



Naughty Elf: Alfie (Santa's Naughty Elf Mates)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Alfie just wants to have fun, but maybe fridge magnets aren't the way to do it.

Every refrigerator needs the F word! That's how I feel about it, but Santa had other thoughts. He fires me on Christmas! Who does that? All I wanted was to give people a few giggles. Now I'm a statue in a strange place waiting for my fated mate to find me.

I'm Pisces (not my real name and don't tell anyone I'm really a Taurus). This year is the year my crystal shop finally takes off! Manifesting! When the security alarm goes off at my warehouse in the middle of the night I find the most gorgeous Alpha I've seen in my life. But of course they're a serial killer, right? Or a thief! I can't just let them stay with me, even if I feel this strange and delicious pull to them. Right?

Alfie has a year to convince Pisces they're fated mates, even if the rabbit shifter Omega can't tell that's what he's feeling.

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Chapter 1

Alfie

The scratch of my gold fountain pen scrapes along the glittering green paper. Only one more letter to finish, then it'll be time to help load the sleigh. I wipe at my brow. Just a little longer and it'll be Christmas. The best time of the year!

I've been better this year compared to other years. I'm determined to be the one to ride with Santa #22 this year as his sleigh helper. I'm a twenty-eight year old alpha and still haven't had the honor. Granted, I don't exactly make it easy.

"Alfie!" Glenda, my supervisor, yells my name. I hold back a smile before turning to face her. Her rumpled blonde hair is wrapped in a messy bun on the top of her head.

"Yes?"

"Did you do this?" She waves frantically at the refrigerator beside her. I can't see the front, but I know exactly what she's talking about.

"Maybe?" I bite my bottom lip and cast my eyes down. "The letters were already there. I just gave them a little help."

She pinches the bridge of her nose. "We can not have monster... fudging is fun on the fridge."

"But it is. I'm just stating facts." At least facts according to the books I read. Having

no monster fudging experience, I don't know for sure if monster fudging is fun or not.

A few of my fellow elves snicker around me. They know the alphabet fridge magnets are my weakness. I can't resist.

"You can't keep doing this, Alfie. It's inappropriate. And disrespectful of your fellow elves. Not everyone... fudges monsters."

My face heats. Of course, I didn't think how the words were disrespectful. I just thought they were funny.

A few elves nod around me with their heads down as they continue to work on letters. We're in the mailroom and our only purpose is to respond to letters to Santa all year long, no matter the day. Most in this room are wholesome "good" elves. Not trouble makers like me.

"I'll behave." At least as long as I remember. "Please don't write me up again," I whisper.

"I'm sorry Alfie, you still haven't learned." Glenda walks over to me with an orange slip of paper stating my offense. There goes my chance of riding with Santa yet again. I nod and stuff the paper in my pocket. I only have myself to blame for the reprimand.

I just want people to like me, and usually that means making them laugh. But apparently my version of funny doesn't mesh with others around me.

Christmas music sounds out. It's time to load the sleigh!

Loading the sleigh is one of my favorite parts of Christmas. There's not much room

for error and it's the one time I'm laser focused.

It's a mass migration of elves as we make our way to the loading bays. In the sea of heads, I can't find any of my friends from the other sections of Santa #22's workshop. I always get anxious in the crowd and my heart pounds. Sweat beads at my temple until we make it to the loading bays.

I always work with the gifts for the Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky tri-state area in the US. Our bay is highlighted in bright yellow. The cheery color always warms my heart and lifts whatever dreary mood I might be in. I grab a safety vest and shrug it on.

There's someone in Southern Indiana that always gets crystals. I don't know who they are. I know exactly which bag contains the crystal and luckily it's front and center of our pile of gifts to load into the sleigh. There's something about the person I'm drawn to every year and I can't ever resist looking.

I grab the hot pink velvet bag. Before peeking inside, I make sure I don't have an audience. No one is watching me, so I untie the drawstrings and look inside. I suck in a breath. This year's gift is an aura quartz heart the size of my palm. No doubt they'll love the beautiful piece. I pull the drawstrings closed again and softly place the bag back in the pile labeled S. IN before turning to the conveyer belt for the final inspection.

Each gift comes out perfectly, as far as I can tell. With my attention to details in my calligraphy, I'm always a good bet for final inspections.

It takes us hours before all the sacks are filled, then shrunk to the size of a fist. Once they're all tiny, we pack the sleigh itself, making sure the backseat is organized by Santa #22's flight plan.

Jingle bells ring out and we all clap. Another year to celebrate.

Confetti rains from the ceiling and I throw my arms out to spin in the glitter.

Maybe I got an orange write up, but it's fine. I always have next year to earn my spot beside Santa.

Speaking of Santa. #22 walks through the door, all smiles. His thumbs loop around his bright yellow suspenders, keeping his red pants up. He's one of the younger Santas, probably in his mid to late forties. I forget. But I like him. I've worked in a few of the other workshops, and they're fine, but #22 is where I'm meant to be.

#22 laughs at a joke someone shares with him. He looks around the room until his eyes land on me, and he winks.

Why the heck did Santa wink at me?

He claps and everyone settles down. "I want to thank each and every one of you for your stellar service once again. We've had an excellent year."

We all whoop and holler our agreement.

"And I'm sure you're eager for me to announce my sleigh helper this year."

My shoulders drop and I scuff the floor of the loading dock with my toe.

"As you may know we've been changing traditions around here in #22. Everyone will get a chance to ride with me. But some need me more than others. It's our time to get to know each other and chat while doing a good job with our deliveries. This year's helper is Alfie."

My head shoots up. “Me?!” I point to myself. This can’t be happening. I’ve been bad.

“Yes, you, silly.” Santa grins. “Enjoy the celebration and meet me back here in two hours.”

“Yes, sir!”

A few people grumble around me, and I brush them off. Santa has a plan and if that plan means I get to ride with him this year, then I’m happy. As I make my way to the party hall, a few elves pat me on the back and wish me good luck.

I’m almost too excited to party. There’s all my favorite party snacks, and you know the whole RIDING WITH SANTA!!

I scream internally and bounce around to the beat of the DJ. Two hours come and go in a flash and before I know it, I’m back at the loading bay. The reindeer are already harnessed to the sleigh. They stamp their hooves, no doubt ready to go.

“Alfie.” Santa gives me a warm smile as he enters the bay.

“Santa, are you sure you meant to pick me ?” I point to myself again.

“Absolutely.” He scrubs a hand over my head, making my already unruly curls go every which way. “We have a lot to talk about.”

I swallow and nod, not entirely sure that we do. Oh, snowflakes, what if he wants to chastise me for the entire trip? I don’t have it in me to sit through an entire night of lectures.

He must sense my discomfort. “Alfie, breathe for me.” He clamps a big hand on my shoulder.

I nod and do as he asks.

“Grab a set of winter gear. It’s not too awful cold on our route this year with the mild weather, but I don’t want you freezing if you get cold.”

I rush to my locker and grab my gear, then stuff it in a shrinking bag as I run back to Santa.

“Are you ready for the ride of your life?” Santa asks as he holds out his hand to lift me into the sleigh.

I bite off an inappropriate response as I climb in.

“Oh!” I sink into the ridiculously comfortable seat and place my bag with winter gear beside me. A yellow quilt slides up over my knees. A lap bar comes down and clicks into place.

“Don’t want you falling out.” Santa taps the side of his nose and starts calling his reindeer. He only has five, but it doesn’t slow him down. There’s a jolt, and for a few intense moments, it feels like we’re free-falling before the magic takes over and evens us out.

Santa chuckles while I white-knuckle the lap bar.

“We have precautions in place. You won’t fall to your doom.” He pats my shoulder and I just nod.

“It’s one thing knowing that and another experiencing the death defying magic.” My heart pounds so hard I feel the beat in my head.

