



Curtis & Jae (Mate Match #1)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Worried about his upcoming heat, Jae signs up for the Mate Match app to find an alpha, not only to get him through it, but for an actual partnership, something he hasn't experienced before. When he meets Curtis, the strength of their connection sends him into an early heat. He asks Curtis to take him through it and is surprised at their compatibility in and out of the bedroom. Could Mate Match have really found him someone special?

When Curtis was pushed into signing up for the app by his friends, he truly didn't expect to be matched with someone as sweet and sexy as Jae. He was even more shocked to be asked to go through a heat with the omega. Can he convince Jae to take a chance on him for something more?

A surprise pregnancy threatens their relationship, putting their Mate Match to the test.

Total Pages (Source): 22

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One

Jae

“Sorry,” my friend Brady said, lowering a cup of tea to the table beside me. “It’s been one hell of a morning. Obviously, I can’t say much other than latecomers have ruined the entire schedule for the day.” Brady wore an uncharacteristic frown.

“Do you think they’ll reschedule?” Maybe it would be better for them to try later if they were frazzled already. There was an air of tension in the building that even the pheromone filters couldn’t block.

“They wouldn’t, not now that they’ve left you waiting for nearly an hour.” He patted my hand sympathetically. “Drink your tea. It’s one of those soothing ones you like.”

I was a regular at the office because I worked as an illustrator. This was the first time I was submitting my own work for their approval. The book was pretty much done, though I knew they’d likely have suggestions to improve it, to really help it sell later.

Brady continued to sit next to me. “What?” he asked when he caught me watching him.

“You can go back to your desk. I know you’re busy.” I knew exactly why he was lingering beside me like a bad smell.

“So...” he began. This would be fun. “How was your date?”

“Awful, but you knew that. I texted you after!”

“I just want the deets, Jae! Don’t hold out on me now. What was he like? What put you off him?”

With a bitter laugh, I pretended to think, my hand propping up my chin.

“Maybe it was his alpha posturing outside of the restaurant, blowing his pheromones all over the place.” Brady flinched.

It was so rude to do that to anyone, particularly strangers.

“Or maybe it was the numerous red flags, like how he spoke to the server.” Brady winced.

Being rude to servers was a big no-no to us both.

“Or how he mentioned traditional roles—”

“Fuck!” he muttered before looking around to check no one was listening in to hear his unprofessional outburst.

“Yeah. The guy was hot, just that’s all there was to him. All looks and no substance.”

“Sorry, Jae, I thought you were onto a winner here.” Brady was so sweet, he genuinely meant it.

“Are you sure this app is legit? ‘Cause, not going to lie, I don’t see it working out for me. Our match was a decent percentage, too.” It had taken me weeks to even sign up for the dating app Brady had suggested to me.

“For sure! My cousin’s friends were matched by them. I swear on it!”

“Then why haven’t you used it yet?”

Brady had the decency to look sheepish. “Because I’m not about to go in heat soon without options. Shit, that’s rude. I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s fair. Between the blockers issue and being single this last year...”

“Why don’t you try a club like I do?”

I sighed. If only it was that simple. I loved how free and easy Brady was with his sexuality. He was open about dating multiple people at the same time and wasn’t shy about sex at all. Not like me.

“Just how I was raised, I guess. Sex was for relationships, so now I feel weird about hookups.”

“Which is fair. Look, try the app again, alright? Maybe fine tune your profile a little. Might help,” Brady suggested. He stood when there was a movement at the end of the hall.

“Jae, come on through, please.”

The meeting went both better and worse than I was expecting.

They seemed to love the story, yet wanted a bunch of edits to both the words and the illustrations.

Thankfully, these were all done digitally, so it was easier to manipulate them into what they wanted.

It was going to be a long process to get something we were all happy with publishing.

The downside was the long queue I would be in and the deadlines I had to meet.

At least I could say I had a contract, provisionally at least. They wanted me to return with a few pages updated with the edits they requested, then we could move forward. A formality, really, since they knew my work was solid. I'd been working for them for years.

Still, it was an amazing step forward to gaining my dream: publishing my own work!

My family would be proud, though also surprised.

They hadn't expected me to graduate with my art degree, thinking I would find a suitable alpha at college, then settle down to have a family.

My role would be the same as my mother's: raising children and managing the household.

Becoming published would prove to them I was right to forge a path just for me, one without reliance on an alpha.

I was practically giddy all the way home. The tram was nearly at my stop when I received a notification. The sound differed from my usual socials. I checked my phone.

Mate Match

You have a new match!

Oh! Was I worried or excited about this one? Could he be any worse than the last

guy? What if he was better?

Instead of checking it out in the app, I decided to wait until I got home to give it my full attention. Besides, what were a few minutes when this could be someone really special?

In spite of myself, I walked faster from the tram stop to my apartment block, only a street away in my haste to see what this match was. Maybe I was just buoyed by my meeting with the publisher, but I had a fizzing feeling of excitement in my gut.

Percy, my cat, was ready and eager to greet me when I got in. He still had food, so it was definitely me he wanted to see, not just hunger winning out. He loved attention from the right people. My ex, Hwan, was not one of those. Really, I should have seen it sooner.

Once I'd taken off my jacket and shoes, I scooped up Percy and went to check out this match.

With how close I was getting to my heat, I was beginning to wonder if I'd get matched with anyone decent for my heat.

I didn't want to give it to just anyone.

I needed that spark of attraction for sex, a connection outside of pheromones and beauty.

While I'd been walking, another message from the app had arrived.

Mate Match

Congratulations, Jae, we have a rare 94% compatibility match for you. [Click here to](#)

open your Mate Matched profile.

I clicked on the link provided and waited for a moment for the information to load.

Mate Match profile for Curtis Taylor.

Curtis is an alpha of 32. He is currently single, works as a home renovations contractor, does not subscribe to any religion, and his ethnicity is described as Black.

His likes: Relaxing after a hard day with good food and great company. I like to read fantasy novels.

His dislikes: Curtis has left this section blank.

Curtis' personal statement:

I am a family oriented alpha looking for an omega who would like a long-term thing.

My business is running well, I've got plenty of friends, but I feel like my life is missing a special someone.

My friends describe me as a soft alpha, whatever that means. They said to put it because it's relevant.

Oh, the picture was cute! In it was a dark-skinned man with a slightly round face, close cropped black hair, a wide smile with bright straight white teeth.

His smile was so genuine and warm, it invited me to stare at him a little longer.

From the pic, I could see that while Curtis was active, the man liked to eat, with some extra padding around the tummy area.

Honestly, I preferred a guy with a little meat on his bones.

I liked to cook, a throwback from when I made things with my mom growing up.

Nothing made me happier than to see someone eating my food.

First impressions: I liked Curtis. He looked like a straightforward alpha. He wanted a family! Plus, fantasy books meant we'd have plenty to talk about.

There was a button at the bottom of the profile. "Do you want to accept this match?" I clicked yes, and was returned to the app where there was a chat function. Already I'd been accepted by Curtis. Another good sign. He'd messaged me.

Curtis

Hi, how are you? I'm nervous. You're my first match on this app.

Well, that was adorable. For a first impression, that was a fantastic start.

Jae

Hi Curtis! I'm having a great day. How are you? I see from your profile you like fantasy books. What's your favorite?

I didn't expect a reply for a while, so it was a surprise that I got one when I was making a cup of tea.

Curtis

Wow! Straight in with the hard questions. I guess that depends on if you mean high fantasy or more paranormal? I'll read anything but one book and movie I return to is

The Last Unicorn. Loved it as a kid and I still can't find anything I love as much.

His pick wasn't something I'd heard of before.

Not unusual. My parents hadn't exactly encouraged us to read fantasy growing up.

They were nonfiction and biography people.

When I was in my teens, I'd discovered a love for graphic novels.

I hadn't looked back since. It took me a moment to look up the book and the animated movie.

That was a great choice, judging by the synopsis and reviews. The animation looked beautiful.

Jae

The animation is stunning! I can see why you like it so much.

His reply was fairly instant.

Curtis

Maybe one of our dates could be watching it?

I replied with a broad grin on my face.

Jae

Yeah, I think I'd like that.

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Two

Curtis

Grace waggled my phone in front of my face, unlocking it. “You’ve got a match!”

My fingers paused on the keyboard. We were in my tiny office, barely big enough for the filing cabinets, wide desk, and three people, though it was enough.

The company I’d started eight years ago had grown from a single person, me, to a crew of twelve.

It was a rapidly growing operation thanks to my employees’ hard work ethic and our fair pricing.

There were two other supervisors now, each running small teams. We were kept busy and were in constant demand.

Sure, part of that was the quality of work.

Though I truly believed it was the amount of omegas on staff which set us apart from other home renovation companies in the area.

There was one on every team. Grace was on mine, while Marty led another.

If anyone asked me, I’d say Grace was the best damn electrician you could find in the state, I’d put money on it.

Marty, my best friend and longest employee, flashed me a look of surprise. “You let her do it?”

“You say let like I had a choice,” I drawled. Hopefully Grace understood it was affectionate. We were still finding our feet with each other, figuring out our growing friendship and what our limits were. I took her signing me up for a dating app as a sign that she was comfortable with me.

She chuckled. “You didn’t! My husband’s brother swears by this one.

He was mated within three months! Can you believe it?

” Grace lounged back in her seat. She was still a little pale after her last heat.

The crew were great with understanding when our omega staff had to take time off for heats.

We were pretty evenly spread with alphas, betas, and omegas and most had experience of their parents, siblings, or friends going through heats to be sympathetic.

Besides, it was dangerous to have an omega in heat at work, especially with building materials, machinery, and crap.

Having been friends with Marty for so long, I knew that from experience.

Hopefully this time, Grace’s heat would stick and they would get their hoped for baby.

We’d only have her part time after her baby leave, but it was better than losing her to the competition.

She was also free to work more if she chose.

We'd play it by ear when the baby arrived.

I was thinking positively that there was a baby in there for them because I knew she and her husband wanted it so badly.

It was one thing which drew me to her in the interview, her honesty was refreshing.

She had straight up told me she and her husband wanted a family, and if that was a problem, not to hire her. I gave her the job on the spot.

"So? Are you interested to see who you've been matched with?" Grace asked.

"I know I am. 'Bout time you went on a date. It's been like three years since you last had a relationship." Marty would know. The beta I'd dated hadn't liked my friend at all. Didn't get his or his daughter's place in my life. That made him pretty unlikable in my eyes. We hadn't lasted long.

"Okay, give me the phone," I said, fingers reaching out for the device.

The app was already open, though not the notification, Grace had left that for me.

Mate Match

Congratulations, Curtis, we have a rare 94% compatibility match for you. [Click here](#) to open your Mate Matched profile .

I opened the profile straight away and nearly closed it again when I saw the guy's photo. He was much too cute for me, even if the photo was a tad blurry.

Seeing the others waiting expectantly, I read out the profile.

Mate Match profile summary for Jae Lee.

Jae is a male omega of 28. He is currently single, works as an illustrator, does not subscribe to any religion and his ethnicity is described as Asian, specifically Korean.

His likes: Movies, books, art, my cat, time with friends, going out to eat, learning about other cultures.

His dislikes: People who don't like cats! The party scene.

Jae's personal statement:

I think I'm pretty easy-going and open to new experiences. I'm looking for a male alpha for a long-term, monogamous relationship.

My ideal alpha is one who wants to protect omega rights, would prefer a cozy night in over one at a club, and is prepared to playfully argue anime ships with me.

"Korean?" Grace mused. "Is he hot?"

Turning my phone, I showed both of them the picture. Grace whistled low. "Damn," Marty remarked.

"Outta my league."

Grace leaned over to smack my face lightly. "None of that. You're cute and one hell of a catch." Marty fist bumped her in agreement.

"What she said," Marty added. "I know Tag did a number on your confidence, but

you've got so much going for you. Jae would be lucky to end up with an alpha like you."

"Does this mean you're looking to date again?" Grace wondered, leaning into Marty. They'd struck up such a great friendship in the months she'd been working with us.

My best friend hesitated. He'd been single aside from a few short-term things since he'd gotten pregnant in his early twenties.

Marty had met an alpha who wanted to take him through his heat.

What he hadn't wanted was the child he'd created with Marty, leaving the omega to raise their daughter alone.

Marty had discovered he was pregnant too late to do anything about it, though he'd said he would have kept the baby, no matter how difficult raising her alone was.

"Not yet. Let's get Curtis mated off first, alright? Then we can think about an alpha to handle all this." He pointed a finger at himself with a grin.

"Have you two never thought—" Grace began.

"No," I said along with Marty. "I love him, but no. He's my best friend. We just wouldn't work like that."

"What he said," Marty agreed.

"Okay, whatever. A match this high is amazing! Are you going to message him?"

"Yeah, just not with you two underfoot."

“Guess that’s our cue to leave.” Marty grinned, showing there were no hard feelings.

Once they both left the office, I took my time over my message. I hoped Jae would like my profile and reply. Butterflies fluttered in my gut at the thought of meeting him. There was just something about his profile that appealed to me.

Somehow, I was still surprised when he replied to me, going in with a difficult question straight off the bat. Figuring out the answer took me a little while, especially since I had a couple of calls to take. I worried Jae would think I wasn’t interested.

When he liked my answer and my fishing for a date, I felt spurred on. Was it silly to feel a connection to this virtual stranger?

We shot back and forth with the basics about our families and jobs. Not all that much information outside of what was in the profile honestly. It took me an hour of back and forth before I dared ask him out to dinner. The force of my smile hurt my cheeks! I couldn’t remember smiling so wide.

“I’ve got a good feeling, Mama,” I said to her picture.

Even though we had a date set up, we still messaged back and forth for a while.

Curtis

Favorite Color? Mine is green. Like grass or leaves. We don’t do landscaping, but I like seeing the yards when they get people in to make them nice. I really should get mine done properly.

Jae

You own a house? I’ve got an apartment. I’d love a place to grow some vegetables!

My favorite color is blue. What's your favorite season? I like spring when everything is growing.

Curtis

Yeah, I was really lucky with this place and renovated it myself in between jobs when I was starting out. Fall is my favorite. The colors are pretty. I should ask if you have any allergies or foods you don't like, so I can make a reservation for our date.

He was gone for a long time. I worried I'd put him off.

I had the feeling I was going to be on edge until our date, stressing about putting him off me before we could meet properly.

Then I reminded myself I had a lot going for me, like my friends had said.

Tag getting into my head and ruining things couldn't be allowed to happen.

Finally, he replied.

Jae

That's awesome! Yeah, fall is a great choice. It's cuddling up with a book or a movie weather. No allergies that I can think of. I don't eat a lot of red meat. As long as there's other options on the menu, I'm pretty easy to feed. Obviously, being Korean, I can handle a little spice.

Well, that made it pretty easy. There were plenty of places I could take him. Once I got home, I spent an hour looking at restaurants in the area before picking a place that I knew had decent pheromone control and great food. I'd never left the place hungry. I called and was lucky to get a table.

Curtis

Our reservation is set. Looking forward to meeting you.

In the message I sent the pin for the place and included the online menu. I hoped he would like where I'd picked. It wasn't the fanciest of places, but I wasn't that kind of guy and I didn't want to set expectations early on.

Luckily, Jae seemed to be on board with my choice.

Jae

Oh! That place looks nice. I've walked past it a few times and thought about eating there. I can't wait to meet you, is that strange to say? We've only been talking for a day. I just feel like we'll have a good time on our date.

Jae

Okay, this might ruin the vibe. A serious question for you. What are you looking for in an ideal partner?

I looked at the question for a long moment until I forced myself to shrug off the worry.

Either Jae would like me for me, or we would have our date and it wouldn't come to anything.

I'd be disappointed, sure, but at least I'd have tried.

Jae was way out of my league, still I couldn't help thinking we could be good together.

Curtis

I'm looking to get to know you, not some image, so it's okay to be real with me.

What am I looking for? A guy who wants to spend Sunday brunch with my family, or a day picking out plants for our garden.

I want someone to come home to. Someone to cook for and with.

A guy I can share my life with. Who has interests, opinions, and thoughts he's gonna share with me.

A mate. I want a family at some point. If that's not biological kids, I'm open to adopting, though I want children to feature in my future.

I want a partner to navigate life with and to hold at night.

Love. A long time of love, like my parents had.

Being vulnerable wasn't easy. My knee-jerk response was to put down something more benign, yet that went against what I was hoping to build with Jae. Starting out with lies would do us both a disservice.

Jae

Kids, huh? Me too. Maybe Mate Match has some things right, because you sound exactly like the kind of alpha I've been looking for. Another heavy question for you. How do you feel about omegas working after they have babies?

I smiled when I thought of Marty. He'd worked his ass off to finish trade school, albeit a couple of years later than me. My dad had helped him out with childcare until

Marty was working full-time and got Maddy into daycare.

Curtis

My best friend, who happens to work for me supervising his own team, is a single omega parent. I hope I've made it easier for him to work and raise his daughter.

Jae

Curtis, you might just be too good to be true. I can't wait to meet you on our date.

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Three

Jae

Brady took a seat at the table opposite me, setting his full beer glass down. “Okay, I’ve changed my mind. I’m no longer supporting this. Are you sure it’s a good idea? This guy could be anyone!”

I leveled him with a look. “It’s a date, not a marriage proposal. Besides, using the app was your idea in the first place.”

He waved a hand. “I know, but I’ve had a change of heart after the last date. All week I’ve been worried about the whole thing. I’ve hardly heard a peep from you!” he muttered accusingly. He took a sip of his beer while he waited for me to answer.

“Yeah, I’m sorry. It’s just... well, we’ve been chatting, my match and me.

He seems really great. Weren’t you the one who said it was time I got back out there?

” Brady grimaced into his drink. “I can’t exactly hope someone will just fall at my feet ready to date me just so I have a convenient heat partner. ”

There was more to me signing up for the app than just meeting someone to take me through my next heat, yet I wasn’t ready to discuss my growing feeling of loneliness with Brady. I had other troubles to worry about.

Over the last few weeks, as my heat approached, Brady had been lecturing me about

getting someone to get me through it.

My last heat was a nightmare, making it more important to have a partner.

They were almost unbearable due to my troubles with the hormones.

While I still had a couple of weeks to go until the next one started, it was a pretty heavy concern of mine.

I tried to console myself that there was plenty of time to find someone I could trust to get me through it.

At least, I hoped. That was why I was about to meet my first proper date in four years.

I wasn't calling the last match a date. It was over before it began.

It was like the first pancake, right? Didn't count.

Brady's frown deepened. "That's not what I mean at all. I... are you really sure you're over Hwan? Is going through your heat with some random alpha a good idea?"

"Wasn't this your idea in the first place?" I reminded him once more. My tone was slightly sharper than I'd intended. I made an apologetic face, which Brady waved off.

My friend's concern, though touching, was utterly unnecessary.

I'd been over Hwan the moment he'd told me he'd gotten his affair partner pregnant.

They were now married and had a darling little baby.

Everyone around me could hardly stop talking about it!

Especially my damn extended family, mainly my grandparents, who insisted it was my fault Hwan had replaced me with someone who wanted to give him a baby, even if there was an overlap between us breaking up and them being together.

They didn't see the cheating as a problem, though, when he'd gotten the outcome they wanted for me.

It wasn't that I didn't want a baby, I just hadn't been ready then, not that Hwan had even asked me!

Neither of us had been willing to accept it wasn't working and risk our families' displeasure when we inevitably broke up.

Our parents had set us up because we both came from Korean backgrounds to ensure our babies were purely Korean. Yeah, gross, right?

My upbringing instilled in me a respect for my elders. My parents were good people, though led by my grandparents, particularly my mom's parents, who had returned to Korea once their children were all married.

The culture and traditions I had grown up with now felt distant to me.

All I'd known was my life in the US. Sure, I had been to Seoul and my grandparents' house in Gangnam many times, but they felt I had become too Americanized.

They lectured my parents constantly about me attending university in Portland and studying a political sciences degree because I wanted to improve omega rights.

Seeing as I became a book illustrator thanks to those art classes I'd ended up taking,

maybe they'd had a point about my changed major—I'd left college with an art degree instead.

Yet, despite changing majors, I still believed omega rights had a ways to go.

I just knew now that it had to come from alphas pushing the change, not one omega with some political science credits.

Plus, I loved my job. Made a decent living out of it, despite what Hwan or anyone else said on the matter.

Since we had evolved to have a secondary gender at the start of the twentieth century, there had been so many clashes over rights.

Men, particularly those who became omegas, suddenly found themselves being treated far differently than they were used to, often losing rights they were accustomed to.

Then there was the issue of alpha females.

They, with their dominant personalities and strong pheromones, clashed with beta males.

The structure of our society had to change.

It took decades before it settled and there was still a long way to go when it came down to things like employment.

Omega males were blocked from professions such as the police and military because an alpha assailant could overpower them with their pheromones.

As science caught up, giving us heat blockers, pheromone suppressants, and other useful tools to even the playing field, there was a push for more equality.

“I’m just worried you’ve left it too late to really get to know someone properly before your heat,” Brady anxiously pointed out, bringing me back to my date and nerves.

“Hmm, I get that, but I’ve been chatting with this guy for a few days now and I feel like there could be something there.

We had a ninety-four percent match rate.

” He really did seem to be the sweetest alpha.

We liked a lot of the same stuff and I’d found him to be easy to talk to.

His texts were becoming the best part of my day.

“Really?” Brady sounded optimistic. Given my history with the app, I didn’t blame him. I’d rejected more than a few potential candidates. “That’s high, isn’t it? The closest you had before was like eighty-two.” Trust Brady to remember that! He was such a good friend.

“Yeah, it is. Based on the quiz we both filled out, Curtis matches high on most of the segments.”

Mate Match was one of the better apps out there, in my opinion, and I’d tried a few before Brady had told me about it.

They were for people looking for love, not just a hookup.

Hell, if I really wanted to, I could hire an alpha for my heat.

Sex work had long been decriminalized. I just preferred to get to know someone before I fell into bed with them.

Besides, this wasn't just about finding someone for my heat. I wanted someone to love.

I'd gone through the process of signing up weeks ago after Brady's badgering.

The quizzes were endless about my values, what I wanted in a partner, even my hypothetical parenting style!

All of it had been exhausting, borderline invasive, but I reasoned if it gave me a decent match, then it was worth the pain.

Okay, so maybe the first few matches hadn't worked out for me.

Those alphas had been entirely too pushy for my liking.

A couple hadn't even ended up in a date.

Curtis, though, he gave me a good vibe. His messages were thoughtful, considered.

He let me set the pace for our interactions, while somehow making me feel special when he replied in the middle of a workday.

We seemed to have a love of books and movies in common.

He was open to watching anime with me. It was something he'd admitted to being new to.

He loved fantasy books, so I was sure I could bring him over to the dark side with

some pretty amazing isekai anime.

I was open to watching or reading his favorites.

Just the fact I was already planning out what we could watch together left me hopeful. Being with Hwan had taught me to trust my gut, and my gut was telling me Curtis was a good one. I hoped he felt the same about me.

“Okay, you’ve done your friend thing and checked in.

Now it’s time for you to buzz off.” I tilted my head in the direction of the door so Brady would get the hint.

I really didn’t want him around when Curtis arrived.

There were still a few minutes before our date started.

Nerves had me agreeing to meet Brady for a drink ahead of my date.

While I didn’t want to get drunk and make a poor first impression, I did want to take the edge off.

“Charming. Who said I was here for you?” He got up, beer in hand.

“You did. Should I read the message back?” I picked up my phone, ready to show him the proof. Until Curtis arrived, I wouldn’t touch my drink. I hadn’t eaten all that much throughout the day, too anxious over the upcoming date. My stomach felt off. I hoped it was just first date nerves.

“No! That’s fine.” He took a step away from me as if I was about to throw my phone at him.

“I’m so grateful...” I tried to soften the blow. Brady meant well, but sometimes he was a little overbearing. It all came from a good place, though.

“Am I overstepping?” He came closer again.

I winced. “Maybe a little.”

Brady’s arms wrapped around me. The other omega was smaller than me, wiry though. Not to be underestimated.

“Sorry, I just worry.”

Pressing our wrists together, I scented him in an attempt to soothe him. “And I love you for it. Seriously, you’re the best friend I could hope for, but my date’ll be here soon, and he won’t want me if he sees you!” I teased.

“Pft. As if. Besides, as I was trying to tell you, I’ve got a date of my own!”

“Where?” I tried to scan the bar.

Brady pointed to a couple just walking in. Both were large, probably alphas, from so far away it was difficult to tell, and they were clearly involved romantically. Their fingers were twined together, gold bands shone on their fingers.

“Two? Are you sure about this?”

“Absolutely! I met them through work. Enjoy your date!” He set his half empty beer on the bar and skipped away without a backwards glance to greet the newcomers with a kiss to the cheek.

The open delight and hunger the alphas—I’d decided they were both alphas—had on

their faces when they saw Brady relaxed me some. Seeing how they moved around him to put him at the center made something inside me ache.

“Hey, are you Jae?” a voice cut into my thoughts.

I turned to get my first look at Curtis in the flesh.

He was just as handsome as his picture. Softer somehow, like his inner kindness hadn’t translated into the photo he’d sent.

Tall, with warm sepia colored skin. His hair was buzzed short and he’d clearly dressed nicely for our date with a light gray blazer over a white button up.

His slacks were well tailored. He had even ensured his shoes were shiny.

Deep brown eyes twinkled as he took me in.

His grin on those kissable lips wavered slightly with his nerves. He looked sweet. So far, so good.

“I am. Nice to meet you, Curtis.”

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Four

Curtis

Oh, shit! Jae was gorgeous, like outta my league levels of stunning.

