



Such a Delicious Omega (His Alpha Desires #4)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: On the other side of death is light and life. When I almost died after being in the wrong place at the wrong time, I decided it was time to start living and stop simply surviving and live my best life. So, I sat down with my friends and made a list of all the things I'd always wanted to do or be.

My friends appeared shocked by the items I penned. The friend they'd known for so many years would think twice before wearing a bright-colored shirt. And yet, I listed skydiving, bungee jumping, flying all the way to Japan to eat blowfish. And I did those things, checking them off as I went. On the tamer side, I rode a horse and took tango lessons. Until only one thing remained on my list.

Visit a dungeon. A kink club lay in the city only a few miles away. It was members only, with exceptions made for guests or, of course, those interested in joining. Was I interested in joining? I'd never know until I tried. If only I had an alpha to go with.

Total Pages (Source): 24

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Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:13 am

Echo

“I’m gonna throw up and piss my pants.” I turned to see my friend Zack turn a putrid shade of green as he watched the instructors and pilot put all the gear into the plane and do the last-minute safety checks.

Fear hadn’t overlooked me. Its hooks were in my chest making me struggle for every breath, but I’d learned to sink into the feeling instead of running from it.

At least, when it came to things on my list.

“You gotta pick one,” I said over the sounds around us. The smaller airport only served private flights and skydiving expeditions, but it sure was noisy. “Throw up or pee. You can’t have both.”

Zack laughed, pushing his dark-brown hair out of his face to no avail. It always managed to find its way back into his eyes. He’d drawn the short stick in coming with me but, at the same time, my group of friends insisted I go with someone. They had worried themselves sick when I was in Japan on my own. “Let’s talk about something else. You need to add to your list. You’ve only got two things left.”

“This and... I forgot the other one.”

“No, you didn’t, Echo. Hell, I didn’t forget, and it’s not my list.”

I nodded as the hooks of fear dug in deeper. Sure, jumping out of an airplane with nothing but a parachute was terrifying, but the last thing on my list made my stomach

turn.

Visit a dungeon. A sex club.

Goddess, the only experience I had with dungeons was from my Google searches and romance novels. I could guess some things I wouldn't like. Electric play. Those violet wands with all the crazy tips I saw when I looked them up scared me. Fire play. Even scarier.

"The dungeon," I muttered, shuddering at the name alone.

"Have you even looked one up yet? Is there a good one in the city?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I'll do all that once I get this crossed off."

Zack stared off into space. His coloring wasn't so green anymore. Maybe all he needed was a change of subject. "You don't have to do any of this, you know. No one would hold it against you."

I snorted. "Are you sure? You and James and Amber are the ones who helped me make it. I...I feel like I need to finish it."

My friend turned to me, hands on his hips. "Well, here we go. Look."

The instructor waved us over. We got onto the plane, and the rest was a blur. The roar of the plane. The yelling from the team as they went over the instructions and safety measures one more time. My stomach did a somersault as they opened the door, giving us a view of the vast expanse we were about to fling ourselves into. The view was spectacular. Looking over the weaving lines of land and water, as though viewing a huge puzzle.

Why was I doing this?

Why did I keep looking death in the face while trying to run from its snares?

We leapt from the plane and thankfully both landed safely on the ground. The rush I'd gotten from jumping and soaring through the sky had given me a temporary reprieve from the clamp on my chest, but as soon as we got back into our street clothes and headed to lunch, the vise grip had strengthened once again.

Making the list—the bucket list—had, at first, been a way of making sure the things I wanted to do were done before I died.

Because after almost dying at the hands of the ocean, I realized how short and fragile life was. We took it for granted, of course—me included. I'd been skirting through life before the boating accident.

Why I thought sailing was a good idea in the first place, I didn't know.

Kendall, my friend who owned the boat, still had a look in his eyes when we talked about that night. He carried some guilt about what happened to me even though I'd told him over and over that it was an accident. I'd fallen off the boat and hit my head on a buoy in the process, rendering me unconscious for just enough time to almost drown. The night had made the water almost black, so no one could see me to save me.

I'd saved myself—barely. My parents said Fate dragged me from the depths. My friends thought the Goddess had saved me for a purpose.

Me? I assumed I was just lucky. No matter the reason—I wasn't wasting one more moment of my life.

But no more sailboats. Not in a million years.

“Where’d you go?” Zack asked as we made our way to lunch. Part of the deal with him skydiving with me was a lunch of his choice afterward.

“Just thinking.”

Over lunch, we kept the subject light until Amber asked how the trip went. All my friends were fixated on the last thing on the list while I was scrambling for things in my head to fill the void—adding to the list. More running toward goals meant sprinting away from what happened to me and the aftermath.

“So...let’s talk about the dungeon,” Zack said, swirling the last of his wine in his glass.

“I’ve got to start researching. The last thing I want to do is to go to a sleazy place. I want to find an upscale club. One that’s safe.”

“Oh!” Cam, another one of my friends exclaimed. “I know of a place. My last date brought me there. It’s not something I’m interested in, but it is definitely a good one. It is called Cuffed. Google it. It’s only a short rideshare away.”

I sighed. “Okay. Let’s do this.”

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Samuel

I never thought I'd be an owner.

I'd worked hard every day of my adult life and most of my teens, but the buy-in for Cuffed was still miles beyond my budget. As I signed and initialed a hundred times it seemed then handed the iPad to Alex on my left. He and the other owners had been bosses but also friends in the few years since Cuffed opened. It was an honor just to work there, and I'd have gladly stayed in my position as long as they were willing to have me. Not bad for a guy like me who grew up on the wrong side of the tracks and got my GED so I could leave school early and help my mom support my younger brother and sister during my dad's long, final illness.

It was a lot for a kid, but I never resented it. Pops had been sick as long as I knew him, but he never failed to have a good word or a smile for us. Even when he could barely lift his head from the pillow, he wanted to hear about my brother's debate or my little sister's basketball game.

He passed before they finished high school, but it was my honor to see to it they went to college and got started in life. Mom remated, the kids were launched, and I was finally able to explore the lifestyle that had called to me all along.

From the first night Cuffed was open, I knew I'd found my people. The only question was how I'd managed to get along for so many years without it. Well, I knew how. Family came first; my father counted on me. My eyes still welled up when I remembered the look in his eyes on that last day, when he no longer had the power of speech, but I knew what he was asking.

“I’ve got this, Dad. It’s no trouble to take care of the people we love.”

“Samuel?”

“What?” Hell. I’d nearly missed one of the most important moments of my life woolgathering. “Sorry. I was just thinking of my dad and how he’d be so proud of me for becoming an owner of such a successful business.”

“Even this one?” Bronson chuckled. “He must be a very enlightened male.”

“He was, although we never talked about lifestyle matters. But he never failed to support any of us.”

“Was?” Bronson patted my hand. “I’m sorry. I didn’t realize your father was no longer with us.”

I shrugged. “I guess I never mentioned it.” It was a difficult subject for me.

“Well, wherever he is, he’s proud of the way you helped the business succeed from day one, and we couldn’t be happier to have you as a partner.”

The others passed the iPad from one to the next, electronically signing the contract that made me an equal owner with the rest. No, I couldn’t afford it on my own, but the grandfather, the pack alpha my father had never so much as spoken of, had left me an inheritance. One large enough to buy into the business and live comfortably for the rest of my life. The alpha position was mine, as well, if I chose to fight for it, but why would I do that? I didn’t know anyone there, had only visited once for the reading of the will, and nothing about the others who showed up for the occasion made me want to be in charge of them.

When the document was signed by all, they handed the device back to me to hit send.

Although at least one of the owners was a member of the Bar, we—wasn't that a great word, we?—used an uninvolved attorney for our legal matters in most cases. He would file all the relevant paperwork adding me into the corporation and whatever else was needed.

“Okay.” I sat back, feeling a little stunned by how fast it had all happened. “I guess I'd better get to work.”

“You sure you want to do this?” Alex asked. “If you'd rather not, we can hire a bar manager.”

“Like what?” I considered. “You all use your skills to handle a share of the load around here, and what else would I do? Unless you don't think I've done a good job with the bar?” I thought I had, but probably most people felt as if they handled their duties well. The owners—the other owners—might have held back from commenting while I was a lowly employee, but I hoped they would feel free to comment now.

“Anything you think you might enjoy.” Talon offered me a stern look. “That's the point of being an owner. Of course, you did an excellent job as bar manager, but it's up to you.”

Studying the conference table in front of me, I said, “I like the position. So, if it's all the same to you, I'll stay in it.”

A whoosh of air had me jerking my head up to take them all in. “What was that?”

“Relief,” Alex replied. “You'd be tough to replace, but we didn't want you to feel compelled to stay as bar manager. Not only are you great with the customers and planning special events, but the employees are devoted to you.”

“They just like watching me spank the naughty subs.”

“And that, too.”

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Echo

Cuffed. Even the name of the dungeon on my map app sounded like a fun place to go. My list didn't specify what kind of club, but from what I'd seen online, it was great for beginners and more experienced people alike.

Amber insisted I wear a suit but I hated jackets, especially now as winter gave way to spring. My wolf kept me plenty warm without it anyway. I decided on all black. Black button-down shirt. Black pants. Sleek black shoes I'd only worn to funerals and when I was the best man at Zack's mating ceremony.

I took an Uber from my place into the city. I lived in a house outside the city limits. The sounds and the lights were sometimes too much for me. The incident had nothing to do with the city or the barrage of lights there, but something about the busy moving parts had me nauseous in seconds.

Even as I gave the driver the address, my stomach flopped. I hid this part of my recovery from my friends, but sometimes, I swore they could tell I wasn't doing well.

As the driver pulled over right in front of the club, he eyed me in the rearview mirror. "This is the place you wanted to go?"

I scoffed and completed the transaction on my phone, choosing to tip him the bare minimum. "It is. Thank you."

He looked out the window and back to me. "A cute omega like you doesn't really belong in a place like this. You know what they do in here?"

Judgy much? I could practically hear the sound of a gavel. “I’ll decide what’s good for me. Have a good night.”

“You want me to wait?” This driver was a statement away from a one-star review.

“No.”

“Suit yourself.”

I got out of the car and smoothed the front of my shirt and my pants with my palms. Gods, I was more nervous about walking into this place than I had been leaping from a plane or even bungee jumping. Going to a sex club was not for the faint of heart.

Approaching the front door, I paused, noticing there was no line to get in. Then again, it was kind of early in the evening. The information online was limited. No pictures of the inside. None of the rules laid out. Not even operating hours.

I did find a discussion where someone said this club was the one place they felt safe to be themselves. That was all I needed to hear.

Once I reached the door, I rattled the handles, but it was locked. I had a vague idea that nightclubs opened late...but how late? Seven? Eight?

The door opened swiftly, making me step back in surprise.

“Deliveries go to the back,” the person said, still in the shadows.

“Oh. I’m not delivering. I’m here for...to come to the club.”

The man came out, and I was instantly hit with his scent. My senses kicked in, smelling the mixture of cigarillo, musk, and bourbon. My knees melted. My body

swayed toward the scent. My whole world turned upside down. “I’m Samuel. We are not open this early in the evening.”

I smiled as he leaned against the brick exterior and lit up a thin cigar.

“I see. Well, I suppose I’ll come back later, then.”

The man put one foot on the brick behind him, bending the knee. “Are you a member?”

“A member?” I repeated. I sounded like a fool. Like a club virgin. Oh, wait, I was.

“Yeah. Cuffed is a members-only club. You have to be a member or come with someone who is—as a guest.” The way he said guest made me shiver. A simple word...but from his lips... His eyes roamed my form as he blew out a line of smoke through his nose. A soft smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. “So, are you a member?”

People passed by, chatting and some snickering. “I’m not a member.”

He shrugged one shoulder. “Then you can’t come in later. Or at all.”

“Is there a trial membership or some way I can tour?”

