



Marked By The Grouchy Grizzly (Heat & Ink)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: I finally went to get a tattoo.

It was supposed to be a beautiful white lily, but the big grumpy tattoo artist had something else in mind.

Only, he didn't freaking tell me before he got started.

When it's time for the big reveal, I don't see a pretty flower.

I see his name.

Tattooed across the back of my shoulder.

He says I'm his.

That I'm his mate.

My friends tell him to go to hell.

That we're suing.

But this grouchy beast isn't shaken.

He doesn't care one bit.

He keeps saying that he's marked me, so I belong to him now.

The worst thing is, I think he may be right.

This can't be happening.

Fate can't be so cruel as to bind me to a jerk like him.

I can't be mated to this big grumpy bear shifter, can I?

CAN I???

Welcome to Heat Ink where hot possessive tattoo artists leave their mark in more ways than one.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 6:40 am

CHAPTER ONE

Julian

It's hard to tattoo when you're irritated. Your muscles tense up. Your pulse quickens. The tightness in your jaw makes it hard to focus.

And right now, this couple is really testing my limits.

I'm getting all twitchy as my inner grizzly bear paces around in a fury. I can feel him moving in the deep, dark depths of me, getting madder by the minute.

I trace the faded black line on my client's skin, tattooing the head of a Kodiak bear onto her ribs. It's the Kodiak bear that her prick boyfriend has lurking inside him.

They're newlmates. And they're fucking annoying about it.

The possessive fucker actually asked me if I could do his mate's tattoo without touching her. I told him yeah, if you want the bear to look like a donkey.

He finally agreed to let me touch her if I had gloves on and he still keeps watching me like a hawk.

She whimpers as I do the shading on the bear's nose .

"You're hurting her," the brute growls, glaring at me.

I glare back at him. “It’s a tattoo,” I snap. “It’s supposed to fucking hurt.”

“ You’re going to be hurting if you don’t be more gentle,” he warns.

I bite my tongue and focus on the lines even though I’d like to take this prick outside and unleash some of my aggression onto his face.

“It’s okay, babe,” she says, whimpering again as she takes his hand.

“I just hate to see you in pain,” he whispers, gently kissing her temple. “It kills me to see it.”

“As long as you’re beside me,” she whispers back, staring up at him with her big doey eyes, “I can endure anything.”

Gross. I want to be sick.

It’s always hard being around newlymates. My bear gets so agitated. He can smell the newly imprinted mark on her neck and it makes him ache with longing for our mate.

We’ve been waiting for her our entire life, but it’s been much harder lately. It’s been physically painful.

“It’s so sweet,” my younger sister Victoria says, smiling at them. “When did you two lovebears find each other?”

Why is she encouraging them?

She should know better. I shoot her a look where she’s sitting at the front desk, but she ignores me. Victoria has always been a romantic. She loves to hear everyone’s story about how they met their fated mates. It’s so annoying.

“Don’t you have a tattoo to prepare?” I ask, interrupting her.

She shakes her head and grins at me. “I’m all done. I have nothing but free time until my customer arrives.”

“Wonderful,” I growl as I get back to work, tracing the bear’s nostril.

It can be hard working with family. Believe me, I know.

I work with both of my siblings at our tattoo shop, Heat & Ink. My older brother Magnus thinks he’s the boss since he found the location and put in the most money to get us started. Then, there’s my younger sister, Victoria. She’s a talented artist, but she never stops yapping. It drives me crazy.

We’re all tattoo artists and we’re all grizzly bear shifters, but that’s where the similarities end. Besides that, we couldn’t possibly be any less alike.

“I was parked at a red light,” the lady says as I stretch her skin out, shading the inner nostril, “when then this man pulled up in his pickup truck beside me. I felt this intense feeling coming over me.”

“I was immediately taken,” the bear shifter says. “I knew I needed to have her.”

“ Awwww ,” Victoria says, clasping her hands together with a dreamy look in her jade-green eyes. I know she’s been waiting for her own mate to come along. Somehow the wait doesn’t bother her bear like it bothers mine. Her bear doesn’t keep her up all night, pacing and growling and snarling in her ear. Her bear doesn’t demand that she go out and search for her mate every waking second. Her bear isn’t making her life a living hell.

I try to tune them out as I continue working on the tattoo. This is going to be a two-

day job. Minimum. Luckily, my time with these lovebears is almost up. Next week me will have to figure out a way to deal with them.

“I’m so in love with him,” the girl says, looking up at her mate with hearts in her eyes. She keeps moving and I have to pull the tattoo gun away. “I never thought I’d ever be this lucky. It feels like my soul is complete.”

“Stop talking,” I snarl. It comes out a little more aggressive than I had planned.

And of course, since my luck is pure dog shit today, it’s right as Magnus comes in from the back.

“Don’t fucking talk to her like that,” her beast of a mate snarls back. His body flexes as he sits up, hands squeezing into fists .

My grizzly bear growls inside, urging me to let him out. There’s nothing he’d like more than to get into a fight right now.

“When she talks, she moves,” I snap back at him. “You want her bear tattoo to be cross-eyed?”

“You want a black eye?” he says, standing up so fast his stool rolls away.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Magnus says, rushing over, trying to calm everyone down. “Julian didn’t mean any harm, did you, Julian?”

“No,” I grunt as I dip the tattoo needle into the ink cap. “It’s just hard to work when she’s constantly moving.”

“Sorry about him,” Magnus whispers to the heaving brute. “He’s having a hard time waiting for his mate to arrive. You know how it is.”

The shifter's shoulders are heaving up and down as he turns to me. His face softens a little when he sees how pathetically mateless I am.

"I don't like the way he's talking to her," he says, but there's less bite in his voice. He shakes his hands out as he walks over to get the stool. "He needs to learn some manners."

I've heard that before.

"Maybe this is a good place to stop for the day," Victoria says, pulling out the large appointment book. "When can we schedule you in for the next session? Maybe in three weeks to give time for your skin to heal? How's Tuesday, June 17th?"

I keep busy with my tools as the newlmates get up and head to the front desk to speak with Victoria. I can feel Magnus' eyes on me. He keeps shaking his head and I know I'm about to get an older brother lecture as soon as those two leave.

As soon as the door closes, he laces into me.

"Are you trying to shut us down?" Magnus says, crossing his arms over his massive chest. He's larger than me, but I'm sure I could take him. I'm way more fierce. He wouldn't stand a chance. "How many one-star reviews have we gotten because of your shitty attitude?"

"We're booked solid for the month," I say, shaking my head. "So, what's the fucking problem?"

We're lucky we're all so talented. People don't mind dealing with a grouchy attitude for an afternoon if it means they get a work of art on their body.

"The fucking problem is," Magnus says, raising his voice, "is that we're running a

goddamn business and we have to stay professional.”

“I was being professional,” I say. “She kept talking. I can’t work with her constantly moving. You know that’s annoying.”

“I thought they were sweet,” Victoria says, putting some final touches on the tattoo for her next appointment.

“And you were no help,” I say, shooting her a dirty look. “You know how my grizzly loves to hear about new mates.”

“She’ll come soon enough, Julian,” she says with a shrug. “Just stay patient.”

I hold back a growl. She has no goddamn idea how hard it is for me. How merciless my bear can get.

“You have to be nicer,” Magnus says, standing over me. “Or, you’re fired.”

I laugh. “You can’t fire me.”

“I’m the boss.”

“You try to fire me and I’ll break your arm.”

“Real mature,” Victoria says, shaking her head.

Magnus throws his arms up in frustration. “I can’t work like this.”

“Just ignore him,” Victoria says. “He’s just pissy because he wants his mate.”

No, I need my mate. I need her like I need skin. She’s a part of me that’s been ripped

off. I'm empty without her. I need need fucking need her.

"We all need our mates," Magnus says with a roll of his eyes. "Doesn't mean we get to hate the world until they get here. We're not wild animals."

My grizzly bear disagrees with that. He's practically feral from waiting.

The bell over the door rings and someone walks in. I take a breath of relief for the distraction.

"Hi, Curt," Victoria says with a big smile. "I have your dragon ready."

Curt is a male stripper who's one of our most regular customers. My sister has tattooed his arms, back, and neck. She's working on his chest now.

I'm not convinced that he's here for the tattoos. The only thing he seems to want is to get into my sister's pants.

A part of me wants to tell him he has no shot. Not a chance in hell.

Victoria is a grizzly bear shifter and he's... not.

He's not her mate and therefore she has zero interest in him no matter how many times he flexes his arms or flashes his baby-blue eyes at her. It's kind of pathetic to watch, thinking he has a chance, while we all know he absolutely does not.

"Think that would look good on my chest?" Curt asks as he pulls off his T-shirt in dramatic fashion. He flexes his chest like he's on stage in front of screeching women at a bachelorette party. Instead, he's in front of my not-so-amused sister and her two older brothers.

“It will look great,” she says, nodding as she looks at his left pec.

“What about on the side here?” he asks, pointing to his abs. “Or, would that ruin my six-pack?”

He’s trying to impress her. Fucking humans... At least I’m not that pathetic.

“Let’s get you on the chair and we’ll figure it out,” Victoria says as she takes her stencil and walks around the counter.

Once they’re distracted at Victoria’s station, Magnus comes over and sits in front of me .

“You got to keep your emotions in check,” he whispers as he puts a hand on my shoulder.

I drop my head and sigh as my bear paces around inside, snarling at the world. I can tell it’s going to be another long sleepless night tonight.

“We’re running a business here,” Magnus continues. “And we need you.”

I take a deep breath as I look at him and then look at Victoria as she deals with Curt, laughing at his lame jokes. He’s constantly flirting with her, but she just rolls with it.

She could literally bite his head off. Her inner grizzly bear is crazy strong. She did have two older brothers and we made sure she was tough enough to handle herself.

Against a human? He wouldn’t stand a chance.

But she’s still playing nice. She’s still being professional.

Maybe I should do the same.

My bear lets out a nasty hiss in my ear as he begins to pace around, snarling savagely.

If only my damn bear could get on the same page...

CHAPTER TWO

Lainey

Have you ever had one of those magical moments when everything feels so unbelievably perfect?

That's how I feel right now. Rolling down the Montana highway in the passenger seat with my two best friends, Carly and Himari, beside me. The scenery is spectacular with the majestic mountains jutting into the clear blue sky. The summer wind is blowing in through the open windows, taking my blonde hair for a ride. Carly is driving. The music is blasting. Open Skittles and chip bags on the center console. Himari's bare feet out the window in the back. We're all singing at the top of our lungs, heading to some obscure out-of-the-way tattoo shop so we can each get a tattoo to celebrate the end of college.

We just graduated after a long four years. Summer is starting. Our whole lives ahead of us...

It's perfect.

But it won't be for long. Himari is heading back to Japan at the end of the summer and Carly will probably move back home to Boston. I still don't know where I'm headed once our lease is up at the end of July. I could go home to Florida and stay with either of my parents, but my heart is not really into either of those options. I don't know. But I don't have to stress about it today. Right now, in this moment, everything is perfect.

We have all we need. Life can't possibly get any better.

Free Falling by Tom Petty finishes and Carly turns down the music. "Any more Starbursts back there?"

"Oh yeah," Himari says as she dumps a bunch into Carly's open palm.

We pass a few cows in a field. One looks at me. I wave to her. She doesn't wave back.

"You're sure this place is going to be good, right?" Himari asks. Out of the three of us, she's the most nervous to get a tattoo. I think she has a thing with needles.

"It's the best tattoo shop around," Carly says. "Remember the big wolf on Jason's back? He got it there."

"Jason was so hot," Himari says, fanning herself. "I'm going to miss these American men."

"You can always stay," I tell her.

She smiles sadly and then looks out the window. I know she's going back. She misses her family. A part of me wishes I didn't say that. I don't want anything to ruin today's fun vibe. I mean, it's not every day that you get your first tattoo with your best friends.

"I never told you guys," Carly says, grinning. "I gave Jason a blow job."

