



Honey for the Bear

(Maplewood Grove #2)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: Sunshiney Hannah is drawn to the gruff, mysterious Cameron, who buys her honey at Maplewood Grove's farmers market but offers little else in return. Cameron's secret—he's a bear shifter—keeps him from Hannah, but their undeniable connection leads to a passionate encounter. Can they overcome fear and embrace a love that defies nature itself?

In this steamy, sweet shifter romance, one BBW human and one brooding bear will discover that when fate brings you together, nothing can stand in the way.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Hannah

The morning sun streams through the trees, dappling the ground beneath the canopy of leaves as I set up my honey stand at the Maplewood Grove farmers market.

The air smells of fresh bread and ripe fruit, a tantalizing mix that somehow blends perfectly with the sweet, floral scent of my honey.

I hum to myself as I arrange the jars in neat rows, each one glinting golden in the sunlight.

This is my favorite part of the week—chatting with neighbors, selling my honey, and soaking up the buzz of the market. It's loud but friendly, the kind of chaos that feels alive.

“Hannah, you're glowing as usual!” I glance up to see Mrs. Harper, a spry woman in her seventies with a knack for flattery and knitting sweaters that no one wants to wear. She's clutching her usual reusable bag, which sags slightly under the weight of whatever produce she's already snagged.

“Good morning, Mrs. Harper,” I reply cheerfully, sliding a jar of wildflower honey toward her. “And you're looking radiant yourself. What's the secret this week?”

She cackles, plucking the jar from the table with gnarled but steady hands. “A spoonful of your honey in my tea every morning. Keeps me young!”

“Then I'm expecting you to live to at least a hundred,” I tease, handing her a small

cloth bag to carry the jar.

As Mrs. Harper ambles off, I take a moment to scan the crowd, soaking in the energy of the market. Vendors call out their specials, children dart between tables clutching fresh pastries, and the air hums with the murmur of conversation.

And then I see him .

Cameron Barrett.

He's striding through the market as if the world doesn't exist, his tall, broad frame cutting through the crowd like a ship through water.

He's wearing his usual flannel shirt, rolled up to the elbows to reveal tanned, muscular forearms, and his jeans look like they've seen better days.

His dark hair is slightly messy, and his stormy gray eyes are fixed straight ahead, as though he's trying to avoid looking at anyone.

My stomach does a ridiculous little flip, and I curse myself for it. This isn't new. Cameron comes to the market every week, always stopping by my stand to buy a jar of honey. Yet every time I see him, I feel like a schoolgirl with a crush, my heart racing and my cheeks flushing.

"Get it together, Hannah," I mutter under my breath, forcing myself to rearrange a row of honey jars that don't actually need rearranging.

When Cameron reaches my stand, he pauses, his eyes darting briefly to mine before shifting to the display of honey.

"Morning, Cameron," I say brightly, trying to ignore the way my voice feels a little

too high-pitched.

“Morning,” he mutters, his voice low and gravelly, like the rumble of thunder before a storm.

He doesn’t say anything else, just picks up a jar of honey and examines it like he hasn’t been buying the exact same jar every week for the past three months.

“You know,” I say, leaning slightly against the wooden counter, “if you’re trying to set a world record for the most honey jars purchased by one person, you’re well on your way.”

His lips twitch, the barest hint of a smile ghosting across his face, but he doesn’t look up.

“What can I say? I like honey,” he says gruffly, pulling out his wallet.

“Clearly,” I reply, handing him a bag before he can ask for one. “Although I’m starting to wonder if you’re secretly feeding an entire colony of bears.”

That gets a reaction. Cameron’s eyes snap up to meet mine, a flicker of something unreadable passing through them before he quickly looks away again. For a moment, I think I might have said something wrong, but then he shakes his head slightly and mutters, “Something like that.”

I laugh, the sound a little too loud in the quiet tension that suddenly hangs between us. “Well, as long as you’re keeping the bears happy.”

Cameron doesn’t respond, just hands me a crumpled bill and takes the bag from my outstretched hand.

“Thanks,” he says, his voice quieter now.

“Anytime,” I reply, watching as he turns and walks away, his broad shoulders disappearing into the crowd.

I release the breath I didn’t realize I was holding, my chest feeling strangely tight.

Why does he always do this to me?

I shake my head, trying to clear my thoughts. Cameron Barrett is a mystery I’ll never solve, and honestly, I probably shouldn’t even try. He’s gruff, distant, and so guarded that he might as well have a “No Trespassing” sign hanging around his neck.

Yet something about him draws me in—something in the way he carries himself, like he’s bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders but refuses to let it crush him.

The rest of the morning passes in a blur of customers and chatter, but Cameron lingers in the back of my mind like a shadow I can’t quite shake.

By noon, the market is in full swing, and I’m busy chatting with a young couple about the difference between clover honey and wildflower honey when I feel a strange prickling sensation on the back of my neck.

It’s the kind of feeling you get when someone’s watching you.

I glance up, my eyes scanning the crowd, but I see no sign of anyone staring.

Shaking off the feeling, I return to the couple, handing them a jar of wildflower honey and wishing them a good day.

But the sensation doesn't go away.

By the time the market starts winding down in the early afternoon, I'm exhausted. My feet ache from standing, and my cheeks hurt from smiling, but I feel a sense of satisfaction from a good day's work.

As I start packing up the stand, I catch myself glancing toward the woods at the edge of Maplewood Grove—the same woods where Cameron's cabin supposedly lies.

What's his story?

The thought comes unbidden, and I shake my head, scolding myself for being so nosy. Cameron has made it clear that he values his privacy, and it's not my place to pry into his life.

Yet I can't help but wonder.

A part of me—an annoyingly curious part—wants to know what lies behind those stormy gray eyes. What secrets he's hiding.

I sigh, stacking the last jar of honey into a crate and loading it into the back of my truck.

"Curiosity killed the cat," I mutter to myself, climbing into the driver's seat and starting the engine.

As I pull away from the market, the image of Cameron's face lingers in my mind, his unreadable expression and the quiet tension that seems to follow him wherever he goes.

I tell myself it's none of my business.

But deep down, I know I won't stop wondering.

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Cameron

The gravel crunches under my boots as I leave the farmers market. The bag in my hand feels heavier than it should for just one jar of honey. I know I don't need any more. I've got enough jars piled on my counter to last a lifetime. But the honey isn't the reason I keep coming back.

It's her— Hannah .

I glance back over my shoulder once, instinctively, as if she might still be standing there, watching me.

But the market is bustling, and her honey stand is already surrounded by customers.

She's probably smiling, laughing, and chatting with them like she always does.

She has this way of making everyone around her feel like they belong. Like they matter.

I don't belong.

And I sure as hell don't matter.

The bag folds in my grip as I tighten my fist, forcing my eyes forward. The walk back to my cabin stretches out before me, the dirt road winding through the trees that edge Maplewood Grove. It's a long way to go for something I don't need, but I couldn't stop myself.

I never can when it comes to her.

My bear stirs inside me, restless and agitated. It's been that way ever since I met her. Every time I see her, it gets harder to keep the beast under control. It claws at me, demanding I do something reckless—something stupid.

Like claim her.

The thought hits me like a punch to the gut, and I shake my head hard, as if I can physically dislodge the thought. No. I can't.

Hannah is everything I shouldn't want. Warm, open, kind—she's a light, and I'm nothing but shadows. I've already been reckless enough just by being near her. If she knew the truth about me, she'd run. And I wouldn't blame her.

The trees close in around me as I leave the main road and head deeper into the woods. The air here is cooler, the shadows longer, and the scent of pine and earth fills my lungs. My cabin lies just ahead, tucked away where no one ever ventures. It's better this way—safer for everyone.

But even as I step through the door and set the bag on the counter, my thoughts are back at her honey stand. The memory of her smile, the way she leaned against the counter and teased me, her laughter—it all clings to me like the scent of wildflowers on the breeze.

My bear growls, low and insistent, and I grip the edge of the counter, my knuckles white.

“Enough,” I mutter under my breath, but it's no use. The beast doesn't listen anymore, not when it comes to her .

I glance at the jar of honey sitting on the counter, its golden glow catching the light streaming through the cabin window. It's stupid, really, the way I keep buying it. I don't even eat honey. But holding it, having it in my home—it's like holding a piece of her.

The thought makes me feel like a fool.

Shoving the bag aside, I grab my keys and head back out the door. I need to clear my head, and there's only one place I can do that.

Earl's workshop smells like sawdust and varnish, the scent hitting me the moment I step inside. The old man is hunched over his workbench, a pair of goggles perched on his head as he sands the edge of a wooden rocking chair.

"Took you long enough," Earl says without looking up, his gruff voice cutting through the quiet hum of the sander.

"I didn't realize I was on a schedule," I reply, shutting the door behind me.

Earl snorts, setting the sander down and pulling off the goggles. He's been running this woodshop for as long as I've been alive, and he's the only person in Maplewood Grove who knows what I am. He's also the only person who doesn't seem to care.

"You're always on a schedule, kid," he says, wiping his hands on a rag. "Problem is, it's the wrong one."

I cross the room, picking up a piece of sandpaper and running it over the edge of a half-finished table. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Earl leans back against the workbench, crossing his arms over his chest. His eyes—sharp and knowing—narrow as they fix on me.

“It means you’re wasting your time pretending you don’t care about that girl.”

My hand stills, the sandpaper slipping slightly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Bull,” Earl says, his voice flat. “You’ve been mooning over her for months now. Buying all that honey you don’t need. Watching her from the woods like some lovesick fool. You think I don’t notice?”

I grit my teeth, the muscles in my jaw tightening. “It’s not that simple.”

“It’s exactly that simple,” Earl counters, pushing off the workbench and stepping closer. “You can’t keep buying honey and pretending that’s all you want.”

His words hit too close to home, and I toss the sandpaper onto the table. “What do you want me to do, Earl?” I snap, my voice harsher than I intend. “Tell her the truth? That I’m not just some guy who lives in the woods—that I’m a goddamn bear shifter? You think she’d stick around after that?”

Earl doesn’t flinch, his expression calm and steady. “I think you’re not giving her enough credit.”