Another chuckle and Santa shakes a red Thermos at me. “I have hot apple cider and

hot chocolate, if you're interested."

"No cider for me." I shake my head. "Gives me the runs."

Santa snorts. "More for me." Then hands me a blue Thermos. "It's mint hot chocolate, if that's okay."

I unscrew the lid and suck down a few mouthfuls of perfect drinking temperature mint hot chocolate. "It's my favorite, then caramel hot chocolate." I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand and give him a grin. "Thank you."

"Glad my intel was right." He unscrews his Thermos and takes a few swallows himself.

Faint music plays and I'm surprised it's human hair metal. Santa gives me a smirk when he sees me eyeing him.

"We all have some secrets. One of mine is..." He waves at the radio controllers. "I hate Christmas music." He shivers and I can't help the giggle.

"I noticed sometimes you wear band shirts, but I can't ever make out the names."

He taps the side of his nose, then pats my head. "Alfie."

The tone is soft, but I just know something's coming. "Yeah?" I whisper.

"Glenda has asked me to remove you from service. And I'm inclined to agree with her."

"I knew this was too good to be true." I slump into the seat, but the lap bar keeps me from going too far.

“Look at me, Alfie.”

Slowly, I do as he asks. Tears well in my eyes, but I push them away. No one has liked me from the beginning. But Santa #22 has always been kind to me.

“I’m proud to call you one of my elves.”

My brow scrunches, and he holds up a hand before I can protest, since he wants to get rid of me.

“Let me finish. You’re always cheerful, with a smile on your face damn near all the time. But you’re not as happy as you let on to being.”

“I am happy,” I protest. “More than happy. I’m?—”

“Lonely.” He gives me a sympathetic look. “You act out because you want friends, but the more you try, the less you have. Alfie, you just need to be yourself. Stop... trying.”

“I am myself.” I huff and cross my arms.

“Tonight is your last night in service to the Santas.”

“Please, let me stay. I’ll do better. This is all I know.”

“I’m giving you a bigger and better opportunity. I’m sending you to your fated mate.”

My face heats. How does Santa know I’ve wanted to find my fated mate since I was a boy? Since I discovered nothing I did ever helped me make friends. Not being good, not being happy, not being playful. I’ve always been an outcast.

“You’ll have one year to court your fated mate. If you both haven’t fallen in love by then, well, you won’t care because you’ll be a figurine forever.”

I suck in a breath. I’ve heard the rumor this year. Naughty elves being shipped off to their fated mates, but I hadn’t thought I’d been bad enough to be noticed.

“This isn’t really a punishment, is it?” I ask.

Santa laughs his jolly laugh. “You’re catching on.” There’s a twinkle in his gray eyes. “Don’t worry, you’ll still be helping me. But I’ll be relieving you of your duties once we make it to where I need to drop you off. We have hours before then. So let’s make the most of them.”

Santa turns up the music and gulps down more hot apple cider. The air is mild instead of bone-chilling cold. I wonder if I’ll get used to having seasons. We’re at the first house before I know it. The sleigh settles on a roof of a mobile home in a trailer park and I grin at all the happy decorations in different yards. This house has glittering multi-colored lights hanging from the gutters. There’s no chimney, but that doesn’t stop Santa. He walks towards the front of the house, approximately where the kitchen, or maybe the living room, should be. He presses his hands together and claps, forming a shimmery cloud around himself. This cloud moves through the layers of the roof until he’s in the living room of the house. I peek over the edge into the festively decorated room with a huge tree and presents all around.

“Alfie,” Santa whispers my name.

Oh! I scramble back to the sleigh and grab the small blue velvet bag labeled ONE. I rush back to the open portal and drop it into Santa’s waiting hands. I gasp when he pulls out two bikes and a dollhouse. I knew the bags held a lot, but it’s always mesmerizing to see them in action.

Santa downs a bit of the milk offered on a small tray on the floor. Then grabs all of the cookies before ascending back to me.

“And that’s how it’s done.” He passes me half the cookies and I stare back at him. He grins as he shovels a powdery cookie into his mouth. I follow suit as we walk back to the sleigh. “We have quite a few houses to hit here. We’ll leave the sleigh and hop between houses.”

I nod and grab the bag labeled for the trailer park. We hop from house to house, Santa descending into each house and bringing up cookies once we’ve delivered the presents. It takes hours, but I know time stands still for us. We finish Illinois before moving to Indiana.

My heart pounds the closer we get to the pink velvet bag. In my heart, I know where he’s sending me. Who he’s sending me to. The person that always gets crystals. But they should be an adult, why do they still get gifts from Santa?

At the latest house I pass Santa a green bag and the next I know takes me to my destiny.

Santa doesn’t say anything on our ride over to a warehouse. He lands the sleigh and turns to me.

“Breathe, Alfie.”

I follow his directions and give him a grin. Tears well in my eyes, this time happy ones. “Thank you for picking me.”

“It’s been my pleasure working with you, Alfie.” He leans in and presses a kiss to my forehead. “Be yourself.” Santa hands me a wad of green bills wrapped together with a rubber band. “I’m not supposed to do this. But... that’s five thousand dollars. Should

give you enough to get you on your feet before you find a job or housing. Use it wisely.”

I hold it to my chest and nod before stuffing it in my pocket. “Thank you.”

The world around me shrinks. I can’t move, but I’m not afraid. Santa’s sending me to my fated mate.

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Chapter 2

Pisces

“It’s not looking good, Harold.” I frown at my spreadsheets as I clutch my pretty tortoiseshell kitty. He’s been my companion for five years and probably the only reason I haven’t given up on going after my dreams. But sometimes dreams are expensive and we have to make big scary decisions.

“One more year,” I whisper into his marble coat. “If by this time next year I haven’t made a liveable profit, then I’ll throw in the towel and get a job somewhere else.” Just the idea of going back to work for someone makes my stomach hurt.

“It usually takes at least five years before a business sees profits. Five years before they close. I’ve only been at it for four.” I nod and shut my laptop.

Harold meows and rubs his head on my chin before looking at me with his big yellow eyes, begging for treats.

“Come on.” I push to my feet and make sure not to trip over Harold as we make our way to our tiny kitchen. I love my apartment. It’s two bedrooms and perfect for Harold and me.

I grab a juice box from the fridge, then grab a few salmon flavored treats from the bag on top of the fridge.

“You know, everyone says Halloween is a good time to make magic. But Christmas

is just as good. There's all these good vibes floating around." I squat to feed Harold his treats. "How about we go make some magic?"

I suck down my fruit punch, then wash my hands.

"I always forget to do magic. Ya know, it never hurts." I rummage around in a drawer until I find my lighter. Then grab a few tea lights.

"Need some salt. And..." I look around for my favorite stone, rose quartz. "Oh! Citrine and aventurine. Always good for abundance and business."

I frown again. "But abundance just means a lot. I need to dial things in. I want a lot of business, money..." I tap my bottom lip. "Happiness." My shoulders drop. "I should be happy."

Harold merows instead of meows as if he knows what I mean. I scratch his soft head. "You want for nothing, my little prince." Petting Harold always brings me comfort no matter my mood.

"Come on, time to manifest, so I can afford to get you more treats and toys like the sweet prince you are."

He trots along with me as I gather the rest of my supplies, then we head out onto our balcony. The cool, gentle breeze makes my long rabbit ears twitch and my puffball of a tail tickle. I probably should have pulled on a sweater, but it's not even cold enough to snow. I breathe in the fresh air.

Harold's collar jingles. We have an understanding between us. He doesn't try to escape and I don't put the harness and leash on him. So far it's worked perfectly.

I have a small patio table that I swipe clean before putting down my candles and

crystals and salt. I don't actually need any of it. Spell work is about intention, the tools just help direct. I arrange my tea lights and crystals how I want them, then circle them all with salt. I'm not the best with words, but I say a few.

