



# The Contracted Bear's Mate: An M/M Mpreg Shifter Romance (Omegas of the Shifter Mafia Book 3)

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** They say dreams really do come true. I didn't know they included nightmares.

I didn't enjoy being a killer. It isn't in my nature, but when I am offered a job that would help people avoid a fate like my omega twin faced, I jump at the opportunity. I refuse to sit around coding in an office building when I could be making a difference.

When I discover that I'm working for the wrong side and that they've been using me all along, my gut reaction is to burn it all to the ground. That's when the dreams started and everything changed.

Once upon a time, my brother and I used to share dreams. I thought it was a twin thing, but he's gone, and my dreams have become my only connection to the omegas who need us most. Please let my gift be enough. Time is running out for the omegas and the cubs in their care, and I refuse to let them down.

**Total Pages (Source):** 26

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

“Sally, let’s get you cleaned up.” The little girl looked up at me, her face covered with far more spaghetti sauce than was in her belly.

I loved my job at Shifter House. It was a home/school for young pups who were waiting for their forever home. I hated the necessity for such a place but was glad that it was there for them. What I didn’t like was my boss micromanaging. Feeding Sally at bedtime would have Jonathan twitching. He not only hated messes but was firm that food should be eaten at mealtime despite the reasons. Thankfully, he left me alone most of the time.

Sally was the newest resident of Shifter House and still adjusting to the huge changes in her life, including the time change. Letting her go hungry would not only be cruel, it would make her transition even more difficult. If my boss wanted to be mad about it, let him.

I picked her up off her seat and set her on the floor. She could’ve gotten down on her own easily enough, but then the odds of me needing to clean the chair grew exponentially if I allowed her to.

“Wait here. I’m just going to clean this up real quick.”

I washed the dish and put it away. We were overdue for an inspection, and my boss was already antsy about it. Best not to let a dirty dish lie, even if only for ten minutes.

“Okay, come on, honey.”

She took my hand, and I walked her upstairs to the bedroom level and straight down

the hall to the shared bath where I washed her face and hands and helped her brush her teeth.

“Okay, we’re going back to your room now and get you changed.”

Sally hadn’t spoken since she arrived. She was scared and had been through trauma of some sort. They never gave me the details on new students. The one time I asked, I was told to focus on their future, not their past. Whatever the eff that meant.

Sally was not the first student who did not speak. From what I could tell, she could hear, and the rest would either come, or I’d teach her some of my minimal signs. I had already tried some with her, but she didn’t respond in kind. I was hesitant to teach it to her for fear of her picking up bad habits. We’d cross that bridge when we came to it. I’d always take care of her to the best of my ability.

That’s what I did. I gave these children my all. My official title was Shifter House Headmaster, but I was much more than that. I was their teacher, their chef, and their caregiver until they were either reconnected with their original family or adopted by a new one. Had we been human, the foster system would be in place, but shifters took care of their own. It was safer all the way around.

Most kids were here for a short time as they got ready to go to their forever homes. Very few stayed past six or seven years old, although we currently had a handful that had. No matter their age, I did my best to make this home to them for the time they were here.

I led her to her assigned room and set her pajamas on her bed.

“When you’re done getting changed, hand me your clothes so I can get them all clean for next time.” I hoped. Red sauce tended to be a pain to get out.

She nodded, and I left to give her privacy. The other kids were already in bed for the night. We were at capacity now with fifteen residents. I wasn't sure how long we would stay full. Jonathan had expressed displeasure that more of the children hadn't found homes yet. I'd personally would rather they wait until the perfect one was found. For as long as they were here, I'd treat them like my own and give them the stability they needed.

Sally, dressed in her pajamas, opened the door and gave me her dirty clothes.

“Now, let's get you into bed.”

Once I had her settled beneath the covers, I tucked her stuffed wolf in next to her and promised to see her in the morning. She smiled up at me, hugging her toy tightly. For a split second, I thought she was going to say something, but she didn't. Not this time. Maybe tomorrow.

It was getting late, and I was behind on my cleaning. No one would come in and say the place was dirty, but the daily sweeping and trash removal hadn't been done. Part of me wanted to let it go. I told that part of me to take a time-out when Jonathan sent me a message saying he'd be there in the morning with a new boss for inspection.

It didn't sound like Jonathan was leaving his role. When I came on board, there were two alphas in charge. Jonathan dealt with the day-to-day running, such as making sure orders arrived and the other alpha, Will, dealt with the children, both coming here and going to their new home. More than once, since Will left, Jonathan mumbled about what a pain in the ass it was that he had to “do everything” now. He was always complaining about something.

After letting him know everything was ready, I went into super-cleaning mode. I didn't mind that the inspection was coming. I ran a good house, but it was important I had everything the way it needed to be. I didn't know a lot about the system, but their

ability to get council funding was dependent upon us doing the best that we could when it came to things like this.

When they offered me this job, I nearly declined. It was far from everyone I knew and the management was pretty grumpy, even during the interview process. But then I walked through the house and instantly knew this was where I belonged. I wanted to make a difference, to help others. The fact that it came with housing when I needed a new place was what sealed the deal.

For the most part, I loved my job. During the day, I couldn't ask for a better life. I worked with the kids and was constantly busy. At night, once they all went to bed, it did get a little lonely. But that was okay. I was saving up money, and, eventually, I'd move on just like the kids. Until then, I'd continue to give them the best life possible under their circumstances.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

Knocking back my second cup of coffee, I groaned. Not even a barrel of dark roast could wake this bear from a fitful sleep.

I sat at the big dining table, taking in everyone. The people there were not only a team trying their damndest to do good things but, somewhere along the line, they had become my found family.

