ton to do the next morning.

Sorting through everything I needed and making a neat pile on top of my laptop, I paused as I caught sight of the picture of my family—my parents and my three brothers—that sat on my desk.

When I was only thirteen and Hunter, my oldest brother, was nineteen, we had lost both my mother and father to a human hate group—HAF. Humans Against Freaks.

Our parents had traveled through a neighboring state to meet another Alpha and Luna, hoping to negotiate a safe haven pact—one that Hunter, as current alpha, honored to this day. At the time, with the supernatural community only having made themselves known three years prior, there were very few safe places for people like me. Mostly because of groups like HAF that had been formed with the sole objective to slaughter any supernatural creature they came across.

Nearly a decade later we were in a far better place as a country, but my parents—and many others—had suffered in the process.

Now, I only had Hunter, Dylan, and Luca. They were extremely supportive and caring, reminding me a lot of my dad. For the longest time I hadn't had such a reminder of my mom, something that had sent me into a spiral of partying and drinking through the second half of high school. Despite that, my brothers had stayed encouraging and understanding, and when I had lost all of my other friends, Ari had stayed by my side.

That was why this bakery was so important to me. Baking was the one thing I could remember doing with my mom every single weekend. It was why I had named the store Bunny Bites, in honor of both her and I being rabbit shifters. It was even why I had chosen the brand colors to be teal and sunshine yellow, like her hair.

I missed her so incredibly much, but I also knew that if she was looking down on me from the other side of eternity, she would be proud of what I'd built here.

Positioning myself on the couch near the window, I got to work on my books—and if it happened to give Ari and Liam a perfect view to watch me...well, that was completely unintentional.

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CHAPTER 2

LENA GRAVES

Lacing up my gym shoes, I eyed the few drops of rain that still splattered against my bedroom window. The dark gray skies had lightened up just slightly, and if I was going to manage to go on a run, now was the time. The radar predicted storms for most of the night.

Tugging on a hoodie over my shirt, I looked at the place on the street where the patrol car had parked earlier in the day. My lips nearly dipped into a frown at its absence—something that was ridiculous to feel disappointed over because it obviously meant they were doing their job and were busy.

Turning on the lamp next to my bedside, I looked around my simple room. The king size bed took up the majority of the space, a white wood frame with painted wildflowers, and the pale green walls matched the bedding. I'd known when I moved out of the pack house that I'd be losing a lot of luxuries, but I found I didn't mind in the least. There was something about the simplistic nature of my apartment that was very calming.

I even had a guest bedroom, connected to mine with a jack-and-jill bathroom, that Ari sometimes crashed in if we were having a late night movie marathon.

Although, not only him...

Shaking myself from that thought, I walked down the hallway to the open-concept

living room and kitchen. My kitchen was quaint and small with yellow cabinets, making my bright blue appliances stand out on the counter. Checking the crockpot I had turned on earlier in the day, I was happy to see the pot roast was nearly ready, the smell invading the entire house. I would have to make this run quick because as it was, I would much rather be curled up eating warm food and watching a good show tonight. At the same time, I also wouldn't admit to hoping I would run into someone...or two someones.

Two men that I always ran into when I was planning to shift. I swear, they must have a tracker on me or something. Honestly though, that wouldn't surprise me coming from Macon or Connery. Trying to squash the excitement of that thought, I locked my apartment and jogged down the stairs that led to the back parking lot of my building. I could have shifted right there, but there was a certain wildflower clearing that my rabbit and I particularly liked.

Breaking into a steady jog, I turned the corner from the parking lot and looked around the roundabout that made up the center of Willowdale Village. Outside of the bus station and train station, there weren't many vehicles in our town. Most chose to walk rather than use a car, taking advantage of the refreshing breeze that ran through our cozy, mountain-nestled village.

We didn't have many visitors in Willowdale Village, being the last town on the train line, and many of the humans stayed in Galena—a town only a short drive away with a population that was almost entirely non-supernatural. The only exception was during ski season, when many humans found their way to the local bed and breakfast.

“Evening, Lena!” Marie, the owner of the local coffee shop, waved as she closed her patio umbrellas.

The center of town was shared by Bunny Bites, Cozy Spell Coffee Shop, Willowdale Village Town Hall, District 9 Fire Department, Second Willow Bank, and Lunar Bed

and Breakfast. Other businesses, like my brother Luca's legal office and the Willowdale Diner, were on the surrounding streets, alongside cozy homes inhabited by village residents. I knew this place like the back of my hand, and I knew I would never move—there was just no way I would find a place as perfect and quaint.

“Stay safe tonight; hopefully the weather won't turn bad!” I called out to the friendly green witch, her excited smile telling me that she was feeding off the energy in the air. I didn't fully understand the dynamic of different types of witches, but I knew that most were very in tune with nature.

As I continued my jog, my rabbit grew more and more eager to shift, the energy running under my skin filled with excitement. I shifted fairly often, but one of the most recent times—not on my own—had been with Ari. His massive blond wolf had towered over me and entertained my rabbit's insanity, which included climbing and hopping over him while he laid in the grass. Honestly, it was more than a bit embarrassing. He never seemed to mind, though. In fact, he asked to shift with me often. It was flattering.

Suddenly, my smart watch buzzed. I looked down to see that Dylan, my brother closest in age to me, was calling me. Throwing it on speaker, I picked up the call.

“Hey!” I chirped. “I'm on a run—what's up?”

“I'm not even surprised you're out jogging in this weather. Are you going to shift?”

“Have to. The weather has been so hit or miss lately,” I pointed out. “What are you up to?”

“I actually wanted to see if you could bake something for me to bring to a meeting tomorrow. I have to go into the city to meet with a few Alphas; figured I could bring something nice.” He sighed as if he was disappointed in himself, and I almost

laughed. Dylan was not one for politics, but he was better at it than Hunter and for sure better than Luca.

“Sure!” I agreed, happy to fit in a small bake for him. “Anything specific?”

“Do something moon shaped.” His amusement was clear in his chuckle. “Everyone there will be wolf shifters.” What a freakin’ dork. At the same time, people would probably love that.

“Got it! Come by and grab the cookies before you leave tomorrow,” I said before hanging up with a quick goodbye, stepping onto the forest path that led to my clearing.

There was a potential I’d run into other shifters, but most of them lived in the pack lands to the west of Willowdale, which were in the opposite direction. I didn’t know how it was everywhere else, but Willowdale had always been very inclusive in its shifter dynamic. Probably because their Luna for so long had been a bright yellow rabbit, of all things, instead of a wolf.

We even had a rare unicorn shifter as our seer... it was sort of crazy.

Needless to say, shifters of every type were welcome to join our pack and live on the pack lands. Even if they chose to live within the village proper, like myself, they were still part of the pack.

I was sure that Hunter would even let non-shifters join if they wanted, considering Willowdale had a sizable witch population. But they had their own coven lands to the north, so it wasn’t necessary. The coven lands were actually one of my favorite places to visit, especially when they were holding festivals or rituals.

Around five minutes later when I finally reached the wildflower-filled clearing, I let

out a small, happy sigh—stretching my hands above my head as my muscles twitched. I wouldn't deny that I had been avoiding shifting as often recently...mostly because I didn't want to set off my mating heat.

Something that happened every single year following your eighteenth birthday.

In years past, I had been able to mostly ignore it because while it turned me on like crazy, if I didn't feed that side of myself—either by spending too much time in my shifted form or having sex a ton—then it stayed relatively mild. While I knew some shifters were blinded by their mating heat, rabbits had it happen annually so it wasn't as intense, luckily.

The only time it became a problem was if your rabbit decided that she had found your mate...or mate s in my case. Which meant that there would be no ignoring my heat this year.

For about two weeks now, my skin had felt tight and hot, as if my body were ramping up without my permission. My rabbit side was so extremely hyped up that it felt difficult to breathe sometimes, let alone focus. It didn't help that no matter where I went, there seemed to be at least one, if not several, super attractive shifters trying to distract me with their good looks and rough voices. Wholly unfair in my mind.

Letting out a groan, I allowed the shift to come over me all at once. Because I'd practiced so often, I didn't have to worry about losing my clothes in the process.

In a pop of air, I transformed into a much smaller, fluffier version of myself, bright teal fur catching my gaze as I moved my paw through the grass at my feet. The wildflowers stood tall around me and I immediately began to hop around, my rabbit taking over fully—probably so she could eat far too much grass and wildflowers. The thick trees of the surrounding forest provided shelter, and while I could hear everything around me, I was mostly able to zone out.

I thought I heard the distant sound of wings moving through the air, but when I looked up, the sky was empty. Still, I hopped toward the edge of the clearing and near the trees, just in case I needed to run. My ears perked up as I looked skyward once more, but when I didn't hear anything, not even the sound of landing in the distance, I continued to graze?—

The thud of a heavy muscular body landing next to mine had me letting out a screech of surprise as I fully shifted back into my human form and fell backwards—narrowly being caught by a hand that cradled the back of my head.

Instantly, the scent of a warm, smokey bonfire filled the space around me. Damnit.

“Connery,” I growled in frustration, hitting his bare chest. “How the hell did you do that?!” Seriously, I not only hadn't heard the dragon shifter land, but then also hadn't heard him shift back or walk into the clearing?! In my rabbit form?! That was insane . Every time he or his brother made an appearance, they would find new ways to surprise me.

The devilish man dipped his head and nipped my neck, instantly causing a hiss to leave my lips as my magic surged over my skin in response. He wedged his large frame right between my thighs, his chuckle vibrating through my entire body. The bite to my skin had my nipples tightening painfully and my face flushing. I felt completely trapped against the ground, and I had to admit that his ability to hold me hostage like this—like I was actual prey to him—was so damn hot.

Somehow, whenever we shifted, he found me and we ended up here.

I was really struggling to find issue with it when it felt so right.

“Get off me,” I growled as I looked up at him. His intense navy gaze was glittering with heat, his dragon extremely present. The low rumble that left his chest didn't

match the humor that seemed to be coming off of him. I seriously had no idea what to make of the man half the time.

He was confident, demanding, so hot—and really, really touchy. His almost luminescent skin was contrasted by his black shoulder-length hair, so dark it had a blue undertone to it, highlighting the silver piercing through his left eyebrow. My skin prickled with awareness of how much he seemed to enjoy the position we were in.

“You want me to get off on you, gorgeous?” he asked, leaning down and nipping my lip. The whimper that left me was completely unavoidable. I knew it wasn’t a kiss, but my heart completely disagreed—and that was the problem with Connery. His teasing, his intensity, had heartbreak written all over it. I had no idea why he watched me the way he did or why at twenty-two he and his brother decided to join the police force and make this place home. I mean seriously, he was as different from Liam as humanly—or dragonly—possible.

“I’m serious,” I whispered as he ran his fingers up my waist, pressing down on me further.

“I don’t believe you,” he growled softly. “I think you love me on top of you.”

The issue was that he wasn’t wrong—at all. The physical pull he had on me was insane...but that was my problem. He wasn’t the only one I felt that with.

“That’s not the point.” I inhaled sharply as his lips trailed down my jaw and neck, my hips rolling against him as he let out a deep primal sound that vibrated against me. Unfortunately, my normal defenses were far from up since he’d caught me post-shift, and I could feel how wet I was becoming, my skin breaking into pleasurable chills.

“It is, though,” he said. “I’m tired of you denying this shit between us.”

“Not denying it,” I whimpered. I couldn’t deny my attraction to him or his brother like I could with Liam and Ari, because they never let me get physically far enough away to do so—but I could keep them at a distance emotionally. I knew that if I didn’t, I would be the one who ended up with a broken heart.

“You just don’t want to give me anything then,” he mused, bringing his head back up to brush my lips. I hissed at the feeling of his length sliding against my heated center. “Why are you holding back?”

“Because this is casual to you. It isn’t to me,” I said, unable to help myself.

The humor dropped from his face. “I’ve never been so serious about anything in my entire life, gorgeous.”

“Connery,” I whispered as this time he pressed a deep kiss to my lips, causing a surprised noise to leave my throat. Instantly, my legs came up and wrapped around him, and his hand slid up to my waist, tightening in an almost bruising way.

My body was so insanely keyed up that I was close to climaxing from kissing alone. The hold this man wielded on my body was far too intense, far too much?—

When he bit down on my bottom lip and tugged, I slipped my hands into his hair as liquid heat flooded between my thighs. I knew he could scent my desire because the growl that left his lips was absolutely primal as his hands moved from the back of my head, pushing up my hoodie and shirt to reveal my sports bra. When he suddenly disappeared, moving down my body, I whimpered from the loss of contact.

My eyes closed as I allowed myself to give into the moment. Connery tugged down the front of my sports bra, freeing one of my breasts. The cool air made my skin prickle, but that was instantly replaced by his hot mouth against my nipple, his teeth toying with it as another pair of lips sealed to my mouth in a possessive, deep kiss.

My eyes snapped open at the new sensation right as Connery's teasing brought me to an orgasm that rolled over me like a heavy wave. His brother's lips sealed to mine, desire saturated every nerve ending and my limbs felt heavy as pleasure pulsed through me, causing me to let out a moan. Holy hell.

"There we go," Macon whispered against my lips. I felt relief not only from the pleasure they had brought me but from his words. Before this there had been only teasing touches, not even kisses...nothing nearly as serious. Yet as I stared into Macon's crimson gaze, all I could see was 'serious'—which was something the man never fucking did.

When Connery fixed my bra, I melted into the ground, staring at both of them in true surprise. "What...what just happened?"

"You know exactly what happened." Macon pressed another kiss to my lips, and I nearly shuddered at the scent of vanilla that surrounded me.

"She's about to freak out," Connery warned, a lightly veiled hurt in his gaze even as he intertwined our fingers.

"And try to run," Macon agreed, running his hands through my hair. I saw a feral glint in his gaze. "Could just chase her. Hunt her down, make her realize how much she needs us."

"Macon," I whispered. Despite his careless grin, I knew the man was beyond serious—Macon was actually a bit feral and psychotic. I mean...I liked it, but it could be overwhelming.

His black hair with bright red tips was cut shorter on top than usual, making me want to run my hands through it—but I resisted. His chest was bare like his brother's, but he was covered in dark tattoos that seemed to swirl under my gaze. My eyes ate up

his muscular torso, both of them were so insanely cut it was almost unreal.

“Yes, bunny?” he teased.

I inhaled sharply. “I need both of you to let me up.”

Connery muttered a curse and sat back, but Macon didn’t move, his eyes running over my face. “We can tell you’re still in pain, that you still need us. Why do you insist on suffering?”

Rolling over and pushing back, I tried to shake myself as I let out a breath. Stumbling to standing, I whispered words that were far too vulnerable. “Because I would rather suffer like this than in other ways.”

Not giving them a chance to ask me to clarify, I turned and high tailed it out of there. I was terrified of the four men that made me feel so much, so intensely, because there was one thing I feared more than physical suffering, and that was heartbreak.

I couldn’t, I wouldn’t, choose between them, and I couldn’t expect them to share—not all four of them.

I was supposed to be fearless, but the emotions I felt for these men made me feel anything but.

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CHAPTER 3

LIAM CLARKE

“Morning,” I called out in greeting. It was Friday morning, so the department was quieter than it was most days. Most of our admin staff were resting before the chaos of the weekend ensued, but I was unsurprised to see Ari and Connery at the office.

“Did you happen to do a drive by?” Ari asked in lieu of greeting, “Macon hasn’t texted Connery back. I was wondering if maybe he stopped in to talk to Lena.”

I shook my head, not because I hadn’t done a drive by, but because I hadn’t seen any sign of Macon. And considering I’d sat in front of Lena’s apartment for a few hours before coming in, I would have known if anyone had gone in or out of there. “Not that I saw.”

“Yeah, that shit isn’t good.” Connery sighed, standing up. “Sorry, guys, but I’m going to need to spend the morning looking for the bastard. I think he might have hurt feelings.”

“Why?” I was notoriously short and rude with people, but not usually with the three of them. Still, I found myself wracking my brain for anything I could have said—

“Because both of us kissed Lena yesterday and made her come. Then she ran back home, acting like it was a huge mistake.”

My thoughts came to a hard stop.

I had no right to be jealous. I knew the score and had even agreed that the four of us would have to share Lena's affection eventually. Hell, I considered Ari, Connery, and Macon as part of my own pack...but the idea of two other men touching my potential mate made me see fucking red.

Especially before I had marked her, before I had gotten to kiss those plush lips?—

“Liam.” Ari's voice snapped me out of it, and I realized my wolf had been producing a loud rumble that I couldn't even bother disguising.

“Sorry,” I said, directing the apology mostly at Connery. He'd been watching me with unhinged amusement, but his worry for his brother was obvious. “When did this happen?”

“Last night when she was shifted in the clearing. Everything was fine until she started overthinking shit. Probably didn't help that we pushed her on why she was denying what she obviously felt and needed.”

“She seemed off even when we talked to her yesterday,” Ari said as I ran a hand through my hair. With a long sigh, I leaned against a nearby desk and tried to calm my wolf, who was still raging in my head, wanting to go prove to Lena that we were a good potential mating option. That we could make her feel as amazing as they had.

“She did seem jittery,” I agreed. “I think her mating heat is about to hit.”

“Shit,” Ari murmured.

Shit was right because unless Lena accepted the very real truth in front of her, it was going to be painful and frustrating as fuck. Dragons could choose their mates, though they felt an instinctive pull toward certain individuals, but wolves had fated mates—all things that I knew Lena was well aware of. We had been confused when

she hadn't recognized the bond when it had been just Ari and myself. I'd been hurt then, but our girl was a bit flighty when it came to bringing people into her circle, afraid to lose them like her parents, so I hadn't pushed it.

Everything had changed when the Demir brothers arrived into town, though. Now we could all actively feel her magic reaching out to us, having recognized the four of us as mates.

This was the first year since she turned eighteen that all of us were here, the brothers only having arrived last summer. Her last heat had passed in a whisper, but this time I could feel it building and my instincts were telling me we needed to be as close to our fated mate as possible. Which was probably why we'd turned into certifiable stalkers, as she had pointed out.

"That's going to complicate things," Connery grunted. "She won't accept our relationship, let alone what a mating heat with us would bring." Something I couldn't entertain mentally for too long or else I would find her and pin her down, taking her like a legit animal.

"You go find your brother," I told Connery. "Ari, let's go scope Lena's place out again and make sure she's okay." Bunny Bites would be opening soon anyway.

"Sounds good," Ari agreed, throwing on his jacket as we left the building and stepped back into the cold spring weather.

The comfortable silence between the two of us was unsurprising as we made our way to my patrol car. I had met Ari the same night I'd met Lena and known him for over two years.

"I'm in the car," I told the piece of perfection in front of me. It was one of my first nights on call, and the last thing I wanted to be doing was busting some senior year

high school party.

Although my wolf was in full disagreement as I stared at the woman in front of me. Graves. That last name sounded so damn familiar... fuck . Hunter Graves. The alpha of the local wolf pack, a pack that I had been considering joining...and that meant that this had to be his little sister?

“No,” she growled, tossing her teal hair over her delicate shoulder. Despite the cool spring weather, she was dressed in only a shirt and jean shorts, and an oversized jacket that was distinctly male was wrapped around her. Something I found that I fucking hated.

“You’re going to end up with handcuffs on if you don’t,” I warned, loving the image of that far too much. “You’re getting delivered back to the pack lands one way or another. Easy way or hard way.”

Her gold eyes lit with challenge. “Hard way.”

A rumble left my throat because I would show her the fucking hard way ? —

“She doesn’t mean that.” A kid her age appeared next to her, wrapping his arm around her small waist. I glared at the contact but managed to restrain myself from saying anything.

“I do, Ari. I really do.”

“No you don’t,” Ari argued. “Get in the car, Lena.”

She rolled her eyes but didn’t argue, slamming the door as she sat in the passenger seat. I shook my head as she began to play with the lights on the top of the car, causing the kids around the front yard to startle. It wasn’t like they didn’t know we

were here—there were two other cop cars besides my own.

“Don’t give her too much of a hard time,” Ari said, a respectful request. “She’s dealing with some shit.”

Normally I would’ve ignored him, but instead I asked a question that was bothering me. “That your mate?”

Considering they were both shifters—although I wasn’t sure what kind she was yet—it wouldn’t be that shocking. Though I would be fucking furious since I was positive she was meant for me.

Ari chuckled sadly. “Just keeping her safe until she snaps out of this.”

That had been the beginning of...everything. The start of my friendship with Ari. Both of us shared an interest in Lena’s safety, and he’d decided to join the police force to help me in my mission to keep this town safe. Considering the previous two cops in our small town had retired, it was much needed help.

It had also been the start of my obsession with Lena, my beautiful teal bunny.

Although it wasn’t until the Demir brothers arrived that we’d been forced to deal with the reality that we all wanted Lena as our mate and she didn’t seem interested in choosing—at all.

That wasn’t the problem, though. Despite my wolf being pissy, I would be fucking fine with sharing her in the long run. The problem was that Lena, understandably so, was still messed up over her parents’ death, so she wasn’t willing to let many people in. At least not as much or as close as I wanted.

I wanted to assure her that I would do everything in my power to ensure we would

never lose one another and that the risk was worth it because of what I knew we felt for each other, but getting our woman to have a conversation about that was damn near impossible. So while we were waiting on her to choose us, we were stuck in a bind, not wanting to push shit. Although my patience was growing thin on that front.

“Opening late,” Ari mentioned as we pulled up across the street, the town center quiet and filled with morning mountain fog.

I nodded, eyeing our girl as she opened the curtains and turned on the lights before unlocking the door. One of the first things I’d done upon her opening was secure every single door and window in her business and the apartment above. I’d also installed a security system. One that may have stopped me from breaking into her place at night to check on her—so I wasn’t positive how I felt about that.

“She looks exhausted,” I said, looking over her golden complexion and heavy eyes. I could see her coffee cup resting on the register as she let out a yawn, not even noticing us across the street.

“Were you serious about the mating heat thing?” Ari asked.

“Haven’t you felt it each year?”

“Yeah, but I’ve done my best to ignore it. Didn’t want my wolf to get excited over shit that wasn’t going to happen,” he admitted before chuckling. “Shouldn’t surprise me you have it marked on your fucking calendar.” I scowled and flipped him off but didn’t deny it. Maybe I had a mental calendar, but I had everything about our woman memorized.

“I don’t completely understand it. Her rabbit has clearly chosen the four of us, but she hasn’t recognized it—or for some reason thinks it’s not going to work out and is trying to deny it, but the actual mating heat will be way worse now that the four of us

are with her almost every day.”

“Doesn’t help that Connery and Macon seem to be purposefully trying to set it off,” Ari grunted.

I thought about that for a moment. “Maybe they’re onto something. Maybe we aren’t being obvious enough.”

“Besides stalking her,” Ari mused. “But you’re right, maybe we should make the first move.”

“You think?” I asked curiously.

“Yeah— shit, I didn’t think you meant now.” Ari chuckled as I opened up the car door, but right at that moment my phone rang. Seeing that it was Connery, I tossed Ari the phone.

“See what’s up and tell them to clear their plans tonight. I’m making dinner plans with her for the four of us. I’ll tell her we will pick her up around six.” I closed the door behind me, hoping that worked for everyone.

As I made my way across the street, I noticed the wind was cooler today, almost biting. As I walked into the bright teal and yellow bakery, I was immediately surrounded by warmth and the scent of fresh baked bread.

“Morning—oh, Liam!” Her eyes went round in surprise, setting down her coffee mug as it nearly spilled over the edge.

“Good morning,” I said, walking up to the counter and putting my hands on it, looking down at her as her perfect scent filled my nose. The way she always stared up at me with a bit of defiance turned me on way too much. Shit. Maybe I wasn’t the

right person to ask her to do dinner with us, especially since we seemed to love going back and forth with one another.

“Are you here to pick something up?” she asked, her gaze running over me briefly as a pink blush stained her cheeks. I took a lot of pride in how she looked over me, and I had to stop myself from reaching over and grabbing her jaw so I could place a firm kiss to her pink lips.

“Not right now. But tonight, yes,” I said. “Dinner tonight, at six. The five of us are having a talk.”