What the fuck was he doing on a dating app when he could have his pick of any alpha out there?

Looking around myself, I clocked maybe three other alphas who'd be down for taking him out if I fucked this up.

I was so going to fuck this up! There was no way—

Get it together , I mentally berated myself. I stole another look at Jae and our surroundings while I tried to focus on what he was saying.

A strange feeling of possessiveness swept over me at the looks they were shooting him. He was here for me, not them, I reminded myself, so I shoved the feeling back. Sometimes my lack of self-confidence was my worst enemy. I didn't want to scare Jae off by being an alphahole.

His pic on his dating profile hadn't done him justice at all.

Didn't show his bright smile, beautifully clear golden tawny skin, angular features or trim body.

His eyes were so dark they were almost black, they were stunning, and his dark hair was styled like in those K-dramas I'd caught Jennie watching.

He honestly could have been an actor or a K-pop idol. He was certainly pretty enough.

What the hell was he doing with someone like me?

While I was active in my job, I knew I was carrying a little extra around the middle.

My eyes were okay. According to my sister, they were my best feature next to my mouth.

I had straight white teeth. My mama made sure I got braces when I needed them.

She hadn't been there to see them removed, but I thanked her often for making me take care of my teeth.

In my line of work, renovating homes, the customer needed to see a friendly smile to set them at ease. When they gave me their homes to upgrade, they gave me their trust. I needed to look dependable because that's what I built my brand, my reputation, on.

Seemed like it worked on Jae, too, since he beamed at me, immediately soothing my nerves. Everything would be fine if he was smiling at me like that.

"Your table is ready if you want to come over," a server said, distracting me from my date.

Being a gentleman, I held out my arm for him. He took it, squeezing gently with another happy grin. There was a zing of electricity between us when we touched. Even over the pheromone blockers in the restaurant, I caught a trace of his enticing

scent.

His touch sent a feeling of rightness over me. It felt like we'd been doing this for a while. Like this was a practiced motion between us. His hand was always meant to fit there. By the way he leaned into me as I led him to our table, he felt the same.

I pushed in his chair after he was seated, earning me a soft look and a muttered, "thank you."

So far, so good. Like Mama always said, manners got you far in life.

"Are you as nervous as me?" I asked him as I pretended to scan the menu, too interested in looking at him instead. He just had such a captivating face! His lips held a slight pout without him seemingly trying. I wondered if they were as soft as they looked.

"Not anymore, actually." He was gazing straight at me, studying my features just as hard as I was with his.

"Really?"

"Yeah." He let out a low laugh. "Chatting with you on the app isn't the same as meeting in person, I get that. It's just I feel like I already know you, and well..." Jae blushed, the pink on his cheeks melted my heart further. I was desperate for this date to turn into more dates.

"Well?" I prompted, eager for his answer.

"I like you already. Is that weird?"

Relief flooded me. Whatever this was, it clearly wasn't one sided. "Not at all. We've

barely started our date and I already want more dates!”

Jae laughed. “What if I have really bad table manners?”

“Then I’ll cook for you next time.” Having Jae in my house would be nerve-racking, but worth it for more of his smiles.

He smirked. “Good answer.”

The server appeared to take our order. We had to ask them to come back since we were too busy chatting about our days to have properly looked at the menu.

“Have you been here before?” Jae asked.

When I said that I had, he asked for recommendations. “You said you eat meat, right? What about dairy?”

“I don’t eat a lot of red meat, but I’m not restricted in what I eat by allergies or anything.”

“That’s right, I remember you said in our messages.” His eyes practically glowed with happiness. Marty and Grace would be so happy I’d remembered details about Jae. They’d coached me to prove I paid attention to him. “Any preferences?”

“Maybe something light? I thought it was my nerves, but my stomach feels a little off.”

Shit! Was he okay? Was he wanting to bail on our date? I’d be disappointed, sure, though I’d understand. He couldn’t help being unwell. “Huh. Are you sure you want to try to eat? I can take a raincheck on dinner if you don’t feel well.”

“No! You’re sweet, but that’s not necessary. I’m enjoying being with you.” He picked up his menu and looked it over. “I’d rather try to eat. Maybe a salad?”

His words gave me a measure of comfort. He did look paler than before. I hoped he wasn’t getting sick. Did he have anyone close by to look after him if he was?

I tried to make a joke and lighten the mood to make him feel better. “Well, I could do with eating a few less burgers and more salads, so—”

“Stop.” Jae’s face was stern. “I’m sure you’ve heard a lot of body shaming shit over your lifetime. Don’t put yourself down, okay? You want the burger? Have the burger. You’ve got an active job, and the cuddly middle you’ve got going on is sorta hot, not going to lie.”

“Really?” I didn’t know what deity had put Jae in front of me, but I thanked them all.

Jae’s face flushed, a sheen of sweat beaded his brow. He took out a tissue from his pocket and dabbed at it before wincing.

“Hardly attractive.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” My fingers itched to do something to help him.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Is it hot in here?”

The restaurant was a perfect temperature for me and I ran a little warmer than most, so it was probably on the cooler side.

This place was one of those nicer chains which had the pheromone control and decent AC.

I liked visiting them so I wasn't blasted with alpha and omega pheromones all the time.

It was common now to wear neutralizing scents, though they only worked short term and often were overpowered by a powerful emotion like lust. It wasn't something I liked to rely on, hence a decent place with climate control.

"Would you like me to see if we can move outside? Might be harder to talk, but if you'd be more comfortable..."

"I'll be okay, thank you." Jae flashed a grateful smile. It was gratifying he was persisting with his date even though he wasn't at his best. "Oh, my goodness, I feel terrible about this. You're exactly like your profile. Things were going well, and now there's this. Whatever it is."

"It's fine. As long as you want to continue our date..."

"I do."

When the server returned, we both put in our orders.

Mine, a burger, since he'd been so determined I get one, Jae's a light chicken salad.

He ordered a virgin cocktail, and I followed his lead.

His drink sounded delicious. Besides, while I liked the occasional beer, I preferred not to drink on dates.

We chatted a little more while we waited for our food. I took a sip of the cocktail, only to be assaulted by the tangy flavor.

“Wow!”

“Right?”

Jae looked brighter now that he had a drink. Maybe it was a blood sugar thing? Whatever it was, the sugar appeared to help. We talked about a few things while we waited for our food. He told me about his project he’d just wrapped up and the transition from a political science degree to an art one.

“Both were a waste of time, according to my mom’s parents.”

“Do they have a lot of influence in your life?” I wanted to understand the dynamic since it was different from mine.

“They try. Mom pushed me towards a couple of matches they made for me. My ex—”

“Hwan? The one who cheated?”

“Yeah, him. I feel bad you know that already.” Jae grimaced. “Isn’t it breaking dating etiquette to talk about an ex on the first date?”

“Well, you told me about him before our date, explaining why you were wary and why you were on the app, so if I wasn’t put off then... I wouldn’t worry. You can tell me anything. I like learning stuff about you,” I told him honestly, meaning every word.

Two flags of red graced his cheeks as he blushed once more. He was so damn attractive. I was punching above my weight with him, but if he was happy to be with me, I wasn’t going to question it, just enjoy it while it lasted.

Our food arrived, interrupting the conversation. We thanked the server before trying our meals.

“This is good!” Jae ate a piece of chicken covered in the dressing, his hand covering his mouth as he spoke. “Sorry, hungry.”

He ate like he was starving until he was finished.

Seeing I’d barely started, he gave a nervous laugh.

It was actually pretty cute how quickly he’d eaten.

Instead of making a comment, because I would have been so embarrassed if someone did it to me, I cut some of my burger off and put it on his plate.

Then I followed it with half of my fries.

“But—”

“No.” I fixed him with a firm look. “I can share. If I’m still hungry after, we can order dessert.” He tentatively ate a fry, making me smile. The alpha in me loved feeding this omega, seeing to his needs.

Jae smiled. “I’m really glad I accepted the date. You...” he paused, looking for words. “Curtis, you’re really great.”

“But?” I’d been waiting for the other shoe to drop.

“There’s no ‘but’ waiting here. I like you.” His eyes met mine. Determination filled his expression. “Really, I do. And I think we should have another date after this one.”

My heart felt like it was beating double time. I was so damn happy I could burst from it. “I’d like that.” It was a struggle to keep it simple, not to pour out all my feelings.

Happy with my words, he nodded, then tucked into the burger and fries with some seriously sexy moans of pleasure. I wanted to adjust myself just from the sounds coming out of his pretty mouth. Seeing him so pleased with something small, like sharing food, made my day.

My friends always said I was a caretaker at heart.

This was what I wanted in a relationship with an omega.

Seeing a need in them and fixing it without being asked.

Jae seemed to be the type to allow me to do that as long as I wasn’t overbearing.

I was pretty sure he’d tell me if I crossed a line.

He struck me as having and keeping firm boundaries.

As long as he talked to me, I could cope with that.

“Um,” Jae suddenly looked concerned. His face paled again, and there was a new layer of sweat on his brow. “I think I know what’s wrong with me. Oh, fuck.”

I tensed, instantly on alert. Without thinking, I was half out of my seat. “What? Is there anything I can do?”

“Oh, damn!” He looked panicked. “This was... I had weeks. The plan... Oh, shit.” He looked to the floor, working something out.

“Jae? Are you alright?” I slipped out of my seat to crouch next to his feet and meet his eyes. That close, the neutralizers couldn’t cover it. The reason why he’d been so off.

My omega date was in heat.

“Um, Curtis...?”

“You’re in heat,” I said in an undertone. We needed to avoid too many people figuring it out. It could be dangerous for him in such a vulnerable state.

“I am. It wasn’t supposed to be for a while.” He gripped my hands tightly. “Maybe it’s your pheromones... When we touched, I scented you and, wow, you smell great,” he whispered. He leaned forward to take in more of my pheromones.

“You’re getting distracted.” I looked around.

So far, no one was paying much attention to us.

Maybe they thought we were having a sweet moment.

I had to figure this out to keep him safe.

“Do you have a plan? For handling your heat, I mean.” We continued to speak in low voices, though I was sure half the place was now staring at us because I was still kneeling at an omega’s feet, having quiet conversation.

“Uh, um... you were the plan,” he said, sheepishly. “I was hoping that by the time my heat came, you’d feel comfortable enough to take me through it. With contraception, obviously.” He winced.

“Obviously,” I muttered dryly. I was honored he thought I could be that for him. It made me feel like he was also thinking long term.

“This is so out of the blue.” He hesitated. “Really, I shouldn’t ask you, but... I can’t do it alone again.” Another pause. “Would you...Do you still want to? Take me through my heat?” Jae met my eyes. “I think... I know I’d like you to, if you’d be willing.”

Fuck! He was going to melt me into a puddle with how earnest and sweet he was. His pheromones were doing a number on me, too. The sheer amount of trust he was placing in me was a heady thing.

“Willing? I’d be honored you’d trust me so soon. I’ll happily take you through your heat.” It was crazy to do this with a guy I just met in person, yet I felt like I knew Jae. I was so attracted to him. The pull was wild! If he was sure about it, then I’d give him the best damn heat he’d ever had.

Taking his hand, I helped him to his feet. I got my wallet out and put down more than enough to cover our meals, plus a hefty tip without waiting for the bill.

Jae came into my arms, tucking his head under my chin. “I knew you’d be a great pick.”

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Five

Jae

Shit! Shit! Shit! Could there be a worse time to go into heat? I had to force myself to take a breath and calm down. Panicking about my situation was going to help no one, especially me. How could I freak out when I felt so safe with Curtis?

Throughout our date, he had given me all the green flags.

The eye contact, the conversation, his honesty, were all so appealing.

When he'd cut a large piece of his burger and given it to me along with more than half his fries?

I was done for. There was no one sweeter than him.

He made our date so effortless even when I hadn't been feeling all that great.

In his Mate Match bio, he said his friends told him to add that he was a soft alpha, apparently not understanding the appeal. The man was a natural caretaker, and it was just so damn attractive it had sent me into heat weeks early. That or his potent pheromones. Likely a combination of both.

At a young age, usually our early teens, when we presented with our secondary gender, omegas were taught that overpowering pheromones indicated a strong alpha.

Curtis' weren't massively intense, they just wrapped all around me like a warm hug.

They gave a feeling of safety unlike anything I'd sensed before in an alpha.

That's just what it took for my system to lie down and beg to be impregnated, I guess.

There was no other reason I could think of for me to go into heat so early.

My cycle had never been so off! This was weeks earlier than usual when I could usually set a clock by my heats.

Ever since they'd begun at nineteen, they'd been regular.

Curtis, naturally, handled it perfectly. Of course he had. I shouldn't have expected anything less. When he embraced me, reassured me? I knew trusting my gut about him was right. Asking him to take me through this felt good.

Well played, Mate Match, well played. Their algorithm knew its stuff for sure. I had to remember to leave them a good review, no matter how things turned out between me and Curtis. They'd done their part, everything from now on was between me and him.

"Would you rather we go to a hotel or my house? Mine isn't far and there's a drugstore open late on the way. I'm not going to suggest your place. I want you to feel free to leave at any time if it's not working out. Your safety is important."

Where had this angel come from? He was almost too good to be true, though I could see the strain around his eyes over holding back. My pheromones were affecting him, yet he thought only of my comfort first, even while he struggled.

"Wow, um, wow. Your place would be better." The heat was making thoughts hard,

and other things harder.

All I wanted to do was strip off my clothes and have Curtis fill me over and over until my heat broke.

That primitive part of my brain wanted him to leave something behind, so he would always have to take care of me.

Giving over control to an alpha I barely knew probably wasn't smart. My friends would have something to say about it. Which reminded me.

"Oh! My friend is here." I suddenly remembered Brady had his date in the same place.

I knew I had to tell him where I was going.

He would be so mad if I left and went MIA all weekend.

I had no clue how long this heat would take either.

"You need to come with me. Tell him where you live. He needs to feed my cat."

Percy, my Maine Coon, would be furious with me if I left him for a couple of days with whatever crunch he had left in the bowl. I'd be unable to relax and enjoy my heat while worrying about him.

"Okay, where is he?"

I pointed out Brady to Curtis, who wrapped an arm around me, keeping me steady as we walked across the restaurant towards my friend.

“Sorry to interrupt,” Curtis said in a polite tone as we reached the table. “Jae would like Brady to take care of his cat for him while he is at my house for the next day or two.”

Not shouting I was in heat gave him big points. “Here.” He gave Brady both his phone number and address with a friendly smile. “I promise to look after Jae right. Will you manage to take care of Percy, or should I—?”

For his part, Brady was subdued as he took in my alpha’s words. He cut Curtis off with an assurance about Percy. He loved my cat. “It’s no problem. I’ll check in on him tomorrow.” Brady had a key to my apartment for emergencies.

He tapped away on his phone. Mine buzzed in my pocket. Curtis stepped away so I could get it. Now that the wave of heat had ebbed slightly as it prepared for the next wave, I felt steadier, clearer headed.

Brady

Are you sure? Will you be safe?

Jae

100% Curtis is perfect. I trust him

Brady

Really? After everything, I thought you’d be more wary. Check in with me please

Jae

I will

“Ready to go?” Curtis asked once it was clear we were finished with our private conversation.

“I’m ready.” While I was also a little nervous, it wasn’t about my decision to be with Curtis. Him, I was sure about. It was just the first time with a new person nerves.

“Have fun!” Brady called with a soft smile.

Curtis took my hand as we left the restaurant. It was only then I realized Brady’s alphas didn’t say a word during the entire thing. I frowned.

“Sorry our date got interrupted,” I said, the faint prickle of another wave bringing me back to the moment.

“We can always have another.” His smile was so genuine and kind it took my breath away.

Most drugstores carried emergency contraceptive kits alongside the more traditional types of contraceptives.

When we had evolved, there was a leap in research leading to breakthroughs in medicine.

It had helped doctors cure many medical conditions, including all STIs and STDs, which was lucky since there was a protein in an alpha’s ejaculate that an omega needed to get through their heat.

Some omegas, like me, didn’t react well to the synthetic kind which could be bought for omegas who either did not have or did not want a partner to take them through their heats.

There were contraceptive pills you could take in the run up to your heat if you had notice. Barrier methods like condoms where you would ingest the synthetic protein instead. Hormonal implants, heat blockers, all sorts of ways to prevent a pregnancy or even a heat.

Unfortunately for me, I was sort of allergic to the implant and heat blockers. The hormones upset my stomach and gave me chronic headaches, so I had to avoid them. Meaning not having my heat just wasn't possible and a synthetic protein just plain didn't work on me, leaving me miserable.

I was what was called a dominant omega because of that.

My pheromones could be particularly alluring to alphas, especially dominant ones, like I suspected Curtis was.

Had he ever been tested? It wasn't standard to check.

You either presented as omega, alpha, or stayed a beta.

I was only checked for my hormone levels when I began heats and had problems with the contraceptives.

My dominant presentation shocked everyone since I was late starting my heats.

Most dominants presented later and started heats pretty soon after, but I had presented as normal at fourteen, slowly changing and developing until my heats turned up at nineteen.

It had taken me a couple of years to figure out what worked for me. If I'd had more time to prepare for my heat, the pill would have worked fine. I could deal with the headaches for a week or so, as unpleasant as it could be.

My impromptu heat had robbed me of time to protect myself. Luckily, there was an emergency option.

I pulled Curtis to a stop just before the drugstore. I could see the sign was lit up, telling me it was still open.

“Are you okay with taking DuoStop?” The popular last minute contraceptive from AlphaPharm worked on slowing an alpha’s sperm and preventing the omega’s egg from implanting. It was sold in liquid form to be injected into a person’s thigh no less than thirty minutes before sex.

Apparently, some alphas didn’t like taking it because their orgasms weren’t as strong on it. You’d think they’d be more concerned with not having to pay child support, but whatever. I just hoped Curtis was on board.

“Oh, I thought you’d want to use condoms. Either is fine with me.” He gave a careless shrug, the movement jostling me slightly since we were closely pressed together. His pheromones wrapped around me comfortingly.

I briefly explained my situation along with the surprise heat limiting my options.

It was embarrassing, though necessary, to be so candid about my medical history and heats with someone so new to my life.

Yet not telling Curtis felt unfair. How could he be expected to take care of me properly if I couldn’t communicate my needs?

“Whatever you want is fine with me.” He scrubbed the back of his neck nervously. “I’m not the best with needles. D’you think you could stick me with my dose?”

“Sure.” I grinned, happy to have such an easygoing alpha with me. There was no way

Hwan would have been so calm about the situation.

The next wave rose, bringing with it a flush to my skin.

Sweat broke out all over my body. I really wanted a shower before Curtis got anywhere near me.

My stomach cramped as my hole clenched. I could feel the slick in my underwear.

I was grateful for the absorbent layer to the briefs I'd picked out.

Designed for omegas, they kept me feeling dry even with the surge of hormones creating slickness to ready my ass for sex.

We entered the drugstore and Curtis asked for the DuoStop, but I paid for it, feeling bad he'd already paid for dinner and now we were doing this.

There was a good chance I was interrupting his entire weekend.

We were given our dosage pens, and the attendant told us how to inject ourselves.

Like those epinephrine auto injectors, we did it through our clothes.

I did mine quickly, trying not to wince at the sting, so I didn't put Curtis off.

It hurt, though, making me reluctant to hurt Curtis with his.

"Is it okay if I do his?" I asked the person behind the counter.

"Not good with needles?" the attendant asked sympathetically. "We get that a lot. You'd be surprised at how many people just don't like needles." They rounded the

desk between us. “I can do it while you distract him if both of you are okay with that?”

Curtis’ eyes met mine. “I’d much rather look at you while you don’t have that thing in your hand.”

I handed over the pen with my thanks and while they got in place, went onto my tiptoes to kiss Curtis.

He made a gasp of either pain or surprise before kissing me back.

His hand cupped the back of my neck in the barest of touches, fingers brushing over my scent gland where an alpha bite would go if he wanted to be my mate.

The bites were incredibly difficult to remove.

Stimulating the gland, particularly during sex, helped the alpha/omega pair bond, which led to a greater likelihood of a pregnancy.

The feeling of our kiss was electric. It held the promise of great chemistry in the sheets, but also genuine affection. I took in more of his pheromones, the scent fizzing through my system, leaving a pleasant warmth behind it.

We parted with a smile to find the attendant looking at us.

They were grinning so widely I was almost embarrassed for the show we gave them.

“You two are so cute! Sorry! I shouldn’t have said that.

” They blushed, made their way around us to return behind the counter, then packaged up the remains of the box folded with the relevant information.

“Please, keep this for your records just in case you need to seek medical attention because of a reaction. Duostop is ninety-nine point five percent effective. I have to remind you of the legal stuff. Don’t forget to wait thirty minutes. Best set a timer now.”

“Thanks. I understand.” I took the packet and tucked it into the inner pocket of my jacket while Curtis played with his phone before showing the ticking timer to the attendant, earning him a pleased look.

Curtis held out his hand. “Ready?”

“Yes.” I took his hand eagerly. Grateful for the grounding touch.

Together we said goodbye and left the store for Curtis’ home.

Nerves plagued me as we walked. Was I doing the right thing?

I could go home and be miserable for three to five days while my heat played out alone.

It would be shorter with an alpha, but that wasn’t the only reason to pick Curtis.

I wanted to be with him. My heat was a convenient excuse.

He had such a soothing presence about him.

I really didn’t want to go it alone. He made me feel safe and desired at the same time.

One look at him keeping pace with me despite his longer legs, a concerned expression on his handsome face, and I knew I’d made the right choice.

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Six

Jae

“Do you need to move your car?” Curtis asked as we walked towards his place. He craned his neck, looking back towards the restaurant. “I don’t want you getting a ticket for parking there too long.”

Ugh, he was the sweetest. I was happy to put him at ease. “Don’t have one.” I gave a careless shrug. “I work from home, mostly. Everything can be delivered and public transport is decent. I took a ride-share to our date.”

“Makes sense. I’ve got my truck for work.” His words were a little stilted. Awkward.

I got the feeling we were both getting in our heads a little.

This was a big deal. I was attracted to Curtis, sure, but I hadn’t been planning on jumping into bed with him on the first date, let alone going through my heat so soon.

I had really hoped we’d have time to get to know each other better, develop a relationship first.

Still, I felt like going home alone and suffering would damage whatever we had growing between us. Me showing him this trust had bolstered his confidence. Not that it was any reason to sleep with him. I wanted to. Curtis was handsome, sweet, and I felt a need to know what he’d feel like inside me.

My hole clenched around nothing, more slick leaked. I tightened my hold on Curtis' hand, feeling more uncomfortable than before and needing his grounding presence.

"Nearly there," Curtis assured me. In response to my pheromones, he leaked some. His control was decent, yet faced with a dominant omega like me, he was struggling with his hold.

Sure enough, we slowed to a stop just at the edge of his property.

The house was impressive. Maybe not much to most, but it had a fair amount of land either side of it to extend if necessary.

There was only one floor, with many gleaming windows throwing the last of the day's sun back at us.

The window trim, wide door, and sidings were all painted a sage green. It gave the house a very homey feel.

"If you want to back out now, I can drive you home." Perhaps Curtis took my silence for hesitation, which was why he offered me an out.

I looked at him, really studied his face.

His medium brown skin was slightly flushed, a sign my pheromones were doing a number on him.

His pupils were dilated and his nostrils flared as he took more of my scent in.

Curtis wasn't conventionally attractive, his nose was a little wide, his mouth slightly down turned.

He had full lips and a softer jawline, but I found I couldn't stop looking at him.

Everything about him just appealed to me.

He was taller than me, not difficult since I was about five foot seven.

Omegas were usually smaller. Curtis looked to be maybe six feet tall.

He was wide in the shoulders, slightly chubby around the middle in that soft way I'd always secretly liked, even if society dictated alphas have a certain body type.

What? I'd always liked men who enjoyed their food, okay?

Most importantly, Curtis gave great hugs, and when he kissed me, I knew I wanted more.

"No. I want you. I want to do this with you." All I could do was be honest with him. Going home, or using a service, didn't appeal, especially not with Curtis in front of me.

"Okay." He turned and led me up the path and into his place.

Inside, I got to see what the home Curtis owned looked like.

He'd already told me there were three bedrooms, one which he used as a home office.

Due to being so close, Curtis had chosen to walk to our date.

The evening was mild for spring, making our fifteen minute journey pleasant.

It was nice to have the cooler air on my skin.

The scent of flowers lingered in the air alongside the traffic and pheromones I was used to.

There was a small front yard, which was neatly kept. I imagined the backyard was the same. Inside was comfortable and clean. Nothing fancy, just homey. From where I was, I could see the living room. It was filled with overstuffed couches and armchairs, bookshelves, and a sturdy coffee table.

“You’ve got a nice place,” I offered as we stood awkwardly in the entryway. Curtis hung up my jacket next to his while I removed my shoes, seeing him toe his off.

“Thanks. Can I get you anything?”

“Can I shower? Sorry, I feel all gross.”

“No, that’s fine. Here, my bathroom is better.” I followed him to the main bedroom, where a massive bed with a navy comforter dominated the space. “I’ll just grab you a towel.” He showed me into the bathroom, his expression blank.

“Cool. Thanks.” Fuck, this was awkward. I wanted the easy affection of the drugstore back. Determined to fix things, I turned on the shower and quickly shed my clothes.

When he returned, Curtis was treated to me fully naked, half hard, and waiting for him. He took me in, his mouth hanging ajar.

“Shower with me?”

He answered by dumping his clothes on the floor with a shy smile.

Wow, he was gorgeous! He had a thin layer of chest hair, a fairly well-defined body with that extra layer of padding I loved.

He looked like he would be comfortable to lie on once we were spent.