"Universe, hear my plea. I am a successful business owner by this time next year. Paying all my bills with profits from my shop Pieces of Pisces and having enough left over to have a life of adventure and ease." That should do it.

My candle flames wiggle with a slight breeze and I shiver. Closing my eyes, I repeat the words. I swear it's like heat drops right onto my head and flows down to my toes and into the earth below my balcony.

"Whoa." I sit and appreciate the silent acknowledgement of the energy. At least that's how I'm going to interpret my reaction, and not as a cold chill. But who knows? When I open my eyes, there's a flash of light in the distance and a trail.

"Did you see that shooting star?" I ask Harold, who's contently licking his paw. He stops and cocks a brow before going back to licking.

"I really think we worked magic. What did I tell you? Christmas is just as good as Halloween for spells."

I push to my feet and stretch before bending over to snuff out the tea lights. It's getting late and I have a big day in the morning with after Christmas sales. If I sell enough, it'll help with the year's profits.

I'm in bed in my rabbit form, snuggling with Harold, when my phone blares to life. Harold is completely unbothered as I bounce across the king-sized mattress and peek at my phone screen.

My heart sinks. It's my alarm company. Please don't be anything disastrous.

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Chapter 3

Alfie

Santa #22 tripped the alarm system on purpose when he left, which means I shouldn't have to wait too long for my fated to arrive. Unfortunately, I'm stuck with the blare of an alarm blasting until someone comes to shut it off.

I can't see beyond the pink velvet bag I'm stuffed in with the aura quartz heart. It leans against my leg. I have no idea where we are in this warehouse or even what's contained inside. Though I can take a guess. The energy in the place is electric and vibrating around me.

A few beeps come from what I assume is the front of the warehouse and the alarm stops, leaving my ears ringing. There's a click.

"H—hello?" The voice is pleasant and soft, masculine.

I can't tell if the lights are on because, well, I'm in a velvet bag. Whoever came in creeps closer, their breathing harsh.

"Anyone in here?" They say just a tiny bit louder.

I want to shout, but I'm frozen in time as some kind of figurine. By the way the aura quartz heart rubs against me, I have to wonder if Santa #22 turned me into a crystal.

The steps come quicker and the person sucks in a breath. "I still don't know why I get

a gift from Santa every year. At least I choose to believe it's Santa and not some creepy stalker."

I imagine they shiver.

A blinding light shines over me as they open the bag. A soft hand wraps around my body and pulls me out. I get a good look at the spotless concrete floor.

"Did Santa bring me a crystal dildo?"

I don't think I've ever wanted to laugh more in my life than now. There's a mirror on a shelf and Santa indeed made my rose quartz body resemble a dildo. With balls. If my fated looks at me properly, they'll notice I do have a face, and it looks like I'm standing on a bag. I definitely look dildo shaped. Like one of those holiday silicone toys, but crystal instead.

"Santa got me a dildo." They moan and start laughing. "Even he knows how long it's been."

They turn me this way and that until I'm facing my fated mate. If I could breathe, I'd stop. My fated is stunning. Their face is round. Tan rabbit ears extend from their head. They have short, light blond hair and the prettiest brown eyes I've seen in my life. Their lips are pillowy and I wonder if they're just as soft. I want to reach out and touch them, but... I'm stuck. Santa never said how to re-elf-ify myself. But I never asked either.

"Why are you warm?" They narrow their eyes and take in more details. "Oh! Maybe you're not a dildo." A finger runs along my body. They steer clear of my intimate parts. "Whoever carved you is an amazing artist. You're so detailed." They squint. "Are you an elf?"

They yawn and look around. “Are you the reason the alarm went off?”

I can only stare on.

“It’s late and I need sleeps for the shop in the morning, so I’m going to leave you here for now, but I’ll be back soon.” They stand me up on a shelf and turn away, giving me a perfect view of their backside in a pair of green and red plaid pajama pants. My fated has a cute little tan ball of a tail. I’ve always liked rabbits.

Magic vibrates through me and the moment I can move, I jump so I don’t crush the shelves. I crash onto the floor and they turn to me.

Their eyes go wide and in seconds they’re a rabbit, racing away from me.

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Chapter 4

Pisces

My heart pounds as I look for a good hiding space under the shelving units. Damn me and my need to clean. Only just two days ago I had a nice big pile of newspaper I could run into, but no, I had to recycle it.

“Wait! Come back! My name is Alfie. He/him please and thank you. I’m an alpha elf from the North Pole, and you’re my fated mate.” He drops to his knees and looks under the shelves. “There you are.”

I crowd against the back wall. Alpha. Elf from the North Pole. I always joke about getting a gift from Santa every year, but it’s just a joke. Do I actually believe? I shake my head and hop toward the front of the row, towards the front door. I have a cat door I should be able to escape from.

I stop as he watches me. Alfie is handsome with honey eyes. His hair is a curly dark blond mess. Mate. My tiny rabbit heart pounds so fast I wonder if I’ll pass out. Mate .

Fated mates, I do believe in, but I doubt I have one of my own. My parents didn’t want me, why would I have a fated?

“Please come out. We can talk. I didn’t mean to scare you. I don’t know what activated the magic.” He swoops his muscular arm under the shelf as if to catch me, and I bite him when his hand comes too close. “Ow!” He pulls his arm back. Serves him right for trying to steal me. I run to my freedom.

Alfie snuffles behind me, causing me to pause.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I’d like to meet you before you reject me, though.” Tears shine in his honey eyes, making the color darker. Despite the tears, he gives me the most endearing lopsided smile. “I’ve always wanted to meet the person that gets crystals every year. I love them, too.” He rubs his finger along the concrete floor and drops his eyes. “I don’t think I have a favorite favorite, but I can narrow it down to my top five.”

I take a tentative step toward him. Maybe he isn’t so bad if he likes crystals.

“Amethyst, because purple is one of my favorite colors. Blue lace agate because it’s so freaking calming. Rose quartz, because who doesn’t need more loving energy?”

I snort and take a few steps closer still.

“Gold sheen obsidian is pretty and I like getting lost in the shimmer in sunlight. And finally, fluorite because it helps my creativity.”

I bound back to where I shed my clothes and bite down on my shirt, then snuggle under my pajama pants, hoping they stay on my back as I find a spot behind shelves to dress in private. I awkwardly walk to my destination with the alpha staying in place, watching me. I’m not sure if he’s too scared to offer to help, but I’m grateful he’s not moving.

I shift and scramble to dress. My ears twitch as I pull my shirt over my head. The alpha, Alfie, smells divine. Like roasted marshmallows and cinnamon with the tiniest hint of evergreen. Do all elves from the North Pole have the scent or just Alfie?

I smooth my shirt and bottoms, hoping I’m presentable, and walk out to meet him. His smile stuns me and I can’t find words until I realize I can’t just stand here and

stare at him.

“I’m Pisces. Also, he/him. Uh...” I wave to my head. “Rabbit shifter omega.”

Alfie gives me the biggest grin and bounces to his feet. He’s so much taller than me, I have to look up at him. Way up. It takes everything in me to not take a step back.

He holds out his hand. “Nice to meet you, Pisces.”

The moment I take his offering, electricity wraps around us and sizzles up our arms. His eyes go wide and I’m sure mine do as well.

“See? Fate!”

I step back, nodding, trying to wrap my head around it all. “Fate,” I whisper. Fate. Mate. “I don’t know what this means.”

Alfie’s brows scrunch and he opens his mouth, but I continue, “I know what it means, but don’t know what it means. You know? What now?”

He opens and closes his mouth a few times as he thinks, and I have to keep from giggling. His brows scrunch again before he speaks. “I don’t know. But if we don’t fall in love by next Christmas, back in the bag I go because I’ll be stuck as a figurine forever.”

“Why?”