Lena’s eyes grew impossibly larger, and she sucked in her plump bottom lip before releasing it. “The five ...of us?”

“That’s right. You, me, Ari, Connery, and Macon.”

“What...what do we need to talk about?” Her eyes flashed with a teal ring around her dilated pupil, making me know that her rabbit was right there, listening to my every word.

Giving into instinct, I reached forward and grasped her jaw, dipping my head so I could brush her nose in a way that had her letting out a small sound from her throat. “Us. We need to talk about us .” Before I carried her ass upstairs, I let go of her chin and stepped back, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

“I would love that—really.” Her words were soft, vulnerable and filled with hope.

“I’ll pick you up at six.” I repeated the details and walked toward the door. “Have a good day, Graves.”

Her amused laugh at my use of her last name had me smiling in return as I left her

bakery. She had done an amazing job with this damn place, and I was beyond proud of her. Which was probably why I always bought a weekly supply of shit for the police station. One day I seriously hoped that she'd be baking at home in our kitchen as well. But until then...

"How did it go?" Ari asked hopefully as I got back into the car.

"Good. Really fucking good."

"Thank the Creator," Ari said. "Connery found Macon. They're in the coven lands, which we need to head over to. He seems fine, but they'll both be better when they hear the news."

The news that Lena was finally giving us a chance. Now, hopefully, we could make her see the truth right before her eyes.

CHAPTER 4

LENA GRAVES

“ U gh!” I complained, laying back in my bed and scowling at the pile of clothes that surrounded me. This was total nonsense.

Had I really closed down Bunny Bites an hour early for this? To lay here in this pile of clothes, confused on what the heck to wear? Yes. Because I had plans tonight; plans that made butterflies explode in my stomach and an excited thrill run up my spine.

Taking a deep breath, I looked over the clothes around me, putting my hands on my hips in frustration. My makeup and hair were done, but when it came to dressing up, everything felt highly average. Either far too ‘cute’ or ‘comfy’. Did I even own any sexy clothes? I eyed the v-neck shirt I was wearing with simple dark jeans and let out a long sigh. Maybe this would have to do.

I felt all out of sorts because last night had been plagued with thoughts about the very men I was about to see, followed by dreams that would probably only ever be dreams—my most desire-fueled imagination. So a restless and frustrating night, followed by a busy day at the bakery after my conversation with Liam, had left me feeling more than a bit off .

Which wasn’t great considering that the conversation I was about to have would be serious, to say the least. Pursing my lips as I sat down on the edge of my mattress, I wished—not for the first time—that I had my mom to talk to. Or a best friend.

After I stopped partying in high school though, I'd lost the people I used to be close to, most of them thinking I thought I was 'better' than them. That had been far from the case. It was more that I had needed a change, tired of waking up every weekend exhausted after long nights trapped with my thoughts. Ari was the only one who had stayed by my side through all of it, and that had been only the beginning of when I had started to feel something stronger for him than friendship.

"S teady, baby girl." Ari's voice was warm against my ear as I shivered, tilting my head up at him. He was trying to get us home from this party, but that was the last thing I wanted.

My brothers thought that I was at Ari's house studying, and his grandma almost never picked up the phone to contradict that message. My head was fuzzy from the few beers I'd had, and I couldn't help but smile at the cute concern on his face.

"You're always taking care of me." I tapped his nose before sighing, suddenly choosing to sit down on the pavement. Ari cursed in surprise, crouching down next to me.

"Of course I am." He frowned. "Although I wouldn't mind a few more relaxed nights in."

My brows dipped as I ran a hand through my hair. "I just...there isn't much to do on the weekends." And if I had nothing to do, it meant I would think about the weekends I used to spend with my family. It didn't help that my brothers were busy all the time keeping the pack running, so I ended up sitting at home by myself for so much of it.

"Lena." Ari's fingers caught my chin as I looked up at him. His eyes were filled with so much concern, and I let out a small noise, wanting to offer him comfort.

"I'm fine, Ari. Just....just tired," I whispered. "Tired of being alone."

“You’re never alone,” Ari promised. “I’ll always be here for you, Lena.”

“But why?” I asked seriously.

“Because you’re my girl.”

At the time I told myself it was nothing, but now I realized my feelings had grown for Ari even through the hurt. And when I turned eighteen, my rabbit had felt an immediate pull to Ari and Liam. So much so that when my mating heat hit I had to damn near hide from them.

And once Connery and Macon showed up? Well, now it was clear my rabbit had decided it was time. I was just so damn hesitant to decide anything—or worse, open myself up to rejection if they weren’t willing to be a part of that type of relationship. One that included us all.

It was why I’d always been so cautious about physicality with Liam and Ari. I had kissed Ari once while drunk, but outside of that I’d never hooked up with anyone. It had always felt like a betrayal of trust, and I’d never felt comfortable approaching either of them.

But the time to make a decision was here, and I knew that this conversation was necessary, even if it made me only more confused on what was going on... Although it was hard to be confused when it came to Connery and Macon. I mean, yesterday had been amazing. My body was still buzzing from the interaction.

Suddenly, the sound of my phone vibrating had me moving off my bed and toward the small end table where I’d placed it. When I saw the time, I realized I only had five minutes until I needed to be ready.

Opening up the notification, my heart instantly tanked, the brand new group chat

popping up with all five of our numbers.

Connery: Got an emergency call in from Galena for both surrounding departments, gorgeous. The riverbank flooded the entire shopping district because of the recent rain.

Ari: When we get back, we'll make it up to you, baby girl. I promise.

Nothing from Liam or Macon, but the message was clear— dinner was cancelled .

My eyes stung. I knew they needed to go help; it was what their jobs demanded of them. But I still felt a surge of disappointment and a bit of rejection. Okay more than a bit. A lot.

Sending off a quick text to tell them to 'be careful,' I muted the volume on my phone so I could ignore it and changed out of my clothes. Moving the pile from my bed to an armchair, I pulled on a pair of leggings and a hoodie before making my way to the living room.

My mood darkened the longer I thought about the cancelled plans. I knew they wouldn't lie about having an emergency, but maybe they'd also decided that dinner wasn't the best idea. Maybe they'd decided there would be too much conflict considering all the mating aspects between their animals. Maybe they'd decided it wasn't worth talking about.

What had I expected from it anyway? For them to decide that being with me was worth having to share me with three other men? Right, Lena.

Honestly, if a simple cancelled date made me feel so down, maybe it was better to not get involved with these men at all. Turning on the television after grabbing a pack of carrot cupcakes I'd made recently, I put on a baking show and pulled a blanket over

me, a sad sigh leaving my lips.

In a way, I was thankful. This taught me that I shouldn't get too emotionally invested in my future with these men.

After several hours of feeling down in the dumps, I forced myself to move around the apartment, tidying up from my hours of binge watching shows and eating junk food.

I had also managed to shut down a few of those pesky emotions that seemed to grow bigger every time one of them texted me to check in. All of which went unanswered because I didn't know what the right thing to say was. I had no right to be upset with them; they were helping with an emergency!

Still, my heart hurt. A lot.

It wasn't until I was almost done cleaning that my phone rang with an unexpected call, causing me to pick up the device. I was glad that I'd unmuted it an hour or so ago.

"Hey—yy!" I said, drawing out my words as Dylan's name flashed on my phone. He was probably on his way back from the Alpha meeting, and I wondered how the cookies went over.

"Lena." I paused at his serious tone. Putting down the bag I'd been going through, I eyed the phone with caution.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing is exactly wrong."

My heart rate slowed slightly, and I went to check on the pot roast that I had going on the stovetop. After eating all those muffins, the idea of normal food was amazing, and I figured it would serve as good leftovers. I had no idea what we would have eaten tonight during our dinner date, but I tried to believe it wouldn't have been better than this.

"I'm on my way home from the city and we're about ten minutes out?"

"We?" I mused, my brows going up. "Are you making random friends on the bus now, Dylan?"

"No." He chuckled. "We as in my mate and me."

My mouth popped open, momentarily shell shocked by his announcement. My brothers had never dated, let alone gone looking for a mate... holy crap . My smile began to grow as a surge of happiness for Dylan radiated through my heart. For all my brothers.

Despite them never dating, I'd been hoping they would find someone soon. Someone to watch after them, especially with how much they worked. Selfishly, I'd also found myself wanting a sister, someone that I could connect with.

"Don't tell the others just yet," he continued in my silence.

"Holy shit!" I squeaked. "This is so exciting! Can I talk to her? What's she like? I had a feeling you three would find your mate soon!"

Sort of. I'd hoped they would, but that still counted.

"Lena." My brother raised his voice slightly, stopping my excitement in its tracks. "For one, she's sleeping right now. Long story short, she's exhausted and seems to

have been traveling for quite a bit. She needs a place to stay. I would bring her to the pack house, but I'm not sure that would be a good idea just yet..."

"Oh shit," I breathed out, becoming more serious. "You are totally right. Those two psychos are way too intense for someone that is fully caffeinated, let alone tired." I thought my brothers were pretty cool, but even I had to admit they veered toward the side of... 'a lot' on most days.

"I don't think she knows a lot about the supernatural community," Dylan said softly, concern heavy in his voice. My brow dipped at the gravity of what he was implying.

"Have her stay at my place, at least for the night," I suggested. "I know you probably won't want to leave, so you can crash on the couch..." My gaze moved over to the pot on the stove, which was bubbling. "Oh! I can make something to eat. Do you think she's hungry?"

"She needs to eat," Dylan stated. Perfect. I hung up the phone and got to work. The pot roast was nearly ready, so all I had to do was prepare a couple of sides.

I had no idea what his mate would be like, but I wanted to make sure she felt welcome. Plus, if we got along, maybe something good would come of tonight. Maybe I would make a new friend.

If only I were able to have such surety when identifying my mate as my brothers did. It had never been shocking, the concept of same-species shifters sharing mates. That was somewhat common, but things became complicated when different species got involved.

Like myself. Rabbits were almost always aligned with their people on who their mates were, but it wasn't fated like wolves, and dragons got to pick who they wanted. When you brought the three of those together—like I wanted to—it got confusing, to

say the least. I still didn't fully understand the dynamic between the four men I was interested in. All I knew was that Connery and Macon were attracted to me and that Liam and Ari both seemed to always be within reach.

When my phone chirped with a security alert for the front of the bakery, I opened my apartment door and eagerly waited at the top of the stairs. I heard my brother's voice and leaned over the railing to try to catch a peek, then decided I was too impatient for that and bounded down the stairs.

"This is Lena's bakery," Dylan said as they turned down the back hallway. "She lives above it."

Taking that as my cue as they came into view, I ran up to greet her, mostly ignoring my brother. "Hello!"

The girl turned her head toward me, flashing a nervous but sweet smile, her bright purple hair covered partially by a beanie. She was much smaller than my brother and clung to him in a sweet way that spoke volumes to their dynamic. When she waved, stepping forward and trying to offer a hand, I pulled her into a tight hug.

"Oh my! You are literally so pretty. I'm Lena, by the way. Also, I'm a total hugger. Sorry about that."

The girl laughed and pulled back, using sign language to introduce herself as Colette.

I was suddenly so incredibly grateful that I had taken a class on sign language in high school. That was back when I thought I wanted to be an elementary teacher, and I figured ASL would be a good thing to know. Turns out I was right! I also had a feeling that it would help my brothers out until they learned it themselves.

"I wish I could sign back better." I sighed, glad that she could understand me. If she

hadn't, I would have been willing to write things out. "I need to practice more, but at least I can translate for this guy over here. Come in, by the way! I made food. Are you hungry? Of course you are, you are absolutely tiny, but hey! Us short girls have to stick together."

I was totally rambling, but she signed back that she was, in fact, hungry as she followed me up the stairs. As I opened the door, I briefly noticed that my brother was taking out his phone to make a call.

Colette paused, and it prompted him to say, "Don't worry, baby, I'll be right in. I have to call someone."

I smiled at the clear connection between the two of them, and I bolstered myself, not willing to let my own sadness on how today turned out encroach on this moment. My brothers deserved to be happy, and I was eager to become friends with their mate.

I just had to hope that one day I would get my happily ever after as well.

CHAPTER 5

LENA GRAVES

“ B unny,” Macon’s rough voice against my ear instantly had my body lighting up, my toes curling as need pulsed through me. This dream felt particularly real, and I savored the way his hands tightened against me as I stretched, arching my ass back into him as he spooned me.

A whimper slipped from my throat at how hard he was, and my magic flashed over my skin as I grew hot and flushed. I wouldn’t get a chance to fix my mating heat in real life, but maybe...just maybe I could in my dreams.

“Lena.” Macon’s voice was far more serious this time, one hand sliding up from my waist and between my breasts to wrap around my throat. The feeling of his natural dominance had me trembling as I tried to push further back against him, my night shirt riding up to reveal my lace panties, no doubt.

I didn’t want to open up my eyes to check, to have this dream end?—

Macon’s nip to my neck, hard and demanding, had my eyes snapping open as a moan left my lips. Instantly, I knew I was not in a dream, but it was far too late to stop my body’s response.

“There we go,” he growled against my ear while rolling us so that I was pinned under him, my legs falling to either side of his large frame. My center was already soaked, my hips moving against him as one of his hands strung through my hair and the other

caught my jaw, demanding a kiss from me.

The needy, possessive touch had my nipples tightening painfully, and the darkness of the room let me pretend we were still in a dream. Something about the way he touched me made me come undone so easily, my defenses completely ripped away.

He didn't give me a chance to overthink or to question myself, instead surrounding me with the promise of pleasure so that I forgot my concerns. It was so incredibly dangerous because I savored the level of control he had over me. A preference of mine I hadn't even realized existed until I met all of these men.

"Macon," I whimpered as he moved down my throat, his hands pushing my shirt up above my breasts. I hissed as his mouth teased my nipple and then moved to the other, my clit pulsing.

"Need to taste you," he murmured against my skin as the snap of my panties sounded, the material falling away. "Need to know that you'll forgive me—forgive us."

His words were enough to have reality filter back in as I remembered what had happened last night—how our plans had fallen through. Hurt radiated through my chest, but before I could say a word his arm locked down on my hips, heavy and impossible to move under, as his mouth suctioned to my clit.

My eyes rolled back at the sensation, my back arching as he let out a primal groan at my taste. Every rational thought slipped from my head. My hands strung through his hair, tightening, but not willing to try to get away from him as he devoured my center.

"That's right, bunny, I can feel how much you need me," He purred, stiffening his tongue and sliding it inside of me. Holy hell. My vision blurred, and the rush of need that had been building inside of me, demanding my attention, rushed over me.

And like a light switch, my mating heat slammed into me full force. Without warning. Without even giving me much of a choice. This was something uncontrollable, an intensity I'd never experienced before.

His hand came over my mouth as I cried out his name, climaxing as he continued to lick up every drop of me, pure satisfaction saturating every single nerve ending of my body. My vision went spotty and my frame melted into the bed like a puddle as a muffled whimper left me from behind his hand. When he suddenly appeared above me and removed his hand so he could kiss me hard, my taste mingled between us.

Macon wasn't done, though. As he pulled back from the kiss, my gaze darted down to his hardened cock in his hand. I couldn't help but stare at the erotic sight as he began to pump his length, angled right at my pussy.

My legs spread wider on their own as his other hand rolled my clit with his thumb, causing me to squirm under his touch. I was absolutely going to come again, and I yearned for him to slide into me, to fill me up in the way that I knew he could.

"Going to come right on this pussy and push it in there where it belongs," he hissed, precum leaking from his cock. My eyes widened at his dirty words, shocked by the need that rocked through me. But he couldn't—especially not know. He didn't know my mating heat was starting, that I could get pregnant. That it was likely I would, even if we weren't fully having sex. I couldn't let him do that without knowing.

"Macon, you can't—" I tried to sit up, wanting to warn him. In a move so fast it nearly forced the air out of my lungs, he pinned me to the bed, his hands trapping mine above me as he slammed his lips against me.

I felt his cock push between my thighs and press into my hole, just enough that when he came in that moment—his seed releasing within me—it caused me to tighten around him, my clit pulsing. When he deepened our kiss and pressed just slightly

further in, I shuddered around him.

I hissed at the sensation of him stretching me with the width of just his head. He held himself there, his breathing rough as a tiny orgasm rolled over me. I closed my eyes and savored the moment. It felt so amazing, so incredibly perfect.

It also felt all wrong since I hadn't been able to warn him better. Guilt flooded my chest.

My eyes opened to find his crimson gaze on my lips before his eyes moved up to meet mine. My voice was quiet as I broke the moment with a reality that I wished I could ignore. "You came inside of me, Macon."

"I did," he rumbled, a flash of victory lighting up his gaze.

"When..." I could barely get the words out, wondering if he would be furious. "When you made me come the first time, it started my mating heat. You shouldn't have come inside of me." My heart beat rapidly as his eyes narrowed on my expression. I should have tried harder to tell him. Dread rolled over me as I felt a surge of even heavier guilt.

"And why not?" Macon demanded, leaning down so we were nearly nose to nose. "You don't think I knew that, bunny? You didn't think I could smell how much you needed me? I just helped push all of this along."

I felt my eyes widen in actual surprise. "What? What are you talking about? You did it on purpose? I don't think you realize?—"

"That I could have just knocked you up?" His eyes flashed with a dangerous light. "Oh I realize it, Lena. I fucking realize it." My breathing went faster as I tapped his chest, needing to sit up. Needing some damn space. It felt like he wasn't taking this

seriously enough.

His lips pressed to mine again, pulling me from my thoughts, his cock sliding against my still wet pussy. “I should slide into you right now. I should take you completely.”

“No,” I whimpered, immediately shaking my head. “This isn’t something to joke about. This is serious—really serious. I could get pregnant so easily! I should have warned you before?—”

Macon chuckled against my neck, and the sound both scared me and had me shivering with need. His lips brushed against mine. “I know how damn serious it is, but do you? Do you realize how serious I am? How serious we are?”

We. I loved that word, but I didn’t dare to hope that was the case. After all, last night could have been about them demanding that I choose. It was a thought that had crossed my mind.

“I don’t, clearly,” I said, my chest tightening. “Especially because last night?—”

“If it hadn’t been an emergency, we wouldn’t have ever cancelled our plans,” he said. My eyes began to water. It was too much, too overwhelming. The hurt that a mere cancelled date had caused and what that meant about my feelings for these men. My yearning for them. The fear that they’d make me choose. The fear that Macon would be angry with me if I got pregnant. The hope that what he was saying—that he wanted this—was true. I closed my eyes as Macon continued. “But I also know it hurt you, which is why I’m not giving you a chance to ignore us. You’re going to forgive us, and we’re going to have dinner tonight, understand? I’m not letting you run away like the other day.”

I could see hurt in his gaze, and I found myself confused on how to handle this. My emotions were raw in these early hours at dawn, and I let out a shaky breath. “I...I

need a minute. Probably more,” I whispered, slowly sitting up. I let my shirt fall as he adjusted his own clothes—wearing only sweatpants and a partly opened zip-up jacket, showing off his muscular chest. “My brother is in the other room. I can’t do this right now.”

My body shivered in the morning chill of the apartment. My mating heat was roaring inside of me, and despite being temporarily satisfied, I knew it wouldn’t last. And then what? Did I call him to help me? What about how I felt about the others? It wasn’t fair to bring them into such a high stakes situation when they might not even know how they feel about me.

Macon’s gaze narrowed as he evaluated my words and seemingly found them lacking. “Tell me you forgive us for last night,” he demanded softly.

“I can’t be mad at you; it was necessary,” I said before admitting, “Just was disappointed.”

“I need the words.” He tugged my chin forward and kissed me. “Now.”

“I forgive you,” I murmured as he kissed me again and stood.

“You have a few hours. Liam, Ari, and Connery are finishing up with the call, and then we’ll be back. We are having a conversation.”

Then he was gone. My mouth popped open as I watched him open up my bedroom window and jump down. I rushed to the window and stuck my head out just in time to see him land easily on the pavement and jog toward his patrol car. The morning light broke against his red-tipped hair and I shivered, remembering how it had looked with my hands strung through it while he devoured me.

This was bad. So, so bad.

Pulling myself back inside, I locked my window and crossed the room to my bedroom door, locking that as well. Letting out a long breath, I walked into the jack-and-jill bathroom before turning on the shower. I felt like I was in a haze as I began to wash my body to wake myself up fully, hating that I was removing Macon's scent. But it was necessary if I was going to focus. Absolutely necessary.

Someone needed to start being blunt about what was going on. I barely knew how Liam felt despite him wanting to get dinner. Did his wolf view me as a mate? Did Ari's? Or was I friend zoned? If they all wanted to get dinner to talk about us, did that mean yes? The Demir brothers were a bit easier to understand, but I also didn't trust that they were serious. I mean, Macon had just come inside of me. He hadn't seemed bothered in the least about the possibility of knocking me up! We weren't even dating! What did I do with that?

Anxiety and panic welled in my chest as I sat down on the floor of the shower and let water run over me. What if he had only been speaking for himself? This was why I had avoided these types of heavy emotions for so damn long. It was overwhelming, and the four of them had become daily staples in my life. I was terrified to lose that, to lose someone else...I couldn't. I just couldn't handle that.

I had hours before I had to deal with them, though. That gave me the strength to pick myself up off the floor, step out of the shower, and dry off. I knew what I needed to do, at least until my head was clear.

Grabbing my phone, I sat on my bed and sent a message.

Me: I need space. At least for this upcoming week. My brothers just found their mate and she's staying at my apartment. I need to focus on my family right now. Maybe we can reschedule dinner after that.

Was that clear enough? I hoped so. The minute I sent the message and put the phone

down, Liam's name lit up my caller ID. Looking outside, I could see his car positioned in its usual spot. Great .

I had a feeling they were going to make themselves difficult to avoid...but that somehow didn't bother me as much as it probably should. When he stepped out of his car and I opened my window to talk to him, I could see the blatant confusion on his face.

"Is this about what happened with Connery and Macon in the clearing?" he demanded. I didn't even question how he knew; it was obvious they were very good at communicating with one another. No secrets in this group.

Should I be following the same policy then?

"It's about a lot of things, Liam. I just really need some space." And to not be having a conversation about it where anyone could freakin' hear. "Please."

Liam's jaw tightened as he leaned back against his patrol car. "I won't keep playing this game with you, Lena. You have one day until we talk."

What game? I hadn't even realized we were playing a game. Alright, that wasn't completely true. I pretty much made a game out of teasing Liam, but he'd always acted unaffected. Or so I'd assumed.

Also, one day was not enough time.

"I'm not agreeing to that," I said in a failed attempt at being firm, closing the window and breaking away from his magnetic gaze. Getting dressed in a pair of jeans and a soft sweater, I braided my wet hair. It wasn't perfect, but it was something—just in case anyone else stopped by. Which was likely to happen given that the others had already called and texted me.

Somehow I could feel that I was hurting them, but it felt unfair. I had relationships with four people that I had to figure out while they only had one. Why couldn't everyone be more clear? Or was I just not giving them the chance to?

Moving out of my bedroom and going to lock the front door, I pulled out everything I needed to make muffins. That would make me feel better. Probably. Hopefully. Until my mating heat was over, I would just focus on my business and family.

It wouldn't be easy, but it would potentially save me a lot of heartbreak in the long run.

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CHAPTER 6

ARI WALKER

This wasn't how I wanted to spend my Saturday night—but it also wasn't unfamiliar. Although Lena and I were now very different from the high schoolers that used to go out every weekend.

Yet here I sat at a bar watching her move about a birthday party, celebrating with guests and giving well wishes, after having dropped off the cake order she spent all afternoon making between taking care of customers. Something I knew because I'd been deemed to be the only one that could watch her without disrupting her peace.

The other three had gone to help this evening in the pack lands, where a group of young shifters had shifted for the first time far too early, something that Macon and Connery had acute experience with. I was glad I'd been chosen to watch over Lena, because I wasn't sure I'd have been able to stay away from her after having had to cancel on her last night.

I was a patient man. Really fucking patient. I had managed to conceal my mating bond with Lena for years; from the first tug towards her when I met her initially to the confirmation that she was my mate when we both turned eighteen. I knew it hadn't been the time, though, and that she needed to make the decision to approach me with it. At least I'd thought so. Now I was wondering if I should have gone about all of this differently.