Himari slaps the back of Carly's seat. "Shut. Up."

"Get out," I say, chuckling. "When?"

“At the Saint Patrick’s Day party,” she says, looking pretty pleased with herself.

I laugh to play along, but my stomach is quivering a little bit. I don’t really like hearing salacious stories like this. Carly and Himari definitely took advantage of their college years. We all shared a rented townhouse, and there were more than a couple of guys coming and going from their rooms during that time. Meanwhile, my room was locked up and out of commission for anything more than sleeping and studying. No men for me. No, thank you.

That wasn’t part of my college experience. I had no interest in that at all.

I glance at the GPS as Carly goes into detail. More detail than I care to know.

We have seventeen minutes left until we get to the Heat & Ink Tattoo Parlor. It was over ninety minutes away, but Carly convinced us it was worth the drive. Apparently, they have a woman there who specializes in flowers, which is perfect for me.

I want to get a white lily on the back of my shoulder. I told the girls it was my favorite flower, which it is, but the tattoo means more to me than that. It’s a present for my future soulmate. It’s a symbol of my purity and commitment to him. A gift to let him know that I waited for him to arrive.

Carly and Himari can’t believe I’m still a virgin, but to me, it’s the most natural thing in the world. I can’t imagine doing anything with someone who’s not meant to be mine.

I guess I’m old-fashioned that way. They think it’s silly, but I don’t know. I think it’s kind of romantic.

“Did you decide on what you’re getting?” Himari asks Carly once they’re done with all that salacious talk. She wants to get an inspiring quote on her back shoulder, but

she wasn't sure which one.

"I'm ninety-five percent sure," she says as she drums her hands on the steering wheel.

"Ready for it?"

"Go," I say, grinning.

"She believed she could, so she did."

"Love it," Himari says.

Carly looks at me with a wince. "Is it corny?"

"It's classic," I say. "And it's true."

I can tell her brain is turning as she looks out the windshield .

"What's the backup tattoo?" I ask.

"Beyond fear lies freedom," she says. "I don't know. This is so hard. It's going to be on me when I'm ninety-five years old."

"Yeah, but your skin will be so saggy that it will cover up most of it," Himari says and we all crack up.

Himari is getting a koi fish on her back shoulder. She's been wanting one since before we met.

We're all freaking out when we pull up to the tattoo shop. It's an adorable little cabin tucked at the base of the Montana mountains, like something out of a rustic dream. The wooden exterior is dark and weathered, the kind that makes you wonder how

long it's been there and how many stories it's soaked up over the years.

A big maple tree towers over the shop, its branches hanging over the roof like it's keeping watch. Neon signs glow in the windows—one flashing an intricate tattoo machine, the other a simple OPEN in bold red letters.

Carly pulls into the gravel lot, cutting the engine, and for a second, none of us move.

“This is really happening,” I murmur, my heart suddenly pounding. Now that I think about it, I'm not too fond of needles either...

Carly narrows her eyes on me, a smile tugging at her lips. “No backing out now, Lainey.”

“I'm not backing out,” I say, swallowing hard.

I don't know why my palms are so sweaty. This is something I want. I've thought about it for months, spent hours scrolling through designs, sketching out ideas, picturing the ink on my skin. But now, staring at the bold red door of Heat & Ink, my nerves are humming like a live wire.

Carly throws open her door, steps out, and stretches. “Okay, let's do this before I second-guess my life choices.”

Himari and I climb out, the scent of pine and crisp mountain air tickling our noses. I can't believe we've been this close to these gorgeous mountains for the past four years and it's the first time we've come out here. It seems like such a waste. This place is special. I can feel the energy tingling in the air.

A bird calls out from somewhere in the forest, sharp and high as we walk to the door. The wooden steps creak as we walk up. Carly is the first one to open the door and

head in. She's always been the bravest.

I take a deep breath as I step inside to the buzz of needles. The warm scent of cedar and vanilla hits my nose, but under the nice scent is a slight smell of sweat mixed with disinfectant and ink.

Carly walks up to the counter as I look around at all of the gorgeous tattoo art hanging on the walls—delicate florals, snarling wolves, intricate mandalas, and old-school flash art of daggers and hearts. These people are talented.

“Hello,” the big burly guy in the black apron says as he walks over with a smile. He's massive with his T-shirt sleeves rolled up his big tattooed arms. He's got a big brown beard, messy hair, and bright green eyes. “I'm Magnus. Welcome to Heat & Ink. First time?”

“For tattoos, yes,” Carly says, flashing him a flirty smile.

Himari giggles. Of course, Carly is flirting with him already. She can't not.

But he doesn't flirt back. He just heads over to the computer next to the old steel cash register. “Then you're in the right place.”

I look around the room with my heart pounding. There are three leather tattoo chairs—two empty and one with a ripped shirtless guy laying on it. He's being tattooed by a cool-looking girl with tattoo sleeves on her arms and straight black hair tied into a ponytail. She's focusing on tattooing the guy's magazine-cover chest.

“Hey, ladies,” the guy getting tattooed says, flashing us a sleazy grin. Carly and Himari giggle.

“He's flexing,” Carly whispers and they laugh even harder.

The girl glances at us with the same fierce green eyes as the guy behind the counter. She's beautiful. So striking. I'd love to have a cool style like that, but I'd never be able to pull it off. I have too much of a good girl next door vibe to pull off tattoo sleeves.

"Is that your sister?" I ask Magnus, because I'm curious like that. They have to be related to have those same piercing jade-green eyes.

"Yes, that's my sister Victoria," Magnus says, smiling, "and our brother Julian is around here somewhere."

"That's so cool," Carly says, running her hand over the old oak counter. "My brother is an accountant. He's so lame."

An Incubus song is playing through the speakers in the ceiling as Magnus checks our reservation on the computer. "Who is getting the lily?"

I raise my hand. "That's me."

"Then you'll be with Victoria once she's done over there," he says. "It shouldn't be much longer. And I have a koi fish and a quote."

"Quote," Carly says, raising her hand.

"Koi fish," Himari says, smiling wide.

"Julian specializes in animals," Magnus says to Himari, "so, you'll go with him. I'll do the quote."

He opens the window beside the cash and sticks his head out. "Julian!" he bellows into the outdoors. "You're up!"

“Wish me luck,” Carly says as she skips over to Magnus’ station and hops into the big leather chair.

I swallow hard. This is real. This is happening.

Permanent choices being made in real time.

There’s no backing out now.

“So, what are we writing?” Magnus asks as he pulls up the stool beside Carly and puts on some black latex gloves.

My neck starts tingling when I hear the back door slam shut. It sounds like one of those old screen doors with an overly aggressive spring.

I touch the spot on my neck under my ear, wondering why it’s doing that. It feels like it’s buzzing .

“ Oh ,” I whisper when Julian walks in. He’s built like his brother, but shorter and stronger if that’s possible. He’s all muscle, but he’s not ripped like the sleaze-bag in the chair. He’s got a layer over it that looks perfect for snuggling up on the couch.

His arms are tattooed from the top of his wrists to under the tight sleeves of his white T-shirt, covering every inch of his thick muscular arms. He’s wearing a black apron like his brother and jeans that show off his muscular legs.

He’s hot. Really hot.

My breath quickens as I watch him clearing his throat. His jaw is clenched tight and his bright green eyes are on the ground like he’s angry about something. He’s intimidating. He looks mean but I can feel in my soul that he’s not. If he was an actor,

he could play prison bully number one.

He grunts and clears his throat as he stomps over to his station, not even glancing at us. My eyes are locked on him as he grabs a full glass of water and downs all of it, making rough sounds in his throat as he drinks.

“Julian,” Magnus says to him, “the nice lady over there would like a koi fish on her back shoulder.”

His green eyes snap over to us, but they narrow on me.

I feel the intensity of his gaze gripping me like steel.

I can’t breathe as we stare at each other.

The world narrows to just him.

Julian .

His name vibrates in my chest, settling into some deep, secret part of me that I didn’t know existed until this moment. The part is ripped open now, the contents flooding through me, taking over. My pulse stumbles, then speeds up, heat rushing over my skin like a wildfire.

The demanding spot on my neck tingles so much I have to touch it and when I do, his nostrils flare. He inhales deeply, watching me the entire time.

“Not her,” Magnus says. “The other one.”

He doesn’t look at Himari. He doesn’t answer his brother. It’s like he’s lost himself in me. Like he can’t look away. Like he’s stumbled into a dream.

I know, because I'm feeling it too.

His green eyes devour me, undress me, shake me to my core.

What is happening?

It must be nerves for the tattoo. It must be stress from finishing school. It must be...

It's not.

No matter how many excuses I can come up with, I know this feeling is not occurring from any of them.

This is something different. This is... I don't know what this is.

"Himari wants the koi fish," Magnus says, looking at his brother funny. "That girl is waiting for Victoria to finish."

"No," he says in a deep gruff voice that sends shivers tingling down my spine. "She's mine."

We haven't broken eye contact this whole time. Everyone is watching us now, wondering what is going on. I wish I knew...

"She wants a flower," Magnus says. "Victoria is the best at flowers."

"I'll go with him," I say. Every cell in my body is screaming at me to go to him.

"Are you sure?" Himari whispers to me. "He looks a little unhinged."

I feel unhinged. I feel like I need to be over there with his hands on me. I feel like I

won't be able to breathe until I'm over there.

"I'm sure," I say as I hurry over.

He's looking at me in awe as I hop onto the long black leather chair.

His sister Victoria goes back to work, but she keeps an eye on her brother, looking at him funny.

"What's your name?" Julian asks, his big chest heaving up and down with every heavy breath he takes .

"I'm Lainey," I say as I put my hand out for a shake.

He slides his big warm hand over mine, swallowing it completely.

"It's nice to finally meet you," he says, staring at me with a look of wonder. "I've been waiting a long time for you."

I shiver when we finally let go.

I don't know what he's talking about, but in a way, I do.

It feels like I've been waiting a long time for him too.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 6:40 am

CHAPTER THREE

Julian

My grizzly bear is in shock.

Hell, so am I.

My mate is sitting in front of me, looking up at me with these big brown eyes and my world is changing in real time. It's morphing and twisting and transforming all around me as I stare at this stunning angel in awe.

Nothing will ever be the same.

My mate is here. Finally.

And I'm not sure what that means.

I've been waiting my entire life for this moment. Waiting, dreaming, aching for it, and now that it's here, I don't know how to handle it.

I don't know what to do. What to say.

"I'd like it on the back of my shoulder," Lainey says in a sweet melodic tone. It awakens a possessive part of me—a part that wants to pick her up and carry her back to my cabin.

I'm so thrown that I don't even process what she's saying. She pulls off her sweater and I suck in a sharp breath when I see her sitting on my chair in her white tank top.

The bare skin of her shoulders, arms, and neck sparks a need in me that I know won't be quenched until I'm buried deep inside her. I want to kiss every inch of her skin. I want to bury my head between her legs and taste her sweetness.

She's breathing a little heavy—either from nerves over getting a tattoo or from being in the presence of her mate for the first time—but whatever it is, her round breasts are moving up and down in a hypnotic rhythm. I glance at them and they're so gorgeous and tempting that it's painful to look away.

“Julian!” Victoria says in a sharp tone. “Julian!”

“Huh?” I mutter as I shoot my sister an annoyed glance. “What?!”

Why is my little sister ruining this moment? Why is she even here?

“I said, I drew the lily tattoo,” she says, looking at me funny again. “Here's the stencil.”

I shake my head, trying to clear it as I grab the stencil and glance at it. It's a beautiful flower and will look so sexy on my mate's skin. I can't wait to put it on her. To mark her with my ink. I want to mark her in other ways as well, but we'll just have to start with this.

She's touching her neck as she looks at the flower, leaning forward enough that I can see her cleavage. My cock hardens to steel when I see those shifting breasts, knowing I'll be seeing them in their full glory soon enough.