I laugh bitterly, shaking my head. “You don’t get it. She’s human. Normal. She deserves someone who can give her a normal life. Not... this .”

I gesture to myself, the frustration boiling over.

Earl watches me for a long moment, his gaze unreadable. “You’re scared,” he says

finally, his tone softer now.

I open my mouth to argue, but the words die in my throat. Because he's right.

I'm scared as hell.

Scared of what she'll think if she finds out the truth. Scared of losing her before I even have her. Scared of what it'll mean if I let myself want her the way my bear does.

"You don't understand," I say quietly, turning away.

"No, I don't," Earl says, his voice firm. "But I do know this. You can't keep running forever. Sooner or later, you're gonna have to decide if she's worth the risk."

The words hang in the air between us, heavy and unavoidable.

I don't respond. I can't.

Instead, I grab a block of wood from the pile on the floor and set it on the workbench, picking up a carving knife. The familiar weight of it in my hand steadies me, the sharp blade glinting in the light.

Earl doesn't say anything else, just returns to his rocking chair, the hum of the sander filling the silence.

But his words linger, echoing in my mind as I carve, the wood chips falling like snow onto the floor.

By the time I leave the workshop hours later, the sun has dipped below the horizon, painting the sky in shades of deep blue and gold. The walk back to my cabin is quiet, the only sounds are the rustle of leaves and the distant hoot of an owl.

My thoughts are anything but quiet, though.

Earl's voice plays on a loop in my mind, his words digging into me like splinters.

You can't keep running forever.

The cabin feels cold and empty when I step inside, the darkness pressing in around me.

I set the carving knife on the counter and stare at the block of wood in my hand.

It's rough and unfinished, but I can already see the shape of it taking form—a bear, standing tall and proud, its head tilted toward the sky.

I set it down and glance at the jar of honey still sitting on the counter.

Hannah's face flashes in my mind—her smile, her laugh, the way she looks at me like I'm more than just some shadow in the woods.

My chest tightens, the weight of my own fear threatening to crush me.

I don't know if I can risk it.

But I don't know if I can stay away, either.

And that terrifies me most of all.

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Hannah

The storm rolls in just after midnight, tearing through the quiet of my farm with a vengeance. The first crack of thunder rattles the windows, and I shoot upright in bed, my heart pounding. Rain lashes against the roof, and the wind howls like a living thing, wild and furious.

I throw on my boots and grab a flashlight, heading for the back door.

My bees will be fine—the hives are sturdy, built to weather storms—but the rest of the farm is another story.

I step outside into the chaos, the rain soaking me instantly.

It's cold and sharp, slicing through the humid summer air.

The garden is a mess. My tomato plants are flattened, and the trellis for the beans looks like it's about to give up entirely. Worse, one of the fence posts near the far end of the property is leaning heavily to one side, barely holding up the wire.

“Damn it,” I mutter under my breath, pushing wet hair out of my face.

There's no fixing it tonight. The storm is too fierce, and I'm already shivering. I'll deal with it in the morning, I tell myself, trudging back to the house. But as I climb into bed and listen to the storm rage on, I can't shake the feeling that something's coming.

By morning, the storm has passed, leaving the air crisp and cool. The damage is worse than I thought. The bean trellis is a total loss, and a fence post has snapped clean in half, leaving a gaping hole in the perimeter.

I tie my hair back, roll up my sleeves, and grab my toolbox. If I wait too long to fix the fence, the deer and wild critters will move in, and I'll lose what's left of my garden.

The morning sun is warm on my skin as I work, but frustration builds with every swing of the hammer.

The post is heavier than I expected, and the ground is still wet and stubborn from the rain.

By the time I manage to wedge the new post into the hole, I've worked up a sweat, and my arms ache from the effort.

"You're doing that wrong."

I yelp, nearly dropping the hammer, and spin around to find Cameron standing a few feet away. His hands are shoved into his pockets, his expression unreadable as usual, but I notice a faint twitch at the corner of his mouth, like he's hiding a smile.

"Jesus, Cameron," I say, pressing a hand to my chest. "You scared the hell out of me!"

"Sorry." Though he doesn't sound all that sorry.

I narrow my eyes at him, trying to ignore the way my heart is racing—not from fear

but from the sight of him. He's wearing a plain gray T-shirt that clings to his broad shoulders and chest, and his jeans are streaked with dirt, like he's already been working this morning.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, trying to sound casual.

"Driving by," he says with a shrug. "Saw the fence. Figured you'd need help."

I raise an eyebrow, crossing my arms. "You just happened to be driving by?"

His lips twitch again, but he doesn't answer. Instead, he steps closer, his gaze flicking to the broken fence.

"You're never going to get it steady like that," he says, nodding toward the post.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence," I mutter, picking up the hammer again.

"Move," he says, his voice low but firm.

I blink up at him, startled by the command in his tone. "Excuse me?"

"Move," he repeats, already reaching for the post. "You're going to hurt yourself."

I open my mouth to argue, but the look in his eyes stops me. It's not just stubbornness. It's concern.

With a sigh, I step back and watch as Cameron takes over. His hands wrap around the post, and I can't help but notice how big they are, how strong. He holds the post steady with one hand while using the other to drive it deeper into the ground, his movements sure and efficient.

“See?” he says, glancing at me over his shoulder. “You’ve got to angle it a little, so it stays in place.”

“I knew that,” I lie, crossing my arms.

He smirks, just barely, and turns back to the post.

As we work together, the tension between us slowly eases. Cameron doesn’t say much—he never does—but his presence is steady, grounding. He hands me tools without me asking, and when the hammer slips from my grip, he catches it midair like it’s nothing.

“Show off,” I mutter, but there’s no heat in my voice.

Cameron just grunts, his lips curving into the faintest hint of a smile.

By the time we finish, the sun is high in the sky, and my skin is sticky with sweat and dirt. The fence looks better than it did before the storm, and I can’t help but feel a little proud, even if Cameron did most of the heavy lifting.

“Thanks,” I say, wiping my hands on my jeans.

He nods, stepping back to survey our work. His T-shirt is damp with sweat, clinging to his back, and I have to force myself not to stare.

“You didn’t have to help, you know,” I add, my voice softer now.

“I wanted to,” he says simply, his eyes meeting mine.

Something in his gaze makes my stomach flip—something raw and unguarded. For a moment, I think he might say more, but then he looks away, his jaw tightening.

“Cameron,” I say hesitantly, taking a step closer. “Why do you keep showing up like this? Helping me?”

He doesn’t answer right away. His hands are shoved into his pockets again, his shoulders tense.

“Does it bother you?” he asks finally, his voice low.

“No,” I say quickly, shaking my head. “It’s just... I don’t get it. You’re always so distant, like you’re afraid to let anyone in. But then you show up and do things like this, and...” I’m unsure how to finish the sentence.

Cameron’s jaw clenches, and for a moment, I think he’s going to walk away. But then he turns to face me, his gray eyes stormy and conflicted.

“Hannah,” he says, my name coming out like a sigh.

“Yes?” I prompt, my heart pounding.

He takes a step closer, and for a moment, I forget how to breathe. The air between us feels charged, like the storm never really left, and I feel the heat radiating off his body.

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” he says quietly, his voice rough.

“Then tell me,” I say, my voice barely above a whisper.

His hand twitches at his side, like he wants to reach for me but is holding himself back. “You don’t understand. I’m not... I’m not who you think I am.”

“Then show me who you are,” I say, stepping closer until there’s barely any space

between us.

The tension is unbearable now, a tight, electric pull that makes my skin prickle. Cameron's eyes search mine, and for a moment, I think he's going to kiss me.

But then he steps back, his expression hardening.

"I can't," he says, his voice cold and final.

Before I can say anything, he turns and walks away. His broad shoulders turn the corner around the house, and I hear the sound of his truck starting up soon after.

I stand there, staring after him, my chest aching with confusion and something else I can't name.

What are you so afraid of, Cameron Barrett?

The question lingers in the air, unanswered, as I turn back to the fence and try to ignore the hollow feeling in my chest.

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Cameron

I storm back to my cabin, the door slamming shut behind me loud enough to rattle the windows. My chest is tight, my breath coming in sharp bursts as I pace the living room. The space feels too small, too constricting, and the walls seem to close in on me with every step I take.

I shouldn't have gone to her.

I shouldn't have helped her.

I shouldn't have let myself get close.

My bear growls inside me, a low, rumbling sound that vibrates through my chest. It's restless, angry, clawing at the edges of my control like a caged animal. It wanted to stay. It wanted to claim her.

I wanted it, too.

My hands curl into fists, the rough pads of my fingers digging into my palms. I can still feel the warmth of her skin, the way her hand brushed against mine when I handed her the hammer.

That tiny, accidental touch had sent a jolt through me, a spark that burned hotter and brighter than anything I've felt in years.

That's the problem.

Hannah is dangerous to me, in ways she doesn't even realize. She's kind and warm and so damn good that it makes my chest ache just being near her. But she doesn't know what I am. She doesn't know what she'd be getting herself into if I let myself want her the way my bear does.

And God help me, I do want her.

I run a hand through my hair, tugging at the roots hard enough to sting. The image of her standing in the sunlight, sweat glistening on her skin, her hair falling loose around her face—it's burned into my mind, a brand I can't shake.

I can't keep doing this.

I grab the nearest thing—a heavy glass jar sitting on the counter—and hurl it across the room. It shatters against the wall, shards raining down onto the floor in a glittering arc. The sound is satisfying, but it doesn't dull the ache in my chest or the fire burning beneath my skin.

I need to run.

The woods stretch out before me, dark and endless, and I take off at a sprint, the cool night air sharp against my skin. My boots pound against the soft earth, the trees blurring past me as I push myself faster and faster.

The shift comes suddenly, violently, ripping through me like a storm. One moment, I'm human; the next, my bear takes over, its massive paws thundering against the ground.

The world sharpens in an instant. My senses explode with clarity—the scent of pine

and damp earth, the distant rustle of a rabbit darting through the underbrush, the faint hum of the bees near Hannah's hives.

Her scent lingers on me, sweet and warm like honey, and it drives my bear into a frenzy. It wants to go to her, to touch her, to bury its face in her neck and breathe her in until nothing else exists.