His thighs were muscular, ass a peach, and that cock?

Damn. I was going to struggle, but it would be worth it.

His cock was long, cut, and thick. There was a vein running along his shaft I wanted to trace with my tongue. After he fucked me, though.

Suddenly, I felt so empty. I needed him.

We came together under the spray in a scorching kiss. My legs shook as I raised up on my toes to properly reach his mouth. My arms went around his neck, my fingers to his buzzed short hair. Curtis' tongue met mine as the kiss deepened.

He hoisted me into his arms, leaning my back against the wet wall. I gasped at the coolness after the heat of the water. Curtis licked deeper into my mouth, sucking on my tongue. My legs wrapped around his waist, leaving his hands free to roam my body.

The prickling burn of my heat was maddening. "Now, please!" I begged as Curtis traced my crack with a finger.

Curtis slipped two fingers into my already wet hole. I could feel slick joining the water running down our bodies. He found my prostate as he loosened me further for his cock.

I was useless to do anything but hang onto him and kiss him back while I waited for him to fill me.

"We have to wait," he said above the spray. "The timer."

“Fuck.”

He continued to tease me, stretch me for that amazing cock while the minutes ticked down.

I’d never been so glad to hear it go off. I was nearly out of my mind, waiting to be filled.

“Shit!” Curtis left the shower, dripping water everywhere. He had to dry his hand in order to turn the timer off. “Sorry,” he muttered when he returned to my side. “Where were we?”

His mouth met mine again, his fingers teased over my erection. I needed to be filled. I couldn’t wait a moment longer.

Curtis hoisted me again. He teased my hole, making me groan with frustration.

“Now, please!” I begged once more.

The feeling of his cockhead pushing past the first ring of muscle was euphoric, only surpassed by the feeling of him fully seated in me.

Then he moved.

I was done for with the way he worked his hips, pumping his long cock in and out of me, hitting every spot that made me cry out. He swallowed my noises as I clung to him.

He broke our kiss to mutter just loud enough to be heard over the water. “Not going to last.” He thrust faster, harder, as he held me against the wall.

In his arms, I felt perfectly safe as he drove me out of my mind. This was easily the best sex I'd had in a long time. What would he be like when he knew my body better? I was surely ruined for anyone else.

Curtis' fingers encircled my cock once more as his thrusts quickened further. With just a few strokes, I came over his hand.

His knot formed, stretching me and triggering another orgasm. The feeling was blissful. I felt rather than scented another burst of pheromones from Curtis. My heat calmed when I felt his cock twitch inside me as he came, too.

I cupped his face, bringing it to mine so I could kiss him again. This one was sweet, full of gratitude for a great experience.

“Next time, I want to suck you first. Oh, and maybe we can make it to the bed?”

I could almost sense his relief. He laughed, jostling me some. “Yeah, sounds good. That was intense. Good, but intense.”

Curtis pampered me for the rest of our shower.

We were still joined for a few minutes, so he made the best use of that time by washing my hair for me.

He then soaped up my body, being careful around my hole and sensitive dick.

He slipped free while he was rinsing me, giving me the opportunity to do the same for him.

Once we were washed, he wrapped me in the fluffy towel he'd found for me to use. By the time we made it to the bed, I wanted him again as I felt another wave of heat

start.

We lay making out on the bed until I got impatient for a taste.

I broke free to kiss down his body, loving the feel of his chest hair under my palms. I licked and sucked his length, teased the head of his cock, and took him deep into my mouth, just enjoying tasting him.

The flavor of his precome burst on my tongue, making me moan, and my hole clench with need.

“More,” I muttered as I came off his thick cock. Impatiently, I crawled up his body, notched his head at my entrance, and slid down on his length. “Fuck!” In that position, he was so deep!

He clasped my hips, guiding me up and down on his dick as he stared at me with wonder. I loved that look on his face. He made me feel so special.

“You’re amazing! Feel so good!” He bit at his lip, holding back a groan. It rumbled in his throat, desperate to be free. The sound made me shudder.

I rode him until I was too sweaty and tired to continue. I needed him to come so badly. My limbs felt like they were on fire!

Curtis flipped us so I was under him. He folded me nearly in half as his rut took over. He drove inside me relentlessly, chasing his pleasure while he drove me wild.

I lost track of time as we fucked for hours.

The sky outside darkened as we learned about each other’s bodies.

I learned how to make him moan for me. He loved it when I dug my nails into his shoulders while he railed me.

I wailed when he drilled into me, not treating me like I was fragile because I was an omega and smaller than him.

When he went wild when the rut took over, I lost it, too.

Everything was perfect.

What was better than the mind blowing sex was waking up to freshly made pancakes. Curtis fed me pieces while he took me apart again. This was unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

He made sure I drank plenty of water whenever he had the chance. Curtis cleaned me up with such care, always tender and kind. If this was what life would be like as his omega, I was signing up for life! I felt so pampered and relaxed.

With him, I felt so cherished. I was almost disappointed a day later when my heat ended. A unique situation for me. Normally I hated my heats. They were uncomfortable and inconvenient.

"You don't have to go, do you?" he asked when I told him it was done. The cutie was practically pouting! "I mean, I'd like you to stay so I can feed you breakfast again."

"Um, I'd like that." One more night in his arms?

Sold. I snuggled closer. We lay in bed watching an anime I'd found that I thought he'd like until we got too sleepy to finish it and settled down to get some rest. It was an effortless way to pass the day with him.

Comfortable in a way I'd never been with anyone, certainly not this soon.

When I woke in the middle of the night, I was cradled against Curtis' chest. I wriggled in place so I could kiss his sweet mouth.

"Hmm," he murmured as he woke. He kissed me back deeply, heating my blood and hardening my cock. I leaked slick and felt his growing arousal. We couldn't get enough of each other.

We rocked together under the moonlight. I couldn't keep my eyes off him. All of it, my heat, and the domesticity in between, it told me Mate Match might have found me someone really important to me.

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Seven

Curtis

Used to getting up early, even on weekends, I rose before Jae did.

He needed his rest after his heat, though it had been a shorter one, likely because it had been a surprise, so I left him to sleep and went to clean up after the last day or so.

It took me a couple of hours to get everything back to how I wanted it.

There was laundry to catch up on, general cleaning to do.

While his heat was ongoing, I kind of ditched everything to ensure he ate and drank enough.

Now that I had a couple of hours, I set everything to rights again.

It helped calm my mind after a mentally exhausting weekend.

Seeing to his needs, even just getting him to have snacks, was hard.

I didn't know enough about what he liked to keep his energy up.

I cleared away the pots and pans from my rushed meal prep over the weekend.

Mostly, I'd thrown together something for us to eat while Jae caught some

desperately needed sleep.

My stomach growled, reminding me that neither of us had eaten all that much.

I decided we both needed a treat. What was better than a hearty breakfast?

He needed something full of protein and carbs.

I knew he'd need to replace some of the calories he'd burned.

We both probably did, though me less than him.

Then I frowned. Jae had loved my body. He wouldn't want me looking down on myself for the extra weight I was carrying.

In the kitchen, I got to working on the breakfast casserole my mama used to make us before she passed.

We lost her in an accident which also put an end to my football career just before senior year.

The plan was for a football scholarship, maybe a business degree if I couldn't go pro.

Busted up knee and two surgeries later, I was fine, but not college football fine.

Losing Mama and football in one blow would have been too much for some, but I'd found support in my family and friends.

Dad was naturally devastated to lose his wife and best friend, yet somehow, in all his grief, he managed to keep me and my sister from falling apart. He'd been our rock in a storm.

The life insurance money from Mama paid for me to go to trade school.

Since Dad didn't need it, he shared it between me and my sister.

I gave some of mine to my sister so she could finish her degree in medicine.

Now a doctor, she had offered to pay it back more than once.

I'd always refused. She had needed it to do something important.

I hadn't needed all that much. Instead of cash, she bought me my first work truck and paid for the branding to start my home renovations business.

I hoped Mama was looking down on us and was proud of the people we had become.

We were still tight. I saw my sister and dad as often as a busy work schedule allowed.

All of us put family first. Even fifteen years later, I still thought about my mama a lot.

Sometimes, if I was feeling particularly low, I would talk out loud to her.

It helped me work through my problems. Dad told me he did the same thing.

Moving around the kitchen, preparing food while cleaning up, was almost second nature to me since I did it often for my monthly Sunday brunches with my dad and sister.

A glance at the calendar stopped me cold. It was the same day as the brunch! My dad and sister were due to arrive at any moment!

Rushing to the bedroom, I went to wake Jae. I needed to give him the chance to bail if

he didn't want to meet my family so soon into whatever we were. I couldn't blindside him and risk losing him for it. It could be a disaster! My family was protective and Jae was vulnerable after his heat.

"Jae?"

"Hmm, Curtis?" He opened one bleary eye.

"Gonna start by saying I am in no way ashamed of you." I made sure he was looking at me.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, I stroked his hair out of his face.

He was far too pretty for me. How'd I get matched with someone like him?

"I'd love for you to meet my family, but I get you might not be ready yet.

It's too soon. Too damn soon for something so big. We're barely even dating."

"What?" He still sounded a little groggy.

"My dad and sister are on their way here. We do Sunday brunch once a month and it's my turn to host."

It took a moment for it to register. "Shit!" He scrambled to sit up.

"Uh, fuck! I do want to meet them, but not like this. In like a couple months, after we've dated more!

"I could tell he was struggling to keep it together.

He paused, craning his neck in his search for clothes.

“You’re right, it’s too soon. Will you be okay if I leave? ”

“Of course.” I could admit to myself I felt a little disappointed, but I put myself in his shoes.

An unmated omega who had just met an alpha, gone through a heat, and was about to meet two other alphas?

That would be intimidating. I’d read omegas needed safety and comfort in the days after their heats, especially if they were surprise ones.

I just wanted to keep him comfortable. That wouldn’t be possible with two strangers in the house.

“Hope you don’t mind, I washed your clothes.” I pointed to the pile neatly folded on the dresser.

Jae leaped up and kissed me soundly on the mouth. I wanted to hold him against me. “You are so amazing! Do I have time for a shower?”

I winced. He sagged back before brightening. “Quick rinse and I’ll be out of here. We can plan our next date later if you like?”

Another date? “That sounds great.” Keeping my voice even was difficult. I locked down on my pheromones and excitement. Another chance to make Jae smile!

He hopped out of the bed before wincing. “Damn. I don’t think I’ve ever felt so well used after a heat.” He missed my blush as he went into the bathroom. Sex with him had been out of this world.

It only took him five minutes to have a quick wash and dress, which was impressive.

“My ride will be here in a minute.” He stepped into my open arms, cuddling close. “Thank you for an amazing heat experience. The way you took care of me? I’ll never forget that, even if things don’t work out between us.”

Just imagining us going our separate ways hurt. I didn’t even want to think about it. I was going to look on the bright side.

“I think they will.” Putting that into the universe felt like the right thing to do.

“I do too. Call me later, okay?”

“Okay.” My relief at Jae feeling the same clogged my throat for a moment. I coughed to cover the swell of emotion.

Following him to the door, my stomach dropped when a familiar luxury car pulled up. My sister, Lara.

Jae’s gaze landed on the car. He paled slightly. Going onto his tiptoes, he kissed my cheek. With a final squeeze of my hand, he dashed by the car just as the door opened.

“Hi and bye!” I heard him shout in some relief as his ride pulled up at the end of my driveway. He was there and gone in just a moment.

“Who was that?” Lara asked as she approached.

I struggled to get myself under control. I wanted to call Jae and have him come back. To send my family away, but they were already here and our bubble had been broken. “That’s Jae. The guy I matched with.”

“The omega from the app?” She turned back as if looking for him. “He’s cute! Did you have another date?”

“Why don’t you come in before you give me the third degree? Where’s Dad?”

“He’s here,” he said, getting out of the car. “Lara was in too much of a hurry to get the tea, as you say. She forgot it takes me a minute to get out of this thing. It’s too low! Why couldn’t you have taken the SUV?”

“You know why, Dad! Jennie needs it for Milo’s soccer practice.” Lara rolled her eyes affectionately.

My sister, also an alpha, was married to Jennie, a sweet omega she met at work.

Jennie was now a stay at home mom to their son, Milo.

They hoped to add to their family at some point, but they’d struggled with miscarriages.

Now Milo was seven, it looked unlikely there was another baby on the cards for them.

Jennie was working on starting her own business and loved to call me for help and to complain about my sister, teasingly, of course.

I adored her, and we’d grown to be good friends.

The two of them were a great match. Jennie was Lara’s rock when things got rough at the clinic.

“I forgot, sweetheart, sorry.” Dad frowned.

He hated forgetting things, having always prided himself on his memory for details.

We were keeping an eye on things. Truthfully, I think it was more his hearing than his memory.

He didn't always grasp the details when we talked fast or if there was a lot of background noise. "When's Milo's next game?"

Lara took Dad's arm to support him into the house. Not that the old man needed it. He was only sixty-seven, and fairly active, too. He'd fallen in the yard last month and I think it had shaken Lara. Truthfully, it had gotten to me, too. It was a reminder we wouldn't have him forever.

Inside the house, I served up the casserole. Dad smiled at it, his eyes filling with unshed tears for a moment before he brushed them off. He still loved our mom. Always would.

"So, the omega..." Lara began.

"Jae. His name is Jae."

"Did you see him, Dad? He was cute, right?"

"I saw. Where's he from?" Dad ate a bite of his food, waiting for me to answer.

"His family is originally from Korea, but he's American. He was born here. Went to college in Portland."

"Huh. So what's he do?"

Rather than go through the question-and-answer session, I pulled out my phone and

showed the profile on the Mate Match app to my dad while Lara got a devious look in her eyes.

“Did Jae stay over last night? You had a date on Friday, right?”

“He did. Jae stayed all weekend—”

“All weekend! Wow! It must be serious then?”

“Uh, he went into heat early. Have you heard of that?” As a doctor, I thought she might know.

Lara sat thoughtfully for a while. “It’s possible he had a reaction to your pheromones.”

“We were in a restaurant with a neutralizer.”

“Still, I’m pretty sure you’re a dominant alpha. If he’s a dom omega, then it’s entirely possible you just mesh well. Did you get close to him? Touch him at any point?” Lara was gearing up for a medical lecture.

“He took my arm when we walked through. I pushed his chair in.”

“You’ve always had impeccable manners,” Dad interjected with approval.

“That could have been enough. It suggests you two are highly compatible.”

“I’ll say!” I blurted. My face heated. That was not something to share with my family!

Lara giggled. “Jennie is going to love this! So you took him through his heat?”

“Yeah, and before you ask, we did DuoStop.”

Rather than smile, she frowned. “Okay.”

“Is something wrong?”

“No, it’s fine. Reminded me of a work thing.” She waved a hand. “Patient confidentiality. It’s fine. I’m glad you took precautions.”

“Are you going to see Jae again?” Dad asked, breaking the weird mood Lara had fallen into.

“He asked me to call him later so we can arrange another date. I really like him. He feels special.”

Both my dad and sister smiled. “Just be careful, please,” Lara urged. “You’ve got a tendency to put more into these relationships than they do. It’s always a little one sided.” She winced. “Sorry.”

“Nah, it’s good. I know what you mean. It feels different this time. I promise.”

“Alright. I’m glad to see you are happy. You seem lighter, I dunno, just different in a good way.”

Dad nodded, agreeing while he continued eating, making cheerful noises.

We chatted while we ate, catching up on each other’s lives. I spoke to Jennie at least once a week, so some of the things Lara said weren’t new to me, but I acted like I hadn’t heard Milo’s math test results and said how proud I was of him.

Dad talked about his yard and his bowling friends.

He'd made a few new friends with a weekly bowling league we encouraged him to go to.

He was retired, and we didn't want him to be lonely.

These guys were always over at his house, or he went to theirs, just to tinker on cars, or tidy flower beds. They kept each other company.

"Me and Jennie are going to take Milo to a movie. Want to come?" Lara asked before getting in the car. Dad was already sitting inside with his leftovers.

"Nah, I've got some stuff around here."

"And Jae to call."

"Yeah, and Jae to call."

"You really like him, don't you?"

I nodded, unable to voice just how much. It was too damn soon. He felt too far away from me. I had to put a lid on that before it became a problem.

"Go call him and I'll see you soon, okay? Come over for dinner this week to tell Jennie the gossip in person for once."

"Alright. Enjoy your movie. Give Milo a hug from his favorite uncle."

"His uncle Steven would argue that title."

"Whatever. Bye."

They left, leaving me at a loss. It was far too early to call Jae, wasn't it?

My phone beeped with a text. It was my work phone as well as my personal one, so I had to leave the sounds on.

Jae

When do you think we should go out again? Thank you so much for washing my stuff and charging my phone! You are so thoughtful x

A smile stretched across my face. Maybe this wasn't one sided for a change.

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Eight

Jae

Anxiety over my decision to leave Curtis' place plagued me during the journey home.

On one hand, it was far too soon to be meeting his family.

We were barely dating! On the other side of it, wouldn't it have shown I was in whatever we were building?

Given Curtis a sign that I wasn't just up for a heat partner and wanted more?

Or would that have looked too desperate?

I settled on it looking desperate and that I'd made the right choice after a lot of back and forth with Brady.

"You don't want to come across as clingy," he declared wisely when I explained the brunch thing to him.

He thought it was sweet that Curtis did something like that with his family.

I had to agree. It showed he was truly family oriented.

Brady had rushed to get to my apartment before me when I'd called him from the ride share for a gossip session.

I hadn't expected him to drop everything to visit me.

Yet, he had, and worse, somehow, he'd gotten there first!

Because he had his key, my friend was waiting for me, sitting on the couch like he'd been waiting there all day.

Percy was on his lap, purring up a storm until he caught sight of me.

Percy sidled up to me, suspicious of the weird scents I carried for a moment.

Once satisfied I was still his willing subject, he curled up in my arms as if trying to remind me never to leave him that long again.

His purrs were loud over Brady's silence.

He was clearly just giving me a few minutes before he launched into his questions.

Finally, he broke. "So, details!" Brady made himself at home with a cup of herbal tea.

He'd made a soothing cup for me, too. After my wake-up call, I needed it.

Post-heat could be hard on me. I usually felt crampy and sore all over for a couple of days.

Not so much this time around, just anxious about being away from Curtis, which was odd.

I didn't want to fuck up what we were building by being too much. I liked him. A lot.

"It was great." I knew he wasn't going to let me away with saying so little. No, my

best friend was going to want everything!

He fixed me with a deadpan look. “You spent two nights with a stranger on the same day you met him. You even spent your heat with him! What was that about?” Brady wasn’t trying to shame me.

He was the most sex positive person I knew.

He just knew how out of character it was for me.

We’d known each other a couple of years at this point.

I’d told him so much about my life before Hwan, and he’d been there for the after part.

To be fair, my reaction to Curtis surprised me, too. “Um, I searched online for some clue why it happened. Apparently we’re very compatible. Something about his pheromones...”

“I bet!” He cackled, earning a glare from Percy. “You can hardly walk! He’s great in bed, then?” Brady’s eyes twinkled with mischief.

“Fantastic. Really, the best I’ve had. The way he worked me over... I couldn’t have asked for a better experience.”

“Does he have a big—”

I slapped my hand over his mouth. “We’re not discussing that, alright?” When he nodded, I let go.

“Well, he certainly seemed into you.” I barely remembered seeing Brady at the

restaurant because of how quickly my heat had come on. “He was cute! Just your type with those big muscles. So, do you plan to see him again?”

I didn’t even have to think about it. “Yeah. I’m hoping we can get together soon. Might call him later.” I tried to shrug casually. Pretty sure I failed.

Brady gasped. By the way his face brightened, I knew he was happy for me. “You really like him!”

A smile stretched across my face, a foreign feeling of late. “Yeah, I really do.”

My friend reached for me, clasping our wrists together.

In my small apartment, the trace of his omega scent lingered.

He’d spent some time here over the weekend, likely keeping Percy company.

He was so good to me. I was grateful for his friendship after losing so many friends when Hwan cheated.

Brady’s pheromones, so familiar to me, were relaxing.

It was good to be home, even if I missed Curtis already.

“The way he looked at you, the way he moved with you, Gio was impressed by him,” Brady pointed out.

“Was that one of your dates?” I asked, realizing we’d only talked about my weekend. The feeling of guilt took some of the shine away from the experience.

“Yeah. Him and his mate, Xavier.” I couldn’t get a read on his feelings about them.

His voice was guarded, his tone giving little away.

“Are they looking for something long-term or—?”

“We’re talking about you and your cuddly alpha,” Brady interrupted my question, firmly changing the subject. I thought since he had brought them up, then they were fair game for the conversation. Apparently not. I’d respect that boundary and leave it until he was ready to talk about them.

“Curtis was so good to me. I’ve never had a heat like it. It all felt so natural to follow what he wanted, because all the things he asked were things to make me feel better. I’ve never felt so cared for during a heat and he barely knows me!”

I must have had a dreamy expression because Brady was sitting there looking so proud.

“Do you think he might be it for you? The one you’re looking for. Future daddy to your babies?” There was a teasing set to his expression, but genuine curiosity in his green eyes.

“If we have another date like our first? Yeah. Even before I went into heat, I felt listened to, cared for. Did I tell you he cut up his burger because I still looked hungry?”

“He shared his food? Damn, he’s a real one.”

“Right? I ate more of his fries than he did.”

“Heat makes you ravenous, doesn’t it?”

“You’ve got yours coming up. Are Gio and Xavier...?” I didn’t want to press, just get

an idea of where Brady was at.

“Not sure.” He gave a careless shrug. “Stop changing the subject! How was the sex? You didn’t tell me nearly enough before. I want all the deets, Jae!”

It took a couple of hours for Brady to leave. Not that I minded. Having company was great when I needed to be distracted. Calling Curtis was on my mind all day. I wanted to make sure we had another date so I could figure out how I felt about him.

Acting so lovesick was out of character for me. I was usually the down to earth, dependable one. Something about the large alpha had me shaken out of my usual routine. Maybe that was exactly what I needed.

I sent him a message to say thank you for all the little things he’d done. The man had charged my phone! How thoughtful was that? I spent some time debating with myself over calling him.

Determined not to let fear rule my mind, I dialed his number.

“Hey,” he said when he picked up. Was I imagining the relief in his tone?

“Are you sure you don’t mind me calling? I took up your entire weekend!” I picked nervously at the shredded arm of the sofa. Percy always picked this one to sharpen his claws on, even with several scratching posts and a catio on my balcony to play in.

The cadence of his voice over the phone was soothing.

“Mind? No, it’s a relief to talk to you.

” He paused and there were sounds of movement.

I imagined he was cleaning up the remains from his family brunch, or batch cooking for the week, like he said he did sometimes.

“Besides, I got plenty done this morning while you were sleeping and a few things done during brunch.”

“How was it?”

“Good.” There was the creak of leather and a grunt from Curtis as he sat on the sofa.

“The usual. Catching up with my dad and sister. Lara was asking about you.”

“I feel bad about bailing,” I admitted. The worry over it had sat like a lump in my gut all day.

“You shouldn’t.” His words instantly soothed me. “Anyone would feel intimidated in that situation, but it would have been worse for you after your heat.” There was a brief pause. “You feeling okay? How’s Percy?” I loved how he remembered my cat’s name.

“He was mad at me for being gone so long.” I thought I heard him restraining a laugh. Percy glared his kitty glare at me, letting me know I was still in trouble. “Do you like cats?”

“Oh, sure. We used to have them growing up. Mama loved them. You never said how you were feeling. You aren’t hurt, are you? D’you need anything?”

His concern was so incredibly touching. Even at this distance, it felt like being wrapped in a warm hug.

“Curtis, I don’t think you get how special you are.” He chuckled, eliciting a shiver. I had to get him to make that noise more. “I’ve never felt so good after a heat.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, maybe the bar is in hell, or I’ve just had a run of bad luck, but that was so easy with you. I mean, I’m tired, I just don’t feel like I’ve run a marathon in concrete shoes.”

He laughed. “That’s quite the image. You should draw it,” he teased.

“Maybe I will.”

We stayed on the call for a long time. Long enough that we both got up to make something to eat. I was tempted to order something in since there wasn’t much in the fridge. The bread was still good, luckily, and I had eggs. A nice, light dinner after a busy weekend.

It was so easy to talk to him that I tried to keep him on the line even after he began to yawn. I knew he had an early start.

“Jae?”

“Yeah?”

“Wanna go see a movie with me tomorrow or Tuesday?”

“Yeah, I really do.”

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Nine

Curtis

Still feeling a little stiff and a lot tired from my weekend with Jae, I eased down onto my office chair with a sigh.

I knew it wouldn't be long before the rest of the crew turned up for what was sure to be a busy day.

I'd have loved to get a little more sleep, though that would have meant hanging up from my call far sooner than I had. Me and Jae had talked for hours!

There had never been someone in my life like him. I'd never been the type of person to spend hours on a phone call. Somehow Jae just kept me talking, kept me interested and wanting to know more about him.

Was it too early to text him? It was only 7am. Yeah, that was too early. The poor guy was recovering from his heat and needed more sleep. I knew they could be draining from hanging around Marty and Grace.

As if summoned by my thoughts, the pair of them entered the office with a bunch of the other crew.

Far too many people in such a small place.

They waited off at the side while I gave everyone their tasks for the day.

Each crew had a site supervisor who would oversee the jobs I doled out, but at the end of the day, it was my name on the business, so I had to ensure everything was done to a high standard and had the right people on it.

“Alright, we’re waiting on deliveries for the Mason house. Jerry, what needs done before it arrives?” I asked, checking my sheet. Writing notes everywhere kept my brain in order.