He chuckled low and deep. Thunder cracked overhead as though reacting to his laugh. His skin was olive and his brown eyes bored into me. The light above his head flicked on, making him seem like some dark angel that saved morons like me from making a fool of themselves. “This is a private club. Those who want to come here buy a membership or an invited guest. Period.”

“Thanks for the information.”

I'd whirled on my heel to walk away with the little bit of dignity I had left when reality hit me. I had skydived. I had eaten blowfish in Japan. Hiked. Biked. Bungee jumped. I could ask the most handsome man that I'd ever seen in my life one question. Turning, I faced him only to find he was already looking at me. "What's your name?"

"Samuel. What's yours?"

"Echo."

"That's a nice name for a delicious omega."

Delicious? Did this alpha just call me delicious? From any other male, that might make me get the ick and fast, but him? Yeah, he could call me delicious all he wanted.

I could do this. I could do this. I took a long inhale and steeled myself as if this were a daredevil situation instead of a simple request. "Can you bring people into the club?"

No...yes." A slow smile grew on his lips. "I can."

"You can. So...would you have me as your guest?"

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Samuel

I don't know what I'd expected to happen once I was an owner, but certainly more of a change than had actually occurred. For the first few nights, I walked on eggshells, trying to behave in the way I believed I should. Formal, serious, distant. But, not only was it making my employees squirm, but it just wasn't me.

A dom? Yes, I was all that, and I loved having a sub over a spanking bench while I chose what tool to make their bottom bloom rose-red, their upper thighs glow in the lights, but I also enjoyed laughing with people and making their days more pleasant. Sometimes that involved spanking. Others, though it was a special drink or a moment of conversation, and the aloofness I'd tried to don did not work with my personality. When Bronson asked me if I was okay or if the stick up my ass was making me uncomfortable, I winced but then laughed and thanked him for confirming what I already knew.

The brotherhood of the ownership in full force.

This afternoon, I'd held a meeting of the bar staff, just like I had once a week since the grand opening. They were all watching me carefully, no doubt the result of my foolishness, but once we were all seated around a few tables pulled together in the bar area with donuts and coffee, and a "normal" version of me, they visibly relaxed.

I hadn't decided whether to comment, but I did say something to the effect of appreciating their cooperation during my transition, leading to a few smirks. I had them coming, and more. They all left to go out to dinner before opening, and were gracious enough to invite me, but that would deny them the pleasure of making fun of

me, so I took a rain check and remained seated while they all headed out through the back of the building.

Every day here was a learning experience, one of the reasons I loved the dungeon. As a manager, I'd had a limited membership, a huge perk I could not have afforded on my own, and I'd taken classes in various arts like whips and hot wax and shibari from experts, but nothing reached into my soul until the one I'd never seen coming.

Spanking.

Mulling over the time that got me here—woolgathering again—I was startled by a noise at the front door. It was far too early for members. We had the occasional early evening special event or, sometimes, the little room hosted an afternoon gathering, but there was nothing on the schedule like that today. Sure it was some confused vendor, I stood and strode toward the door to send them around back to the kitchen.

I pulled it open and said, “Deliveries go to the back.”

“Oh. I'm not delivering. I'm here for...to come to the club.”

Looking at him for the first time, I caught my breath. He was an omega. And, if I wasn't mistaken, a submissive. My wolf wanted him. Now.

But he was not someone I'd ever seen before. “I'm Samuel. We are not open this early in the evening.” I lit up a thin cigar, studying him.

“I see. Well, I suppose I'll come back later, then.”

He was going to leave. And, I didn't want him to. “Are you a member?”

“A member?”

“Yeah. Cuffed is a members-only club. You have to be a member or come with someone who is—as a guest. So, are you a member?” He’d have to be new if I didn’t know him.

But of course he wasn’t, and there was nothing I could do about it. Limited memberships did not allow guests. We talked a few minutes more while a storm gathered overhead and finally, he turned to leave. I couldn’t keep him longer. It wasn’t fair. So I watched him take a few steps while my wolf had a fit inside me, but then...he turned around again. Standing up as tall as possible, chin up, he asked, “What’s your name?”

“Samuel. What’s yours?”

“Echo.”

“That’s a nice name for a delicious omega.”

“Can you bring people into the club?”

“Yes.” I wanted to slap my forehead. My only excuse for forgetting was that it was such a new thing. “I can.”

“You can. So...would you have me as your guest?”

“I’m not sure. There’s a whole process to be approved as a member, and even guests have to fill out some forms.”

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Echo

“Dinner? Right now?” I asked, shocked that he asked me.

“Sure. Why not? There’s a taqueria about a block over. Has the best al pastor in the city. My dad makes the best anywhere, but it’s the closest I can get around here.”

I paused to decide while he rolled up the sleeves of his black shirt revealing tattoos covering his whole arm that ended right at the cuff. If he hadn’t rolled those sleeves up, I wouldn’t have known he had any ink at all.

“Okay. I could eat.” I could eat him right up, in fact.

We walked shoulder to shoulder for the rest of the block before coming to a walkway. He pushed the button to give us the right of way and then stepped back in between me and the street. Interesting. A gentleman and hot as hell? Samuel was now on my bucket list. “What brought you to the club tonight?” he asked, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“Would you believe it was on my bucket list?” I asked, laughing. I’d gotten a lot of flak about my list, mostly from those who didn’t know the background of why it came to be.

He snorted. “Aren’t you a little young for a bucket list? You look plenty healthy to me.”

If he kept making statements like that, I was going to ask him to skip the taco shop

and offer to go with me directly to my hotel. There was something about the way he walked and talked, like he was fully in control at all times. That nothing bothered him. He was a mountain in a storm.

“Um, thanks. I wanted to make one while I was young.” I left out the part about the accident. No way I was going to trauma dump all over this guy.

“And going to a club was on your list? What would you do while you were in there? Any plans?”

I shivered as he opened the door for me to a place that, from the outside, would be somewhere I might avoid unless I was fond of food poisoning. Inside, the tiny restaurant was clean but sparsely decorated in every color imaginable. The tables were all for two and topped with tablecloths that had seen their share of spills. Still, it had a homey feel. The scents of grilled meats, fresh cilantro, tomatoes, and onions immediately made my mouth water.

“Smells amazing,” I said.

Samuel walked over to a table and pulled out a chair for me. As I sat down, he leaned over and whispered, “Sure does.”

When I looked up, he stared at me with an intensity, locking me in place. He was an alpha, that was clear, but there was more. A quiet grace and will all his own made me want to submit myself to him fully.

Never felt that before.

“Samuel, always nice to see you here. You’re having the usual?” The woman who approached us set a bowl of chips and a smaller one of pico de gallo on the table.

He smiled at the woman. “Yes, please, Salma. How are the kids? Amos?”

“Amos is on the grill tonight. The al pastor is always better when he’s here. I swear, he’s magic. And for your friend?”

We hadn’t even gotten a chance to read over the menu. I could barely make out the words since it was on the wall above the register. “I haven’t had a chance to decide. I’ll just have whatever he’s having.”

Samuel smiled. “Are you sure? It’s delicious but hot. Salma likes to test my spice palate.”

The woman giggled. Samuel. Salma. Were they related? Friends? “I do. He’s come a long way since he first walked in here.”

“I’m sure.”

Salma yelled out our order to the chef and then came back with tall glasses of horchata.

“How long have you been a member of Cuffed?” I asked, trying to get to know as much about this man as I could, in case this was the only chance I had. My wolf was telling me all kinds of things. He was my mate. He was ours. We belonged to him.

I had to admit, my wolf had been quiet on the mate front. I couldn’t shift for a long time after the accident and, even now, the times I did were few and far between.

But sitting across from Samuel, my best was louder than ever. Even howling, trying to catch the alpha’s animal’s attention.

“I started out as a bar manager. They hired me right on the spot. Talon, one of the

other owners, tends to do that. He has a sense about employees and whether they will work out or not. We let him do most of the hiring.”

I took a sip of the horchata while he spoke. It was perfectly sweet, rich with cinnamon and vanilla. “You said the other owners. Are you an owner of the club?”

Samuel smiled, showing his white teeth while he readjusted himself in the seat, crossing his legs the other way. “I am of late. It’s still weird to say. I’ve been the bar manager for years.”

“That’s incredible.”

He nodded. “It is. Still getting used to it. Honestly, I just invested money. For the most part, I am still in charge of the bar. I like it. What about you? What do you do for work?”

“I’m a front desk clerk for a hotel. It’s a small place. I like it. It’s interesting to see who comes in and out.”

“Sounds like a fun place to work. See anything interesting? Any crazy stories?”

“Let me tell you about this throuple that came in…”

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Samuel

I never took anyone from Cuffed here, although it was only a few blocks away. It met every bit of the definition of a dive. The antithesis of our club with its perfect design, Salma and Amos had a whole different kind of flare that took place in the kitchen. As I walked in with the omega, I tried to see it as they might. As in, why would this alpha bring me here? He didn't know I was a club owner—something I'd just started to figure out myself—but my suit told him I was not exactly the janitor, and he might have expected a fancier meal.

I could have taken him somewhere with better decor, more expensive menu items, and a sommelier who would turn his nose up at anyone who ordered the house vintage. But I could not have taken him somewhere with tastier food.

The cloth on the table where we sat had been washed so often it was frayed a bit at the edges, and not all the stains had come out, but I'd never paid attention to that before. If Echo minded, though, he didn't say a word. No sooner had we placed our order than we were exchanging stories about our experiences with customer service. Echo worked at a hotel, which put him face-to-face with a lot of characters, and even though we were a private club, sometimes our members and their guests could be vastly quirky.

I was just finishing up a story about a member who brought their boss to the club in what must have been a major brain fart when our dinner arrived. I'd ordered the horchata after Echo said he'd have what I was ordering. The smooth rice beverage could be very helpful in cooling the burn of Amos' favorite serranos.

“People always worry about things like ghost peppers and habaneros,” I warned, as Echo picked up his first taco. “But serranos are sneaky. Even if you can tolerate it, if it’s too hot for you to enjoy, say so. Understood?”

He nodded, opening his mouth wide and taking a big bite. He chewed and swallowed, but his eyes were wide and shining, face flushed, and he puffed in a breath. “Good,” he said, voice trembling just a little bit before he picked up his glass and gulped the horchata.

If he’d been in a cartoon, he’d have flames shooting out of his ears and nose. I crooked a finger and Salma came over, lips twitching in amusement. She set a glass of milk on the table and winked. “Would you like anything else, Samuel?”

“Maybe some carne asada tacos and an order of beans and rice for the table?”

“Right away.” As she disappeared back into the kitchen, I pushed the glass toward the omega who still appeared distressed. “Drink this. And don’t feel bad. Serranos can be sneaky.”

He grasped the glass and drank it down then sighed. “You’re not kidding. I usually manage whatever the Mexican place by my house can throw at me, but it never gets this hot.”

“I’ll finish yours. The asadas are just as delicious, but you add your own salsa to them, to taste.”

A few minutes later, Salma returned with a platter holding a half dozen tacos, bowls of their amazing rice and beans, and the little stand with the various salsas. “Should I bring more milk?”

I glanced at the omega, who shook his head. His cheeks were still red, though, either

from embarrassment, spice, or both. It was a good look on him. “No, just a refill on the horchatas if you don’t mind.” After Salma left with our glasses, I reached over and picked up his plate, transferring the remaining tacos to mine. “Now...taste the asadas and tell me what you think.”

This time, when his eyes went wide, it accompanied a broad smile. “Oh my gods. How have I ever thought my local place knew how to make tacos?” He spooned a bit of each salsa onto a chip and tasted it carefully before adding some of the tomatillo version to his taco. “So good.”

“I’m sure the other restaurant is fine. This one is just extraordinary. Or maybe you haven’t tried their very best item. Try asking the employees what they like to eat. It’s often not even on the menu, but can be great.”

“What a good idea.” He beamed at me. “How do you know this?”