“I love it,” she says, but she's looking at me when she says the words. My bear

grumbles happily inside. I haven't felt him this content in... ever.

She turns around and lifts her blonde hair up as I place the sticky stencil on her skin. I can't breathe when I finally touch her. She's so fucking perfect. Her skin is so soft.

Goosebumps appear on her arms as I trace the petals of the lily with my fingertip. They appear on mine when I hear her short breaths.

"I'm dancing tonight at The Banana Hammock," Curt says to the room of uninterested people. "All the clothes come off."

The two other girls laugh, but my girl doesn't. She's too focused on my touch.

"Are you going to come, Victoria?" he asks my sister.

"I'm afraid not," she says, continuing to tattoo his chest.

"Why not? I've asked you over a dozen times and you always say no."

"I have plans."

"What plans?" he says, not knowing when to take the L and slink away.

"I'm sitting at home and staring at the wall," she says. Magnus chuckles.

Curt scoffs. "How about you ladies? Do you have plans tonight, lily girl?"

I realize that he's talking to my mate and my whole body tightens. My hands squeeze into fists. I slowly turn to him as a low vicious growl rips out of my throat.

Victoria holds her breath as she looks up at me, finally realizing what's going on. She

looks at me, then at Lainey, and then back at me, her eyes wide.

“Is that...?” she mouths.

I just glare at Curt, but he’s too busy trying to look around me at my girl who is showing way too much skin in front of him for my liking.

I move in front of her, blocking her body from his sleazy gaze as I glare at him, another low possessive growl rumbling out of my throat.

My bear is incensed. He’s snarling inside, wanting to burst out and rip this man to pieces for daring to talk to our girl.

“Hey, big man,” he says to me, still trying to look around my frame. “Move, will ya?”

“Stop talking,” Victoria says, grabbing his chin and yanking his head back until his shocked eyes are on her. “I can’t work when you’re constantly yapping.”

“I’m just trying to get some clients for tonight,” he says, unsuccessfully trying to move his head out of her firm grip. “Man, you got strong hands. That fucking hurt.”

“And I’m just trying to make this tattoo look like a dragon,” she says. “Keep moving and it’s going to look like a gecko.”

My grizzly is on edge as I turn back to my girl. He’s like an untamed beast with the way he’s stomping and snarling inside.

I take a few deep breaths and try to focus on the task at hand. This beauty has got me distracted enough. I don’t need that asshole Curt adding to it.

My bear is not settling down. He wants me to put my mark on her. He wants me to put my lips on the spot below her ear and slide my teeth into her flesh, making her mine forever. And he's being relentless about it, grumbling and gnashing his teeth—making his desires known.

I want my mark on her too. Desperately.

Listening to that prick, Curt, trying to pick her up has sparked a possessive streak in me.

I need to make this girl mine. I need to mark her.

But I can't put my teeth on her now. I've barely said two words to her.

And if the girls she's with see me suddenly chomping down on her neck, they're going to call the National Guard. They'll make sure our tattoo shop goes viral for all the wrong reasons.

I just take a deep breath, pick up my tattoo gun, and get to work. I'll be able to talk to her while I tattoo her flawless skin. I'll be able to make her see that she's mine. That she belongs to me. I'll be able to convince her.

But as soon I start putting ink on her skin, my inner grizzly bear's desire takes over. It becomes impossible to ignore .

Mark her! Mark her!

Her sexy whimpers, little moans, and quick sensual breaths are such a turn on.

It puts me into a possessive trance.

And my hand keeps moving.

A deep, dark, primal version of me takes over. The part of me that wants to own my mate. That wants to mark his territory. Who wants to make sure the whole world knows this girl is mine .

I tattoo without thinking.

I ignore the stencil.

Before I can stop myself, I've tattooed a J, then a U.

Shit, she's going to be so mad.

But I can't stop...

L. I. A. N.

When I finally snap out of the trance, I see my name on the back of my girl's shoulder.

I've marked her alright. But it's not going to end well.

“What. The. Fuck?!”

Oh shit.

It's her friend. Himari, I think?

She came over to look at the progress and is standing behind me with her face all pale and her eyes opened wide.

“What the fuck did you do?!” she screams.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 6:40 am

CHAPTER FOUR

Julian

“Y ou tattooed your name on her shoulder?” Himari screeches so loud my ears ring. “What the fuck?!”

“No way, really?” Curt says, looking over.

I grab a sticky bandage, rip it open, and cover the tattoo with it as everyone comes rushing over. And I mean everyone .

Magnus is staring at me in disbelief. Lainey’s two friends are screeching like banshees, and Curt is grinning from ear to ear for the unexpected show.

Meanwhile, Victoria is in full damage control mode. “Whatever happened, I can fix it,” she says with her voice racing. “I’ll take over and blend it into a flower. You’ll never see it!”

“Show us what you did,” Carly demands as she stands there with her arms crossed, evil eyes trying to burn me alive.

“He wrote his name on her,” Himari says. “We’re suing.”

“You’re going so viral for this,” Carly says as she reaches forward and yanks the bandage off my girl. “Oh my god! ”

“Totally fixable!” Victoria says in a high-pitched tone. “Not a problem at all.”

“This is epic,” Curt says, grinning as he pulls out his phone to take a picture.

A growl rips out of my throat as I lunge forward and snatch the phone out of his hand. There’s no way I’m going to let that dickhead take a picture of my girl, especially when she’s showing this much skin.

“Give me the phone,” Magnus says as I’m about to snap it in half. I’m in enough trouble, so I hand it over.

“No pictures,” I warn.

“You’re in no position to tell us what we can and cannot do,” Carly says, huffing angrily. “You’re so fucked, I hope you know that. My dad is a lawyer.”

I have five frantic people in my face, but I haven’t seen the reaction of the only person who matters. While I’m distracted with Lainey’s friends, she slips out of the chair and walks over to the full-length mirror.

My heart pounds as I watch her looking over her shoulder into the mirror, gazing at the reflection of her new tattoo.

She doesn’t look angry or upset. I can’t really tell what she’s thinking.

“I’ll be happy to fix it,” Victoria says, trying to calm the situation down. “I can blend it into the petals easily. No one will ever know that it’s even there.”

“We’ll know,” Carly snaps. “She’ll still have this lunatic’s signature on her. Forever. What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

I inhale sharply as she sticks her finger in my face.

“Yeah, this is seriously fucked up,” Himari says, adding her finger too.

“There’s no charge for today,” Magnus says even though Carly’s tattoo is half done.
“So, don’t even worry about it.”

“You bet we’re not fucking paying,” Carly snaps. “You’re going to pay us once we’re done with you.”

Lainey is still at the mirror, staring at the tattoo. I can’t tell if she likes it or if she’s furious. This girl has a heck of a poker face.

“It was a lapse of judgment,” Victoria says with her hands out. “But I’m telling you. I can fix it.”

“No,” Carly snaps, glaring at her. “We’re leaving. This is the most fucked up thing I’ve ever seen. You’ll be getting a call from my dad.”

“The lawyer ,” Himari adds.

“Come on,” Carly says as she rushes over and grabs Lainey’s arm. “We’re getting out of here.”

I stand up as she gets pulled to the door. I take a step forward, about to stop them, but Victoria steps in front of me, shaking her head.

“Let them go,” she whispers. “She’ll come back.”

My heart aches as I watch my mate getting pulled out of my shop. I rush to the window and watch with my pulse racing as they push Lainey into the car and make a

quick getaway. Himari gives me the middle finger out the back window as they peel away.

My inner grizzly growls, ordering me to go after her.

Fuck off , I snap at it. She's only leaving because of you.

Victoria steps beside me and puts her hand on my back.

"It's going to be okay," she whispers as my whole world comes crumbling down around me. "It will be okay."

Magnus' big booming voice rumbles through the shop. "You're fired."

I drop my head and sigh as their car disappears around a bend. I had her... She was right here... In my arms...

And I fucked it all up.

"You are never stepping foot in this place again," Magnus says, furious. "Do you understand how many lawsuits are about to rain down on us from those girls? You bankrupted us! We're going to be torched online. Our Google rating is going to plummet. I don't ever want to see you in here again. I forbid you to even walk onto?— "

"Magnus," Victoria snaps, interrupting him in a sharp tone. "It was his mate."

My brother's face turns from livid to confused. His nostrils stop flaring. His head tilts. His brow furrows.

"Who?"

“The girl he tattooed,” Victoria says. “It was his mate.”

“Lainey,” I whisper, wondering if I’ll ever get to see her face again. Will she come back? She has to come back... I don’t know how long I’ll have to wait, but I’ll never stop waiting for her. I just hope it’s hours rather than days or weeks or years. Oh god. I hope it’s not years...

“That was your mate?” Magnus says, staring at me in shock.

I slowly nod my head. “Yeah.”

He suddenly bursts out laughing.

“Man, I knew you were a screwup, but goddamn.” He slaps his thigh as he bends over, laughing until his eyes water. “Tattooing your name on her shoulder...”

He can’t control his laughter. Maybe it will help if I go over there and slap him.

“You just fucked it up royally,” he says, shaking his head while he busts his gut laughing.

“Magnus,” Victoria snaps. “That’s enough.”

Gotta love older brothers.

But he’s right. I fucked up royally.

I hope my mate can forgive me. I drop my head, feeling sick to my stomach.

I was so close and now I’m further than ever.

She might never talk to me again.

And honestly, I wouldn't blame her.

CHAPTER FIVE

Lainey

Julian .

My body is flooded with a comforting warmth as I trace the swooping J with my fingertip. I can't stop staring at this tattoo.

I'm in the bathroom of our townhouse, staring at it in awe.

My neck hasn't stopped tingling and I can't help but think that it has something to do with him.

Being in his presence was so intense. It was so... unexpected.

I felt drawn to him. I still do.

Even after what he did to me, I can't stop thinking of his bright green eyes and strong gentle hands. The way they felt on my skin. The way I wanted them to keep moving, exploring my body...

A warm tingling blooms between my legs, making me all wet and needy.

" Oh ," I moan as I trace his name again on the back of my shoulder, loving that I have a piece of him to keep forever .

The thought that I'm somehow marked by him is turning me on in a way I've never experienced before. It's so intense. So all-consuming. My hand slides down my stomach and into my jogging pants. I slip my fingers into my panties and start playing with myself as I think of the possessive way he was looking at me.

"Yes," I moan under my breath when I remember how growly and protective he got when that guy tried to take a picture of me.

My body is so primed and ready that it only takes a few seconds of rubbing before I cum all over my hand.

I collapse against the counter, heaving shallow breaths as the warmth floods my body from the top of my head into my curled toes.

I need to see him again.

Tonight.

My body is demanding it. Even after pleasuring myself, the intense desire only heightens.

I need to talk to him. To ask him why he tattooed his name on my shoulder. To know what it meant.

Everyone was yelling and freaking out, and I didn't get the chance. It seemed like everyone was upset except me.

I wash my hands and splash some cold water onto my face, staring at my reflection as the water drips down my cheeks.

Go to him.

It's a voice from deep inside me, urging me to go.

When I get myself together, I slip out and head into the kitchen. Carly is on the phone with her dad and Himari is texting everyone she knows about this. They're still both furious.

Neither of them has even bothered to ask me how I feel about it.

But they're just being good protective friends, I guess. They don't know that something else is happening here. Something that I'm not even fully aware of .

"Carly, can I borrow your car?" I ask her as I grab her keys off the counter. "I could use some ice cream."

She nods as she holds her hand over the phone. "Sure. Can you get me some chocolate mint?"

"No problem," I say as I hurry out before any more questions are asked—like what state am I getting the ice cream in.

I run out into the cool night air and jump into Carly's car.

It's not long before I'm on the highway, driving the ninety minutes back to the tattoo parlor.

I don't know what I'll find when I get there—probably an empty, closed shop—but I have to go.

I can't just sit here doing nothing.

I have to find that man again.

And I have to figure out what the heck is going on.