I listened and gave advice when needed. Most of these people knew their jobs well enough that they didn’t really need me to tell them what to do.

It was just something we did each morning to check in with everyone.

It also gave them the chance to air any concerns.

Luckily, there was only the usual Monday grumbling about being tired.

One by one, people left the office until only Marty and Grace were left.

“Can’t stay long, gotta get my team out to our job. There’s been a few issues with the designs being changed or measurements being off—“

“Will that affect the budget?” I asked, ready to make a note, just in case Marty needed me to call them.

“The owner’s already put up more money to get it done. They took responsibility for the problems.” He shrugged. “It’s not ideal, but if we keep going at the pace we’re at, we’ll only be a couple days over.”

“Good.”

“Can we ask how the date went?” Grace took a seat in front of me. She sat forward, hands clasping the edge of the seat, looking fit to burst.

“You can. Might not say anything though,” I teased.

Truthfully, I wanted to brag about the amazing omega I’d met and thank Grace for being persistent about using the app to find me someone. Otherwise I’d never have met Jae. I was damn sure our paths wouldn’t have crossed if left to our own devices.

“How was it? Put me and Grace out of our misery.” Marty leaned on the back of Grace’s chair, fixing me with his steady gaze.

“Jae is... he’s someone special. I really like him. We’re going on another date later.”

“Another date so soon? That’s awesome!” Grace enthused.

Marty narrowed his eyes. “You’re leaving something out. Spill it!” There was a pause while he studied me harder. “You’ve had sex! I can sense omega pheromones all over you.”

I lifted my wrist to my nose to sniff. “No, you can’t,” I denied, though I could pick up a trace of Jae’s scent clinging to me despite the two showers I’d taken since I’d last seen him.

Grace tilted her head up to look at Marty. “He totally got some, didn’t he?”

“He did. C’mon, Curtis, tell us what you got up to. My life is so boring right now, I need to live through you.”

From experience, I knew Marty wasn’t leaving until he either had a promise to get all the gossip later on, and he’d likely bug me all day, or he had what he wanted. “The

long and short of it is we had a nice dinner. Jae wasn't feeling well. Turns out he was going into heat—"

"Fuck!" Marty breathed.

"Yeah, so he asked me to take him through it."

"Damn, that must have been some first impression!" Grace remarked, watching me avidly. "And?"

"Well, it broke fairly quickly, but he stayed Saturday night, too." I tried not to go into much detail. Just the basics. "We had a great time together and I think this is the start of something serious between us."

"I'm really happy for you, Curtis. You deserve this," Marty said with a genuine smile.

"So that app is working out for you, then? Maybe we'll get Marty mated off next," Grace joked.

My best friend made a noise of disgust. "Mate Match might have found someone for Curtis, but they'd have their work cut out for them with me."

I had a pretty big problem. Something which at this stage of our relationship could end it before it really began. How was I going to explain this to Jae to make him understand? I desperately wanted to spend more time with him, yet work was getting in the way like it always did.

A delivery was running late. These marble tiles and oak beams were expensive.

With rain due later as well, we had to get them secured or lose a lot of the budget in

materials.

Marty needed to get his daughter from daycare.

Jeff had a doctor's appointment. Really, the only person who could stay behind was me.

There'd be no cinema date with Jae for me. I couldn't promise when I'd get done, and honestly, I was running on fumes. All I wanted to do was go home, eat a quick dinner, and soak in the tub before bed.

Rather than put it off, I called him on my lunch break.

"Hey, Curtis. Everything okay?"

"Hey. I am so sorry about this..." I went on to explain the situation to Jae.

"Tomorrow's good, though, right?" he asked casually, sounding completely unbothered about me bailing on him.

"Yeah. I really want to see you. I just feel bad about today. Like I let you down."

"Uh, no. You didn't. At all. You've given me half a day's notice so I can make other plans, instead of leaving me hanging when you know you likely won't make it at all."

"Sounds like you know that from experience."

"Let's just say my ex was the king of the last minute cancel call."

I felt my face pulling into a grimace. "Not what's gonna happen here. I'll always be honest with you, even if that means letting you down. If I have to cancel, I'd rather

give you time to see your friends or family instead.”

“And this is what makes you special, Curtis. It makes me want to have that date tomorrow instead.”

“I’m glad about that.”

“You know what else this means?” I could hear the humor in his voice.

“What?”

“That I get to pick the movie.”

“Well, I was gonna let you pick. Tell you what, you can choose all the snacks too. Everything is on me.”

“You don’t have—”

“I want to,” I said, interrupting his objection. “To make up for missing out on our date after cutting short our Sunday. I should have remembered my family were coming over.”

“It wasn’t like you knew I’d be there all weekend thanks to my heat. Look, we’re finding our feet in this... whatever it is.”

“A relationship. I want to date you, Jae. When my friends ask, I want to call you my boyfriend, or partner, whichever term you prefer.”

“Honestly, I like boyfriend. If this is you asking me out, then this is me saying yes.”

“I am. Will you go out with me, Jae? Be my boyfriend?”

“Yeah. I’d love that.”

“Dude, your dick must be epic!” Marty laughed at his joke. He sat in the office with a cup of coffee in front of him. Mine was steaming in front of me and not nearly big enough. After a late night, I was dragging. Thankfully, everything was quieter, giving me time to conserve my energy for my date.

I just frowned at him while I sipped my drink. The caffeine was sorely needed.

“No, seriously. First, he has to bail out of your house because of your family—”

“Jae chose to leave. It was too soon for him to meet them, though,” I pointed out.

“Okay, that’s a fair decision.” Marty shrugged. “Then you bailed on your date yesterday and he still agreed to be your boyfriend!”

I smiled, just remembering the conversation.

Just thinking about Jae and calling him my boyfriend left me with a warm feeling inside.

“True, but Jae explained it. Look, not airing his business or nothin’.

..” Marty nodded, expression sobering. “Jae hasn’t been treated very well.

I made a promise to always call well in advance if work stuff came up.

He knows I’ve got this place, employees and everything to deal with. He gets it.”

“Jae sounds special.”

“I think he is.”

The hours passed super slowly. Getting anything done was difficult, which made it luckier that we had a slower day. There were still the same admin tasks to do, ordering, payroll, all the boring stuff.

It was a relief to get home and shower off the day.

Getting ready for my date was harder than I thought.

I wanted to look nice for Jae, just not like I spent hours picking out a shirt.

Eventually I decided on a plain button down and some nice jeans.

The way they fit made me feel slimmer and the structure of the shirt did the same.

On my way to meet my new boyfriend, I picked up a little plant. I remembered Jae said something about liking flowers, except that they died. A little bit of greenery in his office space would be welcomed, right?

I picked him up outside his building with plenty of time for us to get there and get our snacks.

“Hey!” Jae greeted me with a kiss on the cheek.

“Hi. This is for you.” I brandished the little plant at him.

His eyes welled with tears for a moment, then he willed them away. “Oh my goodness, you remembered! I have the best boyfriend!”

Just like that, all my worries about letting Jae down, him being too good for the likes

of me, vanished. If I could make him that happy with a tiny bit of effort, then loving Jae would be easy.

Ten

Jae

Curtis had called me at lunchtime on Monday, sounding exhausted. We'd initially picked that day for our date, but he had to ask for a rain check until Tuesday. A supplier was running late, and the crew had to pull some overtime to get the materials secured because they were expensive.

His apologies were unnecessary, though sweet. I completely got that work had to come first sometimes. His company couldn't afford to have materials being stolen or damaged by weather, so of course they had to get them put away before he could leave for the day.

What I don't think he understood was how good it made me feel to have him think of me straight away. Rather than run late or keep me hanging on, he told me as soon as there was an issue.

Besides, cementing what we were to each other in that call made up for the momentary pang of disappointment at our date being delayed. Then, when he picked me up, he brought me the plant? I knew I was in danger of falling in love with him so fast!

"Is it okay if I run upstairs with this?" I asked, brandishing the sweet plant. The hydrangea was flowering with bright pink blooms. Curtis was so thoughtful! Even the pot was pretty, painted in my favorite shade of blue.

“Of course. We’ve got plenty of time.”

I kissed him on the cheek once more and hopped out of the truck.

Taking the stairs at a fast clip, I soon got to my apartment.

Percy was delighted to see me return after such a short time away.

He was furious when he realized I wasn’t staying.

I placed the plant on my windowsill, kissed my cat on his furry head, and dashed outside once more. I’d make it up to Percy later.

“You didn’t have to run!” Curtis chuckled when I returned, sweating slightly. He turned the AC in the truck up, washing us in cooler air.

“Didn’t want to make us late.”

“I promise, we’ve got plenty of time.” Curtis eased us out into the early evening traffic.

He drove with a competence that was sexy.

His hands held the steering wheel in a loose grip, though I knew he had complete control of his truck.

I felt safe in his care, at complete odds with how Hwan drove.

Really, I should stop comparing these two alphas, it was silly.

They were like night and day with how differently they acted.

Rather than distract him while driving, I sat enjoying the music, some random pop station, so when Curtis spoke again, I jumped. “Fair warning,” he flashed me a dimpled grin, “Grace recommended this movie. If it sucks, we have to blame her.”

“Grace is one of your crew, right?”

“Yeah. I’ve got a couple of women on payroll, none of them work in the office. Honestly, they work so damn hard, they’re worth their weight in gold. Grace is an omega.”

“Really?” I couldn’t keep the surprise out of my voice.

Curtis’ smile grew. “I’ve actually got a few omegas in the crew. My best friend, Marty, is an omega and a single dad. He runs his own team.”

“Wow!” I could sense this was a point of pride for him. “I’m looking forward to meeting them, eventually. Your crew, I mean, if this—”

“I can’t wait to introduce you to my friends and my crew. The people I work with are awesome, I’m very lucky. What about you? You said you’re freelance, but you have a publisher you work with?”

“Oh!” I said, startled at the change of subject and the easy way he announced wanting to let me meet his friends. I felt my cheeks heat. “Right. Yeah, my best friend, Brady, works at the main publisher I do work with, though there are a couple I can rely on contracts for.”

“Is it stressful being freelance?”

“Yes, and also no. Like me, I bet you have times when it’s quieter and that can be worrying.

” Curtis nodded while pulling into a space.

He put his arm on the back of my seat to reverse.

Why was that sexy? I wanted to lick him.

His pheromones buzzed around me, leaving me with a tingling sensation low in my gut.

“Usually I’m lucky and have people queuing up to work with me.

” A bit of a brag, but I’d worked damn hard to get where I had.

“I take commissions as well, and there is a waiting list.”

“Impressive.” He parked and switched off the engine, turning his body towards me automatically.

“I wouldn’t—” I began dismissively, except I was interrupted.

Curtis took my hand, rubbing lightly calloused fingers over my palm. I shivered. If he kept it up, we were going to miss the movie. “It is, Jae. You’ve got people waiting for your art. That’s a big deal.”

Simple words with a lasting effect. For the first time in forever, I felt important.

Curtis didn’t let me pay for the tickets.

I tried, okay, but he insisted he get them this time.

He did let me buy the snacks, though. Except he only wanted popcorn to share and a

bottle of water.

I saw him looking at some candy and picked it up, sure he wouldn't.

Despite my assurances about his weight, he seemed reluctant to eat all that much around me.

I'd work on his confidence, I promised to myself.

My new boyfriend was irresistible, and he needed to know it.

The movie was a fairly decent rom com. It was the perfect excuse to cuddle up to Curtis and just be for a while. We laughed together, held hands, and even snuck in a kiss or two in the dark of the theater. I even got Curtis to eat some of the candy. The smiles he gave me lit me up inside.

After it ended, we stood awkwardly together in the parking lot. I didn't want our date to be over just quite then, though I knew Curtis probably had another early start.

"Invite me over to your place," I finally said, breaking the tension. "I'll take a cab or something home."

"Or you could stay the night." His eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Or that. Invite me."

Curtis chuckled. "Okay, Jae, would you like to come over to my house?"

"Yes, I would." I went onto my tiptoes to kiss him. It was slow and sweet, a tease of what was to come. When it broke, we both grinned. "I'd invite you to mine, but it's a mess because I've been sketching these changes the publisher wants on my book."

“Right, you said. What are they asking for?” He opened my door for me and closed it when I was seated. Under his care, I felt like a treasure.

I explained the alterations while Curtis drove us back to his house. Once in his spot, we lingered in the truck for a moment, nerves rushing in.

“This is silly,” I laughed. “We’ve had sex before.”

“We don’t even have to have sex. It’s not like I expect it. Hell, if you just want to make out for a bit, then go to sleep, that’s just as good.”

“Maybe not just as good. Sex with you is amazing!”

“Yeah, but it’s not all that we are, okay?”

I nodded and waited for Curtis to open the door for me. Inside his house, I felt more of his pheromones wash over me, relaxing me.

He pulled me into his arms, claiming my mouth in a deep kiss. We stood there in the hall, me on my tiptoes, arms around his neck. Curtis hoisted me into his arms and set me against the wall, thrusting his tongue into my mouth.

Like mine, his cock was hard. I could feel it against my ass as he rocked against me.

Our pheromones rose in a cloud of lust, making my underwear damp from the slick I was producing.

I needed to feel Curtis’ cock inside me again to see if it really lived up to the memory.

We both moaned when Curtis lifted me higher and carried me to his bedroom. Damn,

his strength was sexy!

After he laid me out on the bed, he stood and peeled his clothes off. I paused unbuttoning my pants just to watch him. He was thick in all the right places.

“Keep looking at me like that and I won’t be able to take this slow.” His voice was filled with desire and came out as a low rumble.

“What if I don’t want you to?” I challenged.

He was on me in a second and before I knew it, I was naked under him with his tongue in my ass. “Oh, fuck!” he groaned. “You taste so good!”

Curtis worked me open quickly, not that I needed all that much. I was close just with fingers and his mouth on me. We could draw it out later once we’d taken the edge off.

“I can’t wait anymore. I need to get inside you.” Curtis turned me onto his back and raised my feet to his shoulder. He tapped the head of his cock against my hole, getting it wet before he pushed inside.

Even with all the slick I was making, Curtis had a big dick, and it took him a moment to get all the way in. He stopped to let me breathe when his groin met my ass. Then, slowly, he pumped his hips.

I could only cling to him while he fucked me hard. It was everything I remembered it being. The way his pheromones wrapped around me, his big body surrounding me, his thick cock lighting me up inside, was perfect. I couldn’t ever remember sex being that good.

On and on, he speared me on his cock until I was coming, shouting his name. His

knot swelled inside me and he filled me with his release.

We breathed for a long moment until his trembling arms couldn't keep him suspended above me any longer. He switched our positions carefully, still earning a wince when his knot tugged on my rim. He came once more when I tightened around him.

Laying there, over Curtis, I was so relaxed I could almost fall asleep. We needed to clean up or we'd be stuck together.

When his knot went down, he took me to the shower, where I rode him on the little bench until the water went cold. Then he took me to bed, still on his cock and took me apart so tenderly, so thoroughly that I nearly cried.

Curtis cleaned us up quickly after and wrapped his big body around me. We were so warm together we didn't need a blanket. I'd never felt so comfortable with another person in my life and I barely knew him.

Falling asleep in Curtis' arms was as easy as breathing. When I woke the next morning, there was a flower on the pillow next to mine alongside a note.

Jae, Sorry to leave so early. Wanted to stay in bed with you. There's some oatmeal in the crockpot. The door will lock behind you. I'd say take your time and hope you'd be here after I finish work, but Percy will be mad and hungry! Call you later, Curtis x

When I left holding the flower an hour later, it was with a grin stretching my face, a stomach full of that amazing oatmeal, and dreams of a future with my alpha boyfriend.

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Eleven

Jae

After our amazing movie date, there wasn't much of a chance for us to spend any time together in person.

I had a long list of things to catch up with at home and he was starting a job with a new client.

The work needed was pretty involved, so Curtis was finishing work, eating something quickly, showering and going to bed.

The poor guy didn't even have time to have the dinner he promised with his sister and her family.

He spared enough time during the day to reply to my texts, often asking me if I'd taken a break or eaten, which was just adorable.

Curtis was a dream of a boyfriend that way.

He also spared some time to talk on the phone with me at night while he lay in bed.

Being made a priority in someone's life was strange for me.

Again, I could only compare Curtis to Hwan, which was hardly a fair comparison.

Hwan hadn't been a bad guy, cheating aside, he just had different goals than me.

He wanted a social media perfect life with the stay at home omega who cooked and cleaned.

I wanted a partner who would share child rearing and chores while letting me have a life of my own.

Working, maintaining friendships, being someone other than the mate at home, these were important things to me.

A major part of why my prior relationship had failed was because I was fiercely independent. I believed in partnership, not ownership.

"So you said Marty is a single dad and that he leads a team for you? How does that work?" I asked Curtis one night during our late phone calls.

I was interested to see how Curtis helped his friend to work and be a parent.

It was a sort of test to see how he would be with me, if that's where our relationship went.

The longer I spent talking to Curtis, the more I wanted that.

I could see a place for him in my future.

Any time I visualized it, Curtis was the alpha next to me.

"Well, the first couple of years were hard on him. His alpha didn't stick around. Marty left trade school until Maddy was about two. He worked to pay the bills in a grocery store. Me and my dad helped him out with childcare."

“Oh, so you have baby experience?” I could imagine him changing diapers and burping babies. Maybe I’d developed a competence kink, because just picturing it was getting me hot for him.

Curtis laughed. “Yeah. I’m an uncle, too.

Plenty of baby experience here. Marty was getting sick of working at the grocery store, so I encouraged him to go back to school with the promise of a job with me after he completed his certificates.

To save money on bills, he moved in with my dad for a while.

I know Dad misses the company now that they have their own place.

They needed something of their own, though.

Marty works hard to provide for his family. ”

“I’m glad you could help Marty out. You said Grace is an omega too?”

“Yeah. She and her husband just announced that they are pregnant! I’m so excited for them. They’ve been trying for a while now.”

“That’s fantastic news! Pass on my congratulations, please.” Curtis agreed he would. He sounded so happy for his employee. “Won’t that suck when she leaves?”

“Grace is one of my best employees, which is why I’m glad she’s decided she’ll be coming back to work after her leave.

Maybe on reduced hours until the baby is a little older.

We dunno yet. I'm willing to be flexible about it.

I'm gonna be lost without her while she's out, but happy for her at the same time.

We were just talking about it the other day, actually.

I guess she and her husband were crunching the numbers and realized she earns more than him.

It makes sense for her to return to work. ”

I didn't know how to word the next question. Curtis appeared to be everything I wanted in both personality and values. After Hwan, I was more cautious. “What if he was earning more? Would you think she should stay home then?”

“Hmm, well, no.” He paused. “I think it's important for both parents to have something for themselves, though it's usually the omega who stays home. I don't think that it's a healthy dynamic to have one partner relying on the other for everything.”

“You don't?”

“Yeah, unfortunately, I've seen this kind of situation play out a few times.

An omega gives up work to look after the kids, and their work in the home is suddenly devalued.

The alpha believes they are putting more in just because they provide the money, forgetting that childcare is expensive and difficult.

Eventually, their alpha leaves them and they have nothing.

They've been out of the workforce for so long it's hard for them to find something that pays well. ”

Unsurprisingly, since he would have been questioned on his values too, Curtis echoed many of the feelings I had about relationships. He had a lot of sympathy for these omegas. I could tell it was important that he not be like those alphas. He nailed my fears, too.

“I think if I was to have a stay at home partner, I'd make them a part of the business or pay them a salary.

Money just for them. To be honest, there's a lot of pressure on an alpha to provide, mostly from other alphas, to be fair.

So I think I'd prefer to have both partners work and figure out childcare around their schedules. ”

“Curtis, I think you might be a unicorn.” Either that or Mate Match was just that good.

His laugh was so rich and warm. “Because I believe in equality? Honey, it's only right to make things a partnership. My parents were like that. I want what they had.”

His calling me honey gave me a full body shiver. It had been over a week since I'd last seen him. Far too long.

“Let me make you dinner,” I offered. “I want to see you. Our date feels like ages ago.”

“I'd love that. Listen, if I move things about, I can make my day a bit shorter tomorrow. Is that too soon?”

“No. That works for me. Is six alright? I know you get up early.”

“Yeah, six is good. Need me to bring anything?”

“Just your appetite.”

Dinner with Curtis was easy. We caught up on our days while we ate the Japchae I’d prepared for us.

The noodles were made with sweet potato.

The beef strips I’d picked up earlier in the day, along with the carrots and spinach.

As meals went, it was filling and fairly quick to make.

It had been a long time since I’d made the dish with my mom, but it came back to me fast.

Seeing Curtis eating it with enthusiasm warmed my heart.

What was even better was Percy sitting on Curtis’ lap hoping for scraps of beef.

I swear I saw Curtis feed Percy from his hand, something my cat rarely did.

They were already fast friends, which told me everything I needed to know. Hwan had never bonded with Percy.

We ended our date with a make-out session followed by some frotting when I climbed into his lap. Just like all our times together, we had such great chemistry. Nothing was awkward, and he knew what got me off.

The kisses! Oh, the kisses! Curtis was affectionate. Always pressing kisses to my head, nose, cheek. He was happy to sit and just kiss me for such a long time. If that was all I wanted at the end of our dates, then that's all that happened.

Over the course of the next few weeks, there were endless dates.

We hiked. Went to the movies. Curtis took me to the arcade.

I took him to an art gallery, and he loved it.

We spent all our free time on calls or just hanging out.

We had dinner at each other's homes so much his neighbors learned my name!

It was fast. I knew that. I just couldn't help it. Curtis had my heart. I loved him.

"Is it easier if I stay at your place? Save the back and forth," Curtis asked one morning as he got up for work. I'd spent the night at his house and he'd given me two orgasms before he knotted me, earning me my third.

I stretched as I got out of bed. The world lurched a bit. A queasy feeling formed in my stomach. Curtis was going to drop me home so I could feed Percy. Then I was planning on coming back to his house to get some work done without my cat climbing all over me.

"The light is better here. That bedroom you use as an office is the perfect drawing room. Are you sure it's okay I work in there while you're out for the day? I just got the best vibes in there."

My stomach settled. Probably just low blood sugar. I'd make sure to grab a banana before I left Curtis' house.

“Wouldn’t have said so if I didn’t want you here.” He paused putting on his shirt. “Actually, why don’t you bring a couple days’ things and bring Percy over? He’d like it here, wouldn’t he?”

“He’d love having so much space to explore.”

“Great, then we can go out for dinner tonight and you won’t have to go home to feed him in the morning. I know you feel guilty about leaving him alone so much.”

“Really? You don’t mind having him here?”

“Sure. To tell you the truth, I’m just dating you for your cat. Me and Percy have a love connection. He’s my soul animal.” His eyes glittered with humor.

I laughed because, really; they adored each other. When Curtis was around, Percy wanted nothing to do with me. It was low key rude.

“That would be great. Thank you!”

“Honey, there’s no need to thank me. I only want you to be comfortable.”

Percy would be much too curious about the house to pester me. Besides, I could close him in the kitchen or shut the office door if I had to. I knew he would be sleeping on Curtis’ bed, surrounded by the big alpha’s scent in no time.

By the time we were both showered, fed with some of Curtis’ trademark oatmeal he insisted on making for us both, I felt a lot better.

The journey across the city to my place took about thirty minutes, depending on the traffic.

It felt longer for some reason. My nausea returned when we were almost there.

Curtis kept looking at me on the drive. I could feel his worry growing the closer we got to my apartment.

“What?” I asked, just as we were pulling up to my building.

“Are you okay? You look pale.”

“Not sure. Just really tired all of a sudden.” I yawned wide, my eyes watering.

“Why don’t you have a nap and I can come get your things at lunchtime if you’re up to it?” He wiped away the tears with the pad of his thumbs. “Be easier than taking the bus or a cab with Percy and your stuff.”

“Are you sure? Don’t you have a lot going on today?” I didn’t want to be a burden.

“The crew can cover for me so I can check on you. If you’d rather stay home, let me know. I’ll bring you some soup.”

This. Exactly this was the reason that I loved him. He showed his care for me in everything he did and always made me a priority. I leaned over to give him a kiss.

“Thanks. I’ll maybe have a nap and see how I feel.”

A nap didn’t help. I woke up queasy and rushed to the bathroom to vomit up breakfast. Percy stood on the edge of the sink looking down at me.

“Shit! Can’t believe I’m sick.” There wasn’t anything I’d eaten the night before that made me think it was responsible for how I felt. Curtis was a truly excellent cook. I’d gained a couple pounds because he liked to feed me.

A thought wormed its way into my brain. It had been a month since my heat.

I couldn't be, could I? We'd used the contraception. There was only a tiny chance of it happening. Still, the longer I thought about it, the more I couldn't get the idea out of my head.

There was a drugstore down the street from my apartment. I went there and picked up a test along with some stuff to settle my stomach. It was nearing lunchtime, so I looked for a text from Curtis. Sure enough, he'd messaged.

Curtis

Are you okay? Need me to come by?

How was I going to handle this? If I wasn't pregnant, then he could maybe get sick, too. Though we had been around each other for the night, so it was possible he could get sick regardless. I wanted a minute to figure out how I was feeling.

Jae

I'm sick. Maybe you should stay away just in case.

He didn't reply, which was odd. My brain was all foggy from the nausea and still feeling bone tired.

I thought back, and I had been feeling tired more often the last week.

Smells were stronger. Overall, I just felt off.

Alarm bells rung in my mind. Those were all symptoms I should have been paying closer attention to.

Back home, I peed on the stick and waited the two minutes for the test. My timer on my phone ticked down while I bit at my thumbnail nervously. I didn't know what to think or feel about this. All I wanted was my alpha. Why had I said he should stay away?