“Do you think I worked at a dungeon my whole life? I—”

“He was our best waiter when he was in high school.” Salma set our brimming drinks on the table and smiled fondly at me.

“The job came with free food,” I said. “My mother claimed it saved her food budget.”

“How is your dear mama?” Salma asked. “Is she doing any better?”

“A little.” The reminder sobered me. “Thank you for asking.”

“I have to call her and go visit.” Salma patted me on the shoulder. “She’s strong, mijo. You don’t have to worry.”

How could I not? But her words comforted me anyway. She moved to another table,

and I sat back in my seat.

“Your mother is sick?” Echo asked. “I hope she’ll get well soon.”

I didn’t often talk about my family. My parents had left their pack behind, raising me in a mostly human world. “For a while, we thought we were going to lose her, but she’s doing better now.”

“Good.” He reached over and squeezed my hand, and if I’d had any doubt, or if my wolf had, that this was my mate, they were gone at that point of contact. “I take it Salma is an old family friend?”

“My whole life.”

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Echo

“So, now that we’ve gotten to know each other, I would like to invite you to be my guest tomorrow. I have to monitor tonight.”

“Oh? Is that something the other owners do too?”

“We fill in on occasion.” He nodded. “There is a special event this evening, with some guests from another club, and I volunteered to monitor because there will be some training for the people we employ in those roles.”

My stomach sank. He was going to the club without me? I was sure he had before and done things with other omegas but now? I shook off the thought before I had all the information. “What does monitoring entail?”

Because it would kind of shatter me if this alpha was doing kinky things with another omega, another anyone, actually.

Maybe my wolf was right. Perhaps Samuel was my mate. Being around him, well, I never wanted this night to end. I became anxious at just the thought of not being in his presence.

“Afraid I’m going to be playing tonight, Echo?”

Heat rushed to my cheeks, my neck, and everywhere else. “Maybe.”

He took my hands in his across the table and I let him. I so let him. His skin was

warm against mine and I could feel the callouses that lined his palms. He was a hard worker. I could only imagine how those callouses would feel dragging a path over my softer skin. When I took his hand the first time, I was concerned about him, but this was pure sensation. “I’m not playing tonight. Ease yourself, little wolf. Monitoring is simply that. Making sure everyone follows the rules. Talon is the firemaster and he and his omega do displays on a fire table. It’s something to behold, but I will be in the corner, watching and keeping tabs on things. Cross my heart.”

I let out a long sigh of relief. This alpha was already under my skin.

“Do you... I mean, is the fire table something you’re into?”

Chuckling, he stood. “That’s another discussion that we can absolutely have in the club tomorrow night. I really do have to go even though I feel like I could spend hours talking to you. If I didn’t have another engagement, I would take you somewhere for dessert.”

Damn this monitoring gig. This alpha wanted to take me somewhere for dessert, and I didn’t think he meant ice cream—at all.

“Yeah, okay. Let me get a ride.”

I got on my phone while Samuel watched over my shoulder.

“May I have your number, omega?” he asked. Damn, that voice rolled over me, burying me in calm and serenity. I bet he could make an omega come with his sexy voice alone.

“Of course. Here.” I handed him my phone so he could message himself from mine and vice versa.

“There,” he said, handing it back. Our fingers touched, sparking electricity all throughout my body.

With every touch, my wolf was more and more sure. This alpha was my mate.

He waited with me until my ride drove up. “Will you text me once you get home safely, Echo? Please?”

The only thing I could do was nod.

“Good. Be safe.” He leaned over and kissed my cheek. My cock swelled instantly. If he hadn’t said he needed to get back to the club, I would’ve certainly gathered all my courage and asked him to join me.

“Thank you. Good night.”

“Echo,” he said as I got into the car. “After you tell me you’re safe, I’m going to give you some pointers for tomorrow night.”

“Pointers?” I choked out. Goddess, I would gladly take and obey any help or advice he gave me.

“Yes, omega. There are rules.” He winked. “You’re going to follow them, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Samuel.”

“I knew you would. And there’s paperwork to fill out for even guest admission. I’ll send you a link.”

“Good night, delicious omega. Until tomorrow.”

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Samuel

The omega climbed into a low-slung silver sedan with dual tailpipes and rode away. The car reminded me of one more likely to be used for late-night street racing than a rideshare, but the driver had his name and seemed calm enough. If I'd had time, I would have driven him to where he was going myself. It never seemed like a good idea to get in a vehicle with a total stranger, and my wolf certainly had strong opinions about the one he was already calling his mate doing so.

But, as it was, I didn't even have the minutes required to go home and change before I was scheduled to be on duty, and I didn't want to do something to make my co-owners feel like I was taking advantage of my new status. Regret their decision.

From overheard conversations, I happened to know they'd had multiple offers to buy in, nearly all of which they had rejected out of hand at any price. Accepting mine was more than a business decision. It reflected on their opinions of my character. The fact I already fit in well at Cuffed.

I took a different route to the club, winding up at the employee entrance I'd used so many times. Heading straight for my office, I pulled a spare set of clothes I kept there for emergencies and went into my attached bathroom to change. Talon, the fire master, had told me they all had a change or two in their offices because things could come up. Like meeting the omega of my dreams?

More likely meetings that ran over.

But, whatever the reason, it had paid off for me. My suit was not appropriate for the

monitoring job, but my black jeans and fitted T-shirt were. I donned the vest with Monitor emblazoned front and back, sat down to put on my favorite black boots, and I was all ready for work.

While bar manager, I was not strictly tasked with this job, but I'd done it a few times anyway, so although it was my first time as an owner, I didn't expect things to be different. It wasn't as if there had been a notice posted to let people know about my change in status. The employees were aware, but the membership might not be. Not a secret, just not an announcement. Which suited me perfectly. I headed down the hallway and out into the main floor.

"Oh good, you're here." Sandra, one of the bar servers, passed me on the way to deliver a tray of mai tais. "Talon was looking for you about fifteen minutes ago."

Shoot, he must be about to do his scene and needed to be sure he had a monitor in place. I glanced at my watch, but the scheduled time was still a few minutes out. Of course, Talon was one of the most precise of the doms. Each of their skills had critical elements to make sure it went well and nobody was harmed, but fire?

At least to my inexperienced self, it was the riskiest.

"I'm on my way." I thanked her and strode quickly past the seating areas to the spot where Talon would be setting up for the scene. Once, he'd used his skills on many submissives, but once he met his mate, Rowan, no others came under his flames. With the exception of classes he taught, where he and his omega guided others who were mastering the skill. But even then, they were together.

Although I'd witnessed the other owners meeting and mating their fateds, I'd had doubts that there was one out there for me. Not all wolf shifters had one. It was a gift, not a right. My parents were fated to one another, a factor that helped them survive without a pack. I'd never known the pack life, so it wasn't a loss to me. Cuffed was

my chosen family, and the camaraderie and satisfaction I found in the club was a pretty big gift in itself. If I never met my mate or even had one out there, I'd get by.

But as I spotted Talon setting his tools and liquids out, Rowan assisting him, the two working in harmony, an ache I'd kept so suppressed I'd have denied it existed, surged up, stealing my breath. I did have a mate. My wolf was certain of it, and I was starting to believe. I wanted everything that having a mate meant. I wanted the love and friendship. I wanted the wolf connection and a partner for my spanking here at the club.

If he wanted to be spanked. What if he didn't? What if he wanted fire or to be titillated by the violet wand? Wax, whips, rope arts... He wanted to come here, so he must have some yearning for what was offered. And if it was not something I knew how to do, I'd find out. Meeting the need of my omega came before my own.

"Samuel, are you with us?"

I blinked, seeing Talon arch one imperious brow, standing right in front of me. "I-yes, of course."

"Good. I'm starting to think you are daydreamer. How did I never notice that before?"

"I was never in a position for my dreams all to come true," I blurted out then clamped a hand over my mouth.

He let out a startled bark of laughter then cleared his throat. "I'm intrigued, and I have questions, but they will have to wait because a crowd has been promised some fire play. Can you focus on that for the next couple of hours, or do we need to shift people around?" There was no judgment in his tone, but I felt guilty nonetheless.

“I’m fine. Maybe a little overwhelmed by everything that’s happened recently”—some of which he knew about and some not—“but I will be focused.” I took up my position while he laid his omega on the padded table and stroked his skin. Rowan shifted for a few minutes then went absolutely still, his eyes closing, breathing slowing.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes.” I crossed my arms over my chest and stood on the opposite side of the omega where my view would cover what his did not. “I know this is serious.”

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Echo

Once I arrived home, I texted Samuel. I felt like he would know if I waited until I got to my room. Home .

His response was immediate.

Thank you. I can relax now.

That definitely wasn't something you said to an acquaintance.

Having fun? I couldn't resist stringing on the conversation.

Not as much as I could be with you.

I made my way to my room and kicked off my shoes. You just met me, Samuel.

I unbuttoned my shirt and imagined the shadowy man I'd met tonight was doing it instead.

So? What are you doing right now?

Giggling, I sat on the end of the bed. Getting relaxed for the night.

Are you taking your clothes off, omega? Are you removing them slowly? Wishing someone else was doing it?

Was he here? How did he know? I glanced around the room, sure he was here. It was impossible, of course, but that didn't stop me from doing it.

I unbuttoned my shirt. That's all.

In a pause between texts, I changed into my pajamas and found myself smiling in the mirror as I brushed my teeth.

Don't tempt me, omega. I'm already regretting letting you get into a car without me.

I replied with a winky face. Maybe I needed some better flirting skills.

Getting into bed, I pulled the covers up to my chin. An hour or so later, just as I was dozing off, he texted me again.

I've decided to show you the rules of the club instead of telling them to you. Make sure you wear some club clothes.

That made me sit up in bed. Club clothes? What did he mean? So, not what I was wearing tonight?

He answered almost immediately. No. Do you not have club clothing? Hmm.

Hmm was right.

Do I need to go buy something?

I hit the back of my head against the headboard, feeling like the most naive person in the world. That, plus the fact that all of this over text had me groaning in embarrassment. I couldn't see his face or hear his tone. Samuel hadn't made fun of me or been demeaning in any way. Perhaps it was just my self-consciousness making

me feel so awkward.

I've got a better idea. I'll pick you up in the morning, and we can go shopping.

Sounds expensive, I replied.

It's on me. A gift.

Samuel, I've learned that nothing is free in this life. What's the catch?

Another long pause. There's no catch, Echo. I'm a very giving alpha.

My comforter tensed at those words. I would bet he was a generous alpha in bed.

What if you buy me clothes and I don't like the club.

Trust me, Echo. You will love it. See you in the morning. Nine sharp. Give me the address.

We texted a bit more before we said our good nights. The next morning, I woke early. Too nervous to eat breakfast. I'd tossed and turned some, thinking about Samuel, picking apart every interaction, so damned eager to see him again.

My wolf wanted to be near him. His hunger for Samuel was so deep, I could almost feel it in my human organs. I put on some jeans and a fitted T-shirt and shrugged at myself in the mirror. Samuel would probably show up in some hot-as-hell getup.

My heart beat hard in my chest as I headed downstairs.

And there I was, shaking like a leaf by the time I arrived on the ground floor. I was about to go on a shopping date with the most handsome man. He owned a sex club

which he would be taking me to that night.

We were going shopping for club clothes, whatever that meant.

I moved to the lobby, not expecting Samuel yet since I was early but instead, I found him sitting on a chair, arms out, looking as relaxed as I wished I was.

Standing a distance away, I took the time to absorb him like this, from afar. He wore something similar to me, dark jeans and a burgundy shirt, casual, but everything looked formal on him.

I watched as some males and females passed by him. Most gave him a second and third glance. He drew people in. Like a magnet. Me included.

His eyes darted to mine, almost as though he heard me talking about him. A smile grew on his face and my legs moved on their own, taking me toward him.

“Good morning,” I managed to croak out.