I kept secrets from them. I had to, for their own good, but mostly for my survival. Because I wouldn't be able to live with myself if anyone, alphas or omegas, in our little family, knew what I did for our bosses when I made sure no one was looking.

“What the fuck are you growling at?” Pop-Tart asked me and received a swift slap on the back of the head from Hammer, our leader. “Ow. What?” He shot the second question at his brother.

They played around a lot, but everyone knew that Jeremy, aka Pop-Tart, would give his life for Hammer, Hammer's omega, Gray, and their boy, Dominick. He doted on his nephew, spoiling him with not only toys but affection and love.

Reminded me of the way my twin and I used to play around and, yet, would do anything for each other.

I missed Tyrone every day. We were bonded as brothers in the womb and later would find out our dreams were tethered.

“Watch your language,” Hammer said with a steady and yet warning tone.

“Watch my...” Pop-Tart let out a loud laugh. “Since when are we afraid of a little swearing? I heard King say fuck three times this morning before coffee.”

I snorted but tried to cover it up with a cough.

“Language!” Hammer said, this time coupling the command with a bit of a growl.

Gray put his hand on Hammer’s arm. He had Dom in his hands. “When did we make this rule? Because go fuck yourself has become my battle cry.”

Everyone snorted. Hutch, a bit shyer than Gray, leaned on Maverick’s shoulder. “I just blurt out fuck every once in a while. Helps with the stress.” He whispered something to Mav about learning that from him, and the dragon huffed out a chuckle.

Jack cleared his throat. “And sometimes an omega just has to beg his alpha to fuck him. Hammer, you might be the leader around here, but I’m saying fuck.”

Aziz slammed his coffee cup down and left the table. He’d been extra moody lately. We were all tired and stressed. Trying to figure out who the good guys were while taking care of almost one hundred omegas and children was a busy business.

Hammer balled his fists but ended up laughing and shaking his head. “Well, fuck. I was trying not to have Dom’s first word be that one.”

“His first word will be Dada. I know it.” Gray cooed at their babe.

Gray hadn’t eaten much, and Hammer was poring over his computer.

“Give me the cub.” I held out my hands. “You need to eat, omega. Even though this one is crawling now, you are still healing.”

Gray muttered his thanks, but I got a colossal stink eye from his alpha who muttered, “Asshole.”

I got Dom settled on my shoulder, rubbing his little hand in my stubble. I’d been so tired that morning, I didn’t bother with shaving. “That’s going to be his first word if you’re not careful.”

Gray laughed and tucked into his breakfast. Mav, Hutch, and King were on cleanup duty, but it wasn’t much since I tried to do it as I cooked. Besides, there wasn’t too much mess after German pancakes and fruit salad.

My mind wandered to my dream, the one that had plagued me nightly for weeks.

I checked the notes I’d made in my phone last night, but no matter how much information I jotted down, it was always the same. A tugging at my chest. A longing.

The worst of it was the hazy people there. I had a sense in the dream that they were in danger and yet, I heard their laughter and could scent their joy as clearly as I could scent the wolf cub on my shoulder.

“You all right there, Tyrus?” Hammer asked. “I’ve been talking to you for a few minutes.”

I snorted. “I’ll let you know if anything develops with it. Can we leave it at that?”

He nodded. “Yeah. We’re here for you no matter what. You know that, right?”

“I do.”



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

When my alarm went off, ripping me from a dream, it was 4 a.m., much earlier than I usually got up. With inspection day here, I needed to make sure everything was perfect. The better we did, the more funds we'd have, and I was really needing some new art supplies, which Jonathan said weren't quite in the budget. If I nailed this, perhaps I could squeeze them out of him. We'd see. I wasn't holding my breath.

I tried to pull the dream back into focus. It had been a long time since I had one that wasn't, for lack of a better word, normal. During my sleep, I'd connected with someone. I'd done it in the past, usually with a person who didn't realize they had the ability to reach out. More often than not, something would click for them, and they'd yank back, breaking the connection.

When my abilities developed as a teen, it freaked me out. Not only that someone was in my head, or I was in theirs, depending on the night, but also the sense of rejection that came when they didn't want me there. In hindsight, it was ridiculous because I didn't want them there either. But I was a typical teen—weird.

This dream was different though. It didn't feel like somebody who was just wandering around and got lost. It felt almost intentional. I kept thinking about it, grasping at fragments in an attempt to get it back. Had I woken up on my own, it would've been a different story. The dream would just be there for me to filter through. But when I was ripped from a dream, I always lost it. Usually I didn't care, but, in this case, it felt important somehow.

I shook my head to clear it when my backup alarm went off. I didn't have time for this now. I needed everything perfect for Jonathan. I could think back to this later, or possibly find them again tonight.

With a new boss in town, I needed to be ready for inspection. Two big things in one day. More importantly, I needed to make sure the kids were ready. Strangers in the building wasn't something I ever liked to spring on them. They needed to know the rules to avoid getting in trouble with the new guy.

They were great kids, all of them. But that didn't mean they weren't children and apt to make mistakes. A couple were nearing their first shift, adding a level of hormones and sass. But if they knew what to expect and what I expected from them, they'd be fine.

After a quick shower, I went downstairs and started a batch of baked French toast and bacon. It was a quick and easy breakfast and would allow me time to triple-check the kitchen, ensuring I had dates on all the food and that I had rotated the stock correctly. I hadn't been through an inspection at the school yet, but I knew this from my time in food service, so I figured it was best to start there.

I did a quick double check of the living room and the classroom area, which was set up in the old library, and then went up and started to wake the rooms one by one. All the rooms except for Sally's were shared. Hers was a converted closet. Ideally, we would only have fourteen students, but I understood why they wouldn't turn somebody down. Heck, if they said they needed my room, I'd sleep in the hallway. The kids came first. Always.