I slam my massive paw against a tree trunk, the force of it splintering the wood. The sound echoes through the forest, but it doesn't silence the growl rumbling deep in my chest.

She's too close.

I can't have her, but I can't stay away, either.

My bear paces, its claws digging into the earth, restless and agitated. It doesn't understand why we're holding back, why we're denying ourselves what we both want. But it doesn't see the bigger picture.

It doesn't see the danger.

If I lose control, if I let myself get too close, I could hurt her. I could ruin her. And that's a risk I can't take.

The moonlight filters through the trees, casting long shadows across the forest floor. I stop near the edge of the woods, the faint glow of Hannah's farmhouse visible through the trees. The sight of it sends a pang through my chest, a painful ache that makes me want to roar.

She's there, probably asleep, her soft breaths filling the quiet of her room. The thought of her, so close yet so far, makes my bear growl low and deep.

I shouldn't be here.

I should turn around, run back to my cabin, and lock myself away until the ache fades. But my paws stay rooted to the ground, my eyes locked on the faint golden light spilling from her window.

I don't know how long I stand there, watching her house like some kind of predator stalking its prey. Minutes? Hours? Time feels meaningless out here, with her scent in my nose and her image burning in my mind.

The wind shifts, carrying her scent to me, and it's enough to break what little control I have left.

With a low growl, I turn and run, my bear tearing through the woods at full speed. The trees blur past me again, the cool air slicing through my fur, but it doesn't dull the fire burning inside me.

I can't keep running forever.

But for now, it's all I can do.

When I finally return to my cabin, the familiar scent of wood and smoke greets me, grounding me just enough to shift back into my human form. The transition is rough. My muscles ache, and my skin feels too tight, like it doesn't quite fit right anymore.

I collapse onto the floor, my breath coming in harsh gasps and my heart pounding like a drum. The room is dark, the moonlight filtering through the windows casting silver streaks across the wooden floor.

I sit there for a long time, staring at nothing, my thoughts a jumbled mess.

Hannah's face flashes in my mind again—her smile, her laugh, the way she looked at me when she asked why I keep showing up for her.

Why do I?

The question lingers, heavy and unavoidable. I tell myself it's because she needs help because I don't want to see her struggle. But deep down, I know that's not the whole truth.

I go to her because I can't stay away.

Because she's the only thing in this world that makes me feel human.

I let out a low, bitter laugh, the sound echoing in the empty cabin. What a cruel joke. The one person who makes me feel alive is the one person I can never have.

My bear growls softly, a low rumble that vibrates through my chest. It doesn't agree. It doesn't care about the risks or the consequences. All it knows is that it wants her.

And if I'm being honest with myself, so do I.

But wanting her and having her are two very different things.

With a heavy sigh, I push myself to my feet and head for the kitchen. The jar of honey is still sitting on the counter, untouched, its golden glow mocking me in the dim light.

I pick it up, turning it over in my hands, and for a moment, I consider throwing it out the window. But instead, I set it back down and grab a carving knife from the drawer.

The block of wood on the counter catches my eye, and I pick it up, running my fingers over the rough surface. It's small and misshapen, but I can already see the shape of it in my mind—a bear, standing tall and proud, its head tilted toward the sky.

I sit at the table and start carving, the rhythmic scrape of the knife against the wood filling the silence. The work is slow, methodical, and for a while, it's enough to quiet my thoughts.

But no matter how hard I try to focus on the carving, my mind keeps drifting back to her—Hannah.

To the way she looked at me, like she could see right through all the walls I've built around myself.

To the way her hand brushed against mine, sending sparks shooting through my veins.

To the way my name sounded on her lips, soft and full of unspoken questions.

I let out a heavy sigh, setting the knife down and leaning back in my chair. The half-finished carving sits in front of me, its rough edges catching the light.

I don't know what I'm doing anymore.

But one thing is clear. I can't keep running from her.

And I can't keep running from myself.

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Hannah

The smell of honey and butter fills my kitchen, warm and sweet, as I pull the last batch of muffins from the oven. They're golden brown, the tops just starting to crack, and I can't help but feel a little proud. These are my best yet.

I set the tray on the counter and glance out the window toward the woods. Cameron's cabin is out there, hidden somewhere in the trees. It feels strange, knowing he's so close yet so far—like an untouchable force looming at the edge of my life.

My chest tightens as I remember the way he left yesterday, his broad shoulders disappearing around the farmhouse without a single word of explanation.

One moment, he'd been there, strong and steady, his presence as grounding as the earth beneath my feet.

And then he was gone, like smoke slipping through my fingers.

I don't know what I expected when I asked why he keeps helping me. Answers, maybe. Honesty. But Cameron doesn't seem to work that way. He's like a locked door, and no matter how hard I knock, he won't let me in.

Still, I can't stop thinking about him.

With a sigh, I wipe my hands on a dish towel and start packing the muffins into a basket. It's a flimsy excuse, baking these. I tell myself it's a thank-you for fixing the fence, but deep down, I know it's more than that. I want to see him. I want to

understand him.

And maybe, just maybe, I want him to see me, too.

The woods are quiet as I follow the narrow path toward Cameron's cabin, the late evening light filtering through the trees in soft golden beams. The air smells like pine and damp earth, and the occasional rustle of leaves reminds me I'm not alone out here.

The basket feels heavy in my hands, though it's light enough to carry. It's the weight of my nerves, I think, pressing down on me with every step.

What if he doesn't want to see me?

The thought twists in my gut, but I push it aside. If Cameron doesn't want me here, he'll tell me. He's never been shy about keeping his distance or speaking his mind.

When I finally reach his cabin, I stop at the edge of the clearing, my breath catching. It's small and rustic, built from dark wood and nestled among the trees like it's part of the forest itself. Smoke curls lazily from the chimney, and the faint glow of firelight spills through the window.

The sight of it—the sight of him—steadies me.

I walk up the steps to the porch and knock on the door, the sound louder than I expect in the stillness of the woods. For a moment, I hear nothing—no movement, no sound. And then I feel the heavy thud of footsteps before the door swings open.

Cameron stands there, filling the doorway, his gray eyes locking on to mine. He looks

startled, like he wasn't expecting anyone, and his hair is slightly mussed, as if he's been running his hands through it.

"Hannah," he says, his voice low and rough, like he hasn't used it in hours.

"Hi," I manage, suddenly feeling self-conscious. "I, um... I brought you something."

I hold up the basket, and his eyes flick to it before returning to mine. For a moment, he doesn't say anything, and I wonder if I've made a mistake.

But then he steps back, opening the door wider. "Come in."

The cabin is warm and smells faintly of cedar and smoke. It's small but cozy, with a stone fireplace crackling in the corner and shelves lined with books and tools. A half-finished wooden carving sits on the table, and my heart does a little flip when I recognize the outline of a bear.

I set the basket on the table, suddenly unsure of what to say. Cameron watches me, his arms crossed over his chest, his expression unreadable.

"I made muffins," I say, the words tumbling out in a rush. "As a thank-you. For helping with the fence."

His gaze softens, just barely, and he uncrosses his arms. "You didn't have to do that."

"I wanted to," I say, meeting his eyes.

For a moment, we just stand there, the air between us thick with unspoken words. Cameron's presence is overwhelming in such a small space, his broad shoulders and quiet intensity filling every corner of the room.

“Do you want one?” I ask, breaking the silence.

He nods, and I hand him a muffin. He takes it carefully, like he’s not sure what to do with it, and I have to hold back a smile.

“It’s not going to bite you,” I tease.

He huffs out a laugh, the sound low and rough, and takes a bite. His eyes widen slightly, and for a moment, I think he might actually smile.

“These are good,” he says, his voice softer now.

“Thanks,” I say, feeling a strange warmth spread through me.

We eat in silence for a while, the crackle of the fire the only sound. It’s not awkward, exactly, but a tension permeates the air, a sense that we’re both waiting for something to happen.

Finally, I set my muffin down and look at him. “Cameron.”

He glances at me, his gray eyes wary.

“Why do you keep pulling away?” I ask, my voice quiet but steady.

He tenses, his jaw tightening, and I see the walls go up before he even speaks. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you do,” I say, leaning forward. “You keep showing up, helping me, and then disappearing like you can’t get away fast enough. Why?”

His hands curl into fists on the table, and for a moment, I think he’s going to shut me

out again. But then he exhales sharply, running a hand through his hair.

“It’s complicated,” he says finally, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Try me,” I say, my heart pounding.

He looks at me then, really looks at me, and the raw vulnerability in his eyes takes my breath away.

“You don’t understand,” he says, his voice rough. “It’s not that simple.”

“Then tell me,” I say, reaching across the table to touch his hand.

The moment my fingers brush his, he jerks back like I’ve burned him, and the pain that flashes across his face is almost unbearable.

“Hannah,” he says, my name coming out like a plea.

“Cameron,” I whisper, my chest aching.

For a moment, we just stare at each other, the air between us thick with tension. And then, suddenly, he’s moving.

He grabs my wrist, his touch firm but gentle, and pulls me to my feet. The heat of his hand seeps into my skin, and I feel the rough calluses on his fingers.

“Hannah,” he says again, his voice low and strained.

“Yes?” I whisper, my heart pounding so loudly I barely hear him.

His eyes lock on to mine, dark and stormy, and for a moment, I think he’s going to

kiss me. But then he lets go of my wrist and takes a step back, his expression conflicted.

“You should go,” he says, his voice tight.

I stare at him, my chest aching, but I nod. “Okay.”

I turn to leave, but before I reach the door, he grabs my hand again, his touch lingering this time.

“Hannah,” he says, his voice barely audible.

I turn back to him, and the look in his eyes steals the breath from my lungs.

“Thank you,” he says, his voice raw.

“For what?” I whisper.

“For being you,” he says, his grip on my hand tightening for just a moment before he lets go.

I leave the cabin, my heart heavy and my mind racing, the warmth of his touch still lingering on my skin.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Cameron

The second Hannah walks out my door, her scent lingering in the air like a ghost, my restraint snaps. I pace the cabin, each step feeling like a battle between my bear and me. My body is tense, my muscles coiled and my chest tight with the weight of everything I can't say.

Her eyes—damn, her eyes—keep playing on a loop in my head. The way she looked at me, like she was trying to see past every wall I've spent years building. Like she wanted to fix me.