“As punishment.” His honey eyes drop to the floor. “I’m not the best at being good. I’ve done some things my fellow elves frown upon.”

I take a step back and my heart pounds frantically again. “Are you a serial killer?”

Shit. You're a serial killer." I back up again. "Maybe just a thief. That's it. Just a thief." I laugh as I hold my hands up. "Please don't?—"

Alfie looks as if I've struck him. "Nothing like that, no. I have the habit of rearranging the fridge magnets in the mailroom. The other elves thought it was naughty, and I got in trouble. Now I'm here."

"What? I need more information than that."

"The alphabet magnets. My last message may have been monster fudging... but not fudging, if you know what I mean, is fun. On the communal fridge." He cringes. "That is bad. No one wants to see that at work."

"It's not great, no. Probably warrants a visit to HR." I fight my mouth to keep from smiling. "Okay, but it is funny."

"I don't even know if monster fudging is fun!" Another breath stopping grin has me staring at Alfie.

"Same, well, real monsters. I'm quite fond of my tentacle dildo." I slam a hand over my mouth, my eyes go wide. "Why did I tell you that?"

"Dunno, but I like knowing."

The way he's looking at me has my slick trickle from my hole and I try to will my body from reacting.

"Okay okay." I hold up my hands. "We're fated, but I can't— won't —fall into bed immediately." Omegas have too much at stake when they sleep with alphas.

"Oh! No! Never." Alfie shakes his head so hard it's comical.

“Alfie.”

His breath hitches. “Pisces.”

I give him the smallest of smiles. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“We should be friends. I’ve never had a real friend before. Can we try that?” Alfie looks so hopeful.

“We can try it.” My words come out as more of a whisper. “I’ve never really had friends before, either. Except for my cat Harold.”

“Delightful! I love cats.” Alfie grabs my hand and that sizzles goes up my spine. “Show me the cat.” He waves to the door.

I snort. “Hold up.”

“But... cat?” Alfie pleads with his eyes.

“Harold isn’t really friendly to many people.” Besides, can I really take this alpha back to my apartment? It’s absurd! But... “Do you have someplace to stay?” I probably shouldn’t even be asking.

“No, but Santa gave me a bunch of money.” He digs into his pocket and pulls out a huge wad of cash. “I can pay.”

“No. No.” I push his hand back and that zing runs through me. “Keep it. You might need it for something else later. I have a two-bedroom apartment. You can stay with me for now.”

“Is this what friends do?” Alfie tips his head as he studies me.

“Sometimes, I think. Yes.” I nod and turn on my heel. What am I doing? I don’t know, but my planned new year’s resolution is to be more outgoing. What’s more outgoing than inviting a strange yet endearing alpha to live in my apartment with me? My fated. I’m inviting my fated to live with me so we can be friends. Nothing more. At least not until we know each other. “It’s just a short walk.”

He hums beside me as he follows my lead.

“So, the North Pole?” I say.

“Yep! All my life. And you?”

“Same. Well, here not the North Pole.” I wave my hand out in front of me. “Low cost of living.” As if I need to explain why I’m still in the same city as my birth, with no reason to stay. “And I love my little shop. I just wish...” I sigh. “I wish it’d take off. It’s been my dream for Pieces of Pisces to be much more profitable than it is. I barely make enough to live off of.”

“Why’d you start the biz?”

We cross the quiet street to get to the sidewalk on the other side. We’ll get to the apartment in about five minutes. The crossing gives me time to formulate my answer. Not that I needed the time, just how to word it.

“I love crystals and helping people feel better and teaching classes on crystals and—” I stop because Alfie grabs my hand.

I’m not sure I’ll get used to the shock every time we touch, but I don’t think I want to either. His palm is callused and warm and so big compared to mine.

“You sound pretty passionate about this.”

“I am. But...” My shoulders drop. “I discovered early on that my enthusiasm can annoy people, so I rein myself in. It’s exhausting. Some days I just want to vomit everything. I get a lot of older clientele that just want tarot readings. Of course they’re nice, but I wish I could draw in patrons that like me for me. Where we get lost in conversations about rose quartz and moss agate.”

“Then maybe you need to start acting like your true self, not this fake version of you. That’s the lesson Santa says I need to learn. Maybe we can learn the lesson together.” Alfie squeezes my hand. “We can do this.”

“You have more faith than I do.”

Naked trees line the sidewalk leading up to my apartment building.

“Maybe in those early days people were just having a bad time. People go to these type shops when they’re desperate. Right?”

“Sometimes, yeah. They want to feel better and they’ve exhausted all the mundane ways, so they take crystals for a spin. Or want a tarot reading.”

Alfie stops and steps in front of me. “Maybe, just maybe, it was an off day for these people. You should try being Pisces again.”

“Okay. I’ll try. But why do you need to learn to be Alfie?” He seems to exude I’m always me type of energy.

Alfie shrugs as he takes too much interest in the concrete sidewalk. “I act out for attention. Always have.”

“Why?” I squeeze his hand.

“I’d rather have people laughing with me than at me.” He scuffs his toe on the sidewalk and starts walking. We’re close to my apartment building. “It doesn’t always work. I know they’re laughing at me, but I can’t help myself anymore. If there’s something silly I think will bring a smile to someone’s face, I do it.”

“Hence, monster fudging is fun?”

“Exactly. It was funny at the time.” He gasps when he looks up and we’re at my building. “Is that your kitty?” He waves at Harold in the window. Harold cocks his head and leaves his spot, making Alfie pout. “He doesn’t like me.”

“He doesn’t know you.” I snort laugh and slap a hand over my mouth again.

“That was adorable.”

“Harold isn’t usually friendly to strangers and certainly not alphas. So please don’t be upset if he hides.”

Alfie pouts, but I’m pretty sure it’s fake. “I’ll be good.”

I unlock the building and wave for the stairs. “Up and to the left.”

We bound up the stairs with Alfie leading.

“Fate.” He rubs the silver metallic letters screwed into my door. “My apartment number in the North Pole is?—”

“888?”

He nods. “Always thought it was special.” He waits patiently as I find the right key and unlock the door to my apartment.

“Welcome to my apartment. Make yourself at home.”

Alfie sucks in a breath, and I try to see my apartment from his perspective. It’s probably chaos to an outsider, but my rabbit needs enrichment. I have play structures everywhere. Plenty of things to chew on. Toys for cats and rabbits. A cat tree. I have a plastic bin with hay. And another full of cardboard tubes and other fun things to root around in. Harold doesn’t mind all the clutter. Not that I’d call it clutter. Everything is organized in its own way. And the so-called mess is contained to the living room. Everywhere else is clean, only needing a weekly light dusting and vacuum.

“This is amazing,” Alfie says. His eyes seem to shine as he takes everything in.

“It’s home.” A yawn escapes before I can say anything else.

Alfie frowns and his shoulders drop. “You’re tired.”

“I am. The adrenaline is dropping now that I know a serial killer or thief didn’t infiltrate my warehouse.” I yawn again. “But if Harold freaks out, you might need to go unless you have scent suppressors.”

“I do not.”

“Then let’s hope Harold is just a grumpy kitty instead of terrified.” I turn to head towards my bedroom to find Harold trotting out. He rubs his head against Alfie’s calf and purrs. “That... is strange. He doesn’t normally like alphas.” When I take him to the shop, he hides from alphas in his little safe space I built for him in the backroom.

Alfie squats to pet Harold on his head. “Awe, you’re a sweetie pie, aren’t you?” He coos at my cat and I melt. “Why don’t you like the other alphas, little one?”

“An alpha abused him in his kittenhood.” I watch on in wonder as my cat loves on my fated mate.

Alfie frowns as he continues petting. “I’m so sorry, Harold. No one deserves that. I’ll keep you safe. I like kitties and bunnies.” He looks up and winks at me. “And doggies and reindeer and cows, and well, I don’t think I’ve met an animal I don’t like.” He stands up straight again, Harold continues on with rubbing against Alfie. “I think I passed the test.”