CHAPTER SIX

Julian

After my long ass day, I let my grizzly bear out to burn off some of the pent-up energy he's been hitting me with since Lainey left. He doesn't understand why we're not with our mate and he certainly doesn't understand why we didn't mark her neck.

"It's complicated," I whisper to him as I take off my T-shirt and toss it onto my back porch. "But I'm working on it."

The sun has just set over the mountains and the forest sprawled out in front of me is glowing from the silvery moonlight. Fireflies are sparkling between the dark trees. A deer passed by not too long ago. I can smell it.

Normally, my grizzly would be captivated by the scent, but there's only one thing on his mind right now and it's not any of the animals frolicking in the forest.

I sigh as I kick off my shoes and undo my belt while my bear claws and paces around, wondering why I'm taking so long to free him.

"Behave," I warn him as I pull down my jeans .

It's not uncommon for a bear to go to extreme lengths to find his mate. I once heard a story from an old Kodiak shifter whose bear walked across three states to get to his mate. The bear wouldn't let him out for five days.

“I gotta work tomorrow,” I whisper as I slip off my boxer briefs. “And Magnus already wants to kill me, so please behave. You have two hours. That’s it.”

He grumbles an answer, but I’m not sure if it’s an agreement or a protest. Either way, I have to take my chances.

I take a deep breath, shaking out my arms as I close my eyes. I try to relax my body as much as I can before I let him loose.

“Okay,” I whisper, letting him out.

My bear surges up from the darkness, exploding out of me with a primal roar.

I get pulled down inside where I can watch through his eyes, smell through his nose, and hear through his ears. The whole forest comes alive.

Scents and sounds appear that even my enhanced senses can’t pick up. I smell a raccoon that passed this way a few days ago. A rotten carcass a few miles away. I can hear an earthworm wiggling through the dirt by my paw. The breeze through the trees is deafening.

But I’m used to all that. What I’m not used to is this buzzing feeling rippling through my grizzly. It’s an excitement. A desire. A need .

A need to mark his mate.

And not with a tattoo. A proper mark. With our teeth.

He glances over his shoulder at my house—a wooden cabin I built with my brothers. We each have a similar one spread over the twenty acres of pristine Montana wilderness we inherited from our parents before they picked up and moved to

Switzerland for their retirement.

He huffs out a breath and turns back to the forest, stepping into the darkness with our mate on his mind.

“Where are you going?” I ask him from inside as he turns left instead of his usual right. Right leads to the river, to the mountains, to hundreds of acres of wilderness exploration. Left leads to a dirt road that leads to the highway that eventually leads to our shop.

He huffs out a heavy breath as he picks up the pace.

My mind goes right back to Lainey as my bear takes over, waddling his big ass down the dirt road.

I still can't believe I did that. I hope she's not mad.

I know her friends will never like me after that horrible scene, but I'm more worried about my girl. I'll die if she doesn't forgive me. I don't know how I could live with that angel mad at me. It would torment me forever.

I obsess over it as my bear wanders down the side of the highway, singularly focused on our girl. Cars slow to take pictures of my grizzly, but he doesn't pay them any attention. A cute seven-year-old girl waves to him from the backseat and now I can't stop thinking of having children with Lainey. I want a family with her. I want to breed her sexy body until my truck is full of my own adorable kids.

We arrive in the parking lot of Heat & Ink and my bear takes his time, smelling every inch of it. Lainey's scent is still lingering around. It's faint, but strong enough to get our heart pumping.

A rush of excitement hits me when I picture her stunning face with those mesmerizing brown eyes. I shiver as I recall the way they were watching me with such confusion and wonder, like she couldn't quite understand what was happening to her. Why her body was reacting that way.

I let my grizzly smell around for over an hour, but when he starts looking down the highway in the direction she left, I pull him in.

I'm not going to let him drag me around for days and then force me to emerge on the side of the highway in Iowa with no car, wallet, or clothes. I have no idea where my girl came from. It's not uncommon for people to travel a long way to be tattooed by us. She could be from anywhere .

I have to be the one to figure out where she is. Not my bear.

While my bear is distracted, I grab a hold of his essence and yank him in while forcing my way up. He roars at the sky in outrage as he's dragged back in, helpless to stop me.

My bare feet hit the cold, damp pavement and I take a deep breath of cool air, letting it fill my lungs. The night breeze feels good on my hot, sweaty skin and I'm glad that I'm wearing nothing but my birthday suit.

I stare at my shop with my shoulders slumped, replaying the events of the afternoon for the hundredth time. It gets worse every time I think about it.

There's not much you can do about it now...

With a lump in my throat, I head to the door. I have some emergency clothes stashed in the stock room—some jeans, shoes, and a T-shirt. I'll grab them and walk home.

An owl hoots from somewhere in the forest as I reach onto the top of a wooden plank of the roof, feeling around for the spare key.

I grab it, shake my head at my stupidity once more, and then head to the door.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Lainey

I 'm gripping the steering wheel with my heart pounding as I watch Julian reach up to grab something—a key probably.

But my eyes aren't focused on his hands. They're wandering over everything else.

This rugged, sexy man is butt-naked.

I pulled up across the road from the tattoo shop and just as I was about to get out of my car, I saw a massive grizzly bear walk into the parking lot. Not wanting to be bitten in half, I stayed in Carly's car, waiting until it wandered off, but it didn't.

No. Something else entirely happened.

I watched in shock as that giant grizzly bear started shaking and morphing into that hot, naked man over there.

Julian is a bear shifter.

That's why I was so shaken this afternoon. That's why I haven't been able to stop thinking about him. That's why I've been feeling so drawn to him. Been aching for him .

I think... I'm his mate.

I stare at his broad muscular back and hard sculpted ass as it all comes together.

I've heard about bear shifters before, but I thought they were a myth. A legend. Something only those crazies on the internet believe in.

But now...

It's the only thing to explain this feeling I have ripping through me.

I remember reading about bear shifters online. About how they'll wait forever for their mate. How they'll only ever want that one woman destined by fate to be theirs.

I thought it was so romantic. A little far-fetched, but romantic.

I remember wishing I could have a love affair like that.

I touch my tingling neck as Julian turns around, looking at the empty parking lot. He turns enough that I can see his long thick cock. The tantalizing sight makes my whole body come alive. I feel all shaky inside as he takes a deep breath.

I'm staring at it in shock. It's so... big . So... captivating.

I should look away. I really should.

But I can't.

I've never seen a naked man before, and if I'm going to get my first look, I can't imagine a better one than this. It makes me glad I waited all these years.

Julian is pure masculine perfection. Broad shoulders, thick arms covered in intricate tattoos, only now I can see how they trail down his ribs, along the V-cut under his

abs, ending low on his hips. His body is all solid muscle, like he was carved from something unbreakable, something untamed. His skin glows under the light of the porch, golden and warm. He looks magical. He's a shifter. He is magical.

But as beautiful as the rest of him is, my eyes can't stop sliding back down...

I swallow hard as my gaze drops to the heavy length of him. He's big. Thick. Long. A slow heat curls in my belly, spreading lower, making me press my thighs together. I can't stop staring.

My mouth waters. My hands tingle with the need to touch and explore. I want him.

God, I shouldn't be watching this. But it's like I'm caught in a trance, my body vibrating with something primal, something instinctual.

Julian steps forward, bare feet on the wooden porch, completely unbothered by his nakedness. He slides the key into the front door of the quiet tattoo shop and disappears inside.

Panic flares in my chest. I don't want to lose sight of him.

I came all this way...

Before I can stop myself, my hand is on the car door. I push it open and step out into the night.

"Julian."

His name leaves my lips like a prayer, soft but certain.

He steps back out and looks my way.

Our eyes meet, and everything shifts.

No words pass between us, but something else does. A spark. A pull. An energy that tightens around us like an invisible thread, drawing us closer, pulling us together. His chest rises and falls, his jaw tightening as he stares at me like I'm the most precious thing he's ever seen.

Like he's been waiting for me.

I run across the dark empty road, my pulse racing as I get closer to him. I stop at the steps of the porch, looking up at him with a feeling like this can't be real surging through me. How can this be real life?

Julian's eyes are roaming over me, slow and savoring, like he's memorizing every detail. Like he can't quite believe this is real life either.

My body tingles under that heated gaze. I like having his eyes on me. I love the way they look so possessive like he's ready to claim me as his own .

His sexy lips part and his chest rises with a deep inhale, as if he's trying to breathe me in.

I don't move. I can't.

The air between us is thick and charged. Something deeper than just attraction is crackling between us.

Then he exhales and rubs a rough hand over his jaw. His expression shifts, like he's remembering something. Something serious.

His gaze drops to my shoulder and a flicker of regret darkens his face.

“I’m sorry,” he says, his voice raw and gravelly. “The tattoo... I didn’t mean to...”

I reach over my shoulder, pressing my fingers to the spot where his name is now permanently etched into my skin. My heart is hammering, but my voice comes out steady.

“Why did you do it?”

He swallows hard. His dark eyes burn into mine, wild and unfiltered, filled with something deep. Something desperate.

“Because I wanted you to be mine.” His voice is a rough whisper, but every word hits me like a strike of lightning. “I wasn’t thinking. My instincts took over. It was primal. It was...”

“Fate?”

His eyes are so piercing. They grip me. They seize my soul.

“ Yes .”

“We’re mates, aren’t we?”

He takes a deep breath and my heart races. “We are.”

A shiver runs through me at the intensity in his voice, at the weight of his words.

We’re meant to be together. He’s the man for me.

In this moment I know it’s true. The weight of it cements itself in my soul.

Everything changes.

“I felt like I ruined everything with that tattoo,” he says, looking crushed .

“You didn’t,” I say as I run my fingertips over it.

Because the crazy thing is... I don’t hate it.

I never did.

I like that his name is on me.

I want to be his.

“The truth is,” I say as I slowly walk up the creaky wooden steps, coming face to face with him. “The tattoo—the white lily—it was supposed to be a pledge to my soulmate. It was meant to be a promise to my future husband. To let him know that I was waiting for him.”

He tilts his head slightly as he listens to me.

“So, it doesn’t matter,” I tell him. “It was always for you anyway.”

He’s holding his breath. I think I’m holding mine too.

“A flower, or your name,” I say, feeling my heart pounding in my chest. “It’s the vow that matters.”

He steps forward and I shiver as he slides his hand onto my arm.

My eyes drop to his mouth. His lips are so sexy. Everything about this man is sexy.

He brushes his fingers against my cheek, trailing down to my jaw with the gentlest touch. “Lainey,” he whispers, my name rolling off his tongue like he’s savoring it, like it belongs to him now.

I don’t wait. I don’t think.

I rise onto my toes and tilt my chin up.

I’m not sure if I kiss him or he kisses me, but my breath is ripped out of my lungs as our lips connect.

His kiss is hungry and desperate, like he’s been waiting for this moment forever. And maybe he has. Maybe we both have. A low possessive growl rumbles in his chest as he wraps his arms around me and pulls me closer, gripping me like he’s afraid I’ll disappear again.

The night hums around us—crickets chirping in the distance, the faint sound of cars on the distant highway. The air is crisp and cool, but Julian is like a scorching bonfire, his warmth wrapping around me and making everything just right.

God, I could sink into this kiss forever. This moment, this man, this kiss... it feels like home. It feels... right .

I break away, breathless, my palms sliding up and down his big strong arms. His forehead rests against mine, his chest rising and falling in unsteady breaths.

Then, my gaze drops.

Oh .

My eyes widen when I see his long thick erection standing straight up between us,

rock hard and ready to go.

My cheeks burn red as I stare at it, knowing this incredible man is hard for me .

“Sorry,” Julian says, cursing under his breath as he steps away.

“It’s okay,” I whisper, not able to take my eyes off it.

But he’s already in motion, ripping an old tin sign right off the wooden wall like it’s made of paper, sending the rusted screws flying.

He covers his erection with it, looking a little embarrassed. He doesn’t have to be embarrassed, and he definitely doesn’t have to cover it up.