“It is now.” To my surprise, he wrapped me up in a hug. Turning my nose toward his neck, I inhaled deeply, taking in all his scent. My nervousness dissipated almost instantly.

“Should we go shopping?” I asked as we parted.

“I think there’s a greater need we should address first.”

My cheeks flooded with heat. “I...what need?”

Samuel laughed and stroked my cheek with one of his thumbs. “Oh, sweet omega. I’d love to know what thoughts are making you blush like that. In fact, I could probably

guess. And while I would love to indulge you, we have plans. By the way, I was talking about breakfast. I can feel your hunger.”

“Which one?” I asked. Damn, I was bold around this man.

“For food. You need to be strong for all the things we’re going to do today.” His tone emphasized the word all.

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Samuel

This omega needed to eat, and I knew just the place. “Do you like pancakes?”

He grinned at me, his smile lighting up his eyes. “I love them. All kinds. Do you know of a good place?”

“Yes.”

“Is it nearby?”

“Not near here but near the boutique we are going to afterward.” I reached for his hand and led him toward the curb where I’d been lucky enough to park. “You’ll love it.”

“I almost forgot the shopping. Maybe we should have something besides pancakes, or maybe at least I should.”

Opening his door, I paused. “Why is that?”

“Because I’m going to be all lumpy.”

I tugged him back to look at his face, trying to see if he was serious. A crinkle between his brows answered that. “From eating one meal, you’re going to break out in lumps? Does that usually happen?”

“Not break out. I mean, I’m going to be dressed in tight leather pants or a jumpsuit or

something, right?”

“Ah...did you want to wear that?” I didn’t know what to say. We were just going to spend the evening, and I wanted to buy him something nice to wear for that. Most of the subs wore almost nothing, but he wasn’t going to scene.

“Honestly? No, but I thought that was the dress code. I looked online and...”

I struggled with my laughter. “Some people do wear that, but it’s not extremely comfortable. Look, why don’t you just eat what you want for breakfast and we’ll make sure that whatever you wear, it doesn’t make you look lumpy.” I tipped his chin up and studied his eyes. “Deal?”

“Such a deal. Do you think they have pecan pancakes?”

“Omega, if they don’t, I’ll run to the market and get some so they can.”

And of course they had pecan pancakes. Judging from the yummy sounds I was hearing from across the table, they were good ones.

“Are you sure I don’t look...” Echo stood in front of the dressing room mirror, studying himself in of all things a pair of leather pants. They were gray, which I convinced him was a better choice than black. There was no rule against subs wearing black leather, but they didn’t. And if he was coming to scene, he wouldn’t be in the gray ones either. For a number of reasons, including how hard they were to get out of.

But he was turning back and forth, and the little smile tilting his lips confirmed he did not think he looked lumpy.

“Fishing for compliments, omega?” I handed him a silver T-shirt. “Put this on and

we'll see how you look."

"I'm not having good luck fishing?" He thrust his lower lip out in such a parody of a pout, it was all I could do not to pull him into my arms and kiss the stuffing out of him. "Kidding. Let me try the shirt."

I stepped outside the room to give him privacy, and the sales clerk came up beside me. "How's it going in there?"

Just then, the curtain slid aside, and I sucked in a breath.

The clerk applauded. "That's it. Don't you dare tell me you don't like it. You have to go with that outfit."

Considering it was at least the fifteenth one he'd tried on, the man couldn't be blamed for saying this even if he didn't like it, but there was no question. The shirt had a deep V that hinted at the firm musculature underneath. As he gave a turn, it was impossible not to see how the pants cupped his rounded buttocks. My mouth watered.

"I like it," he said. "No lumps at all."

No, the omega subbie had not one lump. Did he even know he was a sub? More importantly, did he know he was mine?

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Echo

I'd volleyed calls all day from my friends. They wanted pictures of the club. Proof of life, but really, they wanted proof that I'd gone. They did the same thing with the blowfish, of course. Pictures or it didn't happen.

"You are getting a lot of calls," Samuel chuckled as my phone vibrated once again. "We didn't talk about it. I guess I got my hopes up and assumed. You're not in a relationship or anything, are you, Echo?"

"No. What kind of omega would I be if I did all of this with you while seeing someone else?"

Samuel stepped closer as my ride pulled up. "I never thought anything bad about you. Trust me. But I wanted to make sure. Because after tonight, I'm not sure I will be able to give you up."

"You won't have to. Those are my friends. Remember the bucket list? They are needing proof."

Samuel chuckled, shaking his head. "I did forget about that. I got carried away with the idea of bringing you and showing you all the ways we could get naughty. Discovering what you like and what you don't like."

"You never did tell me what it is you're into."

The alpha growled. Not at me but at my boldness which seemed to run free when he

was around. I'd never been a bold omega. I didn't flirt with alphas at random or ask for their numbers. But this one? I wanted to pull him into the car with me—screw the club—and have him fuck me instead. His place. Mine. Didn't matter. "You'll find out tonight. Are you still fine for joining me for dinner, or are you tired?"

"I'm not tired at all."

"Good. Text me when you get home. I'll pick you up there. I have to get some things done before tonight. I'll see you at six."

I turned, but as I did, Samuel gripped my hips and turned me back around. "I forgot this," he murmured before pressing his lips to mine. I dropped the bags I was holding and wrapped my arms around his neck, turning my head to deepen the kiss.

I pulled away before I lost myself and said, "See you tonight."

But when I glanced at his groin, I could see that this alpha was already lost. And speechless. I waved goodbye and got into the car. A few miles down the road, I received a text.

That wasn't nice, omega. Leaving me in the street like that. You might be punished for that later.

My response was fast. Promise?

I arrived in the lobby early, trying to see if I could wait for him instead of the other way around, but Samuel walked in just as I arrived. There was something to be said about an alpha who arrived early. My fathers used to say that early was on time and on time was late.

Maybe Samuel's parents did as well.

“You’re early,” I said, feeling my cheeks rise in a smile. I’d been doing that all day, more than I had in quite a while.

“I am. I wanted to be here when you came down.”

I checked my watch. “Are we too early for dinner?”

He shook his head. “I’m sure we will be fine. The club isn’t open yet, so we have plenty of time to talk now. It’s a win in my book.”

“Mine too.”

We walked outside, hand in hand, and got into his sleek car. Not a cheap one but not flashy or overly expensive either. The inside was immaculate, and his smell filled the air in an instant. “Where are we going? Another one of your favorite places?”

He nodded and relaced his fingers through mine. “It is. I wanted to show you the city tonight. All that it has to offer.”

I bit my bottom lip. “I think I’m already looking at the best thing this city has to offer.”

Samuel grinned. “You are so flirty, omega. I love it. We’re going to an Italian place. This time, I don’t know the owner but I frequent it when I’m wanting to treat myself.”

I felt my cheeks flush. “Samuel, please don’t take me anywhere expensive. You already spent money on me all day. Breakfast. Lunch. Not to mention shopping.”

He turned to me as we stopped at a red light. “Echo, I’ve been waiting so long for you. Let me spoil you. It makes me happy.”

My heart soared. I had been waiting for an alpha to care for me as well. I had put that pursuit aside since the accident, but now, I was ready. I'd been ready for Samuel since the moment I met him. "Being with you makes me happy. Just know that a picnic in the park or a dinner at home is just fine with me. As long as you're there."

When we got to the restaurant, he made me wait for him to open the car door. When he closed it, he pressed me against the car and kissed me again. "That's for being sweet. Goddess, I don't want to take you in there. Everyone is going to see you looking beautiful. My wolf is getting very possessive of you."

My channel fluttered in response. Huh. That was a new thing. "It doesn't matter who else looks at me, alpha. I'm yours tonight."

"Just tonight?" he whispered, running his nose along the column of my neck. "Please tell me that you're mine for more than just tonight."

"Definitely more than just tonight. Come on. Feed this omega. I'm starving."

He chuckled and took me inside. The restaurant was small. The only lights were dimmed while single candles flickered on every table.

"Table for two?" the ma?tre d' asked.

"Yes, please. In the back, if you don't mind. We'd like our privacy."

The male in the suit smiled. "Of course. Right this way."

He led us to a table in the corner, tucked away from the rest.

"Should we order wine?" I asked, perusing the menu.

“Not yet,” Samuel said, running his hand farther and farther up my thigh underneath the table. “I want you 100 percent sober for tonight, Echo.”

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Samuel

Echo had sent the paperwork required for the cursory background check we always performed for guests. One of the requirements while they were there was that they would be accompanied by a member at all times, but if they wanted to apply for membership themselves, there was a much longer form to fill out.

Our members came from all walks of life, and many preferred that their choice of personal club not be made public. We had lawyers and doctors, teachers and the mayor. Even at least one person who wore the collar of a clergyman during the day. And their privacy was paramount. They counted on us to ensure it.

But I'd already heard from the membership department that he came through fine, with no red flags at all. Not that I'd expected any, but we'd had a few members asking to bring someone who turned out to be a gossip columnist or other tattler type. Even one undercover man of the cloth who wanted to preach to the kinksters.

We didn't need to check him out, though. Our regular clergyman recognized the name.

It was hard to believe I'd only met the omega the day before, but as we left the restaurant, I couldn't remember a time before him. Well, of course I could if I tried, but I didn't want to. My parents always said when you met your mate, it was like being hit by lightning, and you'd never be the same again.

Turned out, they were right, at least on my part. But did he feel the same? And how did I go about asking? My parents also said even with fated mates, free will played a

role. Even though they'd never met anyone who didn't choose to stay with the one Fate had matched them with.

"Dinner was just great," he enthused. "I'm starting to think there isn't a good place to eat in the city that you don't know about."

"I'm sure there are a ton, but having been in the restaurant industry in the past, I know some. Now, all ready for the main event?"

He shivered. "I thought I was, but when you put it like that it sounds just a little scary."

I took his arm and led him toward the car, shaking my head. "Aren't you the man who jumped out of a perfectly good airplane? Bungie jumped? Climbed the ropes at El Capitan?"

"Yes," he said, but his voice was very small. "I did those things."

"Then why does a casual visit to Cuffed, the club whose door you came banging on yesterday demanding admittance, scare you?"

"I didn't bang," he growled, making me glad to hear returning spirit in his tone. "I just came to see if I could go in and look around."

"Because we're on your bucket list." I opened the car door and helped him in, reached to pull the seat belt over his lap. "And, if I'm not mistaken, we are the final item."

"I probably shouldn't have ever told you that," he said, cheeks glowing with embarrassment. "Now you'll tease me about it forever."

I already, in fact, had my lips parted to tease him some more until he said that last word. Forever. And what I'd planned to say changed, in the time it took me to move around and get in the driver's side, to, "Are you planning to stay around forever?"

"I didn't mean...that is I just...I can't..." He cleared his throat and flicked a careful glance in my direction. "What time do you have to be at the club?"

I chuckled, appreciating his change of subject. If he wasn't ready to talk forever, I could wait. It was the most important thing in my life. If he didn't want to accept the gift of mating, what would I do?

Now I shivered.

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Samuel

We weren't very far from the club, only about a ten-minute drive, but the air in the car was thick with my mate's scent of sandalwood with a spark of citrus, maybe lime. Breathing was hazardous in that his scent had me harder than a telephone pole, and my heart thundering under my breast bone. If we didn't get out soon, I was going to do something most unlike an alpha or a dominant.

There was a parking lot behind the club, and one of the best things about being an owner was getting to park right there in the spot marked with my name. It was close enough to the covered back porch that I could hop out of the car on a rainy night and be inside before my hair frizzed. I hated when that happened, and I wasn't a big fan of using heavy amounts of product. I'd never thought I was vain, but my wolf had the best fur, thick and shiny, according to those who'd seen it, and sometimes it made me a little jealous. Not that I'd admit that to anyone.

"Wow, that's your name stenciled on the wall right there."