But she can't fix me.

I rake a hand through my hair, the strands damp with sweat despite the cool night air seeping through the cracked window. My bear growls low in my chest, its frustration bleeding into mine.

Go after her.

The thought slams into me with the force of a freight train, but I shove it down. No. I can't. She deserves better than this. Better than me.

But then why does it feel like I'm ripping myself in two?

I grab the carving knife from the table, my hands trembling as I pick up the half-finished bear I've been working on for weeks.

The wood feels solid beneath my fingers, grounding me for a moment, but even that doesn't last. With a frustrated growl, I slam the knife down, the sharp clang echoing in the empty cabin.

I can't stay here. Not like this.

The woods swallow me whole, their darkness a familiar comfort.

The air is thick with the scent of pine and damp earth, and the distant rustle of leaves makes my bear stir.

My feet pound against the ground, the rhythm steady and relentless, but it's not enough to burn off the tension clawing at my insides.

The shift comes fast, ripping through me like a storm. My muscles stretch and twist, my skin burning as fur erupts along my arms and chest. My hands curl into massive paws, sharp claws digging into the dirt as I drop to all fours.

And then I'm running.

The world sharpens instantly, every scent, every sound amplified. The forest is alive around me—the scurry of a rabbit in the underbrush, the hoot of an owl overhead, the distant hum of bees near Hannah's farm.

Her farm.

I veer sharply, my paws kicking up dirt as I change direction. My bear growls low and deep, the sound vibrating through my chest. It doesn't care about the consequences. It doesn't care about the risks. All it knows is that it wants her.

We can't have her.

The thought is mine, but my bear doesn't listen. It never does when it comes to Hannah.

I skid to a stop at the edge of her property, my massive form hidden in the shadows of the trees. Her farmhouse is quiet, the windows glowing softly with warm light. I can see her silhouette through the window, moving around her kitchen, and the sight of her makes something inside me ache.

She's beautiful.

Her hair is loose, curling around her shoulders, and she's wearing one of those soft, flowy dresses that make her look like she belongs in a damn painting. She's humming to herself, the sound faint but sweet, and my ears twitch, straining to catch every note.

I shouldn't be here.

The thought hits me like a punch to the gut, but I can't make myself leave. My bear presses closer to the edge of the trees, its instincts screaming at me to go to her.

Just one step closer.

I dig my claws into the dirt, forcing myself to stay put. I can't. If she saw me like this, if she knew what I am...

The very thought makes my chest tighten, a sharp, painful squeeze that leaves me gasping. I've spent years keeping my distance, protecting people from the danger I carry inside me. But with Hannah, it's different.

I don't just want to protect her. I want to be near her.

And that's what makes this so damn hard.

By the time I make it back to my cabin, the fire in the hearth has burned down to embers, the room dim and quiet. I shift back into my human form, the process slower this time, my body aching from the strain.

I collapse onto the couch, my head in my hands with my breath coming in ragged gasps. The cabin feels even smaller now, the walls pressing in on me like a cage.

You can't keep running forever.

Earl's voice echoes in my head, his gruff words cutting through the silence like a blade. He said those words to me years ago, back when I first moved out here, back when I thought isolation was the only way to keep people safe.

But I'm starting to think he was right.

Because no matter how far I run, I can't outrun this. I can't outrun her.

The next morning, I wake up with a pounding headache and a knot in my chest that refuses to go away. The sunlight streaming through the window feels too bright, too harsh, and I groan as I roll off the couch, my muscles protesting every movement.

I need coffee.

The kitchen is a mess, the table still cluttered with wood shavings and unfinished carvings, but I ignore it. I pour myself a cup, the bitter aroma filling the air, and lean

against the counter, staring out the window.

The woods are quiet in the early morning light, the trees casting long shadows across the ground. It should be peaceful, but it's not. Not when my mind keeps drifting back to Hannah.

Her laugh. Her smile. The way her eyes lit up when I tasted her muffins and told her they were good.

I've spent so long keeping people at arm's length, convincing myself it's for their own good. But with Hannah, it's different. She doesn't just make me want to stay. She makes me want to be better.

And that terrifies me.

I find myself at Earl's workshop later that day, the familiar scent of sawdust and varnish hitting me the moment I step through the door. Earl is hunched over his workbench, his hands steady as he carves the leg of a chair.

"Been expecting you," he says without looking up.

I grunt in response, grabbing a piece of sandpaper from the pile on the bench and running it over the edge of a wooden plank. The rhythmic motion is soothing, the rough texture grounding me as I work.

Earl doesn't say anything for a while, letting the silence stretch between us. But I feel his eyes on me, sharp and knowing, like he's waiting for me to crack.

"You look like hell," he says finally, his tone matter-of-fact.

“Thanks,” I mutter, not bothering to look up.

“You want to tell me what’s eating you, or are you just here to brood?”

I sigh, setting the sandpaper down and rubbing the back of my neck. “It’s nothing.”

Earl snorts. “Bullshit.”

I glance at him, my jaw tightening. He raises an eyebrow, his expression daring me to argue.

“It’s Hannah,” I say finally, the words heavy in my mouth.

“Ah,” Earl says, nodding like he’s been expecting this. “The honey girl.”

I scowl at him, but he just chuckles, leaning back against the workbench. “What about her?”

“I can’t...” I trail off, struggling to find the right words. “She deserves better than this. Better than me.”

Earl gives me a long, hard look, his gaze steady and unflinching. “You know, for a guy who spends half his time carving bears, you sure are blind to the fact that you’re acting like one.”

I blink, caught off guard. “What the hell does that mean?”

“It means you’re scared,” Earl says, his voice gruff but not unkind. “You think pushing her away is protecting her, but all you’re doing is protecting yourself.”

The words hit me like a punch to the gut, and I turn away, my hands clenching into

fists.

“You don’t understand,” I say quietly. “If she knew what I am—”

“She’d probably surprise you,” Earl interrupts, his tone firm. “That girl’s tougher than she looks. And from what I’ve seen, she’s not afraid of you. She’s afraid you’ll never let her in.”

I don’t respond, the knot in my chest tightening until it’s almost unbearable.

“You can’t keep running, Cameron,” Earl says, his voice softer now. “Sooner or later, you’re going to have to decide if she’s worth the risk.”

The silence that follows is deafening, the weight of his words settling over me like a lead blanket.

Is she worth the risk?

I already know the answer.

But knowing it and acting on it are two very different things.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Hannah

The late afternoon sun dips low over the farm, bathing everything in a golden haze.

I adjust my wide-brimmed hat, wiping the back of my hand across my forehead as I move from one hive to the next.

The bees hum lazily around me, their soft buzzing blending with the breeze that rustles through the wildflowers.

Normally, this is my favorite time of day—a quiet, sacred moment when the world seems to exhale.

But peace feels impossible today.

I can't stop thinking about him. Cameron Barrett, with his broad shoulders and unreadable gray eyes.

Cameron, who's been coming around my farm more often, fixing fences, repairing roofs, and leaving me more confused with every passing day.

He's like a storm trapped in a man, all pent-up energy and tension, and I can't figure out why he keeps pulling away just when it feels like we're getting closer.

The sound of boots crunching on gravel pulls me out of my thoughts. I turn, startled, and there he is, standing near the fence. He's wearing his usual flannel shirt and jeans, his hands shoved deep into his pockets and his shoulders hunched like he's

bracing for something.

“Cameron,” I say, my voice soft with surprise. “What are you doing here?”

He hesitates, his eyes flicking to the hives before settling on me. “I wanted to check on the fence,” he mutters, nodding toward the section he repaired last week.

I tilt my head, raising an eyebrow. “The fence is fine. You did a great job.”

“Still. Thought I’d make sure.”

Something in his voice—low and rough, like gravel sliding down a mountainside—sends a shiver through me. I watch as he shifts his weight, his hands flexing at his sides, like he doesn’t know what to do with them.

“You can come closer, you know,” I say, trying to keep my tone light. “I don’t bite. Unless you’re made of honey.”

For a moment, I think I see the corner of his mouth twitch—almost a smile—but it’s gone before I can be sure. “I’m not made of honey,” he says, but he steps closer anyway, his boots sinking into the soft earth.

I take off my gloves and tuck them into my pocket, watching him carefully. Something’s different about him today. He seems... restless. His shoulders are tense, his jaw tight, and his gray eyes—God, those eyes—are darker than usual, like a storm cloud is brewing behind them.

“Cameron,” I say gently, taking a step toward him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t give me that.” I cross my arms, narrowing my eyes at him.

“You’ve been acting strange ever since...” I falter, unsure how to finish the sentence.

Ever since he started helping me around the farm?

Ever since he began looking at me like I’m the only person in the world?

“Ever since we’ve been spending more time together,” I say finally, my voice quieter.

His gaze drops to the ground. He scuffs his boot against the dirt, silent for a long moment before finally looking up at me. His eyes are full of something I can’t quite name—desire, maybe, or regret.

“Hannah,” he says, and the way he says my name—low and rough, like it’s been pulled from somewhere deep inside him—makes my heart skip a beat. “You don’t understand.”

“Then help me understand,” I say, stepping closer. I’m close enough now that I can smell him—pine and sawdust and something warm and earthy that makes my head spin. “Because I’m tired of guessing what’s going on in that head of yours.”

His jaw tightens. His hands clench into fists at his sides, and for a moment, I think he’s going to walk away. But then, to my shock, he reaches out and cups my face in his hands.

“You don’t know what you’re asking for,” he says, his voice hoarse.

“Then show me,” I whisper.

And just like that, the dam breaks.

His lips crash down on mine, and I gasp, heat exploding through me. His hands slide to my waist, pulling me against him, and I melt into him, everything inside me screaming yes . His kiss is rough, desperate, like he's been holding himself back for years and can't anymore.

My hat falls to the ground as I wrap my arms around his neck, my fingers tangling in his thick hair.

His stubble scrapes against my skin, sending little shocks of sensation racing through me.

His lips are warm, his kiss fierce and consuming, and I can't think, can't breathe, can't do anything but give myself over to him.

"Cameron," I murmur against his mouth, my voice barely a breath.

