



Such a Brave Omega (His Alpha Desires #3)

Author: Lorelei M. Hart

Category: LGBT+

Description: I've been on the run for so long. Can't remember the last time I slept in a bed that belonged to me. Had a phone that held contacts. Didn't live out of a threadbare duffel bag.

I fell for the wrong alpha. I left him and now, true to his promise, I am paying the price for abandoning him.

Until one night, a car hits me as I cross the street.

With broken ribs and the taste of blood in my mouth, I hobble to the nearest place where I think i will be out of the way of prying eyes and any of my ex's goons only to have someone come out and drag me from my hiding place.

An alpha who smells like whiskey and lemon. Except it is too late. I am too broken, and my ex won't stop until I am dead.

The best thing for this man to do is leave me be, let me fall into the darkness in peace.

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Bronson

As assistant district attorney, I represented the people of the county with diligence and zeal. For ten years. And I enjoyed the work, frustrating though it could be sometimes. And I probably would have stayed with it indefinitely if not for one factor. The election of a new DA who wanted to clean house and fill as many positions as possible with his friends and flunkies. Not that I could be fired without cause, but the office went from a warm and friendly place to the exact opposite.

There wasn't anything dishonest going on, at least that I could determine, but I was not being paid enough to deal with the hostility. So, after a few months of this, I picked up the phone and asked if the large private firm I'd turned down three times before still wanted me to join them.

Best move I ever made. Financially, for sure. But also in the way it challenged me. Criminal defendants deserved the best representation, and it required a new perspective from me. I'd taken pride in all the evildoers I contributed to putting behind bars. So when I met with my first pro bono client behind bars, my inclination was to immediately get started on proving he committed the crime of which he was accused.

Looking at him, sitting there, one hand cuffed to a ring on the table in the tiny meeting room, watching me as if I held the key to the prison door, a shift in my mind announced itself with an internal clang. Every person I'd been charged with prosecuting had been entitled to someone on their side, and now that I was that person, I wondered how often they had not had adequate representation.

The senior partners in our firm had a policy that every new associate must do a pro bono first. And mine was a nineteen- year-old whose whole life was ahead of him if he could avoid a felony conviction. I knew how to get one but had never been in the position of stopping one until now.

The young man was swearing to me that he was not guilty.

Yet, I recognized how much my years on the prosecutorial side had given me insight into how defense attorneys worked. I'd faced these men and women in court and over conference tables as they told me why their client should not spend years in prison. They had never done such a thing before. There were extenuating circumstances. They were innocent of the charges against them.

Many people believed that what they saw on television conveyed the whole story of justice in action. Person commits crime, each legal team gathers evidence—incontrovertible in the case of the lead character of the show—then went to court and presented said evidence to the judge and jury. The jury went out and discussed the evidence and came to a conclusion. They came back in, presented their decision, and were done. The person was let go or incarcerated.

But what these shows rarely conveyed was how much of a case took place behind the scenes. In those conference rooms or, more common recently, over Zoom calls. Of course there was the evidence, lots of documents passed back and forth. Since most discovery had to be shared, there were few surprises once trial began—except the jury's decision. Or the judge's, if no jury was empaneled.

But many times, a deal was struck before trial. A plea bargain. Or perhaps the prosecutor, upon reviewing the evidence, decided that the case was weaker than it appeared at first and pulled it.

My nineteen-year-old client swore he was not guilty, that he had been in the wrong

place at the wrong time. He'd never get into med school if he was found guilty. He was a shifter, and he was determined to help our kind, something he could do much better if he had a human medical license. He'd already trained with his pack's healer since he was a small boy, more valuable experience in my opinion.

I'd spoken with his pack alpha, his fathers, and some of the other elders in his pack and heard only good things, which made me more inclined to believe him than not. He was so young, so ready to help, and everything in me said he had not pointed that gun while committing a robbery. "So, why is everyone so sure you did it?"

"It was late at night, and I went in to pick up some energy drinks to make it through studying. I was waiting in line when all hell broke loose. There were two guys ahead of me pointing guns at the guy behind the counter and demanding money. I tried to get out of the way, but before I made it to the door, there were police everywhere."

I'd listened to that young man's story and believed him. Even if I hadn't, I'd have defended him to the best of my ability. And he walked free. Since then, I'd faced judges and juries many times, earning both a lot more money than I had ever seen in the DA's office and a partnership. Without those things happening, I'd never have been able to invest in the club.

A place where I could be myself.

Finally.

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Tate

“These didn’t get picked up. Eat them before you up and blow away.” Eddie slid a paper plate with two ham-and-cheese croissants in front of me, along with a to-go cup of coffee. I’d had his coffee before. It was saturated with sugar and creamer but at this point, there was no way I would turn down the extra calories.

Besides, anything was better than another round of beans and rice, which had been on the menu for me for months. Maybe years. Sometimes I couldn’t decipher one day from the next.

“Go on,” he prompted, shoulder-checking me. This job had kept me afloat only a few weeks, but the people were nice and Eddie tried to help me whenever he could. “Take your break.”

I picked up the plate along with the coffee and scooted out the back door, bumping it open with my hip. A vintage metal stool sat outside under a rickety awning. Sometimes the other workers would come out here to smoke or talk on the phone, a habit forbidden inside Donut Heaven except for Eddie, who took orders from his personal cell. Plus, he was the owner. He could do whatever he wanted to.

I scarfed both of the warm croissants down in minutes, burning the roof of my mouth on hot cheese, and washing them down with the coffee. A noise from the far end of the alley made me turn my head. A black SUV was stopped on the road. The windows were tinted nearly black—nowhere near legal.

Tingling trickled down my body, starting at the top of my head, but I tried to keep

cool. I finished my coffee and raised my nose into the air, taking in every bit of scent I could. My wolf picked up a lot of different odors—it was a busy alley, after all, but the stench of wolves from Brad's pack rose above the others. Not him, of course. He had others to do his dirty work.

Ice filled my veins, but I couldn't let on that I knew.

Fuck. I had only been here a few weeks, and I was more careful every time I moved.

I no longer had a phone. Eddie hired me under a false name and paid me cash out of the till. The apartment was in a fake name. No digital footprint. Nothing.

I'd burned all my IDs and social security cards a month ago.

They'd still found me.

The rest of the day, I swept like it would be my last time because with Brad's packmates on my tail and the threats he had made still reverberating in my ears, it might've just been my last time sweeping—walking—breathing.

He'd said I was his. And if I left him, tried to be anyone's but his, he would rather see me dead.

While I didn't want to die, especially without really experiencing all life had to offer, I couldn't keep this up forever. I lived out of a duffel bag. I worked for cash, with no steady income.

Roaches in dingy apartments and shady motels were sometimes the only people I talked to, and they weren't people.

I was breathing. Walking. Talking. Eating. Barely sleeping.

But I wasn't living—far from it.

I finished my shift, trying to keep my wits about me. Eddie and his staff didn't ask many questions, which was good, but I hadn't met a soul while I was on the run who didn't suspect something.

I didn't blame them. If I saw an omega who looked worse for wear and asking to be paid in cash, had no ID or phone, I would be suspicious as well.

“Anything else you need?” I asked the crew as I finished up. I would make sure to say goodbye to them since today would be the last time I saw them. I'd write their names down in my journal to remember all the people who participated in my life in even the smallest way.

“We're fine. Have a good night, Henry.” Henry, the name I had given myself this time around. Next stop would have to be a new one. I had a list of those names in my journal as well.

I nodded and glanced over my shoulder a little but wished them well only in my head.

They would forget about me as though I were anyone else who passed through, and that was fine, especially if one of Ryder's betas ever asked questions.

The black SUV followed me, no matter that I took back alleys and curves and turns. When I ascended the steps to my apartment, I spotted them only two blocks away.

There was the slim possibility that this was a random SUV.

Ryder wouldn't stop until my heart no longer beat, or I succumbed to being his mate again.

In my heart, I only had once choice—I would never be his mate again.

Being with him was a slow, painful torture, though he never physically hurt me.

I packed up my toothbrush along with my few pieces of clothing before putting on my running shoes. A few moments later, I shaved off my beard and my hair and put on a red ball cap I found on the top shelf of the bedroom closet. I sat by the door, listening for any steps.

There was one bus in and out of this small town, and I had to wait until the last minute to catch it. The cover of night was my friend.

As soon as the sun set, I walked out and pulled my cap down low over my brow. I took the alleys again, darting in and out of shadows and lights. Yeah, the bus out of here would save me.

As the station came into view, I heard the screeching of tires and then the squeal of brakes behind me. Quickening my steps, I made it to the counter and bought the ticket.

“Please, please buy me some time?” I asked, flicking my gaze to the men now closing in.

The alpha ticket seller glanced behind me and nodded. “Go. Run.”

I sprinted to the bus and made it inside. I frequently relied on the kindness of strangers. First, the alpha at the bus ticket counter and now, this human at the wheel. “Can you please not let anyone else on?” I begged, even though there were plenty of seats empty.

“I’m running behind anyway.” She nodded and closed the door behind me.

The men had reached the bus and banged on the door as she drove away and I released a long exhale.

Got away.

Again.

As I slouched into the first empty seat, my heart was beating out of my chest. My calves were on fire. Terror made my chest seize up.

There was only so long I could keep up this pace.

Ryder would catch me eventually.

I was only delaying the inevitable.

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Bronson

The furniture delivery was late.

A couple of years after opening, the club was ready for upgrades. We'd purchased good quality dungeon items back then, many made by one of our owners, but increased membership made a need for more stations on the floor and setting up a few more private spaces as well. With Talon's and Alex's omegas having arranged a double date for dinner and dancing, two of my partners were out for the evening, and the others were somewhere else.

Another advantage of the amount of time we'd been open was the ability for there to be only one of us on the property at a given time if necessary. We had well-trained staff who picked up most of the day-to-day work that we'd done at the beginning. Finally, after some bumps in the road where we all worked so hard to get things going and keep them going that we found little time to enjoy the club ourselves.

But now? We had a renewed pact outside of our written contract with one another. A gentleman's agreement that we'd all have the chance to practice our kink—as many vanilla types called it. We preferred to call it living our true selves.

Which was why I was so excited about the delivery I was waiting for and so frustrated that it was late. The dungeon furniture was already here and would soon be in use. After over two years, we were finally setting up a new area that touched my heart and mind. A little room. Until now, daddies and mommies and their littles would have to go to the private room themed for them.

A single room, booked out months in advance. And it was charming, no doubt about it, with its crib and changing table and a collection of toys suitable for various ages. But there were far too many people who wanted to make use of it. We hadn't been sure if it would draw enough interest when we first opened, and it would not be something that could just land right in the middle of the stations.

I clicked away on my phone, trying to track the delivery to no avail. The company we'd purchased from was relatively new but offered items unique to our needs, so we'd taken a chance. Something I was beginning to regret. We'd paid up front, as was common with custom orders, and I was responsible for the decision both to use them and to pay what seemed to at least a couple of the owners to question whether they were overcharging us.

Perhaps my eagerness to see the room finished and ready for use had led me to make a foolish choice.

As a daddy, I had spent years in "made-do" situations. None of the clubs I'd frequented locally offered little rooms, but since I did not have a permanent little in my life, I hesitated to set up a nursery or playroom in my own home. Such a place should meet the needs of both daddy and little, in my opinion. While the club was open to most facets of the lifestyle, it was not at all unusual to see a little perched on a caregiver's lap anywhere, but there was so much more to it.

Once I received the furnishings, we would have a full playroom where both committed partners and singles looking for a scene could pass an evening together.

I roamed the main floor, taking in the various stations and areas, all overseen by the dungeon monitors and others tasked with ensuring that everyone was safe and happy. Whatever happy meant to them.

On a large sofa in a darkened corner, a dom cuddled his sub, aftercare in progress.

The submissive curled close to the male who'd marked him with the whip strokes crisscrossing his back. He shivered as lotion was applied gently to the red stripes, his eyes half closed, still lost in subspace.

I was not an impact player, usually, although a spanking to a naughty little's backside could be part of play to both our satisfaction.