Before I could look at the result. The doorbell rang. I rushed to answer it, throwing open the door with more force than necessary. On the other side, Curtis, the big alpha, stared at me. His concerned face scrunched into a frown. In his arms he had a bag with delicious smelling chicken soup.

The scent of it made my mouth water. My stomach gurgled, then it cramped. I ran to the bathroom and barely made it to the toilet before I threw up bile.

“Fuck! Jae, are you alright?” Curtis followed me. Kneeling beside me, he rubbed my back. The motion paused. I heard him pick up the test and confirm what I already knew.

“We're pregnant!”

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Twelve

Curtis

Held in my hand was the proof that my life was about to change in the best of ways. Jae was pregnant with our child! I was over the moon. I just hoped he was, too.

Whatever happened next was entirely up to him.

If he wasn't ready for a baby, then I'd just have to accept it.

Pregnancy was hard. I had no right to demand it of him just because I wanted to be a dad.

His body, his choice. I just hoped he would pick a future with me and our baby. It's what I wanted so badly it hurt.

I resumed rubbing Jae's back, feigning calm. "Can I get you anything?"

"Is that all you're going to say?" Jae closed the lid of the toilet and rested his face against it.

His face was flushed, a sheen of sweat was on his brow.

From his pheromones, I could tell he was struggling, even if his expression hadn't given that away.

We'd only been together barely a month, but I could read him well despite him trying to hide his panic.

Reaching for a shelf, I found a washcloth and dampened it so I could wipe his face for him with cool water. Anything to hide the trembling of my fingers and growing anxiety.

"How you feel about it matters more than what I do. I don't want to influence you, but I'm really happy at the thought of being a parent with you."

"You are?" He looked utterly shocked. Had I been hiding my feelings for him too much?

While I didn't want to scare him, I was in love with him.

He needed to know that this felt like the natural evolution of our relationship.

Sure, a little sooner than maybe was wise, but it was happening.

All we had to do now was decide how we navigated it.

"Yes. I know it happened quickly—"

"How did it happen? We were so careful."

He looked so mournful. Did he not want our baby?

My heart sank at the thought before I reminded myself he was going through a massive change and deserved grace.

Him ending the pregnancy wouldn't mean things would be over between us, at least

not on my end.

Maybe it wasn't the right time for him. That was okay.

Yeah, the idea stung, of course it did. Still, I'd get over it. I wouldn't lose him over it.

"We were. The Duostop was done properly, and we stuck to the timer." I reminded him with as much patience as I could muster. I wanted to be celebrating, not consoling. "We should have been covered. It isn't fully effective, though. Guess we were the point five percent or whatever."

"Curtis...?" Jae looked at me with worry, yet it was tinged with something else.

"Yeah?"

"Point five percent is special. Like it's supposed to be." A giddy feeling rose in my stomach. "I think... I think I want this baby. I don't know what that means—"

Putting a lid on my excitement was hard.

My omega was pregnant with my kid! "I'll be by your side the whole time.

This baby," I got to my knees to cradle his face with the gentlest of touches.

"Means everything. Just like you." I tried to let him see all the love I had for him, though neither of us had dared to speak the words.

"I'd like to be with you while we do this, as a family. "

"A family?"

“Yeah. You and me as a couple, raising a baby together.” It was like a dream come true to speak those words to him.

He smiled. It trembled as his tears fell. “Mate Match really works, doesn’t it?”

“It does. Now, why don’t we get you some water and crackers while we pack up some stuff?” My alpha instincts were screaming at me to protect, to care for our pregnant omega. He had to be with us, where he was safe and loved. I carefully helped him to his feet.

“You still want me to stay over?” He clung to my hands in a death grip.

“I’d have you move in if you wanted to.” The truth of the statement was a shock to my heart, making it race faster. Truthfully, the thought of him living so far away from me made me feel ill.

“Really?” He looked at me in wonder.

“Hell yes! It’s super fast, I know that.

” I squeezed his hands, still clasped in mine.

“We’re such a good match and you make me feel so good.

Being around you, Jae, fills my life with light and happiness.

I’d gotten into a rut before you, just working all the time.

You give me a reason to slow down and enjoy more things.

” I could have gone on forever about how having Jae in my life made it better.

“Oh, wow! I... you make me feel cherished, not smothered. Like you value my opinions and actually want to hear them.” I stole one of my hands back so I could wipe away his tears.

“I do! My crew has been teasing me about you.” I could feel the grin on my face. “They say I smile more since I’ve met you. I delegate more, too, since I want to make time for you. They like that we’ve been dating. They’ll be over the moon about the baby.”

“The baby... are you sure?”

“Never been surer,” I affirmed, wrapping an arm around him to lead him out of the bathroom. “So do you want to try staying a couple days, try the living together thing?”

“That sounds good. A trial run.” His eyes scanned his apartment. “This place isn’t baby friendly at all. There’s all the stairs and no elevator. It’s fine for just me, but with a baby...”

“Which is why we’re lucky we have my house. You could rent this place out if you decide to make the move. I’ve got my office. We can turn it into your office for you to continue working. There’s a room for the baby. We have a yard and room to build on if we need to.”

I was probably getting ahead of myself in my excitement. After a trial run, he could decide to return to his apartment.

Proving he really was on the same page as me, Jae beamed. “You’ve really thought about this.”

“I’m thinking on my feet.” Taking his hands, I led him to his bed and got him to sit

down.

“We’ve got this. You and me, we might have just started, but we feel solid.

Together, we can do this parent thing. We’ve got, what, eight months to prepare?

We’re gonna have bumps, I get that, I just know we can do it. The way I feel about you—”

“How do you feel about me?” Jae looked as if he was waiting on a fatal blow.

“I’m in love with you, Jae.” He let out a deep breath with a smile. “Everything about you is perfect. Your view on life, your kindness. I miss you when you aren’t next to me.”

“Same. I—I love you, too, Curtis.” My heart felt like it was about to burst. I couldn’t believe how happy Jae made me with those three little words.

Then he continued. “Whenever something happens, I want you to be the first person I tell. We’re doing this so fast, but I don’t care. All I want is to be with you.”

“Well, direct me to what you need, and rest for a bit. You’re growing a person now. You need to take care of both of you.”

He cupped his stomach, a sweet smile played about the corner of his lips. “Okay. I’ll need my drawing tablet.”

It took me an hour to gather up everything he wanted for a few days, and to wrangle Percy into his carrier. I dealt with his litter tray since I’d heard pregnant people weren’t supposed to.

Once fully packed, Jae cast his eye over the apartment, took my hand, and led me out to my car.

Living with Jae was just as easy as dating him had been.

Sure, we were bound to get on each other's nerves after a while, but so far, so good.

Okay, it had only been a week. Still, I loved having him to come home to.

We were keeping a lid on the pregnancy until we shared the news with our closest loved ones.

Jae's relationship was strained with his parents after his split from Hwan, so I understood he was wary about telling them until he was further along.

The first Sunday was my brunch arrangement with my family.

It was Lara's turn to host, so after Jae's urging, I decided to go.

As much as I wanted to tell my parents, I agreed it was better to wait.

It was something he wanted to do together.

I suggested he invite his friend over to keep him company while I was out and prepared some granola bars for them to enjoy as a healthy treat.

Jae had me eating better because I was making sure he had all the good things he needed to grow our little bean.

"Nice to meet you properly this time. Heard good things," Brady said as I answered the door to him. I was minutes out from leaving.

The young omega had brown hair and warm tan skin. He was around the same height as Jae, with a slender build and forest green eyes. I liked the vibe he gave off. Protective, yet willing to give me a chance.

“Yeah, nice to meet you under better circumstances. D’you mind making sure Jae eats something? We’ve switched to decaf coffee and tea, so he’s good there, but I worry about him not eating. His sickness is pretty bad.”

I was aware Jae had told Brady about the baby to ask him for his advice about our setup. Surprising us both, Brady had been all in, telling Jae to go for living with me and having our kid. He said he was looking forward to being an honorary uncle.

Needless to say, I liked the omega.

“Got you covered. Been reading articles online and they recommend ginger, so I picked up this tea he might like. Kitchen through there?” He patted my arm as he swept by me.

The scent of his pheromones washed over me, with no reaction.

Since Jae had come into my life, I’d stopped noticing attractive omegas like Brady.

His scent was probably enticing to other alphas, but for me, there was only one scent I loved. Jae’s pheromones were like home to me.

“Yeah. I better get going. Thanks for coming over.”

“No worries.”

Before I left, I went to the living room, where Jae was curled up on the sofa with Percy.

The cat loved the house and had made himself at home.

Work would start on the catio as soon as I was sure they were there to stay.

I was hopeful it wouldn't be long before he gave his old place up.

"Heading out, babe," I said, dipping down to kiss him. "Brady's in the kitchen making tea."

"Hey, I was thinking. Next brunch will be after our first appointment. Can you move it here, then we can tell everyone? Then we can have dinner with my parents or something."

"Sounds good to me." More than good. I was relieved he was ready to tell my family. It sucked to keep such good news from them, though I understood him wanting to be there.

His grin made me smile in return. There were nerves at the thought of telling my family. I was pretty sure they would adore Jae and be excited about the baby, but they might voice concerns about how quickly things were going.

The drive to my sister's house didn't take long. She lived in a nice area with sprawling homes fairly close to her clinic. I pulled in and was barely out of my truck before Milo came rushing out of the house.

"Uncle Curtis!" He jumped into my arms. "I missed you!"

"Missed you, too, little bug. Sorry I've not been around much."

"It's okay. Mama says you have a boyfriend. Can I meet him?"

I carried Milo into the house as he spoke. Dad was at the table with Jennie while Lara served them.

“Hey stranger!” my sister called as the others made their greetings.

“Can I meet your boyfriend? Mama says he has a cat. I want a cat, but I’m not allowed.” He pouted at his moms.

“That’s what I was going to ask. Jae would like to meet everyone. How about instead of at Dad’s we have brunch at my place next time? He’s been staying with me, so it’s familiar territory.”

“Sounds good, means I don’t have to cook,” Dad said enthusiastically. He was a great cook, but it was a lot of effort for him now that he was getting older.

Jennie nodded. “Milo can skip practice if necessary. I’m looking forward to meeting the man keeping you so busy! It feels like forever since I’ve seen you!”

Keeping her and my sister in the dark about Jae made me feel bad.

They were my closest friends after Marty.

We reasoned there was no point until we had the check up and knew everything was going okay, but I thought it was more about Jae’s nerves than worry over the pregnancy, which was fine.

My family could wait. They’d still be there.

I went to both of my sisters to kiss their cheeks before I hugged my dad. Milo clung to me the whole time.

“Little bug, you are going to love Percy,” I told him as I went to grab a plate, holding him in one arm. He was a skinny kid for his age. So bright, though.

“Who’s Percy?”

“He’s Jae’s cat. He’s been living at my house, so you’ll get to meet Jae and his cat at the same time.”

He hugged me close with a squeal. I put him down so he could return to his mom’s side. Jennie stroked his hair while he excitedly chattered.

“How come Jae’s been staying with you?” Dad asked.

I hated the idea of lying, so I stretched the truth. Jae had been planning on staying for a couple days to work before we found out about the baby, so I made an excuse about the light and the room, giving Jae inspiration.

“Huh, well, your house is nice, I guess. He’s got his own place?”

“Yeah, he bought it a while ago. We were struggling to get time together properly with how busy I was at work. His hours are more flexible, but he doesn’t have a car and lives across town.”

“You’ll need to make sure he gets a car, so he doesn’t feel trapped if it ends up being a long-term thing,” Dad advised. He was right. Jae would need a car, one with enough room for all the baby stuff. I made a mental note to talk to him about it.

“Will do, Dad.”

When I returned to the house, Brady was just leaving. “Jae just fell asleep. He ate some of those bars. I’m taking some home. Hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all. Thanks for hanging out with him. You’re welcome over any time.”

Brady patted my arm. “Maybe not anytime, but thanks.”

Watching Jae rest, I felt hopeful for our future.

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Thirteen

Jae

The email was a culmination of years of hard work and weeks of redrafting.

My few pages of edits I'd submitted were a hit with the publishers!

They wanted to give me a contract for the book and a sequel!

The best part was that they'd found a gap in their schedule for me, meaning my book would be published in a matter of months.

Just before the baby was born if everything went to plan.

To say Curtis was excited was an understatement.

He was over the moon for me. Having a partner so ready to celebrate my success was a new experience for me.

Curtis was happy to stand in my shadow to bask in my light.

He came home early from work the day I got the email, with a cake and another plant for my office.

It really was my space now that my things were taking up all the available room.

It was just as well my boyfriend was a contractor because we were going to run out of space in this house quickly with all my stuff added to his, plus things for the baby.

With how busy things were for his company, Curtis was having to work on a Saturday.

I was well ahead of the revisions thanks to a peaceful office to draft in.

Percy was obsessed with the catio Curtis had bought for him, and spent most of his day out there in a shady spot where he could watch the birds on a feeder, which gave me some much needed peace to concentrate.

It was harder in the morning when my sickness was at its worst. I'd read it was due to low blood sugar and kept snacks for me to nibble on in the morning.

Once it hit afternoon I felt better, not completely myself, and there were odd spells of nausea, but more able to function than in the morning.

I had the house to myself, and honestly, I was feeling a little cooped up.

Bored too. The house was clean. I was going to drive myself up the wall if I tried to do more work.

What I really needed was to go outside. It was tempting to visit Curtis at work.

We'd discussed me meeting his best friend and the rest of the crew, but I knew they were too busy and I didn't want to set them back further.

"Why don't you have lunch with Brady?" Curtis suggested when I called him from the grocery store down the street from his house.

“He’s probably busy.”

“What if he’s not? You don’t know until you ask.”

“Okay, fair. I’ll try.”

Brady answered on the third ring. “Hey, boo!”

“You busy?”

“Never when it comes to you. Want to get lunch?”

I laughed. “That’s what I was calling to ask.”

“Great minds! I know a place we should go to.”

We met at a packed bistro not all that far from the publisher where Brady worked, which was the same place I’d met him. We’d been friends ever since, bonding over heats, being omegas, the book world and troublesome alphas.

He leaped up from his seat to hug me as soon as I entered the place. I returned it, rubbing my wrist over his scent gland on his neck automatically. Brady relaxed just a fraction at the move.

“Missed you!” He sat and pushed a menu towards me. “I know what I want. The food is great here! Ah, I’ve missed your face!”

“It’s only been a few days!” I laughed before scanning the sheet in front of me. So many things sounded amazing. “What’ve you been up to?”

I was waiting, ready for Brady to launch into some steamy tales of dating those two

alphas, Gio and Xavier. He'd been on a few more dates with them and fully expected to go through his heat with the pair. Instead, he was quieter. Tense in a way I wasn't used to.

"Um... there's something I need to tell you."

"Everything okay?"

"Yes, and no. I'm fine... just... I think Gio and Xavier have someone else." Brady bit his lip nervously, waiting for my response.

"Oh," I said after a moment. "Did you know they were still seeing other people? You were only dating them, right?"

Brady sighed. "Yeah. I was, and not exactly. It hadn't been discussed, just implied with how they were behaving, being all territorial."

"So, how do you know there's someone else?"

He told me about his recent dates with them where he'd seen information for a birthing clinic, women's underwear, and pregnancy vitamins like the ones I took. There were signs all over their apartment that they had another person in their lives.

"Oh, shit! Sorry, babe, that's awful. What're you going to do?"

"Well, I contacted the admins of the group I met them through and they won't do anything until I've got proof. So, that's where you come in."

"How?" I asked, mystified.

"Well, you need a decent clinic and I researched the fuck out of this one and it's

perfect for you.

All you have to do is make an appointment at the clinic in about forty minutes, when Gio and Xavier are supposed to be there.

” Brady sat back with a smug look on his pretty face.

These alphas were going to regret hurting him.

He thought they were going to be something, except they were just stringing him along.

“How did you figure out their appointment time?”

His chuckle was hollow. “Gio likes his calendars. He got a reminder which he dipped out of pretty quick. He’s been on edge since. I think he suspects I know about her and the baby.”

“Why didn’t they break things off with you?” It was so maddening to think of these alphas stringing my friend along.

“Xavier just does whatever Gio wants. I don’t think Xavi is as into this woman as Gio probably believes.

Pretty sure he prefers male omegas. I think Gio picked her and Xavier went along with it.

” I could see tears welling up in his eyes.

“Thing is, I thought they wanted a baby with me, so I’ve been making all these plans, and it’s all bullshit!

” Angry tears fell from his forest green eyes, making them red-rimmed.

“How much longer were they going to string me along? Until after my heat? When I was pregnant, too?”

Fuck, I was furious at these two alphas! How dare they treat Brady like that!

“Okay, I’ll do it, but first, cake.”

Brady wanted them to know he knew about their pregnant omega.

He wasn’t there to make a scene, just subtly get his proof, then leave.

I’d get my appointment set up and help out my friend.

Two wins for the day. Once that was done, I’d take him home to my place, okay Curtis’, for the night. I was starting to think of it as home.

Jae

Brady’s upset, can he stay with us tonight?

I sent the message over our lunch of the gooiest chocolate cake, fully not expecting a reply until much later. My alpha seemed to have a sixth sense when it came to me, though, and messaged back quickly.

Curtis

Of course. I can crash in the office and you can have a sleepover. I’ll take home pizza if you like.

My boyfriend was the best. After our confession of our feelings, it felt natural to say it often. I sent him back a text thanking him for being the best alpha and telling him that I loved him, which of course he replied with a little love you gif.

The clinic was clean and welcoming, with soft tones decorating the walls and art of beach scenes adding to the serenity they were going for.

At the desk, a receptionist took my details and found me an appointment.

I checked with Curtis that he could make the time I'd picked for our first checkup, even though I knew he'd move heaven and earth to make it.

"Okay, your appointment is all set up. Thanks for putting your details onto the tablet. They'll start a file for you, which the midwife will see when you come in.

Don't forget to bring a urine sample! I'll give you a pot.

" He went into the back and returned with a sample container just as an examination door opened and three people left, all holding hands with beaming smiles.

Brady, acting quickly, took a photo of the trio. "Aww, what a lovely family!" His acting was on point because I almost believed he was being genuine. I could see how brittle his smile was, though. His eyes were still red from crying.

Truthfully, I didn't know which one was Gio and which one was Xavier. Nor did I care. Both of them had hurt Brady. If only they'd been honest and not strung him along.

The room went deathly silent, with the trio on one side and me with Brady on the other.

The two alphas stared at Brady without speaking, while the pretty dark-haired omega glanced between them.

She was very pregnant. They'd likely been seeing her and known she was pregnant before Brady entered their lives.

"Do you know him?" the omega asked in a timid voice, picking up on the tension.

"Oh, no! Sorry, I just thought you looked sweet together. A perfect family." Brady managed another of his fake smiles.

Then he took my hand and practically dragged me from the clinic.

I thought I heard one of the alphas protesting behind us.

Not that I cared what they said or did. Brady was done with them, so I was, too.

We walked the short distance to the parking lot where Brady had left his car. I left him to his feelings, just holding onto him, offering silent comfort.

At the car, he paused. "Can you drive? I don't think I should."

"Of course."

It had been a while since I'd last driven and took me a minute to get used to Brady's little car.

I used GPS to get back to Curtis' because I wasn't used to driving the route, I was always the passenger, either on the bus, in a cab, or when Curtis dropped me off.

Living where we did and with a baby on the way, I really needed to pick out a car.

Curtis had suggested it more than once.

Brady didn't speak the whole time. I could tell he was crying.

There was a sour note in his pheromones.

When we got back to the house, I just led him inside, encouraged him to take off his shoes and pants, and climb into bed with me.

I curled around him, my heart breaking for my friend.

He sobbed in my arms until we both fell asleep.

"Hey baby, I brought dinner. Would you like to eat it in here?" Curtis' scent and touch was instantly soothing. He rubbed my back gently. When I sat up, I saw Brady sitting next to me, some tissues bunched in his fist.

"We can eat at the table if you want. I'm not that hungry anyway," Brady offered.

"Nah, let's just stay here. C'mon," I patted the spot next to me for Curtis to join us on the bed.

"No, it's fine. I'll leave you to your sleepover. Me and Percy have made a nest in the office so you two can have the bed."

"I'm not kicking you out of your bed!" Brady protested around a mouthful of pizza. I knew the smell of melted cheese would tempt him into eating. "Besides," he said when he swallowed, "I want Percy cuddles tonight. Just let me have dinner and some Jae cuddles here, then I'll sleep in the office."

"If you're sure. I'm happy to sleep there, though." Curtis was being completely

genuine. It wouldn't bother him in the slightest to make room for my best friend. It made me love him more.

"Nah. I appreciate it, Curtis. You're really great. I think I need the space to feel my feelings. Knowing you two are in the next room is enough for me." I adored how accepting Brady was of my relationship with Curtis.

"Okay." Curtis settled on the bed and reached for the pizza. "As long as you know, you're always welcome here. I wouldn't have minded sleeping apart from Jae for the night if it helped you."

"I do, and that's what makes you so special, Curtis. One day, I hope to have what you and Jae have."

Hours later, in the dark of our bedroom, I whispered words of love into my mate's skin as I kissed all the way down his chest, over his rounded stomach, and down to that exquisite cock. My hands massaged those meaty thighs I loved so much while I took him deep.

After he came, I snuggled into his arms, sure I'd found a home, a mate, true love, with him.

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Fourteen

Curtis

In the week after Brady found out about his alphas and their secret baby, I noticed a change in Jae.

He was more... settled, I guess. Calmer for sure.

He didn't seem to question his place in my life or in our home and because of that, he was more productive and his sickness eased some.

Both of which made me feel happier. I wanted to ease all his stresses and be someone he felt at home with.

As for Brady... he was grieving the relationship he thought he was building with the cheating alphas.

The situation there made me so angry on his behalf that I wanted to do something out of character and march to their place to give them a piece of my mind and maybe a knuckle sandwich.

Brady was so sweet, I couldn't understand why an alpha, let alone two, would take advantage of him like that. Stringing him along was cruel.

By the Sunday afternoon, he'd picked himself up enough to slap a brave face on and head home. He thanked us both for the sleepover and loved on Percy, who had barely

left his side, then hugged us both goodbye.

Over the course of the week, we got ready for Jae to meet my work family.

They were lower stakes, in his opinion, than my actual family, so were acting as a test run.

We were holding off telling them about the baby until we'd told my dad and sisters.

Jenny, my sister-in-law, was as much my sister as Lara was.

There were days I'd pick her over Lara, no question!

The crew had all worked hard over the last few weeks.

Business was booming, to the point where I was looking to hire more people.

We'd met our deadlines, so I was rewarding them with a half day paid in full and a catered buffet.

My team had earned a completion bonus, which I was sharing between us all, with mine going towards the food.

I could tell Jae was nervous about hosting the brunch, but I knew the crew would welcome him.

More because they were a bunch of nosy shits than the lunch spread I was putting on.

Luckily, I knew just the thing to put him at ease.

I'd taken the morning off work to help Jae get the house ready and pick up the food,

though there was something more important to do first.

Jae roused under my caresses. I wanted to cover him in kisses, just not until he was awake enough to tell me what he wanted. “Hmm...” Jae opened a slightly bleary eye. “What time is it?”

“Early enough for me to knot you. To ease some of that stress. Then for you to have a nap.”

“I’m fine,” he protested.

“Baby, you barely slept last night. When you did you were muttering in your sleep. Let me make you feel good so you can catch another hour’s rest.”

“We don’t—”

“There’s plenty of time. The house is clean. The food will be ready in plenty of time. All you need to do is relax, let me take care of you, then shower later.”

“But—”

“But nothing. Are you really trying to talk yourself out of an orgasm?”

“When you put it like that... carry on!” Jae grinned, looking far more awake.

We only wore underwear to bed, each of us generating too much heat for more clothing.

I peeled him out of his, watching as he hardened under my touches.

Getting him ready for my cock didn’t take long.

I sucked him into my throat while fingering his slick hole.

Wanting a taste of him, I licked over his entrance, dipping my tongue inside him.

The slick there was sweeter now, full of bonding hormones now that he was pregnant with my baby.

I was seriously addicted to my mate, and we hadn't made it official yet.

There was nothing I wanted more, but at this early stage of the pregnancy, it could be dangerous to bond with him.

The overload of hormones, which were intended to set off a heat, could cause a miscarriage.

I wanted to, so damn badly, just not until after the baby arrived, or once we got married.

What he was to me wouldn't change because he didn't wear a mark on his scent gland.

In my heart, he was my boyfriend, my mate, my everything.

It wasn't long until Jae was begging for my cock. I could have gotten him off by just fingering his hole and sucking him, but I wanted to be inside him so badly. I groaned when I slid into that tight wet heat. Jae murmured a curse, then just clung to me while I rocked my hips.

Before Jae came along, I'd been paranoid about my body, hating the extra layer I carried, or how it jiggled while I fucked into him.

Now I didn't quite love it, instead I accepted that Jae thought it was sexy.

He loved stroking any part of me he could reach when he sucked me off and when we were having sex.

There was always heat in his gaze when he watched me take a shower.

Jae loved my body because it housed my soul, and I knew he loved every extra inch.

When my knot grew and I came, I carefully turned us on the bed so Jae was over me. He teased my nipples, looking flushed and sated. All the signs of stress were gone.

"Better?"

"Much. Are you going to nap, too? I can come with you to pick up the food."

I leaned up to kiss his head. "Sure. I'd like that."

A short nap, a shower, and breakfast later, and Jae was looking much better. He took my hand on the way out to the truck and gave it a grateful squeeze. "Thank you for knowing what I needed."