He makes a low, guttural sound that vibrates through me, and his hands grip my hips tighter, pulling me closer. I feel the hard planes of his body pressing against my softness, and the heat pooling in my belly spreads like wildfire.

But then, just as suddenly as it began, he pulls back. His chest heaves as he stares down at me, his gray eyes wild and full of something that looks an awful lot like regret.

"I shouldn't have done that," he says, his voice rough.

I blink up at him, my lips still tingling from the kiss. "Why not?"

"Because..." He takes a step back, dragging a hand through his hair. "Because you don't know what I am. You don't know what you're getting into."

Frustration flares inside me, hot and sharp. “What does that even mean, Cameron? You keep saying I don’t understand, but you never tell me why! You can’t just kiss me like that and then pull away!”

“I’m trying to protect you,” he growls, his voice rising.

“From what? You? ” I take a step closer, poking him in the chest with my finger. “Because newsflash, Cameron, I’m not some fragile little thing that needs protecting. I can handle myself.”

His eyes lock on mine, and for a moment, the air between us crackles with tension. Then, without warning, he grabs my hand and pulls me toward the farmhouse.

“Where are we going?” I ask, stumbling after him.

“Inside,” he says, his voice low and firm.

My heart pounds as he leads me through the door and into the living room.

The moment we’re inside, he spins me around and kisses me again, backing me up against the wall.

This kiss is different—slower, deeper, like he’s trying to memorize the feel of me.

His hands roam over my curves, sliding down my sides to rest on my hips, and I shiver under his touch.

“You drive me crazy,” he murmurs against my lips, his voice thick with need.

“Good,” I whisper, tugging him closer.

He chuckles, a low, rumbling sound that makes my knees weak. “You don’t know what you’re doing to me.”

“Maybe I like driving you crazy,” I say, my voice breathless.

Cameron’s lips trail down my neck, the rough stubble of his beard scraping deliciously against my skin, igniting a trail of fire wherever he touches. I let out a soft moan, my head falling back against the cool wall, surrendering to the sensations that course through me.

His hands are large, enveloping my smaller frame with a possessiveness that is both thrilling and comforting.

A reverence in his touch, a silent prayer, speaks of a fear of losing me yet an undeniable urge to claim me as his own.

The dichotomy is intoxicating, and I revel in the way his strength contrasts with my own delicate form.

“Tell me to stop,” he says, his voice strained, almost pained, as if the words themselves are a battle against his own desires.

“Don’t you dare,” I whisper back, my voice barely audible but laced with a fervent desperation that mirrors his own.

That’s all it takes. The dam breaks, and the flood of his restraint washes away in an instant.

With a growl that rumbles from deep within his chest, he lifts me effortlessly, his strength a stark reminder of the size difference between us.

I feel like a feather in his arms, my legs wrapping around his waist instinctively as he carries me across the room.

Cameron presses me against the wall, his body pinning mine in place. I feel the heat of him through our clothes, the hardness of his arousal pressing against me. He grinds against me, the friction sending sparks of pleasure shooting through my core.

His hands roam freely, tracing the curve of my waist, the swell of my hips, the softness of my thighs. Each touch sends shivers down my spine, and I arch into him, my fingers fisting in his shirt, desperate to feel more of him.

Cameron's eyes are dark with desire as he pulls his shirt over his head, revealing the expanse of his broad chest and the sculpted muscles of his abdomen.

His body is a work of art, each line and curve a testament to his strength and power.

I can't help but stare, my breath catching in my throat at the sight of him.

"You're beautiful," he murmurs, his lips brushing against my collarbone and sending another wave of pleasure coursing through me.

"So are you," I manage to say, my voice trembling with the intensity of my emotions.

He laughs softly, shaking his head. "Not like you."

Something in his voice—a rawness, a vulnerability—makes my chest ache.

It's a glimpse behind the curtain of his stoic exterior, a peek into the depths of his soul that he rarely allows anyone to see.

I reach up and cup his face in my hands, pulling him down for another kiss and

pouring all of my love and reassurance into it.

As our lips meet, Cameron's hands move to the waistband of my pants, deftly undoing the button and zipper. He slides them down my legs, his fingers trailing fire along my skin. I lift my hips, helping him remove them completely and leaving me bare before him.

His gaze is intense as he takes in the sight of me, his eyes roaming over every inch of my exposed flesh. I feel a flush of heat spread across my cheeks, but I don't look away. I want him to see me, to see how much I want him.

Cameron's hands move to his own pants, undoing them with a swift motion.

He steps out of them, standing before me completely naked, his arousal evident and impressive.

I can't help but stare, my mouth going dry at the sight of him.

He's large, both in height and in girth, and I feel a shiver of anticipation run through me at the thought of him inside me.

He lifts me again, my legs wrapping around his waist as he presses me back against the wall. I feel the head of his cock teasing my entrance, the heat of him against my sensitive flesh.

"Are you ready for me?" he asks, his voice rough with desire.

"Yes," I moan, looking into his eyes with need-filled desperation.

With a slow, deliberate thrust, he enters me, filling me completely. I cry out, the sensation of him stretching me, claiming me, sending sparks of pleasure shooting

through my body. He's large, and the feeling of being so completely filled by him is almost overwhelming.

Cameron begins to move, his thrusts slow and deep at first, allowing me to adjust to his size. But as my body relaxes around him, he begins to pick up the pace, his hips snapping against mine with a force that leaves me gasping.

I feel an orgasm building, the pressure coiling tightly in my belly. Cameron's hand finds my clit, his fingers working me in time with his thrusts and driving me higher and higher.

"Come for me," he growls, his own release imminent.

With a cry, I shatter around him, my orgasm crashing over me like a tidal wave. I feel him follow me over the edge, his own release filling me as he growls my name.

But Cameron isn't done with me yet. He pulls out of me, setting me on my feet before turning me around and bending me over the back of the sofa. I feel his hands on my hips, positioning me just how he wants me.

He enters me again, the new angle allowing him to penetrate me even deeper. I gasp at the sensation, my fingers gripping the sofa cushions as he begins to move.

Cameron's thrusts are harder now, more urgent, and I feel another climax building within me. The room is filled with the sounds of our passion, the slap of skin against skin, the moans and gasps that escape my lips.

I look back at him over my shoulder, watching as he takes me with a fierce intensity that leaves me breathless. His eyes are locked on mine, filled with a heat and desire that mirrors my own.

“Cameron,” I gasp, my hips pushing back against him, seeking more of the delicious pleasure he’s giving me.

With a final, deep thrust, I shatter once more, my orgasm ripping through me with an intensity that leaves me trembling. I feel Cameron follow me over the edge, his release filling me as he growls my name.

We collapse together on the sofa, our bodies slick with sweat and the evidence of our passion. Cameron pulls me into his arms, holding me close as our breathing slowly returns to normal.

“You’re mine,” he whispers, pressing a kiss to my forehead.

“And you’re mine,” I reply, snuggling closer to him.

We lie there, tangled together in the warm glow of the setting sun, the world outside forgotten. Cameron’s fingers run through my hair, his touch gentle and soothing. I rest my head on his chest, listening to the steady thrum of his heartbeat and feeling completely at peace.

But even as my eyes drift closed, I can’t shake the feeling that Cameron is still holding something back. A tension in his body, a slight hesitation in his touch, speaks of secrets untold.

As the night wears on, I fall into a deep sleep, lulled by the warmth of Cameron’s embrace. But when I wake the next morning to find the space beside me empty, my heart sinks.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Cameron

I run, dammit.

The second I leave her farmhouse, I shift mid-stride, my body rippling and twisting as the bear takes over. The burn of the transformation is familiar, almost comforting, but tonight it feels different. Tonight, it feels like punishment.

My paws slam against the earth as I tear through the woods, the cool night air rushing past me. The trees blur, dark shapes streaking by, but I can't stop. I can't think. If I think, I'll break.

Her scent clings to me, sweet and maddening, a mix of honey and wildflowers that I can't escape no matter how far I run. It's in my lungs, in my blood, and every time I breathe, it pulls me back to her.

To her touch.

To her voice.

To the way she looked at me, soft and open, like I was something good. Like I was someone worth loving.

I let out a roar, the sound echoing through the forest, and slam my claws into a tree. The bark splinters beneath the force, and chunks of wood rain down around me.

I shouldn't have let it happen.

But God, I wanted her.

I wanted her in a way that scared me, in a way that made my bear claw at me, desperate to claim her, to mark her as ours. And for one perfect, terrifying night, I let myself have her.

And now I'm paying the price.

The woods are quieter now, the sounds of the night muted as I slow to a stop near the river. The water rushes over the rocks, cool and steady, and I lower myself to the ground, the bear still clinging to my skin.

The guilt is worse in the silence. It gnaws at me, sharp and unforgiving. No matter how hard I try, I can't shake the image of her lying in bed, her hair spread out across the pillow, her soft, sleepy smile when I kissed her goodbye.

I left her.

I had to.

But even as I tell myself that, I know it's a lie. I didn't leave to protect her. I left because I'm a coward.

The bear growls low in my chest, restless and angry, but I ignore it. It doesn't understand. It doesn't see the danger the way I do.

Because the truth is, I'm not just risking her heart. I'm risking her life.

Hours later, I'm back at my cabin, pacing the length of the living room like a caged animal. The fire is dying in the hearth, the embers glowing faintly, but I can't bring myself to care.

My thoughts are a mess, tangled and chaotic, and no matter how hard I try to sort through them, they always lead me back to her.

I don't know how to do this.

I don't know how to want her without destroying her.

The bear growls again, louder this time, and I slam my fist against the wall. The sharp pain is a welcome distraction.

"You're losing it," I mutter under my breath, dragging a hand through my hair.

The sound of a branch snapping outside pulls me up short, my senses going sharp and focused in an instant. The air shifts, carrying with it a scent that makes my blood run cold.

Not hers.

Something else.

Something wrong.

I'm moving before I even realize it, shifting as I bolt out the door. The bear takes over, its instincts sharper, faster, and I let it guide me, my paws pounding against the earth as I follow the scent.

It's faint but distinct—wild and feral, tinged with blood and rage.

A rogue.

The realization hits me like a punch to the gut, and I push myself harder, fear clawing

at my chest. If a rogue is this close to Hannah's farm...