My eldest teen, Abel, grumbled about needing five more minutes. Usually, I'd probably give him that, but this was not the day to be running late.

"It's French toast and bacon day."

Those two foods had him up and getting ready. Once I was sure everyone was awake and tending to what they needed to, I went back to the kitchen and put the French toast in one oven and the bacon in another.

Soon enough, the “chef extraordinaire” of the week, Abel, arrived. His job was to help set the table. When I first started implementing chores, they all looked at me like I had lost my mind. Apparently, the person who was here before me didn’t do any of that. But now they liked the silly titles and took the responsibility seriously.

After breakfast was eaten and cleaned up, it was time for school. I set them up with their seat work just as the squeak of the front door told me it was time.

“Okay, boys and girls. Remember what I said? We need to be on our best behavior today. You have your seat work, and, when you’re done, you can read your book-report book. If we do a great job, we’ll spend the afternoon outside”—I put up air quotes—“doing science.” We were going to go hang out in the woods and find cool rocks and maybe skip them in the river.

They chorused, “Yes, Headmaster.” Normally, they called me by my name. We were, at our core, a family, even if only temporarily. But I’d instructed them to be formal today, and they understood the assignment.

I snuck out of the classroom, leaving the door ajar so I could hear them if I needed to.

“Hello.” I walked into the room where Jonathan was standing with not one but two men. I assumed one was the inspector and the other his new coworker, but no introductions came. “I just want to introduce myself. I’m Sloan. If you need anything or have any questions, let me know.”

“Where are the children?” Not the welcome I was expecting from Jonathan, but he looked off. Maybe he was nervous too.

I showed them the way, and the children, being the wonderful ones they were, did exactly what I had told them to.

“Well-behaved,” one of the men I didn’t know said.

“Yes, sir,” I confirmed.

“That’ll be all.” He turned and went the other way, and I returned to the classroom.

About a half hour later, Sally managed to explode her pen all over her shirt. She looked mortified. I wasn’t. It was only a shirt and, as long as I swapped it out before the inspector came back through, all would be good.

“I’ll get you some new clothes, honey. You stay here.”

I didn’t want her wandering around, with or without me. The longer they stayed here and were the epitome of perfect children, the better. I was looking forward to them being their normal selves again though. They were more fun when they were simply themselves.

“Kids, same rules apply.” I went upstairs to her room and grabbed a shirt.

Just as I was about to leave, I heard something that would haunt me to my dying breath.

“You said Sally doesn’t talk?”

“No, sir.”

“Good. That’ll fetch a pretty penny.”

My heart thumped in my chest. Fetch a pretty penny? No, no, no, no, no. They couldn’t really be saying what I thought they were. I intentionally slowed my heartbeat before leaving the room, crossing everything they had moved on, but not in

the direction of the classroom. As I turned the corner, they were there, all three of them, almost as if they were waiting for me.

“Oh, hello.” I decided my safest option was to play dumb. “If you need anything...”

The next thing I knew, I was kicked, hit, and knocked to the ground. I could hear my ribs break, followed by the distinct sound of my wrist doing the same.

Shit.

I had to hold it together and not let the kids see or hear what was happening. After they left, I would shift, and everything would be okay. Only my plan was missing a vital fact—they came prepared and, before I could sit up, they had a collar wrapped around my neck.

“No way you’re getting this off.” The man spit on my face. “That’s what you get for listening to things that are not your business. Maybe if you’re good next time I come by, you’ll be able to shift again.”

I didn’t understand what he meant until they left a few minutes later and I tried to shift for the first time. Tried and failed.

I needed to get the kids out of here. Now.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

Who are you? I asked in my mind, hoping the question would penetrate the distance between me and whoever shared my dream.

Sharing dreams wasn't for the faint of heart. My mind was cradled between sleep and waking; the cool sheet lay beneath me. I fisted bunches of the comforter covering my body as my heart raced beneath my sternum and images fluttered in my mind.

In my dream, I was on all fours. My nose picked up scents that weren't familiar to me. Overpowering sweetness. Children. Maple syrup. Fear and joy tangled together. The unease of tension lingered like a sourness.

I was in a home full of children.

Not me but the one who reached out through our night visions.

Who are you? I repeated, lifting my head a bit as though the motion would propel my thoughts better.

The turn of a doorknob caught my attention, and my bear turned to see who was coming in. All sound in the house ceased instantly as a shadow filled the doorway. Toys were dropped. Chattering and giggling halted.

The joy was sucked out of the room and from the faces of the children.

One boy in the corner's chin quivered as he wrung his hands.

What is this? I asked but again received no answer.

Tears pricked my eyes as I saw more men come into the room, each one assessing the children. Eyeing them from head to toe. They paced the room, sometimes touching the head or chin of a boy or girl.

None of the children moved. Fear took over the other scents.

Something was wrong here.

Something huge.

Alpha, we need help. They need you. I need you.

The terror-laced words came from the person sharing the dream with me. I closed my bear eyes, focusing on my senses, trying like hell to uncover who this was. A male; that much I knew. An omega—there was no denying that gentle demeanor and honey scent. It saturated all of him, even though he was nowhere near me.

Find them. Find them before it's too late. Find me, please.

I woke with a gasp, inhaling every bit of air in my bedroom. My skin was coated with a sheen of sweat. My temples pulsed with the abrupt departure from the dream.

Who in the hell was I sharing the dream with? A regular occurrence between my twin brother and I was one thing, but having a stranger delve into my mind in that space between consciousness and unconsciousness was quite another.

But, as I stood and caught my breath, another wave of recognition passed through me. Though I didn't know the name or the face of the person who had been with me, there was a recognition I couldn't deny.

I refuted the claim of my bear telling me he was my omega.