“I keep messing everything up,” he says, his jaw tight. “I’ve been dreaming of this moment every day for all twenty-seven years of my life. I never thought I’d mess up this badly.”

I slide my hand down his chest, feeling his heart pounding under all that muscle.

“You’re not doing so bad,” I say, licking my lips.

His fierce green eyes soften as he looks at me. “Lainey, let me fix this. The tattoo. Let me make it right.”

My friends would freak out if they knew I was here. If they knew I was about to give this guy a second chance.

“I don’t want you to be upset with me.”

“I’m not,” I tell him .

“For your friends then,” he says. “So at least they don’t hate me.”

“Okay,” I whisper, smiling as I take his hand. “Let’s go inside.”

He opens the door and we step inside, about to try this again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Julian

I feel overwhelmed with gratitude as I place Victoria's stencil on my girl's skin. I can't believe I got a second chance with her. I almost ruined it again by being naked. The first thing I did when I stepped into the shop was put on my spare clothes.

My heart is pounding. I can't believe she's sitting here in front of me right now.

Even my grizzly bear senses the enormity of the situation. He's dead silent inside like he's afraid that if he moves he'll scare her away again.

Behave , I warn him just in case.

It's silent inside the shop—just the soft sounds of our breathing as I line up one of the petals so it hides my name.

“You don't have to cover it completely,” she says in a sweet melodic voice. “I don't mind if it shows a little.”

Her back is to me, so she can't see the smile spreading across my face. After all this chaos, she likes it.

“You want my name on you? ”

She shrugs with an adorable little grin on her face as she looks at me over her

shoulder. “It’s kind of growing on me.”

“I’ll tell you what,” I say as I shift the stencil so my name is inside the petal, hidden but still visible if you look closely. “Since you’re keeping my name on you, I’ll tattoo your name on me.”

“Looks like you’re almost out of real estate,” she says with a chuckle as she glances at my tattoo-covered arms. “Where are you going to put it?”

“Anywhere you want.”

“After what you put me through, maybe your forehead,” she says, teasing. I hope she’s teasing.

“Whatever you desire,” I tell her as I place the stencil, making it stick.

She laughs. “My friends would probably choose that for you, but I won’t.”

I peel the stencil off, leaving the picture of the lily on the back of her shoulder.

“How does this look?” I ask her.

She heads over to the mirror, checking it out.

Meanwhile, I’m checking her out. She’s so perfect. I couldn’t imagine a more tempting mate for the universe to choose for me.

My body gets going as I admire the beautiful curve of her hips. My blood starts to boil as she moves around, looking at the tattoo from all angles. Her ass looks incredible in those jeans. It’s taking everything I have not to charge over there and rip them off. I sit on my hands, trying to keep myself under control as she touches her

neck and looks at her reflection.

I love her body. I can't wait to see it all, to touch it all, to taste it all.

I've waited twenty-seven years to have sex with my mate and now I can't seem to wait another second. My whole body is on edge. My hands are shaking I want it so badly.

I want to breed her .

I want to see her stomach growing with my child. I want to see her hips getting thicker and wider as her due date comes closer.

"I love it," she says, turning to me with a smile that takes my breath away.

She's wearing the same white tank top as earlier, those beautiful round breasts just waiting to be released. I can't wait to see them bouncing and jiggling as I slide my hard cock deep into her.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" she says. "It's getting late. I can come back another time."

"No ," I say a little too quickly. "I won't be able to sleep anyway."

"Me neither," she says with her cheeks blushing.

She walks back over and I focus on my tools instead of watching her sexy body coming toward me. I can't be too distracted while I do this. I learned that lesson this afternoon.

She slips onto my chair and tucks her hands into the groove of her inner thighs,

watching me as I get the needles and colors ready.

“Are you going to be okay with a little pain?” I ask. “I don’t want to hurt you. That’s the last thing in the world I want.”

“I’ll be okay,” she says, smiling. “A little pain never hurt anybody. Is that a saying?”

I laugh as I dip my needle into the ink and press the button to collect it. “I don’t think so.”

She turns around and I get a whiff of her vanilla conditioner. My bear grumbles, content at being surrounded by her alluring scent. Every breath I take fills me with tingles.

I start the tattoo and she takes it like a champ, only letting out the occasional whimper when I’m too rough. It breaks my heart, but it also turns me on. The sounds she’s making are so fucking sexy. The whimpers, gasps, and little moans are exactly what I’m going to hear when I fuck her.

“Distract me,” she says as I trace the stem of the lily .

I need a little distraction too. I can’t stop thinking of this girl naked.

“Tell me about yourself,” I say.

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything.”

She chuckles. “I just graduated from University.”

“Congratulations,” I say, already so proud of her. I knew my girl would be a smart one. “What was it like?”

She tells me all about her time at Gonzaga University in Spokane and how she’s unsure of where to go and what to do now that it’s over. Her family is in Florida, but she’s not sure if she wants to go back.

“You’re not going back home, are you?” I ask, the desperation clear in my voice. I can handle having her ninety minutes away—as horrible as that would be—but on the other side of the country in Florida? I couldn’t... I’d have to go with her. I’d follow her anywhere.

“I don’t think so,” she says. “My parents are divorced and they’re both settled in now. My mom got an apartment with my stepdad, and my father has a younger wife and two new kids. I love them all, but a house with toddlers in it isn’t the place for me anymore.”

“I think you should move here,” I say.

She laughs. “Move into the tattoo shop?”

“In with me.”

She shakes her head and laughs. “Are all bear shifters this crazy?”

“When they meet their mate, yeah.”

She looks over her shoulder at me and I get lost in those gorgeous brown eyes. She’s stunning. She’s mesmerizing. I can’t handle it.

How am I ever supposed to get anything done with her around?

“I need to know a little bit more about you before I agree to that ,” she says with a grin. “Tell me about your life. Those were your siblings? ”

I tell her all about Magnus and Victoria and our life in Montana. About our parents, building our cabins, opening the tattoo shop, and anything else she wants to know.

I don’t think I’ve ever talked this much in my whole life, but I keep going like an open book, telling her anything she wants to know.

“How did all three of you get into tattooing?” she asks.

“My mom is an artist,” I tell her. “She’s always painting and drawing and working on her art, so we were always around art supplies growing up. We all got pretty good.”

“Did she do tattoos as well?”

“No,” I say, grinning when I recall the memory. “Magnus bought an old tattoo machine at a yard sale when he was a teenager and brought it home. We thought it was the coolest thing and we learned how to use it, tattooing on pig carcasses, fruit, fake skin, our legs, our friends, anything really. Victoria is six years younger than me—she’s twenty-one now—so she was always trying to hang out with us. She was watching the whole time and when we finally let her have a turn, we were shocked to find out that she was the best one out of the three of us.”

“I can picture you as a kid,” she says, smiling at the image in her head. “I can’t wait to see some pictures.”

I open my drawer and grab an old photo I have laying around in there. It’s Victoria’s sixth birthday and she’s smiling wide in front of her cake—looking adorable with her two front teeth missing. Magnus and me are in the back. Magnus is giving her bunny ears with his two fingers and I’m scooping my finger into the icing of the cake. It’s

one of our favorites.

“So cute,” she says, smiling at the photo. She has a million questions about my parents and what they’re like. They moved to Switzerland so my mom could paint the mountains and my father’s grizzly bear could roam in them. I haven’t visited them yet, but they seem really happy .

“Whose idea was it to open up the shop?” she asks as I finish one petal and start on another one.

“That was Magnus. He’s always been the go-getter. The man with the plan.”

I talk about how it’s been so hard for me without her and she just listens quietly. She doesn’t freak out or get scared or tell me this is moving too fast. She takes my free hand and holds it as I talk. I take a breath of relief, knowing those days of intense longing and pain are finally over. She’s here now. I can just sit back and relax for once.

The hours fly by and before I know it, I’m done. I put my tattoo gun down and then wipe her skin with green soap to get rid of the stencil and any excess ink.

“Are you done?” she asks, perking up in the chair.

“Go check it out,” I tell her. “Tell me what you think.”

She rushes over to the mirror and turns, looking over her shoulder at the new work of art on her body. Her lip quivers and her eyes fill with tears when she sees it.

“Are you okay?” I ask, rushing over to her when I see those tears. “Do you not like it?”

She shakes her head, staring at it in awe. “I love it. It’s beautiful. Thank you.”

I watch as she runs her fingertip over my name which is just barely visible on a flower petal if you know where to look.

“Thank you for keeping it,” she whispers, looking into my eyes. “I keep having this feeling that my body needs to be marked by you.”

I glance at the spot on her neck that’s destined for my mark. She shivers as she reaches up and touches it.

“What goes here?” she whispers.

My mouth waters as I stare at it. I slide my hands onto her arms, gripping her as I close the distance between us.

“The mark on your back was mine,” I say in a voice that comes out all deep and growly. “This spot is for my bear. ”

She shivers, but there’s a spark of arousal in her eyes. It makes me snap. It pushes me over the edge.

I’ve been holding myself back all night for this girl, but I can’t anymore.

I lean down and take her mouth in a hard, demanding kiss. She whimpers on my tongue and it pushes me even further.

I go sailing over the edge.

She moans as I scoop her up into my possessive arms and carry her back to the chair.

There's no going back now.

It's time to claim my mate.

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Source Creation Date: July 28, 2025, 6:40 am

CHAPTER NINE

Lainey

I feel weightless in Julian's big muscular arms as he carries me to the black leather chair like I weigh nothing. He's so strong. So powerful. I never thought I'd be so turned on by such a rugged, manly man, but here we are.

"You're the one for me, Lainey," he says, possession emanating from those sexy brown eyes as he looks down at me. "I'm never letting you go, girl."

"Good," I say as I wrap my arm around his neck and tilt my head up.

He kisses me so good my toes curl.

My body is humming as he lowers me onto the chair, kissing my face and neck. My nipples are aching. My pussy is on fire .

I want to see him without clothes on again. I want to see that big sexy chest and those beautiful tattooed arms. I want to feel his strength. I want to feel his weight pressing down on me. I'm craving it all over .

"Take it off," I gasp between kisses as I pull and tug on his shirt.

He leans back with a low growl and yanks his shirt off in one smooth motion.

I gasp as I look up at his towering torso, thick with muscle and decorated in beautiful

ink.

My hands are trembling as I reach up and touch his hard chest. I can feel his heart pounding back there. It's almost beating as hard as mine is.

"You're so sexy," I whisper as I drag my hand down the ridges on his stomach.

"You're the sexiest thing I've ever seen," he says, drinking me in with those lustful brown eyes. I love the way he looks at me. It's like he can't get enough no matter how long he stares. I've never felt so desired in all my life.

My breath shudders as I feel the heat of his body under my fingertips. Julian watches me, his dark eyes burning, his chest rising and falling like he's barely restraining himself.

His cock is rock hard. It's right in front of my face, pushing against the inside of his jeans, thick and long. My mouth waters as I stare at it.

"Fuck ," he growls as he watches me staring at it. "Touch it, angel."

I shiver as I slide my hand down his thick hard shaft. He lets out a primal groan that makes my pussy clench.

I'm going to do it. I'm going to slide him into my mouth. I don't know how to get him off, but I'm going to try.

I undo his belt with shaky hands, pulling it free before flicking open the button of his jeans. He's breathing so heavily as I slide the zipper down, anticipation thick in the air. He lets me take my time, lets me peel the thick fabric down his muscular thighs, revealing black boxer briefs stretched tight over a long, hard erection that makes me forget how to breathe.

My eyes flick up to his as I run my palm over his throbbing shaft, this time with no thick jeans between us. Just thin cotton. His breath hisses through his teeth and he sinks his hands into my hair. I can tell he's holding himself back. He's trying to be gentle even though I'm making it hard for him.

I love how much I affect him. I love knowing this powerful, dominant man is at my mercy right now.

“Take it out,” he growls, his voice thick with need.