"Bronson?" A domme whose mommy preferences had led her to apply for the position of little room manager came to my side. "I hear there's a truck unloading in the back." She was looking extra fetching today in her poodle skirt and black leotard topped with a fuzzy pink cardigan. The uninitiated would never dream what a strict mommy she could be.

"Selena, that's the best news I've heard all day. Is it our special delivery?"

She grinned, her high tight black ponytail bobbing. "I think so. Want to go and see if it is?"

"You know it." Linking arms with the woman whose 1950s persona had her in high demand with the littles who came to the club, we walked inside. "You sure you'll be able to concentrate on working when it all comes together? It's going to be awfully tempting to sit down and do a puzzle with a winsome little girl."

"Four nights a week, I'll be working. The others are mine to do with as I please, and the free membership doesn't hurt at all."

We cut through the kitchen on the way to the back door where we found a pair of workers unloading multiple boxes marked simply furniture . The equivalent of naughty movies coming in a brown paper wrapper.

"I can't wait to see!" she cooed. "Can I take charge?" Her eyes sparkled, fingers

flexing as if she held a flogger ready for a naughty bottom. Not all littles required a gentle hand. “I promise to see it all set up just the way you laid it out.”

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Tate

“Last stop,” the bus driver said loudly, waking me up. I pulled my hoodie down as the doors of the bus slapped open.

No one outside.

“We weren’t followed. You’re okay,” she assured me with a whisper.

“Thank you.”

I got off the bus and realized how hungry I was as soon as my feet hit the pavement. With no phone to help guide me, I whirled around, realizing I was in a city. Didn’t know the name of it, but I would ask someone once I found something to eat. My body ached from the sleeping position.

Across the street, I saw a place selling mini corn dogs and fries, but they didn’t open for another hour. My mind was set on the tiny hot dogs and waffle fries, so I decided to find a place to stay—one that was moderately clean but mostly cheap. I’d been on the bus for a few days and desperately needed a shower—hot water was a bonus.

My standards had dropped to the bottom of the barrel since leaving Ryder. He bought me the best of the best of everything, and I always had my pick of whatever I wanted to eat. His shower, our shower, had been bigger than Eddie’s donut shop. Or at least it seemed that large in memory.

Those things didn’t matter when you were being screamed at while you cowered in

the corner of said shower, praying to whatever god that would listen to make him shut up. Make him be nice to me. Make him show me the minimal amount of affection and care.

Not to mention, he was a mean daddy. Mean—harsh—aggressive—demanding. Everything I'd never wanted and yet fell into the deep end with.

I shook my head, trying to make those thoughts go away if only for a moment. A roof of some kind over my head would have to take precedence.

With a death grip on my duffel bag, I walked down the streets of this city, admiring some things and crossing the road to avoid some others. I'd lived in a lot of places since leaving Ryder. While there was no physical line on the street or sign warning you of a bad area—there were always clues.

Lately, these were the places I stayed, the ones right on the line between shady and comfortable—between nightmare and security.

Up ahead, I saw a flashing sign for a motel. The missing lights made it read Mote and I chuckled walking to the front office.

Inside, the place stank of musty cigarettes and cheap chocolate of all things.

“Can I help ya?” the woman behind the counter asked as she folded towels that looked about as soft as a steel wool scrubber. The cigarette stuck to her bottom lip was marked with the magenta lipstick on her lips and her teeth.

“You have a single room available?”

She nodded. “Got three. On the top floor though. Nobody wants to walk up a damned flight of stairs and our elevator is busted.”

“The top floor is great. How much?”

She quoted me and it was cheaper than I thought. Wordlessly, she slid a key on an enormous ring over the counter toward me. No fancy key cards in this place. Again, it was better that way. Ryder had connections. He knew people who could get into any hotel or motel—anywhere. When her back was turned, I scooped up a handful of random pieces of candy from the glass dish with the FREE sign on it. Calories were calories.

“Thank you,” I said, and walked toward the door.

“Thank you...Chester.” She checked the sign-in sheet since I paid with cash. I stopped outside the office to check the map before proceeding to my room. The decor was tangerine and cream, a color palette that spanned from the slick, quilted bedspread to the wallpaper.

I wondered for a second what these walls must’ve seen in their time.

After a surprisingly hot shower with a showerhead that sprayed every direction but at the person trying to get clean, I got dressed in clean clothes, jeans and a T-shirt. All nondescript. I could be anyone and no one, and that was my plan.

Traverse this city without anyone knowing my name or anything about me, really.

It was my chance at survival.

My mouth watered thinking about the mini corn-dog place, and I headed that way once I was sure the coast was clear and my nerves had calmed down some. When I returned to my motel room, I intended to ask the woman in the office if she knew of anyone hiring for cash and then settle in with my dinner and some cartoons, anything to take the edge off this stress.

I was only able to afford a three pack of the corn dogs, but the alpha behind the counter threw in an order of fries and gave me a wink.

“Thank you.”

I ducked out of the way of others in line and rolled the top of the brown paper sack to keep my food as warm as possible.

When my feet hit the street, a pair of headlights turned on. A car I thought was parked revved up the engine, barreling straight toward me. There were parked vehicles on the other side of the street. Nowhere to run. Gasps and screams bellowed out behind me.

Fuck, this was going to hurt.

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Bronson

With Selena in charge of setting up the little room, I found myself at loose ends. We'd agreed to allow those we'd placed in management positions to do their jobs, which was at least part of why I agreed to let her do the full job. I'd promised my partners, and how would it look if the first time an opportunity came up, I insisted on handling things myself.

Still, I was twitching to see the final result. And if it didn't turn out in reality to be exactly as I envisioned, we'd make changes. After all, everything we bought could be moved around with ease. It was one of the advantages to the choices we'd made. With so many plans for various gatherings and events, we needed the flexibility.

I could see the hallway from here where boxes were being hauled in full and carried out empty. Sipping my drink, I told myself it must be going well and that I didn't need to worry or fuss about the whole thing. I didn't even have anyone else to hang out with and complain.

The other owners were out for the night.

Whipped, they were. I envied them. We'd all been single when we opened the club, but two of us had been snapped up by omegas who made their lives good. Better than good. And while I missed our late nights sitting around dreaming about the future of the club, and while I was more than a little envious, I couldn't think of a better fate for my friends than these perfect-for-them males.

And the babies that had followed?

Who knew it was in any of our futures.

Not me, though. If I ever found a little to play with more than once or twice, I'd call that a mega win.

"Another whiskey sour?" Samuel asked, already picking up the whiskey bottle.

"No," I said, covering my glass with my hand. "Just one for tonight. Thank you." Maybe I'd go home and relax for a while instead of lingering here.

"Boss," one of the bouncers said, coming up behind me. I hated when people came up behind me. Reminded me of my past. A trickle of fear made its way down my spine.

I growled, "What?" I stood and turned around, shoving my back against the bar—where it was safe.

"There's something you should see."

Pushing off the bar, I followed Rath through the club and to the back exit. He unlocked it and we walked out. Usually this was where the owners exited the building. Talon had his own exit from the back of his office but the rest of us used this door.

"Well?" I barked. "What is it?"

"He's over here."

He?

We walked around one of the dumpsters and in between them was a crumpled man. An omega. One who looked the worse for wear.

“Let’s get him out.”

Rath and I pulled the body out gently. I pushed my fingers to the omega’s throat.

“He’s alive, but barely. Call an ambulance.”

Rath pulled out his phone and paced while he talked to the operator.

The omega’s hand slapped mine several times.

I leaned down. “What’s your name?” I asked. “Who did this to you?”

“Please. Just let me die. It’s better this way. Let me fucking die.”

Not on my watch.

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Tate

My eyes flutter open. It's dark. Either that or something is wrong with my eyes. I move to try and sit up, when strikes of pain light up every limb—every bone—every muscle.

I spot the dirty, caked wheels attached to something. Oh, a dumpster.

Why am I near a dumpster? My pants are wet and sticking to my legs. The metallic taste of blood is in my mouth. My wolf is whining. Howling. Working in his own way through our bond to help me as much as he can, but it's useless.

The moments before losing consciousness come flooding back to me. Going to get something to eat. Seeing the headlights. Hearing the horns, the screaming, the gasps.

The ringing in my ears as the front of the car slammed into my body.

I'd run, run for what was left of this sliver of life but had given up in some alley. Before I passed out, I remembered the walls vibrating with bass music playing inside. The smell of sex and lust thick in the air as I took what I thought were my last breaths.

Sucking in another inhale, I realized...this is what it's like to die.

I let myself give up on life at this point, praying to the Goddess for a life beyond this one—one beyond pain and anguish and heartache. The edges of my vision blurred. Fingers of cloudy ink encircled my gaze, and I forced a smile.

Death would mean peace for me. I'd been running from Ryder but at the same time chasing peace.

Here it came.

The corners of my mouth pulled up in a last smile when four hands grabbed onto my shoulders and legs. I was being dragged somewhere. The warmth my body gathered while lying down vanished, replaced by cold concrete under my back.

The smell of whiskey and lemon washed over my body and senses.

Oh, this must be what the afterlife was like. The Goddess must've dragged me into another place to be with her.

I believed that and clung to it until two fingers pressed to my neck. Warm, living fingers.

"He's alive, but barely. Call an ambulance." I heard the words, but it was the voice that flared in my veins and brought me back to life.

Damn him. Taking me from my peace.

My wolf howled inside me, wanting the opposite. He wanted the male closer. Wanted to wallow in his scent and let him take care of us.

I'd never liked whiskey or any other alcohol until that moment.

Even though I was now aware that I wasn't dead, the desire for another life, one after this one, called to me. It took an eternity to get my eyes open again, but once I did, I saw him. His shoulders were broad. A light shone behind him, outlining his large body and highlighting the brown strands of his hair. It was still dark out. I didn't

know how much time had passed since the car hit me.

A new wave of hammering pain nailed me in the torso. The person was trying to help me, but I didn't want help—I wanted death. His warm hand was still on my shoulder, and I tried to slap it away, believing that this hand, his touch, was tethering me to a life I no longer wanted to live.

It wasn't a life at all.

The male leaned down. His irises were smoke and ash. "What's your name?" he asked. His breath poured over my form, making me shudder. Even that small vibration made everything ache ten times worse than before. "Who did this to you?"

I coughed and sputtered, trying to speak. "Please. Just let me die. It's better this way. Let me fucking die."

He murmured something I couldn't hear. There was someone else talking a distance away. I couldn't make out the words, but the male hovering above me ran his fingers through my hair and asked me to hang on.

Said everything was going to be okay.

I let out a laugh of derision. Now that I was on the verge of death, there was a male, an alpha from what my wolf was relaying to me, and he was telling me the one thing I'd wanted to hear all my life.

Everything was going to be okay.

"What hurts?" the man asked. Those smoky eyes gazing down my body.

"Everything," I laughed. "Everything."

“Can you tell me what happened? Did someone beat you?”

I shook my head, in the process realizing my temples were throbbing. Damn, I didn’t even get to eat my mini corn dogs before I died.

What a shame.

“Tell me anything,” he begged. An alpha begging. That was a new one.

“It doesn’t matter,” I said, trying to comfort him. No idea why I wanted to comfort this stranger, but the care he’d given me in these few minutes were more than I’d ever received—even from my fathers.

“It does,” he said and turned his head. “Rafe, where in the hell is the ambulance?”

“No,” I grumbled. “No ambulance. Let me go.”

“I’m not letting you go.”

I wanted to reply but heard an ambulance approaching from a distance.

The male took my hand in his and squeezed it. “You’re going to be okay.”

I let my eyes close as the siren neared. The splash of tires in puddles. Doors opening. Men speaking.

That was the moment I let go of it all.

The hope of dying. The hope of peace.

Goddess, if you’re wanting me to live longer, let it be in calm.

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Bronson

Damn.

I'd just been thinking that I'd be single forever, grateful for a night or two with someone, and then bam! This omega turned up, severely injured, and touched me in a way no other ever had. If he'd just gone off to the hospital with the paramedics, I'd probably never have seen him again. After all, I didn't know him from Adam. Not even his name. But in the chaos surrounding the arrival of the authorities, an odd thing happened.