“You did.” I turn towards my kitchen. “Are you hungry? It’s late, but I can make you something.”

“Oh, no. I’m good. I had a ton of cookies with Santa.” He pats his tummy as he grins. “So many cookies.”

“Okay, then.” I fight the yawn.

“You need to sleep.” Alfie plops onto the couch. “I’ll just take the couch and?—”

“I have a second bedroom. But you should take my bed. Let me just change the sheets and it’ll be?—”

“I can not take your bed.”

“Uhm, my guest bed is a twin and I’m not sure you’ll be very comfortable.” I wave for him to follow me. When we get to my bedroom, I flip on the lights, wave inside. “I have a much bigger bed.” I lead him to the second room. “See, tiny bed.”

I turn to him, and he’s just grinning. “I’m fine on the couch or on the tiny bed.”

“It just feels wrong. I’ll change the sheets on my bed so you can get a good night’s

sleep.” I rush back to my bedroom and start stripping the bed.

“If you insist.” Alfie helps and we have the bed and pillows stripped quickly. I grab a new sheet set from the top of my closet and we get the bed back together in silence. “You know...” He looks at me and nibbles his bottom lip. How is an alpha of all people so sweet? His eyes drop to the bed. “The bed is too big for just me. There won’t be any harm in sharing it.”

I spread my hand over my side of the bed to smooth out the comforter. Could it be that simple?

“Just for sleep. No getting rowdy or anything.” His cheeks blush at the same time he starts to yawn. “It’s been a long, long night.”

“I usually shift and cuddle with Harold. The guest bed is big enough for that.”

Harold decides for us and hops on top of my bed. He curls up while we’re still yammering on about sleeping arrangements.

“I wouldn’t mind.” Alfie shrugs as he turns down the corner on his side. He yanks off his shirt and a soft moan escapes my lips. He’s more muscular than I realized and so yummy. If he heard my moan, he’s being polite by not mentioning it. He folds his shirt neatly before placing it on top of the dresser, and I appreciate the gesture.

“I think Harold already chose you and I don’t like sleeping cold.” I pull off my own shirt, a little self-conscious that I’m thin and soft, along with my short stature.

Alfie’s eyes rake over my chest, and his tongue darts out to lick his lips. He makes a soft little sound I’m hoping is approval. It’s like he has me in his hold. I can’t look away.

I slide Harold closer to me so Alfie can climb in under the blankets. It's not ridiculously cold yet, but it's still chilly enough I need blankets to sleep under. Harold's the same and he roots under the blankets until he's satisfied.

Instead of joining him, I move to drop my shirt in the clothes hamper by my door, then turn off the lights. I'm not ready for Alfie to see me naked. As soon as I plant my hands on the bed, I shift into my rabbit, letting my pajama bottoms and underwear fall to the floor. Alfie holds up the blanket and I hop in next to Harold, who purrumpfs at me as we get comfy in our usual way.

"You two are so so so cute together." Alfie's hand is already in Harold's fur and a twinge of jealousy heats through me. I snort the thought away. Harold is a good kitty that deserves all the pets. I'm just... me.

Alfie turns to his side to face us. His hand absently petting. I fight myself, but I butt my nose under his hand. Pets please.

"My fated is the cutest mate in the world." His huge hand starts at the top of my head and smoothes down my back. It's everything.

Through the night, Harold migrates closer to my mate and I follow him until I'm snuggled up to Alfie's chest. The perfect place for a bunny like me.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:00 pm

Chapter 5

Alfie

An alarm blares and I wake to a purring kitty and a rabbit pressed against my naked chest. The bunny, Pisces , bounces up and shifts to his human-self to turn off the phone. He must have forgotten I'm here because he shrieks and covers his groin with a pillow all at the same time he falls out of the bed with his legs sticking straight in the air. The cat, Harold , the sweetie pie, seems to grumble and glare in the general direction of Pisces before settling back down.

I chuckle as I slide Harold out of the way so I can crawl over the bed and look down. Unmoving, Pisces stares at the ceiling, clutching the pillow to his crotch. He doesn't seem hurt, more embarrassed than anything.

"Are you okay? You went down pretty hard."

"I'm fine," he croaks out. "I just didn't want you to see me."

I cock my head. "Why not? You're gorgeous Pisces." I didn't think shifters had anything against nudity, but I guess Pisces is different, which is fine.

"I'm plain. Plain Jane Pisces. There's nothing interesting about me."

I blink back at him, processing what he said. "You're very interesting."

"You're just saying that because we're fated mates," he mumbles.

I flop to my back to look at the same popcorn ceiling as he's got his eyes glued on. "You've always been interesting to me and I never knew who you were until now. Every year when we load the sleigh, I always sneak into the gifts to find the one I knew had the crystals in it. I don't know how I know, instinct I guess. Over the years, I realized Santa was giving you a crystal to help you with something every year. He gave you blue lace agate three years in a row."

Pisces swallows beneath me. "I was having a lot of anxiety about leaving the foster system. The crystals actually helped calm me. By the time I was dumped out, I was in a better headspace." Without leaving his spot on the floor, he opens the nightstand and rummages around until he finds the three velvet bags. "I still have them."

Harold climbs onto my chest as I give the ceiling a grin. "Very interesting."

"If you say so."

"Elves receive Santa gifts, too. I also get a crystal every year. I got a really pretty moss agate this year. I had it in my pocket when Santa turned me into a rose quartz figurine."

Pisces chuckles softly. "You looked like a dildo."

"I heard, and, well, saw." Though I'm still wondering what the bag I stood on was about. "Wanna see my pretty rock?" I maneuver with Harold to sit on the edge of the bed.

Pisces finally looks at me, and he's got the sweetest smile. "Yeah. I wanna see your rock."

I slide to the floor and Harold merrrrrs before jumping from my hold. Pisces's eyes light up when I hand him the moss agate. The polished stone is about half the size of

my palm.

“Oh. This is a beaut.” He turns it over and over, no doubt taking in each of the deep green dendritic inclusions inside the milky white. It’s like the tiniest of tree branches frozen in milk, if you ask me.

“You know, I would have thought you’d have more crystals around.” He has a salt lamp on a small table in the corner, but that’s about it.

“I didn’t want Harold to get into them, so I keep them packed away.” Pisces pushes to his feet, leaving the pillow behind. He’s practically hopping to the closet where, with a lot of effort, he pulls out a huge tub with a lid. “These are all my personal stones, along with the ones I leave in the nightstand.” He yanks the lid off.

The box is organized with dozens of smaller boxes and divider trays. I’m impressed with the system.

Another alarm blares from his cellphone on the nightstand, and he races to shut it off. “That’s the second reminder alarm. There’s one more in ten minutes, which means I have to be out the door.” His eyes dart around the room. “Do you have more clothes with you?”

“Not here?” But I suspect my Santa gave me what I need in that bag that’s still at the warehouse.

“Okay. Okay.” He paces. “Get in the shower. I’ll bunny bathe to save time. I don’t have anything that’ll fit you. We’ll have to go shopping after I close the shop for the day. I can’t miss one of my best shopping days.”

“Pisces.”

He sighs and his shoulders drop as if he's relaxing.

"Take a breath. Everything will be fine. Besides, I think I have clothes at your warehouse. There's nothing to worry about." I cup his cheek and he leans into it. I don't think I'll ever get used to the sizzle of our touch.

"Ohhhh-kaayyy. Breathing. Calming down. Breathing. Go shower." Before I can say anything else, he's a bunny again.

His ears stick up like they do in his human form and he reaches up to grab one to lick. I can't watch too long or he'll probably scold me as a bunny, but he's so damn cute it's hard to resist.