The damned grizzly was horny as fuck and lonelier than a man on the moon.

Males like me didn't have omegas. We didn't deserve them and, even if we had them, they deserved better than a contract killer.

I need you.

His words still echoed in my mind. Before I forgot, I reached into my bedside table and wrote everything I could remember down. What kinds of trees I'd spotted outside the window. The fact that the children were wearing shorts and T-shirts, so they must be in a warmer climate.

Anything I could recall, I scribbled down.

I had to tell the others, but I hesitated with my hand on the knob. Hammer knew a little about my brother and I dream walking but, just like me, they probably thought all of that ended the day Tyrone died.

We were both wrong.

Putting my fear in its rightful place at the back of my mind, I turned the knob and walked into the kitchen, following the scents of breakfast.

"We need to have a meeting, team members," I barked.

"Good morning to you, too, sunshine," Pop-Tart commented.

The other team members turned around and, once they saw me, they all pushed back from the table. "Gym," Hammer said.

Since the omegas took up most of the warehouse space, we did our work where we



could. In an effort to shield them from the gruesomeness that could be our jobs, we often had meetings in the gym now.

“Everyone?” Gray asked.

Hammer looked to me for that answer. I cleared my throat. “Yeah. You and Hutch and Jack are family and team now.”

Once we got into the gym, I took my time forming the right words. They had to know the seriousness of this.

“I called all of you in here to tell you about an omega and a lot of cubs who are being held somewhere. They are all scared, and I’m not sure of the exact details, but their lives are in danger.”

“This was a tip?” Hammer asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“No. I found out another way.” Gods, I didn’t know why I was so closed off about this. Perhaps because when Tyrone and I told our parents about sharing dreams when we were kids, they told us we were making things up and never to talk about it again.

“Tyrus?” Hammer said, taking a few steps toward me. “What aren’t you telling us, brother?”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

Everything changed since the inspection, since I discovered the entire job had been a lie. I wasn't hired here to help kids find a better life. My job was to make them a product, and not an hour went by that I didn't want to puke over it.

I still wasn't sure if something had changed with the new "boss" and the inspector, or if it had always been this way and I'd been too oblivious to know. And the inspector...he certainly wasn't someone from the council making sure we were running this place in the best interests of the children.

The guilt of my part in all of this hurt far more than the broken bones and bruised body. These children counted on me to protect them, and I'd failed. I vowed to fail them no more. I was going to find a way to save them.

Last night, I went to sleep, fully intending to find the person I had recently connected to in my dreams. I didn't know them from anyone else on this earth, but they felt safe. And really, what choice did I have. They were my best hope. If all went well, they would hear me and understand my plea for help and send someone to rescue us. Goddess knew I couldn't do it on my own. I did connect with someone, but how successful it was, I still wasn't sure.

One thing I was sure of was that I wasn't healing well, or really at all, without being able to shift. My injuries were bad and, if I wasn't careful, infection was going to set in. They limited my ability to do most everything. Heck, I couldn't even turn a doorknob with my one hand, and because of my injuries, the kids were scared. I did the best I could to soothe their fears, to tell them it was no big deal and I was just having trouble with my beast. But they could see the collar. They might not recognize what it was, but they weren't dumb. They knew something was terribly wrong.

When I woke up this morning, I felt confident that I had reached the right person while dream walking. He was there and kept asking me who I was, but that wasn't something I was able to answer, and the weird part was, I wasn't even sure why. The only words that came through were the ones I practiced before I went to sleep.

My pain made my skills less skillful, for sure. I really needed to shift. My wolf whimpered in pain and fear. I tried to remove the collar, but all I managed to do was hurt myself. Maybe if I had both hands, I'd do a better job, but I didn't. The collar stayed.

He might not have my name, but I gave him as many hints as I could. I showed him a vision of what I feared was going to happen as well as glimpses of some of the best memories I had with the children. It was my best effort. Please let it have been enough.

Now all there was to do was wait while I looked for another way out.

It took extra time for me to get ready in the morning. Just putting on a shirt was sheer agony. I didn't even bother with jeans, pulling on sweats instead. It was the best I could do.

When I went downstairs, Abel asked me if he could help cook. Normally, I'd have taken it as an opportunity to teach him some kitchen skills, but I didn't have it in me today. Abel seemed more than willing to take over the task completely, which was good because I just couldn't do it.

Breakfast was somber despite my attempts to make it otherwise. The fifteen kids and I sat around the table eating toast, cheese, cereal, and cut-up bananas in silence. One of my older ones, Emmet, cried quietly at his seat. His attempts to hide it failed.

"Emmet, can you help me with something in the kitchen?" I didn't need to do

anything there, but he was a young teen nearing his first shift and having me ask him about his tears in front of the others wasn't a good option.

"Sure." He got up and left the room.

I followed him, hobbling the entire way. "What's going on, buddy? You can tell me."

"I can't tell why." He watched the floor.

"You can trust me, Emmet."

"I heard..." He sniffled. "They did..." He grabbed a paper towel and blew his nose into it. "I don't want the collar, sir."

Sir. Not Headmaster or even Sloan. Sir.

All I wanted to do was hug him and tell him everything would be okay. But I wasn't sure if it was true or if I'd be able to even manage it, not in my current condition.

"Tell me what brought this on, please." Maybe it would give me a hint of how best to help him because right now, I was feeling helpless.

"The other day, when you got hurt, I was sneaking to the kitchen to get a cookie. I know you said we were not supposed to leave, but Sally's stomach was rumbling, and I know where the cookies are."

"Oh, honey, I'm not upset about that." The fact she communicated her needs to him was huge.

"No. That's not... I heard them, the men who were with Jonathan. I heard them."

“You heard them what?”