I let out a roar, the sound shaking the trees, and the scent shifts, closer now, more deliberate. It's circling. Stalking.

No.

The farmhouse comes into view, the faint glow of the porch light cutting through the darkness. My heart pounds, the bear's growl rumbling deep in my chest as I scan the area, every muscle in my body coiled tightly.

And then I see it.

The rogue is massive, its fur matted and dark. Its eyes are wild with madness. It's crouched near the edge of the garden, its focus locked on the house, and a low, guttural growl escapes me as I charge.

The rogue turns at the last second, its teeth bared, and we collide with a force that shakes the ground. Pain explodes through me as its claws rake across my side, but I don't stop. I can't stop.

Its scent is overpowering, rank and bitter, and the bear in me roars with fury, driving me forward. My claws sink into its shoulder, and it howls, twisting beneath me as it tries to break free.

But I'm stronger.

I'm faster.

And I've got something to fight for.

The rogue lashes out again, its claws catching my chest, and I feel the sharp sting of blood, hot and wet against my fur. But the pain only fuels me as I slam it to the ground, my jaws snapping inches from its throat.

It thrashes beneath me, its strength wild and unpredictable, but I hold on, driving it back, away from the house, away from her.

The fight is brutal, a blur of teeth and claws, and by the time the rogue finally goes limp beneath me, my body is screaming in protest, every muscle burning with exhaustion.

I stagger back, my chest heaving, and shift back into my human form, the pain sharper now, more acute. Blood drips from the gashes on my chest and side, staining the grass beneath me, but I don't care.

Because when I look up, I see her.

Hannah is standing on the porch, her eyes wide with shock and her hands trembling as she clutches the doorframe.

"Cameron?" she whispers, her voice barely audible.

I open my mouth to speak, but the words don't come.

Her gaze drops to my chest, to the blood, to the torn remnants of my shirt, and then shifts to the rogue's body lying motionlessly on the ground.

She knows.

She knows what I am.

And for the first time in my life, I don't feel fear.

I feel shame.

"Hannah," I say, my voice rough, broken.

She takes a step closer, her eyes searching mine, and I see the questions there, the confusion, the disbelief.

But there's no fear.

She's not afraid of me.

I don't deserve that.

"I'm sorry," I say, the words choking me, and then I turn and run, the pain in my chest nothing compared to the ache in my heart.

I don't stop until I'm deep in the woods, the darkness closing in around me, and when I finally collapse to the ground, I let out a roar, the sound raw and broken, filled with everything I can't say.

Because no matter how much I want her, no matter how much I love her, I know I can never be what she needs.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Hannah

The woods are alive with noise—the wind whispering through the trees, the faint hum of insects, the rustle of leaves under my boots. But all I hear is the sound of my heart pounding, steady and relentless, like it's trying to drown out every thought in my head.

I keep walking, even though I don't know where I'm going. The farmhouse feels too small, too suffocating, and I can't stay there, not after what I saw.

Not after him.

Cameron.

The image of him—his massive bear form, bloodied and snarling—flashes in my mind, and I shake my head, trying to push it away. But it lingers, clinging to me like a shadow. The thing is, it's not the bear that scares me.

It's him.

Or maybe it's the fact that I thought I knew him.

I stop at the edge of the clearing, leaning against a tree and pressing my hand to my chest, trying to calm the frantic rhythm of my heart. The air is cool against my skin, but it does nothing to quiet the storm inside me.

The truth is, I don't know what to feel.

He lied to me. He kept this huge part of himself hidden, and now that I know, I can't stop wondering what else he's been hiding. What else he's been running from.

Yet...

I can still see the way he looked at me last night, raw and vulnerable, like he was terrified of what I'd think. Like he was bracing himself for me to scream, to run, to hate him.

But I didn't.

I wasn't afraid of the bear. I wasn't even afraid of him.

I was afraid of how much I still wanted him, even after everything.

"Hannah."

The sound of his voice cuts through the quiet like a blade, low and rough, and I turn slowly to see him standing a few yards away, half-hidden in the shadows of the trees.

For a moment, neither of us moves. He looks wrecked—his clothes rumpled, his hair mussed, and his eyes... God, his eyes. They're stormy and dark, filled with something I can't name, something that makes my chest ache.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, my voice sharper than I intend.

"I needed to see you," he says, taking a cautious step forward. "I needed to make sure you were okay."

I let out a bitter laugh, crossing my arms over my chest. "You mean after you turned into a bear in my backyard? Or after you ran off without a word?"

He flinches, his jaw tightening, and for a second, I feel a pang of guilt. But then I remember everything he's kept from me, and that guilt twists into something harder.

"I'm sorry," he says, his voice quiet but firm. "I should have told you. I should have been honest with you from the start."

"Yeah," I say, my voice trembling. "You should have."

He takes another step closer, his gaze searching mine. "I was scared, Hannah. Scared of what you'd think, scared of losing you."

"You don't get to decide that for me," I snap, the words tumbling out before I can stop them. "You don't get to lie to me and then act like it was for my own good. That's not how this works, Cameron."

"I know," he says, his voice breaking. "I know I screwed up, okay? But I was trying to protect you."

"Protect me from what?" I demand, throwing my hands up. "From you? Because that's what it feels like. Like you're so afraid of what you are that you've convinced yourself I should be afraid, too."

He doesn't respond, his hands clenching into fists at his sides, and the silence between us feels heavy, suffocating.

"You don't get it," he says finally, his voice low and rough. "You don't understand what it's like to have this... thing inside you. To know that if you lose control, even for a second, you could hurt the person you care about most."

My chest tightens at his words, and for a moment, I almost soften. Almost.

“Then why didn’t you tell me?” I ask, my voice quieter now. “Why didn’t you trust me, Cameron?”

He looks at me then, his gray eyes filled with so much pain it makes my breath catch. “Because I didn’t think I deserved you.”

The words hit me like a punch to the gut, and I take a shaky step back, my arms wrapping around myself.

“Do you know what hurts the most?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper. “It’s not the bear. It’s not even the fact that you lied. It’s that you didn’t trust me enough to let me in. You decided for me, and now I don’t know if I can ever trust you again.”

He steps toward me, his hand outstretched, but I take another step back, shaking my head.

“Hannah, please,” he says, his voice cracking. “I’ll do whatever it takes to fix this. Just... don’t walk away.”

My chest aches at the desperation in his voice, but I force myself to stand my ground.

“I need time, Cameron,” I say, my voice trembling. “I need time to figure out what this means, what we mean. And I can’t do that with you standing here, looking at me like that.”

He freezes, his hand dropping to his side, and for a moment, I think he’s going to argue. But then he nods, his shoulders slumping in defeat.

“Okay,” he says quietly. “Take all the time you need.”

I turn away, my heart pounding, and start walking back toward the farmhouse.

“Hannah,” he calls after me, his voice raw.

I stop, but I don’t turn around.

“For what it’s worth,” he says, his voice barely audible, “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

The words hang in the air, heavy and bittersweet, and I close my eyes, letting them wash over me.

But I don’t respond.

I keep walking, even though it feels like my heart is breaking with every step.

And when I reach the farmhouse, I don’t look back.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Cameron

The woods are my refuge, but lately, they feel more like a prison.

I've been out here for days, shifting between my human and bear forms, wandering aimlessly through the dense trees, avoiding everything and everyone. The sun filters through the canopy, dappling the forest floor in patches of gold, but it does nothing to lighten the weight pressing on my chest.

The guilt hasn't eased, not even a little. If anything, it's gotten worse.

I keep replaying the look on Hannah's face as she walked away from me. It wasn't fear. That's the part that kills me. It wasn't fear, but something softer—hurt, disappointment. Like I'd shattered something fragile between us.

And I had.

I should feel relief that she left, that she's safe from me and everything that comes with being in my life. But all I feel is this hollow ache that no amount of running or shifting can fill.

A squirrel darts across the path in front of me, its small body a blur of movement, and my bear growls low in my chest, restless. I force it back, clenching my fists until my nails dig into my palms. I don't have time for the bear's instincts right now.

I need clarity.

I need to figure out what the hell I'm doing.

By the time I reach Earl's workshop, the sun is high overhead, and sweat drips down the back of my neck. The familiar scent of sawdust and varnish greets me as I step inside, the cool shade of the shop a momentary reprieve from the heat.

Earl is at his workbench, a chisel in one hand and a block of wood in the other. He doesn't look up as I enter, but I feel his gaze flick toward me, sharp and assessing.

"You look like shit," he says, his voice gruff.

I grunt in response, grabbing a rag from the bench and wiping the sweat from my face.

"What are you working on?" I ask, more to fill the silence than anything.

Earl snorts. "Don't pretend you came here to talk about woodworking, kid. You look like you've been dragged through hell and back."

I lean against the bench, crossing my arms over my chest. "Thanks for noticing."

He sets the chisel down and turns to face me, his eyes narrowing. Earl's always had a way of cutting through the bullshit, and I know I'm not going to get out of this without him prying at the truth.

"Let me guess," he says, crossing his arms to mirror me. "This is about the honey girl."

"Her name's Hannah," I say, my voice sharper than I intended.

He raises an eyebrow, his expression unchanging. "Hannah, then. What'd you do to

screw things up this time?”

I let out a bitter laugh, dragging a hand through my hair. “What didn’t I do?”

Earl waits, his silence heavy and expectant, and I sigh, leaning back against the workbench.

“She saw me,” I admit finally. “She saw the bear.”

Earl doesn’t react, doesn’t flinch or look surprised. He just nods like he’s been expecting this.

“And?” he prompts.

“And now she knows I’ve been lying to her,” I say, my voice rising. “I didn’t tell her what I am, what this life is. I thought I was protecting her, but I just—” I break off, shaking my head. “I hurt her.”

Earl studies me for a long moment, his expression unreadable. Then he sighs, rubbing a hand over his face.

“You really are an idiot, you know that?”

I glare at him. “Thanks for the insight.”

“You think staying away from her is protecting her? That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard.”

“I’m dangerous, Earl,” I snap. “You know that. You’ve seen what happens when a shifter loses control.”