While he hadn't disclosed what had happened, Macon had made it clear that he'd

tried to push her to see the truth this morning—and well, clearly it had backfired.

I had even tried to give Hunter, her eldest brother, a note from me to give to Lena this morning. He hadn't wanted to—at fucking all. Luckily, his new mate had been decent enough to take it and deliver it to our girl. Yet every text, call, and now letter had gone unanswered. I could see the tension in her shoulders as she moved around the room, and despite the smile on her face, there was a slight sadness to Lena's expression. I hated to see that.

When she leaned over the bar to order a drink, I saw her catch my scent—her head snapping to the side with wide eyes in realization that I was there watching her. She was wearing a pair of leggings and sweater that clung to her curves, and I didn't hide, like I normally would, my appreciative gaze.

I could tell her mating heat had started, so her perfect scent was now tinged with a level of desire that had my wolf growling loudly in my head.

I was just glad that I'd mastered a level of control over myself throughout the years. If she only understood what I wanted to do to her—how I wanted to spread her out and devour her whole every single fucking time she was breathing the same air as me.

Suddenly, my view was blocked by some asshole. A rumble broke from my throat as I stood, and I was glad I'd worn my uniform since people moved out of my way in response to it. Although it didn't seem to bother the bastard who continued to talk to Lena, laughing about something she said as she leaned back from him slightly. She was clearly just being polite...which was good because it meant she wouldn't mind what I did next.

"I'm actually going to just finish this drink and head out," she said, her eyes moving to me. A spark of something danced there, almost like pleasure.

“Just stay for another drink or two. It’s early?—”

I scooped Lena up, throwing her over my shoulder and moving toward the door. She grumbled something about her drink but didn’t otherwise object to my action. The guy shouted after her but didn’t try to follow, which was a smart move on his end. I smoothed my hand over Lena’s ass as we finally stepped outside and I placed her down.

“What the hell was that?” she asked, crossing her arms. I wondered briefly if she was talking about me touching her ass but then realized she was too frustrated for that to be the problem.

“You delivered your cake, time to go home,” I said with a shrug, blocking the entrance to the bar and putting my hands in my pocket casually.

Something about my words made her actually mad, and she rolled her eyes and turned away from me, storming down the street. I cursed, jogging to keep up with her and steering her toward my patrol car, the SUV glinting beneath the full moon. Unfortunately for her, my wolf was extremely present tonight, and while I wasn’t worried about shifting, every step she took away from me had me wanting to chase and pin her down.

“I’m not riding with you,” she growled, moving away from me and the car. “I’ll walk home.”

Turning her swiftly, I walked her back against the SUV, cupping her jaw as she looked up at me in surprise. I spoke softly but seriously. “You aren’t walking home. You’re getting in the damn car.”

“No,” she bit out.

“Why are you mad?” I asked, giving in to the urge to run my hands through her hair, not worried about anyone interrupting us. The bar was about a mile outside of town, located on a road that ran through the woods near the coven lands, and the darkness made me feel like we were alone.

“Mad? I’m not mad.” She looked away momentarily before her narrow gaze returned to me. “Confused, annoyed I didn’t get to finish my drink, and frustrated that I can’t seem to make friends, even?—”

“He didn’t want to be your friend,” I pointed out, trying to not show my amusement.

“You don’t know that.” She tilted her chin up. “Plus, why do you care?”

“Loaded question, baby girl.” I smirked, but I didn’t feel an ounce of humor now.

“Enlighten me, then, Ari. Because no one seems to be able to tell me anything straight.”

I wanted to, but I hesitated because it felt like a conversation meant for all of us.

“Of course you won’t.” She spun towards the car and threw open the passenger door. “Everything is always so relaxed and chill with you, Ari. Why would I expect an actual, serious answer?”

I snapped. More specifically—my wolf and I snapped.

In a quick movement, I grabbed her hips, pulling her back right as she was about to climb up into the passenger seat. My cock was so incredibly hard against her perky ass, and she looked up at me in surprise, her eyes darkening with realization of how turned on I was.

“I don’t feel relaxed or chill about any of this,” I rumbled, running a hand up her throat so that she couldn’t look away from me. “In fact, I’m about two seconds away from showing you exactly how I feel, Lena, but you asked me to leave you alone. You asked all of us to leave you alone.”

“Because it feels like everyone is keeping secrets from me!” Her voice broke, heartbreak written on her face. I couldn’t handle seeing that. I turned her sharply, dipping my head and sealing our lips together.

Lena’s taste was perfection on my lips, and the way she moaned was absolutely divine. Her hands ran up my arms as her nails bit into my skin, the short sleeves on my uniform shirt something I was thankful for.

“Is that clear enough for you?” My wolf nearly pushed out of my skin in response to her rabbit, who was trying to encircle us with her magic. To trap us. Despite being a predatory animal, I would fucking love for my little bunny shifter to trap me—the idea was so fucking hot, it was unreal.

“I need more,” she whispered. I groaned, happily devouring her lips that she offered to sweetly.

When we broke away, she looked up at me with so much vulnerability it nearly broke me. “I need to know you actually want me, Ari.”

“Want you? You’re all I’ve wanted since I knew what it meant to want someone. I haven’t gone a fucking day without wanting you, baby girl.” My hand captured hers and I ran it along the hard outline of my cock, her eyes flaring with excitement. “Every single fucking minute I’m around you—hell, even when I’m just thinking about you—I’m so damn hard. This is because of you.”

“Ari,” she breathed out, biting down on her lip before grabbing my belt and undoing

it with quick, impatient movements.

“Lena—” I warned, but she’d already unbuttoned my pants and released my cock. Her soft, hot hands nearly wrapped around my length completely, and my knees felt wobbly as I used my hands to cage her against the car, holding onto the roof. Her breathing was fast as she began to stroke me, looking up at me with heat.

“You’re so big.”

“Fuck,” I grunted, closing my eyes and willing myself not to come. Not like this.

All my fucking control was thrown out the window when the woman got down on her knees in front of me and ran her tongue over the head of my cock. My eyes snapped open, taking in the sight before me. Her smaller frame was hidden in the darkness of the patrol car, but we were still out in public for anyone to see. Her bright golden eyes burned as she stared up at me with need, running her tongue over my length once more.

“Baby girl, you don’t have to.”

She held my gaze defiantly as she suctioned her lips around my cock and took me fully in her mouth. I let out a deep groan as my length hit the back of her throat. My hand strung through her hair, trying to resist the urge to push deeper, to make her gag on my cock.

“Tell me how,” she whispered, pulling off my cock just momentarily.

“Relax your throat and take me as deep as you can,” I said, unable to help myself.

Instantly Lena was doing exactly that, and my balls tightened at the sensation of her wet mouth and throat taking me. I tugged her hair and she moaned, encouraging the

darkness inside of me. When she began to move faster, I found my hips moving, pulsing deeper inside of her throat as she gagged, tears forming in her eyes. I let my hand stay loose enough that she could pull away at any moment, but she didn't—she fucking didn't, and before long I could feel myself needing to come.

“Fuck, I’m going to come,” I cursed.

“I want to taste it,” she whimpered.

The idea of seeing my cum on her tongue was so fucking hot, but unfortunately, it would have to wait. In a fast move, I pulled her up from the ground and threw open the back door of the SUV.

“Up,” I demanded as she stepped onto the running board, one hand tightening onto the partition cage and the other grasping the head rest of the back seat, her ass poised right where I wanted it. My fingers made quick work of pulling down her leggings and panties, her wet, slick pussy glistening in the darkness of the night.

Letting out a deep groan, I buried my mouth against her pussy as I stroked my cock to the taste of her. When she began to moan out my name, I didn't hesitate to straighten and run my cock along the length of her pussy.

“I’m not going to take you like this—not for our first time. But I need to come on you. Need to mark you, Lena,” I said roughly while moving my hand over her curvy hip to strum her clit. Her body melted further down as her ass went up, showing me her perfect pussy.

“Ari,” she whimpered, her soft voice filling the car. “I need to feel you—please.”

“Only my fingers,” I growled, trying to do right by her. I slid two fingers inside of her, feeling how fucking tight she squeezed around me. “Fuck, Lena, I don’t think I

could slide inside of you even if I wanted to—you're so damn tight.”

“It feels so good, but I want more,” she whimpered as her magic filled the car like a heavy rush of water, dancing across my skin. “Just a little, Ari. Please?”

“We shouldn’t,” I said, and it took everything in me to get the words out. “You told me to leave you alone, that you needed time?—”

A pained noise left her as she moved her ass back so that my fingers would continue to pump in and out of her. “I know, but I need you.” Her tone was filled with so much need, and it felt like a betrayal of my feelings to deny her anything. “I really need you. My skin feels so damn hot?—”

“Your heat.” I leaned over her, kissing her neck. “Your heat is in full effect and you need me inside of you. Is that it, baby girl? But do you know what that means?”

“Yes,” she hissed, her legs spreading wider. “I know what it means, Ari. I know.”

Crawling onto the back seat of the SUV with her and closing the door, I pulled her onto me so her wet pussy was sliding against my cock. Her hands dug into my shoulders, and I groaned at the feeling of her soaking my cock as she moved back and forth on me, causing a primal rumble to leave my chest.

“We should wait until you have a clearer head.” Although that was the last thing I fucking wanted right now.

“Just a little,” she begged. Then she froze as a thought occurred to her. “Unless you don’t want that.”

“Turn around. Spread your legs on either side of me,” I demanded roughly. “I’ll give you what you want.” There was one thing I couldn’t handle after all this time, now

that we were at this point—and it was her believing that I couldn't or didn't want her.

She turned so her perfect ass was perched right over my lap, reverse cowgirl, and her fingers were intertwined in the partition cage so she was leaning forward slightly. My cock was hard and pointing right toward her pussy as I ran it over the wet heat that leaked off of her. I'd heard that rabbits' mating heats were intense, almost overwhelming for them, and I could see just how keyed up her body was for this—for me. I just wished I could see her laid out naked in my fucking bed.

“You're in charge here, baby girl. You control what you want. Take what you need, Lena.” My hands turned bruising on her hips as she took an inch of me, her hot pussy surrounding the head of my cock.

I hissed as she circled her hips, trying to push down lower. I could feel how tight she was, and I moved my fingers to the front of her, circling her clit. She moaned, her body relaxing as she began to roll her hips. When she sank down another inch I had to physically restrain myself from slamming her tight hot body down on my length. I had no idea what she and Macon had done, if they had gone all the way, but the last thing I wanted to do was hurt her.

“You're so huge,” she moaned, letting her head fall back as her teal hair ran over her slim back. She felt so fucking perfect, and I knew that it would be damn near impossible to pull her off of me before I came deep inside of her. I wasn't even in all the way, and already I wanted to stay buried within her forever.

“I want you to come, Lena,” I growled, leaning forward to run my lips against the back of her neck. “I want you to feel good. Don't hurt yourself?—

“Fuck.” My snarl filled the space as she bottomed out on my cock. Lena gasped, and a small pained noise left her throat as she trembled against me.

I quickly captured her jaw and turned her head, seeing tears on her cheeks. The shock on her face made the reason obvious.

Fuck—this wasn't supposed to happen like this. Her first time should have been somewhere more special. So why was it so damn impossible to regret? Circling her clit once again in a slow movement that I hoped would help her relax, I continued to kiss along her shoulders and neck.

“Look at you,” I breathed out. “Look at you taking every single inch of me so damn well. You are so fucking perfect—so fucking good.”

“Ari, that hurt,” she whispered, then shifted and moaned as I continued to massage her clit, “but...but I don't want to stop.” Her pussy tightened around me, and I let out a low rumble as she squirmed, her body rolling against mine as she tried to find a better position.

“You tell me what you need and I'll give you everything,” I told her, sucking on her neck hard enough that she shuddered.

“I need you to move.”

I lifted her off my cock, turning her toward me and sliding back inside of her in one movement. She whimpered my name and slammed her lips against mine, the feel of her body pressing against my own one I never wanted to forget.

“You feel so fucking good,” I praised, nipping her bottom lip. “Now let me make you feel amazing.” Gripping her hips, I began to lift her off my cock before sliding her back down on it. Her nails bit down on my shoulders and her moans filled the car as I began to pump in and out of her, using her tight body to relieve every ounce of stress I'd felt for years. It felt selfish, so damn wrong, knowing it was her first time, but I could see in the way her cheeks flushed and her body tightened around my cock that

she was loving it.

“Tell me when you’re going to come,” I demanded in a low growl, and her eyes fluttered shut for a moment as she began to move on her own.

When I slammed up into her particularly hard, she cracked into a million pieces—her scream of my name filling the space. It was fucking glorious and nearly brought me to my own fucking climax.

“Lena, I’m going to come,” I said roughly. My balls tightened, my cock pulsing with warning as I cursed trying to lift her off me.

“Inside of me,” she gasped, subconsciously exposing her neck to me as she tilted her head to the side. This woman was going to be the death of me. I continued to pump in and out of her, forcing myself to make a decision I knew she would hate.

“No!” Lena cried as I tried to pull her off. But she pushed down once more, taking me further inside of her.

“I have to; you don’t want that.” I hated how much I wanted her to disagree with me.

“I want you. I want your cum,” she whimpered.

For the second time tonight, my restraint snapped.

My pace grew hard and demanding, almost angry at her for pushing me this far when I was trying to keep the best in mind for her. I had fought so damn hard to consider what she’d want when she wasn’t in a heat-fueled frenzy, but I couldn’t ignore her words. She was telling me, right now, exactly what she wanted. When my cock slammed up into her one last time, my teeth bit down on her neck and I exploded inside of her.

My seed shot into her waiting body and she shuddered against me, my climax triggering her own. The taste of blood from my mating bite had my wolf letting out a primal rumble that her rabbit responded to instantly.

Holy... holy fuck.

I don't know what I expected from Lena, but when she wrapped her arms around me and stayed on my cock, burying her nose in my throat, I felt relief. I savored our mating bond as it wrapped around the two of us.

This would change everything. This was the start of something that would be forever.

I just hoped she wouldn't regret it come morning.

CHAPTER 7

LENA GRAVES

I shouldn't leave without saying goodbye. I knew that.

But my nerves got the better of me as I finished up a quick shower and quietly got dressed. Ari's apartment was a one-bedroom, a cozy, clean space that I hadn't been to very often, and he was currently splayed out on the bed, sleeping peacefully. The only way I'd gotten out of his arms was by telling him I had to go pee.

My heart tightened as I ran a hand over my mating mark. Last night had fundamentally changed a lot. It had felt so natural between us, confirming the intensity of feelings that had grown for him over the past few years.

After bringing me to his apartment, he showered me with affection while we cuddled and watched movies—apologizing for taking me so hard in a quiet, rough voice against my neck. I had a feeling he hadn't realized I was a virgin because he alluded to Macon and I from that morning, but Ari had still taken me without holding back...and I loved that. I loved him.

It had been the perfect night, but in the light of day I found myself nervous to face reality.

So I quietly got ready, brushing my teeth with a spare toothbrush he had in packaging before leaving through the front door. I would send him a text about how much last night meant to me when I got home—that was a good idea, right? Had I always been

this flighty?

I felt like a chicken-shit; I wouldn't lie.

Walking through the streets of Willowdale, I watched many of the shop owners opening up for the day. I felt almost high—on cloud nine—from the previous night. But when I saw my bakery, I frowned. There was no cop car out front. Were the three of them still over by the pack lands? Maybe I would grab Colette and stop by—she probably wanted to see her mates anyway.

As I entered the back entrance to my apartment, humming under my breath, I paused when I found Liam waiting for me on the stairs.

My body heated under his gaze, his eyes taking in the mating mark on my throat. Worry and guilt pooled in my stomach as he stood and walked toward me. Instantly, I was backing up against the wall, my breath catching.

“You never came home last night,” he growled, his lips skating over mine while leaning into me.

“I didn't,” I admitted breathlessly. “I was with Ari.”

A dangerous, almost lethal noise left Liam as he captured my jaw, his other hand running over my waist before tightening to bruising. “And what were you doing with Ari, Graves?”

His use of my last name made my body explode with need, which frustrated me to no end. It was like I couldn't control my own body. The fire that was rushing through me could be temporarily put out but not extinguished. It was so volatile and intense, feeding off of my emotions and affection for these men, trying to force my hand.

Trying to force me to be fearless, to take what I wanted.

“I think you know,” I whimpered as his gaze ran over my neck once more and a snarl left his lips. “Liam?—”

In a fast movement, he had me in his arms and was stalking up the stairs to my apartment. I frantically searched for Colette, but a quick look told me she wasn’t there. I had to guess she had gone out to explore, which I was thankful for. Liam and I obviously needed a moment alone right now.

“We need to talk,” I said, defeated. He obviously didn’t approve of my actions, and now my fears were coming true. I’d chosen one of them—I’d chosen Ari—and now I was losing Liam.

“Oh no.” He chuckled, although he was far from amused. “The time for talking is over. You let Ari mark you.”

I opened my mouth to explain but was stopped in my tracks when he suddenly dropped me on my bed, tugging off each of my shoes. I moved back, wondering what he was doing as he left me to close the door. Then he turned and stalked toward me, causing my heart to surge.

I let out a small screech when he tugged my ankle forward and I fell back, my body spread out for him. My leggings and oversized shirt weren’t enough to cover the way my nipples hardened at his gaze, and I wondered if he could scent how turned on I was since I wasn’t wearing any panties.

“What do you mean?” I demanded of him, breathlessly. “That the time for talking is over?”

I still had a million and ten questions.

“I mean that you’ve let Connery, Macon, and Ari taste you in more ways than one. You let them make you come. You’ve let them mark you and come inside of you. You’ve made your decision, Lena,” he said knowingly, his gaze moving down to my throat.

“I...I didn’t plan any of this. I don’t regret it, but my mating heat is going on?—”

Liam slammed his lips against mine and I moaned against them, his kiss deep and slow as if he were savoring the taste. I allowed myself to sink into it, enjoying a kiss that I’d wanted for so damn long, and when he suddenly pulled back I felt disappointed.

“I can look past the fact that you’ve allowed every single one of them to touch you before me, but what I can’t look past is not telling me where the hell you’re going to be. You can’t just not come home.”

Understanding dawned within me. Liam wasn’t mad at me being with the others...he was mad about not knowing where I’d been. Shit. I should have at least texted. After all, this was the man who’d forcibly installed a security system on my business and home. All he had ever asked of me was to be safe, and then I hadn’t messaged him, and Ari clearly hadn’t either. Shit .

Liam’s voice was rough as he let out a deep rumble from his chest. “For that, you’ll be punished.”

In a second flat, I was flipped onto my stomach and his hands tore down my leggings to expose my bare ass. I whimpered as he caught one of my legs and pulled so that I was flat, Liam moving between my legs. I knew he could see how wet I was, his fingers moving over my ass and then barely brushing my pussy, a tremble working its way through me.

“Liam!”

“You like the idea of me punishing you?” he asked, the answer seemingly important to him.

“I don’t think I should be punished,” I growled.

“That doesn’t answer the question.” He chuckled, the sound soft and dangerous.

“Grip your headboard and do not let fucking go.”

Whimpering, I eagerly followed his instructions as he ran his fingers over my skin in a caress?—

Smack.

The sound was clear and sharp as a sting went across my ass. I cried out, gripping the headboard harder, as I tried to move away. Liam’s hand tightened on my leg. “Do not fucking move.”

“That hurt.”

“What hurt was when you didn’t let me know where the hell you were. I was left wondering all fucking night where you were while I was stuck in the pack lands. No calls, no notifications from your security system, not one text,” he said. “That’s what hurt.”

Another smack came across my ass and I moaned in distress, putting my head down against the sheets and rocking my ass up. As much as the sting hurt, that wasn’t what bothered me. No, it was the very obvious fact that I was getting turned on by it. Something Liam noticed after the third smack .

“You do like this,” he said in satisfaction and approval, lightly running his fingers over my center. I could feel Liam move so that he was over me, his fingers moving more solidly against my center while gathering my wet heat. When I looked back at him, I watched as he popped his fingers into his mouth and let out a groan.

“You taste like fucking heaven,” he groaned, the vibration running through my body. Smack. I cried out in frustration this time as I shot him a dirty look.

“Liam, I get being upset?—”

“Concerned. Worried. Upset.” He growled as I moaned, two fingers sinking inside of me. “All good fucking words for how I felt, Lena. Creator, you are so tight and hot.”

I scowled. “Stop teasing me.”

I may have been confused mentally and emotionally, but there was absolutely nothing that confused my body about this situation. These men had awakened something in me, and there was no ignoring it.

“Like you tease me? Every single fucking day since I met you?” he demanded.

“You tried to arrest me when I met you!” I bit out, another smack on my ass causing an embarrassing moan to leave me.

“Damn right I did, but that was only to stop me from bending your sweet ass over the front of my patrol car and fucking you so hard you saw stars,” he said sharply, adding another finger. “Are you sore?”

The last question was asked with concern and gave me whiplash so that I felt momentarily dazed. “No...I mean, not really.” My mating heat wouldn’t allow for that.

“Good,” he growled, continuing to pump in and out of me. “I want you so worked up that you come around my fingers, Lena, and then I’m going to lick up every single drop of it. Especially knowing it’s because you’re getting off on me spanking you.”

“Who says it’s that?” I whimpered. “Maybe it’s just because I think you’re hot.”

Another smack , and he chuckled knowingly as I tightened around his fingers. Before I could stop myself, I was pushing further back against his hand and fucking myself with his thick fingers. I tossed my head back and allowed myself to enjoy it fully, even the smack against my ass. I knew Liam was mad, but the man was bringing me so much pleasure that it was hard to view it as anything but a means to that end.

My skin flushed with heat, and I suddenly came around his fingers— hard —a moan of his name slipping from my lips.

I melted into the mattress, ass up, when I suddenly felt his cock run over my slit. I tried to adjust myself, but the man stopped me with a hand on my neck. “No, you stay right there, Lena. You’re going to take my cock, just like I want. You understand?”

“Yes.” I shivered in excitement. “I want that.”

Liam impaled me in one hard stroke, a loud moan leaving me as I shuddered around him in relief.

“Fuck,” he rumbled, tightening his hand on me. “You like that?”

All I could do was moan again, desperately needing him to move. His voice was rough and almost pained as he continued, “Of course you fucking do. You walk around teasing the four of us every damn day. I bet this entire time you’ve just been wanting to get fucked. For one of us to take away the choice and instead take what we want.”

Liam wasn't wrong, and I whimpered as he began to stroke in and out of me. His physical dominance over me made every prey instinct inside of me come alive. I couldn't escape even if I wanted to, though. His hold on me was completely unyielding, and the way he was taking me was wild and primal.

"You're a fucking tease," he said sharply. "You've been a tease since the start, a complete brat, and I'm done not taking what I want."

"Liam, you feel so good. Please keep going," I moaned, spreading my legs further so he could move deeper.

"I bet I fucking do. And you're taking me so fucking well," he growled, tightening his hands in my hair. "You're just so fucking needy for it. You walk around with this perfect fucking body, asking to be bent over. I can smell that you're in heat, that you want to be fucked. That you want to be bred. You can't help but put your ass up and ask for it."

Oh shit. His pace grew more demanding and harder as I tightened around him, my clit pulsing at him using me like this. "You're going to take all of my cum, aren't you? I want to hear you beg for it like a good girl. If they get to fill you up with come, you better believe I will."

"Please!" My voice was almost raw from screaming at the hard pace he was setting, his erotic words making the experience that much more surreal.

The bed thumped against the wall, and I found myself almost dizzy from the intensity of it. From the pure need rolling over me. Liam was something completely uncontrollable, like a damn storm. His pace was so intense, so deep, and I could only take it, his weight making it impossible for me to do anything else.

"Beg. More." Each word was punctuated as I cried out his name.

“Please—” I gasped. “Please, Liam, come inside of me.”

He groaned. “Of course I will. Can’t leave you empty, need to fill you up—fuck, Lena.”