By the time I'm out of the shower, he's dressed in a pair of nice black dress slacks and a festive Christmas sweater with a decorated wreath on the front.

The third alarm goes off.

Pisces's eyes go wide. "We gotta go!" He takes my hand and tugs me towards the door.

"What about breakfast?" I ask.

"I don't normally eat breakfast." His face turns red as he rushes to the kitchen. "But I can make you..."

"It's okay. I don't want to make you late."

"We'll pick something up on the way as long as the line isn't too busy."

He races back to the door, grabs his keys from the hook, and ushers me out. "Be good

Harold. See you later.” Pisces runs down the stairs and I follow him. He’s fast as fuck, so I trail behind.

He’s already next to an old beater of a car. Probably twenty years old at least, but it starts right up and there aren’t any concerning noises.

Pisces is so focused on the road. He’s white knuckling the steering wheel and in the early morning there is hardly anyone on the road.

“Are you okay?” I ask as we pull into the drive of a donut place I’ve never heard of and he turns to me.

“I don’t like driving. The warehouse is close to my apartment, but the shop is further away and the drive gives me anxiety.”

“I can drive.”

He eyes me as if to size me up. “I might take you up on the offer. Wait, do you have a driver’s license?”

I shrug. “I did in the North Pole, but didn’t really need it.”

“What kind of donuts do you like?”

“Any? All?”

He orders an entire dozen of donuts of all kinds and my mouth waters. He’s stressed, and he’s trying to take care of me. I really need to help take care of him.

“Eat up,” he says when he passes me the long box. He flips the lid open on my lap and grabs a glazed cruller. The glaze sticks to his lips and I want to lick them clean.

We eat donuts in silence as he continues the drive to his shop. I'm not nervous though. Pisces has a calming effect on me where I don't feel like I need to fill the void of quietness. I want to be like that for him.

When we pull into the shopping complex's parking lot, the box still has half a dozen donuts. "Looks like we have lunch sorted," I say.

"I hadn't even thought of lunch. On days like today, I normally don't have the time."

There's no one in the entire parking lot.

"It's still early. I needed to be here before the crowds, otherwise I get super overwhelmed because I'm opening at the same time people are trying to come in and the day fries my nerves."

Finally, Pisces parks and we're in front of a small storefront with a rainbow flag and a banner that reads Pieces of Pisces with a cute little crystal drawing on either side of the script.

"I love it already."

"It's my second home." He tips his head. "Or third, if you include the warehouse."

I follow him to the door with our box of donuts. There's a soft chime when we enter and the scent of incense and candles hits me. He turns off the alarm and flips on the lights. There's a Christmas tree in the far corner and so many fairy lights strung around the entire room.

"Welcome to Pieces of Pisces." The grin on his face warms my heart.

I turn in circles to take in the entire place. So many shelves of crystals. He's got

tumbles and beads and palm stones and towers. There are wind chimes and tapestries and wall banners. Candles and incense. Tarot and oracle cards. Essential oils. Books and books and books. It's so welcoming, filled with love.

He fidgets by the register. "So, what do you think?"

"I think this is amazing. And is that—" I point towards the back.

"A classroom and then my small kitchen, where I open new stock and take breaks. Oh, and a bathroom."

"I can work with this," I say.

His face scrunches. "What do you mean, work with this?"

"A little North Pole magic." I wiggle my fingers. "And I studied business a bit. We can get you where you want to be. I'm sure of it. If you want help, that is." My mind races with all the possibilities.

Pisces casts his eyes to the floor. "You really want to?"

"I'd love to! This is your dream, and I'd love nothing more than to help my fated achieve everything he hopes for."

He blinks back at me and I swear tears swim in his eyes. "Okay." He wipes at his face and leads me to the kitchen. It really is small, but has a full sized refrigerator, microwave, and sink. There's a cute little table and a set of chairs. I leave our donuts on the table and he shuts the door when we exit the room.

Next, we visit the classroom, which can easily fit thirty people. It's much bigger than I would have thought. There's a computer and a printer. Pisces plops down at the

desk. “I need to make some signage.”

“Oh, let me! I was a calligrapher in Santa’s village. I can make them fancy.”

“What supplies do you need?”

“I can make anything work.” I grab a purple permanent marker from his pen cup on the desk. He hands me some printer paper. “What do you want me to write?”

In under twenty minutes, I have dozens of signs about what’s on sale. I might also be preening at his praise.

“Seriously, this is gorgeous.” He tapes the final sign to the door. The parking lot’s still completely empty and I have to wonder how early we got here.

“Now what?” I ask as I take in everything I missed. There’s so much to look at.

“We wait.” He gives me a cheery smile, but his eyes tell me he’s scared.

“Do you have social media? Have you posted about today’s sales?”

“I forget. Then I get overwhelmed.” Pisces nibbles his bottom lip and hands me his phone. Sure enough, his last posts were early November and before that May.

“My sweet omega. We’ll need to ramp up promo.” I start posting on the social media he has for the shop.

“I don’t want to annoy people.”

“I get that, but you want new people to find you and keep the regulars happy happy.”

He nods again. I realize we got here several hours early to prepare for the day. He fidgets nervously at the front counter while I wander the shop taking pictures and posting them to his accounts.

His phone blares to life with another alarm.

“It’s time!” He rushes to the door and dozens of people pour in. I’d been so consumed in my task that I hadn’t noticed how full the parking lot was getting.

“Pisces!” someone calls out. A petite, pretty omega with brown skin launches themselves at my mate and I chuckle at the sound Pisces makes.

“Yolanda!” Pisces giggles as he hugs the person back. He doesn’t think he has friends, but obviously this is someone he can trust.

They chat animatedly as people browse the shop. I keep a sharp eye on everyone, just taking them in.

“Who’s the sexy alpha?” Yolanda asks when I venture closer to the pair.

Pisces snorts, leans in, and whispers, “My fated mate.”

I’m preening again when he gives me the sexiest bedroom eyes before turning back to his friend.

Yolanda squeals and jumps up and down. “I’m so happy for you! Oh, Pisces, that’s wonderful. Did you know the second you touched? That’s how it was with Sheila and me.”

He nods shyly. “It was like lightning.”

“Exactly! Then, no matter what I did, I couldn’t resist her. And like a fool I tried.” Yolanda laughs, and it fills my heart with joy to see someone so happy with their fated. Maybe one day that can be me and Pisces.

Pisces leans in again. “I don’t have plans to resist. At least not for long.”

He gives me a knowing smile and waves me over. “Alfie, this is Yolanda. She’s been coming here since the day I opened. Yolanda, this is Alfie, my fated.”

“Lovely to meet you,” she says as I take her tiny hand in mine.

“Likewise. I look forward to meeting more friends of Pisces.”

She nods. “I look forward to seeing more of you.” She squeezes Pisces’s shoulder. “I’ll be browsing, but one day I want your meet cute story, when you’re ready to tell it.”

I start to open my mouth, but she shakes her head. “When both of you are ready to tell it.” She tips her head to Pisces, who is as red as a strawberry. Yolanda twirls away to shop.

The day goes on like this. With people so excited to see Pisces and him not realizing he has dozens of friends, or at least people that want to be his friend. By the time we close up shop, he’s dragging, so exhausted.

“Let me buy you dinner,” I say. “I’m not a skilled cook. I burned way too many cookies during bakery training, and that’s why I was trained in calligraphy.”

“No, I can’t let you buy me dinner.” He throws his head back. “Gah! I can’t believe I let you do all that promo for me without offering to pay you. I can pay you.” His cheeks are so red again. “I will pay you.”

“Don’t worry about it. I enjoyed myself.”

“No. No. You’re getting paid for the day. Then we probably need to negotiate a rate of pay or something, or I don’t know.” His eyes plead with me. “I can’t have you working for free, even if you had fun.”

“I had a load of fun and I’d love to learn how to run the register so you can take a break tomorrow.”