I slide my fingers under his waistband and tug his boxer briefs down. His cock springs free, hard and thick. His swollen head is already glistening with pre-cum. I swallow hard, mesmerized as I stare at it up close.

“You're so big,” I whisper, wrapping my fingers around his huge cock.

He groans as I stroke him slowly, testing it out, feeling the power of him in my hand. His muscles ripple as he grips my head a little harder, watching me with barely restrained hunger.

I bite my lip, then lower my mouth, dragging my tongue over his thick head, tasting him. His whole body shudders. I love it.

“Fuck, Lainey,” he growls as he watches me give a blow job for the first time. I slide my tongue from the base of his cock up to the very tip, moaning at the taste of his pre-cum.

“That's it, sweet girl. Now put it in your mouth.”

I part my lips and take him in, hollowing my cheeks as I suck his cock, forcing him in as far as I can. His pre-cum drags along my tongue—salty, masculine, intoxicating.

So fucking perfect. His muscular thighs tense as I grip him hard with my hand, stroking what I can't fit into my mouth.

“ Yes ,” he rasps, his voice tight with restraint.

It may be my imagination, but I think I can hear a low growling as if his inner bear is enjoying this as much as he is.

My neck tingles like it's demanding to be marked. I try not to focus on the needy feeling under my ear and instead just focus on the big hard cock sliding between my lips.

I swirl my tongue around his massive head, teasing and tasting. His fingers tighten in my hair as I take him in deeper, letting his shaft slide back and forth against my tongue. My lips are stretched wide around his thick cock and my jaw is starting to ache from his tremendous size.

He lets out a primal groan, and I feel the ache deep inside me.

I move faster, sucking him in deeper, pushing him to the back of my throat, moaning as I take every thick inch. His hips jerk, and his growl turns feral.

“Goddamn, Lainey,” he growls. “You're gonna make me lose it.”

I want to feel it. I want to know what it's like to have this man lose all control. What it's like to have him cumming deep in my mouth.

My hand moves faster along his shaft. I squeeze tighter. I pick up the pace, bobbing my head and working him harder, sucking him deeper, loving the way his cock keeps pulsing against my tongue.

My jaw aches and my hands cramp up, but I don't stop. I can't stop.

He's so big. So thick . I love the way he fills my mouth. I love the way his fingers tighten in my hair. The sexy carnal sounds he makes are so raw and erotic. They make my pussy drip with need. I love the way he's barely holding himself together because of me.

He grabs a fistful of my hair without thinking, but then when he realizes how hard he's gripping me, he lets go and yanks his hand away like he just touched a hot stove.

It's so sweet how he doesn't want to hurt me, but I kind of like the roughness. I like the feeling of him losing control. It's such a turn on.

His breathing turns ragged as I suck him off harder. His muscles tremble. I know he's close. I want to taste him. I want to push him over the edge.

"Fuck, baby, I'm gonna cum," he warns, his voice guttural and desperate.

I don't stop. I take him in deeper, my throat burning as I suck him hard. His massive body goes rigid in front of my eyes. His tattooed muscles flex. A deep growl rips from his throat as his cock pulses and he cums in my mouth. I whimper as hot cum surges all over my tongue.

Yes... Fuck, yes...

I swallow him down with a slutty moan, taking every drop, my body humming with satisfaction. He groans as his strong hands gently cradle my cheeks, watching me with those dark, hungry eyes.

"That's my mate," he whispers, his voice rough, but at the same time, it's filled with adoration and admiration. "You're perfect, Lainey."

I pull him out of my mouth with a soft pop, licking my lips as I look up at him, feeling powerful, feeling wanted, feeling utterly his.

I let go of his dick and lean back in the chair, my wet pussy aching as I look up at the tattooed god in front of me.

His hungry green eyes slowly slide down my body and linger on my pussy. I whimper as he steps forward and drops to his knees.

My cheeks burn, heat spreading through me as he hovers dangerously close to my most intimate area. No one has ever seen it or touched it before, and I can tell he's about to do both. Nothing—not even an army—could stop this man from claiming what's already his.

His breathing is ragged. His muscles are coiled so tightly he looks like he's seconds away from losing control.

I perk up in the seat, but he pushes me back down, his lustful eyes on my hips.

His big hands tremble as they unbuckle my belt and pull my zipper down. I'm breathing short raspy breaths as he gently pulls my jeans down my thighs and off my feet. He tosses them behind him as his lustful eyes focus on my panties.

They're wet. I know they are. I can feel it.

“ Fuck ,” he whispers as his strong hands settle on my knees, spreading my thighs apart. He inhales long and hard through his nose, and I know he's smelling my arousal. I can see it in his eyes.

There's a battle going on inside him—the primal need to claim me fighting against the restraint he's barely managing to hold onto.

The primal part almost wins when I feel his hands squeezing my knees.

“You have no idea what you do to me,” he growls, his voice rough and urgent. “Fuck, Lainey. I don’t know how to be gentle when all I want is to devour you.”

My breath stutters at his words, my nipples tightening, my pussy aching. “You don’t have to be so gentle,” I whisper, my voice shaking with need.

His eyes darken as he looks at me. “Oh yeah? You want me to devour this pretty little pussy? Because that’s exactly what I’m about to do, sweet girl. I’ve been holding back, but your sexy body is making it really fucking hard to control myself.”

A shiver rolls down my spine as I watch him. I want him to lose all control. I want his lustful side to win.

Maybe this will help...

I sit up and pull my shirt off. His hungry eyes darken as I reach behind my back, flick the little hooks on my bra, and take it off, letting my breasts tumble free.

He growls as he grabs them in his strong hands, massaging and kneading like he’s been starving for this moment. His thumbs flick over my hard nipples, sending a bolt of pleasure straight to my core.

“So pink and perfect,” he rasps before lowering his mouth. That hot tongue slides over my hard tingling nipples one at a time while I gasp for air.

It feels so good. His mouth is heavenly.

He spends some time exploring my naked breasts, but when I get wetter and wetter, the scent is too alluring for him and he turns back to my pussy .

My thighs tense under his grip as he spreads my legs open, his eyes locked on the damp fabric of my panties. He groans—a deep, hungry sound—before he leans in and drags his tongue up my throbbing sex.

It's over my panties, but I still scream out from the pleasure. It's so intense .

“ Mmmmm ,” he moans as he slides his finger into the band near my thigh. He pulls my panties to the side, revealing everything I've kept safe and untouched for him.

My heart pounds like a drum as I watch him stare at my naked pussy. He looks mesmerized by it like he's never seen anything so alluring.

“ Fuck ,” he growls. The heat of his breath on my hot sex makes me cry out and makes my back arch. “So nice and wet for me. You want me to taste this sweet little pussy, don't you?”

“ Yes ,” I whimper, gripping the arms of the chair. I need it.

He tortures me, just watching with that hungry gaze as I squirm on the chair, desperately needing to be touched.

I reach down to touch myself, but he grabs my wrist and guides my hand away.

“No, no, no,” he says with a grin. “This is my job.”

“Then do it,” I beg, unable to hide my desperation.

He grins as a low, possessive growl rumbles out of his chest. “I thought you'd never ask.”

I scream out as he dives in, his hot tongue plunging deep into my virgin hole.

My legs tremble as he devours me, licking every inch of my aching pussy with hot, slow, strong licks of his perfect tongue.

Moan after moan pours from my lips as he feasts on me like a starved man, his tongue ruthless, his grip unyielding. My fingers dig into the leather chair. My hips roll. My back arches. I squeeze his head with my thighs whenever he hits a spot so sensitive I can't take it.

I feel like I'm going to combust. I feel like I'm falling. I feel like I've unearthed a new height of pleasure that I didn't know my body was capable of.

He flicks his tongue on my throbbing clit, sending vibrations shooting straight to my core, making me scream out, making me shake.

"You taste like heaven, sweet girl," he growls on my pussy between heavy licks. He circles my clit with his tongue before taking it into his mouth and sucking hard.

I'm gonna cum...

"You were made for this," he says, his deep growly voice so fucking raw and sexy. "You were made for your man. This juicy little cunt was made for me."

I know it was. I'm his... I've always been his...

My body shakes and convulses on the chair as he spreads my legs wider and pushes his tongue in deeper. Just when I think it can't get any more intense, it does. He keeps bringing me to new levels.

The pleasure is overwhelming. My body is burning, trembling, unraveling beneath his skilled mouth.

I can't take it. I can't hold back.

I'm close... So close...

"Cum for me, angel," he growls, my wetness covering his mouth. "Let me taste your cream."

I unravel.

I shatter, crying out as pleasure crashes over me in waves, leaving me breathless, ruined, and completely his.

CHAPTER TEN

Julian

Laine is gripping my hair with both hands as she humps my face, spreading her wet virgin pussy all over my mouth. My sexy girl is cumming hard .

I keep licking, moving my mouth, and sucking on her folds as she cums on a man's mouth for the first time. It's so hot. My girl is a firecracker.

I can't get enough of this wet juicy cunt. I slide my tongue into her tight hole and then drag it over her pink folds, zigging and zagging as she moans and cries out. Her legs are shaking on my shoulders. She's squeezing and massaging her tits, her body convulsing on my long leather chair as I draw out her pleasure with my tongue.

“ Fuck ,” she gasps, eyes squeezed shut. “It's so intense .”

I growl on her cunt as my cock aches. I'm so fucking hard. I'm so ready to breed this sweet angelic body.

I lean back and wipe my mouth with the back of my hand, watching the stunning view in front of me. My girl's trembling legs are spread wide open and her tight little pussy— that she was so shy to show me only a few minutes ago—is on full display. It's beautiful. It's glistening . I can't take my eyes off it.

When she moans heavily, I drag my eyes up her body, past her round tits and open mouth. Those gorgeous brown eyes are locked on me, wondering what I'm about to

do next.

“You taste like heaven,” I say as I stand up, pushing my pants and boxer briefs the rest of the way down.

She watches with a little moan as I grip my hard cock and start stroking it as I kick off my pants.

“I’m going to fuck you now, angel,” I growl as I go to her. “I’m going to claim what’s mine.”

She reaches for me as I kneel between her spread legs, guiding my cock to her hot, wet hole.

“ Yes ,” she moans when my thick head pushes up against her opening. Her hands squeeze my arms, her nails digging into my flesh as she cries out.

I’ve barely pushed in half an inch and she’s already making a racket. Every animal in the mountains will be hearing us in a few minutes with the way she’s going.

I’m going excruciatingly slow for her. I don’t want to hurt her and I know my cock is big, especially for this tight little cunt.

“ Please ,” she begs, squeezing my arms harder. “Please, Julian. I need it.”

I grin as I see the desperation on her face. I love this girl.

“You’re mine ,” I growl as I push in deep, thrusting my hard cock into her wet heat and taking her cherry. Her pussy clenches tight around my cock, making me hiss out a breath.

She's virgin tight. Her silky walls clamp down on my shaft while she rolls her hips and moans like a dirty whore. I love those sexy sounds. She's so innocent, so to hear such filthy sounds coming out of her mouth is so erotic. It's such a turn on.

“ Oh shit ,” she hisses through clenched teeth. “Fuck, you're so big, Julian. I can barely take it. ”

I hover over her, kissing her temple, kissing her face and neck and lips. My cock is lodged deep inside her, buried to the hilt.

“You're amazing, angel,” I whisper between kisses. “It feels so good.”

My cock was made for her cunt. Every hard inch is right where it's supposed to be—buried deep inside her, filling her up completely, stretching her tight little pussy around it's thickness.

Her soft, silky walls clench and flutter, trying to adjust to the fullness, and it drives me insane. It feels so good. I can't believe I'm here right now. I can't believe I'm finally with her.

“You're perfect,” I growl, my voice rough with need. “So damn tight and warm. Made just for me.”

She whimpers, her fingers digging into my shoulders as I start to move, slow and deep, letting her feel every inch.