The human emergency workers assumed I was the injured omega's significant other or maybe next of kin. They weren't very clear about their impressions beyond the fact that they offered me a seat in the back of the ambulance for the ride to the hospital. And odder still, I climbed in and went.

My wolf was particularly insistent that we go and make sure the omega was all right, preferably right after chewing up whoever harmed him in this way. But at this point, nobody seemed to be able to figure out how he was injured. He'd claimed he wasn't beaten, but he sure looked like it.

They had me stand aside while they gently lifted him onto a gurney and strapped him in, covered with a coarse blanket that was not at all what I would choose to warm him with. A soft quilt, a cotton sheet...me.

How could I even be thinking like this in such a tragic moment? As I took my place beside him, I rested a hand on his shoulder, feeling like anyone should be able to feel

a friend nearby when they were in such bad shape. He wasn't even conscious anymore, so far as I could tell, and a spark of panic made me want to feel his warmth, to know he had not tipped beyond life.

The hospital lay no more than ten minutes away, but it felt like an hour while the driver wove in and out of traffic, siren blaring and lights flashing. The other attendant sat beside me on the bench, monitoring the mysterious patient's vitals.

Calling the human emergency services had been a risk. In most cases, the omega would have been able to shift into his wolf and heal, but that required full consciousness and a measure of strength he just didn't have.

As long as they didn't need to operate, it should be okay. I'd heard some rumors about shifters who required surgical intervention, and while our human forms were pretty close to the regular folk—after all, it wasn't as if someone was going to find a wolf curled up inside him or anything—there was always the concern that some anomaly would come up.

Finally, we swept into the ER loading area and the omega was wheeled into a curtained cubicle without ever regaining consciousness. Still under the impression that I was his partner or maybe next of kin, I was allowed to follow him in and sit beside him while we waited for a doctor to come in and look him over.

Nurses flitted in and out, taking his vitals and commenting that his heart rate was a little high for someone in his current state, but I just agreed and called it a family condition. Somehow nobody was asking me for much information, which was very lucky because I had almost none.

"The doctor will be in soon." Yet another nurse I hadn't seen before poked her head around the curtain. "How are we feeling?"

“Well, you and I are probably fine, but the patient is still not awake, and I hope I’m not remiss in pointing out that might be a problem?” With great difficulty, I kept my wolf from emerging and leaping on her. “So...how soon is soon?”

As it turned out, soon was right that moment, just as the omega opened his eyes and tried to sit up. He went right back out, but that moment seemed to reassure the medical team. He did not need surgery, thankfully, but his injuries were made worse by malnutrition and dehydration.

Any hopes I’d had for getting him out of there would have to be put off for a bit while he regained some strength. And I’d be there with him as much as possible because...well, because I would.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:26 am

Tate

An alarm woke me up. A beeping I'd never heard before. Someone make it stop.

"What..." I croaked, not able to get the rest of my question out. My throat felt like someone had rubbed sandpaper inside its walls.

"Easy," someone said from my right. My eyes fluttered open to find bright lights and a pale-white ceiling above me.

The beeping hastened.

"Here," the voice said again. "Drink something." A straw was pressed to my dry lips, and I sucked down a good amount before it was taken from me.

"Where am I?" I managed to get out. I lifted my hand realizing there was a pricking sensation on the back of my wrist.

"You don't remember? Let me get the nurse."

I turned my gaze to find a tall, broad man standing over my bed, pressing a button on the guardrail near my head. I squeezed my eyes shut and hissed as someone's voice asked what we needed. The voice was barely intelligible above the radio-like static.

"He's awake."

"We're on our way."

The man sat on the chair next to the bed and patted my hand. “Everything is going to be okay.”

His voice and touch triggered my thoughts. Shit. I’d been hit by a car. Ryder. Or Ryder’s goons. The alley. The dumpster wheels. The wetness. The pain. The man. The alpha. He saved me. “Who are you?” I asked.

“My name is Bronson.”

Bronson. The way he said his name, the voice wrapped around my chest and warmed parts of me that had been cold for so long. “You were there. You wouldn’t let me die.” I pushed down on the bed on either side of my hips to sit up a bit but as soon as I moved my torso, pain stabbed my sides. My lungs were on fire. There wasn’t a spot on my body that didn’t ache.

“No. I couldn’t let you die. I don’t even know your name. You had a wallet with nothing more than a few dollars in it. No ID. No driver’s license. Nothing. They were calling you John Doe until you woke up.”

“It’s Tate,” I said, cringing at my slipup. The truth so easily fell from my lips. Maybe because this alpha made me feel safe.

“Tate. Can you tell me what happened?”

I leaned my head back against the paper like pillowcase. The smell of bleach and disinfectant infiltrated my senses, along with the spicy warmth of the man next to me. “I don’t want to get you involved. People near me get hurt. It’s better if you don’t know.”

“Let me worry about my own safety. The paramedics said you weren’t beaten like I thought. They suspected a car accident. But I can’t figure out why you ran and

decided to die behind a dumpster.”

I laughed, but the motion sent a new wave of pain through my chest and waist. “Not my best decision. And the paramedics were right. I was hit by a car. A speeding car.”

“So, why not stay at the scene? Get some help. Unless...”

Bronson finally got it. His smoky eyes clouded as his pupils widened. He scooted to the edge of the chair and was about to say something else when the door opened. “Good morning. Let’s get your vitals. How is your pain?”

The slim human flitted through the room, checking my IV and numbers on the screen and typing things into the computer.

“Everything hurts,” I said.

“On a scale of one to ten? Ten being someone amputated your arm?”

I flicked my gaze to Bronson, not wanting to seem weak in front of him for some reason. “Um, eight?”

“He was hit by a car going full speed and then dragged himself to safety. He’s being modest,” Bronson said to the nurse.

The human blushed and nodded. “Ten it is. I’m going to get you something to put in your IV, so say whatever you need to before then because it will be lights out after that.”

When the nurse left, Bronson put his hand on me again. The beast inside me howled, dragging out the sound, hoping the sound would carry through my throat and to the alpha near me. “Someone did this to you. I need to know who.”

He was a handsome one. Not the type I would normally go for but a bolder type of alpha. His eyebrows were bushy but well-kept. His jaw chiseled. A round face. Serious eyes. Those hands were bigger than my head.

“No, you really don’t. Thank you for your help, but I’m fine. As soon as I can leave here, I’ll move to another town and be nothing more than a memory.”

“You’ll never be just a memory if I have any say in it, omega. I need to go take care of some things but I’ll be back this afternoon.”

“You don’t...” I started to protest, but he leaned over me, nailing me with a stare that had me locked down in the best way possible. My sentence lodged in my throat.

“I will be back later with better food than what they are offering here. Is there something else you would like? Anything?”

Him.

Naked.

“No. I suppose I need to rest.”

His gaze dipped to my lips, and I wished he would lean down a bit more and press his mouth to mine. “Rest up, then, omega. I’ll be back.”

Yeah, I’d heard those words before.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:26 am

Bronson

I visited the omega every day, watching him and wishing I had the ability to lend him the strength he needed to get well. The doctors, who by now assumed I was either his next of kin or his partner, although for some reason nobody asked, said he should pull through.

Once he woke up, he was very weak but perfectly able to manage his own medical decisions, so there was no need for me to give them any kind of formal paperwork or prove my relationship. Tate was happy to see me and treated me like he'd known me for decades instead of days.

I came in every morning for an hour or so before work, bringing him nourishing and tasty food from the café bakery near my home. Then I returned in the evening with more food and anecdotes from my day to share. Most of what I did was pretty boring for anyone outside the law world, but I managed to make it more colorful, very pleased and excited if I could get a laugh or smile from him.

We were both concerned about the fact that this was a human hospital, and eventually someone was going to figure out that he was not an average person with the anatomy that entailed. He also had a sketchy history in terms of paper trails and no insurance. Few if any shifters paid for such things. Nearly anything that went wrong with us could be healed by one simple thing.

A shift.

Our animals possessed healing powers that could only be used in their forms, so as

long as Tate was too weak to make the change, he was no better than the average human recovering from traumatic injuries and neglect.

He was also worried about the circumstances that led to his accident. While in the hospital, he was probably all right, but when he got out, he faced the dangers that he'd barely begun to explain to me.

But every day he was a little better, and we were both watching and waiting for him to be strong enough to make the shift that would complete the healing process. Honestly, even with the worries, the time we spent together was the best hours I could remember. We talked about all sorts of things, from the weather to animals to growing up shifters in a human world. I brought him everything I thought he might like to eat and drink, although he protested.

We were biding our time until we could leave the human world and return to the real one.

Tate

“You can’t be serious.” Contrary to my words, I threw the sheet off my legs and instantly felt the soreness seeping in from that easy movement.

Oh man, this was going to suck.

“I’m absolutely serious. I’ll watch the door.”

“Thanks.” I slid my legs over the side of the bed and then realized we had another predicament. A small one since shifters were more accepting of nudity, but this was Bronson.

Bronson, the alpha of my dreams.

“I’ll turn around. Don’t worry, sweetheart.” He moved to face the hospital hallway while my chest exploded from that term of endearment.

I wasted no time, since I had none to waste with humans all around. I tore off the gown and shifted right there, barely containing the howl from my wolf. Not only was I shifting for the first time in a long time, I was in front of this delicious alpha. Once I saw Bronson through my animal’s eyes, there was no doubt in my mind.

My wolf had fought me over Ryder, over being with him.

He was begging me to bond with Bronson. Begging.

My paws walked over the cold floor toward our alpha. He lifted a paw and pressed against Bronson's calf, wanting him to see us.

"There you are." He crouched down and ran his large hands through my fur. "Get a good stretch and heal that beautiful man of yours. But quickly. There are so many humans about."

A whine left my wolf's mouth, making Bronson pout out his bottom lip. "Oh, that sound, little one. I know. We will have more time. Go on, be a good boy and stretch."

Good boy.

Yeah, I could be his good boy.

My wolf did as the alpha commanded. I stretched my legs out in front of me in a bow to the alpha and then did the same with the back legs. My wolf took over our bond, healing me with the same supernatural magic that made me able to transform from wolf to human and back again. My human side went into a sleep state while my beast did his work.

"We're out of time, Tate. Shift back now."

Too bad, my wolf told me. I need a bit more time. The thing was, I couldn't exactly tell Bronson that.

"Hold on a minute. He's changing," Bronson yelled through the window, but the nurse only said he'd seen everything. It was no problem but he needed to check me over and talk to me.

Shit.

A few minutes later, my wolf finally released me to shift back and by that time, the nurse was banging on the door and threatening to call security. Why, I didn't know.

My vitals just weren't that important especially since they were already monitored on the...oh, wait, they weren't anymore.

Especially when I was a wolf.

I flailed about, trying to get my gown back on, and hurled myself back into bed and covered myself with a sheet.

Bronson nodded, calm as fuck, and let the nurse in. "I asked you to wait. He was getting changed and using the bathroom. No need for the theatrics." The power in his voice was undeniable, and it made me shiver.

I was all healed up, thanks to my wolf.

"I...I'm sorry but with the nature of the accident...I was concerned."

My body and heart stilled, waiting for Bronson's response. "He is safe with me. There is no danger here. Perhaps you could get along with whatever was so important for you to bang on the door like that?"

They stared at each other, but it was the nurse who lowered their gaze. He was human and probably had no idea he didn't stand a chance with Bronson being an alpha. The alpha would always win.

Shit. That was something Ryder used to say.

Once the nurse took my vitals and typed them all into the computer, he nodded. "You are cleared to go home now. The doctor prescribed some pain meds. You can pick

them up downstairs.”

“Oh, thank you.”

I should be happy. Should be thrilled to be able to get out of this sterile place and return home.

Except I had no home.

The nurse made his way out of the room, claiming they would be back with a few papers to sign.

“You don’t look happy, omega.”

My wolf lay on his belly inside me. That one word meant the world to me.

“I’ll figure it out. It’s not your problem. I really appreciate all you’ve done for me.”

Bronson approached the bed as I wrung the sheet in my fists. I would make do. I was a survivor, not a victim.