"Perk of ownership," I confirmed. "And usually I will go in the back door for convenience, but I'll have to take you around the front."

We entered the lobby and approached the desk there. "You'll need to turn over your phone," I reminded him. It had been in the paperwork I sent him with the rules of the club.

"Not you?" he asked.

“Not the owners,” I confirmed. “But you’ll never see me taking my phone out on the main floor to answer a call, much less snap a picture. Everyone’s privacy is valuable here, including yours.”

“I appreciate that,” he said. “I don’t know what I might be doing here if I’m ever lucky enough to come back, but I imagine my employers wouldn’t be thrilled to see it on the net.”

“And that also means if you see someone here who you recognize as a public figure or celebrity, you do not approach them and address them by name unless they introduce themselves. Some have club names, and they will use those. Others really don’t care if they are recognized, but until you know for sure, just smile and be polite. Address the alphas and dominants as such.”

“I am so going to screw up.”

“No, you aren’t. But stay right with me, and I can help you.” I led him through the various parts of the club, showing him where people gathered for conversation or observation, the bar—which was my domain and a point of pride—and finally on to the main floor where I looked around for something he might find interesting.

“Alpha, are you spanking this evening?” The little subbie appeared at my elbow, looking eager. “I am free if you need—”

“No.” I had spanked her once, and ever since then, she approached me every time. Her eagerness was exhausting, and I’d never repeated that first time, but it didn’t stop her from presuming. “I am here with a guest, observing.”

“If you’re sure?” she wheedled.

I fixed her with a stern glare. If she did not back off and act properly, there were

punishments. I feared she'd like most of them. "Go find the dungeon monitor and ask him to please lock you in the little cage for an hour. Do you know why?"

"I do." Her eyes lit up, and she danced away. Yes, she would like the punishment.

"A cage?" Echo sounded shocked. "That sounds awful."

"Not to her." I led him up to one of the spanking benches where another dominant was applying a flogger to the rosy bared cheeks of a bound submissive. I preferred not to tie my subs down, but sometimes it was necessary for safety reasons. Or perhaps the dom and/or sub liked it that way.

"Ooh." Echo's released breath told me everything I needed to know about whether this omega would want to try spanking. "This is what you like to do?"

"It is."

"Can I try it?"

"Next time." Although I would love to show him now, the benches were all occupied, and I thought it better for him to watch. By the time we'd done that for a couple of hours, he was squirming, and I was ready to toss someone aside and take over their bench. But things didn't work that way, and instead, I pulled him into my arms for a long searching kiss.

"Alpha, take me home with you? For the night?"

Samuel

We were still kissing as we exited the club via the employee entrance. No, it wasn't strictly allowed, but anything that added time between Cuffed and home was a minute too much. He clung to my shoulders, allowing me to guide him to the car and help him inside. The kitchen had no doubt been busy at this time of night, but nobody had said anything to us... Although, with my omega's tongue tangling with mine and his hands on me, I might not have noticed if they had. They certainly would not have chided me on breaking the rules. Yet another ownership perk. One of my co-owners might say something later, but I'd deal with that then.

I reached over and caught the end of Echo's seat belt, pulled it across him, and clicked it closed. This omega was too precious to risk his safety. Closing the door, I tried to slow my racing heartbeat. I was in no state to drive until I regained control of my body and mind. My heart was already lost to him, but it didn't have charge of the car, fortunately. Remaining where I stood, I took deep breaths of the cool night air. I'd need to be a lot more together before I risked getting into the small space where pheromones would threaten my sanity. Windows down, though, might help a little.

"You forgot this." Talon's deep voice cut into my erotic fog. "On your way out the back door with your guest."

I listened for judgment but heard none as I turned to see what we'd forgotten. Our common sense maybe? At least mine. There I was, taking Echo around the club, showing him things and trying to be a dispassionate guide when there was little or no hope of that happening.

“Samuel?” He studied my face with a narrowed gaze. “Should you be driving?”

“Not yet.” I let out a forced laugh. “That’s why I’m standing here.”

“I get it. When I met my mate, I forgot everything but my name.”

“I’m George, right?” I quipped then shook my head. “How do you cope? Does the intensity wane so you can focus on other things? I mean, we haven’t even been to bed yet, and I’m a wreck. My wolf is demanding we mark him now.”

“The animals are smart. They have no conflict where mates are concerned. Actually, in most cases, they know the route to take. You should listen to him.”

“It’s not entirely up to me, you know.” I glanced into the car where Echo was watching us. How much could he hear through the closed window? “What if he doesn’t want me?”

“Aren’t you taking him home with you? Doesn’t look like a kidnapping to me.”

“No, it’s not. He is in for tonight, but I can’t mark him just because he lets me take him to bed.”

He snorted. “No, you sure couldn’t. Except, the connection between you is so strong my wolf is getting excited. That said, you know you could take him to one of the new private rooms upstairs if you are concerned about driving.”

I considered the idea, but my wolf had a fit. He wanted him in his den. Preferably permanently. “Thanks, that’s another benefit of ownership I suppose? Using a private room without a reservation?”

“Only if it’s available. We won’t throw members out, of course, but somehow it

seems that there's usually one open when we need it."

"Maybe next time. My wolf wants him in his den. I want him in my home. And the time we've been talking has really helped to calm things down. I just won't let him touch me."

"Good choice. Also, open the car windows."

I nodded. "Already thought of that. Hey, didn't you say I forgot something?"

"Oh, right." Talon reached into his pocket and pulled out a phone. "When I heard you were taking the back exit, I grabbed this from the lobby lockers."

"Yeah, I know I shouldn't do that. Guests use the front door."

"But mates of owners use any door they like." He put the phone in my hand and slapped me on the shoulder then gave a wave to the omega in the passenger seat. "Drive safe and remember communication is everything."

"Usually it's a lot easier to remember, but I will. This is too important to mess up." I blinked. "What if I mess it up?"

Talon walked away, chuckling. He stopped at the doorway where his omega waited. As soon as he did, he slipped an arm around Rowan and the omega leaned in to him. "Samuel?"

"Yes?"

"You asked about intensity?" He grinned at me then looked down at his omega, eyes flaring with fire a dragon would envy. "What do you think, omega mine? Are things getting less intense after a few years?"

Rowan never looked away from the firemaster. “No. Just the opposite.”

“Since Samuel and his omega don’t want the private room...what do you say?”

“The babysitter is paid for the whole night, alpha.” They went inside and closed the door behind them, and I went around and got into the driver’s seat.

“Ready to go home?”

“They even have a family?” Echo asked. “And they’re still ready to burn up the sheets?”

“Every chance they get. I know I asked him about it, but I really didn’t have to. If the two of them, and the other owners and their mates, are any example, matings really are everything I’ve ever heard and more.”

“Wow. I guess so.”

“How much of our conversation did you hear?” I reached out and ran a finger down his cheekbone.

“All of it. Do you really think I’m your mate?”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you have to agree.” I had never made such a courageous statement in my life. I couldn’t draw air in my lungs waiting for his response to that. If he wasn’t sure, I’d wait, even if it killed me. If he said no...I felt like it would.

“You are my fated, my true mate I’ve waited my whole life for. Even before I realized I did. Will you mark me tonight?” He flushed. “I mean, if you want to.”

“If you did hear all of that, you know I do. But if we’re going to get home safely, no

touching until we are parked in the garage. Deal?”

“Yes, deal.” He pushed himself as far away as the seat allowed. “Ready to go.”

Somehow, we managed to get there without pulling over and doing the deed on the side of the road. It wasn't far, but it felt as if it were. With all the windows down and the moon roof open, he still smelled incredible, and every breath, every laugh, every word he said no matter how ordinary was an incitement.

My home was another purchase from my inheritance. I had bought a two-story house as close to what I wanted as I could find then made some renovations to finish it up. I came around the car and helped Echo out then led him through the darkened kitchen and up to my room. We began kissing again at the bottom of the stairs, and by the time we got to the top, our clothing littered the steps and we were naked. I hadn't turned on any lights so far because shifter sight made it easy to see where we were going, but once I laid him on the bed, I turned on the nightstand lamp.

His skin glowed in the lamplight, and I took a moment to memorize how he looked at this moment, before we made love for the first time. Before the mating and marking. Trailing my lips along his jaw, I sucked gently at the skin on the side of his throat where I would leave my mark. “You're sure you want this, omega?” It was irreversible, and I had to ask one more time, even if there was only one answer my wolf and I would survive.

“More than anything in my life.” He shifted restlessly under me as I explored his body with lips and tongue and teeth, hands and fingertips. Such soft skin over such toned muscles.

“But before we do, I would like to try something.”

“What is it?” His voice was breathless. “Anything.”

“Never say ‘anything’ to a dominant. Before we try real play, we’ll need to have a lot of conversation, but for tonight, maybe just a taste of spanking?” It was a big part of who I was, and I wanted him to experience that side of me. Give him one more chance to back out if he didn’t want me anymore.

“Tonight, at the club, I heard all those people talking about your mastery of the art.”

“People who will never experience it again,” I pointed out. “If we are mated.”

“Show me what will be mine.”

I nearly came on the spot. “All right.” I sat up and patted my lap. “Climb on.”

He never hesitated, merely stood up and bent over, allowing me to guide him into position. His bottom stuck up into the air, smooth and tempting, and I rested my palm on its coolness.

“Have you even been spanked before? I mean as an adult.”

“Not even as a child,” he confirmed. “You’ve got virgin ass cheeks there.”

My cock was rock-hard, jutting into his belly. But he was hard, too, and I took that as a positive sign when, after establishing a safe word, I began to warm his skin with firm strokes. If his moan at the first sharp swat was any indication, it would be the first of many satisfying sessions here and, if he consented, at the club as well. I peppered his backside with spans meant for pleasure and not pain, his skin pinkening under my palm. Working from down to his sit spot and the tops of his thighs, I demonstrated where he could expect my spanking to land in future. Handprints merged into a smooth, pale-red glow before I stopped to check his slick.

“Omega, you are so ready for me.” And as much as I was enjoying this, we had

business to attend to.

“Mmm?” He glanced over his shoulder, eyes glazed, and I shuddered. “I’m so close, alpha.”

Reaching for his cock, I gave it a squeeze then another. The angle was a little awkward, so I rolled him over facing up and continued to jerk him off, watching his expression change from dazed to wide-eyed. “Come whenever you’re ready, omega.”

“Then now.” His cum spurted into the air like a thick, warm waterfall, coating my hand and his belly. I should clean him up, but I had no time for that. Lifting him, I laid him on the edge of the bed, pushed his knees to his chest, and buried myself deep in his slick, hot channel. I stroked deep and fast, too close myself to wait, to give him the long fucking he deserved, but I would make up for that later. This was about joining us for life. Hopefully he’d remember it fondly despite my teenagery rush to fulfillment. I poured deep inside him, my knot swelling instantly, then I bent to sink my teeth into the spot where I’d licked earlier. Marking him inside and out as mine. Fate’s great gift, the other half of my soul.

When my knot shrank, I pulled him to me in a close embrace. “Sleep, omega mine.”

“Yours,” he mumbled, eyes closed, snuggling into me. “Always yours.”

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Echo

I woke to complete darkness, thirsty and at the same time, needing to use the bathroom.

“What is it?” Another voice resounded from behind me. At first, I was confused about where I was. I knew it wasn’t my place.

The one thing I did know was that voice. “I need to use the restroom and get some water. Can we put a lamp on?” Even with my enhanced shifter sight, I couldn’t see through this utter blackness.

“Of course.” The bed dipped a bit and then a soft light clicked on. “Sorry about that. I sleep late after staying at the club most of the night. Need to block out the sun.”

“It’s okay.” I walked to the bathroom and used the facilities. His bathroom was pristine. Even the faucet gleamed.

“Here,” he said after I got out and shut off the light behind me. “Some water.”

We stood there, facing each other. The light shone behind him, making him seem ethereal. I wholeheartedly expected wings to appear behind him—some wickedly sexy angel. “Good morning,” I said after taking a few sips. “What time is it?”