He stares at me as if I’ve grown a second head. “You want to learn the register?”

“I want to help in all ways I can.” I want Pisces to be the happiest omega in the world.

“You wouldn’t mind taking orders from an omega? Because this is my shop.”

“Not one bit. You’re amazing, Pisces. I’d never dream of trying to take over.”

He lets out a soft breath. “Okay. We can work together.”

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:00 pm

Chapter 6

Pisces

I lock up the shop with Alfie trailing behind me. He's got a bounce in his step that I envy. He looks to me, bright eyed. "Let me drive. You're exhausted."

After unlocking my car, I toss him my keys, then settle into the passenger seat, hoping I don't regret my decision. "You're really good with the customers."

"I'm a people person. I love talking about anything and everything." Alfie starts the car and gets the heat going. It's not insufferably cold yet, thankfully. That'll come in January, then it'll be spring, as if winter never even showed up.

"I really liked having you at the shop today. It was like a weight lifted off my chest, having someone there to help. I get anxious when it's just me, but I've been too scared to budget for an employee. I think I will, though."

His shoulders drop. "I'd love to be with you every day. Elves are used to daily work. If I'm not busy, I get anxious and an anxious Alfie gets into mischief." He winks then pays attention to the road. He's a smooth driver, and it doesn't seem like he's stressed about it at all. "I saw a cute little restaurant on our way here this morning."

Our stomachs rumble at the same time.

Alfie chuckles. "And please don't argue with me. I'm buying us dinner."

“Okay.” I sink deeper into my seat. If my alpha wants to take care of me, I’ll let him. At least this once.

His posture straightens, and his shoulders give a little shake. “I’m going to spoil you, my omega. Just you wait.”

“I don’t need spoiling.”

“It doesn’t matter if you need spoiling. I want to do it. Take away your cares. You’re stressed, and I want to take some away from you.”

“I’ve never had anything like that, so you’ll probably experience some resistance.” Honesty is the best policy in my book.

Alfie nods. “I plan to make you feel like the most cherished omega in the world, so be prepared.”

“Just so you know, I have no idea how to be cherished or let anyone help me. I’ve been on my own for a long time.” I fight the tears wanting to fill my eyes.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Alfie whispers. “I want to take away all that pain.”

“I’m not sure you can.” I fiddle with my seat belt, needing something for my hands to do.

“At least let me help ease you from it. I have a lot of love to give, Pisces. Let me love you.”

“It’s because we’re fated mates. Would you give me two glances if we weren’t?”

“You are my catnip. Everything about you is exactly what I’ve always dreamed of in

an omega.”

My cheeks heat at the knowledge. “You don’t exactly know all my baggage, Alfie. We don’t know enough about each other to know anything.” Except that’s a lie. In the short time I’ve known Alfie, I know he’s kind and gentle. He lights up the room he’s in. He’s the most charming person I’ve ever met. And he smiles at me. Me . As if I’m the only one he wants to look at. He respects my need to not sleep with him as soon as possible. Sex needs to be on my timetable.

“I’ll be here when you’re ready to share. I’m not going anywhere unless you tell me to leave. Tell me you’re not interested in seeing where this goes and I’ll leave.”

Tears fall now. “I am interested, and I’m scared. Scared that once you really know me, you won’t be interested. I don’t know that I’m strong enough for that kind of heartache.”

“You are, but I don’t plan on breaking your heart. Not ever.” Alfie holds out his hand.

Slowly, I take it and sit with the sizzling electricity that shoots up my arm. It doesn’t take long to get to the restaurant he saw. I’m not sure I’ve ever noticed it.

Alfie parks and he’s on my side, opening the door before I get my seatbelt undone. The action makes my heart flutter and I take his hand when he offers it. I don’t think I’ve ever touched anyone so much in my life.

“Let’s get to know each other, Pisces.”

The restaurant is a little mom and pop place that sells comfort food. It’s not busy, but the inside is cheery and still decorated for Christmas. Christmas music plays softly on a speaker somewhere in a corner.

“Now, Pisces, tell me something no one else knows.” Alfie locks his fingers together and leans forward, setting his chin on his knuckles.

I fidget in my seat. “Only if you do the same.”

“Naturally.” He gives me a toothy grin. “I’ll go first if it’ll help.”

I nod and grab the cloth napkin from the table to give me something to fidget with. Alfie is so handsome it’s hard to look at him. Never in a million years would I have thought I’d have a mate, fated or otherwise, so good looking. I resigned myself to being single my entire life because I won’t let an alpha control me. Alfie doesn’t seem the controlling type. My heart says I can trust him.

Alfie taps his bottom lip. “Okay, so I didn’t think this through. It’s a hard question!”

“It really is. I can only think of one thing.”

Alfie leans forward. “Yeah?”

“But you said you’d go first, so you have to wait.”

Alfie snorts and nods. “Got me. Okay... something no one else knows.” His nails tap on the table. “I like the harmonica and have a small collection from all over the world.”

I blink back at him. “I never would have guessed.”

“I know the instrument annoys a lot of people, but I find it soothing. Plus, damn near anyone can learn how to play it. I’m not that smart, but?—”

“Don’t say that. You’re smarter than you give yourself credit for.” I know it.

“Okay, I’m not very musically inclined, and I’ve tried so many times with different instruments. The only thing that clicks is the harmonica.”

That’s so charming. He’s charming. I might already have fallen for him. Alfie looks at me expectantly, but I can’t look him in the eye right now.

“My name isn’t really Pisces, but Pisces is the name I chose for myself.”

“Pisces suits you, though.”

“I think so anyway. I like it better than Peter,” I mumble my given name.

Alfie’s eyes go wide. “Like?—”

“Yes, like Peter Cottontail,” I groan out.

“Pisces is much better.”

“That’s what I think.” Too bad I’m not really a Pisces, but a Taurus, but Taurus didn’t feel like the right name for me.

The server brings out our drinks. Water for me and sweet tea for Alfie. We put in our orders and the server leaves us again.

Maybe I can be brave. Share with Alfie more about myself than even Yolanda knows. “I don’t tell people this, but my biological parents gave me up. They were both rabbit shifters and... well... rabbits tend to have giant families, procreating until they just can’t anymore. I was their last, a single birth, number twenty-two, and they decided I was the one they couldn’t keep. Apparently, twenty-one kids were all they could afford. So, they gave me away.”

“I’m sorry.” Alfie strokes my hand.

“It’s fine. I got a letter when I turned eighteen explaining it all and my family history. I didn’t go looking for them, they haven’t come looking for me. It is what it is. I don’t care for the most part. But it makes me feel guilty about wanting a large family. What if?—”

Alfie squeezes my hand. “You’re allowed to dream big.”

“I never thought I’d find someone that would understand me, so I’ve kept to myself. Never dreamed about having the family I want. Which is about seven kids, if I’m being honest. And I... I’m not a virgin, but the only sex I’ve had is heat sex in clinics with random alphas assigned to me.” My face heats. My heart pounds. No one knows any of that. A cold sweat prickles my brow as embarrassment floods through my body.

The color drains from Alfie’s face and I pull away. I’ve scared him. He doesn’t want that many kids. He thinks I’m a weirdo.

I push to my feet, ready to hightail it to the bathroom to cry in peace.

“Pisces.” His soothing voice brings me down from the brink of panic. “Please stay. I know you’re upset, but for the life of me, I don’t know why. There’s nothing embarrassing about what you’ve shared with me. And...” He nibbles his bottom lip and looks at me through his lashes. “Seven kids sound perfect,” he whispers. “I’m an only child and I’ve always been envious of my fellow elves with siblings.”

I drop back into my chair and stare at him. “You really wouldn’t mind seven kids?”