“They’re gonna take us kids, but they’re gonna take you first. They called you...” He sniffled, tears now freely falling. “They called you breeding stock.”

Despite the agony running through my body, I pulled him in for a hug, holding him close.

“It’ll be okay, Emmet. I promise you. It’ll be okay. We’re gonna get out of here. I vow it.”

And if it was the last thing that I ever did, I would keep that promise.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

I took a long, deep breath and looked around the room. These were my brothers, for all intents and purposes.

We shared grief, joy, and pain.

We had each other's backs.

"I've been sharing dreams with an omega for a few weeks now, but last night, he spoke to me. There are kids there, cubs and pups. The smell of fear..." I didn't have the words to describe the sourness that lingered in my nose.

"Sharing dreams? You're a dream walker?" Aziz asked. "When did this happen?"

Pop-Tart leaned against the squat rack since this gym was our meeting area now. No long table or chairs for us. What mattered was that the omegas were here and safe now. We would deal with what we had. "Is that why you've been looking like shit for weeks? The dreams?"

I growled a bit at him, making him chuckle. "Probably."

"Is this a new thing?" Hammer's brother pushed.

"He used to share dreams with Tyrone," Hammer chimed in. "Isn't that right, Tyrus?"

I nodded. Hammer and I'd had exactly one discussion about Tyrone, our twin bond, and how we shared dreams. How our last dream warned me of his impending death. A nightmare horrible enough to make me never want to sleep again.

Hammer remembered everything.

“Yes. I used to share them with my twin but haven’t had a dream walk since he died. Then, a few weeks ago, I had some weird dreams and that’s when I realized they were real. And the omega spoke to me through them. Until now, they were sensations. Feelings. Scents and a weird awareness of what was happening until he spoke to me. The omega and those cubs are in trouble.” I spilled it all out there, hoping they would take me seriously and act immediately.

If I hadn’t crumbled their trust by confessing this strange part of me.

“You know where they are? The kids and the omega?” King asked. “If he’s pressing the urgent message, then we need to get moving. How do we find them?”

“I know the location. I mean, it’s nothing you can plug into GPS or any maps app, but I know where it is. It’s a few hours north. Up the highway.” I closed my eyes. “Pine trees. So many damned pine trees.”

Everyone fell silent. Mav and Hutch cuddled their babe, but their eyes were on one man, like the rest. They were waiting on Hammer’s command. Instead, Gray stepped forward, Dom asleep in his arms. “Tyrus, thank you for sharing all of this with us. I’m sure I speak for all of us when I say we’d love to hear more about your gift but”—he turned to his alpha—“we need to get moving.”

Hammer nodded, his chest puffed out with pride. He and Mav had damned fine omegas. Damned fine. “Gray is absolutely right. Tyrus, there’s only the one omega?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“And clearly he trusts you because he’s giving you info. Did you see alphas there? Fuckers we need to take out?”

I blew out a breath. “There were others in the dreams, and the cubs were scared of them, but I got the feeling they were visiting and not present all the time.”

He nodded. “Mav, I’m gonna ask you and Jeremy to stay back with Gray, Hutch, Jack, and the omegas here. The rest of you get ready to fight if we need to, and let’s bring all the vans. Blankets and snacks for the kiddos. We don’t know what conditions they’ve been living under. Is that okay with everyone?” While he asked the group, his stare was on his omega. Gray, Hutch, and Jack were part of the team now and didn’t like being left behind, but everything was so unknown on this bust. I didn’t blame him for wanting his omega to be safe.

Hutch stepped forward. “I’ll prepare everything for the kiddos while the rest of you get ready. I think, with all the variables on this one, it would be better for us to stay home. Right?” He still blushed when he addressed the group, turning to Mav as if for some kind of approval.

I would never have that—the approval of my omega.

Mav nodded. “He’s right. Let’s move everyone. I guess I need to get some more bunks brought in. Go rescue some cubs.”

We broke off, and I received some claps on the shoulder from King and Aziz. They didn’t reject me. Of course, what I’d told them was only a slice of me, but they accepted me as I was.

In less than a half hour, we were dressed, armed, and had four passenger vans headed north. Car seats, blankets, and snacks were in the back.

“Tyrus,” King said. He was driving, and I was in the passenger seat since the map was in my head. “You know, in my pride, someone who can translate dreams and walk through the dreams with others are considered godlike. What you have is a gift.”



“You think so?” I said. “Our parents told us not to speak about it.”

He nodded. “Parents make lots of mistakes. We all do.”

“So...I’m a god to you?” I said, barely containing my chuckle.

He sighed, shaking his head. “I knew I shouldn’t have told you, bear.”

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Before I went to sleep, I recited my script over and over again. I had to have my words down or else nothing would go across our bond. I could share my show, pictures of where we were. They were much easier to convey than the words for some reason. This was my first time with that struggle, but also this was my first time with a blocked wolf, and I wasn't altogether sure how much the collar actually blocked him.

We were on borrowed time. From what I could tell via our dreams, the alpha understood the urgency of the situation and felt passionate about helping us get out of here. All I knew about him personally was that he was an alpha and cared about these kids and getting them to safety. For now, that would be enough.

In our most recent dream together, he tried to show me his plan. All of my attempts to decipher the blurred message were met with failure. I was relieved he was coming to help us but fearful he needed me to do something to prepare, something I was unaware of. I was going to keep the kids together as much as possible—no reading on the porch or working on drawings in their rooms. From the time we woke up, we were together. I even had Sally sleep in one of the other rooms. This was no time to take chances.

The day of the rescue was a whirlwind. I hadn't realized that; ever since I'd been caught and beaten, they had people—shifters—circling the area, making sure we didn't leave. So, when someone came in, shifted in the living room, and told all the kids to get to the basement because we were under attack, I was caught off guard, unsure at first if he was there to help or harm. When he used my name, I had my answer. He was one of the bad guys.