I raised the hand to my lips so I could kiss it before letting go to open his door. The journey was mercifully short because I knew Jae would be stressing about getting back in time to set everything out if we got stuck in traffic.

Jae was right to come with me. I wouldn't have managed to get everything out to my truck without his help. As it was, we had to take two trips. Maybe I'd ordered too much food.

When we returned to the house, Marty was inside, having used his key to get in.

Maddy was nowhere to be seen. “Hey, hope you don’t mind but Maddy wanted to meet your cat.

I’m Marty, the best friend and half the reason he was on the app in the first place.

” Marty stepped forward to shake Jae’s hand, but saw he had his hands full of the things I let him carry in.

The lighter things only. “Let me.” Marty took a couple of things off Jae and headed for the kitchen.

Watching his response, I breathed a sigh of relief, it hadn’t seemed to bother Jae at all. I’d forgotten Marty had a key and I’d have to check that Jae was alright with that going forward. This was his home, too.

“Oh, that’s fine. Percy loves kids. I’m glad you came early.

I think Curtis went overboard with the food.

” Jae looked vaguely stunned, though relieved to hand over his share.

He trailed Marty to the kitchen, where the other omega had already put out the reusable plastic cups and biodegradable plates.

“Daddy! I saw the cat!” Maddy came racing into the kitchen. She stopped at the sight of Jae. “Is the cat your cat?”

Jae dipped down to speak to her, eye to eye. Maddy was eight now and growing like a weed. “He is. Do you want to meet him properly? He might come down if I’m there.”

“Yes, please.”

“That’s good manners, Maddy. Why don’t you follow Jae and let me help Uncle Curtis?”

The pair left the kitchen. Once they were out of sight, Marty whispered. “When were you going to tell me Jae is pregnant?” It wasn’t an accusation, though there was hurt in his eyes.

I checked that no one could overhear me. “Not until after we told my family. It’s really early. We’re just being cautious.”

Marty nodded. “Okay, I get that. But you were going to tell me soon, right?”

“As soon as we told my family, I was going to come round with cake.”

“That is the correct response. We can still be best friends.” He laughed. “Okay, the crew might not figure it out if me and Jae pretend we aren’t drinking in solidarity of Grace. Us omegas sticking together. Hannah might pick up on it, so what do you want to do there?”

“How did you know?” It was confusing the fuck out of me.

“There’s a subtle change in the pheromones of an omega when they are pregnant. I could tell when I got close,” Marty explained. “Most omegas wouldn’t pick up on it, but Grace’s scent has recently changed, so I could pick up that note in Jae’s pheromones.

“Wonder why they do that?” I mused while I helped Marty arrange the rest of the food.

“It’s a protection thing. Omegas notice it first to support the pregnant omega. Alphas notice it subconsciously. Watch how they will automatically do things for Grace and Jae later.”

Sure enough, I watched Grace have a whispered conversation with Marty as soon as she was introduced to Jae.

Hannah did the same and was included in the secret.

Then alphas like Jerry constantly moved to make space for Jae, like they did for Grace.

They gave up their seats and offered to get him drinks. It was quite amusing to watch.

We spent the day and into the evening eating and drinking.

Some of the crew had alcohol, though I abstained.

They took turns telling stories about jobs we’d done.

Some of the crew brought their kids around and they all played well with Maddy when we could get her to leave Jae.

There were a couple of board games going on in the dining room and a soccer game in the backyard, which a few of the neighbors joined in on.

All in all, it was pretty chill. Exactly the introduction Jae needed to my work family.

My boyfriend had a fast friend in Maddy.

The little girl had stuck by his side most of the day after their cat wrangling

adventure, where not only did Percy allow Maddy to pet him, he also permitted her to carry him around like a baby.

Percy was back in his catio where he'd retreated to once the majority of the guests arrived.

He was happy to watch them from a safe space.

Maddy was curled up against Jae's side, dozing lightly, all tired out from playing with the crew who were like her extended family.

Our guests helped clean up before they left, so all there was to do at the end of the night was brush our teeth and climb into bed.

"You work with some great people," Jae said against my neck. He was cuddled in close, an arm over my stomach. I didn't think he realized he was rubbing it.

"Yeah, I do. They liked you a lot." More than I thought they would. I'd expected politeness and maybe some distance, but they were warm and welcoming, soon telling Jae funny stories about me at work. It couldn't have gone any better.

"I'm looking forward to telling them about the baby. They're going to be so happy. They spoil Maddy. All of the kids, really."

"Maddy's different. It's like she belongs to us all since she doesn't have an alpha dad. She's a sweet kid."

"Yeah." Jae yawned. "I like all this. The friends, the house, having a quiet life with you. It makes me happy."

"Having you in my life makes me the happiest man alive."

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Fifteen

Jae

By the time I'd gotten to eight weeks pregnant and my first appointment with a midwife, I had decided to make a real go of living with Curtis. It was time to sort out my place and put it up for rent, maybe even sell it.

We just worked. I felt like we'd been dating for a much longer time.

We still couldn't keep our hands off each other to the point I worried about harming the baby.

I didn't know all that much about pregnancy, it wasn't talked about in my family, so I didn't know if I was hurting the little one.

It was just that resisting Curtis was too difficult.

Our chemistry in and out of the bedroom was fire.

I loved being around him. He was my big, cuddly, protector mate.

I longed for the day he'd mark me as his, though I wanted to wait until we got married first.

Our appointment was at a new midwife led clinic highly recommended by Brady.

He'd looked into services in the area for me.

Some would see it as an overstep. I just liked how invested he was in the baby.

We'd decided not to go to the one he'd taken me to after the alpha incident.

The vibe was off with the place and I couldn't get the memory of Brady's face out of my mind.

No, that place was tainted. This one had good energy.

I handed the pot to the midwife, Erika. She was a tall, black woman, with her hair artfully styled in braids, and a gentle aura about her. As soon as I met her, I felt at ease, even if it was when I was handing her a pee sample.

"Nice to meet you both. I'll be the primary midwife for your care.

I also take on call shifts at the center.

However, I can't promise I'll be the one for your labor.

It all depends on when that happens, okay?

"We both nodded. She took the sample and put these sticks in it. "Can I ask how long ago your heat was?"

"Eight weeks," I answered.

"Exciting! Your hormone levels look right. Sugars are okay. I'll have to check your iron. How long have you been together?"

“Eight weeks,” Curtis said with a laugh. “Long story.”

Erika smiled at us both. “Well, I couldn’t have guessed it was only two months. You’re cute together.” We muttered our thanks, both a little embarrassed. Our love story was irregular for sure. One day we’d tell our grandkids it with pride.

Erika took my blood pressure, pricked my finger to get my iron, then palpated my abdomen.

“All is looking good here. I want you to pick up a pregnancy vitamin—“

“I’m taking one.”

“Alright, that’s good. Maybe up your iron intake then, since it’s lower than I’d like. Make sure you’re getting plenty of folic acid. It is important for fetal development. Do you have questions?”

“Should we be abstaining....?” I managed to get out suddenly irrationally worried I was doing everything wrong. I thought the vitamins would be enough.

“No need. Your baby is well protected in there. Now, I’m not saying I recommend sexual gymnastics,” she laughed, “but the hormones and pheromones are great for both you and the baby, as well as regular sex, keeping you bonded as a couple.” Erika paused.

“Curtis, do you mind stepping out to get Jae some water? I think the heat in the room is getting to him.”

I was feeling slightly warm. With a squeeze of my hand, Curtis left the room.

“Sorry, I hate to lie. I just need to check your mental state. Are you doing this of your

free will? How is Curtis at home? I see you live together.”

“Oh, um...” I felt completely flabbergasted. “Everything’s fine. Curtis is amazing.”

“Perfect,” Erika said, leaning forward to take my hands. “Thought so, but it’s part of my checks. If anything changes, just give me a sign and I’ll get you whatever help you need.”

“Thanks for checking.”

“My iron...”

“Isn’t bad. Could be better and growing a baby is hard. Have you had a lot of sickness?”

“Yeah, it’s getting better. I just thought the vitamins would be enough.”

“If you eat a varied diet and take the vitamins, you should be fine. I didn’t mean to scare you. It’s my job to ensure your health while carrying this baby.”

Her words made me feel better. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’m just going to type up my notes while we wait for your man.”

The room was warm. I was grateful that it wasn’t long before Curtis knocked and returned with a cup of water for me. I practically gulped it down. “Thank you,” I whispered to him.

He kissed the top of my head. “Anything for you.”

“Well, congratulations to you both,” Erika said when she finished typing on her

computer. “Everything looks okay, so we’ll see you for your scan at twelve weeks, okay?”

I couldn’t wait to see our baby.

Nerves filled me, waking me much earlier than usual.

Far worse than before I met his employees.

Not that I had anything to worry about. The house was clean and ready for our visitors without me lifting a finger.

Curtis had made me sit and watch him clean because the stress made my sickness flare up.

Most days I was fine as long as I ate little and often.

If I was worried, I was sure to throw up.

“Hey, don’t worry. It’ll be fine. They’ll love you,” Curtis reassured me. “Come on, let’s shower together before they come.”

As a larger man, he had a pretty roomy shower. There was even a bench to rest on, which he sometimes did after a long, tiring day at work.

We undressed and got under the hot water together. Curtis immediately started washing me, massaging my scalp and then shoulders. I wriggled under his hold, feeling the surge of our pheromones wrapping around us.

“Want you,” I whispered, the words almost drowned out by the spray. I leaned back into him, wriggling against his hardening cock.

“You sure?”

I turned and stroked his cock to full hardness. “Yeah.”

“Do you want to go to bed?”

“No. Here. Now.”

“Come sit on my lap, then.”

He pulled me closer, so I was straddling him. My mouth met his in a messy kiss. Our foreplay was short. I was too desperate to feel him, to get lost in the feel of him.

“Please,” I begged as he worked me open with careful fingers. Everything Curtis did with me was gentle, always aware of his larger size.

His cock lined up at my hole and eased inside slowly. I moaned at the perfect feeling of him deep inside me.

“More.”

Curtis pumped his hips, holding me steady with his big hands.

Neither of us lasted long. Curtis pulled out before his knot formed and pumped his release over the tile floor of the shower.

Our mouths met again, this time in a sweet kiss.

“Thank you,” I breathed.

“For what?”

“For everything. I feel better now.”

“Good.”

By the time there was a knock at the door, we were dry and dressed for the day. Curtis had the food well in hand, so I waited in the kitchen for his family.

“Hi!” his nephew, Milo, was the first to greet me. He looked a lot like Curtis, with the same tight curls cut close to his scalp, just with a lighter brown complexion. He was cute. “I’m Milo. Where’s your cat?”

“I’m sorry about him.” Behind Milo came a petite woman with pale rose skin darkening with a blush. Her blonde hair was long, curling halfway down her back. “I’m Jennie. This is my son, Milo, but you probably already know that. He’s been very excited to meet you and your cat, obviously.”

“Nice to meet you.” I repeated the sentiment with Lara, Curtis’ older sister, and his father, Patrick, or Ricky, as he preferred to be called.

Lara and Curtis looked so alike, there was no mistaking they were siblings, except she had her hair in a sleek chin-length bob. Same warm brown eyes and deep brown skin. Their noses and chins they obviously got from their dad.

Ricky was a balding older man with a rounded belly. His beard was short, well cared for and full of gray hairs, adding a distinguished quality to him. His wide smile while he made his greeting put me at ease.

For the occasion, we’d bought a neutralizer for the kitchen.

Curtis was worried the pheromones from all the alphas in the room would be too overwhelming for me.

Especially after the party for his crew, where I'd spent a lot of time outside or near an open window.

He had also considered that they'd be heightened depending on his family's reactions to our news.

It was such a thoughtful gesture. A signature Curtis move. I couldn't help but love him more.

We also didn't want Jennie figuring out our news before we could tell everyone ourselves. Yeah, I'd been shocked when he told me Marty, Grace, and Hannah all knew. Not that I minded. They'd kept it to themselves with no issues.

I tried not to let my nerves get the better of me, though it was hard.

Meeting the family was a big deal! Plus, we had our news to share.

Once I found Percy for Milo, that was all it took for the ice to be broken, especially since Percy was in a fine mood and immediately went to Milo's lap for cuddles.

He very rarely did that. Or maybe he just liked kids, because he'd been the same with Maddy.

It was a good omen of things to come. When I told Milo he was special, it melted everyone.

We wanted to wait until everyone was eating before making our announcement. Waiting and getting through all the small talk was so hard! I just wanted to blurt it out!

Eventually, there was a lull in the conversation.

“There’s something I wanted to tell you all,” Curtis began.

“Jae moved in permanently?” Ricky asked hopefully. He turned to me. “Are you going to rent your place out?”

“Yes. I’ve given the apartment to an agency for them to lease it for me. I love living with Curtis,” I answered honestly. Taking that leap of faith had been the best thing for our relationship. Not once had I regretted moving in.

My boyfriend squeezed my thigh gently. “Love having Jae here. Especially since he brought Percy, too.”

“I love Percy. He’s fluffy,” Milo commented from his place on the floor, where he was tempting my cat with scraps from his plate.

“That wasn’t what I wanted to tell you.” Curtis paused, looking at me. “Me and Jae are having a baby!”

The room erupted in chaos. Everyone congratulated us with hugs and lots of happy exclamations. It was so warm and welcoming; I struggled to hold back tears. Curtis had told me they’d be overjoyed, I just hadn’t expected them to be so welcoming.

“Well, that makes two new babies for the family then,” Lara spoke over the din. “Jennie’s five months pregnant! We wanted to wait to check...”

Curtis pulled his sister into a tight hug. I went to Jennie and wrapped my arms around her.

“I’m going to be a big brother!” Milo had abandoned Percy to hug his grandpa.

“And a cousin! Two babies for you to help with, Milo.” Ricky turned Milo on his lap

so he could feed the child. “Grab grandpa another slice of that quiche. I’m going to need more energy for all these grandchildren.”

“Congratulations!” I said to Jennie, really meaning it. Curtis had told me about their problems. I was relieved not to be causing pain on our happy occasion.

“You, too! Curtis is so sweet. I’m glad he has you and now your little one on the way.”

I looked at the man a computer had decided was pretty much my ideal match. “I’m glad I have him.”

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Sixteen

Curtis

Given how well the meeting went with my family and how overjoyed they were for us, I thought Jae would be more enthusiastic about taking me to see his parents so we could tell them our news.

Avoiding their calls and messages surprised me. I knew he was still having some sickness, though it was lessening now he was done with the first trimester. He eventually told me he wanted to wait until after the scan to tell his family because he feared the stress was going to harm our baby.

His family would not approve of me. I got that.

They wanted another Korean guy in the family.

There was pressure from his grandparents to marry well, and the only way he could do it was if the man was someone like Hwan.

It didn't matter to them that Jae wanted a partnership.

He had his own goals in life. My man was about to release his first children's book with illustrations he'd drawn himself.

Something I supported him fully in. One day he would be rich and famous and I'd be the kept husband looking after the kids, I often teased him. I'd be happy to do it.

My dad was still fairly fit and active. He wanted to help with childcare and offered to babysit a couple of days a week, while Jae worked from home to create the sequel and do any other work he had.

Dad would come to our house on the days he took care of the baby so Jae could get some hours in.

I was going to train up a couple of my crew to take on more jobs, helping me cut my hours to forty, max. It was time to prioritize my family.

We didn't need either of us to work all the time to provide. The house had a tiny mortgage I could probably pay off with my savings, but I was secretly adding to them to start a college fund and maybe pay for a wedding.

Jae was my future. I wanted to make sure he knew it.

"Now," Erika said with a smile. "Let's go see your baby, shall we?"

She led us to a room where the sonographer was waiting. I didn't pay much attention to the sonographer, couldn't even have pulled them out of a lineup, because I was too distracted by what was about to happen. We were finally going to see our baby!

"Tracy will put the gel on your tummy and you'll feel pressure as she gets the best picture of your baby," Erika explained the process.

"Ah, cold!" Jae shied away when the gel was poured on him.

"Sorry," Tracy said, setting to work.

Quicker than I thought, the flub-flub sound filled the room.

“A very healthy heartbeat,” Erika remarked. She looked at the screen and muttered something to Tracy. “See there, that’s the baby’s head and down here is their spine. They are measuring perfectly for their gestation period. Great job, Jae.”

“Thank you,” he mumbled, with tears in his eyes. “I can’t believe that’s our baby.”

Erika moved out of the way to give me my first proper look at our little wonder.

“Hey, little one! Aren’t you perfect?” I kissed Jae, just a simple press of my lips to his. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Being you. This. All of it.” Everything I was feeling was overwhelming.

“Would you like a photo?” Tracy asked.

We left the clinic with a photo each. I couldn’t wait to show my family how well our little bean was doing!

We knew Jennie and Lara were having a girl.

They’d paid for a detailed scan after the anatomy scan.

The pictures were great. Something I’d like to have even if we didn’t find out the sex of the baby. I wondered if Jae wanted to know.

“Do you think you want to find out what the baby is?” I decided just to ask. Jae was always truthful with me. It was one of the things he prided himself on. I loved it about him.

“Um,” Jae was still looking at his picture in wonder. His eyes finally met mine. “I think I’d like it to be a surprise, if that’s okay with you? If you want to find out and not tell me I’d—”

“No. I agree. By the time the little bean comes along, our niece will be born. We’ve already got a nephew, so it doesn’t matter if Bean is a boy or a girl, really.”

“Our? We?” He looked mystified. Poor Jae just didn’t get how special he was to me.

“Jae, sweetheart, they’re your family now. I know you’re scared your family will disown you because I’m black, but I think they love you more than that. Just in case, my family has already adopted you. Even if things go wrong with us—”

“They won’t!” His expression was fierce.

I kissed the top of his head. “No matter what, you’ll always have them. Milo won’t let you take Percy from him. Do you know he’s been bugging his moms for a cat again?”

Jae laughed, then looked at the photo once more. “How about we drop in on my parents? Rip that bandaid off?”

“Are you sure you’re ready?”

“At this rate, I’ll have given birth before I’ve told them I’m pregnant!” His laugh was a little manic. “Let’s just do it, now that we know little bean is fine.”

His family lived in an affluent area of town similar to that of my sister, but more old money style. Their house was a large two story, two car garage home which dominated the street.

“I dunno why they still have such a big house. My brother Jun, an alpha, is married with three kids already. He chose an omega girl my grandparents picked out. They seem happy, though. My sister, Iseul, is a beta. She has one child with her husband. She got with a Japanese man she met at work and my grandparents didn’t speak to her for a year. ”

“Ouch.”

“She said it was peaceful, actually. I know if Mom and Dad end contact with me, Iseul will still call. We aren’t as close as I’d like. She’s five years older than me, so growing up, we had little in common.”

“I think your parents will surprise you.” Call it a gut feeling, but I believed his parents weren’t nearly as bad as his grandparents.

“Really?”

“Okay, I’m going on faith here. I’ve got faith they will.”

We exited the car and walked up to the front door, where Jae rang the bell.

An older woman answered. She was beautiful.

Like Jae, she had tawny skin, though her complexion was as cool as her attitude.

Some of her facial features were so similar to Jae’s, it was impossible not to realize who this was.

Jae’s mom’s hair was styled in a chignon with a few strands of gray showing.

Her outfit was simple, tailored black slacks with a cream blouse.

She looked effortless and elegant. Intimidating.

“Jae! I was about to send out a search party. You never return my calls. We went to your apartment, but it seems you moved without telling anyone!”

Ouch. Poor start.

“Hey, Mom, could we come in? I’ve got some stuff to tell you.”

“Alright. I’ll call your father.” She moved out of the way and Jae led me into the house, a firm grip on my hand that his mom didn’t miss.

The living room was tense by the time Jae’s mom and dad joined us. Jae had his dad’s eyes and lean build. He was where Jae got his golden hue, though his nose and the shape of his eyes were all his mom.

“Jae! About time! Who have you brought?”

“Mom, Dad, this is my boyfriend, Curtis.”

There was a tense moment where I didn’t think they were going to speak to me. We took seats nervously on the overstuffed couch.

“Hello, Curtis, I’m Minjun. My wife is Haneul. You must tell us about yourself and how you met Jae!” Minjun clearly was more receptive to me than his wife.

“Nice to meet you,” I started, politely. “I own a renovations business where I have twelve employees now, though I’m in the process of hiring a few more. Jae and I met through the Mate Match app. I knew it was my best chance for meeting someone with the same outlook on life as me.”

“And what outlook is that?” Haneul asked, frostily. This meeting was not going well when it came to her.

“A family one,” Jae answered. “There’s more to tell you.”

His parents looked at him expectantly until finally Minjun spoke. “What is it, Jae?”

“I’ve moved in with Curtis. We’re pregnant.”

You could have heard a pin drop, the room was just that silent.

“You’re pregnant?” His mom looked stunned.

“Yes. Twelve weeks now. We’ve just had our scan. Would you like to see?”

“Of course!” Her words were softer. There was something in her eyes I couldn’t understand not knowing her well. She was guarded, yet hopeful.

It was when Haneul looked at our little bean I saw her soften fully. “Curtis, what’s your family like?”

I told them both the story about my dad raising me alone after Mom died.

I might have been nearly an adult, still I’d needed my dad more than ever at that time.

They asked me questions about my sister, her family, and if we were close.

My smile widened as I thought about the warm welcome my family offered compared to Jae’s.

I could hardly blame his parents for being stunned.

My family had some warning. We'd sprung this on Haneul and Minjun.

They weren't rude while they asked, just curious.

The more I spoke, the more I could see the walls come down.

They asked about our first date and how little bean came to be.

Jae helped me answer, his face red with embarrassment.

I even got them to laugh when I told them about training Percy to do jumps.

By the end, I knew they were going to accept me. Didn't mean there wasn't a tough road ahead.

"Your grandparents are going to be furious, you understand?" Haneul said softly. I saw her coldness in a new way. She was worried for Jae, just chose to show it in a different way, how she had been taught to.

"Yeah. I'm prepared for whatever. They've never really known what to do with me as a male omega. Things would have been easier if I was the beta instead of Iseul."

Haneul took her son's hand. "True. I will protect you from them as much as I can."

"I will, too," Minjun added. "We live so far from their control now. Why should we let their opinions have any bearing on our lives? Curtis, you seem to be the perfect man for Jae. Haneul, our Jae was never as calm or happy with Hwan, was he?"

She gave a bitter laugh. "No. I wish... I wish so many things. We shouldn't have let them push him on you. I think you have picked right this time. The baby... I am so excited about the baby."

“I am, too.” Minjun took his wife’s hand and kissed it. “We can’t wait to get to know you better, Curtis.”

“Thank you.”

We had afternoon tea and then dinner with his family.

I stole away to send pictures of the scan to mine and found myself in Jae’s old bedroom.

I could tell it was his room by the posters on the wall and all the art.

For a long time, I stood there looking at each piece he had drawn.

His style was familiar to me by now. He’d drawn my portrait, which was on my dresser next to a photo of him I loved.

“You’ll make sure he publishes that novel, won’t you? Hwan didn’t see the value in Jae’s art. I think you do.” Haneul approached me slowly, looking around her son’s room with a fond expression.

“He’s so talented, it would be a crime not to encourage him. Not that he needs it. He’s got a publishing date!”

“Oh! That’s wonderful! I wonder why he didn’t say.”

“I think he was just more focused on the baby because of the scan today. The book is nearly done. He’s got an office at our house. My dad wants to help with childcare so Jae can continue to work after. I’m cutting my hours to make sure—”

“That makes me so happy to hear. I would also like to help. With childcare. I want to

be a presence in the child's life. In all your lives. I hate that he was scared to tell us, though I understand why."

I felt vindicated at her words. While I understood Jae's concerns, I had an outsider's perspective. These weren't bad people, just cautious and trapped by tradition.

"We've got time until the baby comes to work it all out. I'd be grateful for your help."

"So would I," Jae said from the doorway, a loving smile on his face. "Thanks, Mom. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, about the baby and the book."

I didn't hear the words Haneul said to her son when she embraced him. All I knew was the look of relief on Jae's face was worth it all.

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Seventeen

Jae

Now that we'd passed the twenty-week line, I had a sweet bump and more of my energy back.

Pregnancy agreed with me, apparently. My skin was glowing.

I felt happy all the time, and the movement of our little bean?

Adorable. Sure, I was told that would change when they decided to use my bladder as a football, but I was enjoying it for now.

One thing I really liked was the return of my libido because it had abated some after twelve weeks. Wanting sex more often was something I liked to take advantage of in the early mornings with my man. It was our time to spend together before the day got busy and life intruded.

I snuggled deeper into his arms, brushing my ass against his groin. Curtis muttered something sleepily, pulling me tighter against him. He pressed a kiss on the scent gland on my neck. One where I hoped to have a mating bite in the future. Only from Curtis, though. He was it for me.

My cock hardened in my briefs. I wriggled again, feeling a hardening in the cleft of my ass.

“You starting something, baby?” Curtis sounded more alert. He nipped at my gland this time, following it with another kiss.

I moaned, feeling slick leaking. “Yeah. I need you.”

“How bad?”

“Really bad!”

“Bad enough to ignore morning breath?”

I couldn’t help my laugh. “Absolutely. Give me your knot. Please, I need it.”

He turned me, so I was laid on my back, making it easy to kiss me. The kiss was deep and hungry. Even after months of living together, we still had this need for each other.

I was too impatient for his cock to wait. Pulling at his briefs, I slid them over the curve of his ass and pulled him into me.

“Now!” I demanded.

Curtis chuckled, but complied. He helped me get undressed and turned me onto my side.

The recent horny spell meant we were having a lot of sex, so I didn’t need much prep. He slid inside with a groan. He nipped at my scent gland again as he thrust.