He shakes his head. “I used to help in the North Pole daycare when I had free time and loved every minute of it. I think if I weren’t so good with calligraphy, Santa

would have transferred me to the daycare unit permanently. But, uh, I'd have to rein in what I spelled out with the alphabet magnets around kids."

"They wouldn't have understood what you spelled out." I bite back a grin, but when his stunning smile beams back at me, I can't help it.

"I hope you brought your appetites!" the server says as they bring out our food.

The warm scent of freshly baked rolls and roast beef fills my senses. We both dig in and I moan into my first bite.

"I don't usually have big meals," I confess. "Certainly not with sexy alphas."

"Life with me will be... different. Let me paint the future for you." Alfie wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. "Pieces of Pisces is so busy you have to have several employees to help run it. I'm your promo manager. You do your thing and keep the whole place running the way you like it ran. When we're ready, we'll start a family. The shop will sustain all nine of us or more, however many kids we have. We'll go on adventures when the kids are old enough. We have loads of friends. And most of all, we're deeply deeply in love."

"Sounds beautiful." I sigh and take another bite. What would a future like that be like?

"It'll be hard work, but we're both hard workers." The determined look in Alfie's eyes tells me he really does believe his words. Maybe I can too.

"I'm willing to give it a go."

"Really?" Alfie has a roll poised to his lips, and he drops it. "You want to?"

“I want to see where fate takes us. I want to see this vision played out.”

We chat as if we're old friends. Alfie is the easiest person to talk to and the longer we talk, the more at ease I become. Just his voice calms my itchy brain. Usually I'd be anxious, ready to dart out of the restaurant as soon as possible, but with Alfie, I want to just be with him. We share a dessert and before I know it, we're back at my car.

Without even thinking, I hand him the keys.

“Can I kiss you, Pisces?”

Nerves come back and eat at my stomach. “There's something I forgot to mention before.”

“You've never been kissed?”

I nod. “I've never dated. Never been kissed. Never made love.”

“We have a lot of firsts to look forward to.” He eyes my lips, but doesn't move.

Alfie is letting me set the pace. Everything is on my timeline, and he's not pushing me for anything. The simple request for a kiss was a request only.

I stand on my tiptoes and press my hands to his cheeks, taking in his beautiful honey eyes. Alfie leans into me and when our lips connect, it's like the world stops for just us. His arms wrap around me, pulling me closer, and I can't get enough of him. He tastes like dessert. Like Alfie. Like sunshine. Like life itself. His hands thread in my hair and I want him closer still.

Too soon, the kiss ends, and we gasp for breath.

“So that’s kissing.” No, that’s kissing my fated.

“Yeah,” Alfie’s as dazed as I am. We stumble apart and climb into my car.

But I don’t want to stop. I launch at him from across the center console, needing to touch him. He chuckles and lets me slide into his lap. We just stare at each other from this position until, like we’re sharing a brain, we kiss. Again and again. Just kissing. Feeling. Exploring with hands. Nothing below the belt, but we don’t need that. Not yet.

“Pisces,” Alfie breathes out my name when we break for air. He nuzzles my neck and I practically melt in his arms right here. I never want to be too far from him. “Let’s get some place more comfortable. We don’t have to do anything more than kiss.” He kisses my nose and I slide back over to my side of the vehicle.

“Got carried away.” But embarrassment doesn’t burn through me. No, I feel empowered more than anything.

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Chapter 7

Alfie

Bliss, that's what life with Pisces is like. It's been a month and everyday we get closer and closer. I look down at my bunny snuggled to my chest with Harold just as close. Bunny Pisces is the cutest bunny I've ever seen in my life. His little nose wiggles in his sleep as if he scents something yummy. His ears stick right up. And his wittle tail . I just wanna nom nom the little fluff ball. Cuteness aggression is a thing, and I got it in spades.

The alarm wakes us with a gentle song now instead of that heart stopping terrifying screaming alarm. It means my sweet little bunny wakes up gently instead of scared. It took me weeks to convince him to make the switch. He blinks up at me and shifts into his human form. He's not afraid of me seeing him naked anymore, but we still haven't had sex. Which is fine. I understand his need to wait.

Rabbits can get pregnant the first time they have sex with an alpha if birth control isn't involved. Apparently, all heat clinic alphas are required to take alpha birth control, which is why he trusted the clinics. He doesn't trust heat condoms since we're fated, and I totally get it.

I drag my finger from his belly button to his chest, watching his stomach jump. He hums as he stretches. Harold grumbles and hops off the bed to go hop onto the table in the corner with the salt lamp. The first time he'd done it, I was concerned, but it's his favorite thing to do. He wraps his paws around the salt and just sits like that. He doesn't even lick the salt, he just basks in the light.

Pisces's fingers dance across my chest. He likes touching me as much as I like touching him.

"I think I'd like to... try something today." He won't look at me, and I tip his head up to meet his eyes.

"Try what kind of something? We can try that new restaurant for dinner if you want."

Pisces shakes his head. "Something..." His tongue darts across his lips. "I want..." He swallows. "I want to suck your cock. That's not something I've ever done in the heat clinics. And it won't get me knocked up." He grins at me. While he wants seven kids or more, he's not quite ready yet and I don't blame him. We're still getting to know each other. And the shop is still working on being more profitable.

"I won't stop you if you're ready to explore my body." I'm certainly ready to explore his, but I'll never push him for it.

"I am."

I roll to my back, bringing him with me so he's straddling my waist. "Kiss me sweet Pisces."

He leans down and captures my lips, his hands on either side of my face. The familiar sizzle of fate stays with us as the fireworks of his kiss explode behind my eyelids. Kissing Pisces is like nothing else. He steals my breath and gives me life at the same time. My cock perks in interest with his squirming. Our hands roam each other. His cock hardens against my stomach, and he ruts against me. Until he's ready, I won't touch him, though. Slowly, he slides down my body, taking my sweatpants with him.

My cock springs from its prison and Pisces's eyes go wide. It's the first time he's seen my dick. I'm not small by any means, and he swallows.

“Wow,” the whisper is barely audible, but I hear it anyway.

“You don’t have?—”

His tongue darts out to lick me from balls to tip and I flop back to stare at the ceiling while my brain comes back online.

“You taste so good, Alfie.” Pisces licks my tip as his hands pump my length. “So so good.” He gets more enthusiastic in his sucking and slurping. Enjoying my cock. He hums as he goes, adding vibrations to the mix.

“I’m not gonna last if you keep doing what you’re doing.” My hand goes to his hair, but I don’t yank. I just need to touch him.

“I read how to do this in a magazine. Am I doing good?” The scent of Pisces’s slick fills the air and I bite back the need to taste him.

“Oh, sweetheart, you’re doing amazing.” I moan as he sucks one ball into his mouth while continuing to stroke my cock.

“I want you to come in my mouth.” He can’t take my girth, but he doesn’t need to.

“Keep doing what you’re doing, baby, and you’ll get your wish.” Fuck, this might be the best blow job I’ve had in my life. Is it because we’re fated or he’s just that good right out of the gate?

He continues to hum that happy little tune, and I tip over the edge. “Coming!” I shout as my orgasm rips through me.

Pisces splutters as he drinks in what he can, but cum spills from his lips.

“You look so sexy dripping in my cum,” I say.

Pisces licks his lips and pushes the spilled cum to his mouth. He slurps up the remains like it's the best treat in the world.

"Mmmm. I already wanna do that again." He nuzzles against my cock, nosing my thigh, before flopping over on his back. He's so hard, his cock presses to his stomach.

"Would you like me to reciprocate?" I hope I don't sound too desperate, but I want him.

Pisces wipes at his chin and licks the last bits of cum from his fingers. "Yeah," he whispers.

I hop off the bed, then pull him by the ankles to the edge. All the while, he's laughing. He pushes to his elbows to watch me drop to my knees, ready to worship his cock.

"Tell me if I need to stop or I do anything you don't like."