“Julian,” she breathes, her eyes glazed with pleasure. “You feel so good. So good.”

I thrust into her, harder than I had planned, but she takes every inch with nothing but heavy moans. Fuck, she's tight. Her silky cunt is gripping my raw cock like a vice, squeezing and squeezing and squeezing .

“We’re just getting started, sweet girl,” I say as I thrust in hard, pressing my pelvis against her engorged clit. “I’m going to make you cum all over my cock.”

She closes her eyes and moans, surrendering to the rhythm of my hips as I thrust in and out of her.

We’re made for each other. Nothing has ever been so obvious.

My bear growls inside, wanting more. Wanting everything.

He’s not content with claiming our mate’s cunt. He wants his mark on her and he’s not talking about a tattoo. He wants me to chomp down on her neck to let every shifter she passes know that she’s ours .

“ Soon ,” I growl, trying to hold him back .

“What?” she says, her brown eyes darting to mine.

But I don’t stop moving and she forgets all about it, only able to focus on my big cock sliding in and out of her. I grab her breast and squeeze it as I thrust in harder, making my girl cry out for more.

Her sexy moans spur me on, her sweet little pussy gripping me like she never wants me to leave.

She’s so wet. I glance down at my hard shaft plunging in and out and grin when I see her cream coating me.

The thought of breeding her pushes me further. The thought of cumming in her and filling her womb with my seed has me close to losing control. I close my eyes, trying to get a hold of myself, but she’s pushed me too far. She’s killing me.

I love that I'm the first one inside her. The first one to claim her. The only one.

Her body is a masterpiece. I take it all in, trying to sear the stunning vision into my memory for when I'm old and gray. Her beautiful breasts are heaving up and down, those perfect pink nipples hard and erect. Her face is flushed, her skin glowing with sweat and pleasure. Her brown eyes are glazed over, heavy-lidded with desire, her lips parted as soft, desperate whimpers spill out. I'll never forget how she looks right now—wild, needy, completely undone just for me.

My bear starts to get impatient—snarling and growling as he paces around, wanting me to mark her. He makes a rush to get out, but I squeeze my body and push him back down. Fuck, I'm too distracted by her. He almost got out.

“What's wrong?” she asks between moans while I fuck her.

Instead of answering, I pick her up and sit on the chair, bringing her down on my cock so she's straddling me. My sexy girl doesn't miss a beat. She grabs onto my shoulders and starts riding my pole, sliding that wet tight cunt up and down my cock .

I drop my head back and moan as I watch her big tits bouncing up and down in front of my face.

My bear quiets while I run my hands over her ass and up to her breasts, but the silence doesn't last long.

Mark her , he demands.

Fuck off , I hiss back.

He paces angrily, desperately wanting to get out.

I glance at the spot on her neck and he roars in outrage. That was a mistake. I try to focus on her bouncing breasts instead, but it's too late. He wants to take matters into his own hands and mark her now.

I grit my teeth as he rushes forward. I feel him barely slipping through before I can push him back down. My body swells up for a second, my skin pulling tight over my expanding muscles. I feel the burn of a phase, but it quickly disappears as I shove him back down.

My cock thickened and lengthened for a second or two, but it's enough to push Lainey over the edge. She squeezes my shoulders and screams out as she cums all over me.

I wrap my arms around her, holding her tight as she sinks down, her pulsating pussy engulfing my cock. It's hot and tight and pulsing as she cums on my dick for the first time. I focus on the amazing feeling, but then my selfish prick of a grizzly bear ruins it.

He rushes forward again, stronger than ever.

I grit my teeth with a groan and flex my muscles, trying to hold him back.

Lainey screams out as my cock grows inside. I'm already too big for her. I hope she's okay.

Her nails rake down my chest as her thighs tremble around me, desperate cries ripping out of her mouth.

“I'm sorry ,” I say, but it comes out sounding all deep and monstrous.

I spot brown fur sprouting out of my hulking arms. My gums ache as my canines

emerge.

No ...

Stop...

My bear is not stopping. He wants his mark on her neck and he doesn't care what he has to do to get it.

I glance at the long mirror on the other side of the room and gasp when I see golden eyes staring back at me. I'm a fucking monster.

I'm stuck mid-phase—my arms, shoulders, and chest swollen in size. Long brown fur is covering my tattoos. My sharp canines are pressing against my lips, making me look like a beast. I spot my furry hands and curse my bear when I see long black nails torn through my fingertips and resting on my girl's delicate skin.

Look what you're doing , I scream at him.

He roars back.

I try to force him back in, but he doesn't move. It's like trying to shove a giant boulder. He's unshakable.

Meanwhile, my girl is still riding me, taking every thick, long inch as she moans and cries and cums on repeat.

Mark her , my bear demands. Mark her. Now!

I don't want to lose control with my angel. Not like this. Not now.

But my fucking bear doesn't care what I want.

He wants her marked.

He wants it now.

And I don't know if I can stop him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lainey

His dick keeps getting bigger and thicker and longer as I ride him. I'm taking every inch, feeling more full than I've ever felt in my life.

Julian is struggling to control himself, struggling to control the beast inside, but I can't stop riding this big, perfect cock.

I moan as my pussy pulses and cums on him. I don't think I've stopped cumming this whole time. It's like one long never-ending orgasm.

His body is half monster—furry arms, hulking frame, eyes shining like gold, but it's only turning me on more. I slide my pussy up and down his dick, not stopping when I see his teeth growing and sharpening, not stopping when I feel his claws sharp like nails on my bare thighs. I can't stop. It feels too fucking good.

His face twists up in agony from his bear. I don't know how to help him, but I want to try.

I cup his stubbly cheeks as I slide my clenched pussy up and down his cock, and look into his golden eyes. "What is it?" I whisper.

His hands tighten on my ass and I moan when I feel his claws close to piercing me.

"What is it, Julian?"

Those sexy golden eyes drop to my neck and I know instinctively what he wants. What he needs. What I need.

The needy spot on my neck tingles more than ever. It vibrates through my whole body, taking over.

I need his mark on me. I need it now .

“Do it,” I beg, kissing his lips. His teeth feel so strange on my mouth, but it’s so hot. It’s so sexy. “Do it. Mark me.”

He’s trying to hold himself back. I can tell by the way his body is getting all tight and rigged.

But I don’t want him to hold back. I’m his mate. I can take anything he gives me. My body was made for this moment.

“Mark me,” I say as I throw my head back, exposing my neck. “Mark your girl. Mark your mate.”

He lunges forward with a possessive growl and sinks his teeth into the tingling spot.

I cry out, instantly cumming on his dick as he latches onto me, marking me as his own.

He thrusts his big cock up, his body shuddering and convulsing as he cums deep in my pussy. I cry out again when I feel his hot cum surging inside me.

The tingling on my neck turns to a warm comforting glowing feeling as he holds on, his teeth buried in my flesh, his cock cumming in my cunt.

He releases my neck with a contented growl and the incredible feeling spreads through my body, mixing with my orgasm and making me feel like I'm floating away. It's only his big possessive arms wrapped around me that tell me I'm still here with him.

I roll my hips—drowning in the pleasure—as I watch his eyes return back to that beautiful shade of green. His shoulders and arms slink back down, the fur disappearing and his sexy tattoos coming back into view.

I kiss his warm mouth and moan at the familiar feeling now that his teeth are back to normal. His hands slide up my back—his fingertips soft now that his claws are retracted.

I have my Julian back, but it's better now. It's more certain. It's permanent.

His mark is on me. He has my cherry.

We're one now. We're mates.

And there's no going back.

I rest my head on his chest, smiling at the comforting sound of his heart beating for me.

He wraps his arms around me, pulling me into him.

Warmth surrounds me—his scent, his touch, his love.

My eyes grow heavy and my body sinks into his right where it belongs.

Right at home.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Lainey

“Well, what do we have here?”

I wake up, so startled to hear a woman’s voice that I nearly have a heart attack. I gasp, clinging to the blanket draped over my body and yank it up to my neck. Thankfully, I woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom and I put Julian’s huge T-shirt on, so I’m not naked.

“Good morning,” Victoria says, grinning as she stands in front of me, holding a coffee and a large greasy bag.

Oh crap. This is not how I want to meet Julian’s family—half asleep in Julian’s tattoo chair while he’s—where the hell is he?

We kept trying to leave last night to go to his place, but every time we got up... well, things happened and we ended up back on the chair until we passed out for good.

“You must be Julian’s mate,” she says, her grin getting larger. “We didn’t meet properly yesterday. I’m Victoria.”

I reach out my hand. “Hi. I’m Lainey.”

The grin melts off her face as she looks at my outstretched hand. “Would you mind washing that hand first?”

Eek. Probably a good idea though.

My cheeks blush as I snap my hand back. I jump off the chair and hurry over to the sink, using extra soap as I wash up.

“Julian was around here somewhere,” I say, hoping he’s going to get back soon.

“No worries,” she says, strolling to the front desk with the bag of food. I quickly gather my clothes off the floor, hide behind the privacy divider, and get dressed. “I brought breakfast. Are you hungry? You must be.”

She’s grinning as I blush harder.

“I’m sorry to meet you like this,” I say, humiliated. “I came to see Julian after everything that happened yesterday and?—”

“You don’t have to explain,” she says, interrupting me. “You’re mates. Of course, you’re going to be drawn to each other. It’s unavoidable, right? I’m just happy to have you here. Julian was really having a hard time without you.”

“He was?” I say, but before I can get her answer, the front door opens and Magnus walks in.

“Can’t wait to see how many horrible one-star reviews we get because of that shit show yester?—”

He suddenly stops talking when he sees me standing in the middle of the shop all awkwardly.

“You’re back?” he says, staring at me in shock.

“She came to join us for breakfast,” Victoria says, tossing me a wrapped up breakfast sandwich. I catch it and then she throws one to Magnus. “Isn’t that nice?”

“Yeah,” he says, nodding as he opens the sandwich and takes a huge bite. “Happy to have you here. And hey, if you can stop your friends from review bombing our shop, that would be great.”

“ Magnus ,” Victoria says in a sharp tone. “She’s our guest . ”

I like her already. It’s going to be fun being sisters with her.

“I’ll get them to take down any reviews they’ve left,” I say as I walk over, already feeling a bit more at home. “And I’ll even leave you a five-star review since Julian fixed the tattoo for me.”

I pull down my sweater, showing them my beautiful new lily tattoo.

“ Wow ,” Victoria says, leaning over the counter to get a better look. “I didn’t know he’s so good at flowers.”

My mate is good at everything . Except, maybe showing up for breakfast when I need him.

“Oh,” Julian says when he walks in from the back and sees his siblings around me. “You guys are here early.”

“No,” Magnus says as he makes a show of looking at his watch. “You’re just always late.”

“Sorry about that, bro,” he says, kissing me on the cheek before grabbing a sandwich out of the bag. “It won’t happen again.”

Magnus is staring at him like he doesn't quite know if he can believe him or not.

"A lot of things are going to be different now," Julian says, smiling at me. "I'll be better. I promise. I was having a rough time, but that's over now."

I can't help but smile as he looks at me while he says it. I'm the reason things are going to get better. I'm the reason he's changed.

"So, you won't be a grumpy asshole anymore?" Magnus says with a laugh.

Julian shakes his head with a grin on his face. "No, but I'll be a grouchy dick."

Magnus laughs and smacks his brother's shoulder. "I'm glad it worked out for you two. Hopefully, my mate is around the corner too."

"So," Victoria says, her jade-green eyes full of interest as she looks at me. "You're part of the family now, Lainey. Tell us everything about yourself."

For the first time in a long time, I feel like I might have a home.

I smile as they all turn to me, waiting for me to answer with my life story.

It sure feels like it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Julian

It's been a month since my newlmates clients left in a huff. They're coming back in today so I can finish the woman's tattoo—the head of a Kodiak bear on her ribs. Normally, I'd be dreading the appointment, having to hear how much they love each other and how perfect they are for one another, but today is different. I'm actually looking forward to making amends.