I wished I'd known who he was so I could know what exactly I was up against. If I had access to my beast, I'd have taken him down then and there. But I didn't. Instead, I shuffled the kids to the pantry, pretending that we were going to the basement, opening and closing the basement door and clicking it locked.

Thank Gods they didn't check to make sure I followed through.

If my dream alpha was rescuing us, I wanted him to be able to find us, and the basement added an entire floor between us. This was better.

The kids did their job. They were silent, even though some of them were barely containing tears. They didn't make a sound, not even when someone walked through the kitchen. Not even when the pantry door swung open and a stranger stood there, counting the kids, his lips moving but sound not coming out.

"We're here to protect you." I wasn't sure if it was the person from my dreams or not. But it didn't matter. At this point, anything was better than what was going to happen to us if we stayed.

We followed him out and were split into a couple of vans. The kids didn't like to be separated. I didn't like it either, but we had to do what we had to do to get out of here and, without a bus, going in two groups was the only option.

The driver's side door opened and closed, the scent of blood tickling my nose.

"That's the last of them." He pulled on his seat belt, not even paying attention to his nakedness.

"You're gonna put some pants on there?" the man in the passenger seat asked.

"Pop-Tart, shut the fuck up. We need to get out of here, and you're worried about my

lack of fashion sense. You didn't see me commenting on your dumbass cap this morning, did you?" He was already driving.

It actually relieved me that they were able to joke around like that. It meant, the immediate threat had been decimated. Or, at least, I hoped it did.

Whichever the case, it had Sally giggling for the first time, and that alone was gold. She snuggled close to me.

"Don't worry, sweetie. We've got this."

They drove us back to a warehouse, and everything was so chaotic yet organized. My students weren't the only kids there, and there were caretakers immediately at the ready to help us. To my surprise, I relaxed. We were safe. I felt it deep down. My kids were safe.

"Let's see if we can get you to shift," someone said to me, their eyes on my wrist. I wasn't sure who they were and didn't think to ask.

I shook my head. "I can't." I pointed to the collar. "Believe me, I've tried. This is my punishment."

They winced and immediately schooled their face. "Well then, let's see what we can do about that."

They took me off to a corner where others couldn't see and called in a couple of alphas. They all looked at my collar and tried to figure out how to remove it without hurting me.

"We're gonna need a dark healer," one of them finally said. "At least I think so because there's some dark magic bullshit keeping this sucker closed."

I sucked in a breath. “Maybe...maybe human intervention?” I held up my useless hand, sucking back the cry of pain trying to force its way out. “Like a cast, maybe? It could help.”

“Yeah, we’ll figure out something. Let me make a call.”

The alpha left. I still didn’t know a single person’s name here. It hadn’t been relevant at the time, but now? Now it was.

“What’s going on?” The alpha who had been sitting in the front seat of the van, the one who drove us here, naked, came into view. When his eyes met mine for the first time, I realized this was him. He was the one I had shared my dreams with.

“You,” I said.

He looked at me and gave a half nod. “Can we go somewhere and talk?”

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In private. While there were a lot of things I wanted to do with this omega in private, talking wasn't at the top of my list, especially given the look in his eyes.

He was going to reject me.

I just knew it.

My insides quivered. My hands fisted and released, trying to ease some of the tension inside me as we walked from the main area to my room.

Because if he was going to reject me, I wanted it to be in my bedroom. Apparently I liked to torture myself.

Once the door was closed behind us, he closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. Once he opened them again, my breath was stolen by his grass-green gaze. I'd never seen that color on anyone. His black hair fell over his forehead making him appear even more rebellious and sexier.

"You wanted to talk?" I choked out. If this was going to happen, I wanted to get it over with.

My bear growled inside me, wanting to touch him. Feel his soft skin against mine. Hear the noises he would make as he writhed beneath me.

"I did. You're Tyrus. You're the bear."

In all the chaos, my omega and I hadn't been formally introduced. Not the kind of

introduction he deserved.

Then again, he had a collar on his neck and had been abused for gods knew how long, so nothing was normal about any of this.

“I am. And you’re Sloan. The omega wolf.”

He smiled and nodded. My cock bobbed at his smile. Damn it. I’d probably come in my pants if he laughed. “I am. You...you and I...the dreams.”

I reached out and took his hands in mine, trying to ignore my thoughts about rejection. I had these few minutes with him and would make the most of it. Touching him would give me a sweet memory once he left me. “Let’s sit down.”

We sat, and his thigh pressed against mine on the small love seat in my bedroom. “Have you done that before?” he asked.

“I have.” I watched his expression fall. “With my twin brother.”

He heaved out a breath and laughed. “Oh. Your brother. Did I meet him? Everything was a blur.”

I shook my head. “He passed some time ago, but he was the only one I have ever shared dreams with. No use for that little jealous streak.”

Gods. Was I flirting? Flirting with this beautiful, sexy omega I couldn’t have. I should’ve been ashamed of myself, but I wasn’t. Not one bit.

His cheeks flooded with ruby heat. I wanted to reach out and rub my thumb across them. “I didn’t know what was happening at first. I had never shared a dream with another. It was strange and yet, I wanted you to know that there were days where I

lived for that time with you. It brought me a comfort I had long forgotten and, honestly, given up on. Those brief moments between us warmed me better than my own fur.”

All my hang-ups about him not wanting me and rejecting me were tossed in that moment. He was mine.

And I had a sneaking suspicion that the reason we could dream together was because we were mates.

“You’re mine,” I blurted. We both laughed, and I shook my head. My damned bear got the best of me and shouted out his thoughts, no finesse about it. “What I mean is...we’re mates, right? You feel it too?”