We were naked, our cocks jutting out between us. Flashbacks of the night before fluttered through my mind. The spanking display. The way he’d held me, gripping me tighter with each impact of the other couple. His hot breaths on the back of my neck.

I hadn't realized spanking could be so erotic but with Samuel, it was scorching hot to view—I would bet even sexier to experience.

“About seven. What are you thinking about?” he asked, stepping toward me, our swords crossing in the most delicious way.

“Last night. That was one hell of a display.”

He nodded, and his gaze dipped to my lips. “Perhaps one day, it will be you and me. I didn't hurt you last night, did I?”

He hadn't spanked me with anything but his hand. And while he was strong and I felt the sting of his palm against my ass more than once, it was nothing compared to the pleasure it brought with it. “No. It was just enough, alpha.”

“Mmm.” He ran his thumb across my bottom lip. “You'll let me know if it's too much, won't you? I would never want to hurt you unless you were enjoying it.”

Nodding, I leaned forward, resting my head on his chest. “We have the safe word.”

“Yes, we do,” he whispered into my hair. He kissed my head a few times, stroking my back with tiny circles. “Are you hungry?”

I moaned, pressing my body into his. “Yes.”

“For food, my love. Let's get you fed and then we can take care of that other hunger as well. Did you want a shower first?”

I nodded. Samuel led me to his shower and we washed each other with care. It went beyond sex. Other than making love, it was the most intimate experience.

Being with Samuel was a bucket list all its own.

“What do you like to eat?” He laughed. “I’m learning your body and you, but I have no idea how my little wolf takes his coffee. I want to learn all of those things about you. What makes you tick.” He said all of this while drying me off with a fluffy black towel. Because of course his towels were black.

“A splash of cream. And I don’t really like sweet breakfasts.”

“Eggs? Bacon? How does that sound?”

I laughed and pulled on a pair of sweatpants he offered me, sans boxers. “Sounds fantastic. What can I do?”

We went into the kitchen together and, while I hadn’t noticed the night before, Samuel’s kitchen was a chef’s dream. Viking stove with six burners. Marble for days. Everything organized and yet minimal. “This place is great.”

He nodded. “Thank you. It’s a lot for one person, but I was holding out hope that I would find my mate one day. That I would find you. Now, a very important question. Are you opposed to toast?”

I snorted. “I’m not that big a snob. Toast is fine. Lots of butter but none of that jelly or honey business.”

“Goddess forbid.” He chuckled. He popped some bacon into the oven and prepared eggs with cottage cheese and shredded cheese on top. He slid some sourdough into a fancy toaster.

“The club must be lucrative. Your home is amazing.”

He turned around, and I knew I'd struck a nerve. I hadn't meant to but as my mate's irises grew darker, it was there. "My grandfather died and left me an inheritance. Everything. I invested in the club and bought this place."

"I'm so sorry." I wrapped my arms around him and soothed him physically and through the bond. "I didn't mean to make you confess that."

"Not a confession, mate. I wanted to tell you. I would've. I'm glad it was brought up." He lifted his hand to touch the mating mark on my shoulder. "I never met him. My parents went rogue and left the pack behind."

We ate our food in silence. He cooked everything to perfection. I had a feeling he would. He was precise and controlled in everything he did. "Could I persuade you to stay with me another night?" he asked.

"You could. But I have to be at work in the morning."

"That's okay. I'll drive you back."

"Not necessary."

"No but I want to."

"Sounds good. I can come up for the weekends or maybe in the middle of the week." As I made the plans, my stomach sank as I grew anxious even thinking about being away from him. Mates, shifter mates, once they found each other didn't part ways. They usually rushed things and moved right in. But Samuel had his job, and I had mine. Even if we started a family, I wanted to work and contribute to the household.

"I'll come and see you at your home. We will make it work."

I pushed my plate away, sated by the food but not even close to being sated by my mate. “How, oh how, should we work off that meal?”

“I don’t know. A walk?” he said, sidling over to me.

“Hmm, that would require a shirt and shoes. That won’t do. Any other ideas?”

“I have a few.” He picked me up and carried me to the bedroom where we expended all those calories and more.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Samuel

“You don’t have to do this publicly,” I said for at least the fifth time. “The first real spanking can be pretty intense for some people.”

We’d made love a number of times, but only the one spanking the first night. And now, here we were, at the club, in front of many people, all of whom seemed to know it was his first time for a true bench experience. Our little session at home did not truly take his spanking virginity; at least it wouldn’t have by most of their definition.

“I want to,” he insisted. “We’ve already talked about this. And I’m already laid out like a turkey dinner.”

We were at one of the spanking stations, and Echo lay over the bench. He was naked, hands tied over his head and ankles to the other end of the bench. In future, I might not do this, but it was too easy for a newbie to move suddenly and end up spanked or flogged in a place we did not want to go. Too high on the back could end up harming the sub’s kidneys; too low, and their balls were right there fully exposed. Not that they might not get some sort of attention, but it had to be careful and deliberate.

A small crowd gathered around us, and I felt unaccountably nervous. Me. The one who gave demos and showed how it was done. But it had never been with someone I loved before, and I also felt a twitch of possessiveness. His body was mine—and I hadn’t been anxious to share it, but he wanted this. And judging from the way he lay so comfortably, my omega had a bit of exhibitionist in him. I could deal with that as long as nobody but me touched him while he was like this.

And nobody would. The DM stood guard to ensure my orders were followed. To keep everyone outside the marked lines of the station and their hand to themselves. I leaned down and whispered, “Ready?”

“Yes, alpha.” He had been instructed to call me alpha or sir at the club, as was respectful, and hearing it from his lips had me hard every time. “I am ready, sir.”

He was killing me.

I began with warming him up, first with firm rubbing then light pats that worked up to the level of spanks I’d given him on our mating night. His breathing was a little ragged already, and I reminded him, “In and out, omega. Deep breaths, slow...don’t forget to breathe.”

I hadn’t decided whether to proceed beyond just the use of my hands, wanting to watch his reactions, but they were everything I could wish for, and I reached into my toy bag for a paddle I’d had made just for tonight. Just for him. I laid it on his hot skin, the pale wood against the redness the hottest thing I’d seen tonight. “I’m going to give you ten strokes of the paddle.”

“Yes, sir.” Oh my Goddess. I’d been called sir by a lot of omegas and never reacted this way. Sex happened here all the time, and nobody would mind or be surprised if I opened my pants and fucked him, but I wasn’t ready to share that part of our lives yet, and maybe never would be.

Instead, I lifted the paddle and said, “Count them off.”

“One.” The crack of wood against taut skin echoed in a room that had become very quiet around us. Had everyone stopped their play to watch? I’d deliberately chosen a midweek day when it was less crowded for his first experience here, but there were dozens on hand. “Two.”

Each swat was a bit harder than the one before, and the last raised welts. But he never safe worded. Never cried out. Just moaned and whimpered and took what I had to give.

“Ten.” And with that, he burst into sobs, shaking like a leaf.

I untied him and lifted him into my arms, carrying him and my bag to the conversation area where I found a quiet corner for aftercare. I cuddled him close while he cried as if his heart would break. Then, when he settled a bit, I turned him over my lap but not for a spanking. I applied ointment to his bottom, which still glowed red. The welt had already begun to recede, and nothing I had done should be making him cry from pain.

No...spankings had a magical ability with some people to release years of emotion. Of mental pain or other kinds, and all I could do was let him let it out. Still, knowing that didn't make it any easier to see those tears. Sure, he'd feel better afterward, cleansed even, but I hated that he'd had all that locked inside him to start with. It made me want to find anyone responsible and shred them with claws and fangs.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Echo

The drive home was a blur of emotion and tears. Samuel said nothing. He held my hand. Rubbed my back and my thigh, but the silence was all I needed. Once we got back to his place, he came around the front and pulled me out of the car, even unbuckling my seat belt.

“I’m sorry,” I muttered, or tried to, through the sobs as he unlocked the electric dead bolt and let us in.

“There’s no need for you to apologize, mate. That often happens, especially with a first spanking.”

“It wasn’t the first.” I stopped as he scooped me up with one hand under my knees and another around my back. He set me on the sofa gently.

“No, but it was the first real one.”

I put my hand up and pulled him down to sit on the couch beside me. “Please. Sit with me. There’s something I need to explain to you.”

He sat down next to me, and I almost began crying again, the emotions so close to the surface. “I don’t really know what happened tonight, but, some things from my past flooded back.”

“What things? Can you tell me?”

We held each other for a moment. I knew I would have to tell him, but it never was the right time to crack open your chest and spill your guts. Sometimes when I told the story, it seemed so silly. I almost drowned. I didn't. It was one time. The entire ordeal lasted less than twenty minutes.

But none of that self-loathing talk took away the panic attacks—only running did that. The thing was, now that I had Samuel, I didn't want to run anymore.

And that scared me the most.

“A few years ago, I was in an accident. I was sailing with my friend. He had a boat, and we thought the weather was fine. Kendall and I had both checked it. He said he knew what he was doing. He was the owner of the boat, after all.”

“A boyfriend?” Samuel asked, and I was surprised the question wasn't coupled with a growl. He was an alpha. Alphas were possessive over their mates. From Samuel, I didn't mind.

“No. Just a friend. We stayed out later than planned and, before we knew it, the sun had set and we were only halfway back. The water got choppy. The waves were nonexistent during the day and then, out of nowhere, they were splashing over the rails. I held on as tight as I could, helping Kendall, but...”

I paused, stricken with the same fear I felt that night.

“Take your time, Echo. I can feel your fear and your pain through the bond. I know this isn't easy.”

“It's not, but I want you to know.”

I took a few long, deep breaths as Samuel pushed comfort and love into the bond. His

calm washed over me time and time again until I let myself submit to it. “I fell overboard. Hit my head on a buoy. The water was so cold and dark, I couldn’t see anything but the moon up above as blackness took over.”

“How long were you under?” he asked.

“I don’t know. I was maybe ten feet down by the time the adrenaline hit me and I swam to the surface. Kendall was yelling for me, and he pulled me back onto the boat. I’ve been running from that pain, that night, ever since.”

Samuel sat up. Something had clicked. “The bucket list?”

I nodded. “The bucket list. Those things took up my time and gave me something to run toward for a long time. Until the club.”

“And me.”

I nodded and swiped my face of the last of my tears. The weight was lifted. My mate knew about my trauma, no matter how small it was compared to other things people had gone through.

But the truth was, I could’ve died that night.

And I would never take life for granted again.

“How does that relate to tonight? Did your spanking bring up some pain?”

I shrugged. “You didn’t hurt me—well, not more than I wanted you to. There was something about being there. So raw and open—my pain visible. I don’t know. That last strike, it opened a dam inside me. All my emotions came flooding to the surface when I’d successfully pushed them down for so long.”

“Sweetheart, I’m so sorry you went through such a traumatic experience.”

“I’ve been holding onto it for so long. I needed to share it with you and now...now I think I can let it go.”

“It might not just be the one time. Don’t ever feel like you have to hold back when those emotions come up. It’s a release.” He covered my body with his, taking my mouth in a way that made me feel so wanted and safe and secure. When he looked down at me, I could see the love he had for me. “You are so brave. So perfect, omega. I’m sorry you went through that.”

“Me too. I...” We hadn’t said this before. “I love you, Samuel.”

“And I love you. Every day, I love you more.”

“I feel so free.” I laughed. “I’m already eager to go again, even if it does make me blubber like a baby. I love that it’s something you and I share. That you and I have that bond but, right now, I’m wanting you to take me to bed. Please.”

“Are you sure?” he asked while kissing my neck. “You aren’t too tired?”

“I want to replace all that negativity I let out with something good.”

Samuel

I couldn't believe it. Things had moved so fast since I met my mate, and moving in was definitely the next logical thing to do, but I feared the change would be painful. Echo had told me how proud he'd been to move into his own place and support himself all on his own.