My body detonated around him as I cried out, his teeth slicing through my skin on the opposite side of my throat as he bottomed out, hard—white hot pleasure and pain rolling over me. My legs split further apart, and I groaned in relief at the feeling of him filling me with his cum.

I melted against the bed as he released my neck, pulling out and turning me on my back before sliding back in. He let out a low rumble, examining my expression with so much affection and dark possession that it leveled me.

“Beautiful. You are so fucking beautiful,” he breathed out, eyes lingering on my neck. “Come on.”

When he slid out of me, picking me up and carrying me to the shower, I simply stared at him in dazed astonishment. After everything that had happened between us just now and the way he had talked to me...I just hadn’t expected such a drastic difference. Yet for the next thirty minutes, he slowly washed every inch of my body.

“You need to make a decision, Lena,” he said softly after giving me a sweet kiss.

My body tensed. “I thought you said you were done waiting for me to?”

Liam’s eyes darkened as he interrupted, “Your body is different than your heart.”

With that, he turned off the water and helped me into a towel. My brows dipped as I considered his words.

I already knew where my heart stood with all of them. The only question was—was I fearless enough to tell them?

CHAPTER 8

LENA GRAVES

Standing in front of the bathroom vanity mirror a short time later, I brushed out my hair before tightening my towel and making my way back into my bedroom. I paused in the doorway at the sight of Liam already getting dressed.

Was he leaving? I suppose I had assumed that we would spend more time together, like Ari and I had.

But Liam was different, so I shouldn't have assumed that.

Any semblance of bravery I'd had before, convincing myself that maybe it was worth expressing how I felt to him, absolutely disappeared. I nibbled my lip, considering my options, before looking around for my robe. Liam had seen me naked moments ago, but I suddenly felt far too bare.

"You're heading out?"

His gaze seemed to darken on me as he walked across the room and captured my jaw, dipping his mouth to mine. I sighed into the kiss and almost pouted as he pulled away. "I wasn't going to—unless you planned on kicking me out."

Relief filled my chest as I shook my head. "I would love for you to stay. Let me get dressed, and we can make breakfast."

“I’ll go get it started. Come out when you’re ready,” Liam said, dipping his head and brushing our lips once more. His hand tightened around me, and I could have easily gotten lost in that kiss, feeling almost dizzy as he pulled away and offered me a knowing smirk. I stared wide eyed at the normally grumpy man, shaking my head as he walked away.

I had thought about Liam in my room often, but seeing him here was very different.

Once my bedroom door closed, I popped open the windows to ensure that my room didn’t smell like...well, sex. Especially with another shifter staying here with me. I frowned, wondering when Colette would be back. Crap. Was I a bad roommate? I needed to text her to ensure she was okay. After all, she didn’t know the area well.

We hadn’t learned a lot about one another yet, but I’d found she was mostly an open book. Through that, two things had become clear to me.

First, she didn’t really understand what it meant to be a shifter.

Second, she was running from her family—even if she didn’t say that.

Both made me feel protective over my new friend. I was glad Colette had found her way here, and I really, truly hoped she’d be able to call this place home...as long as my brothers didn’t mess it up. I figured they wouldn’t, but you never know.

After getting dressed, I sent her a quick text to tell her I was making breakfast. When I stepped into the living room, I found Liam sitting on the couch with his shoes next to him as he talked quietly on the phone. His gaze moved up to me, and he motioned with his hand for me to step closer.

“If they need more help, I’ll come by,” he said, his brows furrowing with concern. I sat next to him, but he quickly tugged me onto his lap, and I melted against his frame.

The voice on the other side continued to talk, and when Liam looked down at me, I watched his eyes fill with heat.

“I’ll tell her you said hi.” Liam hung up, and I arched a brow in question.

“Connery,” he explained. “This pack issue is growing more extreme. Even more young shifters shifted last night. They need help containing and calming them.”

“You should go,” I said. “I’ll stay here with Colette. I don’t think she should go to the pack lands with all of the chaos, especially since my brothers will be so busy.”

“Colette? Is that your brothers’ mate?”

“Yeah.” I smiled. “She seems really cool. She communicates through sign language, so Luca has been trying to learn how so they aren’t stuck texting. I have a feeling Hunter and Dylan won’t be far behind him.”

“Interesting,” Liam said. “Are you sure you don’t want to come? I don’t like the idea of being separated. In fact, my wolf fucking loathes it.”

Nibbling my lip, I thought about Ari and wondered if he would feel the same way.

Liam’s phone rang as he looked down and smirked, picking up the call. “Morning, Ari.” Well, that just felt purposeful from the Creator. Liam nodded, looking amused, and kissed the side of my head. “Yeah, she’s here and safe, but I’m about to leave. We have to get to the pack lands.” Then, after a pause while he listened, “I’ll let her know. See you soon.”

“How is he?” I asked, trying to not seem too interested—or like I was totally overthinking the fact that he hadn’t called me yet. Then again, my phone was across the room.

“You ran out on him this morning?” Liam mused.

“I...may have been trying to sort out my thoughts and got nervous.”

Liam smirked. “You going to do that after I leave?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted. “I don’t really understand what’s going on right now, Liam. I mean, I know what happened between each of you and myself individually, but I don’t know what that means for all of us. I don’t even know why you wanted to have dinner the other night.”

Liam’s gaze moved over my expression thoughtfully as he smoothed a hand through my hair. “I want all of us to talk together, but let me assure you, whatever you’ve worked out in your head is probably wrong.” He paused to make sure my eyes were on his so I’d see the truth there. “This is a good thing, and now that Ari and I have both marked you, it’s an inevitable thing. I think you know exactly what is going on, Lena. I think you’re just scared to admit it.”

Before I could question him, I heard the alarm on my security system going off, probably because Colette had come back. Knowing it wasn’t time for this conversation, I said, “After this pack thing is sorted, can we all try dinner again?”

“Of course.” I stayed tucked in Liam’s arms as he stood from the couch. “Now go help your new friend—she’s probably worried the police are going to arrive because the alarm is going off.”

“Well, you are here,” I teased.

Liam walked with me to the door and offered me a knowing look before ordering, “You send another text like last time—asking us to leave you alone—and I’ll be happy to use it as a reason to punish you again.”

My mouth opened in surprise as he disappeared down the back stairs, my cheeks flushing. Damn him. When the alarm continued to ring at the front of the shop, it pulled me from the moment. I cursed and jogged down the steps to go help Colette.

“I feel bad; you have to be bored,” I said to Colette as I stood at the counter. She looked up from where she was tucked into the corner, reading a book.

“I don’t mind at all. It’s nice to be able to just sit around and watch people come and go. People love the bakery, clearly, so it’s fun to watch them pick out what they want. I just wish I could help more.”

I flashed a smile of pride at her assessment of my business. “Well, if you really want to, I’m sure I can find something for you to do—although it is fairly slow this weekend.”

“This is slow? That’s amazing. My life was very controlled back home, so I didn’t get a chance to sit around and watch people.”

A million questions popped into my head, so I risked asking, “What do you mean by controlled?”

Her gaze darkened. “I lived in a human community that hated shifters, so I rarely got to shift, let alone do anything that could remotely expose our secret.”

“I can’t imagine that.” I frowned, my brow dipping. “I count myself lucky for growing up in Willowdale. You’re going to love it here—there are no restrictions like that. I mean, the only reason it’s a slow weekend to begin with is because so many people are helping on the pack lands with the young shifters.”

“I really like Willowdale—more than anywhere I’ve ever been,” she admitted.

I smiled softly before the door opened, pulling my attention to the family walking in. The next few hours in the shop went by quickly, bringing us into early evening. Between the groups coming in for a weekend treat, I managed to get some cupcakes baked in the back and prepared for the week. Normally, I would have planned for a far longer baking session on Sunday, but neither my focus nor my energy levels would allow for that—not today.

Colette eventually went upstairs but made me promise I would call her if I needed help. I wouldn't lie, though, the quiet of the bakery in the closing hours was welcome. I was finally left alone with my thoughts for the first time all day— and I had a lot of them.

I'd officially mated with Liam and Ari, their marks present on my neck. My magic intertwined with theirs, even reaching out to them now. Not only that, but Macon had marked me, and I absolutely knew how Connery felt about me. Considering Liam's words, I had to assume that maybe they were willing to share...to some extent. I mean, Liam had only ever acted weird in response to Ari's marking, but following our mating he'd become completely relaxed. And the brothers were certainly each aware of how the other interacted with me.

Maybe this entire time I'd been blind to what was right in front of me. That was the best case scenario. My feelings for these men were intense and strong, so I had to hope that was the case—because at this point I wouldn't choose between them.

To be honest, I didn't think that was even an option anymore. I mean, three of them had come inside of me—even though Macon and I hadn't fully had sex. And I was in heat. I had even warned them! They absolutely knew how serious this was, and I had to assume they wanted that—wanted serious.

A hesitant, hopeful smile pulled at my lips. Could I truly be that lucky?

My rabbit trilled happily in my head as my skin rolled with heat. It was enough to make me shiver as I tried to resist the urge to text one of the men. I'd already texted Ari, apologizing for leaving without saying goodbye, but he hadn't responded except to say that he was glad I'd made it home safely. Hopefully the short response was because he was busy in the pack lands and not for another reason...like being upset with me.

No. I wouldn't let myself overthink this anymore—not tonight. I would just wait until I saw them next.

Deciding to close up for the night and treat myself to a relaxing girls' night with Colette, I locked up the bakery and went upstairs. When I didn't see her in the main room, I went looking and found her sleeping in her bedroom, absolutely knocked out. I closed the door quietly and turned off the lights because I had no doubt that she was still exhausted from traveling.

"Well, now what?" I murmured, looking around my space.

On Sunday evenings I usually made dinner for my brothers and I, but that obviously wasn't happening. With a long sigh, I settled on making myself a delicious meal of leftovers from a breakfast casserole I'd made the other day. Once I'd warmed it up, I laid out on the couch with a blanket, selecting a binge worthy show. I thought I would be plagued with enough thoughts to stay up for most of the night, but before long my eyes were growing heavy and I was whisked away into dreamland.

A cool autumn breeze ran through my hair and across my face as I finally opened my eyes. I was in a park, the ground covered in the bright colors of autumn and the sky a cool cloudy gray. I wrapped my arms around myself, the thick wool of one of my favorite coats protecting me from the chill.

Willowdale was unusually quiet as I made my way through the park I'd played in

many times as a kid, finding myself a comfortable seat on a swing. As I rocked back and forth, I tried to listen for signs of life, but I found nothing. It was an odd dream that felt somewhat pointless ? —

The crunch of leaves had me freezing as I turned sharply, nearly falling off the seat. My eyes widened on an unfamiliar figure walking toward me with a bright smile.

“Well, this just worked out perfectly!” the woman chimed. My eyes searched her, taking note of an array of tiny details as I tried to figure out if she was someone I knew.

Her bright red hair was cut in a sleek bob at her shoulders, and she was wearing a perfectly starched suit and heels that did not match my dream at all. But the way her bright green eyes warmed on me was filled with a maternal affection, which I didn’t understand.

“Do I know you?” I asked. “I mean, you’re in my dream so I have to assume I do...”

“No, actually.” She sat down on the swing next to me, offering another flash of bright white teeth. “My name is Kaltes.”

“Lena,” I offered in return, “but I’m guessing you knew that.”

She nodded in affirmation. “I visit all rabbit shifters that are experiencing their first true mating heat. So here I am, checking in on you.”

I reared back in surprise. “You do? Why? That seems like...a lot.”

“I quit my day job. Made it a bit easier,” she teased. “I’m something of a goddess, but no one learns about the gods anymore—at least not like they used to. Don’t worry, I don’t mind. I still do my job...unlike some gods.”

I sensed a story there but didn't think now was the time to ask. "Well, thanks for visiting." I truly was appreciative. "Why though?"

Kaltes suddenly grew serious. "Going through a mating heat as a hare can be confusing—but follow your instincts. You are drawn to the individuals you are for a reason; your rabbit believes they're the correct fit for you. Don't fight it. Everything, and I mean everything, will work out how it's supposed to. I want you to believe that, Lena. I can feel how heavy your heart and head are with worry."

Her words resonated with me probably more than she realized, and I swallowed down some emotion. "You said 'individuals.' Is it common for us to have more than one mate?"

"Of course," she assured me. "I have twelve mates."

"Holy shit," I murmured.

Her eyes shone with a knowing light. "Do you have any other questions while I'm here?"

Deciding to bite the bullet, I asked, "The chances of getting pregnant during my mating heat..."

"Are nearly absolute. But usually that only happens once you bond with all of those who you consider mates. I didn't have my first daughter until I'd found all my mates. It tends to be a running trend."

I nodded, silently thinking that through.

Kaltes eased out of the swing. "If you ever need me, I'm only a dream away. You will be able to reach out to me just as I've reached out to you. I will always answer

you the best I can.”

“Thank you,” I said genuinely. “I don’t have many people who I can ask this type of thing...so thank you, Kaltes.”

The blaring of my alarm was the next thing I heard, jarring me from the dream as Monday morning light streamed through the window. For the first time in weeks, I woke up feeling at peace. I had to believe she was right—that everything would work out as it was supposed to.

CHAPTER 9

CONNERY DEMIR

R ounding the back of the bakery, I threw my car into park, taking the spot next to Lena's small blue Mercedes. She never used the car, but she still had it decked out with sparkly accessories inside.

Grabbing my jacket, I climbed out of the vehicle and pulled out the spare key I'd made for Bunny Bites . I wish I could say I'd made it with innocent intentions, and a large part was so I could just check on her when needed, but it also allowed me to feed my not-so-little obsession with Lena. Which was why I had also made one for her apartment.

My phone buzzed, alerting me that one of the others had seen the notification through the security system. I ignored it. There was only one person I wanted to talk to right now, and that was Lena. She was probably sleeping, but that didn't matter to me. I just needed to be in the same damn air as her, close enough to touch her, even if I didn't. I was the only one who hadn't seen our woman in days, and while the others seemed content with getting a good night's sleep before seeing her, I absolutely could not.

It didn't help that she'd sent a message inviting me over.

My gaze moved down to the text as I slid open my phone, locking the bakery door behind me before trailing up the stairs.

Me: This should be over by tonight, gorgeous. I promise. Breakfast in the morning?

It had taken most of the weekend and late into Tuesday night, but the young shifters were finally secure and taken care of. I didn't regret helping, but I would admit that the entire time my thoughts had been on Lena—especially since she'd been texting the group as well as each of us individually. I wasn't sure what had changed besides the obvious with both Liam and Ari taking her as a mate, but her normal walls and defenses seemed down. Which had only been proven by the message she'd sent back.

Gorgeous: I would love that. Let me know when you finish...you can come spend the night here, if you want. It would be easier to go to the diner in the morning.

It wouldn't be the first time I'd knocked out at Lena's place, but I usually stayed in the guest bedroom or on the couch. This invitation had a distinctly different feel to it...or maybe it was wishful thinking. Either way, I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth. It probably should have bothered me and my dragon more that three other men, including my own brother, had already put some type of claim on her...but I didn't feel anything remotely like that. In fact, I was just fucking thrilled she seemed more on board than ever before.

My brother and I had been alone for most of our lives, and despite our two-year age gap, we'd both been forced to become adults sooner than we should have. We left home at only sixteen, moving from the east coast to the midwest when the situation with our parents had become too volatile.

From there it had been a game of wandering, and it wasn't until last year when we came to Willowdale and met Lena that we realized we'd finally found it. Home. Which is why we struggled to leave her alone...

As dragons, we were able to choose our mates, but once we'd met Lena, there really was no choice. She was it for us. And when we realized how flighty our girl could be,

it became a waiting game.

I think Liam and Ari had expected a fight when they realized we wanted her as our mate, but I hadn't wanted to fight. I had just wanted her—would forever want her.

Unlocking her apartment, I slipped into the dark room and breathed in her familiar scent, fucking thrilled to be surrounded by anything that was Lena. I moved quietly into her bedroom, careful to discard my shoes outside the door before setting down my jacket. Lena lay on the bed with one long, bare leg thrown over the covers, moonlight spilling through the window and onto her frame.

A groan caught in my throat at the gorgeous sight, her night shirt pushed up to reveal a pair of pink lace panties that framed her perfect ass. The shirt she wore was tight against her chest, and her perfect breasts were nearly visible through the material.

I stopped at the edge of the bed, suddenly unsure of myself. I had been planning to slip into bed and fall asleep so I could wake up with her in my arms, but now that I was staring down at my gorgeous mate, I wasn't sure I had the necessary control.

My cock was already hard, tenting my sweatpants. I ran my hand over my length, my gaze running to the apex of her thighs. I wanted those panties off and my mouth buried against her pussy. Fuck. Maybe it would be better for me to sleep out on the couch....

Walking around the side of the bed, I crouched down near her face and smoothed a hand over her soft cheek, wondering if it was the right move to wake her up. It would be for completely selfish purposes. But I had missed her so damn much, and the idea of being able to kiss her was nearly enough to drive me to shake her awake. When she didn't respond to the touch to her cheek, her breathing deep, I shook my head and stepped back.

I would just sleep on the couch...

My thoughts drifted off as Lena murmured my name and rolled over to be closer to me. It was such a sweet sound, and the movement had rustled the sheets, revealing even more of her perfect ass. My throat went dry as my self-control stood on the precipice of true danger.

Doubt nagged at me. What if I woke her up and everything I thought I'd garnered from her texts had been wrong? What if she pushed me away again? What if she wanted more space? I wasn't sure I could handle that. We acted as if it didn't bother us, but every time she pushed us away it hurt just a bit fucking more than the last time.

Deciding to trust the control I'd built up over time and refusing to be away from her, I got into bed. Pulling her against me, assuming she would wake up at least a little, I was surprised when she only melted into me. Her ass was pressed right against my cock, and her deep breathing had me looking over her peaceful expression with contentment. Lena was so damn gorgeous.

Pressing my lips to her shoulder, my dragon rumbled inside of me, wanting to mark her desperately. My gaze tracked the way her breathing hitched just slightly and her nipples pebbled under the thin material of her sleep shirt.

Cupping her breast, I teased the nipple slowly, watching in fascination as her lips parted and her breathing caught—a flush stealing over her cheeks in the darkness of the room. I found myself captivated by her reactions and continued to tease her body, playing with her nipples over her shirt before sliding underneath, loving the way her delicate skin reacted to my touch. I couldn't tell you how long I teased her before her hips rocked back against me, Lena reacting to me even while deep in sleep. Why was that so fucking hot?

I should have felt wrong about touching her in her sleep, but bringing her pleasure felt excusable, so I didn't allow myself to hesitate to move my hand between her legs. I bit back a groan at how hot and wet she was over the silk of her panties. I slid my hand down the front of the material, wet heat surrounding me as I rubbed light circles over her clit.

When she shifted, her outside leg coming up over mine as she rolled toward me, I froze, but her continued deep breathing encouraged me. I continued to circle her clit, watching in fascination as her magic surged out and sparked against her skin in the faintest glimmer of teal.

Suddenly, the feral urge to make Lena come in her sleep washed over me, wanting her to feel my touch while trapped in the confines of her dream. When a moan slipped from her lips, I slid my fingers down her pussy and pushed two fingers inside of her tight, hot center. She tightened around me, and her body arched off the bed as she gasped in relief, her climax hitting her in a wave.

A satisfied sound left my throat as she eventually melted back into the bed. It should have been the end of it, but when I pulled my fingers out and brought them to my mouth, her taste exploded in my mouth.

I found I couldn't deny myself the ability to taste from the source. I slipped away from her side and she spread out completely, her arms above her head against the pillows. Slowly removing her panties, I groaned at the sight of her perfect pussy, her thighs messy with wetness from her need—from needing me , even if she didn't realize it.

Sliding flat against the bed, I brought my mouth against her center and let out a deep rumble at the explosion of her sweet taste. If she woke up now, I wasn't sure I could stop. Still, I kept my movements slow but firm as I licked every inch of her, wanting every single last drop of her release.

When she began to tremble and moaned, my gaze shot up to find her eyes moving rapidly behind her eyelids, signaling her deep sleep had been interrupted. But the pleasure on her face and how hard her nipples were told me that it was because of the need she felt, and I fucking loved that.

Sitting up on my knees, I released my cock from where it had been painfully restrained and stroked it over her center, my dragon demanding viciously that we mark her. It was an urge almost impossible to control, but I somehow managed, taking a sharp inhale and stroking slower, wanting this to last.

The image of her laid out for me, almost as if she wanted me to take her just like this, was utter perfection. I had no idea how she'd react when she woke to me in her bed, but for the moment I could pretend. I could fucking pretend that she wanted me to slid inside of her, to claim her fully as my mate.

“Fuck,” I hissed as her hand slipped down her body, frustration marring her expression as she rocked her hips. Unable to help myself, I lifted her hand gently and kissed it, pressing my cock against her tight fuckhole in replacement of her fingers.

Lena let out a soft moan, and my breathing was rough as I realized the position we were in—the position that I was in. I'd imagined sneaking into this damn room a million times, and now that I was here, I was barely restraining myself.

I couldn't...I couldn't take her like this.

I inhaled sharply, battling with the urge to claim her as I continued to slide my cock against her perfect pussy. When she moaned my name, I slid in just a little bit. Just enough that if I came, it would be inside her. I couldn't handle the idea of her not having my cum, and the way she tightened around my head and rocked her hips had me wanting to slip in further.

Pushing in another two inches, I let out a deep rumble at the way her body had to stretch to accommodate me. I leaned forward, caging her against the bed fully. The movement and sound caused her eyes to flutter open, and she looked up at me in sleepy surprise.

“Connery— more , please,” she breathed out, her words sealing her fate.

I slid in hard, making her cry out. She clutched around me, her nails sliding against my shoulders. I groaned against her neck, holding myself there as my length pulsed inside of her, feeling like it was being welcomed home. Lena moaned, pushing up against me with her hips as her legs wrapped around me, trying to make sure I didn’t leave her tight heat.

There was absolutely no chance of that—ever.

“I need you to move—fast and hard,” Lena whimpered. “My body feels like it's on fire. I can’t even explain why, I just need you so bad.”

“Because I was in here teasing you, touching every single part of you, making it so you were so damn wet before you even woke up,” I growled, pulling back and watching her gaze fill with heat and delight. “I couldn’t help but make you come, even in sleep, but then I had my mouth buried against your sweet pussy and you kept tempting me. You were so wet, I couldn’t fucking stop. ”

Pulling back, she moaned as I slammed balls-deep inside her once more. “I’d been planning to sleep next to you, to hold you, but instead you opened your pretty little thighs and I couldn’t help but push right into that perfect cunt of yours.”

“I wanted you to come here tonight,” she said as I pulled out and impaled her once again. “I hoped you would, even if I was sleeping.”

“Fuck,” I snarled, pumping fast as she stared up at me with so much desire it ruined me. “Do you know how many times I imagined doing this? You kept fucking denying us and what we could be. All I wanted was to pin you down in that clearing and make you take me—make you realize how much you need me. How good it could be.”

“It feels amazing. You feel amazing.” Lena moaned breathlessly as I continued to stroke in and out of her. When I suddenly rolled us so that she was on top, she sank fully onto my cock and I let out a feral sound at how fucking glorious she looked taking all of me.

Lena tugged off her shirt to reveal her perfect breasts, placing her hands on my chest and beginning to bounce. The sound of her moans and our skin coming together made my cock pulse, leaking precum inside of her.

“Tell me you want this,” I growled. “Tell me you want me to mate with you—to mark up that pretty little neck and bury my knot deep inside of you.” If she didn’t want me I would stop. I would pull out. It would fucking kill me, but I would do it for her.

“Yes,” she whimpered, rolling her hips. “I want your teeth and cum inside of me.”

Shit.

“And my knot,” I warned her, rolling us once more, unable to help the need to dominate her. I pushed her legs to her chest so that I could pump into her fully. “Are you prepared for that, gorgeous?”

“I can handle it,” she said, looking only momentarily concerned.

Stroking in and out of her, I could feel the skin on my cock shift and lengthen, her eyes widening as she cried out my name in surprise. Holding her down further so she

couldn't move away from me, I pumped hard and fast inside of her, and when she cried out—her orgasm crashing over her—I lost any semblance of control.