My own mate is in my life now and that grouchy, unfulfilled version of me they met last time is gone for good.

I'm happy now. Actually, happy doesn't begin to describe the feeling of having Lainey in my life. I'm drowning in bliss. That's more like it.

I've had her in my life for three weeks, four days, fourteen hours, and twelve minutes. And every second has felt better than the last.

She didn't move back to Florida. She didn't even move back in with her roommates who were both horrified to find out that she was dating the man who tattooed his name on her shoulder. She moved right in with me and we've been going strong ever since.

Every night, she falls asleep in my arms, and every morning, she wakes up with my hands on her body, my name still inked on her skin, and my mark still proudly displayed on her neck.

I fucking worship her. I can't get enough of my mate.

Not one day has passed without us having sex at least three times. I can't control myself around her, although I'm starting to think she likes it when I lose control. She loves getting me all growly and wound up. My growls and firm hands always turn her on.

She's at a job interview right now for a small marketing agency in town. She's really excited about it, and I really hope she gets it. I don't want her to have any excuse to leave.

"Are you going to come watch me dance tonight?" Curt the male stripper asks my sister Victoria while she tattoos a snake on the side of his ribs.

"You've asked me that a hundred times," she says, focusing on her work. "What makes you think I'd say yes this time?"

"I don't know," he says, shrugging his shoulders. "Maybe you're extra horny today?"

Magnus is behind the desk going through our accounting for the month. He just shakes his head as he listens.

"Never going to happen, Curt," Victoria says, not missing a beat as she shades in the green scales. "I'd rather gouge my eyes out."

"Oh, come on," he says with a huff. "You don't know what you're missing."

Victoria grins as she focuses on her art. "All three inches of it?"

Me and Magnus burst out laughing. Curt is not amused.

The bell over the door rings and the newlmates walk in, arms hooked around each other .

“Are you going to be nice this time?” the big Kodiak shifter asks me, already looking pissed off.

I can tell he’s expecting me to bark back, but I don’t. I smile at them. A genuine smile.

“I’m sorry about last time,” I say. “That wasn’t professional. I’m a changed man.”

He glares at me for a while and then it dawns on him. “You found your mate?”

I nod, unable to hold back my wide smile.

“Mate?” Curt mutters with a laugh. “Who talks like that?”

We all ignore him. We’re used to shifter activity going over humans’ heads. There’s a whole world they don’t pick up on.

“That’s great,” the girl says, grinning at me. “What’s her name?”

Just thinking about my mate’s name feels like my insides are ballooning with happiness. “Lainey. She’s perfect.”

The cold look the Kodiak shifter is giving me thaws and he warms up. “I’m happy for you, man.”

“Thanks,” I say, shaking his hand. “So, we’re cool?”

“Water under the bridge.”

“That’s a relief,” I say, showing them to my station. “I’ve been feeling bad about it. Let’s get that tattoo finished.”

Curt tries flirting with Victoria, again, and gets shut down, again. It’s a pretty normal day in the shop.

Until Lainey explodes into the place with a smile so radiant it makes my heart ache.

“I got the job!” she squeals, bursting with excitement.

I leap off my stool, scoop her up in my arms, and spin her around, hugging her like I’m never going to let go.

“So, that means you’re staying?” I ask as I lower her to her feet.

She cups my cheeks and looks me in the eyes. “Are you kidding? I was never going to leave. I’m with you for life, baby.”

I kiss those soft juicy lips, pouring every ounce of love, possession, and raw need into it. She’s mine—always has been, always will be.

When I finally pull back, she’s breathless with those beautiful brown eyes shining up at me.

"For life," I echo, brushing my thumb over her flushed cheek. "Forever."

EPILOGUE

Julian

Two years later...

Everyone's over at our place for a summer BBQ—Magnus, Victoria, and our parents who are visiting from Switzerland to see their grandcub for the second time. They came to visit when Lainey first gave birth and they instantly fell in love with my mate.

"Why didn't you go find her years ago?" my dad joked when he saw us together for the first time. "I didn't know my son could be so happy."

"Believe me," I said, "if I'd known where to look, I would have."

"Could have saved us a lot of trouble," Magnus added. "Remember how intense and brooding Julian was? Always growling at everyone? It was exhausting."

Lainey laughed, nudging me with her hip. "I kind of liked brooding Julian. "

I narrowed my eyes playfully and whispered to her. "One brooding grizzly bear shifter coming up tonight, just for you."

She gave me a salacious smile. "I can't wait."

I'm so happy we're all together again. Our little one, Angelica, is growing up so fast.

She's resting on Lainey's jutting hip, playing with her mom's blonde hair and laughing her adorable little head off as I cook the burgers on the grill.

"This is so wonderful," Mom says as she looks around at all of the smiling faces. "Love, laughter, and a full house. I'm so proud of you, son."

"Thanks, Mom," I say, blushing.

"And I'm proud of this little one," Mom says, reaching for Angelica. Angelica smiles wide when she sees her grandmother's outstretched arms and reaches for her back.

They both giggle as Lainey hands her over. The instant my mom has our little grizzly cub, Lainey sidles up beside me and slides her hand up my back.

"I love you," she whispers.

I kiss her temple, feeling like I might float away on the next breeze. "I love you too."

"And where are your mates?" Dad asks Victoria and Magnus who are sitting around the table on our porch.

Victoria sighs as she cracks open a beer. "I was hoping you knew."

"They'll come when it's time," Magnus says, his jaw tightening as he stares out at the mountains. "I'm not worried. Do I look worried?"

"A little bit, yeah," Dad says. That man has never had a filter and it's only gotten worse with age.

"I have to go take a whizz," Magnus says, quickly heading into the house.

I take a deep breath as I flip a burger. I hope his mate comes soon. Magnus has always been the most level-headed out of all of us, especially when it comes to mates, but he's been having a hard time lately .

I know that seeing me and Lainey together is starting to upset his bear, and now that we have Angelica too—it's getting rough for him.

“When is it my turn to hold her?” Dad asks, putting his hands out with a big smile on his face.

Angelica sees her loving grandpa and squirms out of Mom's arms. She lands on her feet and wobbles as she tries to keep her balance.

“Is she about to—?” Lainey whispers, watching with bated breath.

I'm burning the burgers, but I don't care. My baby girl is about to take her first steps.

Angelica pushes off my mother's knee and wobbles on her feet, determination taking over her face.

We all gasp, none of us moving.

My heart stops.

Then—

She takes a step.

And another.

Then a third before she wobbles and tumbles forward, right into my father's arms.

For a second, we all just gape, too stunned to move. Then, we all burst out in cheers.

Lainey lets out a squeal and claps her hands, running over and dropping to her knees beside Angelica. “Oh my God, baby! You did it!”

My mother gasps, pressing her hands to her chest, tears welling in her eyes. “I’m so happy I got to see that!”

“That’s my girl!” Victoria says, rubbing Angelica’s little back.

My father just hugs her, soaking in her baby scent.

And me?

I feel like my heart is about to explode. I drop to my knees and steal Angelica from my dad. Her little hands grasp my face and she giggles, knowing she did good.

“That’s my girl,” I whisper, kissing her all over as she squeals with delight. “I’m so proud of you, sweetheart. Those legs will take you on many more adventures throughout your life.”

Lainey leans in, kissing our daughter’s forehead, then my cheek. “She’s incredible.”

“Just like her mama,” I say before kissing her lips.

This is more than I ever expected out of life.

I don’t need anything more than this.

My mate, my child, my family—this is more than I ever dreamed possible.

Dad winks at me. “You do realize she’s going to be running everywhere soon, right?”

I laugh, holding Angelica close, breathing in her baby-soft scent. “Let her. I’ll always be here to catch her.”

Lainey reaches for my hand and intertwines our fingers. Her eyes are shimmering with love and happiness.

I’m glad my grouchy days are over. Being a lover definitely beats being a grump.

“The burgers!” Magnus shouts as he walks back out.

“Oh shit!” I gasp when I see the smoke billowing out of the barbecue. I hand Angelica over to my girl and rush over to the grill.

“What’s going on out here?” Magnus asks, looking confused as I flip the burnt burgers.

“Angelica just took her first step!” Mom says proudly.

“Ah, I missed it!” Magnus says, frowning.

Lately, I’ve been feeling like I’m taking first steps too.

Opening myself up. Letting myself be happy. Enjoying the world.

I take another step deeper, feeling gratitude for my wonderful loving family.

And nothing—not even a burnt hamburger—can ruin it.

EPILOGUE

Lainey

Fourteen years later...

I 'm trying not to laugh as I watch Julian getting frustrated. He's attempting to conduct a fly fishing lesson on how to tie a hook to our four crazy cubs, but no one is listening. Angelica is on her phone, our twins, Michael and Liam, are wrestling in the water, and our youngest, Nathan, is pulling off his clothes, about to turn into his little grizzly bear.

"Don't ," Julian warns as Nathan pulls off his pants. "You're going to scare the fish away."

"But this is boring," Nathan whines. "Why can't we catch the fish with our bears? It's more fun that way."

Julian looks at me and I shrug. "Don't look at me," I say, laughing. "This was your idea."

We're at his favorite spot on the river, where it goes around a bend and the sun hits the clear cold water just right so it sparkles like diamonds. It really is gorgeous, but the kids are in no mood for an old man's sport. They have endless energy to burn.

Michael throws Liam down, but he pulls him down with him and they both crash into the water. They're fighting over a fishing lure. I don't know why. They all look the

same to me.

“Can you guys—“ Julian shouts, but the boys go underwater before he can finish.

He looks at Angelica who is busy typing on her phone so fast her fingers are blurring.
“Can you put that away?”

“Just a second,” she says, not looking up from her screen. “I’m just sending a text real quick.”

“You’ve been on it all day.”

No answer.

My man looks at me with exasperation in his eyes and I try not to laugh. “I think you’re doing great!”

Just as I finish saying it, Nathan’s grizzly bear bursts out of him.

“I said no!” Julian says, throwing his hands up. But it’s too late. Nathan’s little grizzly cub is leaping into the water, scaring all the fish away.

Liam tackles Michael and they crash into Angelica which causes her to drop her phone into the river.

Her face turns apocalyptic as she looks at her twin brothers. “You two are dead .”

“Wait!” Julian says, but it’s too late again. Angelica bursts into her grizzly bear. It roars out in fury, charging at the boys.

Both Liam and Michael let their grizzlies loose and then run away from their much bigger sister, splashing in the water.

Julian looks at our four children—all of them in their bear forms—splashing, fighting, and playing in the river, and he drops his head with a sigh.

I giggle as I walk over and rub his back. “I was super interested in your fly fishing lesson. ”

He shakes his head playfully as he looks at me. “Yeah. Right.”

I can’t help but laugh. Our family is crazy and chaotic and unruly, but it’s ours and it’s perfect. I wouldn’t change a thing.

The life I’ve built with this man still makes me pause in disbelief.

I can’t believe I got this lucky. I can’t believe this wonderful man is mine.

“Might as well join them,” Julian says as he pulls off his shirt.

I suck in a short breath when I catch a glimpse of his strong tattooed torso. This man still takes my breath away. I still find him so unbelievably hot.

He steps back and slides his pants down, and before I know it, he lets his bear loose.

“Hello,” I say as my big furry friend comes over to see me.

He sniffs my neck, making sure his mark is still there, and it makes me giggle.

“Can I have a ride?” I ask as I grab onto this thick fur.

He lowers his body and I pull myself up, sitting on his wide powerful shoulders.

Nothing beats riding a grizzly bear. It’s still the most surreal feeling ever.

He walks into the river with me on his back and the kids stop wrestling when they see us.

“Uh oh,” I say with a grin when they come rushing over to play. “Four against one, that hardly seems fair.”

I hold on tight as Julian wrestles with our kids and I get a front row seat to it all.

Like I said, our family is a little chaotic and crazy, but it’s mine.

And to me, it’s perfect.

The End