Over and over, he nipped and licked at my shoulder and neck, probably leaving marks as he moved inside me. This position was perfect for feeling every damn inch of his dick.

He reached around me to smooth a hand over my belly before he bit my ear. “Love you.”

Even though I’d heard the words before, so many times, they were special to me. “Love you, too.”

His hand wrapped around my cock, stroking me in time to his thrusts. I came before him and then again when his knot stretched my hole.

I luxuriated in the scent of his pheromones, the feel of his arms around me and being pleasantly full of Curtis.

For a while, I dozed, until his knot shrank and the needs of my bladder pulled me from his arms.

Best way to start the day!

The office set-up Curtis had worked out for me was amazing.

The chair he had researched was super comfortable and he’d ensured I had the best light for drawing.

Most of my commissions were up to date. I’d have to go into the office later in the week to go over a contract in person, but otherwise my day was clear to work on my stuff.

I’d sent the final draft of my book away. Soon it would be printed!

I’d just had a snack and was working on a character concept when I got a call from Brady, because he worked for the publisher I was contracted to, I assumed it was a business call. They were considering taking my graphic novel on, another long

forgotten project from before Curtis came along.

“Hey, how’s it going?” I greeted my best friend. I hadn’t heard from him in a few days, both of us so busy with work.

“Jae? You need to look at this. I’m going to send you a video, okay? Watch it and call me back.” Brady sounded upset. It had me alert immediately.

“Alright. What’s happening?”

“Just look at this, okay?” He ended the call abruptly. I stared at the phone for a minute in shock. Brady was never rude to me like that. Whatever it was had him rattled.

A message with a link popped up. It took me to a news site, one which had a reputation for facts over scaremongering. A feeling of foreboding came over me.

The video loaded quickly. In the report, a woman was facing the camera with a familiar building behind her. Her face was set into a stern expression. Oh, this had to be bad!

“Whistleblowers have come out saying AlphaPharm knew a batch of the popular quick acting contraception DuoStop was faulty and still allowed it to be sold. The company then hid the fact that they knew worsening this terrible situation. Despite taking the precautions necessary to prevent a pregnancy, AlphaPharm knew their contraception would fail in as much as fifty percent of uses. The company has since issued a product recall for two batches. If these egregious actions have affected you, the medical council suggests reporting this either to the police or to a medical professional. In a statement from AlphaPharm’s legal team, they have confirmed a significant compensation package will be paid to those confirmed to have become pregnant after taking the faulty DuoStop. ”

What the fuck? I watched the video three times before what she said really registered. Faulty DuoStop? They'd known about it? How could this have happened?

"Oh, shit!"

Could we have taken one of the faulty batches?

I loved being pregnant with Curtis' child, but I would have preferred a little more time to date him before taking such a big step.

Would I go back and change things? Maybe not.

I was lucky. Curtis was perfect for me. We were building an incredible life together.

We were well suited, thanks to the Mate Match app.

Things could have been different, though. I thought of all the omegas relying on the contraception who were maybe not in the position to have a child. Would they have felt shamed and had abortions? Were they having kids they might not be able to afford?

Rather than call Brady back, I sent him a text telling him I'd speak to him later, first I needed to speak to my alpha. I paced the room, rubbing my stomach, our bean kicking away as I called Curtis.

"Hey, babe, is everything alright?" He sounded slightly tense, not likely at my interruption. Curtis was the first to admit he rarely took a proper break. A call from me often gave him the excuse to rest some.

"Have you seen the news?" I asked abruptly, my stress sharpening my words.

“Been a bit busy here. The owner ordered the wrong size sink, and we had to discuss—”

“Sorry, but you really need to check the news.”

My incredibly patient boyfriend let out a little sigh. “Jae, I’m really busy here. Could you tell me what’s happening?”

I took a second not to get upset. Damn hormones.

Curtis wasn’t dismissing me, he was just busy and I’d interrupted.

Rather than lie and say he’d check it out, or put me off to later, he wanted the news from my lips.

He trusted what I said. I was working on unlearning bad habits from my relationship with Hwan.

Quickly, I outlined the problem. Playing the video back so he could hear the words from the source’s mouth.

Curtis swore a line of expletives that would have had him banned from my parents’ house.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

Bless him, always thinking of me first. “I’m fine. I think. What about you?”

“Jae, you’re the best thing that ever happened to me. We accepted this situation as fate, giving us a push. A point five chance baby or a happy accident, doesn’t matter how they happened. This baby is wanted.”

“Yeah. They are. I’m grateful they gave me the push for more with you. I just feel bad for all the other omegas hurt by this. We’re lucky. What about the ones who are struggling?”

“Always thinking of others. You have the sweetest heart.” His pride in me was evident.

“Do you still have connections from when you were working on your degree? Could you see if anyone wants to take this on? Surely there has to be a way of stopping it from happening again. If it wasn’t for the whistleblower, we might never have known.”

I took a moment to think. In order to get the legislation necessary, it would require a ton of support. This issue affected not only omegas, though. It caught alphas in its web, too.

“Hmmm, I might know someone. It’s part of an omega’s fundamental rights to have safe, effective contraception, so I think it’ll be an easy sell. DuoStop isn’t cheap.”

“Right. You’ve got this. Are you sure we’re one of the damaged batches?”

“No. I didn’t check. Just assumed. It seemed to fit.”

“If you want, I can stay on the phone while you have a look.” I heard him rustling about in his office. Hopefully he was taking time to eat something.

It took only a moment to pull up the news site on my tablet and get the batch numbers. Finding where I’d put the package for the DuoStop took longer.

All the while, Curtis told me about his day, asked questions about mine, and eventually reminded me what I was wearing the night we met thinking that maybe the

DuoStop package was still in my coat pocket. I loved him so damn much.

“Got it! Right where you said it was. How did I not remember this coat?”

“To be fair, you were in heat at the time you wore it.”

“Let’s blame that.” I fumbled with the package before locating the batch number. I checked it three times, even repeating out the numbers to Curtis. He got called back to work before I could tell him the news.

We’d taken the faulty DuoStop.

Truthfully, I didn’t know how I felt about it. When I thought it was just a point five percent chance, it felt like the baby was special.

Then I realized it didn’t make the baby any less in my eyes.

What were the chances of a date, a person I’d only just met setting off my heat weeks early?

What were the chances of us falling pregnant during our first heat together?

I’d been with Hwan for years and while I’d taken contraception, I hadn’t been consistent with it because of the headaches.

Our batch of DuoStop had been out for over a year! What were the chances that was what we’d get in that drugstore? It was a chain of events that had made this happen.

The baby I was carrying was the happiest of little accidents because I had Curtis by my side. That little baby had brought us together, and I loved them for it. I knew others weren’t so lucky. It made me determined to fix this. Now I knew I had to fight

for them to get justice.

Eighteen

Jae

Getting old acquaintances on board to create a new law should have been incredibly challenging.

It was not. This scandal had affected more people than initially thought, giving me more allies than I could have hoped for.

During the initial investigation, it was found that there was at least one other batch with a less than advertised effectiveness. Lara helped with that information.

My potential sister-in-law admitted to having her concerns that we'd end up pregnant when Curtis told her we had used DuoStop. As a doctor, she had seen more than a few patients in her clinic who had become pregnant despite taking the proper precautions.

"I'm so sorry I couldn't say anything," she'd apologized the day after the news had dropped.

Curtis had told his family we were one of the couples who'd used one of the faulty batches, wanting to be open with them about what I planned to do. They were fully on board.

Lara also wanted to help with her medical knowledge. She admitted there was talk in the medical community, many theories that something had happened, well before the

story broke. There just had been no proof, only suspicions, until the whistleblower let the story out.

With a couple of doctors adding to the ranks, we quickly put together a team, proposed a bill, and made compensation easier to obtain. It was a hell of a lot of work. Far more than I should have been doing, especially with a book about to come out and a baby on the way.

Luckily, I had Curtis. My man was wonderful at ensuring I took regular breaks and even had a nap schedule for me. He wasn't above coming home after lunch to make sure I took a nap. The thirty-minute snooze did help me, so I rarely fought him. Besides, it was best for the baby.

I was busy fielding calls from lawyer friends about which lawmakers were most likely to be sympathetic when I got a surprise visitor at the front door one afternoon: Hwan.

"Hey, Jae." He greeted me, looking sheepish in his sharply tailored suit. "I'm sorry just to turn up like this. Your parents told me your new address and your news." He was clearly uncomfortable, yet tried to be friendly. "Congratulations! Can I come in?"

Shaking off the shock, I moved out of the way. I still hadn't said a word, more than a little overwhelmed.

"Is your boyfriend home?" Hwan was scanning the entryway.

The question broke me out of my confusion. "Curtis? No. Should I call him?"

Hwan hesitated. "Maybe. Depends." He sighed. "Are you okay talking for a minute?"

“Yeah, sure. Hold on, I’ll see if I can get him on a call.” I pointed him through to the living room and went to call Curtis in the kitchen.

“Hey, are you alright?” Curtis asked as soon as he answered. While it wasn’t uncommon for me to call during the day, I tried to keep it to his lunch break. My man would drop everything for me, I knew that, I just didn’t like to take advantage of it.

“Um... Hwan is here. At the house.”

Curtis went on full alert. “He is? Why?”

“I don’t know. Do you have time—?”

He let out a frustrated noise. “I can’t get home, but I’ll stay on the line with you.” I heard him walking. Probably to somewhere quieter to hear the call better. “Do you want me to send someone over? I could ask my dad, or send one of the crew.”

Just knowing I had backup was enough for me. “Just stay on the line. He won’t do anything.”

Returning to the living room, I caught Hwan watching Percy warily.

My cat was sitting on an armchair looking regal, just staring at my ex boyfriend who had stayed standing, probably wondering if he was about to be attacked.

“He’s never liked me,” Hwan remarked. “Maybe we should have both guessed we weren’t meant to be. ”

“Maybe. Why don’t you sit down?” I sat on a chair, motioning for Hwan to take the sofa. I placed the phone on the table. “Curtis, you’re on speakerphone.” My boyfriend stayed silent, waiting for the reason Hwan had turned up unannounced.

“Look, we might not have been a good match.” I scoffed.

His jaw clenched briefly. “Still, it didn’t give me the right to cheat.

I came to say I’m sorry for how I behaved in those last few months.

We had our ups and downs, but that’s no excuse for acting so horribly and betraying you in such a way.

I really am sorry, Jae.” In his eyes was a plea for forgiveness.

His apology rocked me. It was the last thing I expected him to appear at my home to say. “Uh, alright. I mean, it was awful at the time. It hurt a lot.” Hwan winced. “I’m over it, though. Things are good now.”

Hwan appeared relieved and maybe a little sad at my words. “I’m glad. I just wanted to take this opportunity to clear the air and maybe offer some support.”

“Support?” The question came from the phone.

“Word has been going around that Jae is working with some important people to create some accountability for medical firms, particularly when it comes to omega reproductive health. My firm—”

“Hwan is a lawyer, Curtis,” I interrupted Hwan to say.

“Ah, thanks.”

“Yes, my firm is interested in working with you and those you’ve gotten on board to push through the laws you need.”

Okay, it wasn't the apology, offering to help was the last thing I expected. I didn't think the Hwan I knew cared about omega reproductive health. He must have seen the confusion on my face because he went into more detail.

"Seungmin, my husband," he winced, discomfort all over his features, "was horrified when the news about DuoStop broke. He told me he was particularly worried about less affluent omegas and the burdens this would cause them." Despite being my replacement, I wasn't angry at Seungmin.

In fact, he sounded decent. "When I was told you were working on the situation, he asked me to help you. He has always felt bad about how we started. He didn't know about you until later. "

"Oh." I'd never placed any blame on Seungmin.

My ex had admitted the other omega hadn't known he was in a relationship when they began.

Besides, Hwan had a lot going for him. He was attractive, well off, came from a good family, and was charming.

I couldn't fault the young omega for wanting him.

"Would you thank him, please? Let him know I'm not angry at him. I never have been."

"I will. Thank you, I appreciate how gracious you are being with me just appearing like this. Will you consider my offer and my apology?"

Life was all about choices and the paths they put you on. Hwan's led me to a much better life. If he could help me now so I could improve things for omegas, then I'd

put my pride aside and do what was necessary.

“There’s no need. I accept both. What is done is done.” I shrugged. “Yes, it hurt, but it gave me Curtis, where I’m much happier. I’d also love the help. There’s a lot of work ahead.”

“Yeah. Jae has his book and the baby to think of. Anything that’ll lighten the load for him is welcome,” Curtis added, still on the call.

“Ah, yes. I’ve heard about the book. It’s wonderful! I’m glad your dream is coming true.” Hwan genuinely looked happy for me. “Your grandparents are telling everyone about the book. I don’t think they know about the baby. Maybe you should tell them before they find out from someone else.”

Hwan’s remarks about my grandparents sat with me all day, even following me into my meeting with the publisher the next day. Brady could tell I was distracted.

“Why don’t we plan your schedule over lunch?” he suggested, bringing the meeting to a close.

The company had promoted Brady to agent.

He was my go between for the editor, the company higher ups, and controlled my diary.

There was a decent amount of promotion planned, a lot of it for after the baby was born, which would require us to travel.

Curtis, of course, was coming with us, which was why he was hiring more people to cover him.

I still had a few signings to do before I went on leave to have the baby. The hype from the DuoStop stuff was giving me a lot of attention, which the publisher wanted to maximize on. Completely fair, plus it helped my book get seen.

“Alright,” Brady said over our lunches. “What’s wrong?”

It took a little while, but I explained Hwan’s visit and his offer.

Brady was suitably angry at Hwan’s audacity to just turn up, though he also appreciated the apology, saying, “about damn time!” When I got to the part about my grandparents, Brady bristled.

“Ugh, I hate that he’s right. You need to get ahead of this and just tell them on your terms.”

“But—”

“They can’t do anything to you without looking petty. They live so far away and have no influence over your life. Just tell them.”

When Curtis got home, I asked him if he would be there for the call.

I knew Hwan and Brady were right. My grandparents deserved to hear the news from me, not my parents, who I’d banned from telling them, or the news.

Once the book went live, I knew I’d have to do events, and they’d know straight away.

They were thirteen hours ahead of us, so we had to wait until just before we went to bed to do the call. My grandmother loved technology and loved a video call, preferring to see our faces when we spoke. It had been quite some time since I’d

called her.

“Hello Grandmother,” I said in Korean, the words feeling strange on my tongue. I was so out of practice!

“Ah! There’s my grandson! It has been too long since I last saw your handsome face. Are you married yet?” She spoke in rapid Korean, the words almost too quick for me to understand.

“Could we speak in English, please? I have someone to introduce you to. He doesn’t speak Korean.”

She frowned. “Have you picked someone who does not know our language?”

Immediately, I felt defensive over Curtis. “He’s learned some phrases.”

Irritation filled me. Nothing I did seemed to be good enough.

My grandmother was my mother’s mom. They had a strained relationship because my mom wanted to stay in the US when my dad was offered a job with my grandfather’s company.

I was so grateful for her making that choice because I felt like there were more opportunities in the US for me and my beta sister.

“Is Grandfather at work?” My grandfather still hadn’t retired, though he was in his seventies. He thought my father was weak for retiring early, while Mom thought it was smart. She didn’t want him dying in his office of stress.

“No. He is here. The doctor told him to slow down. He works half the hours now,” she said with some pride.

The scenery changed as she walked through the house to find him. She then spoke too quickly for me to translate. Neither looked happy.

“We have heard rumors,” my grandfather said without greeting me, “that you are pregnant and unmated.”

I was stunned. How had they learned the truth?

“I—we plan to bond and maybe marry—”

“You will marry this alpha. Even if he is not of our choosing, you must marry and mate with him now that you are having his child.” Grandfather’s face was stern.

For a long moment, no one said anything. Then Curtis moved closer so he could be seen on the screen. “Hello, I am Curtis. I love Jae very much and hope to marry him when we are ready to. After the baby is here. I am excited to join your family.” His Korean was clumsy, though incredibly charming.

“You will do,” Grandmother said in a clipped voice, which softened when she added. “We are too old to travel for your wedding. Your grandfather is unable to fly. Instead, we will help you to pay for it. Send us a list for the baby!”

“Thank you.”

“We are proud of you, Jae. For the book. So incredibly proud!” Then she turned to address Curtis. “We do not want to repeat what happened with Iseul and miss seeing the baby grow. Do you make him happy?”

“I try,” Curtis said honestly. I held his hand tightly.

“Then that is enough.”

Nineteen

Curtis

It felt like the pregnancy passed at lightning speed. Before we knew it, there was only a week to go until the baby's due date. They grew well, and by all accounts, Jae's pregnancy was a textbook one for a male omega.

Over the months after the news about AlphaPharm, Jae worked tirelessly alongside a team of lawyers to change the law so that every pregnancy which occurred due to a contraception failure would be tracked to ensure this couldn't happen again.

Basically, when you bought any type of contraception, the type and batch was noted on your file.

Then an alert would ping out if too many of the same batch led to pregnancy.

The help Hwan had provided was instrumental in ensuring companies wouldn't get away with hiding that they were selling faulty products.

I tried to get Jae to slow down, but he was adamant he had to help.

All I could do was get him to take breaks when possible.

It wasn't my place to tell him he couldn't do something he felt so passionate about.

Besides, the lawyers argued Jae gave a "face" to the campaign and his presence was

vital.

Since some of these were old friends from college, they fought harder for him and the affected omegas.

They also often backed me up when Jae was burning himself out.

While he wasn't actively creating the laws, he was constantly being asked to consult with lawmakers and those in the medical profession about what omegas needed and how this screw up had affected them.

Whenever the subject was broached on the news, Jae's face was often used as an example of what happened when an omega did everything right, but were pushed into a situation caused by greed.

Everyone knew our love story by now and how the baby had pushed us closer.

Jae was quick to point out he was lucky and that he was fighting for less fortunate omegas.

I just wished he would slow down or that the campaign would use some of the other omegas who had come forward. Jae was putting himself at risk, and though I understood why, I just wanted him to take care of himself first.

Surprisingly, Hwan was good on that front, too. He had experience with willful omegas, as he put it, including pregnant ones, so he knew when Jae was pushing the limits of his endurance and how to get him to back down.

I did not have my mate's ex backing me up on my bingo card, but here we were. If it meant Jae and the baby were healthy, it didn't matter who it was.

The process of changing the law was involved and required the pharmaceutical companies to be honest with their test data, along with designing a system for reporting.

The sheer amount of omegas pregnant after DuoStop failure was enough to get it passed into law.

Insurance companies had to ask about their contraception when an omega presented as pregnant, and all the data went into a nationalized system.

No state by state reporting where some areas who were less favorable to omegas would “lose” their details.

All the information was entered into one database.

We were lucky. The pregnancy worked out okay for us.

Jae was the best partner in this that I could have asked for.

We had jobs, money, security. Jae and the team fought with AlphaPharm to increase the payout to not only cover the medical costs of the pregnancy and birth, but for the first three years of costs associated with having a child. Babies were incredibly expensive!

We had Jae’s rich grandparents begging to buy us stuff all the time, partly in guilt for how they’d acted when his sister announced her pregnancy. All the support we had made us incredibly fortunate. There were many omegas out there who didn’t have that support.

AlphaPharm was paying through the nose for their greed.

All they had to do was recall the products already distributed when they found out they wouldn't work correctly.

Yet they hadn't, because that would have been costly.

Apparently, there was only a fifty percent chance of the DuoStop batch we had used being effective.

One batch discovered later was only seventy-five percent effective.

The only reason the company didn't go under was the lack of proof so many omegas had to show they had used the affected batches, meaning they didn't get the compensation. It was so unfair!

Jae hadn't worn the jacket since the end of his heat. He had forgotten the package was there, so our payout was processed quickly.

I knew Jae felt a lot of guilt about getting the money, but I argued it was better in our pockets than AlphaPharm's. He relented, knowing I was right.

Besides, it came in handy when we wanted to take a break from the stresses of life and when getting ready for our impending little one.

A few weeks after our niece, Ella, was born, we went to a spa which specialized in pregnancy massages.

They showed me how to rub Jae's feet properly.

Again, Jae felt guilty, like we should be helping Jennie and Lara out with Milo or the baby, getting some much needed baby experience.

I reasoned after his months of campaigning, he needed the rest more than our family wanted our help.

Besides, we made Milo's day when we dropped off Percy for him to look after for the weekend. I worried for Jae's sake that we wouldn't get the cat back! Percy was bonded to his owner, though, and purred up a storm when we returned.

Percy seemed fascinated by Jae's bump. He spent all his time with Jae, often sleeping right next to him at night.

"I'm so nervous." Jae cut into my daydreaming with his words. I took his sweaty hand and squeezed it.

"We're nearly there. Baby has been moving today, right?"

"Yeah, not as much as before, and I had an upset tummy earlier."

As much as I worried, I was pretty sure it was normal for the stage of the pregnancy. "The baby doesn't have as much room to move now. The tummy thing, though, I'm sure Erika will know what's up with that."

Jae gave me a grateful smile. We were sitting in the waiting room of the birthing center for our final checkup before the birth.

"I'm sorry, but your last appointment's balance needs to be cleared before you can have your anatomy scan today." The receptionist tried to be quiet, but their words carried through the room.

"But my insurance was supposed to pay for that." I could feel the omega's frustration rising. She was arguing with the desk clerk, trying her best to stay calm despite the upsetting circumstances.

“It says here the insurance ran out before the claim went in, so they’ve declined it.” The receptionist grimaced. “I’m sorry.” They really sounded it. Must have been horrible to be in such a situation. “Are you able to pay the balance?”

The woman backed away, muttering to herself. She looked through her phone and shook her head sadly.

“My new insurance should cover the scan. Are you sure I can’t get it done?”

Unfortunately, the clerk shook their head. “It’s against our policy. Outstanding balances have to be paid in full or put on a payment plan with a thirty percent deposit.”

“Shit.”

Jae squeezed my hand, bringing my attention back to him.

He’d been listening in, too. “Can we help her? Pay her balance? We’ve got all this money and I can’t help but think this could have been me.

Without you, I could have lost my job because I couldn’t get through the morning sickness.

” His eyes met mine. His pleading was clear. “I want to help her.”

“That’s all you needed to say. Of course we can, sweetheart.” Anything I could give him, I would. I brushed my thumb over the swell of his cheek. “You are the kindest person I know. It hurts me to see how upset you’re getting.” I stood. “Let’s go speak to her.”

I helped Jae to his feet and over to the desk. His bump was so big and low now, it was

uncomfortable for him to walk far.

“Excuse me, I couldn’t help but overhear,” he began in a soft voice.

The pregnant lady reddened. She hung her head. “Fuck my life! Could this day get any worse? I’m so embarrassed!” she muttered.

I glanced at the clerk, who also looked uncomfortable. “This was a private conversation.” She spoke to the lady. “I’m sorry they overheard.”

“We want to help,” Jae interrupted. “We’ll pay the balance, and pay for today’s scan.”

“And for the birth,” I added. Why not help her out? We had decent insurance and plenty to pay for it.

Jae’s head snapped round. “Are you sure?” If I didn’t believe he loved me before, I would have known it then.

“Seriously?” the woman asked. She looked at me like all her Christmases had come at once, though she didn’t quite believe it was real.

“Yes,” I answered, firmly. “We got the payout from AlphaPharm,” I explained to the omega. To Jae, I said, “This is the best way to ease your guilt about it. Let’s pay it forward by helping...” I looked at the pregnant lady, waiting for her name.

“Sophie,” she supplied.

“Let’s help Sophie out so you feel better about the payout.” I figured if I framed it as Sophie helping to alleviate some of Jae’s guilt, then she would be more inclined to take our money.

“I’d like to do that.” Jae went to Sophie, taking her hands. “Please, let us.”

Sophie laughed. “Who am I to turn that offer down? My husband is going to be over the moon. He lost his job looking after me when I was sick. The start of the pregnancy was hard. He’s got another one now, but the insurance—”

“Hey,” Jae said gently. “Stuff happens. I’m just glad we can help.”

“How long do you have to go?”

“A week!”

“Exciting!”

I turned away from them to go to the clerk. “Is her appointment available if it’s paid?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Can we put money on her account to cover the birth or be billed after?”

“We can bill you after.”

“Great. Let’s get the outstanding and the scan paid today and if you could note on the account to bill us. Whatever she needs, okay?”

“Fantastic.” In an undertone she added, “Thank you so much! I hate this part of my job. We try to work with people but—”

“I get it.” I really did. They couldn’t afford to do all the work without being paid. I knew this center had drop ins once a month. A long line of people often formed

around the block.

Sophie hugged us both before she was taken for her appointment.

“Thank you for agreeing,” Jae said, looking lighter than air. The good deed had been great for his conscience.

“Jae?” Erika called. “Come on through.”

“Well, your blood pressure is perfect. Your urine sample was also perfect. Are you still enjoying the pregnancy?” Erika was upbeat as usual. Today she was wearing a lilac headscarf covering her braids. The color matched the cheerful scrubs she wore.

“I’m nervous about the birth, but at the same time, I can’t wait to meet them!” Jae was lying back on the bed, a sheet covering his groin, waiting for Erika to check him over.

“Yeah, I get that. The last two weeks feel like they last months, right?” Erika snapped on some gloves. She examined his stomach thoroughly. “Oh, baby is head down. I did think you were carrying low. Have you had any unusual bowel movements?”

“Um, I had a bit of an upset stomach earlier. It was disgusting.” Jae’s face was hilarious. I swallowed back a snicker.