Her soft, curvy body carried the impact of my hard, harsh movements, and my breathing was rough in the room as I finally gave in to the need to come, slamming hard inside of her. I came so hard I saw fucking stars as my teeth sliced through the soft spot between her neck and right shoulder. My knot at the base of my cock, which only appeared for dragons when we were fully buried inside of our mate, swelled up to keep me lodged inside of her. The stretch of my size had her crying out my name as my cum filled her up so completely that I fucking knew I would breed her.

“Going to keep you stuffed so full, all the fucking time,” I said against her skin as she trembled at the pressure of our connection.

Propping myself up on my elbows, I groaned at the sight of us still connected, her abdomen inflated by my knot. Her golden eyes were dilated with desire, and I leaned down to kiss her before breathing out words that were imprinted on my soul.

“I love you, Lena.”

“Connery,” she breathed out in surprise. “You love me?”

“Of course I love you. I'm obsessed with you. I love the way you fucking breathe, let alone anything else. I need you in my life, gorgeous.”

Tears pricked Lena's eyes. “I love you, Connery. I love that you've never given up on this—on us. I love that you push me, even when I'm too scared to make the jump myself.”

Pressing my forehead to hers, I savored her words. “I will never let you go.”

Lena flashed a tiny smile. “Figuratively and literally, it appears—how long are we stuck like this?”

I groaned as my cock seemed to get harder inside of her than ever before. “If you keep talking about loving me, I’m never going to be able to pull out of you, gorgeous.”

“We’ve got time.”

Her teasing words were so damn true though. We had all the time in the world.

CHAPTER 10

LENA GRAVES

“I ’m glad we didn’t go to the diner,” I said, laying my head on Connery’s chest. He hummed in agreement, smoothing a hand back and forth across my lower back. Our breakfast dishes sat on my end table alongside our coffee cups, the scene perfectly domestic and cozy. It was well into late morning at this point, but I could not convince my body to care or move.

I was perfectly content just laying in bed with Connery, listening to his steady heartbeat. It helped that my entire body was still lit up with the aftereffects of our mating—the marking, knotting, and fantastic sex—leaving me feeling like a perfect pile of goo.

We had taken a super long shower after he was finally able to pull out of me and then fell asleep, only waking about an hour ago. At that point we decided breakfast in bed was a better option than leaving the house.

“I’m just glad you didn’t try to kill me for climbing into your bed last night,” he hummed.

“Like I said, I was sort of hoping you would do that. I thought it was really hot, and I would not complain if you wanted to do that again.”

Connery groaned and tilted my chin up with a firm finger. “And here I thought I couldn’t love you more than I already do.”

Offering him a dazzling smile, I moved up his body to press a kiss to his lips before collapsing back in his arms. “I’m finding that love isn’t something you can control, exactly.”

“No it’s not,” Connery agreed. The buzzing of a phone on the bedside table distracted us both. “Both of our phones have been blowing up all morning. If I had to guess, Liam—the impatient bastard—wants all of us to talk.”

“Every time someone says that, it makes me so nervous.”

“Why?” Connery frowned. “Liam is big on communication. Always has been.”

My mouth popped open. “Communication? Liam?!”

“With us.” Connery offered me an amused look. “Don’t be nervous, gorgeous. We’re going to need to get used to talking as a group.”

“I like the sound of that,” I said as he let out a deep hum and kissed my forehead.

“We should probably get moving.” He sighed. “Pack is having dinner tonight at the main house, and I’m pretty sure we’re all going, so we can just talk there.”

“Oh good, I can see Colette.” I sat up, stretching my arms above my head with a yawn. Connery wrapped his arms around my waist and let out a low rumble, pulling me back to bed. “Thought you said we had to get up?”

“Eventually,” he grumbled, causing me to smile as I curled back against him.

Eventually ended up being another hour before we finally got moving. While he got ready fairly quickly, I moved around my apartment slowly after pouring another cup of coffee. “I’m going to meet you guys there. I need more coffee and time.”

Connery nodded in understanding while pulling on his jacket, his gaze darting to my kitchen counter. Last night I'd gone grocery shopping but had only put away the perishable stuff. Everything else was left on the counter. I frowned, following his gaze to see what had caught his attention. When I realized what he was looking at, my cheeks turned bright red and I snatched the box off the counter and tucked it up into the cabinet, as if it had never existed.

"Don't need to hide that from me, gorgeous," Connery murmured, appearing behind me and stopping my hand from closing the cabinet.

"A box of pregnancy tests? Totally not hiding them. They obviously belong here in the kitchen, just forgot to put them away," I teased, turning into him and finding his eyes heated.

"I know you're in heat and what that means," Connery said, causing me to draw my lip in. "Don't think for a second you need to somehow feel guilty for not spelling it out. I was well fucking aware of what I was doing last night."

A breath whooshed out of me, and a genuine smile tugged on my lips. "I got them just in case, but I won't lie—I did feel guilty. I kept saying something in the moment when I should have said it far sooner."

"Like I said, I knew exactly what I was doing when I buried myself inside of you and filled you with my cum."

Inhaling sharply, I felt a blush stain my cheeks. "We don't even know if it will happen."

"Let me make myself even more clear," Connery said seriously. "I hope it does. All I want is everything with you."

My throat grew thick as I went up on my toes and kissed him softly. “I love you.”

“Love you more, gorgeous.” Connery flashed a smile and pulled back. “Now get your little ass ready. I want to see you at the pack house in a few hours.”

“Will do.” I sighed happily as I pulled the pregnancy tests out of the cabinet as the door closed. I had bought them preemptively. Bunny shifters had a much shorter gestation period than other shifters—only five months—so a positive pregnancy test could be shown in days rather than weeks. Still, I knew it was a little soon to have any results. Staring down at the package, I tried to imagine what I’d do if I did get a positive result.

How would I feel? I honestly didn’t know. It wouldn’t be a bad feeling, that much I knew, but it was accompanied by a nervous excitement. Until I could know for sure, though, I was going to do my best to keep it from my mind.

Carrying the box to the bathroom, I put it away and checked my phone, confirming that I would meet all of them at the pack house in late afternoon, which gave me plenty of time to get ready.

It also gave me time to go visit a friend that I’d been meaning to see.

After putting on some light makeup and pulling the top half of my hair away from my face, I decided to focus on comfort as I put on a pair of leggings and an oversized knit sweater.

When I added a pair of cozy socks as well as a vest to keep me warm, I caught my reflection in the mirror and smiled, noticing that something was different. I didn’t want to say that I was glowing, but there was a difference in the way I was holding myself.

Suddenly, my phone rang. I swiped to answer, seeing that it was Luca. “Morning! I’m just heading over to the pack lands to come see you guys.”

“Morning?” Luca mused. “Sleep in?”

“Oh. Yeah, sort of. I was tired.” I hesitated, not feeling one hundred percent comfortable with telling my brother that Connery had spent the night. I didn’t think Luca would mind—he seemed to tolerate all of the men in my life—but as with most brothers, he wasn’t a huge fan of them.

“Are you coming down with something?” Luca pushed. “You never sleep in.”

“Maybe,” I hedged, trying to move past it. “How’s Colette? I want to talk to her.”

“She’s busy right now, but she’s loving it here.” I could hear the smile in his voice. “At least I hope she is.”

I had no doubt that she was loving it; the pack lands were absolutely wonderful to live on. It was probably freeing for her considering the restrictions she’d been subjected to growing up.

Colette would soon come back to the apartment and pack up her things, and that made me sad in a way. In a few short days we’d begun developing a friendship that I could feel blossoming into a sisterhood. Something I’d never had before. So while I was sad to see her go, my happiness for her was far greater. I was happy that she was finding her happily-ever-after with my brothers.

More so, I had no doubt that the move would have very little effect on our relationship—I knew how close the two of us were. I mean, her magic had all but confirmed it— when she spoke to me telepathically !

Last night I'd come upstairs from the bakery, still in thought about the four men that seemed to occupy every neuron of my brain, and wanted her opinion. I'd posed the question about how I should handle the concept of the four of them wanting me to choose—even though they had never said that. Colette had made quick work of getting to the bottom of the situation and then explaining that she didn't think they'd ask me to choose.

That hadn't been the surprising part of the conversation, though. No, it had been when she answered me through a telepathic connection, her voice appearing in my head! It was absolutely insane and so cool. She'd then gone on to explain that it only happened when she felt close to someone and trusted them. So we were pretty much best friends already. Which is why I was so excited to see her today—I had a lot to update her on, needing to come clean about everything that had happened with my men so far.

My men. That felt amazing to say.

“Well, good. I'll bring over some extra treats from the bakery so she doesn't miss Bunny Bites too much and is tempted to come back,” I teased and practically felt Luca roll his eyes.

“Sounds good,” he said. “Be safe on the drive over; it's raining.”

Was it? I literally hadn't noticed, even though my bedroom window had been open most of the morning.

“See you guys soon,” I said before hanging up, looking out the window to confirm that it was, in fact, raining. Well, that made me feel a bit better about the bakery not being open this morning. Normally I would let people know in advance, but sometimes life got ahead of me.

Alright, this was one of the first times this had ever happened, but still I knew people would be understanding.

Grabbing some treats from the refrigerator in the kitchen, I packed up my car and turned it on, the warm air blasting on my fingers. Turning on some music, I pulled out of the parking lot behind my apartment and began my drive toward the pack lands. The drive was familiar, and because of that my thoughts began to get lost in a swirl of memories, of how this place—the pack lands—had been my home for so long.

“Dad,” I complained, sitting on the couch in his office and glaring at Hunter from across the room. “I think you need to really think about who should be Alpha next. I am way more suited for the position.”

Hunter scoffed at that, his brow furrowing, as Dylan chuckled at my analysis. I wished Luca was here because he would’ve agreed. Just because Hunter was sixteen now, he thought he was in charge of everything. Literally everything! At ten, I felt like I had a far better grasp on the situation at hand.

“Oh?” My dad offered me his full attention. “Alright, I’m all ears. Why do you think so? Maybe I’ll reconsider who gets to inherit the pack.”

“Dad!” Hunter’s voice cracked and Dylan burst into laughter.

“Look at that outburst of anger.” I waved my hand. “Not all of us can be calm and collected like me.”

“You got mad last week because I ate the last piece of lasagna!” Hunter growled.

“Because it was mine,” I retorted, before rolling my eyes. “I’m better at being diplomatic than him. Just saying.”

“I agree,” Dylan sighed. “I’m sorry, Hunter, I think she should be—ouch!” Hunter glared at him after thumping him on the head.

“As much as I love that idea.” My dad pulled my attention back. “I don’t think you actually want to be Alpha, Lena. I think you just don’t want anyone telling you what to do, and even if you were Alpha, your brothers would probably still try to do that.”

“Fair,” I huffed. “Fine. You can stay Alpha, Hunter, but just remember—I could be it, if I wanted.”

“And you would be an amazing one,” my mom agreed, sweeping into the room and dropping a kiss on my head. I scowled outwardly, but I secretly loved it when she did that.

Those little moments, those little scowls, were ones I had come to regret. My parents' death taught me to appreciate the small things around me—the tiniest interactions—while also making me afraid of developing close relationships with anyone outside of my family.

I already feared losing those I loved, so adding to that circle only caused more trepidation. I knew if my parents, especially my mom, found out I was living my life that way, they would come back from the grave to give me a talking to.

Mom’s motto in life had always been about living every day to its fullest...so why was it so hard to do? To accept the possibility of hurt and loss?

My throat got tight at the concept of losing the men I’d come to care about so incredibly much. But even more so, the idea of having a child, an innocent baby...my eyes stung at the emotion that stirred within me. There were so many terrifying factors to consider. What if something happened to me, or to my men, and left our future children alone? What if something happened to them?

My heart beat loudly in my ears as adrenaline raced through me. My breaths were short and shallow, and I pulled over to the side of the road and put my head against the steering wheel, trying to calm myself.

When I finally managed to pull in a steady breath, I straightened myself up and continued driving down the familiar road that would take me to the pack lands, now eager to arrive. I needed to get out of this car, but more so I needed to go see the one person that I knew could possibly provide me with some answers and solace about the future.

Eliza—the packs' seer.

CHAPTER 11

LENA GRAVES

After being let through the wooden gate by the two guards on duty, I drove through the pine forest towards the dark wooden cabins in the distance. The main house always had its lights on, and as I approached, I felt the air stir around me. It was like my mom or dad was in the car with me and we were returning home from a day shopping in Galena. Obviously that was far from the truth, but the atmosphere carried a faint signature of their memory any time I came here.

Not only the memory of the two of them, though—also memories of Ari and even Liam.

“Ari.” I sighed, leaning back against the tree. “I just don’t understand it. Why the police?”

Ari offered me an amused smile, stretched out on the ground with his arms behind his head. I didn’t bother stopping myself from appreciating the way his shirt rode up, highlighting his perfect abs. Damn him. “I mean, you said you like a man in uniform, didn’t you? That’s why.”

I rolled my eyes. “I was teasing Liam when I said that. You can’t possibly want to work with him every single day. Every. Single. Day.”

Ari flashed a smile. “Oh, come on, he’s not that bad.”

“He’s almost arrested us like ten times!” I nearly screeched.

“Nah, Liam wouldn’t do that.” Ari chuckled. Shaking my head, I looked toward the path when I heard footsteps crunching in the leaves and dried pine needles on the ground.

“What wouldn’t I do?” Liam asked, his badge shining in the sunlight. I frowned at him as his eyes sparked with amusement at my attitude.

“I was saying that you would arrest me,” I pointed out. “And that I couldn’t believe Ari would want to work with you every single freakin’ day.”

“I’m not too worried,” Ari mused. “Maybe I’ll get to arrest you this time, baby girl.”

“You better not.” I narrowed my eyes on him, jumping slightly as Liam appeared next to me, crouching down. He grabbed my chin, and when he spoke softly, I felt my chest squeeze.

“I’m not taking your friend, nor am I here to stop your fun, Graves. I promise.”

I think that him stealing my friend had been the thing I was most worried about. Ari had been my only friend, so for him to suddenly pick a career when I had no idea where I was taking my life...well, it had been unexpected.

Luckily, it hadn’t turned out to be too much of an issue, although partying hadn’t been an option anymore. Then again, by the end of senior year—pretty much after the first few busts from Liam—I had been mostly over it.

I still couldn’t believe I had been that into partying. On the surface, there was nothing wrong with what I’d done—enjoying life as a teenager and breaking some rules. But the thing that cast a dark shadow over it was the knowledge that I’d done it for the

wrong reasons. I'd wanted to keep my mind busy, to keep my heart occupied with other things so that I wouldn't...think. Thinking has always led me down a bad place. Slowly but surely, in the years that passed, it had become easier.

But the pain of their loss would never be fully removed. The echoes of their lives were like painted memories surrounding me, reminding me of the love I'd lost. I could only hope to fill my life with more love, enough so that when I remembered theirs I could do so with happiness.

Pulling into the hidden garage on the side of the main house, I turned off my car and slid out, grabbing the bakery boxes from the back. I walked inside and left the boxes on the kitchen counter, the glinting marble and dark wood so damn familiar, before making my way into the den.

"Captain Magnus," I said, unsurprised to find him there.

The serious man turned and offered me a sharp nod, placing the tablet he'd been working on down on the coffee table. He was head of security for the pack, and with his background in special operations somewhere overseas, we were lucky to have him.

I had to assume security was something he enjoyed—the dude was always working, and when he wasn't...well, he was focused on Eliza.

"Lena. You're here for the pack dinner, I assume?"

"Yes." I put my hands in my jacket and looked around the familiar space. "But I was about to go find Eliza, if she's home. I need to ask her something."

"She's home," he confirmed, suddenly far more interested in my plans. "I was going to check on her anyway, if you want a ride over there."

“I would love that,” I said, thrilled to get back out of the house. I climbed in next to Magnus on an ATV-golf cart like combo that security often used to get around, and relaxed. I was simply along for the ride, knowing Magnus wouldn’t talk to me much. I didn’t take offense to it; he just tended to be a man of few words.

Instead, my focus was fully on the beautiful landscape around us as we passed forested path after forested path, all of them featuring warmly lit cabins. Children’s laughter filled the air, and shifted individuals darted past as the spring breeze moved through the lively space.

There were times when I very much missed living here, even though I knew it wasn’t the right place for me—at least not right now. I needed space to heal and a place to find my own spot in this world. My place in Willowdale Village.

As we neared the center of the pack lands, the hundreds of mountainous acres mostly uninhabited, my ears picked up on the river nearby. When we turned down a familiar path, I instantly smiled, seeing that Eliza was waiting on the porch already.

“Hey, Magnus,” I drew out, feeling suddenly a bit uncomfortable. “I need to talk to Eliza about something personal. I know you normally hang around...”

“I was planning to do a check up on the riverbank. I’ll keep my distance,” he assured me, and I offered him a thankful smile. “Besides, I’m not sure that mia magia wants to see me.”

I always forgot that Magnus called Eliza ‘my magic,’ but every time I heard it I thought it was the sweetest thing.

“I doubt that,” I said, not wanting to push. The relationship between the two of them was odd, to say the least. Magnus was nearly ten years older than Eliza’s twenty years, but they had been in each other’s lives for over two years now. When she first

arrived here in the frozen tundra of January, he had found her hypothermic, nearly dead, and covered in blood by the riverbank. Running from something or someone .

I didn't know the full story, but his protectiveness suggested that either he was in love with her or the threat was very much real—or both.

“Lena!” Eliza's cheerful, soothing voice filled the air as I got out of the cart and met her halfway down the stairs for a hug.

“Sorry about stopping by unannounced,” I said. Her eyes ran over my face, their milky white texture taking in everything. In all technicality, Eliza couldn't see. In the human world she would be considered blind, but those of us who knew her knew that was far from the case. Her magic was unique for so many reasons, the least of which being that she was a rare unicorn shifter.

Her ability to see into the future, especially for the sake of the pack, had become extremely valuable in making long-term decisions. And while her visions took up the majority of her mental space, Eliza could see the physical world as well, but in a different way than one would expect. The people around her, she'd explained, appeared in outlined pulsating figures the same shade as their auras. I couldn't imagine seeing the world in that way, but I thought it was beautiful the way she described it.

Then again, literally everything was beautiful about Eliza, and I wasn't afraid to admit that. She was built very waif-like, always wearing natural materials that made her look that much more ethereal, like a wood nymph. What stood out the most about her, though? Her rainbow colored hair. It was almost always pulled into a relaxed waterfall style, showing off a mixture of purples, greens, oranges, blues, and pinks. I honestly didn't think anyone, even the best hair colorist in the world, could replicate it.

“Never a problem; I love having you over,” she insisted. “Let’s get inside. The weather has been absolutely awful lately.”

I personally liked it, but I had a feeling that for someone who spent as much time outside as Eliza did, it wasn’t nearly as fun.

“Thanks for the ride,” I called out to Magnus.

“No problem,” he said, his voice more gruff than before. “Eliza, I’m going to be down by the riverbank if you need me.”

Eliza looked toward him and seemed to hold his gaze for a long moment before nodding. Man, the way he said ‘if you need me.’ I couldn’t properly describe it, but I could practically feel the emotion between them. When she ushered me inside, I followed after, looking around her beautiful cabin.

The space fit her perfectly. The one bedroom cabin featured a massive apothecary where the kitchen was supposed to be and a living space filled with every blanket, pillow, and comfortable surface known to man, all around a fire. The walls and ceilings were covered in crystals and plants, the entire space smelling and feeling alive and vibrant. I had never been inside her bedroom, but I had to imagine it was much the same.

Eliza and I had grown close enough over the past couple of years that I could call her a friend, but with her there was always a distance. Like a wall separating the two of us. She was always there when I needed advice or an ear to listen, but when I tried to return the favor, she was a sealed vault. It was a boundary I respected, so I took our friendship for what it was and appreciated it, especially since she sought me out when she ‘felt’ that something was wrong.

I sat down in my usual spot, and Eliza went to make a pot of tea.

“What’s bothering you?”

“I’m in my mating heat,” I breathed out. Her brow dipped, the kettle beginning to heat on the stovetop. “It’s technically my third, but I was able to ignore the others. This year I couldn’t, and I know it’s because my rabbit considers Ari, Liam, Macon, and Connery her mates.”

“Okay.” She nodded in understanding, clearly wanting me to continue.

“I’ve always been hesitant to give them a full chance...for a million reasons, but mainly because I thought that I’d have to choose.” I wasn’t telling her anything she didn’t already know—I’d probably talked to her about it more than anyone else.

“Even though they’ve never signaled that,” she pointed out.

“But it would make sense,” I murmured, having already explained my theory about half of them not having fated mates and therefore all the reason to find someone they could truly call ‘theirs.’ “Anyway, I gave them a chance, and I may or may not have slept with three of them—been marked by three of them. And the other also finished inside of me, so that sort of counts, I guess? And they knew I was in heat! So I’m confused, or maybe I’m not...” I trailed off, not quite sure how to finish that thought. All I knew was I needed some type of answer, some type of reassurance—desperately. But something held me back about asking her to do a reading about my future with the men.

“I want to know if anything is going to come from the mating heat,” I said finally, almost afraid to breathe the words out loud.

“Of course you do,” Eliza said softly, sitting down across from me and handing me a cup of tea. She motioned for my hands, and as I placed them in hers, I prepared for the sensation of her magic rolling over my skin.

“Before I do this, I want you to know one thing,” she said. “Your fate and future is one I always pay attention to, and while paths change and you always have options, your future is good, Lena. It’s always been good. You are filled with light and love, and there is no amount of darkness that can weigh that down. Everything, absolutely everything is going to work out how it's supposed to.”

My eyes welled with tears. “Thank you, Eliza. I needed that.”

“Now close your eyes.” She squeezed my hands, and as my eyes closed, her familiar magic rose up and rushed over me like a soothing breeze smelling faintly of lavender.

Describing the process of having Eliza read your future was almost impossible. Millions of images rushed past, noises and songs I didn’t recognize rang in my ears, and thousands of emotions ran through me. None of it clear and none of it understandable, except to one person—Eliza.

Instead of trying to figure it out, I just let myself enjoy the process, and when she squeezed my hands a second time, I opened my eyes.

Eliza’s smile gave me hope. She spoke in a near whisper, as if keeping the moment a secret between us. “As you know, being in heat increases the chances of conceiving more than tenfold for rabbit shifters. You should prepare for that possibility. I see thousands of paths ahead of you, Lena, and the majority of them have children.”

A smile broke onto my face. There were a million other emotions as well—concern, worry, anxiety, excitement, happiness, nervousness—the list was filled with both good and bad. But more than anything, there was a kernel of hope that things in my life were about to come together. I just had to be strong enough to take the future that I wanted—the future that could bring me true happiness.

CHAPTER 12

LENA GRAVES

“Thank you for everything, including hanging out,” I told Eliza.

The two of us were slowly making our way from her cottage toward the main pack house, the cool early spring weather biting my skin. After reading my future, the two of us had spent an hour or so talking and drinking tea, but there had been a lot of comfortable silence as well—almost as if she could tell that I was trapped in my own head.

“That’s what friends are for,” Eliza insisted, tucking her hands into her long jacket that brushed the forest floor. I didn’t consider myself a fashion expert by any means, but I could tell that at some point Eliza had worn expensive and stylish clothes regularly. Even the clothing she wore now was paired in ways I would never consider, all of it looking very ‘vogue’ on her tall, thin frame. I had considered asking her for fashion advice a few times, but I knew it wouldn’t look the same on the two of us. It was something I’d accepted long ago.

“And I really do consider you my friend,” I said softly, hearing the footsteps behind us. Magnus was far enough away to give us space, but not far enough to truly allow Eliza to walk through the forest unprotected. In his mind, at least.

I thought I was pretty terrifying for a bunny shifter...but probably not scary enough to fight off any actual threats. At least not the ones that inspired fear in someone like Eliza. Unicorn shifters were known for being particularly deadly.

“You know you can tell me anything, right?” I asked her.