"Echo, I'd like to ask you to move in with me," I said one night over dinner at the taqueria. "But if you'd rather, and if you actually want to live with me, I could move into your apartment." I'd been there overnight a few times, and it was nice, just a whole lot smaller and farther from the club. It was closer to his place, though, and more convenient for his work.

"You want me to move in?" He sounded a little surprised.

"We are mates, after all." I kissed his forehead. "Mates usually live under one roof."

"That's true. I just didn't...I guess I expected it to take longer to get to this point. I work with more humans than shifters and I watch a lot of TV. They take forever to get anywhere in a relationship." He paused. "But we are really there."

"Agreed. So, your place or mine?"

Salma brought our plates and we waited while she set them on the table and moved away. We both had our "usual" order now. Mine the hotter, his the asada, and we split the order of beans and rice. As soon as we came in, Amos started on our orders.

We took a few bites of food before continuing. It was as delicious as always, and the older couple watched us from the kitchen doorway with fond smiles. “I feel like we are under observation,” he murmured. “Should I make a face at them?”

I laughed. “I have a better idea.” Waving them over, I put an arm around my omega. “We have an announcement to make, and we wanted you two to be the first to know.”

“What is it, mijo?” Salma looked from one of us to the other. “It sounds like good news.”

“I think so. We are going to move in together in...”

“In Samuel’s home,” Echo confirmed. “Mine is too dinky for the two of us and doesn’t have a Viking stove.”

“Oh, this is a celebration!” Salma clapped her hands. “We need a pitcher of margaritas right away,” she called to the bartender. “Our boys are making a home together.”

And wasn’t that exactly the best way to say it? We were making a home together. That night, we drank and ate and laughed, Salma and Amos spending as much time at the table as their customers allowed, and by the time we were done, there was no question of driving home. Not by either of us. We left my car at the club and called a rideshare.

The next morning, Echo groaned. “Amos’ bartender must be costing him a fortune with those heavy pours. My head is pounding. Aren’t you hungover?”

“Not really. I don’t usually get hangovers, but I do know the only solution for one.”

“Not one of those awful tomato juice, hot sauce, and raw egg concoctions?” He

clapped a hand over his mouth and paled. "I'm gonna hurl."

"No, you aren't." I hopped out of bed and reached for his hand. "Come on." Leading him to the back door, I stepped out on the porch, but he held back.

"We're naked."

"You don't hate that at the club."

"Actually at the club, I am naked and you aren't. I don't want people staring at my alpha. You're all mine." He groaned again. "So, where is this hangover cure?"

I chuckled. "Possessive omega." I didn't hate that he was. "We're going to shift and run."

"Shifting helps? I mean, I know it can heal wounds and stuff, but too much tequila?"

"So I've heard. Like I said, I don't get hangovers, so I can only go on hearsay. But it's worth a try, isn't it? Or I can go see if I have any tomato juice and eggs?"

Instead of answering, he shifted, going from a hot pale omega to a gorgeous gray wolf. Despite my joking about not minding being naked here, I had bought this house because it sat at an angle where no other house's occupants could see into the backyard. It also came up against a wilderness area perfect for running. I shifted as well and raced toward the opening in the fence disguised by a large shrub. We ran side by side over the ground, passing trees and boulders, leaping over streams and rolling together down a grassy slope. If Echo had any trace of a hangover left, I saw no sign of it.

It had taken us a while to introduce our wolves, but now that we had, I predicted we'd be spending a lot more early mornings and late evenings in our fur together. My wolf

was ecstatic at the prospect.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Echo

“Welcome to the Briarwood hotel. Are you checking in today?” A sweet older couple came in, hand in hand. The woman smiled, but it took her and her husband a good bit to actually reach the counter.

“We are checking in. It’s under Tuttel.” Her voice was soft but musical. It immediately made me think she was a grandmother who baked cookies and cakes for everyone.

“I see. A reservation for three days. There are freshly baked cookies and coffee over there on the counter and here are your keys. Enjoy your stay.”

“Thank you, dear. And congratulations. You’re absolutely glowing.”

I clicked out of the reservation and smiled at her, but her words didn’t immediately register. They began to walk toward the stairs and I stopped them. “Excuse me. Congratulations on what?”

The man, her husband, patted her on the arm and whispered something in her ear.

“Nonsense, Jimmy. If I don’t tell him, he’s going to find out eventually.” She turned to me. “What I meant was congratulations. You’re expecting. We had seven children ourselves. They are such a blessing.”

They walked away, but I stayed put. How did she know? I had suspected something was up with me, and after a few weeks put two and two together and realized what

was going on but with our sometimes conflicting schedule, I hadn't brought it up yet.

Good thing tonight was date night. But first, I had to make sure.

"Do you mind if I leave a few minutes early?" I asked my manager.

"No problem. We're pretty slow, and you always come in early. Go on. Have fun with that man of yours."

Samuel had come to pick me up at the hotel a few times, and boy did I hear about it the next day. Everyone thought he was handsome and sexy, but not nearly as much as I did.

I stopped by the pharmacy and bought one of each kind of test, just in case. If I was going to tell him tonight, then I wanted to be absolutely positive. This wasn't small news. This was life-changing, earth-shaking news.

I had to be sure. Returning to the hotel, I went into the employee lounge and used the restroom there to take the tests.

I had to wait until the large water I drank took effect. Samuel called me and asked if I was on my way.

"I'm leaving in ten minutes." While my mate didn't care if I was punctual or not, I did. After a quick shower, I was ready to take the tests. I lined them up on my counter while I got dressed. Nervously, I checked myself in the mirror and packed up a bag, counting down the seconds until my life changed—or didn't.

The thing was, my wolf already knew. There was a pup inside me.

Still, this human brain of mine needed to see for itself.

In the bathroom, I loomed over the tests, reading each one. Some had lines. Some had words. But they all said the same thing.

I was pregnant. Samuel's pup was in my belly.

Now to tell my mate.

By the time I got home, I was shaking. My overthinking and nervousness had gotten the better of me and I wished we were going to the club so he could spank it out of me.

"What's the matter, Echo?" he asked as soon as I got out of the car. "Talk to me, mate."

"Let's go inside. I have something to tell you."

His brow drew downward, and his smile turned to a frown. "You're scaring me."

"Nothing scary. Well, maybe? I'm not sure."

We walked inside and he took my bag from me, tossing it on the couch. "Echo?"

I took his hands in mine. I would have to blurt it out or risk losing my nerve. "A woman walked into the hotel today. She said congratulations and that I was glowing. I asked her what she meant. She said, you're expecting, of course."

Samuel sucked in a breath and didn't look like he was going to let it out.

"So, that got me thinking. I mean, I think a part of me already knew. My wolf did. But I went by the pharmacy anyway to check."

“And?” He already had tears brimming in his eyes. “Echo? And?”

“And there’s a pup inside me. Your pup.”

Samuel instantly fell to his knees in front of me. “Omega mine. You’re pregnant?”

“I am.” The tears fell out of my eyes as he pressed his head to my stomach.

“Are...are you happy?”

He tipped his chin upward and wrapped his arms around my butt. “You’ve made me the happiest alpha alive. You did that before you were pregnant. But now? We’re going to be a family.”

“We are. I was so nervous coming over. I didn’t know. We didn’t talk about it. We didn’t discuss having a family or any of that.”

“You are my mate. I expected this would happen sooner or later. Wait, Echo, are you happy? You are asking me if I’m happy, but are you? This wasn’t exactly on your list.”

I laughed, throwing my head back as he stood. “I’ve never been happier. I have you. I have our babe in my stomach. What else could I ask for?”

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Samuel

“I know you said you weren’t in a rush to see a healer, but when I told Jabez about the baby, he insisted on stopping by to give you a quick going over.”

“Well, doesn’t that make me sound like a car or something?” He huffed out a breath. “A going over, really?”

I shrugged. “Or you could wait until next time you go to the club and let him pull you into the medical play room for a public exam.”

His eyes grew wide. “You are kidding, right? A public exam? Is that what goes on in there?”

I finished making the bed and fluffed the pillows. “What did you think? I mean, it’s not all that goes on, but it’s a popular activity. And one, I must admit, that Jabez doesn’t indulge in.”

“He doesn’t like exams?” Echo looked puzzled, one hand rubbing circles on his still-flat belly.

“I imagine he likes them okay, but it’s not a kink for him.”

“No, I guess if you do it all day, it’s work.” He headed into the bathroom and emerged wearing a towel around his waist.

I surveyed the room for neatness and went over to put away a few pairs of freshly

washed socks from the nightstand. Somehow laundry was always getting away from me, but I didn't know how they ended up there. At least they were clean. "Okay, I think it looks all right in here."

"It's fine, but why...ohhh. I get it. We're playing doctor up here."

"Not playing doctor. This is..."

The doorbell rang at that moment, and I left Echo upstairs getting dressed and went down to answer it. He'd soon be undressing again, but I didn't bother to point that out. He was being pretty cooperative, and I appreciated that.

I opened the door to admit our community healer carrying a very traditional-looking little black doctor's bag. He did not play at medical kink, as I'd said, but what he did do, as an owner, among other tasks, was first aid. In a club where there was a certain level of edging, it was a needed thing. Fortunately, nearly all our members were shifters, meaning, they could under most circumstances shift and heal, but an experienced healer on hand could make a difference. "Welcome, Jabez. It's nice of you to make a house call."

"Well, you mentioned that Echo wasn't crazy about getting a healer right now, so I came over to see if I could encourage him to start his care now. As long as everything is going okay, there's not a lot to do besides monitor him, but it's important to be sure, as soon as possible."

"I didn't think shifters got as much prenatal care as humans, but this is sounding like it."

"Most don't, but that doesn't mean it's a bad idea. How has he been feeling?"

We headed up the stairs to the bedroom as we spoke, and when we got there, it was to

find my omega wearing just a pair of undershorts. He looked hot but also a little disgruntled. “I decided not to bother getting dressed.”

“Hi, Echo, I thought we’d talk before the exam. But why don’t we do it the opposite way so you can be dressed and feel more comfortable for our discussion.”

“Do you need me to leave?” I asked, even though my wolf was protesting the very idea, hard.

“Up to Echo,” Jabez said. “Some alphas try to control the appointments, but as far as I’m concerned, the omega is carrying the child and he’s the boss where pregnancy matters are concerned.”

“I couldn’t agree more.” I went over and patted my omega’s shoulder. “He knows that, too. What do you say, omega mine? Can I stay?”

“Of course, alpha. I’m going to need you to help me remember any details or instructions. Suddenly, being pregnant feels very complicated.”

“And I haven’t even talked to you yet.” Jabez offered him a friendly smile. “Lie back and relax. I’m going to start with taking your vitals.”

I settled in a chair across the room to give the healer space to do his job. He examined my omega with such respect and care, my wolf never even protested another alpha touching our omega. Jabez had a real gift of bedside manner, I noted, as he asked Echo questions, listened to his answers, and made helpful recommendations.

After he finished, Echo got dressed while I led Jabez downstairs to the kitchen for tea and conversation. My omega came in and sat down, picking up a cookie and taking a bite. “And?” he asked. “Am I normal?”

“No,” Jabez said, “as I am sure your alpha will agree, you are extraordinary. But everything is fine with both you and the baby, as long as you don’t eat too many cookies.” He helped himself to another. “These are delicious.”

Since I’d baked them myself, and was the alpha father of the baby in question, I beamed with pride.

Echo

Week thirty-eight of this pregnancy could be summed up in one word—discomfort. Samuel and Jabez, mostly Jabez, had insisted I take the last two weeks of my pregnancy off, not because anything was wrong but because standing that long at the hotel desk was proving exhausting.

Plus, I had a full-time job feeding this pup inside me.

“I need cheese,” I exclaimed but paused, determining the best way to roll off the couch and get to the refrigerator.