“You’re dismissing me.” There was no disguising the hurt in his tone. “Well, I’m not going to let you. What are you going to do, Tate? You haven’t told me if you have a place to go. No one has been here to visit you. You have no phone. No ID. I’m sorry but I can’t just walk away and be okay with not knowing. In fact, I’m not fine with walking away at all.”

“He won’t stop,” I confessed. “If you get involved with me, it will only lead to trouble.”

Bronson sighed and came to perch on the side of the bed. “Trouble I can handle.

What I can't handle is going to sleep at night wondering if you're okay."

I couldn't deny this man the truth. No matter how embarrassing or humiliating. "I don't have anywhere to go. I was living out of a seedy motel. I bought my dinner with most of the last of my money. I have nothing."

"You have me," he said, taking my hand in his. "You have me."

"I don't want to be a burden."

"You're not. Not to me. Let me take care of you. I have a comfortable home and make a good living. Let me help you get back on your feet in a healthy way. No more surviving."

No more surviving sounded nice.

"I don't even know how to live in a healthy way," I admitted. "It's been too long."

"Then I'll teach you." Goddess, that sounded loaded. I would bet this strong, serious alpha could teach me all kinds of things.

I sighed. "Are you sure?" I asked, stroking my thumb across the back of his hand. Because how could I not touch this man?

"I'm sure. I even brought you some clothes. It's not much. We'll get you some more but it's enough to get you out of here without flashing someone."

Snorting, I watched as he fished out a bag from the tiny bedside table. I hadn't even seen him put that in there. "I might want to flash someone."

"Not on my watch. The only person you will flash is...your mate."

Going with Bronson scared the living crap out of me, but not going, well, that was a mistake I didn't want to make.

Bronson

Finally, it was time to take Tate home. And by home, I certainly did not mean the fleabag motel where he'd been paying by the night. To all appearances, some of the clientele was paying by the hour. While we were waiting for the manager or clerk to come to the desk, I counted three separate omegas wearing clingy clothes going in and out of a couple of rooms on the end, accompanied by alphas who were most certainly not their own.

My wolf and I both bristled that Tate had ever stayed here. What if one of those alphas had happened upon him when he was going in or out of his room and decided to force themselves upon him? "None of those guys ever approached you?" I asked, just in case one of them needed to die soon.

"Not those, no. A couple of others, but the sex workers hanging around on the corner swooped in and informed them that this was their turf and that ended that. I tried to make it really clear that I was not in their line of business, and since they didn't threaten me or anything, I guess they believed me."

"I see." Nobody here at the moment we could tear up. I banged the bell on the counter a couple of times. Tate didn't have the key to his room on him when he went to the hospital, and since he hadn't been paying for the room, his things were probably not in there anyway. "Anyone work here?" I raised my voice. "Is there a manager on-site?" It was the middle of the day, and the door to the office was unlocked. Surely, someone was on duty. I was considering climbing over the counter and searching them out when, finally, the curtain dividing the office from whatever lay behind twitched and a short, balding male covered with freckles hustled out,

rubbing his eyes.

“Can’t a girl get a moment’s rest around here?” She planted his hands on his hips and glared up at us. “All the hourly rooms are taken. You’ll have to come back this evening.”

“I’m not here for...that,” Tate said in a low voice. “Remember me? I was staying here and then didn’t come back to check out?”

Her gaze narrowed. “Oh, it’s you! If you want your things, you’re going to have to pay for the nights we’ve been holding onto them.”

“This omega has been in the hospital after a serious accident,” I said, barely controlling my temper. “And what is your fee for holding on to a few bags for someone?”

“We charge the full room rate,” she blustered. “After all, we didn’t know if you’d come back and need to use it.”

“So, you kept the room empty all this time and never rented it?” The traffic outside, people coming and going, had kicked up while we stood there. “Is that your contention?”

“Correct.” She bobbed his head with assurance. “That is what I did.”

After all his time in the hospital, Tate did not need this. What he needed was to be tucked into bed in my comfortable home—preferably my bed—and convalescing. I probably could throw a few hundreds at this weasel shifter and get Tate’s belongings and be on our way. Or tell her to keep it all and buy him new things.

But even this early into knowing the omega, I recognized he had his pride, and

everyone had a care for their belongings, no matter how meager. Well, what was the point in going to law school if you didn't use your license to fight the bullies of the world.

“Mr. Tate?” I really needed to get his last name at some point. But it felt like we'd skipped right past that point already. “Can you identify for me which room number you stayed in?”

He thought a moment. “Sixteen. Right over there where that alpha is going in.”

“Into the room Mr. Tate is expected to pay for?” It was no trouble to let outrage color my tone. “That is in violation of at least six city, county, and state statutes—off the top of my head. But I am sure there are a few more. I'll need to place a call to be sure...”

I pulled my phone out and scanned the contacts. “Before I do, I believe my client mentioned some other issues with the room. Mold, was it? Stained and torn bedding?”

“Client?” The weasel's voice came out squeezed. “What are you? His pimp?”

Let the record show, I did not murder him on the spot. Or at all. Instead, I fixed her with my best prosecutorial smile. “His attorney. With some good friends in the various offices of this city.”

For some reason, five minutes later, we had stowed Tate's things in the back of the car and were on our way home having not only paid nothing but having received Tate's original payment back. The weasel waved us off, shouting something about no hard feelings and no need to call anyone.

The omega watched me with open admiration. “How did you do that?”

“All part of the service.” I winked at him and turned onto the main street. “Hungry?”

“Starved.”

Tate

Bronson didn't bat an eye at me ordering the kids burger and nuggets from the fast-food joint—not even when I ordered the sugar-free fruit punch. Sure, I loved my little meals, but I also knew a sugar bomb would hurt my tummy.

When we pulled up to his place, I froze. This wasn't a house. It was a mansion, at least by my standards. The brick was dark gray, the mortar a lighter smoky shade. The accents and metal were black. The color scheme suited Bronson perfectly. A press of a button on his console opened the garage door, and I didn't quell my gasp at the sight of a professional organizer's wet dream. Not that I was one but damn, I'd seen the videos when I had a phone.

"Are you hurting?" he asked, sliding his hand over mine. "As soon as we get inside, we'll get one of these pills in you."

"No. I'm not hurting. Well, a little, but I'd rather not take the pills. I don't like how they make my head fuzzy."

He nodded. "Then why the gasp?"

"Your house is beautiful. Everything in its place. Even labels."

Bronson looked out the windshield, his eyes widening as though he were seeing his own house for the first time. "I like things in their place. It makes my life simpler. Eases my anxiety."

“Maybe sometime we can talk about what gives you stress,” I said.

“Maybe. Hold on. I’ll help you in.”

He didn’t have to assist me in or out of the car. My wolf had taken care of most of my injuries, leaving me sore but perfectly capable of walking and moving around with only a marginal amount of pain. Bronson insisted on helping me though. He opened the passenger door and wrapped his arm around my torso gently and led me inside. The interior was as impressive as the exterior. Clean. Neat.

No bullshit on the kitchen counters. Huge bonus in this omega’s book.

“You can stay in the bedroom next to mine.” I looked up at him. “You know, in case you need anything in the night.”

With this alpha around, I was sure to need something in the night. Him. Inside me.

I shook my head of the thoughts. I didn’t even know if he felt the same, and I questioned my feeling that he was my fated.

I couldn’t be trusted with my own safety and relationships after Ryder.

“Is there...” I hesitated. He had done so much for me already, but he’d asked me to make myself at home while we were on our way here. “Can I take a shower? I smell like hospital.”

He nodded. “How about a bath? I have all kinds of salts and bubbles. You can relax and ease those aches.”

When he said the word ache, I swore he glanced down at my groin. Wishful thinking, maybe.

“A bath would be perfect. Is that in another room?”

“No. There’s a huge tub in your en suite.” Bronson made sure I was settled in a chair before walking into the bathroom to fill the tub. After a moment, he came out with some bath bombs. “Which one? Cotton candy is fun, but the lavender and vanilla is relaxing.”

“Oh.” I stared at the choices. He had a basket in his hand with at least a dozen options. “Can I have both?”

He chuckled. “Of course. Fun and functional. Why didn’t I think of that?”

Once the tub was filled, he brought me to the bathroom but excused himself when it came to the getting-naked part. What a shame. I bet he would be fun for bath time.

I sank into the hot water whose steam carried all the calming and happy smells I loved. My muscles relaxed immediately and I let out a moan. Bronson was talking to someone—probably on his phone—but also, he moved around the house in a hurry, his footsteps at sprinting speed.

What in the heck was he doing?

A rubber duck perched on the corner of the tub. With one finger, I plopped it into the water, giggling as it splashed before righting itself. It was wearing sunglasses and a bandana.

Maybe Bronson liked to play with it?

Realization poured over me. I was safe. My tummy was full. I was warm in this luxurious bath. There was a non-leaking roof over my head and a comfy-looking bed on the other side of the door.

I could breathe.

That's when I began to cry. Not just cry but sob, letting it all go.

I hadn't been safe in months on my own or in years with Ryder.

Bronson had changed my life over the course of days.

"Tate, are you okay?" Bronson asked, knocking on the door gently. "Tate?" he repeated once I didn't answer. I couldn't stop crying long enough to. "I'm coming in."

My body was hunched over, my face cradled in my hands. That position plus the colored water gave me some modesty, but honestly, I didn't care. Bronson had seen me at my worst. Broken. Almost dead. Bloody. Ready to accept my fate.

So, I wasn't surprised when he wrapped my shoulders up in his arms and laid his head against the back of mine. I found myself pressing into his warmth, craving more of his touch, whatever he would gift me.

"I've got you," he said. "Let's get you out of this tub and into bed."

He held up a huge towel and, when I stepped into it, I realized, he'd warmed it for me. Once he wrapped it around my body, he took another and dried my hair. At least I had cleaned up before I fell apart.

Bronson helped me into some pajamas and, judging by the smell, they were his. "I hate to leave you here, but I have to get to work tonight. I have two jobs, but I'm only a phone call away if you need me. The number and the home phone are on the bedside table until we can get you a cell."

“Oh, that’s not...” I started to protest, but the look he gave me stopped me in my tracks.

“No arguing, omega. Not tonight.” I nodded. “How about I tuck you in? You need your rest.”

“Yes, please.”

Gods, he hadn’t said anything about being a daddy, but already he had the role nailed. He fed me. Gave me a bath. The warmed towels. Now tucking me in?

I opened my mouth, the question on the tip of my tongue.

“What is it, Tate?” he asked, leaning down to push the covers in all around me.

“Nothing. Thank you. That’s all I wanted to say...thank you.”

He cocked his head, probably able to scent my lie. Or if I was right, and he was my mate, feel my lie. “You’re very welcome. I’m going to work. Please, rest. I’ll be back soon. I promise.”

Bronson

Before I left for the club, I stopped in the kitchen and looked to see what I might have for snacks. This omega needed more than three meals a day to return to full strength. The hospital stay and his shift had helped, to be certain, but he had a ways to go before he was 100 percent.

When he was, would he leave without ever looking back?

If he did, that would be his choice. No matter how drawn I was to him, how much I wanted him to be my omega, my little...my everything, in the end, it would be his choice. He could stay or go, as long as I made sure that he knew he was welcome to stay here.

His choice of food at the drive-thru was a definite hint that he might be a little, but it wasn't a guarantee, and I didn't want to make him a snack that would insinuate anything. But who didn't like hot cocoa for a comforting treat?

I had a jar of homemade coconut cocoa mix I'd first prepared when a friend who avoided dairy was staying over. It was dry coconut milk, coconut sugar, cocoa powder, and a pinch of salt. The dairy-free alpha was so pleased he drank the whole batch over the course of a few days and left with the recipe in his pocket.

I liked it too. Enough that I always kept it in the house for myself now. Filling a Thermos with hot water, I set it aside while I heated water in the electric kettle and got out some cheese, grapes, and crackers to arrange on a tray. Then I sliced an orange and added that. I had a cup of strawberry yogurt as well and almost didn't put

it on, not wanting to overwhelm him, but then I did anyway. He needed the calories and the nutrients.