Eliza smiled, keeping her gaze ahead. “I know, Lena. I know I can trust you.”

“I feel like I don’t know anything about you,” I pushed. Partly because I felt like I’d told her so much today, but also because I could feel something weighing on her.

Eliza’s face filled with a momentary wave of sadness that almost made me feel breathless. “Sometimes the horrors of the past are best left there so the peace of the future can be celebrated.”

Which meant whatever she had been through had been truly awful. I nodded in understanding and we continued our walk quietly for a few more minutes, the path becoming paved as we neared the heart of the community.

“I will tell you one thing,” she said, in a conspiratorial tone. “You are completely right with your assumptions about me and Magnus. There is something there, but you understand it probably as much as I do.”

I felt my eyes widen. “You like him?”

Her lips pulled into a small smile. “Like him? I love him .”

Oh. Oh shit .

“He loves you too,” I said with certainty. “He watches over you constantly.”

“Duty is different than love,” she said, her smile falling. “I think our age difference bothers him. I think he can’t see me as anything but the seventeen-year-old he found half dead on the riverbank. I’m not sure he’ll be able to ever see me as anything but that.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” I countered. “Have you told him how you feel?”

“Oh, I’ve made it obvious, much to my own embarrassment,” Eliza murmured. “He just keeps quietly watching me, never fully reacting to my statements.”

“Maybe push him a bit?” I wagered. “I won’t lie, when the guys pushed a little, it helped me realize that they were into me. Maybe that would help him?”

“Maybe.” She sighed. “Or maybe he just feels like he has to watch me. I mean, he’s perfect. Literally perfect. So he probably feels bound out of duty and kindness?—”

“Hey, Magnus,” I turned sharply, hating the sad look on her face.

As I suspected, the man was only twenty feet away. He hurried forward with a questioning look, Eliza tugging on my arm as if to warn me to stop. I wasn’t going to bust her or anything, I was just going to be oblivious and ask questions.

“Yeah?” he asked. His eyes moved to Eliza. “Is something wrong, mia magia?”

“What does that mean?” I asked. He’d given me the perfect place to start—better than what I’d had planned.

Magnus’s eyes widened, and he glanced back toward Eliza. “My magic.”

“Wonderful,” I said with a nod. “Very cute. So, I’ve always had this question, and I’m hoping you can shed light on this—you saved Eliza when she arrived here, right?”

“Yes.”

“Lena—” Eliza’s voice was a bit of squeak.

“Since then, has anyone asked or told you to look out for her? Have my brothers ordered you to do that?”

Magnus reared back in surprise. “What? No.”

“So why do you watch her?”

Magnus’s gaze slid over to Eliza again, whatever retort he’d been about to lodge dying on his tongue.. “I think that’s a conversation for the two of us. Eliza knows why.”

“No I don’t.” Eliza kept her expression blank, but I could feel the energy bubbling beneath her skin.

“Eliza, come here.” His demand was gentle, and I squeezed my friend's hand and nearly skipped off. She looked so much happier already, and I was glad to help clarify things for both her and Magnus. If only I could do the same for myself.

“See you at dinner!” I called out to the both of them before jogging up to the central house. The sounds of voices and familiar scents filled the air, the warmth of community radiating through me.

It wasn’t until I entered through the private entrance of the house and into the main living quarters that I felt my nerves return. I was about to see all of them, and knowing what I knew now from Eliza, I felt like it was my responsibility to bring up the very real possibility that I could be pregnant.

I could do this. I absolutely could... not do this.

Turning a corner into the hallway, I immediately locked eyes with Liam, who stood at the other end in front of the doors to the dining hall. Except he wasn’t alone. Two

female shifters were laughing at something he was saying. My entire body froze up at the emotions that cascaded over me, threatening to drown me.

Jealousy. Possessiveness. Anger at him. Anger at them.

Holy shit.

Placing a hand on my fast beating heart, I tried to breath through it, but red danced in my vision, causing my knees to feel shaky. I had never felt this way—hell, I’d never felt jealous before. Insecure that the four of them could get tired of dancing around whatever this was between us and find someone else? Absolutely. But pure, unfiltered possessiveness and jealousy? Never. I didn’t know if it was my mating heat or because he’d marked me, but I suddenly felt the absurd urge to rip him away from them.

The next thing I knew, I was wrapping my arms around Liam and burying my head against his chest, his uniform smelling like his warm, natural scent. I let out a hum of relief as he strung his hand through my hair and held me to him.

“Oh shit,” one of the women said. “Sorry Lena, I should have realized?—”

“It’s fine,” I said, not opening my eyes and instead rubbing my cheek against his chest. I heard Liam promise something about checking out the stoplight on Fourth Street—hinting that it could be broken—before both women walked away. I didn’t move from my spot.

“You okay, Graves?” Liam asked, twirling my hair through his fingers after loosening his grip.

“No.” I tugged back and scowled at him. “Why are you talking to other women?”

Wait. What had I just said?

My eyes widened at my own words as I took a big step back from him and covered my mouth. “What the hell am I even saying? Creator, I’ve officially lost it.”

“No you haven’t,” Liam said, tugging me back against him. “It’s because we’re officially mates. I don’t blame you at all. Hell, Lena, I’ll never talk to another woman again if you don’t want me to. I’ve just been waiting on you to finally choose.”

His words had me freezing up as my heart tightened painfully, my heightened emotion and hormones causing my brain to interpret his words in the worst way. My eyes watered as I looked him in the eye. “Choose? You want me to choose?”

“Yes,” Liam said, his gaze moving over my face in concern. “Shit, why are you crying?”

“Screw you, Liam!” I rushed into the dining hall, slamming one of the doors shut behind me.

Choose?! I couldn’t choose. I wouldn’t choose, not at this point.

Storming away, I ignored Liam’s call of my name and tried to find somewhere to escape to regulate myself. I knew I wasn’t acting normal by any stretch of the imagination, but my magic was riding me so hard it felt like I could barely breathe. Adrenaline was coursing through me like an angry storm, and I was damn near shaking.

No one paid much mind to me as I crossed through the hall. The familiar wood beam ceiling and window walls were normally welcoming, but right now they felt like a box—a cage to showcase the mass of emotions surging through me. When I reached the long table at the front that stood apart from the others in the room, I strode

straight to Colette and Hunter.

“You won’t believe this shit!” I threw my hands in the air, unable to contain my frustration or hide my tears. My brother offered me a concerned look as Colette touched his arm softly in comfort. Somehow that only made the tears come faster.

“I have no idea why you support Willowdale’s police force,” I said to Hunter. “They suck. They all suck.”

Colette rounded the table and pulled me into a hug, and I clung to her as I let out an ugly sob. I was so incredibly thankful for her friendship as she led me out to the patio, away from prying eyes.

I slumped into a chair, putting my head down on top of my crossed arms on top of the table, and let out a shaky breath. I needed to calm down, but for some reason, it was so hard . Had I just hit my limit? The jealousy thing paired with the possible pregnancy thing and having officially mated to three of the four men in my life? And he wanted me to choose ?! What the hell was there to fucking choose at this point?

“I think I hate them,” I said, knowing the words were absolutely false. “I hate Liam specifically. Stupid jerk.”

Colette sat down next to me, her voice echoing through my mind. “What did he do?”

“So remember the ‘issue’ I was dealing with? Yeah, so nothing was resolved on that end.” I had thought it was resolved, but clearly not. “And now Liam has decided that I have to choose, even though he saw Ari’s mark on me when we mated!”

“Is that what he said?”

“No.” I ran my hands through my hair. “Not exactly.” I wanted to tell Colette about

everything, especially Eliza's prediction, but before I could say a word, a shadow appeared over me. Liam crouched down next to the table, pulling my full attention. His dark eyes were filled with so much concern that it made me even more angry at him.

"What do you want?"

Liam looked toward Colette and offered a greeting. "Luna, it's good to see you."

I was momentarily surprised by the title, never having heard it applied to anyone but my mom—yet it didn't bother me. In fact, I think it was a fantastic fit for Colette. But I was pissed that yet again he was giving attention to another woman, and not only that, but that he'd chosen to speak to her before speaking to me.

"You need to go." I scowled at him. "I don't want to see you."

Liam's gaze swung back to mine, his voice filled with an authority that made my skin prickle. "Stop it. We need to talk. Now. Let's go."

"Screw you—" I let out a growl of frustration as Liam scooped me up in one easy movement, throwing me over his shoulder.

"Let. Me. Go," I snarled, pushing away from him as he switched me into a bridal hold. The sound of leaves underfoot told me he was carrying me into the forest.

"Never," he rumbled.

"Liam!" I snapped. "Put me down. Now."

"No," he replied stubbornly. "We need to talk."

“I am not choosing!” I yelled, hot tears leaking from my eyes yet again. “You can’t ask me to choose between all of you. Three of you have marked me, and asking me to choose now is cruel. I won’t do it.”

Liam paused, letting me slide down his body. My knees gave out and I fell on my ass, burying my head as I curled in on myself. When Liam’s arms wrapped around me and he pulled me into his lap, I let out a small sound and buried my nose against his throat.

“Is that what you really thought I wanted?” Liam’s voice was raw with emotion. “Fuck, Lena, I would never make you do that.”

The pressure in my chest released as I frowned, looking up at him. “You said that I had to choose.”

“Choose us . I wanted you to choose all of us. We’ve been waiting this entire damn time for you to finally realize we belong together and make the choice to be with us.”

I stared blankly at him as my lip dipped. “Really? Do you really mean that?”

“Of course I do,” he said, running a hand through my hair. “I would never make you choose, especially when you have two other mating marks on your neck. You could be fucking pregnant with any of our pups. I would never make you choose, Lena. I love you. I would never put you through something that excruciating.”

“You love me?” Now tears streamed down my face for an entirely different reason.

“Of course I love you. What the hell do you think we’ve been doing here for the past few years? I’m fucking obsessed with you, Graves.”

My lips pulled up slightly, my eyes still watery. “So you admit to being a stalker?”

“I do. I fucking loved every minute of it.”

“And what if I love my stalker back?” I whispered, my lips brushing against his.

“What if I love you too, Liam?”

“That’ll make this next conversation and everything that follows way fucking easier,” he rumbled, standing up with me in his arms. I had a feeling that he was taking me to meet with the others, so I melted into him without objection.

“I do. I do love you.”

“I love you too, Lena.”

CHAPTER 13

MACON DEMIR

I could feel something was wrong with my bunny.

Before she even came into view, her stress became apparent through our connection. The intensity of her emotions throughout the day, ranging from fearful to joyous, were all completely unexplained to me. But in the past half an hour they'd grown to something even more overwhelming—jealousy, possessiveness, fear, and then pure anger all intermingled into one heavily saturated wave. The only reason I hadn't gone to find her was because I knew Liam was bringing her here.

Even now, even after I'd felt her joy and relief, the heaviness of those emotions weighed on me as I listened for her approaching footsteps.

"Fucking finally," Connery cursed as Liam broke through the brush, off the normal path. Lena's face held a softer expression than I'd dared to hope for, an encouraging sign for the conversation we needed to have.

"What's wrong?" Ari demanded, noticing that her cheeks were wet with tears. Why the fuck had she been crying? Also, why did she look so damn exhausted?

On top of that, I couldn't help but notice how damn sweet she smelled, even more so than usual. I knew it was because of her mating heat, and I found it almost impossible to hold back, to not surge forward to touch her. To kiss her.

“Misunderstanding,” Liam said.

“I thought Liam was implying that I had to choose between the four of you, but he wasn’t,” she explained. “But I do think we need to talk. I feel like I keep assuming things and then getting them wrong.”

“When I said that, I meant that she needed to choose to be with us, not choose between us,” Liam said.

“Let’s make it clear then,” I said. “We really fucking?—”

“I want to be with all four of you!” Lena blurted. Her cheeks flamed bright pink as I smiled massively. “I want to be with all of you. I don’t want to choose, and it scares the hell out of me that you might want that. I’m scared you’re not going to want to share and see what this could turn into for our future.” She bit down on her bottom lip, hard, to keep herself from a continuous worried ramble. She didn’t need to be worried, though.

“I promise you, Lena, that is far from the case,” Liam said, pulling her attention.

“We’re all on the same page and have been since this past summer,” Ari agreed. “We all recognize that what we feel for you individually isn’t going anywhere. We aren’t letting you go anywhere, Lena.”

“Don’t worry, bunny,” I said, trying to bring a smile to her face. “My brother and I don’t plan to steal you away anymore—although when we first met you, it was damn tempting.”

My brother shook his head at my antics, adding, “Do you think we would’ve put our mating marks on you while expecting you to choose, gorgeous?”

My gaze darted to the soft skin between her left shoulder and neck as I tried to resist the urge to mark her here and now. That would be absurd...still extremely tempting, though. Especially if I could take her out on the forest floor like the animal she turned me into.

“I didn’t know what to expect, or if any of you had talked,” she said softly. “I just immediately thought of the worst possible scenario...which obviously was far off base. The way all of you make me feel is so much more intense than I ever expected, and I’m terrified of what that would mean if you ever decided you didn’t want to be part of this...or didn’t want me.”

“Never going to happen,” I assured her in a low rumble.

“But that’s not all I’m scared of,” she breathed out, twisting her fingers. I stepped forward instinctively, wanting to pull her into me, but she put a hand out to stop me. “I love the idea of you touching me, but I’ve got to get through this. I’ve got to get it all out or else I’ll chicken out.”

Nodding, I put my hands in my pockets and restrained the urge to go to her.

“I’m scared of losing the four of you,” she said, her tone more firm. “You four mean everything to me. Literally everything.”

I could practically hear the word ‘love’ on the tip of her tongue, but she held back. I wanted to hear her say it when we were alone and she was under me, so I understood her hesitancy.

“Scared of losing us?” Connery asked in confusion.

“I’m scared of something happening to you like it happened to my parents,” she whispered, looking down at her feet. “I’m so damn scared of that.”

“Nothing will happen to us,” Liam assured her. “Putting aside that we’re the town’s entire damn police department, we are more than capable of handling ourselves. We will always do everything in our power to come home to you, Graves.”

I had literal death on my hands, my soul stained with the blood of those that had wronged my brother and me in the past few years. I didn’t plan on telling Lena that, but the last people she needed to be worried about was us.

“If anything, I’m more worried about you,” Ari agreed. “This town is peaceful, but that doesn’t mean it’s not dangerous. I don’t like the idea of you going home to an empty apartment every damn night.” Although I highly doubted it would be empty ever again.

“We are going to do everything in our power to protect you,” Connery agreed. “And if that means protecting one another, then we will.”

“Or anyone else in our family,” I said pointedly in reference to her heat and potential pregnancy. I knew Lena damn well, and I knew it would be on her mind. If she was scared of losing us, I could only imagine how fearful the idea of motherhood would make her. It wasn’t going to be a fear I allowed to fester, though. I planned on proving to her just how safe we would keep our entire family.

“We need to talk about that.” Lena bit down on her lip. “I went to see Eliza today, about the future...I didn’t ask her about us, but I did ask her about that. I know she can see multiple paths at once, but in most of her visions, she saw that we would be expecting...and soon.”

Music to my fucking ears.

“We knew what we were doing, gorgeous. I told you that,” Connery pointed out quietly as I nodded.

“I’ve always wanted a family with you,” Ari said, pulling a smile to her lips. “I think I told you that once.”

“And before I even asked you to dinner, I could sense your heat was coming,” Liam added.

“And that didn’t stop you from asking me to dinner or starting any of this,” she murmured.

Now she was fully getting it.

“Let me make it as clear as possible—we want this, Lena. We want you. We want you with us every damn second, living and breathing the same air as us. We want all of that. There is absolutely no doubt in any of our minds, so you should remove it from your own.”

“Okay...” Lena breathed out, a smile slowly forming on her lips. “So we’re doing this? For real?”

“For real,” I confirmed, finally approaching her and tugging her around her waist. “Just say the word and we’ll all move in together, bunny.”

“I would love that—I want this. I want a future with all of you.”

We would absolutely give that to her, and so much more.

“We need to take her home,” I told the others.

After pack dinners, everyone usually went on a run, but we’d skipped out this time—we didn’t think Lena’s rabbit would enjoy that as much as our dragons or wolves did. We did, however, go to the bonfire. Now a few hours later, Lena was

curled up on my lap, her head tucked against my neck and my hand strung through her hair.

I could feel people looking at us, but I did my best to ignore it, not wanting my temper to spark when I inevitably found that some of those gazes were male. They had no right to be looking at our woman. Still, I understood that Lena was popular here. Everyone loved her, and before us she'd never shown an interest in mates. Now she was surrounded by four of them.

"I'm hesitant to move her. She looks exhausted," Ari said. All of this had been a lot on Lena, and while I think we finally had a very clear understanding, it didn't take away from the stress it had caused her.

"I'm surprised her brothers haven't said shit," Connery pointed out.

At this point in the night, her brothers and their mate had disappeared inside, and while they had offered us looks, none of them seemed particularly surprised. It wasn't like we'd been quiet about our feelings for Lena—outside of her own damn brothers, we had pretty much told every other bastard in the vicinity to stay the fuck away from her.

"I'm sure that's coming," Liam sighed, approaching and crouching down next to where I sat with her on a log. "We should bring her back to her apartment."

"The house is nearly done. Sure we don't want to just go there?" Ari asked.

"I think we should bring her by tomorrow and show her. She's finally on the same page as us; I don't want to send her running," Liam said. "Plus, the first shipment of furniture won't be delivered until late tomorrow night."

I shook my head in disagreement but knew it wasn't worth the battle. Instead, I stood

with her in my arms and made my way down the path that led from the backyard to the front of the house where we had parked. When my brother shouted that he would drive Lena's car back, I got into the back seat of the SUV as Liam and Ari took the front.

Lena murmured something against my neck but other than that continued to sleep deeply, her steady breathing causing my own to regulate and slow. My body always felt like it was in a constant state of alertness when she was around—almost like I was manic or hyper. It was intoxicating. But in moments like this, I felt content just holding her against me. I could hold her like this forever.

“Who's going to do rounds tonight?” I asked Liam.

“All of us, unfortunately.” He sighed. “There have been some sightings of unmarked vehicles throughout the area. Hunter thinks it could be someone looking for Colette, so they're keeping security tight around the pack lands.”

We'd already been on heightened alert last night, but it seemed the problem was developing further.

“So if we see anyone, pull them over?” Ari asked.

“I'll call and see how they want to handle that, but I would assume so,” Liam said.

“One of us should still be posted outside of her place tonight—it's centrally located, so if any unmarked vehicles drive through town, it would be fairly obvious,” I pointed out.

I didn't like the idea of not being by Lena's side tonight, especially with a potential threat, but protecting Willowdale was my job, and there was something satisfying about that. For so long my brother and I had wandered without purpose, and while the

main reason we'd joined the police force was to protect Lena to the best of our abilities, it was a good feeling to serve a larger purpose.

I'd never let that get in the way of Lena's safety, though. As we drove, my thoughts wandered to when we had first met her.

"I have no idea what we're doing here," Connery said. I grunted in response, running a hand through my hair. We'd driven into this town late last night, another stop on an endless journey.

"I think we should give it a try. The big cities give me a fucking headache," I admitted as I looked around the quaint streets of Willowdale. There were shifters everywhere, and the flower beds that lined each street were in full bloom. This was objectively the most beautiful town we'd traveled to so far.

"Yeah, but we're going to stand out here."

"Hi there." A bright voice had me snapping my head to the side as I squinted up, nearly blinded by the sun. Or blinded by this woman's fucking beauty, because the minute I shifted and got a full look at her, a rumble broke from my chest in surprise.

Large golden eyes and bright teal hair that fell to her waist, the woman in front of us looked like something out of a fucking storybook. She was wearing a sundress and sneakers, a bag under her arm that appeared to be filled with freshly purchased flowers. I actually felt the need to distance myself from her, feeling like I was somehow polluting her space.

What the hell was going on with me right now? I never gave a shit about that type of thing. My dragon roared in silent protest at the idea of moving away from her at all.

"Hi," Connery offered. That single syllable was impressive considering my words

seemed to be stuck in my throat.

“Are you new in town?” she asked curiously. “I’ve never seen either of you around.”

“Yes,” I admitted. “Just passing through.”

“Are you staying at the bed and breakfast?” She looked behind us at the establishment in question.

“Yeah,” Connery said.

“Well if you need a tour around ? —”

“We do.” I needed a lot more than that, but a tour was a fucking amazing place to start.

It had taken only one afternoon with her to realize that we were absolutely staying in Willowdale. Not only that, but Lena was set to be our mate. It wasn’t until days later, after finding an apartment, that we realized we weren’t alone in our affections for her—or that our girl wasn’t exactly keen on settling down just yet.

It felt fucking fantastic to finally be here, where there was no more damn confusion.

When we reached her apartment, I told Liam and Ari I would make sure she was settled before coming back down. They decided to check the security system, the locks on the bakery, and her apartment as I carried her upstairs.

She’d only lived here a few months, but Lena had absolutely made the space her own. The walls were warm, every corner filled with soft, comfortable surfaces. Her kitchen had recipes plastered to the cabinets and the fridge, and the room always smelled faintly of vanilla. I couldn’t wait until our house together smelled similar, the scent so

tied to her.

Walking into her bedroom, I laid her down and removed her shoes and jacket, tucking her under the covers. Making sure the windows were locked, I leaned down and pressed a kiss to her lips as she sighed my name.

“I love you, bunny,” I said quietly, knowing she wouldn’t hear it but wanting to tell her anyway. “I promise that this is going to work out how it's supposed to.” With her in our home as our mate and wife, carrying our children, and being spoiled every single damn day.

Walking out of the bedroom, I closed the door securely and nodded toward Ari, who was locking up the guest bedroom windows. Connery had already dropped the keys for her car on the table and gone back downstairs to the car. Leaving her apartment, we made sure everything was secure before finally getting back into the SUV.

“We’re going to have to figure out scheduling going into the future,” I pointed out. “I don’t like the idea of leaving her at home by herself.”

“I don’t either,” Liam admitted. “Which is probably fucking insane.”

“Is it?” Ari asked openly. “My wolf sure as hell doesn’t think so.”

“I don’t see an issue with thinking like that either,” my brother agreed. “Plus, imagine how we’ll feel if she really is pregnant.”

A low rumble broke through my chest at the thought. The concept was fucking mesmerizing to consider—Lena carrying our hatchlings.

“Or even more so,” he continued, “how we’ll feel if we have to leave her and our kids at home.”

“You’re right,” Liam agreed instantly.

“I was surprised she went to Eliza,” Connery said.

“I’m not,” I told him. “I’m surprised she didn’t ask her about our relationship, though.”

“I think some part of her recognized that she already knew where we stood,” Ari said.

I believed that. I just had to hope that when Lena did find out she was pregnant, she wouldn’t get scared and run. Our girl was fearless when it came to everything but matters of the heart, and this situation had the potential to shake her to her core.

CHAPTER 14

LENA GRAVES

Something about this Thursday felt far different than any other— and I knew why .

It was partly because I felt behind at the bakery, which was something I had never let fall by the wayside. I baked even when I didn't need to, but recently my time had been more occupied than usual. I'd managed to bake this morning, waking up at dawn to do so, but I still hadn't opened for the day. My brothers had asked me to meet them at the old ballet studio, so I'd open after that.

But that wasn't the true reason today felt different. No, it was because the truth between me and my four men was out there—there was no ignoring it. Not that I would want to, especially since I'd woken up to such sweet messages from all of them.

Nervous butterflies took residence in my stomach, and as I drove to meet my brothers and Colette, I couldn't help but look behind me at the two patrol cars that followed. I had no idea why they wanted me to drive separately, but they'd made it clear we had plans afterward.

I'd known these men for what felt like forever, but somehow they managed to make me nervous—especially about the unknown. It wasn't a bad feeling, but it was exhilarating and a bit scary. It didn't help that my entire body felt off, my muscles aching and my skin hot. It seemed partly due to my magic but partly due to something else, my stomach queasy.

Trying to put it aside, I pulled up to the old ballet studio and took out the key that Luca had asked me grab from his office. I had a feeling what my brothers were up to, especially considering the brand new sign in the window, but I didn't have confirmation. Colette had been a ballet dancer most of her life and had confided that she wanted to eventually open her own studio. If I freakin' found out that they had bought her the old studio, I was going to be thrilled.