“Let me,” Samuel said. He’d come in right at the second I’d professed my need for dairy. He had impeccable timing in all things.

“You don’t have to,” I pouted, but contrary to my statement let myself roll back to comfort like a beached whale. Saying things like that was only allowed in my mind. Samuel said mates didn’t let mates talk badly about themselves.

Still, sometimes it slipped out.

He came over and kissed my forehead and gave my belly a bit of a rub. “But I like to. Snack plate, or do you want the block?” He chuckled. Yes, a few days ago, I’d stood in front of the fridge and bitten into a block of cheese. Was I ashamed? No.

Would I do it again? Absolutely.

“I want a fancy plate. You make the best snack plates.”

“Okay, but only a small one. And to go. I have a surprise for you.”

“What is it?”

“I bought you an outfit, and we have to leave in about an hour.”

I groaned. Nowadays, I needed a two-hour buffer on all outings. Maybe three.

“Where are we going?”

“To the club.” My mate came back with a small plate of snacks and a bag in his other hand.

“I’m too big, Samuel. No one wants to see a manatee get spanked.”

“None of that, omega. And there’s not going to be any spanking. I have a surprise.”

I devoured my snack while he showed me what he’d purchased. “That’s going to show my whole belly, Sam,” I protested. “I’m not feeling so beautiful right now if you haven’t noticed.”

“But you are.”

“It will ride up. No way that shirt is covering this belly.”

“You’re hurting my feelings, mate. I bought this for you.” Complete with a pouty bottom lip.

“Oh, that was low,” I laughed.

“I know. I’m sorry not sorry. Come on. I’ll help you get dressed.”

Not long later, since Samuel was helping me, we made our way out and to the club. It was during the day, so I wasn’t sure what the surprise was, but my tummy fluttered with nerves about it.

“This way,” Samuel said, and I knew from being here enough that he was leading me to the meeting room. If this alpha, no matter how much I loved him, brought me here for a meeting, there would be trouble.

Not really, but my hormones were making me feel tough.

When we walked into the room, it was dark until Samuel flipped the lights on and I heard, “Surprise!”

I stepped back, hand on my heart, and gasped.

A surprise shower.

That was what he had been doing all day.

All the owners and their omegas were there. Even some of my friends, including Zack and Kendall.

“Samuel wanted you to have a shower. We have one for all the omegas,” Talon said.

“Thank you so much,” I said. It certainly was a surprise. Samuel and I had bought everything we needed for the baby, but our friends loaded us up with things I hadn’t even thought of. A chest-feeding pillow. Gadgets that they swore by.

Even some things for after the birth for me to be more comfortable.

They'd thought of everything and more.

"This is why I kept your snack small," Samuel chuckled and wrapped me up in a hug while the cake was being cut. We hadn't found out the sex of the baby. Another surprise for us. We'd decorated the nursery in neutral tones so we could reuse everything for the second baby.

Yeah, my alpha was already planning on another one.

I told him, I would decide on that after this one came out.

"Thank you for doing this. We love you, don't we?" I rubbed my belly.

"I can't wait to hold him or her. I know we have a while yet, but they are going to be beautiful, just like their papa."

Ah, this man never failed to make me blush.

He thanked everyone for coming, and they helped us put the gifts into the car.

Kendall was the last one to leave. He came over and gave me a big hug.

"I know you still hold guilt over what happened, but there's no need to. Really. I have long ago forgiven you, but you have to forgive yourself."

"I'm trying. I really am. I'm so happy for you. If I ended up with someone like you, mate, well, maybe I need to create a bucket list of my own."

"You should. Life is too damned short for waiting. We both know that."

Once we got home, Samuel ran a bath for me, at my request. Even that hour or so of

the party had worn me completely out and my feet hurt. I hadn't experienced any of the swelling or other side effects some omegas did, but tonight, this baby was weighing on me.

Even my back hurt.

"Are you enjoying your bath?" Samuel asked later. He'd gone to put everything away.

"I am. Thank you again for doing that for me. It was really special. I had no idea."

He came over and kissed my lips and took off his clothes. "I'm glad I can still surprise you. Now, scoot up a bit. I want to spend some time holding my mate."

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Echo

“Everything is going well. Have you experienced any contractions at all?”

Jabez came to the house for our visits. He was an owner of the club, but his calling was healing. He was always kind and gentle, careful with the boundaries since I was a mated omega, but my alpha mate was right in the room with me.

“My back has been hurting a bit the last few days but that’s all.”

“I need to check if you’re dilated.” He turned to Samuel. “Samuel, why don’t you come down here, and we can take a look together. See? My gloves are on.”

Always considerate.

“Okay.” Samuel went to stand beside Jabez, and I had to get on my hands and knees for them to inspect my channel properly.

Not embarrassing at all.

Wasn’t like everyone at the club hadn’t seen my ass in the air over a dozen times already. But this was in our bed and in my home. Still, I knew he had to check.

“Are you sure you haven’t been feeling any pain, Echo? Tightness in your back?”

“A little, like I said, but nothing out of the ordinary. Why?”

Samuel cleared his throat. “Because, omega mine. You’re already dilated. How much?”

Jabez made a humming sound. “Three inches. You’re on your way. I would suggest walking around a bit to encourage this labor to happen.”

“Are you serious?” I asked, flipping over. “I’m...is that why my back has been achy?”

Our healer nodded. “Yes. It’s the beginning stages. I’m only a block over if you need me, and tonight is my night off from the club. Why don’t you two walk a bit. Try some spicy food. Sex...”

Samuel looked ghostly. “Are you saying sex can help bring the labor on?”

“I am. Have you not been reading the books I brought over?”

“I have,” I giggled. “Him? Not so much.”

Jabez packed up his stuff. “Get yourself some jalapeno poppers or something. Walk around the house. Fool around. I would bet I’ll be back before the night is over. Get ready, you two. You’re about to be parents.”

I covered myself up while Jabez left. He’d been over so many times lately that he just let himself out.

“Am I the only one freaking out a little?” I asked.

“Yes. No. I’m not freaking out exactly. I’m excited and anxious and I’m not looking forward to you being in pain, but I’m ready to have this baby with you. I also know that you’ve spent this week begging him or her to come out.”

“I have. But now...let’s walk around. I need to put my eyes on the nursery, and then my wolf needs to nest a bit. These pillows and blankets aren’t right.”

This last week, along with asking my babe to come out as soon as possible, I’d been nesting like a feral wolf. Washing everything for the baby. Cleaning until there wasn’t a speck of dust in the house.

More cleaning.

More nesting.

My appetite had decreased the last few days, and now I knew why. I was close to having this baby.

So, my mate and I walked. Up the stairs. Down the stairs. Into each room. Admiring the nursery. Checking supplies just in case we needed to go to the hospital.

Made the rounds again and again until morning turned to afternoon. Samuel stayed with me the entire time.

“I need a favor,” I blurted, once we were back in our bedroom.

“Anything, Echo.”

“I want sushi and a frappe-sugary-cinno with so much caramel on it, it will make my teeth hurt when this is done.”

Samuel bent over laughing. I watched him, happy I could make him laugh when the first contraction hit.

It hit me hard, dead center in my spine and twisted like a wrench inside me.

“Oh, Goddess!” I cried out.

“What? Contractions?” he asked.

“A big one. A...”

My wolf spoke louder through our connection. Pup. Pup. Pup. It’s coming.

“I felt that. Your wolf reached out to mine, omega. Our babe is coming. Now.”

“Call Jabez. Please. Help me to the bathtub.”

While Samuel ran the water in our huge tub, my water broke, but I gave zero cares because soon after, a worse contraction hit. I could feel my channel widen with each one.

“I’m here!” the healer called out and I could hear him bounding up the stairs. Once he was upstairs, he came into the bathroom. “Samuel, let’s get him into the tub.”

I zoned out somewhere in there while my wolf took over. I was helped into the tub and soon after, I felt the babe begin to emerge from inside me. The pain was excruciating, but my wolf sent calming waves to me.

“There’s the head. One big push, Echo. Let’s get this head out.”

I clamped down on the edges of the tub and pushed with all my might. The head of our babe came out. I couldn’t see it but I could feel it.

“Samuel?” I cried out as a bolt of fear shot through me.

“It’s okay. You’re doing incredible. You’re so damned strong, and I’m right here.”

His words gave me the strength to push two more times.

And then our son was born.

His cries might've been the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard besides my mate's voice.

"What should we name him?" Samuel asked after our son had been cleaned up and I had as well. We were tucked into our bed when Jabez bid us good night and our babe was suckling at my chest.

"What was your grandfather's name?" I asked my mate.

"Lane William."

"I like that. Do you?"

He leaned down to kiss our baby's forehead as he did to me often. "I love it. Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. Welcome to our family, Lane."

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Samuel

We were getting a hang of this father thing, one day at a time. I got up for all the night feedings in the beginning until Lane, one day out of the blue, decided that he was going to sleep through the night.

We didn't.

All night, we stayed up, watching him, holding our fingers under his little nose, making sure that he was asleep and not fulfilling a nightmare of new parents.

From that night on, he slept through the night and gave my omega time to rest and recuperate.

Instead of going back to work right away, he took an extended leave of absence. I would've supported whatever he chose to do but the day he decided to go back to work, he cried all day and the night before.

In the end, he decided it wasn't time yet, and his boss agreed.

The time with our son was so precious, especially in these phases.

"What's that smell?" Echo came into the room. His body was different than it had been before, with more curves here and there, but he was still my perfect, delicious omega, maybe even more so.

That body had held our child.

He'd earned every stretch mark by being the strong man he was.

"You?" I said, making him instantly blush. He was holding Lane in his arms, our son's head lay against his shoulder.

"Aww, you stole my line. Goulash? It smells incredible."

"Thank you. It's almost ready. Want to put him in the swing while we eat?"

Echo laid our son in the swing and sat at the table. We took turns cooking and doing everything else.

Tonight was Lane's six-month birthday.

We ate and celebrated amongst ourselves. No one else needed. For his first birthday, there would be more of a party but tonight, this was enough.

"How is it?" I asked as my mate took his first bite.

"Delicious."

"Yes. Yes, you are."

Echo laughed. "I have a surprise for you tomorrow night."

"What is it?" I asked. We both loved surprises and tried to spring things on each other as much as possible.

"Jabez is babysitting tomorrow night. So you and I can go to the club."

Best surprise ever.

Source Creation Date: August 4, 2025, 8:14 am

Jabez

Every time I delivered a baby to a happy couple, it was a reminder of what I had lost. Not that I would deny them the joy of their new arrival, but my mate's passing while pregnant with our young had stolen that from my life.

And his. He'd been so young and enthusiastic about everything. Our mating. Our new home. Our baby to come. Fate was so unfair to give me only a year with him before stealing him back to the ethers. Shifters usually lived decades past humans...and my mate had been a human. So, I'd known when we met that I would outlive him. But I never thought he'd die at twenty-six. Of an aneurism. There wasn't even any time to do anything about it. He just sat up in bed, grabbed the sides of his head, and said it hurts.

Then he was gone. Dead in seconds. I called the human paramedics, although I was a trained healer and could recognize departed when I saw it. Still, my brain demanded I do something to fix the worse moment of my life.

His family blamed me, not for being a shifter. They didn't even know about that. But for getting him pregnant when he'd known since he was a child that he shouldn't. The aneurism risk had been identified then.

Thing was, he'd never told me about it.

I still couldn't think of him without searing pain in my soul. I tried to be grateful for the time we had together, but how could I when I was still angry at Fate...and at him.

Why didn't he tell me?

We could have adopted if he wanted children that badly. For me, he came first, anything he wanted. But I would never have given him death.

Samuel and Echo had a healthy baby boy. Most of the other club owners were also growing families, but I would never have another mate. I threw all my energies into caring for others and my kink.

The violet wand was a source of endless fascination for this healer. A distraction from the sadness at the core of my soul.