Tiptoeing upstairs, I paused outside the guest room door and listened for any signs of him being awake. When I heard only soft, even breathing, I pushed the door open and slipped inside to leave my tray on the bedside table before heading to work.

I had told him that he was welcome to stay, but his independence would not let him if he didn't feel the same way I did. I knew him well enough already to recognize that fact. I hadn't been at the club in a few days, or I would not have gone tonight. But I couldn't expect the other owners to take on my responsibilities forever. Despite having more help, we still had jobs to do.

And with the little room open, mine had increased. Selena had done a great job, but she didn't work seven days a week and she'd already picked up a couple of shifts for me. As I entered the little room, my heart lifted as it always did. It had taken us quite a while to get to this point, but the hard work and expense were worth it.

Tables and chairs, adult-sized but designed to resemble those children might occupy were scattered around with the room, each laid out with an activity, craft, or game. We had not yet had a grand opening or anything like it, but our plans were well underway for the event, as soon as I decided on a date.

Originally, I'd wanted it to be soon, but now, my mind was more occupied with the possible little in my guest room. As I watched, mommies and daddies with their adorable littles were starting to arrive. Some were dressed in onesies or short shorts or other outfits appropriate for their age play, others more casual, but we tried to accommodate them all as best we could. And that meant giving them a place to go from their run-of-the-mill personas to what I was observing now. Smiling littles and their caring daddies and mommies.

Many of our members and their guests changed clothes when they arrived, but as part of opening this space, we had also taken over one of the group changing rooms, redecorating it from black and stainless-steel décor to rainbow animals scampering over the walls and a rug that doubled as a race-car track. Lockers painted bright colors afforded everyone a place to leave their street clothes and other items while they were enjoying the night's activities.

Would Tate like it here?

“Bronson, what are you up to?”

“Huh?” I turned to see Talon watching me from just outside the room. His skintight black leather pants and vest stood in stark contrast to this space. “Sorry. Just enjoying the show. I think it's going well, don't you?”

“Better than, but you look like you're a million miles away. Why don't you go on in and join the fun?”

“Well, I'm supposed to be working...”

“Which you are not doing, right? What's going on?”

“You know that little or maybe little I told you about?”

He nodded. “Right.”

“He is at my house as we speak, and I was wondering if he was doing okay.”

“He got out of the hospital, great! So, why are you here?”

“Doing my job, of course. I can't expect people to cover for me all the time.”

He chuckled. “I think that’s the point in being an owner. We’ve all worked hard to get to the place where we can flex our muscles a little, right? Enjoy the fruits of our labor?”

“Yes, but...”

He planted his hands on my shoulders and turned me away from the little room. “I’ll get someone in here to babysit, and you go home and take care of your boy.”

“It’s not for sure he’s little, you know.”

“Keep telling yourself that.”

Tate

Roaming around Bronson's house searching for clues was wrong. Snooping in his things. Checking out his medicine cabinet. The other bedrooms. The basement. All of it was wrong and nosey and paranoid of me, but I did it anyway.

There had to be a catch to all his niceness, right? Alphas didn't just show up, angels in the darkness, and rescue omegas from death. They courted them hard, love-bombed them until they couldn't think straight, only to leave them lonelier next to their alpha in bed and in life than they had been before them.

And then there was Bronson.

He left for work, putting his number on the table, but I didn't call. So, he called only a few hours after he left. Was I okay? Did I need anything? He could make it home in only a few minutes if I needed anything.

I wasn't allowed to ask Ryder to make me a cup of coffee the morning after my miscarriage.

Things got really bad after losing the baby. His meanness and abuse became nonstop. Before that, there were moments of sweetness. Kindness. Even shadows of love.

Not after losing the baby.

I was pathetic.

Worthless.

Useless.

And it was only a matter of time before Ryder said he would find an omega who knew how not to lose a baby.

Claimed I got rid of it on purpose somehow.

The baby in my belly had become my life in those short six weeks.

I would've loved that baby with my whole life.

He was the one who struck out, knocked me to the floor, and made me lose it.

So here I was, searching for Bronson's secrets but finding none.

The man kept his house spotless. There was a chance he had a housekeeper, but he didn't seem the type. When he drained the tub of water, he rinsed all the bath bomb stuff out and got on his hands and knees to scrub the tub.

People with housekeepers didn't do that.

This man, this alpha, this wolf male, well, I was quite sure he was my fated mate.

With no dirt to dig up, I made myself at home on the sofa and turned on the TV, going straight to YouTube. I could tell a lot about a male, or any person for that matter, by their watch history and whether or not they had said history turned off.

Bronson not only had his turned on but filled with home repairs and DIY things, along with some sex furniture videos. Not porn but videos from the manufacturers.

Interesting.

I didn't see any dungeons or shady rooms. Maybe there was a hidden room I didn't see.

I'd turned on one of the free-with-ads movies and gotten comfortable when I heard the garage door open. It was before midnight, but with the pain medicine-induced napping all day and then another deep sleep when I arrived at his house, I was wide awake.

My tummy fluttered hearing him shut the door to his car and then open the kitchen door afterward. The alarm system announced him as well. Or, rather, announced the entrance of someone.

I panicked for a second, thinking that maybe, somehow, Ryder had found me and was here, until the sweet scent of whiskey and lemon filled my senses.

Turning around, I saw him put his keys on a hook and his wallet and phone in a bowl on the table near a door. Everything he did was with purpose.

"Hi," I said, not wanting to alarm him. He lived alone. Maybe he'd forgotten I was here at all.

"Hi, yourself. I thought you'd be asleep."

I shrugged and pushed the button to turn off the TV. "I couldn't sleep anymore. I feel like I've been doing nothing but sleeping for days and days."

"You kind of have." He came over to sit next to me. Too far for my liking and my wolf's craving but close enough that he felt comfortable around me. "Are you hungry?"

I nodded. “A little, but I can make myself something. I won’t make a mess.”

Bronson cocked his head and squinted. “Even if you do, it’s okay. Everyone makes a mess when they cook. We clean it up.”

We. We clean it up. Ryder never lifted a fucking finger in our house. His house, rather.

“Oh, okay.” I moved to get up. Bronson was up in an instant, helping to lift me. As I stood, our eyes met. Our faces only a breath away.

His eyes flicked to my mouth while he licked his bottom lip. He was gorgeous from across the room but, up close, I was convinced the goddess carved him with her own hands. There was a golden ring around his pupil. Almost bronze. I hadn’t seen that before. “I can make you something to eat.”

“You don’t have to,” I protested mildly. “I shouldn’t be hungry at all, after the snacks you made me.” Which I had gobbled up shortly after he left.

“I want to,” he murmured and before I could say anything else, he lifted me up, honeymoon-style, gentler with me than I’d ever been touched.

Somehow I knew Bronson was capable of being less so if I wanted him to. Less gentle, but nonetheless caring. But always, always in control.

He sat me down on a barstool and went to work, letting me approve things before he cooked them. He made a simple meal of chicken and stars soup from a can and grilled cheese triangles. I spotted more of my favorite soups in the pantry before he closed it, along with teddy bear cookies. Interesting.

My stomach sank. Did he entertain littles here? Was that why he had things stocked?

“What?” he asked, cocking his head sideways. “Your scent changed.”

“Nothing,” I lied. “Thinking.”

He nodded. “I’ve got water, milk, and orange juice in the fridge. I also have chocolate milk and juice boxes in the pantry.”

“Do you have kids?” I asked, curious but not wanting to pry. Okay, I was totally prying.

“I don’t. I keep a good stock in case my nieces and nephews come over.”

“Oh,” I whispered. Damn it. I wished he would’ve said he had littles over. And at the same time, I was glad he didn’t.

We moved to the living room and, since I couldn’t decide on a drink, he brought me one of each. Sweet alpha. When I sank into the lush sofa, my body decided it had enough, and I found myself devoid of any kind of energy to eat.

“Are you tired again?” he asked, sitting next to me. Closer than before.

“I am. I’m hungry but so tired.”

“Would you let me feed you, omega?” He breathed the words, filling me with hope and a joy I hadn’t experienced in far too long.

“You wouldn’t mind?” Daddy? The word hung on my tongue, but I feared it wasn’t the right time.

“Not at all, sweetheart. Open up. Let me take care of you.”

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Bronson

“We need to talk.” The words nobody wants to hear but I had to say as soon as I walked in the door from the office. “If you’re feeling up to it?”

Tate blinked at me. He’d been staying at my home for over a week now and every day he looked better. In fact, while I hadn’t known him long enough to be sure, I’d have said he was fully recovered. “You want me to leave. I understand. It was nice of you to let me stay this long, but I don’t want to overstay my welcome.” He stood in front of me in the living room, looking ready to leave that moment. “Thank you for everything.”

I took his arm and led him across the room to the sofa. “Wow. Talk about taking things to extremes.” Pushing him down to sit, I joined him on the couch. “We’ve spent the past almost-two weeks together and did I at any point give you the impression I was not enjoying your company?”

“But I eat so much and sometimes I’m not tidy.” He dropped his head, studying his lap, and my heart squeezed at the sight. “I’m sorry.”

This little had been through way too much. “Tate, you eat whatever you need to gain strength. And you’re more than tidy enough for anyone. If I ever get my fangs into the alpha who did this to you, I’ll shred them and leave them for dead.” I smiled, my fangs descending with my wolf’s agreement. “Mostly because they will be dead.”

His eyes widened. “You really mean that, don’t you? You would do that for me?”

“Omega, I would do anything for you. But right at this moment, I wanted to talk about something very personal in my life and see if it lines up at all with yours.” We’d skirted the topic far too long. “I’m a daddy. Do you know what that means?”

His head lifted, a smile curling the edges of his lips. “Depends. It could mean you have young somewhere with an omega and wanted to tell me about that because...well I don’t know why, but you did.”

“That’s not what I mean.”

He let out a puff of air. “Then it means you are someone who enjoys age play and might want to have an omega who is also a little.”

“Yes, and some things you’ve chosen and some ways you’ve behaved have made me dare to think that you might be...could be...” Now that the moment had come, all my big communication skills were going straight to hell. Imagine if I stood in front of a judge and stammered like that. I’d be laughed out of court. I closed my eyes for a second, and when I opened them, the laughter I’d been thinking of was rippling from the omega.

“Alpha, you have found yourself saddled with not only an injured omega but a little who has spent every minute since he opened his eyes in the hospital to see his rescuer still there at his side pretty sure you are the daddy of my dreams.”

“Why didn’t you say something?” I chuckled. “I know. Why didn’t I? But we are talking now, and if you keep using your words to say things like that, you’re going to be stuck with the daddy with the swollen head—and not the one I hope you’re also interested in.”

“I’m interested in everything about you, but I need you to know I am not really an experienced little. Oh, my ex treated me like a child sometimes, but not in a good

way. More like, I was his inferior and needed to be reminded of that on a daily basis.”

“I really want to kill him.” Maybe our wolves could battle. Not over the omega but over the alpha’s terrible behavior. “And we can talk about that anytime, as long as you know I am not of that opinion in any way, shape, or form. You are a handsome, funny, smart omega gifted with a resilience and bravery few can ever aspire to.”

“Wow. You make me sound like a superhero. I hope you don’t expect me to fly anywhere tonight or anything.”

“Actually, I thought you might like to visit the club, if you’re not too busy.”

He grinned and leaned in to rest his head on my shoulder. “I think I can clear my calendar. What did you have in mind at this kinky sex club place I’ve been reading so much about online?”

“You’ll have to come along and see.”

When he asked what to wear, I suggested casual clothing, since he’d just be taking a tour. “If you like it, we can always shop for club wear for you later.”

“A club and shopping?” He batted his eyelashes at me. “I may be a gold digger yet.”

No, he never ever would, but as I showered getting ready for our evening, I was both nervous and excited. Mixing the club I’d put so much effort into, with the omega I was falling hard for had the potential to be the very best night of my life. Or not...

Tate

I don't know what I expected from the club. There were no photos online, and the reason became clear when we entered and someone stationed at the front desk took others' phones and locked them away, giving them a receipt to pick it up on the way out. I started to ask if they were going to also take Bronson's, but a glance at his amused expression shut that question down. Although everyone else who passed through while we were in the foyer handed over their device, my alpha was one of the club owners. He was not subject to the rules so much as responsible for enforcing them.