We would be two best friends who each owned small businesses—which was absolutely badass.

As I pulled up to the curb, I hopped out and immediately went over to the patrol cars that pulled up. Offering Liam a curious look, I asked, "Where are we headed after this?"

"Want to show you something," he said quietly.

I looked at Ari. "You have to give me more than that."

"I'll tell you, gorgeous," Connery called out from the second car, and I rewarded him with a winning smile.

"No he won't," Liam countered. "I promise it's a good thing."

"Has to do with us moving in together," Ari relented. Liam shot him a look.

My eyes widened as I heard the sound of an approaching fourth car. Nodding, trying to keep my expression even, I bit down on my lip to restrain a squeal of excitement. Living together—moving in together. Taking a shaking breath, I put my hands in my pockets and grabbed Luca's key, going to stand by the studio entrance.

I was doing my best to ignore the patrol cars as I watched my brothers and Colette get

out of their vehicle, waving at my friend.

“Morning!” Colette chimed in my head. I pulled her into a hug as I tossed the key toward my brothers over her shoulder.

“Morning!” I squeezed her into a tight hug. “Hey, thank you for yesterday. I really needed someone to talk to, so thank you for being there.” Even if I had gotten kidnapped by Liam right after.

“Never a problem.” Colette pulled back and looked toward the dance studio. “Any idea what this is about?”

I shook my head with a shrug as she looked toward the studio with veiled hope and excitement. Yeah, they had totally bought it for her.

“I’m sure it’s a good thing,” I promised her, urging her to follow my brothers inside. Once they’d disappeared through the door, I walked back to the patrol cars, where Connery and Macon were talking to Ari and Liam.

“Where now?” I asked curiously.

“Just follow us,” Connery said, smoothing a hand up my back. “You could drive with us, but we might have to go on patrol and we aren’t sure how long we will be at the property.”

“I’ll drive.” I leaned into him. “How far is it?”

“Near my place,” Liam said.

They all seemed excited, but I didn’t think I’d get any more information out of them. So I practically skipped to my car, wishing I’d asked one of them to ride with me. But

then I probably would've spent the entire time asking them questions instead of looking at the scenery, which meant I would've missed how beautiful it was.

We drove east of the central village, the road thick with forested pines and a river that meandered alongside the road. The pavement quickly turned to dirt as we passed a familiar house.

While I'd only been on Liam's property twice, I knew he owned a substantial amount of land and lived in a quaint, cozy farmhouse. It was what I expected out of this area of Willowdale. Which was why I was shocked to find something so much larger than that a few miles past his house.

I followed their patrol cars to a gate set into a low stone wall topped with planters, behind which sat a massive estate. The gate opened slowly, revealing a stone driveway that looped up toward the house and back down the opposite side of the sprawling lawn like a horseshoe.

The house was a true spectacle though.

Three stories tall, it had a bright blue roof and white stone walls. It had a quaint appeal, rocking chairs grouped on the wrap-around porch, but the size made it grand. A wreath of spring flowers hung from the glass paneled front door, the molding painted bright blue to match the roof, and it made me wonder who lived here. Whoever it was had impeccable taste.

I parked at the bend of the 'U' behind Liam and Ari, at the front of the house. When I opened my door, Connery met me and took my hand, leading me to the front door. Through the glass I could see that the interior was empty. Untouched.

"Is it for sale?" I asked, all of them watching my reaction with curiosity. I tried to keep fairly neutral but it was almost impossible, the urge to go inside and explore

almost overwhelming.

“Private sale. Construction was only recently completed,” Liam explained.

“On nearly ten acres, half of it mountainous,” Connery added.

“Can we look inside? It's beautiful.”

Macon took out the key, the door opening onto a gorgeous two-story foyer. The style of the house was soft and feminine, but neutral in coloring. The molding and light fixtures reminded me of one of those french country decor magazines, and the light wood flooring practically gleamed under the chandelier.

Moving into the brightly painted kitchen, the bottom cabinets a soft yellow and tops a cream shade, I found my smile growing. There was so much light in the space, and everything seemed almost custom designed to my specific tastes. Despite its massive size, it seemed to have so much warmth to it.

“How many bedrooms?” I asked as we made our way into the back of the house where a large den sat, a two-story fireplace against the far wall. My eyes were immediately pulled to the back yard through a massive set of floor-to-ceiling windows.

“Eight,” Ari said as I took in the huge piece of land that stretched behind the house, all the way to the forest edge. Snow-covered mountain peaks rose in the distance.

“I love this place.” I turned to them with a hesitant smile on my face. “I’m sure there will be a ton of offers on it, but if you guys are serious and you really want to?”

“Live together forever? Yes, we do.” Macon flashed a knowing smile, making me blush.

“Right.” I sighed happily. “Maybe we could at least get some of the details. I’m sure it’s expensive, but?—”

“Let us handle figuring that out.” Liam wrapped an arm around me and kissed the top of my head. “If you love it, that’s all that matters.”

“I love it,” I breathed out. “It’s literally perfect.”

“You should check out the rest of it, just to make sure.” Connery winked.

I had no doubt that I would love it as much as I loved them.

To say this afternoon had been perfect would be an understatement. After checking out my dream home, the boys promising to contact the seller, they had helped me in the bakery all afternoon, Macon taking the afternoon patrol shift.

We had been fairly busy, and everyone who came in seemed unsurprised to see them—but several didn’t let the chance to make teasing comments pass them by. I accepted them gladly, not bothering to be coy about it. There was no hiding the affection these men held for me.

When we were officially sold out for the day, we closed shop, Liam informing me that he was switching out with Macon, who would be here soon.

“Keep me updated,” I insisted. “I want to know what the seller says. And be careful when you’re out tonight.” Liam smiled and pulled me close, laying a kiss on my lips.

“I will,” he promised, glancing to Ari and Connery. “I’ll call you two if I need help.”

“Sounds good,” Ari said while checking the casserole we had in the oven.

“I’m so ready to just relax and watch TV,” I said as Liam left, sitting next to Connery on the couch and melting into his side. I had just showered and my hair was damp, but I was dressed in oversized comfy clothes so I had absolutely no trouble imagining just closing my eyes and knocking out.

When Macon appeared a few minutes later, right in time for dinner, he went straight to the shower after taking my mouth in a deep kiss. The scene was so entirely domestic, and I absolutely loved it. I also found myself imagining these exact types of moments every single day. Would I be so lucky as to get that? It seemed so—which was insane.

It wasn’t until after dinner when we were all watching television that the door opened to reveal Colette and Hunter. I winced, realizing that this was probably one of the first times my brother would have to come to terms with the fact that I had mates—especially since we were all laid out on the couch in front of the television together.

“Ah crap,” I mumbled, not knowing how I would explain this.

“Really?” Hunter asked as I moved to sit up. He offered me a dry look before moving his gaze to the three men, none of whom seemed bothered in the least.

I shrugged, my cheeks heating as if I’d been caught doing something bad, before I hopped off the couch. Colette nodded toward her room, and I happily followed. My brother was totally going to say something to them, and I had no intention of being part of that.

“You’re moving out?” I asked, my lip dipping as she began to pack up her things.

She stopped, nodding before reaching over to squeeze my hand. “But I won’t be that far. Plus, it sounds like you’ll have a few visitors?”

I shrugged, trying to downplay it. I wanted to tell her everything, but now wasn't the time. "Yeah, they're alright."

"Baby!" Ari's voice echoed from the other room. "You gotta give us more credit than that!"

I totally did, but I suddenly felt shy. I'd never openly talked about my potential mates or relationship to anyone before. I wasn't ashamed in the least, but I didn't want to say the wrong thing—or misinterpret the seriousness of our relationship. Which was ridiculous considering all the conversations we'd had, but I was still unsure on how to define what we were.

It would be easier once we moved in together...or maybe I needed to stop being such a wimp about this. I knew exactly what this was; I just was nervous to fully accept it.

Helping Colette pack up, I saw her brow furrow as she looked over everything she owned. She fixed me with a look, something seeming to occur to her. "I don't have a lot of money left, but I have some. Do you want to go shopping tomorrow? I'm going to need something other than your brothers' oversized stuff."

"I like you wearing my shit!" Hunter called out. Colette scowled, making me laugh.

I loved the idea, especially since I had so much to catch her up on. "Noon?"

She nodded, putting her bag over her shoulder and grabbing her charger. When we walked back into the living room, I found my brother glaring at my men, who didn't seem too bothered. I sighed and deflated on the couch, waving to both of them as Colette nearly pulled my brother from the house.

"So, how was it?" I teased.

“He just warned us to treat you right. It could have been worse,” Ari admitted.

“It could’ve been,” Connery agreed. “But he literally has a mate that he shares with his brothers—it's not like he can say shit.”

“Don’t worry, bunny, we have it handled.” Macon tightened his arm around me, skimming his lips over my shoulder. “Besides, your brother doesn’t scare us.”

They would absolutely be the only ones that felt that way. I loved it though. I wanted the men I was with to fight for our love, no matter what. Plus, I knew that at the heart of it, my brothers wanted me to be happy—even if they were a bit overprotective.

When Ari’s phone rang, he let out a groan. After a few quick words, he announced, “Connery, we’ve got to go—Liam needs us.”

“Sounds like it's just you and me,” Macon said, biting down on my ear. My entire body lit up under his touch.

Why did I have a feeling this was a terribly wonderful idea?

CHAPTER 15

LENA GRAVES

“Macon,” I whimpered as he let out a groan against my pussy, causing my legs to tremble. His grip on them was hard and he had yet to come up for air, continuing to torture and tease me.

Minutes after the others had left he’d all but carried me to my room before spreading me out and stripping me bare. Since then he’d been devouring me whole, and despite the merciless teasing, with the way it was keying up my body, I found I didn’t want him to stop—ever.

“You taste so damn good, bunny,” he groaned. “Touch yourself as I eat this sweet pussy.”

I didn’t even bother fighting him on that, my fingers toying with my breasts as I rolled my hips against his mouth. His tongue was so hot against my flesh, and the way he switched between humming against my clit to stiffening his tongue and pushing it inside of me was maddening. I could feel how wet I had grown, and he was licking every single bit of me up.

“I need to come,” I begged as my body turned a hot flush, my nipples painfully hard and my skin breaking out into chills. My clit ached, and my hips were rocking against his face of their own volition.

Pinning my hips down, he broke away from my pussy and let out a low rumble. “Not

until I'm done. Only then do you get to come. Understand?"

Before I could respond, his teeth grazed my clit, my back arching up as I moaned, an electric pulse of pleasure traveling through me and making my magic amp up even more. My legs spread wider, and I pinched my nipples hard. I was so damn close, it was only a matter of time?—

"Why did you stop?" Macon had pulled away, moving his thumb to roll my clit while watching me in amusement.

"I told you, Lena. You'll come only when I say so." He flashed me a dark smile. "Besides, I want it to be when you're wrapped around my cock."

My eyes darted down to his thick, long length as he stroked it. I squirmed against his fingers, two thick digits sliding into me as he continued to roll my nerve ending. My breath caught, feeling as though I was about to hit the point of no return.

"Macon," I growled as he chuckled darkly. He pinned both of my hands above my head, removing his touch as he slammed his lips against my own.

"No dice, Lena," he said, nipping my lip. "I want you fucking drenched and needy when I slid into this cunt. I want you begging me to come inside of you."

"I am begging," I whimpered against his mouth. "I need you—bad."

Macon's gaze ran over my face as his cock pressed against my center, the tip running over my slick entrance. My breath caught, and I tried to open my legs, to encourage him to slide in.

"Fuck," he groaned, the vibration of it running through me. "You're so fucking wet, I can feel you practically trying to suck me in."

“Please,” I whispered, my eyes fluttering shut as he suddenly pushed in just an inch, my body shuddering in relief. “Please, please, fucking please.”

“Thats a good fucking girl,” he growled, slamming into me in a hard punch forward.

I cried out his name in relief as my body shattered around, magnetic pleasure infiltrating every inch of me. His thick cock felt so damn good pulsing inside of me, and despite it stretching me, I opened for him completely.

“You feel like home,” he said against my lips, pulling back and pushing back in—hard. White hot pleasure hit my abdomen, and I moaned out his name as he began to stroke in and out of me at a hard but fast pace.

I could feel his heavy balls against my ass, and when one hand came down to thumb my clit, I tightened around him, my legs trembling. Rocking with him, his head pressed against my shoulder, I followed the wave of his body as he lodged himself as deep as possible inside of me each and every time. My nails bit down on his back as he suddenly shifted, bringing my leg up so he could punch even closer, looking down at me with so much possessiveness it shook me to my core.

“I’m not going to come fully inside you this first time,” he said, the words sending me into distress. I dug my nails into his chest, wanting him closer. “I’m going to come at least twice in this perfect fucking pussy, and if I’m all the way inside you, I’m going to knot you and have to stop. I want you fucking overflowing with cum before we’re done here, bunny.”

“I want that.” My words were followed by a moan as he continued in more shallow pumps, his fingers never leaving my clit. “I want your knot, and I want your mating mark.”

“Of course you do,” he growled, bending down to kiss me. “Because you’re my

perfect fucking mate.” The statement was accented by a particularly deep thrust that had me crying out his name. “But I have some time to make up for. Everyone else has marked you—everyone else has filled you full of their fucking cum since you started your heat. That’s hardly fair, given we’re trying to breed you. To fill up this pussy with as much cum as possible.”

“Macon!” I shouted as he bit down on my breast, a hot aggression running over him that was only partly his dragon.

“You want that, don’t you?” he demanded. “You want us to breed you, to lock us to you forever.”

“Yes!” I cried as he hummed his approval.

“Good. Now open those thighs and let me do my job.”

Moaning, I did exactly that as he pinned my hands above my head and slammed in once—twice—before holding himself only an inch or so inside of me, a groan of relief leaving him. I whimpered, feeling him fill me with his cum, his eyes turning nearly feral as he gazed down at our connection.

“Holy shit!” I cried as he slid back into me. I felt so incredibly full, his cum and cock making me feel absolutely stuffed. I moaned as he dropped his head and bit down on my breast, the orgasm that slammed into me nearly blinding me.

I felt shaky and out of breath, trembling, as he suddenly pulled out and flipped me onto my stomach. I whimpered at the feel of his hand on my waist as he pressed his cock into my pussy in a hard thrust. I moaned into the pillow at the sensation of how he seemed even bigger than before.

“Stick that ass up, I’m not done with you,” he growled. I did so, spreading my hands

to either side and gripping the bed as he began to pound into me. His hand gripped my ass as his filthy words played against my ears. “You are so fucking beautiful. So fucking perfect. I’m going to have you every single day, bent over, spread out for all of us. You are never going to have a moment of peace because none of us will be able to stay away from this pussy—away from you. You’re going to be so full of cum it’s going to be impossible for you to not get knocked up. Everyone—fucking everyone—will know exactly who you belong to.”

I nearly climaxed at his words alone, crying out his name with pleasure as he used his thumb to tease my ass. His words were rough as he groaned, “And one day, I’m going to take this ass. We don’t have to rush into it, bunny, but I want to see this ass stuffed full of my cock. Do you want that, Lena? Do you want me to fill all your holes up with cum?”

“Yes,” I gasped as he continued to pump in and out of me, pressing his thumb into my tight hole.

“Maybe it’ll be a reward for being a good girl and taking all our cum,” he snarled. “Maybe a better reward would be all of us switching between being in your ass, pussy, and mouth. I’m sure you wouldn’t mind if we shared your perfect body, right?”

The imagery had me shuddering around him as he slapped my ass hard enough to launch me forward.

“I would love that,” I admitted breathlessly, nearly blinded by pleasure at this point.

“Then that’s exactly what we’ll give you. We’ll give you anything and everything you love. Fuck, I’m going to come. Open those legs wider, bunny. I’m going to knot the fuck out of you.”

I eagerly followed his instruction, and when he slammed into me one final time, I gasped at the pressure of so many things happening at once—his teeth slicing into my left shoulder, his cock pulsing and filling me with cum as his knot stretched the delicate skin of my entrance. I whimpered at the sensation as the scent of blood filled the air. My blood, on his mouth, on his teeth. Why did I love that so damn much?

Electric currents ran over me, my magic surging as relief like I'd never experienced—far past the pleasure from even an orgasm—rushed through me. The connection I had with all four men snapped into place as tears welled into my eyes, causing me to let out a moan of satisfaction. Liquid heat had my body melting into the mattress as Macon kissed along my neck. He held me against him, making sure to not press against me too much, while staying lodged deep inside of me.

“Fuck. I should’ve finished with you facing me so I could kiss you and hold you better,” he groaned. “Goddamn it, Lena, I love you so damn much—too damn much. It should be illegal.”

A giggle left my lips, and I felt partly dazed as I turned my head to offer him a soft smile. “I love you, too. I love you so incredibly much. I’m glad it's not illegal, because I want this—I want everything between the five of us.”

“And that's what you're going to get,” he promised, rolling us so we were laying on our sides. I whimpered at the change in movement but melted into his touch and the bed as he smoothed his hands over my body in gentle, caressing touches.

My eyes grew heavy, and I didn’t mean to, but within moments I’d slipped into a state of pleasure-filled sleep. It wasn’t until I felt Macon pull out of me, turning me toward him and kissing me gently, that I realized we could move once again.

His voice was rough against my lips. “I know you're tired, but let's shower and then eat some food. I want...I need to take care of you.”

Who would say no to that? Not me.

He carried me to the shower, and I stood beneath the stream of hot water as he began to wash my body in slow movements, massaging my skin as he went. I didn't even realize that he was done, still in a sleepy haze, until the water turned off and he wrapped me in a robe. Opening up the cabinets, my eyes widened as he chuckled and took out the box of pregnancy tests I'd put in there.

"You may want to take one of these soon," he murmured, taking a brush to my hair.

Letting out a hum of agreement, I said, "I'm going to give it a few more days. Don't want any false alarms." Or getting my hopes up and being disappointed.

Still, I had to remember that things would happen if they were meant to happen—that there were a million wonderful ways to build a family. To create a future together. I was eager for that future to start, though. Now that I knew how they felt, there was absolutely nothing holding me back.

CHAPTER 16

LENA GRAVES

“Here you go.” I handed Colette her coffee and placed mine in the cupholder before pulling away from the drive-thru window. I had picked her up only twenty or so minutes ago, and already the day had been so damn fun as we made our way to go shopping in Galena.

It was around an hour drive, so I had tunes playing while she told me all her plans for the ballet studio—something I was thoroughly excited for. I wasn’t a dancer by any means, but I would totally take a class to stay fit and support her.

“It’s more perfect than I could ever have dreamed—all of it. And I have your brothers and you to thank for that,” Colette said. “Everyone has made me feel so welcome.”

My smile grew. “People already love having you here, and it’s exciting knowing that soon—probably really soon—you’re going to be my actual sister.”

To say I was thrilled at the prospect of helping to plan Colette’s wedding was an understatement. I’ve always loved weddings, especially ones that were unique and really showcased the personality of the couple. I already had so many ideas of how to do that for the four of them, so now I was just waiting for the official go-ahead to start planning.

If they didn’t propose soon, I was totally going to start bothering them about it.

“You’re right.” Colette’s eyes brightened. “I just hope my parents don’t show up and ruin everything—or worse.”

“We would never let them take you from us,” I assured her, taking another sip of my coffee while steering with one hand. “Even if they brought every single HAF member with them.”

Both Colette and my brothers had updated me on how bad her parents had treated her, and more so the possibility of them coming after her—somehow aligning themselves with HAF while hiding the fact that they were the ‘freaks’ the group hated.

Of course, my life in Willowdale hadn’t been perfect, but it had been pretty damn close. It had been filled with people who loved and cared about me, even in my darkest moments. More so, people who accepted the fact that I was a teal bunny shifter without question. I couldn’t imagine living in a town where you not only had to hide what you were, but where people actively and vocally hated what you were to the point that they would take extreme measures of violence. I shuddered at that thought. How humans could be capable of so much cruelty always shocked me. It wasn’t like they had any animal instincts to blame it on, either!

“Humans Against Freaks.” She breathed out, shaking her head. “It’s insane to think that I lived so close to so many horrible people for so long.”

“Never again,” I promised. “No one should have to live like that.”

As we continued our drive, the music filling the car, my thoughts turned to the biggest piece of news I needed to tell her. I’d already alluded to the air being cleared between myself and my four mates—my mating marks more than a bit obvious. But there was one big piece of information that not even my men were privy to because I had found out after Macon left this morning.

I was damn near positive I was pregnant.

The test hadn't been absolute, but the second line had been faintly there. Enough so that thinking about it caused my heart to palpate with nervous excitement. After everything I'd been through, I thought I would have felt fear or panic, but instead I felt settled. I knew the news would be well received by my mates, and I hoped they were serious about living together and getting married because we were going full speed ahead.

"Okay, so." I turned down the music after taking a sip of my coffee, the peppermint mocha flavor jumping on my tongue. "I need to tell you something. You have to promise you won't judge—" Not that Colette had a judgmental bone in her body. "Well not judge, but don't tell my brothers yet." I needed to tell my mates before anyone else— except for my new best friend, of course. "I mean, it's not really a big deal..."

"Lena ." Colette touched my shoulder in a comforting move, interrupting me. " What you say stays between us, I promise. You know I'd never judge you."

I inhaled, suddenly feeling nervous about telling anyone. As if speaking the words into existence would somehow change them. I decided to try to soften the intensity of my announcement by explaining I'd known for a few days rather than finding out literally an hour or so ago.

"So, I found out something a few days ago. Something big. Something that?—"

Suddenly, the sound of sirens had Colette whipping around as I let out a curse in confusion. Immediately, I knew it wasn't any of my men. Not only because the unmarked SUV following us was unfamiliar, but because all four of my men had known exactly where I would be today. I was positive they even had my location or were tracking me somehow. It was probably just a routine stop, but worry infiltrated

my chest as I pulled over to the side of the highway and threw the car into park.

Colette pulled my registration and insurance card from the glove compartment as I opened my wallet to take out my license. Before the cop got out of his car, I shot off a text to my men letting them know where we were and what was happening.

After what felt like minutes of concerned silence, the driver's door to the dark SUV finally opened. When I saw the large man approaching, I felt my stomach tighten uncomfortably, my fingers twitching in resistance to rolling down the window. I did so anyway as he leaned down, looking into the car. I hated this. I hated everything about this. There was no way a human should make me feel this uncomfortable, even one in law enforcement.

"Afternoon, ladies." He said, eyeing me before looking over at Colette—his gaze darkening and locking onto her. My internal alarms were screaming, and I immediately tried to pull his attention back to me.

"How can we help you?" I asked, trying to keep my voice light and unbothered. I wasn't positive that it actually worked.

"Did you know that you were driving five miles above the speed limit back there?"

I nearly growled in annoyance. That was absolute bullshit. I'd set my car to cruise control on purpose while on the highway.

"I'm pretty sure that's allowed," I pointed out, refusing to let him bully us.

His gaze narrowed on me. "You two don't look familiar. Do you live in Galena?"

I let out a frustrated sigh. "No. Willowdale Village. Sir, why exactly are we?—"

“I’m waiting for backup,” he snapped. “Just calm down, miss, before you say something that could get you in more trouble.”

I reared back. “Backup? For fucking what?”

Colette’s voice popped into my head. “He never showed us a badge, Lena.”

“Plus, how do we know you’re really a cop? Where’s your badge?” I demanded. The guy wasn’t even wearing a damn uniform.

My accusation caused an instant reaction as his face turned bright red in anger. The delay was exactly what we needed, though, because at that exact moment, a second car pulled up—a patrol car with Galena on the side of it. Oh, thank the Creator.

The man let out a string of curses and sprinted back toward his SUV, throwing himself into the front seat before speeding away, leaving me staring at his car fading into the distance with wide eyes.

“What the hell was that?”

As we watched the new cop get out of his car, Colette’s voice echoed in my mind. “I don’t know, but I have a feeling that wasn’t the last of it.”