“And I’ve also seen what happens when a man pushes away the one thing that makes him feel human,” Earl says, his voice sharp. “You think you’re protecting her, but all you’re doing is breaking both of your hearts.”

I flinch, his words hitting me harder than I want to admit.

“She deserves better,” I say, my voice quieter now.

“Maybe she does,” Earl says with a shrug. “But she’s not the one running scared. Is she?”

The words hang in the air between us, heavy and unrelenting, and I feel something in me crack.

“I don’t know how to fix this,” I admit, the words tasting bitter on my tongue.

Earl sighs, stepping closer and clapping a hand on my shoulder. “You start by being honest—with her and with yourself.”

I leave Earl behind, and the walk back to my cabin feels longer than usual, the weight of Earl’s words pressing down on me with every step. The woods are quiet around me, the only sounds are the rustle of leaves and the distant hum of insects.

I stop at the edge of the clearing, staring at the small cabin that’s been my sanctuary for years. It feels different now, smaller somehow, like it’s closing in on me.

I can’t keep hiding here.

Earl’s right. Hannah deserves honesty. She deserves more than I’ve given her.

But the thought of facing her again, of admitting everything I’ve been too afraid to

say, twists something in my chest.

What if she doesn't forgive me?

What if I've already lost her?

The bear growls low in my chest, restless and impatient, and I take a deep breath, trying to steady myself.

"I'll fix this," I say aloud, the words more for myself than anyone else.

And for the first time in days, I feel a flicker of hope.

The next morning, I'm at the farmers market before it even opens, the familiar hum of activity buzzing in the air. Vendors are setting up their stalls, the scent of fresh produce and baked goods mingling with the crisp morning air.

I spot Hannah's stand before I see her, the jars of honey glinting in the sunlight like liquid gold. My chest tightens at the sight, memories of her laughter and the way she looked at me flashing through my mind.

Then I see her.

She's arranging jars on the table, her movements quick and efficient, but I notice a tension in her shoulders that wasn't there before.

I take a deep breath, my hands clenching into fists at my sides. This is it.

"Hannah," I say, my voice loud enough to carry over the bustle of the market.

She freezes, her hand hovering over a jar, and then she turns to face me. Her eyes meet mine, and for a moment, I forget how to breathe.

“Cameron,” she says, her voice even but guarded.

I step closer, the distance between us feeling like a chasm. “Can we talk?”

She hesitates, her gaze flicking to the customers milling around the market, and then she nods. “Okay.”

We move to the side, away from the crowd, and I take a deep breath, the weight of what I’m about to say pressing down on me.

“I’m sorry,” I begin, my voice low but steady. “For everything. For lying, for running, for hurting you.”

She crosses her arms over her chest, her expression unreadable. “Why did you do it, Cameron? Why didn’t you trust me?”

“I was scared,” I admit, the words tumbling out before I can stop them. “Scared of what you’d think, scared of losing you. But mostly, I was scared of myself. Of what I am.”

Her gaze softens slightly, but she doesn’t interrupt.

“I’ve spent my whole life keeping people at arm’s length,” I continue, my voice breaking. “Because it’s easier than letting them see the parts of me I don’t want to face. But with you, it’s different. You make me want to be better. You make me want... everything.”

She blinks, her eyes shining with unshed tears, and I take a step closer, my heart

pounding.

“I know I don’t deserve your forgiveness,” I say, my voice barely above a whisper. “But I’m asking for it anyway. Because I can’t keep running from you, Hannah. I don’t want to.”

The silence stretches between us, heavy and charged, and then she takes a deep breath, her shoulders relaxing.

“I was never afraid of you, Cameron,” she says softly. “I was afraid you didn’t trust me. But if you’re willing to try, so am I.”

Relief floods through me, and I step closer, reaching for her hand. She lets me take it, her fingers warm and steady in mine.

“Thank you,” I whisper, my voice thick with emotion.

She smiles, a small, tentative thing, but it’s enough to spark hope in my chest.

And for the first time in weeks, I feel like I can breathe again.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Hannah

The morning is cool and quiet, the kind of slow, sleepy start that usually soothes me after a restless night. But today, no amount of tea, fresh air, or sunlight filtering through the curtains can ease the tightness in my chest.

I've been staring at the wooden bear for the better part of an hour.

It sits on my kitchen table, small but solid, its rough edges smoothed by hands much larger than mine. Cameron's hands. I run my fingers over the carved surface again, feeling each groove and curve. It's beautiful in its simplicity, yet, it feels like it weighs a thousand pounds.

How long has he been working on this? Was he thinking of me the whole time?

The thought makes my stomach twist—part longing, part frustration.

He's still trying. Even after everything.

I push my chair back with a sharp scrape and stand, pacing the kitchen. My bare feet slap against the cool wood floors as I move, the sound echoing in the otherwise quiet space.

He left me.

He fought for me, protected me, bared himself in a way that no one else ever has. And then he left. He didn't even give me a chance to figure out what I felt, what I

wanted.

Yet... this bear.

This stupid, thoughtful, carved bear is sitting on my table like an apology he doesn't know how to say out loud.

Damn it.

I grab the figurine and hold it tightly in my hands, the wood warm from my touch. It feels like a challenge, like he's daring me to decide whether I'm going to let him back in or not.

But the truth is, I already know.

I've known since the night he kissed me.

The woods are alive with sound as I make my way up the path to Cameron's cabin. The wind rustles through the trees, carrying the faint scent of pine and damp earth. Birds call to each other from overhead, and somewhere in the distance, I hear the steady trickle of the creek.

The air is crisp, biting at my skin, but I don't care. I'm too focused on the knot of nerves twisting in my stomach, tightening with every step I take.

The cabin comes into view, tucked between the trees like it's always been there, a part of the forest itself. Smoke curls lazily from the chimney, a sign that Cameron is home.

I stop at the edge of the clearing, clutching the carved bear in one hand. My heart feels like it's racing and stalling at the same time, each beat loud in my ears.

What am I even going to say to him?

The truth, I tell myself. Just the truth.

I take a deep breath, squaring my shoulders, and march up to the front door before I lose my nerve.

The knock echoes in the quiet, three sharp raps that feel like they belong to someone much braver than me.

For a moment, nothing happens. The cabin stays silent, the only sound is the faint rustling of leaves in the wind.

And then the door opens.

Cameron stands in the doorway, and my breath catches in my throat.

He looks like hell.

His hair is messy, sticking up in all directions like he's spent the last few days running his hands through it. His face is shadowed with stubble, and dark circles sit under his eyes, as if sleep is something he gave up on a long time ago.

But then his eyes meet mine, and everything else fades away.

"Hannah," he says, his voice low and rough, like he hasn't spoken in hours.

"Hi," I say softly.

For a moment, we just stand there, staring at each other. The tension between us is thick, heavy, but underneath it is something warmer. Something that feels like relief.

“I wasn’t sure if…” He trails off, his hand gripping the edge of the doorframe like it’s the only thing holding him up.

I hold up the carved bear, my fingers tightening around it. “You left this on my porch.”

He nods, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallows. “I didn’t know what else to do.”

My chest tightens, and I take a step closer, holding the bear out toward him. “Why, Cameron? Why now?”

He hesitates, his gaze dropping to the ground. “Because I couldn’t stop thinking about you. About everything I said, everything I didn’t say.”

I wait, letting the silence stretch between us, until he finally looks up again.

“I left because I thought it was the right thing to do,” he says quietly. “Because I thought I was protecting you. But all I did was hurt you.”

“You did,” I say, my voice trembling. “You hurt me, Cameron. You shut me out when all I wanted was to be let in.”

He flinches, as if the words physically hit him, and I take another step closer, closing the distance between us.

“But then you left this,” I say, holding up the bear again. “And now I don’t know what to feel. I don’t know what you want from me.”

“I want you,” he says, the words tumbling out in a rush. “I’ve always wanted you, Hannah. From the first moment I saw you at the farmers market, I knew you were different. I knew I couldn’t have you, but I couldn’t stay away.”

His voice breaks, and he takes a step back, running a hand through his hair. “But I’m not good at this. I don’t know how to let someone in without screwing it up.”

I stare at him, my heart pounding. “Then stop running. Stop shutting me out. Stop deciding for me what I can or can’t handle.”

He looks at me, his eyes filled with something raw and vulnerable, and I take a shaky breath.

“I don’t care what you are, Cameron,” I say softly. “Bear, human, whatever. That’s not what matters to me. What matters is that you trust me enough to let me see all of you—even the parts you’re scared of.”

The silence that follows is heavy, charged, and I feel like I’m holding my breath, waiting for him to say something, anything.

Finally, he steps forward, his hand reaching out to cup my cheek. His touch is warm, rough, and it sends a shiver down my spine.

“I love you,” he says, his voice barely above a whisper. “I know I don’t deserve you, but I love you, Hannah. All of you.”

My chest tightens, and I feel tears prick at the corners of my eyes. “Then show me, Cameron. Show me you mean it.”

He leans in slowly, his lips brushing against mine, and I close my eyes, melting into his touch. The kiss is soft at first, tentative, but it quickly deepens, his hands sliding

around my waist to pull me closer.

I cling to him, my fingers tangling in his hair, and for the first time in what feels like forever, the tension between us eases.

When we finally pull apart, his forehead rests against mine, and I feel his breath warm against my skin.

“I’m not going anywhere,” he says softly.

“Good,” I whisper, a small smile tugging at my lips. “Because neither am I.”

And for the first time, I believe him.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 9:57 am

Cameron

Hannah fits perfectly in my arms, like she was made to be here.

We're on her porch swing, the night wrapping around us like a blanket. The stars are bright above the trees, and her head rests on my chest, her hair soft against my skin. The faint hum of bees lingers in the distance, mixing with the cool breeze that carries the scent of wildflowers and honey.

This is what peace feels like. Her warmth pressed against me, her soft breaths steady and calm.

I thread my fingers through hers, holding her hand tightly as if letting go could shatter this fragile moment. It's impossible to believe that just a few days ago, I thought I'd lost her for good. That I thought my secrets, my bear, would be too much for her to handle.

But she's here. And by some miracle, she wants me.

I press a kiss to the top of her head, letting my lips linger there. "You feel like home. You know that?" I murmur.