We'd spent so much time talking before we came that it was getting rather late when we arrived. "We will take the nickel tour," he said, sliding his arm around my waist and bringing me in to his side. "Just to give you a taste and a chance to get a first impression. Okay?"

"Sounds good to me. I've never been anywhere like this, and I don't even know how to behave." What if I made a fool of myself and embarrassed this important male in his place of business. During the day, he was an up-and-coming attorney, but he'd invested in this business that, from what I'd read in the online photo-less articles, Bronson's club was rapidly becoming one of the best known of its type in the area. He had told me they did no advertising, since it was a members-and-guests-only place, but it seemed they didn't need it.

"You have very nice manners, my sweet boy, and I am sure you know courtesy carries over every situation. I will introduce you to people and let you know how they are to be addressed as we go. For example, we are about to 'accidentally' cross paths

with Master Talon. One of my closest friends, even if he does have a propensity to have too much interest in other people's love lives."

"I heard that." The tall, broad-shouldered man in black from head to toe approached us and gave me a friendly smile. "So you are Tate. We've heard a lot about you around here."

"You have?" Startled, I glanced at Bronson, who arched one imperious brow. "I mean, you have, Master Talon?"

"He's learning." The dom nodded approvingly. "I take it that since you are both dressed in jeans and comfortable shoes, you are here to observe rather than scene?"

"Yes, it's Tate's first time in a club like ours and I'm showing him around." He took my hand in his. "Everything going well tonight?"

"As always. But if you have work to do, I could be a tour guide for your omega?"

"Yeah, and that wouldn't cause you any problems with yours." They exchanged a few more remarks before we parted ways and began a very casual stroll through the main area—or at least I assumed from the large room filled with people that it was—of the club. There were all kinds of things going on, a lot of which were what I'd heard called "impact play," and were not something I would like to partake in.

What would make a daddy want to invest in something like this unless it was for profit, which would be understandable. But while I was impressed and a little awed by all the people I saw around us and what they were up to, I wasn't sure I'd want to come again.

"So, what do you think so far?" Bronson asked after finishing a conversation with a woman wearing a corset so tight it nearly cut her in half. The whole time they spoke,

she'd kept up a rhythmic thudding of some kind of leather-tailed tool with a wooden handle against a bound woman's back. "It's really something, isn't it?"

"Yes." I could agree that it was something, although not something that interested me much. "Everyone seems to be having a good time."

"They are, each in their own way. Some people need a spanking or a whipping or a small electric shock in their lives. But I don't think you need those things."

I couldn't suppress a laugh. "I won't turn down a friendly spanking in the right moment."

"Good to know." He gave my hand a tug. "We will be closing in an hour, and I don't want you to miss my favorite part. I had a lot to do with designing it, and I think my friends are shocked at how successful it is even though it just opened."

"What is it? Blood play?" I'd read about that... please don't let it be that .

"Uh, is that what you'd like to do? I won't judge if you do, but you'll need to find another alpha somewhere else for that particular activity because—"

"Gods no," I blurted out. "I was just...just no." I only knew what it was because I had stumbled upon it in my research.

"That's a relief because it's totally not my thing. No, where we're going is just down this hallway." He led me off the main floor and down a passage with doors on either side. "There are private rooms and various other things along here, but the room I have in mind is at the end of the hallway, here."

When he stopped in front of a door with a window inset, I froze then pressed my nose to the glass. "Oh my gods. Is this for real?"

“It is, and if you like, we can come back here and play another night. Here comes Selena now.”

“Mommy Selena when I’m on duty,” the woman he addressed said. She looked like someone out of a 1950s TV show with her flouncy skirt, short sweater with two puff balls hanging from it, and hair pulled tight into a ponytail way up on top of her head. “And who have we here?”

Mommy Selena showed me around the little room. It was nearly empty because most of the littles were already tucked into their beds at home, but I was able to see all the things to do and even sit long enough for Da—for Bronson to read me a short book before we had to leave.

I never slipped into little space, but our evening had a whole other effect on me. Both of us, I suppose. We were no sooner in the door of the house than clothes were flying everywhere and we didn’t make it past the sofa before I was on my back, my alpha on top of me and looking down into my eyes.

“You’re gorgeous, do you know that, omega?” He kissed my face and hair and lips and down my chest. “And so brave. Nobody would have guessed it was your first time seeing everything you did tonight.”

He closed his mouth around my cock and sucked me off all the way until I came in his mouth before rising to claim my needy, slick hole. I wrapped my legs around him, digging my heels into his ass cheeks and sobbing with the pleasure and joy of coming together with this man. He filled me in a way nobody else ever had or ever would because there would be nobody else. A fact proven when he came, his knot swelled, and his fangs descended to sink into my throat, marking me his.

Nothing he could have said would have stated his intentions more clearly. He marked me. I sank into the deepest sleep I could remember, perfectly comfortable and happy

and thinking maybe I was brave after all.

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Tate

“Good morning, beautiful,” Bronson said, tugging me closer into his embrace. I’d been awake for a while, thinking about the events of the night before.

While I was pretty damned good at overanalyzing things to the point where I questioned my own sanity at times, there was nothing about how Bronson acted that was anything near a red flag. In fact, he was green flags all over.

Even in the sex club.

“Is it morning already?” I asked, letting out a yawn.

His warmth curled around my back as he slung his arm over my waist, splaying his hand over my stomach. “It is.”

I giggled, pushing my ass against his already hardened cock. “Didn’t we just go to sleep?”

“A few hours ago,” he whispered with his mouth pressed lightly to the back of my neck. “I can’t believe you’re mine.”

I turned around to face him. “I can’t either. I hoped. I wished. I was so scared you didn’t feel the same way or that you wouldn’t accept the little part of me.”

“Sweetheart, from the first moment I saw you, I wanted you. I couldn’t let you go. You were begging to die, but there was no way my wolf would let that happen. My

heart broke for you. Whatever he did to you, even if it takes my whole life, I'm gonna help you forget as much as possible. I accept all of you."

"You're already helping, mate. You've already healed some parts of me just making me hope again. I didn't know there was an alpha out there like you. And you're such a loving daddy."

He growled, nipping at my shoulder. "I'll be the best daddy. I swear it."

"You will. It might be hard for me to trust sometimes, but I'll work on it, Bronson. I will."

The first thought process I wanted to get rid of was the comparison to Ryder. Bronson was good and kind and sweet because he was, not just when compared to Ryder.

Bronson deserved his accolades independently from my past.

"I'm here. I'm not leaving you for any reason, and whatever we have to work through, we'll do it together. You're mine for the rest of my life, Tate."

The tears came from my eyes on their own. My heart surged with so much love and safety.

It might've been the first time my jaw wasn't clenched. My chest was no longer tight. I wasn't naive enough to think these things would never happen to my body again, but for this moment, they'd vanished.

"How about a shower and breakfast?"

I nodded. "I'm starving. What can we make?"

He eyed me like I was the meal. “How about mini pancakes and a yogurt bowl with fruit and granola? Fun and good for you. We need to keep you strong and healthy.”

“That sounds good. But first, I have something to tell you.”

His dark eyebrows furrowed. “You can tell me anything, Tate. Please don’t be scared to tell me anything. Even if I disagree with you or something would make me upset, it won’t change how I feel about you.”

I nodded. That point would take a while to sink in. “I looked around your house the other day. I was in every room and even opened your medicine cabinet and basement. And your YouTube history.”

The alpha’s face erupted with a broad smile, showing his teeth and making his eyes glimmer. “That’s all? Tate, you can go through anything of mine anytime you want. My basement. My phone. Anything. And I want you to know that now that you’re mine, everything I own is yours. When you’re ready, we’ll get you an ID and your social security card and I’ll give you access to all my accounts.”

Do not compare. Do not compare. Do not compare.

Ryder gave me twenty bucks a week, if I was lucky and was a good boy.

“I don’t know what to say,” I admitted.

“You don’t have to say anything. Let’s go get cleaned up and have breakfast.”

One languid shower later, we got dressed in a sweatshirt and matching pants for me and only gray sweatpants for him. “We need to go buy you some new clothes today, if that’s okay with you.”

I nodded. “Maybe some little things, too, Daddy?”

He sighed. If I wasn’t mistaken, he looked happy. More than happy. “Absolutely. Do you want to help with breakfast? Grab the milk for me?”

While we made breakfast together, we put some music on the TV from a slow-motion cartoon that I loved and calmed me. The modern cartoons revved me up and made me feel jittery.

Once the pancakes were made, Bronson set up some toppings for the yogurt parfait to make it fun. He waited for me to take a bite before digging into his pancakes and bacon. “Are you eyeing my bacon, little one?” he asked, smiling.

“Maybe.”

“Here you go. I’ll never get upset if you get something from my plate, okay? Try not to be afraid of asking for something when you want it.”

“Thank you.”

True to his word, Bronson and I shopped for all kinds of things the rest of the day. Clothes. Shoes. Personal hygiene items just for me. He even got me a tablet so I could watch things in bed or whenever I wanted. He bought me a phone and then we went “little” shopping at a store that carried just those kinds of clothing items. I’d seen lots of really cute outfits on my tour of the club, but I hadn’t known that there were boutiques like this. I never wanted to leave it.

I’d never been so spoiled before. I loved it, but there was that niggling in the back of my head saying there had to be a catch somewhere.

That he was nice now but might not be later.

I pushed them away as best I could. They would come back, but I would push even harder.

I trusted Bronson.

“I was thinking maybe we could set up a playroom at the house? One for you to play in and do whatever you want.”

Searching his face, deciphering his features, I tried to judge if he was joking.

“You would do that for me?” I asked with tears blurring my vision. “A real playroom?”

We were on our way to the car with bags in hand. He put them in and took mine and did the same. I saw some of the bags overflowing with coloring books and puzzles. He called me a cozy little and I realized how true that was. I played with things that calmed me, watched shows that slowed me down. “Tate, I would do anything for you. I’ve waited for you for so long, not only as a mate but someone to share this lifestyle with. I’m at your mercy, sweet omega.”

The tears poured down my face, and he embraced me right there in the parking lot, not letting go until I moved. I sniffled. “You are the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

My mate nuzzled my cheek with his nose, inhaling deeply. His wolf let out a low growl of acknowledgement and approval. “Let’s get home. My sweet boy is overwhelmed, I think.”

I nodded, loving that he could read me so well. “Shopping is a lot.”

“Home, then. We’ll have a nice calm supper and a long bath. How does that sound?”

“Like heaven, Daddy.”

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Tate

I filled out as many job applications as I could. Everything from home improvement stores to grocery stores and even some restaurants. Bronson encouraged me to go back to school and someday I would, but in the meantime, while I was still taking control of my life, I wanted a paycheck of my own. My mate said every cent of my money would belong to me, whereas his would be shared between us but it didn't seem fair.

I wanted to buy him gifts and surprise him with things and not from his paycheck or put it on his credit card.

That afternoon, I cleaned the house as best I could, but Bronson kept things in their place and so, the keeping up with it took up less than thirty minutes. He told me I didn't have to do that either. He would take care of everything.

But being in this house got boring sometimes.

My new phone rang in my pocket, making me jump a mile high. I still wasn't used to answering a phone where I knew the person on the other end wouldn't scream at me.

"Hello, mate."

He rumbled deep in his chest. "Hello to you. What are you up to?"

"I cleaned and applied for thirteen dozen jobs. Other than that, nothing."

“Have you eaten? You haven’t been eating enough lately?”

I laughed. “Are you worried about me?”

“I am. You’ve been nauseated a lot and you skipped breakfast this morning even though it was your favorite French toast sticks.”

Sighing, I felt my chest warm at how sweet and caring my mate was. “I’m fine. I’m about to eat something now.”

“Good. I’ll be able to leave here in a few hours. You and I still have a date tonight?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Excellent. Go eat, please.”

I giggled. “Yes, Daddy.”