He nodded. “Of course, with this damned thing on, I can’t sense much, but once I saw you, there was no denying it. That’s why we can dream like that, right? We were bonded even before we met.”

Fuck. His words broke me.

I grabbed my omega by the waist and settled him in my lap. While I brushed that inky hair from his forehead, I spoke to him gently, “We are bonded. And I’ll get that collar off of you one way or another. We’ll find a way. We need to get to know each other, and there are things you should know about me, but I’m yours if you decide you want me.”

He turned and, for the first time, initiated touch, cupping my face with his hands. “We both have a lot to share, I think. I have so much in my head and things I’ve gone through. I might be a mess for a while. But I’ve waited my whole life for an alpha—someone to care for me and love me so I can love them just as much. I begged the gods every night that the person I was having visions with would come



and rescue me. And you did.”

“I begged the gods as well. I begged them for an omega, but I might not be worthy of you.”

He shook his head. “Worthy is in the heart of the beholder. Can...can you hold me closer? It’s been so long since I’ve been held by someone who cares for me.” He let out a laugh. “It’s been so long since someone older than a teen cared for me at all.”

I situated him so his legs were straddling my hips. He wrapped his arms around my neck and laid his head against my shoulder, facing me, much like Gray and Hammer’s pup did when he was about to fall asleep. He inhaled against my neck while I held him closer and rubbed his back. “Those children love you,” I said, once his heartbeat slowed.

“I love them. They don’t deserve what life has given them. But they will be okay now. At least they’re safe. It will take a while before they feel secure, but they will be fine.”

A twinge in my heart alerted me. There was more to the sweet man in my arms for me to know.

“There’s something you need to say,” I prompted. We had already bonded, so it wasn’t out of the question for me to pick up on his cues already, but it was also a bit jarring considering we’d only met a few minutes ago. My human mind getting in the way again.

“I need to stay with the kids tonight, and maybe for a while. I’m the only one they know. Not that your team isn’t amazing, but...”

“I understand. It’s okay.” Those kids were his life. No way I would stand in between

him and them. Not for a second.

“But it’s not,” he said, pulling back to meet my gaze. “I also don’t ever want to leave this spot or you.”

I beamed with pride, while my bear huffed out a hot breath of approval. “I don’t want to be away from you either.”

He sighed. Clearly, he was torn, and the last thing I wanted was to add more stress to his already-exhausted body and soul. “How about I sleep near you in the common area? I promise to keep my paws to myself.”

He blushed again, shaking his head. “You would sleep in there when you have this great room?”

I shrugged. “If it means being near you? I’d sleep in ten feet of snow without a single complaint.”

“Okay. As much as I’m loving being near you and in your arms, I need to go see them. Make sure they are good. And I’m exhausted.”

He was. I could feel it through our tether. It even made me tired. “Let’s go, then.”

We got up and made our way to the door, but Sloan stopped and looked at me over his shoulder. “For the record, alpha, I look forward to the day when you don’t keep your paws to yourself.”

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Falling asleep on the ground with your body already all banged up and broken shouldn't have been the best night's sleep in recent memory. But somehow it was.

Once the kids were all asleep, and Tyrus promised to keep an eye on us for a while, slumber came quick and hard. He had his own comfy bed and still chose to be here with me...with us. It meant more to me than even I'd realized at the time. My excellent sleep could attest to that. I didn't toss or turn the entire night, and I woke refreshed and ready for the day. In pain, but impressed.

It was probably early; at least for most people it would be. When you regularly get up before the sun, anything past sunrise was sleeping in. I sat up. It took so much more effort than it should've to get up. It probably didn't help that I'd been sleeping on the floor or that I'd been in his arms the day before. Never had pain felt so worth it—the feel of his arms hug, his warmth, what little of a scent I could detect, thanks to this stupid collar filling my senses. If he held out his arms, I'd step into his embrace without hesitation.

In the far corner, the kids were already up and in a half circle. Sitting in the middle? Tyrus. I headed to the bathroom quickly and came back out and over to them to see what they were up to.

“And this is my favorite book,” Tyrus said, holding up a picture book with a cartoon monster on the cover. Even the teens and preteens were watching him as if he was the most amazing thing ever as he began the book.

It was the story of a kid who pretended they had a pet monster, only to find out it wasn't pretend after all. All the kids giggled as the creature came to life, Tyrus

making all of the voices. It was a silly cartoon, nothing scary, and I heard even Sally laughing along with the creature's antics.

It was going to be really good for them, at least for as long as we were here. I didn't know what would happen to them once the dust settled, but, for now, they were all safe...all laughing.

"He's pretty amazing, isn't he?" one of the alphas who'd been helping us said. I really needed to learn names.

"He really is. I'm Sloan."

"They call me Pop-Tart."

"Is that your name?"

"They call me Pop-Tart." It wasn't really an answer, but I was going to take it.

"I came to get you because we have someone here who can help you get this collar off...we think." That didn't sound overly promising.

"The kids are here." I wanted this off, but I also wanted them to have things as normal as possible.

"They'll be fine with Tyrus, and then pretty soon everybody's going to be called to breakfast. You'll see them there."

I didn't love the idea, but out of all the people here, I trusted Tyrus the most. If anyone was going to keep them safe, it was him. And really, nothing about this place felt unsafe. Not that I'd been the best at discerning what was or wasn't secure. I shivered at the thought of how compliant I'd been working at Shifter House.

“Okay.” I followed him into a little room where a healer awaited me. They were nice enough, but there was for sure an edge to them that had me not overly comfortable.

The healer didn’t say much, focusing on the issue at hand. First, he had me drink some nasty things in little shot glasses. I didn’t ask what they were. If he didn’t offer, I didn’t want to know. More than once, he mumbled words I didn’t understand.