She tilts her face up to look at me, her lips curving into a soft smile. "Good," she says, her voice a quiet hum against my chest. "Because you're not getting rid of me now."

Her words send a warmth through me, a steady thrum in my chest that spreads

through every inch of me. I pull her closer, my hand sliding along her back until she's practically in my lap.

"Never," I promise, my voice low and firm.

The swing creaks softly beneath us as she shifts, turning so she's straddling my lap. Her hands rest on my chest, her fingers splayed over the fabric of my shirt, and I feel the heat of her touch seeping into my skin.

Her eyes are bright in the moonlight, her expression open and full of something that steals the breath from my lungs.

"I love you, Cameron," she says. The words are so simple, so sure, they hit me like a punch to the gut.

I rest my forehead against hers, closing my eyes as I breathe her in. "I love you, too," I whisper. "More than I've ever thought it was possible to love someone."

Her smile softens, and she leans in, her lips brushing mine. The kiss starts slow, almost hesitant, but it doesn't stay that way for long.

My hands grip her waist, pulling her flush against me as the kiss deepens. Her fingers slide up to tangle in my hair, and I groan against her mouth, the sound low and desperate. She tastes sweet, like honey and something uniquely her, and I can't get enough of her.

It's not just the kiss. It's everything. The way she fits against me, the way her warmth seeps into my skin, the way her breath hitches when my hands slide under the soft hem of her sweater to find the bare skin of her back.

"Cameron," she whispers against my lips, her voice breathless and full of need.

My name on her lips is fire. It burns through me, igniting something wild and untamed in my chest. I pull back just enough to look at her, my hands tightening on her hips.

“Do you have any idea what you do to me?” I ask, my voice rough.

She laughs softly, her fingers brushing along my jaw. “I think I have some idea.”

Her teasing only makes me want her more. I capture her mouth again, this time with more urgency, more heat. She melts into me, her body pressed as close as it can get, and I feel her heartbeat pounding in time with mine.

I carry Hannah up the stairs, her laughter echoing in the quiet house, a melody that stirs something primal within me.

Her legs are wrapped tightly around my waist, her arms clinging to my neck, and I feel the heat of her body seeping through our clothes.

The strength in my arms, the way I can lift her effortlessly, it's a reminder of the power I hold.

But her trust in me truly makes me feel invincible.

We reach her bedroom, the door creaking softly as I push it open with my foot.

The dim light from the bedside lamp casts a warm glow over the room, highlighting the curves of her body and the soft smile playing on her lips.

I set her down gently on the bed, but my hands linger on her waist, unwilling to break contact.

“Hannah,” I murmur, my voice rough with need. “You're everything to me.”

She looks up at me, her eyes full of desire and something deeper, something that makes my heart race. “Show me,” she whispers, her voice a soft plea that sends a jolt of heat straight to my core.

I lean down, capturing her lips in a searing kiss, as my hands roam over her body and feel every curve and dip.

She responds eagerly, her fingers tangling in my hair, pulling me closer.

The kiss deepens, turning hungry and desperate, and I feel the tension building between us, a fire that threatens to consume us both.

With a growl, I break the kiss, my hands moving to the hem of her sweater. I pull it over her head in one swift motion, revealing the smooth expanse of her skin. She’s beautiful, every inch of her, and I can’t help but pause to admire her, my fingers tracing the line of her collarbone.

“You’re perfect,” I say, my voice thick with emotion.

She shakes her head, a soft laugh escaping her lips. “I’m not perfect, Cameron.”

“You are to me,” I say, and I mean it. Every word.

I trail kisses down her neck, my hands sliding to the clasp of her bra. With a flick of my fingers, it comes undone, and I pull it away, baring her to my gaze. Her breasts are full and round, her nipples already hard with arousal, and I can’t resist leaning down to take one into my mouth.

Hannah gasps, her back arching off the bed as I suckle her, my tongue swirling around her nipple.

I feel her hands gripping my shoulders, her nails digging into my skin, and it only

spurs me on.

I move to the other breast, giving it the same attention.

My hands roam over her body, feeling the heat of her skin beneath my palms.

“Cameron,” she moans, her voice breathless and full of need. “Please.”

I know what she wants, what she needs, and I’m more than willing to give it to her.

I trail kisses down her stomach, my hands sliding to the waistband of her jeans.

I undo the button and zipper, pulling them down her legs and tossing them aside.

Her panties follow, leaving her completely bare to my gaze.

“You’re so beautiful,” I murmur, my voice a low growl as I take in the sight of her.

“And you’re mine.”

She nods, her eyes locked on mine. “I’m yours,” she whispers. “Always.”

The words send a surge of possessiveness through me, and I feel my bear stirring within, eager to claim her. But I push him back, focusing on the woman in front of me, the woman who has captured my heart and soul.

I spread her legs, positioning myself between them, and I feel the heat of her arousal against my skin. I lean down, my breath ghosting over her core, and she shudders, her hands gripping the sheets.

“Please, Cameron,” she begs, her voice a desperate whine.

I don’t make her wait any longer. I lean in, my tongue sliding through her folds and

tasting her sweetness. She cries out, her hips bucking against my mouth, and I grip her thighs, holding her in place as I devour her.

My tongue circles her clit, teasing and taunting, and I feel her trembling beneath me. I slide a finger inside her, feeling her tight heat clenching around me, and I groan against her, the sound vibrating through her body.

“Cameron,” she gasps, her voice breaking on my name. “Oh, God, Cameron.”

I add another finger, stretching her, preparing her for what’s to come. My tongue never stops its assault on her clit, and I feel her getting closer, her body tensing as she nears the edge.

“Come for me, Hannah,” I growl, my voice rough with desire. “Let me feel you.”

She does, her body shuddering as she comes apart beneath me, her cries filling the room. I don’t stop, drawing out her orgasm until she’s a trembling mess, her breaths coming in short, sharp gasps.

When she finally comes down, I pull back, my fingers sliding out of her as I sit up. She looks at me, her eyes hazy with pleasure, and I can’t help but grin.

“Your turn,” she says, her voice still breathless.

I don’t need to be told twice. I stand, quickly shedding my clothes, and she watches me with hungry eyes, her gaze roaming over my body. I know I’m big, my muscles honed from years of hard work and shifting, and I see the appreciation in her eyes.

I climb back onto the bed, positioning myself over her, and she reaches for me, her hands sliding over my chest and down my stomach. I groan as her fingers wrap around my cock, her touch sending a jolt of pleasure through me.

“Hannah,” I growl, my voice a warning.

She just smiles, her eyes locked on mine as she leans forward, her tongue darting out to lick the head of my cock. I hiss, my hands fisting the sheets as she takes me into her mouth, her lips sliding down my length.

It’s heaven and hell, the feel of her mouth on me, the wet heat of her tongue. I feel myself getting closer, my hips thrusting instinctively, and I have to fight to keep control.

“Hannah,” I gasp, my voice strained. “If you don’t stop, I’m going to—”

She pulls back, her lips curving into a wicked smile. “Not yet,” she says, her voice a sultry purr. “I want you inside me first.”

I don’t need any more encouragement. I position myself at her entrance, my cock sliding through her wetness, and I feel her trembling beneath me. I lean down, capturing her lips in a searing kiss as I thrust inside her, filling her completely.

She cries out, her nails digging into my back, and I groan against her mouth, the feel of her tight heat around me almost too much to bear. I start to move, my hips setting a steady rhythm, and she meets me thrust for thrust, her body arching to meet mine.

“You’re mine,” I growl, my voice rough with possession. “Say it, Hannah.”

“I’m yours,” she gasps, her eyes locked on mine. “Always.”

The words send a surge of pleasure through me, and I feel myself getting closer, my thrusts becoming more urgent. I reach between us, my fingers finding her clit, and I start to rub, feeling her body tense beneath me.

“Come for me, Hannah,” I growl, my voice a command. “Come with me.”

She does, her body shuddering as she comes apart around me, her cries filling the room. I follow her over the edge, my orgasm crashing through me like a tidal wave, and I groan her name, my hips stuttering as I spill inside her.

When we finally come down, I collapse beside her, pulling her into my arms. She rests her head on my chest, her fingers tracing lazy patterns over my skin, and I hold her close, my hand tangled in her hair.

“I love you,” I murmur, my voice thick with emotion.

“I love you, too,” she whispers, her voice a soft sigh against my skin.

We lie there in silence, our bodies entwined, and I know without a doubt that this is where I’m meant to be. With her. Always.

We don’t talk for a while, content to just exist in the quiet together. But as the night deepens, I feel the words bubbling up inside me, the truth I’ve been holding back for too long.

“Hannah,” I say softly, my voice breaking the silence.

She hums in response, her head tilting up to look at me.

“There’s something I need to tell you,” I say, my chest tightening. “Something I’ve been holding back.”

Her expression shifts, her eyes softening as she waits for me to continue.

“You’re my mate,” I say, the words finally tumbling out. “In shifter terms, it means you’re... everything to me. My soul, my heart, my future. It’s not just love. It’s deeper than that. Permanent.”

She blinks, her lips parting slightly, and for a moment, I can't breathe. But then she smiles, her fingers brushing along my jaw.

"Good," she says simply.

I blink, stunned. "Good?"

She laughs softly, her eyes sparkling. "Good. Because I want forever with you, Cameron. Whatever being your mate means, I'm all in."

Relief floods through me, and I pull her into a kiss, my heart pounding with a mix of love and gratitude.

"You have no idea how much I love you," I murmur against her lips.

She smiles, her forehead resting against mine. "I think I have some idea."

The night fades into morning, and as the first rays of sunlight filter through the curtains, I know without a doubt that this is where I'm meant to be.

With her.

Always.

We sit on the porch together later, the swing swaying gently beneath us as we watch the sunrise. She leans against me, her head on my shoulder, and I hold her close, my hand resting on her thigh.

"I'm going to carve you something else," I say after a while, the thought striking me suddenly.

She tilts her head to look at me, her lips quirking into a smile. “Oh? What is it this time?”

“You’ll see,” I say, grinning.

She laughs, the sound warm and full of life, and I kiss her temple, my chest tight with love.

This is it.

The future I never thought I’d have. The peace I never thought I’d feel.

And I’m never letting it go.