I gathered up my new wallet and phone and tucked them into my jacket before walking out the front door. My gaze scanned my surroundings and when Bronson asked if I would agree to have a location tracker on my phone, I agreed. He didn’t care where I went, but if my ex showed up and tried to do something, Bronson would be able to find me. He even brought me to the police station to file a report. They wouldn’t give me a restraining order because I didn’t have any proof, but they knew who he was and that he was after me.

Or was.

I had no idea if Ryder was still tracking me or trying to find me. Hopefully he moved on. Not to another omega. Maybe to some serious counseling.

The corner store a few blocks down offered the best steak sandwich, and all my wolf wanted was meat lately but when I walked in, the smells instantly turned me off.

“Excuse me,” someone said and walked by me with a newborn in one of those fabric carriers strapped to their front.

That was when it all hit me.

The exhaustion.

The nausea from the sight of all my favorite foods.

The fluttering in my belly which I thought was from being in love with Bronson.

Still, despite the gag-inducing smells from all kinds of food, I was starving.

“One steak and cheese, grilled, please. Double steak.”

While the person behind the counter grilled up my sandwich, I ducked between aisles. There was one thing I needed.

A pregnancy test.

My hands shook as I tapped the card on the reader to pay for everything. I found my way back to the house in no time since I practically sprinted.

A pregnancy test.

I tossed the sandwich on the counter and went to the guest bathroom since it was the closest to me. After skimming the instructions, I peed on the stick and then slid to the floor with my back against the wall.

We hadn't talked about kids. Or even if that was a possibility. Bronson didn't know about my previous miscarriage.

Goddess, what if I lost this one too and he hated me—threw me out on the streets like Ryder threatened to.

What if he hated me because my womb was broken? Because I was broken as an omega?

When the timer on my phone went off, I reached for the stick and saw the two blue lines. Two meant pregnant. That much I hadn't skimmed over.

Pregnant. Me.

With my sweet alpha's baby. I had to tell him, but in that moment, holding the stick, locked in that tiny powder room, I didn't know how. Certainly not by text or over the phone, but how would I face him and give him the news.

Because I would have to tell him about the other baby.

The one I'd lost.

Because I wasn't strong enough to keep it, to protect it against Ryder and his violence.

My stomach gurgled from not eating all day, making me get up and answer the call. I washed my face and went to the kitchen. I had to be strong for this babe inside me. This one would make it.

This time I was strong.

Now to figure out a way to tell my mate.

Bronson

A case at work was keeping me from taking Tate to the club for a real fun daddy/little evening, but he was being so sweet about it that I didn't let it worry me too much. Getting home at nine or even later, I knew I'd find dinner keeping warm in the oven and the loving embrace of my omega afterward for a night of lovemaking.

When I kept telling my partners about work being so absorbing, they teased me a little about wanting to stay home on my honeymoon in the evenings, and I couldn't deny the fact that I liked being with Tate. We hadn't delved too deeply into the daddy/little side of things, although we talked about it a great deal. I'd never needed to be little very often, but with this man, it seemed easy to be in any form that took. Big. Little. Wolf. And his wolf? Well, mine was more than smitten.

"I'm going out for a run before dinner, if it will hold a little longer?" I said one evening when I got home around ten. "If I don't run off some of this tension, I'm going to punch a hole in the wall."

"Case not going well?"

I shook my head. While there was litigation going on, I couldn't get into the details, but he knew how stressed I'd been. "It will, eventually. I just hope you don't give up on me before it does."

"Me?" He grinned and pulled his shirt over his head. "Heck no. I'd rather go out for a run with you than go anywhere else."

“Even the little room? I feel so bad about promising you a fun evening of play and then letting you down night after night.”

“No. It’s all right. I am happier here with you anyway.”

I eyed him. “You were so excited about playing when we visited. What’s changed?”

“Oh, nothing.” He stretched and yawned in the saddest example of looking casual I’d ever seen. “No big deal. Ready to run?” His pants dropped to the floor, and he stepped out of them. “Let’s get outside before we shift. Remember, last time? We didn’t do that, and there was nobody with opposable thumbs to open the door.”

I chuckled, remembering how we’d stood there on all fours like dogs waiting for their owners to let them out. “That was pretty silly. Seriously, though, before we go. Don’t you want to go to the club?”

“I’m getting cold standing here naked,” he bit out in a very un-Tate-like way. “Are we going or not?”

“Going, I guess.” I opened the door, waited for him to pass, and followed, closing it behind me. “We need a retinal scan that recognizes our wolves for going in and out.”

“Good idea.” He shifted and darted away down the walk. I had enough property for a good run, or we could head out into the BLM land behind the house—one of the reasons I’d bought it.

Tate’s wolf was as handsome as his human, and I let him get some distance ahead of me before shifting myself to launch into our favorite game of chase. But I couldn’t get my head completely around the fun when I was trying to figure out why all of a sudden, he didn’t want to go to the club.

Just a few days ago, he'd been laying out outfits and trying to decide what he'd wear. Talking about Mommy Selena and how the littles could earn gold stars if they behaved well or were especially good about not spilling glitter all over the place. He even wanted to bake brownies to bring in to share.

And now?

Completely lost interest?

My suspicions were all over the place. But one kept swirling back. Was his ex in the picture again? He wouldn't be the first omega to go back to someone he had no business being with. But he was marked. He was mine. And he seemed happy about that. So how?

I lost sight of Tate's wolf and silently cursed. He wouldn't be going back to the man who nearly cost him his life. Putting on a burst of speed, I caught up with him and bowled him over down a gentle slope. A nip at his neck told him who was alpha. As if he didn't know.

He was just acting weird because he didn't want me to feel pressured to come home and take him out. That was the sweet omega I knew.

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Tate

“You’ve hardly touched your dinner. I thought those mini burgers and tots were a favorite meal of yours.”

Bronson was right. The tiny Hawaiian buns were soft and sweet. He cooked the burgers perfectly and there was none of that pickle debauchery. He even bought me tots and happy face fries. Everything was perfect.

Everything but my stomach. I’d been nauseous since taking the test earlier that day, and now my anxiety was a vise grip around my entire body.

“Tate?” He pushed some of his alpha power into his voice making me snap back to reality.

“It is my favorite meal,” I confirmed.

“Then what’s going on?” Instant calm washed over me as he slid his hand over mine, giving me warm comfort. “Talk to me. We can’t work together on a problem if I don’t know what the problem is.”

When he came home from work, he changed into a pair of gray sweatpants and padded barefoot on the wood floors. I loved how he relaxed here.

In my heart, I knew I could tell him anything and he wouldn’t get angry, but it was hard to get over those old patterns of thought. Healing took work.

“There’s something that’s bothering me. No, it’s not bothering me. I’m afraid and afraid you will be upset at the outcome, and I’m not...”

Bronson tossed the tot he was holding, onto his plate and came around the bar to pick me up. He worked in an office and in a club, but I’d found he was incredibly strong. He carried me to the couch and moved me to straddle his lap, facing him. Strong hands found my hips and gripped them. “Are you afraid of me, Tate?”

“No.” I shook my head. “I’m afraid of what you’ll think of me.”

He exhaled and I saw tears well in his eyes. “Tell me what’s going on so I can help you. Please, mate. Whatever hurts you, hurts me.”

I steeled myself mentally. I had to tell him the truth. He deserved it. “When I was with Ryder, I got pregnant. I loved that baby. But, one night, Ryder got angry and pushed me down and I lost the child. I couldn’t even protect my baby.”

The tears he had been holding fell down his face. “Omega, I’m so sorry you lost your little one, but I hope you know that wasn’t your fault. That bastard abused you, and he’s at fault.”

I shrugged. “He said it was because I wasn’t a good omega. I was too weak, and the baby probably knew and didn’t want to live.”

Saying it out loud made it seem silly, but Ryder cut me in half with those disgusting words.

“He is a shame of an alpha and a jerk of a man. You didn’t deserve those words and they are the furthest thing from the truth. You are so brave and kind and giving. You could’ve come out on the other side a bitter and mean person, but you aren’t. He did that to you. He killed your child, omega.”

“I know that now, but the old feelings creep up. Sometimes they are louder than the good thoughts.”

Bronson hugged me to him and wrapped his arms around my back, rubbing circles, soothing me more and more with every breath.

I still had something else to tell him.

He pulled back and I decided to gather up a bit more courage. “I...I thought of all of that and him and the other baby because today, I bought a pregnancy test.”

He nodded. “And you already took it?” His Adam’s apple bobbed. I didn’t want to torture him a minute longer.

“I’m pregnant.”

Big tears rolled down my alpha’s beautiful face as his smile grew. His cheeks pinked. “Tate, you’re carrying my young? My pup?”

I nodded. “I’m scared I’m not strong enough, and I’m going to lose it. The way I lost the other one.”

Bronson took my hands in his and kissed each one. “This is not the same. This situation is not the same, and I’m not Ryder.”

“No. No, you’re certainly not.” We paused. Letting the news sink in. “Are you happy?” I asked, bracing myself for the chance he wasn’t as thrilled as I was. Scared but thrilled.

“My mate, my love. I’m so damned thrilled, I don’t know what to do. I’m beyond happy to be having a family with you. I never thought it was in the cards for me. But

you have changed my life around in the best way possible. Am I happy? Never been happier in all my life.”

My turn to cry.

Once we’d hugged and laughed together, Bronson cleared his throat. “Are you comfortable going to a healer? I would like you to get some testing done and make sure everything is okay since you’ve had a miscarriage before.”

“What if it isn’t? What if something is wrong? Would you find another omega?” I choked on a sob. To know my alpha was in the arms of another would kill me. Ryder’s cheating hurt a little bit, back when I was with him. Bronson? My heart would never recover.

“Tate.” He drew me in to lie across his chest. “I will never find another omega. You are it for me. You are my fated. My true mate. No matter what happens, you are mine.”

I nodded, and my hands went to my stomach. “I want to go to the healer. Would you come with me?”

He peppered my head and face with kisses. “I wouldn’t miss it. Can you do me one more favor?”

“What?”

“Now that I know you’re having our baby, I really want you to eat your dinner.”

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:26 am

Bronson

The club was a refuge for so many daddies and littles, people who couldn't be their true selves in their everyday life in many cases. Some were more open about their kinks and bents, but many lived a vanilla life to all outward appearances and only let their hair down when they crossed the threshold to our club.

We provided that sanctuary with pride and compassion. And I got it. The firm I was working with might not understand my preferences, although they did know about my other business. It was something I had to reveal in order to be hired. I owned an interest in a members-only club. From some of the jokes in the office, I got the impression they thought it was one of those gentlemen's clubs where half-naked girls and guys gave lap dances to married businessmen on their lunch breaks.

And they were fine with that. Making me think that somewhere down the line, I'd need to consider hanging my own shingle because I didn't like that they thought it was okay to cheat on your spouse and most of them probably were. But that was for down the line, not while we were in the middle of a pregnancy where stability was critically important to both of us. My omega was a stay-at-home omega, at least for the foreseeable future, making my income all we had.

As we got dressed for the club, not our first time in the little room but our first big event, I tried to push those thoughts away. My job was just fine. It paid the bills and, along with my profits from the club, made it possible for us to do things like set up our nursery without having to worry about the price of cribs.

"Are you sure I don't look silly in my short shorts and tight tee with this belly?" Tate

asked for the hundredth time that night. “I don’t want people to laugh at me.”

“There are other littles and other members who are expecting. I doubt there will be any laughing,” I assured him. “But if we’re going to get there in time for the event, we’d better get going. Are you going to change?”

“No, I think I’ll just wear my street clothes over these. They’re so tight, they won’t even make me lumpy.” He grimaced. “Or, rather, lumpier.”

“Good point.” No reason to argue when it was true. “Then let’s get a move on, omega. The big fun awaits.”

We drove up to the club to find a line snaking down the block. Although nobody was dressed in a onesie or anything, any observant kinkster would know that they were caregivers and littles ready for the grand opening of the little room that had been technically open for months. And my omega had been involved in the planning. The whole way over, he had been texting with Mommy Selena and others who had been on the committee. It had been very hush-hush, and even I didn’t know exactly what was going on. All he would say was, “There will be glitter.”

But that was pretty much a given anyway.