Erika laughed. “Yep, that’s your baby getting into position. Your uterus has signaled its eviction notice to the baby. The hormones have cleared your digestive system so everything can get in the right place for the birth, okay? It’s shut off one line so the other can open, make sense?”

“Yeah, kinda.”

“Jae? Your baby will be here in the next few days.”

“Really?”

Erika was quiet while she examined him internally. “For certain. You’re already three centimeters dilated. Baby is impatient! Good news is, I’m on call for the next few days, so it could be me handling your labor.”

“Curtis!” Jae’s panicked expression caught me off guard.

“What’s wrong?” I couldn’t help going to his side and taking his hand. Erika disposed of her gloves while giving me a fond smile. I liked our midwife and was grateful for her steady presence.

“We have to clean the house! Is the hospital bag ready? Did we buy diapers?”

I couldn’t help my laugh. “Honey, I have it all in hand. You just relax and save your energy. The birth is all on you. I’ll do everything else.”

“Just you listen to that man!” Erika ordered with a wink. “I’ll see you in a couple of days, maybe sooner.”

Our baby could come at any time. I couldn’t wait.

Twenty

Jae

By the time we got home after the appointment, I'd worked myself into a state. Any time now! While I couldn't wait to meet the baby, I was terrified about the labor part.

Yes, I knew it was going to hurt. I was sort of on board with that. I planned to take as much of the pain relief that I could. The birthing center didn't do epidurals, which I was okay with. They weren't all that useful for male omegas, anyway.

With the Entonox, AKA nitrous oxide and oxygen, my TENS machine, the battery-operated device with electrodes to block my pain that Curtis had thoughtfully bought for me, and pethidine, I was sorted for pain management.

It would be fine. Probably. I also had a birthing ball for at home.

It was so cute that Percy thought it was a toy.

Curtis, the meanie, locked it away in my office from him.

Erika knew I wanted to be mobile during active labor until I wanted to push and had told me the center had birthing balls there.

My mind was a mess, trying to figure out if we had everything we needed and if I was even ready for this mentally.

“Are you okay? You’ve been awfully quiet.” I could feel Curtis’ concern.

“Nervous. Feels like we’ve been waiting for the baby to come forever, but sort of overlooked how they come out of me.”

“It’s not too late to opt for a c-section if you’d rather.” Curtis wore a frown. “I can take more time off work, or your mom can come by and help while you heal.”

“Hmm.” I paused. “I did think about it. The long healing puts me off, and it limits how many babies we can have.”

“Already planning more?” His face broke out in a grin.

I couldn’t help my answering smile. “Yeah, I am. Already I can tell you’re going to be an amazing father. You’re so thoughtful and kind. You’ve been a dream partner through all of this.”

Curtis pulled me close, kissing the top of my head. I loved it when he surrounded me like this. “Well, I’m happy to make as many babies as you want. With you as their daddy, they will be adorable.”

Just being in his arms relaxed me.

“Why don’t you take a nap?” Curtis suggested. “You seem tired.”

Sleep sounded so good. Getting any decent rest was damn near impossible with my belly as swollen as it was.

“Yeah, I think I will. I’ve felt tired and sore all over, all day.”

Concern flitted across his face. “Why didn’t you say? Can I run you a bath first?”

“Nah, getting in and out of it is a pain. A shower might be nice, though.” I was so grateful for the bench in the shower stall.

“Okay, let me start the water for you and find something for you to wear after.”

“Will you join me?” I felt particularly needy at that moment. My alpha had to be with me. I needed to soak in the scent of his pheromones, feel his touch.

“Of course. Let me get things ready.”

Curtis, proving he was the best partner ever, had the water temperature perfect, our towels were heating on the rail, and I just knew my most comfortable clothes were waiting for me. Not that much fit me anymore. I was so looking forward to getting into my old stuff after the baby arrived.

I sat, back aching, on the bench while the water cascaded over me. It felt so good. The heat worked on my tired body, making me feel languid.

My alpha washed me with gentle, loving hands, before quickly cleaning himself. He wrapped a towel around himself before he dried me thoroughly and led me to the bed.

Dressed, I tried to get comfortable enough to rest. I still ached and knew sleeping would do me good, but there was something else I wanted.

Luckily, Curtis knew what I needed. “How about I suck you off before your nap?”

“What about you?”

“Jae, I’m so hot for you right now, a few strokes and I’ll be done.”

We hadn’t had penetrative sex for a couple of weeks because I found it

uncomfortable. I'd grown addicted to blow jobs and hand jobs before bed. I always slept better when I was sated.

"On me?" I wanted to be covered in his scent. Wanted to taste him.

"Yeah," Curtis' voice was a low rumble.

He wasted no time lowering my pajama pants and boxer briefs to get at my stiff cock. He licked and sucked on me until I begged him to let me come.

When I did, Curtis climbed over me, straddling my chest without adding any of his weight to my body, and stroked himself.

"Open up," he groaned. I did as he asked, sticking out my tongue to catch his release. As he came, I leaned forward to get it all, making Curtis moan my name like a plea.

Happy and sated, I drifted off to sleep while Curtis cleaned me up and redressed me.

Pain woke me. A sharp feeling coupled with heat over my lower belly.

"Curtis!"

He came running into the room. I'd felt him get up a while ago, probably to do some chores or paperwork.

"What's wrong?"

"I think my contractions have started!"

Relaxing some, he thought for a second. "Do you want to wait for the next one, or get your ball and TENS ready?"

“Maybe wait?”

We waited for a couple hours, having a light snack and moving about some, while the contractions became more painful and regular.

By the time they were ten minutes apart, I was sitting on my ball with my TENS machine in place, using the stimulation to help with the discomfort each contraction brought.

“Normally Erika would say wait until the contractions are five minutes apart before coming in, but she wants us to come now. She did warn there might be some traffic. Apparently, there’s been an accident, so only one lane is open.

” Curtis stood in the doorway to our bedroom with clear concern.

“Lara is bringing Milo over to check on Percy while we’re at the center. ”

“Okay.” I stood on shaky legs and waddled to Curtis. “Do we have everything?”

“It’s all in your car.” Curtis had bought me the vehicle months ago to ensure I had the freedom to come and go as I pleased.

Jennie and Marty had helped him pick out the make and model because they both had experience getting car seats in and out of their own cars. He really was the best. So thoughtful!

“Just need the most important thing...” he continued. At my confused glance, he added, “You and your cargo.”

Erika was right, the traffic was terrible. My contractions were four minutes apart before we even got there! I was terrified I’d be giving birth in the car or on the side of

the road.

After a brief exam, we were taken down to the delivery suite.

There Erika explained I was already nine centimeters and had probably passed the point of getting the pethidine injection.

She warned that giving it too close to delivery could make the baby sleepy and cause me to push longer. None of us wanted that.

I had to make do on the Entonox, which left me with a buzzed feeling. The room was warm, so I stripped down to a long t-shirt that covered my junk, not that I really cared what Erika or her assistant, Trevor, saw.

At three minutes apart, my water broke. I couldn't help getting upset at the mess I'd made and apologizing to Trevor, who was responsible for cleaning it up.

"You're doing so well," Curtis praised. "The group chat is so excited."

We'd introduced my parents to Curtis' family and closest friends at the baby shower.

My sister had even attended with her little one.

It was the first time I'd met my niece, Nari, Iseul's daughter who had clicked with Maddy.

Our families had hit it off and had made a group chat for all the baby news.

It was sweet to see my parents take so quickly to Ricky.

They'd even had dinner together a few times.

“Jae? Now that your water has broken, I need to check you again. Would you mind coming up onto the bed?”

Curtis helped me climb up. Rather than go onto my back, which ached something fierce, I went onto my knees, clinging to the high back of the bed, my butt raised from the mattress.

“Perfect position. If you want to push like this, gravity will help things along. Well done for going with your instincts,” Erika praised. Trevor monitored the gas and air, making sure I didn’t take too much and get sick.

“Oh, that’s lovely. You’re fully dilated. Do you mind Trevor doing an exam?” I shook my head. The trainee omega midwife went to Erika’s side. “See? Put your fingers here... feel?”

I didn’t pay attention to them, too focused on my body and the almost unbearable need to bear down.

“Erika! I think I need to push!”

“Go with it,” Erika coached. “Follow your body’s lead.”

Time made no sense. All I knew was pain and the need to push this baby out. We were so close.

I felt the baby’s head crown.

“Wait! No pushing until I check.” Erika examined the baby, making sure the cord wasn’t around their neck and it was safe to continue. “Okay, next contraction, I want you to give the biggest push!”

It took a few more agonizing contractions, but the euphoria when the baby slid free was incredible.

“Congratulations, daddies! You have a baby boy!”

Erika cleaned him up, and he made his first cry. It was the most beautiful thing in the world!

“Well done, Jae! You’re amazing. I love you so much. Both of you!” Curtis had tears running down his face as he clung to me.

Trevor came to me with a loosely wrapped baby. “Here you go daddy, meet your baby.”

I turned so he could place him on my chest. I’d lost my shirt after overheating.

“Hello, little one, it’s nice to meet you!” I felt the wetness on my cheeks, but didn’t care. My baby looked up at me, unseeing, but recognizing my voice as they lay skin to skin.

Curtis kissed me, then our baby. “Perfect. Both of you.”

The moment was blissful until Erika caught my attention. Curtis was having his turn with our baby. Like me, he’d lost his shirt so he could hold him close, getting that skin to skin contact to help them bond.

“Could we take your son to weigh him and start his paperwork?”

“Of course.”

“Jae? I’m worried about how much blood you’re passing and you’ve still got the rest

of the placenta to go. How about you get on your knees again? Maybe the change in position will help.”

I did as she suggested and pretty quickly she was smiling at me as the placenta slipped out. So disgusting, but also a miracle.

“Do you consent to cord blood samples being taken?”

“Yes.” I’d already discussed it with Curtis.

“Great! Well, you did fantastically. Little one is in excellent health, all seven pounds and ten ounces of him. We’ll get you a snack, maybe some toast and then move you to your room for the night.

You can go home in the morning, okay? Visitors can come for the evening hour, but I’d prefer it if you waited until you got home. ”

“Yeah, me too. I like having Curtis here, though. Does he have to go home?”

“No, there’s room on the bed for him. Do you have a name for the baby yet?”

Curtis beamed. “His name is Leo.”

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Twenty One

Jae

We stayed the night at the clinic, taking tips from other omegas there on how to get Leo to latch properly.

Despite our exhaustion, Curtis was the one to hold Leo and settle him when I needed to close my eyes for an hour or so.

He argued that I'd just given birth, so it was the least he could do.

The man was my hero. He'd been with me for everything, being attentive and gentle as always.

If I hadn't fallen in love with him before, I would have fallen hard then.

During my most vulnerable time, I felt safe and cherished by the man I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.

Just going home was a production. Leo needed to be fed first, then his diaper changed.

Of course, he spit up on his outfit, meaning he needed a different one.

Then there were the hundreds of pictures we had to take for our family and friends.

Even the people Curtis worked with wanted to see the newest member of the crew.

By the time we got into the house, the last thing I wanted to do was deal with people.

Luckily, my parents were there to corral everyone into an orderly line for baby cuddles.

My dad and Curtis ensured I was sitting down with my feet up, Percy in my lap, and a soothing cup of tea in hand while my mom made something delicious in the kitchen.

Lara and Jennie had done our laundry while Ricky had vacuumed.

They even had Milo doing chores! There was a little playpen for Ella set up so she could watch everyone.

Our nephew was the first to hold Leo before his grandpa, Ricky, got a turn. The older man's eyes filled with tears.

"I wish your mama was here to see him."

"She's been with us since before he was born. You know she wouldn't miss out on seeing him." Curtis looked tired. My man needed a nap.

"Mom?" I whispered, gaining her attention. "Could you get Curtis to have a nap?"

"Of course. You should both be resting right now."

"He's barely slept, looking after me and Leo instead of sleeping."

"He'll run himself into the ground." Her frown was out of love for my man. We'd grown closer recently, with Curtis making us see each other in a new light.

Leo became fussy, so Curtis scooped him out of Ricky's arms and cradled him close to his chest, rocking slightly. He was a natural with our baby.

Mom went to him. They spoke in low voices, but enough of my mom's words carried for me to hear.

"You are doing a remarkable job caring for my son and grandson, but you need rest."

I didn't need to hear Curtis' words to know he was protesting.

"What would your mother be telling you right now?" Mom guilt. My mom was wicked. I couldn't help letting out a tiny scoff. Everyone else was too absorbed in their tasks or talking about the baby to intrude on the moment between Curtis and my mom.

This time Curtis' protest was weak. He knew he needed to relax, or he'd get sick.

"Now, both of you are going to have some sleep. We'll watch Leo for an hour. Just a short nap. You must learn to sleep when they are sleeping. We will help with the house."

Curtis relented. "Alright. Just an hour. Jae will probably have to feed him soon." He gave a tender glance to the baby against his wide chest.

"Good. One hour." Mom paused. "Curtis?" His eyes met hers. "I was prepared to like you for Jae's sake. Now, seeing you with my grandchild like that, I'm ready to love you for you. I would be proud to call you my son one day soon."

"Can I count that as your blessing to ask Jae to marry him?"

He looked over at me, smiling when he saw I was watching. The love in his eyes was

almost overwhelming.

“It is a request that you do it as soon as possible. Now give me that sweet baby!”

Curtis gently passed Leo over to my mom, her expression softening beyond anything I’d seen from her in my life. I saw the moment she made room in her heart, not only for Leo, but for Curtis. She patted his arm, then went to join my dad on the couch.

A nap did us both a world of good. I slept curled up in Curtis’ arms, content with my life and secure in my future.

Some of our family stayed for dinner, though Lara, Jennie, Milo and Ella all left after the adults got their baby cuddles in. Our parents were such a great help rather than getting under foot. Most looked reluctant to leave.

The house was so quiet when they returned to their homes. Curtis was burping Leo after I’d fed him again.

I was tired, sore all over, yet I’d never been happier. I had the love of a good man, a sweet baby, and a loving family.

Taking a seat next to Curtis, I laid my head on his shoulder.

“Should we try to put him down to sleep?”

“Yeah, we could all do with a few more hours.” Curtis kissed the top of my head and then Leo’s little nose. “I still can’t believe he’s here. I love you both so much.”

“Love you, too.”

“I might be slightly delirious with tiredness, but I swear to you, I’m going to marry

you soon. Make you happy until the end of our days.”

“Is that a proposal?”

“Yeah, it is.” He turned, meeting my eyes. “Jae, will you marry me? Be by my side for the rest of our lives?”

“I’d love nothing more.”

Curtis took a week off to help me out at home.

He probably would have taken longer, but the crew needed him and I was fine.

Me and baby Leo were learning each other.

I knew he loved being held up against my shoulder instead of cradled.

Leo liked to nap with his arms sticking up like he was surrendering to sleep.

He hated baths, and I got that, still he needed to be cleaned after some epic diapers.

Me and my baby had lots to learn, though we had all the support we needed to do it. Being a dad was the best feeling in the world and I was glad to be going on this adventure with Curtis by my side.

The doorbell rang while Curtis was at the grocery store. It felt like we’d run out of everything. Leo was fine for food because I was nursing, it was just that there was nothing for us to snack on!

“Hold on!” I called to the visitor. I tightened my robe around me and carried Leo to the door, hoping it wasn’t another delivery from my brother or grandparents.

My brother, Jun, had been the one to tell my grandparents about my pregnancy and had apologized many times since then.

He was out in Korea visiting them when I called to let them see baby Leo.

I was never angry at my brother, it hadn't been done out of malice, I knew that. My brother just didn't think sometimes.

His recent olive branch gift was this incredible three wheeled stroller which was perfect for running with, probably more useful when Leo was a little older.

I guess he felt guilty about our distance and telling our grandparents before I could.

He'd been so warm on the call with them, saying several kind things about Curtis and the baby.

Everything was forgiven. Our baby was the start of a new chapter for my family.

Brady's face was pulled into a frown when I answered. "Hey," he greeted. "I came for baby cuddles!"

"Everything okay?" I asked while I stepped out of the way to let him in.

"Yeah. It's fine."

"Is Xavier still bothering you?" Brady had told me the two alphas were divorcing and the situation with the other omega was complicated.

He turned evasive. "Look, is it okay if we don't talk about him for a while? I just need—" He stood, wringing his hands.

“It’s fine. Come in, take Leo. I need a shower!” I led him into the living room, where it looked like a bomb had gone off. Brady began picking things up for me like the amazing friend he was. There were never enough hours in the day to get the place clean.

“I was going to say, but I thought it was rude to point it out!” He laughed, sounding more like himself.

Once he sat on the sofa, I handed Leo over to him. “Hey little Leo, I’m Uncle Brady.”

It was sweet to see them together. Brady held the baby so carefully, like he was glass and could shatter at any moment.

“Uncle Brady is going to watch you while Daddy showers,” I cooed to my precious son.

“Go! You reek!” Brady laughed.

“See how nice you smell after you’re covered in baby puke.” I took my chance to run for the shower.

The water felt so good! Curtis was great about letting me get washed up, but his visit to the grocery store had run on longer than he thought since we were out of pretty much everything. He hadn’t predicted Leo spitting up on me as soon as he left the house either.

Even though I knew Leo was safe with Brady, I didn’t linger under the water. Just showered off quickly and found something puke free to wear. I needed to do laundry.

When I returned, the living room was fuller. My mom was chatting with Brady and Maddy, who was taking her turn to hold Leo. I heard Curtis and Marty in the kitchen

and went to help them after kissing my mom on the cheek.

“Hope you don’t mind us popping in like this,” Marty said while he unpacked the many grocery bags. “We found Curtis looking half asleep in the grocery store and wanted to make sure he got home safe.”

“It’s good to see you!” I went to hug Marty. He returned the gesture and bussed my cheek.

“You look so good! We won’t stay long. Maddy has been desperate to get her baby cuddles in.”

Curtis tidied up the now empty bags. “Careful, she’ll be asking for a sibling now,” he teased. “Maybe you’ll let us sign you up for Mate Match at last.”

“Maybe.” Marty’s lips twisted into a smile. I thought I noticed a wistful look in his eyes. Perhaps he’d caught a dose of baby fever.

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Epilogue

Jae

I thought parenthood was an adventure. Doing a book tour with a baby was the same game, just on hard mode.

Luckily, I had Curtis and my mom with me for a lot of the tour.

Curtis had made Marty a partner in his business along with expanding further, so he could take the time off to see the country with me and baby Leo.

He'd pay Marty back when it came time for Marty to go off for parental leave.

Yeah, our friends were finding love thanks to Mate Match, just like we hoped.

Navigating being a dad, writing and illustrating another book, and still working was rewarding. I wouldn't have changed anything in my life for a second.

Yet, I still loved mornings when I knew I had time to lie in bed with my man.

Leo was sleeping through the night and we had an hour before my mom would arrive to take him to a baby group, she had heard about.

Mom loved spending time with her grandbabies.

Getting with Curtis had brought her closer to Iseul, too.

She often looked after Nari and Leo together, giving me time to catch up with my sister, or just have a break.

I wriggled down the bed, running my hands over the curve of Curtis' stomach. I loved his big belly! He roused when I pulled his hardening cock out of his underwear and took it into my mouth.

"Jae," he moaned as I sucked him. I worked my tongue over the head and into his slit, lapping up the precome there. "Baby, let me taste you."

Totally up for that, I popped off his cock and lay back. I shoved off my underwear, flinging them to parts unknown. With my luck my mom would find them when she was cleaning up.

I was distracted when Curtis pushed back my thighs and licked down my ass crack. He flipped me over to my stomach to get at my hole easier. He pushed his tongue inside me, groaning at the taste of my slick.

Our foreplay wasn't drawn out. There wasn't the time to really play with each other's bodies. We didn't want to risk Leo waking while still knotted. Curtis thrust inside me, pulling me up so my back was against his chest. I loved this position. He was so deep inside me I felt like I would burst!

On and on he pumped into me until I felt him swell and he came. He continued to rock through his orgasm and stroked me until I reached mine. It was quick, but exactly what we both needed. We lay together on the bed, still joined until his knot went down and he slipped free of my body.

In the room next to us, Leo let out a cry.

"I'll get him," Curtis said. He got up, that delicious body on display making me want him again. I wondered if I should get ready for a heat. Leo wasn't nursing anymore,

so they could return soon.

“Curtis?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you want another baby?”

Leo gave another impatient cry. “Let’s get the wedding and our trip out of the way first, huh? Then we can talk about more babies.” He paused at the doorway. “Why? Is it your heat?”

“Yeah. I think it might be soon.”

“Okay, let’s talk to your mom about having Leo.” Our son was getting irritated. His cries grew in volume. “Go shower. We can talk about this later.”

My mom arrived when Curtis was in the shower. We’d switched off Leo duty after a quick, emotional discussion about future babies. “Jae, I think you might be going into heat,” she remarked almost as soon as she scented me.

I guess it was official. I was about to have my first postpartum heat. There was so much to do before then. We’d already decided to give my body more time to recover before having another child. Our life was busy enough and we could afford to wait another year or two.

Despite our first try with DuoStop, there wasn’t anything else we could use that wouldn’t make me sick or draw out my heat longer than it needed to be. We’d just have to trust it would work this time now that the faulty batches were gone.

The way our family and friends rallied around us to get me through this heat and take care of Leo was a testament to how far we’d come.

Grace covered Curtis at work. She was now the leader of her own team and would hold down the fort with Marty while Curtis was with me.

Brady moved some things around, giving me time to enjoy my heat experience and relax after it without a deadline looming.

My parents and Ricky packed up Leo to stay with my mom and dad for a couple of days.

It was wonderful to have so much support.

What was better was having two almost completely guilt free days just enjoying my mate.

Curtis

It took us ten months to get married. Our ideal venue had two spaces.

One when Leo was two months old, which was far too soon to throw a wedding together, or this one when Leo was crawling and standing up all over the place.

It wouldn't be long before he was walking!

I had so much to do in the house to baby proof it now that he was mobile.

Brady and Haneul still complained that barely ten months wasn't long enough to plan a wedding, but they'd done it.

The wedding was tasteful, yet simple, held in a local hotel and attended by most of our family and our friends.

Brady was Jae's best man, with his brother, Jun, also standing with him.

I had my best man, Marty, and best woman, Lara, as my attendants.

Both were too important to me for me to choose between them.

Milo led his sister down the aisle, helping her spread rose petals.

We each walked down the aisle after the best people went down together. Jae was with both his parents, me with my dad. I knew my mom was there in spirit.

Out of the perfect day, the only downside was some sadness that Jae's grandparents were unable to attend due to his grandfather's ill health. They watched the ceremony and speeches over a video call, taking part in the day they had insisted they pay for.

Despite Jae's worries, they didn't care about my ethnicity, too busy fussing over Leo to care who his alpha parent was.

It helped that Leo was the mirror image of Jae, with his golden skin and dark hair.

He had my nose and lips, maybe. Time would tell on that.

If all our kids looked like Leo, then I'd have a football team's worth of them!

Still, they were proud of him, not just for his novel, but for how he chose to live his life on his terms and the work he did changing the law to help other omegas.

I really believed they were happy for us and I was looking forward to our trip to Korea to meet them for Leo's first birthday.

Dad was coming, along with Jae's parents.

Jae breaking from familial expectations brought him and his sister closer.

Not to be left out, the eldest, Jun, made more of an effort with his siblings, especially after accidentally telling his grandparents we were pregnant before we could.

They were regulars at our home, having playdates with their kids and Leo.

They welcomed me into their family easily and I felt like Jun could become a close friend.

“You better get going. You need to check in for your flight,” Haneul warned. Minjun was holding his grandson, completely unaware we were still there. Jae was hesitating over leaving our son.

“Are you sure—”

“Jae,” his dad chided, showing he had known we were lingering.

“We can manage. We have Ricky coming over for dinner. Lara is on speed dial if anything happens.” He spoke faster to prevent Jae from interrupting.

“Which it won’t. You forget we had three children.

Leo is such an angel, aren’t you?” He grinned at our baby.

“We’re going to have the best time, and you are going to relax for a change. ”

“Come on,” I said, taking my husband’s hand. “Give him one last kiss and we’d better go. We don’t want to miss our flight.”

His grandparents had paid for first class flights to an exclusive wellness resort as a sort of mini-moon.

Our Korea trip would be our true honeymoon, and we’d explore the country while

Leo got to know his great grandparents.

But first, a fancy spa was going to pamper us for three days.

With Leo's first year almost behind us, we needed it.

I loved being a parent, and now, a husband.

Wouldn't change it for the world, but the first few months were exhausting.

There were times I fell asleep sitting in the shower after work.

Jae struggled with the guilt of working and raising our child, feeling that he was being selfish to have something for himself.

His mom had talked him out of that, omega to omega.

All of it helped us get to where we were now. Married and still very in love, even thinking of another child after we visited Korea. We'd gotten through these last few months stronger.

We kissed Leo once more and got into the car. I'd just pulled away when I got a message.

"Check that for me, would you?"

Jae unlocked the device. "It's an email from Mate Match."

"What does it say?" I glanced over at him to see his jaw hanging open. "What's wrong?"

"Uh, nothing bad. They want permission to add us to the testimonials for successful

matches. They'd love to display one of our wedding photos on their website." He thought for a moment. "What do you think? Do you want to? I feel like we should. We wouldn't be together if it wasn't for the app."

"I'm on board. Mate Match gave me the life I'd only dreamed of before."

I picked up his hand and kissed it. If I wasn't driving, I would have kissed the mark on his scent gland. We'd done the marking in private after our wedding. Jae was everything to me. My husband and my mate. The mark just proved it to everyone.

Jae beamed at the simple show of affection. "A loving husband I adore and a cute baby. Mate Match really delivered that happily ever after."