“They’ll be here any minute,” I told Colette, already having spoken to Liam on the phone after Sheriff Jack had given him a call.

Colette and I were sitting comfortably in the Galena police station, and while I was more than a little on edge, Colette was downright pale. The incident had really shaken her up, and I felt like this was somehow my fault. All we’d freakin’ wanted to do was go shopping.

“Lena!” Ari’s deep voice had me standing out of my chair as he practically scooped me up, sweeping me into his hold and surrounding me with familiarity and warmth. Letting out a shaky breath, I melted into him as he kissed me hard before pulling away, slowly setting me down. I felt almost dizzy from the whirlwind effect.

“Wow,” I whispered, feeling a wave of emotion at the concern and palpable fear I could see on his face.

“I was so damn worried about you,” he said. “But we’re here, baby girl, and we’re going to figure out what’s going on?—”

“Ari,” I interrupted softly, unable to hold it in any longer.

“Yes?” he asked, smoothing my hair away from my face.

“I love you,” I admitted easily. “I love you, Ari. I love how much you care, how protective you are—how protective you’ve always been. And I love the person you are. You’re not only my best friend, you’re my mate and I love you.”

“Fuck,” Ari groaned, pulling me against him and slamming his lips against mine. “I love you too, baby girl. So incredibly much. I feel so on edge right now knowing you were in danger, but hearing those words on your lips is fucking heaven.”

I gave him a softer kiss this time, forgetting that we were in the station to begin with.

“Liam, good to see you,” I heard Sheriff Jack say. I looked around Ari and found all three of my men walking toward me. I could hear someone say Colette’s name, and I had a feeling my brothers had been right behind my mates.

“Gorgeous.” Connery smoothed a hand over my hair. “What happened?”

“We got pulled over by an unmarked car,” I explained. Liam, who seemed tense, grabbed one of my hands and brought it to his lips. “And he didn’t have a badge, but he said he was waiting for backup?—”

Macon let out a deep rumble and narrowed his eyes at Sheriff Jack. “I want them found. Now.”

“Already on it,” he assured my men.

“I’m more worried about Colette than myself,” I admitted, sneaking a peek at my friend who was talking to my brothers in quiet tones. “He seemed hyperfocused on her.”

“I’ll make sure to talk to your brothers to understand fully what’s going on,” Liam assured me. “For now, I want to get you home—away from this fucking place.”

I nodded as we moved to leave the station, giving Colette a shoulder squeeze in passing. As I thought about going home, I began to feel uneasy. I suddenly didn’t like the idea of going to my apartment at all. In fact, I found that was one of the last things I wanted.

Once we finally made our way outside, each of my men exchanging quick words with other cops at the station, I squeezed between Ari and Connery in the back seat of the patrol SUV. Liam took his place in the driver’s seat, and Macon was following in my car. I was glad for the favor, but I hated that he was alone at the moment.

“Well, that was an eventful Friday morning,” I said, trying to lighten the mood. Then I sighed. “Crap. I should’ve grabbed my coffee from my car.”

“We can get a new one on the way home,” Ari promised. “Or even make one at home.”

“Home,” I murmured. “I don’t...I don’t really want to go back to my apartment.”

“Where do you want to go, gorgeous?” Connery asked knowingly.

“Well, ideally my dream house,” I mused. “But I’m guessing we haven’t even heard back from the sellers yet?”

Liam made an amused noise as he shook his head. “There are no sellers.”

My heart dropped. “What do you mean? I thought it was for sale.”

“The land was for sale,” Ari hedged. “This past summer, when we bought it.”

“Oh.” My eyes widened.

“Then we spent the past few months developing and building it. Furniture was delivered last night,” Connery added.

“Wait...really?!” I squeaked in surprise. “So the house is ours?”

“Been ours from the start,” Liam confirmed. “Wanted you to have a place that you could truly call home, Lena. A place where we could start our life together.”

Tears welled in my eyes, and I couldn’t help but smile. “That’s so amazing; I had no idea! And the house is perfect. I literally could not have picked anything better myself.”

“I can’t wait till you see the furniture,” Ari said. “I may have hacked into your Pinterest account to get ideas.”

“I love that,” I squeaked in excitement, eager to get there.

Nearly bouncing in my seat, I called Macon after so that I could tease him about not telling me. Waiting to get back to Willowdale Village, especially now that I knew the truth about the house, seemed like an impossible task.

“Why didn’t any of you tell me?” I asked over speakerphone.

“Didn’t want to freak you out,” Macon answered. “At least that was the thought process. Not that I completely agreed...”

“Because you never worry about that shit,” Connery reminded him.

“Thought it might come across as a bit intense, buying land to build a house for the five of us when we weren’t even dating,” Ari said, causing a giggle to slip from my lips. He wasn’t wrong—he really wasn’t wrong. I wasn’t sure how I would’ve reacted before now to the news, but I was just so incredibly thankful and appreciative of them.

“I’m so glad that you guys could see the future I was too afraid to imagine,” I said, my throat catching with emotion as we pulled down a familiar dirt path.

“Here we are,” Liam said as the gate opened and both of the cars pulled through. My eyes ate up every single inch of the estate.

I whispered a single word that put my heart at ease and caused pure joy to radiate through me. “Home.”

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:22 am

Waking up next to Lena sprawled out in the middle of the two massive Alaskan king size beds we'd put together with a custom frame, I realized just how fucking happy I was. There was no other way to describe it. Joy filled my chest, and as I looked over the three others that were still knocked out alongside her, contentment radiated through me.

This was how life was supposed to be. This was my pack—my family.

I was so incredibly glad we'd put a rush order for shipping on the furniture, Lena's eyes having lit up once arriving at the estate and walking inside. She'd explored every inch of the property, taking time to sit on each surface. If she was a wolf, I would say she was marking the space with her scent, but I didn't think rabbits did that...or maybe we were rubbing off on her. Either way, I was thrilled that she loved it.

When we'd picked out furniture and household items—from clothes, to every baking utensil known to man, to extra fluffy towels just for her—we made sure to order everything we'd need to be able to move in right away, but we'd also made sure that Lena would be able to choose the decor to make this place truly home. I knew our woman liked to decorate, and I had never been so damn confident in my decision as I watched her walk around, her expression lit up with pure happiness as she talked about everything she wanted to add.

I'd also been glad I'd packed up some of her stuff and brought it over, figuring that when she was done shopping we'd come back here to show her it was finished. I just hadn't expected to get her text message and then a call from another fucking police station telling me that my mate had been brought in. I was just so damn relieved that

nothing had happened to her. I would've lost my fucking mind and never let her out of my sight if something had. Though honestly, I was pretty much already at that point.

I'd felt an intense surge of possessiveness at the idea of any other cops pulling her over or possibly arresting her—before I understood the full story. If anyone was going to lock her ass up, it was going to be me. Not the bastards from Galena. Pushing those thoughts away, I carefully slid out of bed to draw the curtains open, the morning light making its way across the floors—but not quite to the bed.

Knowing that Lena probably needed more sleep, I resisted the urge to wake her up and instead made my way to our en suite bathroom. The house had a total of eight bedrooms, most of which were currently set up as guest bedrooms. The exception was the primary, the room the size of three normal bedrooms put together. It had a balcony that looked over the back of the house, as well as a huge bathroom with a deep sunken tub. Turning on the steam shower, I made quick work of getting ready for the day, choosing to put on a pair of sweatpants.

We needed to go into the station today, but I was hoping it would be more of a relaxed weekend overall compared to normal. I knew we needed to bring more men onto the force, especially some of the younger shifters that worked part-time on security for the pack lands, but for quite some time I had hesitated. Partly because Lena would stop in sometimes and I didn't want her around other fucking men, but more so because we'd just brought on Connery and Macon. I wanted to make sure we didn't rush bringing on more just to have numbers—I wanted to make sure that everyone had the right mindset going into it. Especially once tourism season came around and there were conflicts between humans and supernaturals.

Still, if we were going to be busy getting our lives settled, maybe it was time. I made a mental note to ask Captain Magnus who he suggested for the post.

Outside of that, I'd already posted a sign on the bakery saying that it would be closed until Monday for Lena's birthday. I wanted to give our girl the chance to relax a bit after everything that had happened. Unfortunately, she seemed to not love relaxing all that much and had already made plans helping Colette at her new dance studio.

Apparently they were doing some type of open house. I was glad my mate had found someone she felt so close to, and I had to remind myself to make sure she didn't get so lost in work that she forgot to make time for herself or her friendship. It was something that could happen easily with Lena since she was always focused on supporting and helping others, and the bakery sometimes increased the problem. Much like the police department, Lena hadn't brought on any other employees, and I was going to suggest to her that she do—especially for days like today.

"Morning," Connery said as I left the bathroom and found him walking into the bedroom with a tray of coffee and fruit.

"Morning—and good call on the breakfast." I nodded toward the table on the balcony. The weather was pleasantly warm this morning, and when I opened the doors, Connery jumped onto the railing. I had no idea how flight-inclined shifters got used to that shit. I wouldn't say I was afraid of heights, exactly, but it was far from my friend. And I sure as hell wouldn't go out of my way to stand on a railing two stories off the ground.

"I'm going to fly until everyone wakes up." Then he jumped, the sound of wings snapping as he shifted midair into a massive navy dragon. He shot straight into the sky, his wings spanning nearly the entire width of the house. I wasn't sure I would ever get used to that, honestly.

I had the sudden urge to shift myself as I eyed the grounds, sitting down while sipping my coffee. It wasn't the time to go for a run, but later I would. It'd be the perfect excuse to scout out areas to install security cameras throughout the acreage

we owned. I wanted the ability to have eyes on Lena and eventually our kids if they were playing out here. I had done the same with my old property right next door.

My old property—that thought made me pause. What the hell would I do with it now?

“He’s out flying?” Macon asked, stepping onto the balcony. I nodded and was mostly unsurprised when he climbed up onto the railing and jumped, shifting midair and soaring skyward just as his brother had. I took another long sip of my coffee, wondering what it was like to be a shifter only found in storybooks. I bet it was interesting. Although there were a lot of great things that came with being a ‘normal’ shifter that could blend into nature.

For example, I’d been able to get away with watching Lena in her clearing far too often. Probably more than she would’ve been comfortable with. I hadn’t been able to help myself. I was a certified stalker when it came to her.

My paws pressed against the wet January ground, the snow melting just slightly as I settled down to keep eyes on Lena. It was her lunch break at the bakery, and I could tell she was tired. In her bunny form, she rolled around in the wet snowy grass, not making any move to hop around. My nose twitched as I listened for other shifters in the area.

Lena didn’t view herself as prey and I didn’t want her to, but she was still vulnerable, especially with so many wolf shifters in the area. So one of us, almost always, was nearby when she shifted. Usually she knew we were there, but I could tell that she wasn’t aware right now, her golden eyes darting around as her teal ear twitched.

Deciding to make myself known, I stood up and moved out from the brush, her frame immediately startling as she hopped away from me—making it halfway across the clearing in record time. I resisted the urge to give chase and instead made my way to

the center of the clearing before laying down. Closing my eyes and half exposing my stomach, I waited until I heard her approaching.

I let out a grunt as she jumped onto me, thumping me with her foot near my face, not once but twice. As if pissed, I startled her. I nearly chuckled internally at that but instead shook her off and readjusted myself so that my chin rested against the ground. When she appeared in front of me and curled up right by the tip of my nose, my exhale of hot air ruffled her fur. Closing my eyes, I was happy when she decided to stay with me through her entire break.

I may not have been able to hold her or cuddle her in real life—at least not yet—but for now this was enough. It was enough just to be close to her.

“O h, coffee!” Lena’s voice broke me from my memory as I looked up to find her sliding onto my lap, tucking her body against mine. She stole my mug and drank half of it as I watched her with amusement. Her teal hair was messy and pulled up, her golden eyes relaxed and filled with a sated comfort.

“Drink as much as you want.” Ari yawned, appearing on the balcony as well. “Connery insisted on getting that fancy coffee machine downstairs, so a ‘normal’ coffee is the least of what it makes.”

“I’ve wanted that coffee machine for the bakery for so long,” Lena said with a tiny smile. “You four are so incredibly thoughtful; I can’t get over it.”

“Just love you,” I insisted, kissing her temple. I really didn’t consider myself a thoughtful person at all, but if she thought that I wasn’t going to tell her differently.

Suddenly, the sound of wings drew all our attention up as Macon and Connery flew overhead. Deciding now was as good a time as ever, I lifted Lena and placed her down in my seat, going to grab what I needed from my closet. The brothers would be

landing soon, and I decided that I wanted our mark on her before she went out today . It was the only thing left to symbolize that she owned us in the same way we owned her—completely and wholly.

I grabbed the velvet box from the closet just as I heard Macon and Connery land, Lena seeming thrilled at their shift. We needed to shift as a group more often. I understood how amusing it probably seemed and would look—two dragons, two wolves, and a bunny shifter—but in my mind it was just our perfect family. Briefly the idea of what our kids would turn out to be popped into my head but I ignored it, not allowing my brain to go there. Not right now.

“I still can’t believe you didn’t tell me you were having this built.” Lena sighed happily, looking at the forested edge of the estate. “I mean, seriously—nothing could be better than this. It’s absolute perfection, and the land is so peaceful and quiet. It’s perfect for us.”

Lena was perfect for us.

“We didn’t want to scare you with how much we were on board with all of this,” Ari reminded her.

“Wanted to make sure you loved us before you realized how deep in you were,” Macon chuckled.

“I do love all of you,” she admitted softly. “So incredibly much. “

“Well, I can’t think of a better time for this, then,” I said, taking a knee in front of Lena.

Her eyes went wide. “Wait, what?”

“Give him your hand, gorgeous,” Connery mused.

“Of course,” she squeaked, putting forward her delicate hand as I opened the box. I could feel the others watching her expression, captivated by it, so I spoke openly for all of us.

“Lena, you know how much we love you. We want you as our everything—our mate and our wife. Will you do the honor of marrying us?”

Tears sprung up in her eyes as a pure, radiant smile filled her face, looking at each one of us. “Absolutely. Yes .”

Relief filled me as I slid the large topaz stone surrounded by a halo of diamonds onto her delicate finger. I nearly groaned at how fucking good it looked on her, and when I had a moment, I tugged her chin forward and placed a kiss on her lips.

“I love you, Lena.”

“I love you,” she said back, a single tear spilling over as she looked around. “It's almost overwhelming how much I feel for all of you.”

“I know it's for a good reason, but I hate seeing you cry,” Connery rumbled.

“Well, it's for more reasons than just this,” she admitted, her eyes dancing with excitement and pure happiness.

My brow furrowed in confusion. “What's it for?”

“I took a test yesterday and it was a faint line, but this morning I took another...” She paused, biting her lip. “I'm pregnant. We're pregnant .”

Holy shit. My eyes widened as Macon fucking cheered, the others reacting as I stared at my beautiful mate and the way she was glowing. My hand immediately went out to touch her stomach as her eyes warmed on me with so much joy.

We were starting a family—this was happening. Everything was about to change in the best way possible.

Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:22 am

LENA GRAVES

10 YEARS LATER...

I consulted the checklist in front of me, letting out a frustrated groan. Why had I made so many plans? Better yet, why had I offered to help with so many things? Or bake for all these freakin' events—for free, mind you? Because I'd been in the holiday mood. Clearly, I needed to tamp down my excitement for next year.

“What’s wrong, gorgeous?” Connery asked, coming to stand behind me. Falling snow gathered on the windowsills outside, and the stained glass snowflake art the kids had made at school made light dance across the marble counters. All of which were covered in baking plans and supplies.

“So, remember when I was making holiday plans?” I slid the calendar out from under the checklist. “And I agreed to host Christmas Eve here for family and then Christmas Day for anyone from the pack? And remember when I said, ‘no one needs to bring anything, we’ll make all the food’? Oh! And do you remember when I volunteered to bake for six events plus two school charity drives all within the next week? And do you remember when I also said, ‘we can shop closer to Christmas’ and now we are days away and have nothing? Because I’m just remembering all of that.”

Connery chuckled against my neck and slowly turned me to face him. “First of all, yes. I remember all of that. I even remember asking if it was too much, but I’ll hold back on an ‘I told you so.’”

I smiled at him as I smoothed my hand over his chest. “You can have this one, don’t

worry.”

Connery pressed his forehead to mine and inhaled. “Okay, here’s the deal—Christmas presents are already bought. Ari is wrapping them upstairs while the kids are at school. And no, we didn’t forget the grab bag gifts. He has labels for everything.”

Relief filled my chest.

“Second, Liam already hired catering from Galena for Christmas Day and then invited the restaurant owners to stay and enjoy themselves.” He chuckled at the way my body melted against him. “For Christmas Eve, Macon and I will handle the cooking. And the kids already have outfits for both days, so that’s another thing you can check off.”

“Creator, you guys are amazing.” I sighed happily. “So all I need to do is bake for eight events? I can do that.” The bakery was only open every other day this month, and I’d just tell the staff I wouldn’t be in until after the holidays—with one exception. “Oh, and I’ll need to go to the bakery the night of the Christmas Festival. Okay, that’s totally doable.”

“Feeling better?” Connery asked.

“So much better.” I nodded. “Now I just need to make a plan for baking and enjoy the holidays, which after this year we desperately need.”

“How are you feeling?” he asked sincerely. Only two weeks ago I’d been super sick with flu-like symptoms, and while I was feeling better, I still wasn’t back to my normal self.

“Exhausted,” I admitted. “I wish these kids wouldn’t keep bringing home stuff from school.”

“Speaking of...” Liam passed through the kitchen, holding his cell phone and car keys. “I’m going to pick up the girls. Apparently Jane has a fever, Claire has thrown up, and Anna almost fainted in gym class.”

“Shit, let me grab my shoes. I’ll come with you,” Connery said. I felt an echo of his worry until I really considered the situation and what Liam was saying.

I offered Liam a dry look. “That seems oddly good timing since the girls were just talking about how they wished holiday break started today instead of tomorrow.”

“Yeah, I thought that was odd too.” He chuckled knowingly. “I already told Macon. He’s coming back from the park with the twins now.”

“Alright.” I sighed. “I’ll tell Ari to finish up the presents so that no one sees them—mainly the girls.”

“Sounds good.” He dipped me in a quick kiss as Connery threw on his jacket.

“Love you both!” I called out as the door closed, shaking my head in amusement. Those girls had their dads absolutely wrapped around their fingers in the most adorable way.

Anna, Jane, and Claire had just turned nine, but they had the attitude and sass of teenagers. They were the eldest, so they truly thought they ran the show—which was particularly funny when they thought they could pull a fast one on us like this.

All of them happening to get sick in a matter of hours, when they’d been perfectly fine this morning? Possible, but unlikely.

We had no idea what to expect when we found out we were pregnant the first time except that the gestation period would be shorter—and it was exactly the six month range we’d assumed. By early autumn we had three newborns and not a single idea of

how to handle it. We learned quickly, though, and nine years later they were happy and healthy rabbit shifters.

As I strode through the hallway, my gaze fell on a photo of the girls, and I smiled at the way they had their arms thrown around one another. Thick as thieves, those three. Jane's curly bright pink hair sat piled on top of her head, whereas Anna's long straight blue hair hung down to her waist. Both styles very different to Claire's lavender hair, which was pulled into an intricate braid. Each had such a specific style, and as they got older they seemed to come into it more and more.

It was both hard and amazing to watch them grow up so fast.

"Mom!"

I turned toward the door and crouched down, ready for the five year old that barreled into me. "Hey you, how was the park?" I pulled back from the hug, ruffling the snow out of his black hair. His smile was bright as he started to pull snow out of his pocket and hand it to me, making me squeak in surprise.

"Nolan," Macon said, walking into the foyer and carefully kicking his boots off so as not to disturb our other son, who was sleeping on his shoulder. "Go get a towel from the mud room and help clean the water up. I'm sure Mommy loves the snow, but it's melting, buddy."

"Oh!" He looked down and sprinted toward the mud room. Nolan was the definition of excitement and curiosity; he loved doing and helping. Nothing squashed that innate sense of wonder, and I really hoped he kept it his entire life.

"James fell asleep?" I asked, smoothing my hand through his blonde hair. While we didn't know for sure, I was nearly positive that James was a dragon shifter and that Nolan was a wolf shifter. It's what my magic was telling me, and I'd learned to listen to it.

“On the way home. He’s so tired, also a bit warm and feverish.” Macon frowned.

“Maybe the girls really are sick,” I said softly, taking James from him. “I’ll take him upstairs and get him some medicine if you want to get Nolan lunch. There’s some stuff in the fridge.”

“Sounds good.” He dipped his head and brushed his lips against mine. I sighed into it happily, James shifting slightly from me pressing toward Macon. “You look beautiful today, bunny.”

And then he was gone, helping Nolan. Shaking my head at his sweet words, I trailed up the stairs with James sleeping soundly in my arms. I swear, while nearly a decade had passed, the intensity of emotion and love I had for these men had only grown.

Five kids in ten years was as exhausting as it sounded, despite them being spaced out by five years between each labor and delivery. We wanted at least a few more, but we were in no rush. Considering the short duration of the pregnancy and the amount of babies each yielded, my mates had insisted on not rushing things—even choosing to do other wonderful amazing things to my body during my mating heat each year rather than sex.

Although, that was usually hard for all of us because as I learned, I was not only really into the dirty talk but my men had more than a little bit of a breeding kink. But as they emphasized to me time and time again, my health and happiness came first. It was something I loved so much about them, even if at the time—mainly during my mating heat—I was cranky about it.

When I reached the second floor of the house, I carried James into his space-themed bedroom and tucked him into bed after taking off his shoes and coat. I placed a thermometer under his arm and eyed the low grade fever, deciding to hold off on giving him medicine and let the fever run its course. Pressing a kiss to his forehead, I stared down at my son for a moment longer before stepping out of the room, keeping

the door open so I'd hear if he woke up.

As I reached the third floor of the house, I walked into our family office, which among other things held a worktable for the kids to do their schoolwork. Ari looked up at me with a bright smile as he finished taping one last present, the black and red wrapping paper neat and folded so perfectly that I had no idea how he did it. Seriously, I sucked so much at wrapping presents.

"The girls are all sick and heading home from school," I said, walking around the table as he put aside the last gift. He boosted me onto the surface. "Thanks for wrapping all those. I know that probably took a lot of time."

Ari shrugged, flashing me a smile. "I sort of enjoy it, I won't lie." And I was so glad that he did. "You think they're faking it?"

"I don't know." I sighed, looking toward the window. "They're pulling up now. Let's see how they get out of that car." Because I'd be able to tell everything from that.

Ari helped me off the table as we both went to the window, eyeing the black SUV that parked right in front of our house. Liam and Connery got out first, and when the side door opened to reveal my daughters, I busted out laughing. Not only were they not sick, but they were carrying bags from the diner, chatting happily with big smiles on their faces.

"Little liars!"

"I don't blame them," Ari admitted. "Who has school days before Christmas?"

"True." I held his hand and nodded toward the stairs. "Let's go see them."

As we made our way downstairs, James stumbled out of his room. Ari scooped him up, letting him fall back asleep in his arms. I let out a hum, making a mental note to

put some soup on for dinner just in case his throat was bothering him.

“You three do not look sick!” I called out. The triplets froze, all staring at me with wide, gold eyes.

“We felt sick but now we feel better!” Anna hurried to explain.

“It is a miracle from the Creator!” Claire added, flashing a big smile.

“We didn’t want to risk getting any of the other kids sick,” Jane agreed before spotting James. Frowning, she moved forward and looked him over. “Wait, he’s actually sick.”

I hummed in agreement and messed with her hair. “Alright, since all three of you are playing hooky, you’re going to help me bake for these upcoming events. Eat your lunch and then we’re getting to work.”

As we made our way into the kitchen and breakfast area, I found my other mates and Nolan already eating lunch. The room grew loud with teasing comments about the girls not being sick as I sat down on an island chair, absorbing the noise and chaos. But also the joy—so much joy. We were surrounded by so much love, and there was absolutely nothing I would trade this for.

I had been fearless enough to take hold of the happiness right within reach...and now it was mine, forever.