We parked around back and used the employee entrance, entering without my omega even having to give up his phone. As the mate of an owner, and thanks to some paperwork I’d done, an owner himself, Tate was trusted not to take pictures inside. It was going to be a great evening. As we passed through the kitchen, I took in the cooks preparing snacks and sparkling nonalcoholic drinks for our event. Although not one of the littles attending was under twenty-one, they did not have cocktails in onesies. And if a daddy wanted something a little stronger, he’d have to head out to the bar. No booze in the little room. It was all wholesome and adorable. And tonight’s surprise celebrity was going to put it over the top.

“Hey, boss, there’s some crazy guy out in the alley.” One of the line cooks who had just come in after taking out a bunch of veggie trimmings for the composter set his empty basket down beside the trash. “Want me to call security?”

“Let me check the monitors first.” I headed over to the screen that was in each of the employee-only areas. “Maybe he’s a guest of a member and is lost.” I clicked on the device until it found the figure stumbling around outside. “If he is a guest, he has an awfully odd fashion sense. I’m going out to talk to him.”

“Alpha, Daddy, no.” My omega’s voice, hushed and urgent, came from close to my ear. “Maybe he’ll go away. Don’t make him mad.”

I turned on a heel and embraced my mate. “Don’t make who mad?”

“Ryder.”

Oh hell no. I turned back toward the screen. “That’s him?” Somehow, in my mind, his height was matched to his evilness. “I hope I make him mad. Turn off the cameras,” I told the head chef. “Everywhere.”

Tate was on my heels as I reached the rear door, but I gave him a gentle push back inside. “Wait here. You’re not in any shape to get into things with him, and if he harmed a hair on your head or, god forbid, the baby, then he’d have to pay the consequences.”

I closed the door behind me and stepped out into a pool of light. “Okay, Ryder. It’s time to come out and play now.” I had turned off the cameras for two reasons. The first, innocent enough, because I didn’t want my omega hearing anything horrible the alpha might say. The second, not innocent in the least. If he attacked, I wasn’t going to stand there and take it. Rather, I would let my wolf do as he would. At some point, an alpha had to do what he had to do.

“Ryder, if you are out here, come and speak like males. I have some things to say to you.”

“I’ll just bet you do.” The alpha I’d seen lurking in shadows stepped out into the light. “I’m here to take back my omega that you stole from me.”

“You can’t steal a person.” The very idea made me sick. As it would every dom in the club. Power exchange was just that. It was not one person submitting to another with no recourse. Every sub who entered a scene did so with a safeword and an agreement on how things would go, what was acceptable to them, and where their interests lay.

Here, dungeon monitors and other security protected their safety. But out in the world, bastards like this Ryder abused innocent little omegas and beat them up, caused them to miscarry, and then blamed them for the loss.

“Sure you can. He belongs to me, and I’m here to claim him.”

“If you care so much, why did you have him run down by a vehicle and nearly killed?”

“Oh that? Because he was too much trouble. I need him back to finish the job.”

Rage rolled over me, scalding and mind-stealing. I’d heard of alpha rage before but never experienced it. Two seconds in, my wolf did what he’d never done before and shifted without my permission. He took over our body and launched himself at the murderous alpha before he knew what was coming. He took Ryder to the asphalt and bared his fangs ready to end him.

But before he did, a half dozen other wolves were there, and they blocked me, stopped me from doing what needed to be done. My wolf snarled and snapped but

could not get to him. Or the others. Two huge black wolves lay over us until a silver arrived and stepped between us and Ryder.

He was flanked by two men, tall with silver hair. “We will take it from here,” announced one. “Our alpha has declared the fate of his pack member and will see it carried out. But not here, where humans might come.” They grasped Ryder’s arms and dragged him away, out of sight, followed by the huge wolf, their alpha.

The others stood, releasing me, and I shifted and got to my feet. And I was surrounded by my friends, business partners, and management of the club.

“What do you think they will do with him?” I asked.

The scream that echoed back to us answered my question before I finished speaking it, and I turned toward the building. “I have an omega waiting to make glitter art,” I said. “I don’t want to disappoint him.”

Inside, one of dungeon monitors handed me a pair of black pants and a black silk shirt. Not exactly little-room couture, but it would do. I dressed and found Tate sitting in a chair outside the kitchen. “Come on, omega. The glitter awaits.”

“Daddy, what about...”

“He will never bother you again. His pack has him, and they will make sure of it.” I hugged Tate tight. “And we will continue with our lives as if he never was born.”

We wouldn’t speak of this again. Justice had been meted out by the wolf’s alpha, and his body would also be dealt with. Probably dropped in a deep hole somewhere. It was too good for him.

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Tate

I'd paced the house until the walls blurred together. My playroom was lonely, but my wolf and I were focused on the pup inside me. I was overdue by two days and was doing anything I could to make this baby come out.

Pregnancy had been a dream, and I now realized my struggle and loss with my other baby had been because of the abusive ex who called himself my mate.

Troubled papa, troubled baby.

Bronson made sure I had no troubles, as best he could. We had everyday things, but we kept our home calm and safe.

Safe was undervalued in a relationship, or I had undervalued it.

No one should be afraid to be themselves.

"You're going to drive yourself mad, mate."

I stopped at the sound of his voice. So did the babe inside me. They knew their papas well. "They stopped kick...nevermind, there they go again." The kicking and movement inside me went on nearly twenty-four hours a day. The healer said it was normal, but it felt like an earthquake was going off in my belly. Feet sticking in my ribs. Fists pressing out of my abdomen. The kid never stopped.

"Come relax in the living room. I made you a smoothie. Pineapple and papaya."

“Another thing you read about in your pregnancy books?” I laughed. He took my hand and led me into the living room where we sat side by side in our chaise lounge. It was perfect for me to sit in because I could keep my feet up. Swollen ankles hadn’t been an issue, but it felt good.

“Yes. Dates, too. Drink up.”

I sighed but did as he asked. He took such good care of me. The smoothie was delicious, and I drank it all while Bronson rubbed circles on my belly. He lay across my chest, saying things to my belly, or rather, the babe inside my belly.

“What are you telling them?” I asked, running my hands through Bronson’s dark, thick hair. I hoped our baby had his hair. And his eyes and his nose. A replica would be fine with me.

He chuckled and wrapped his arm around the bottom of my belly. The support made me sigh. “I’m telling this pup to come on out. How much he or she is loved and how excited we are to see them and have them in our lives. I’m also telling them how beautiful of a papa they have. How lovely their pale-yellow nursery is.” He placed a kiss on my lower belly, and a pain struck me in my lower back.

“Oh!” I said, bucking from the lounge.

Bronson sat up, his eyes wide. “What is it?”

He helped me to stand, and another spike of pressure and pain shot through me. “This pup listened to you. That’s what. Call the healer, please. Now, mate. Please.” Two pleases. I was desperate.

While he talked to the healer, I moved back to the chaise but this time got on my knees and used the back of the chair as a brace to lean on. The contractions were

coming in waves now, and each of them seemed more painful than the last. Each one left me breathless and spent.

“He’s at another birth. He’s sending someone else.”

I shook my head so hard it made my temples throb. “No. No one else.” I was slow to trust. That wasn’t going to change today.

“Hospital?” Bronson asked, coming over to stroke my back. His strong, warm hands felt so good.

“No. I’ll do this myself. My wolf and my body know what to do.”

“Do you want to be here, or should we go somewhere else?” he asked.

I turned my head. “You’re not going to argue?”

“Absolutely not, mate. You have survived so many things. You are strong and capable and brave as fuck. I trust you with our baby’s life.”

“Let’s move to the bedroom. Towels. Blankets. On the floor.”

The move to the bedroom was a blur of breathing and stopping and bracing myself as the intensity of the contractions built up more and more. Once Bronson laid everything out and spoke to the healer, telling him to cancel the replacement coming over, he took off his shoes and got on the floor next to me. I was on my hands and knees, naked, with sweat pouring off me.

The pup is coming. We can do this.

We could.

My hands curled into fists as the urge to push took over my senses. My body tensed, pouring every ounce of energy into the process, as it should.

“It’s time, mate. Can you get ready to...” Another round of pushing took over my body. My wolf was mostly in charge now.

“I’m here,” Bronson said, now sitting behind me. “Oh, sweetheart, I see their head. You’re almost there.”

My eyes rolled back in my head as a burning sensation fired up on the ring of my channel. It was time to push this baby out. To welcome him or her into this world.

“I’m pushing,” I said, clenching my jaw. I moved my knees apart, widening my stance and gathered everything in me.

And pushed.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

“That’s it, Tate. That’s it. He’s here.”

“He?” I sobbed, collapsing onto my chest, face down on the blankets. My ass was still raised high. I knew there was a bit more that had to come out. The afterbirth.

“He, omega mine. You gave us a son. A beautiful son.”

Bronson clipped the umbilical cord and brought him to me. I rolled over, and my

mate placed our babe on my chest. I counted his fingers and toes and made sure everything was fine. I would love him no matter what, but I had to inspect him.

“He’s beautiful, just like you,” Bronson said, tears running down his face.

“He’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen,” I said, blinking back some of my own tears.

“You did so well, mate. I am amazed by you.”

I nodded, agreeing for once. “What should we name him?” I asked.

“We talked about Cillian. Did you still want that?”

“Yes. I love it. And I love you, alpha. None of this would be possible without you.”

He hugged us both and helped me clean up and clean our babe up. The healer arrived soon after and praised me along with Bronson on a job well done.

We were a family now.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:26 am

Bronson

My omega was the best. At everything. From the moment the baby was laid on his chest, he was a dad. With all the skills that entailed. I knew he'd been reading up on the subject since he found out he was pregnant, but I believed he was a natural. Our son was happy, healthy, and well-fed, and the two of them thrived.

The arrival of my new family member had me thinking. The law firm was all-encompassing, promising me a fast partnership and paying me very well but at the same time, working me to a frazzle.

Days could be fourteen or fifteen hours long, leaving me no time for the club or my mate and son. What kind of a life was that? Three weeks into my paternity leave, I put in my notice and signed a lease on a small office where I hung out my shingle. I still firmly believed everyone was entitled to excellent defense, and with my profits from my "side gig," I could do it at a cut rate and still be fine. Take on a few cases at a time, people who would have had to take the services of anyone they could find without a reason to think they could be successful.

And many of these people were shifters. Living on the fringes of human society, they were often caught up in matters they didn't even understand. And the teenage males? If they didn't go to jail, it was just because they didn't get caught. It was mostly just mischief, for which judges would give hours of cleaning the freeways or volunteering in a nursing home. If...the client had a good lawyer.

I would be that lawyer.

Tate was thrilled; I was home for dinner every night, and I came up the path, whistling. He'd made friends with the other partners' mates, and they set up babysitting so they could all come to the club once or twice a week.

I never thought I'd have a home filled with laughter, a job that fulfilled me in so many ways, a place to meet up with friends and express a side of me that just didn't fit in other places. Oh, and a little wolf. Most didn't shift until at least adolescence, but our child? Ran on all fours before he could walk on two. I had a fated mate, the best one ever to walk the earth. My gratitude overflowed.

And my heart beat with love for Tate and Cillian. Every blessed thump.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:26 am

Samuel

“I’m sorry, Samuel. I know this money came to you in a sad way but thank you for trusting us with some of it. We will expand the club and bring even more members in.” Talon clapped me on the back, and the other owners nodded, sharing his sentiment.

“I’m glad you can put it to good use.”

The others broke from the meeting room, most of them with their omegas. The club opened in a few moments ,and I suspected it was date night all around.

When I’d been an operations manager for Cuffed, I hadn’t had much time to explore my own secret desires but now that I’d invested my money and was a full-fledged owner, I would have more time to play.

“Samuel, there you are. We’ve got three servers who didn’t show up for work.”

I sighed, shaking my head. Perhaps there wouldn’t be time enough to play after all. “I’m on my way,” I said and followed Rafe out the back.

Cuffed was expanding, taking over the entire block, and I was proud to be a part of it.

But my wolf craved an alpha. One to care for me. One to come home to.

Maybe the alpha of my dreams would stroll in the front door of Cuffed and sweep me off my feet.

An omega could dream.