It had been mentioned by more than one person that they thought some dark healing went into the creation of this collar. If he was using dark healing to remove it... That was something I didn’t want to put too much thought into. Dark healing wasn’t something to mess with.

Eventually, he brought out a tool that looked like it came out of a medieval torture chamber in a horror movie. No one else in the room seemed concerned about it, and I held in my fear the best I could.

Pop-Tart was still there, and everything about him shouted that he would protect me. A haziness from the liquids, or maybe the words, clouded my ability to focus on exactly how they were removing it.

A loud pop followed by both clarity and a sense of feeling like myself told me they were successful. For the first time since the collar was placed around my neck, my beast had control. He could come through if he desired. He wanted to so badly.

“I need to shift. Can I shift here?”

“No. You can’t shift yet. You need to eat breakfast.” The healer was adamant. “Go with them. Eat. I want you to make sure you double stack your protein.”

“We have eggs,” Pop-Tart promised him.

“Then have eggs—no less than eight of them. An hour after that, you can try to let your beast out.”

“Okay.” Try wasn’t the word I wanted to hear.

My beast didn’t like it either, although his solution was to do it now. It took all my strength to push him down. Not that I had much, as broken and battered as I was. I wasn’t going to risk ignoring the healer’s suggestions. I was in bad enough physical shape already. I didn’t need to make it worse.

Pop-Tart led me to where everybody was eating their breakfast. Tyrus sat with the kids, telling them dad jokes that had them groaning. I filled up my plate with all the eggs and sat with them. I didn’t love eggs, but I wasn’t willing to risk something going wrong with my first shift.

Tyrus looked at my neck. “All good?”

“Yeah. All good.” At least as good as it could be for the moment.

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“What do you need?” I asked Sloan after breakfast. He had gotten his collar off and showered immediately, in my bathroom, of course, but there was something still bothering him.

He turned to smile at me and shrugged. “I haven’t shifted in so long.”

“Can I shift with you?” I asked, feeling like a young cub asking another cub to go on a first date. My heart fluttered. My stomach buzzed with excitement. The back of my neck heated with tingles. Gods. I was a wreck for this omega.

“I can shift by myself, Tyrus. It’s okay.”

I growled a bit. “First of all, I love my name on those lips.” I ran my thumb across the bottom one. “Second, while this place is safe, I won’t take any chances with you. And third, and most important, I want to.”

Sloan pursed his lips and rolled his eyes. “Well, if you aren’t too busy.”

“Come on. Let’s go.”

I checked with the others to make sure everything was covered for a while. They all had been giving me knowing looks but said nothing about Sloan.

I took Sloan’s hand and led him out the back of the warehouse and into the forest. My nose told me there was no one else around. I was glad since my omega was safe; plus, no way in hell anyone was going to see him naked except me.

“I want to see your bear,” he claimed once we arrived in a secluded area.

“You want me to shift first? Oh, omega. If you wanted to see me naked, all you had to do was ask.” It was a half tease, of course. Sloan had a lot of inside work to do. He had gone through so much and, while I was privy to only a part of it, my bear knew there were layers and layers of pain and anguish inside that beautiful exterior. I would never push him, but that didn’t stop me from wanting him with every cell of my body.

“Stop teasing and show me that big, bad bear.”

My bear took over and, before I could shed my clothing, I let out a loud growl and was on all fours and furry in a matter of seconds. He wanted out immediately.

I sensed a bit of fear coming from my omega, so we lay on our belly in front of him, putting our face between our front paws.

My omega was the only one on this earth I would submit to this way.

“Oh my gods, you are huge and kind of scary, aren’t you, big guy?” He eventually stepped forward and pressed a hand to the top of my head. “Your fur is so soft. I thought it would be prickly.”

We huffed, letting him know we understood his words.

All shifters communicated differently.

Sloan sat on his haunches in front of me. “Alpha, you are magnificent. Fearsome and brawny. Wynorrific. That’s the word.”

Sloan had mentioned he was a teacher before all this horror came into his life. So



damned sexy when he used words like that. I blew out a breath. Had no fucking clue what that word meant but it sounded bad-ass.

“It means beautiful and terrifying,” he said, as though reading my thoughts. He ran his fingers through my fur around my mouth. A sensitive area for my bear, but our omega could touch us anywhere he wanted to. “You’d tear down the world for someone you cared about, wouldn’t you? You’d tear it all down for me?”

I rolled to the side and exposed my belly to him. A bear thing if there ever was one. The ultimate act of submission. To him. To us. To his power over me.

All of me belonged to him.

Even if he decided he didn’t want me.

All of me had always belonged to Sloan.

“My wolf is dying to run with you. You don’t have to look away, Tyrus. You can see all of me.”

My bear feasted on the sight of his omega’s form as he stripped in front of us. He had scars that I wanted to avenge, but they would fade in time. The ones inside might not ever fade. They would hide and duck behind the other parts of him but would come out and show themselves at the most inopportune times. That’s how trauma worked.

My mate was more beautiful than the sunset.

In a split second, he phased from human to wolf in front of me. His wolf rubbed his muzzle against my bear’s, nudging him to run with the omega.

Not a request I would ever turn down.

While we ran, new scenes fluttered in my mind and, almost immediately, I realized they were coming from Sloan. He was sending me visions while we were awake.

Can you hear me, Sloan?I asked, testing the bond.

I can. Did you see my visions?

My heart warmed. I knew the bond was strong, but there were times, especially with multispecies shifter bonds, when mates couldn't communicate in their animal forms. Relief flooded me. I wanted to speak to my omega at all times, hear anything and everything he wanted to convey to me.

I see all of you, mate.

Sloan shared visions of him with the children. Me, through his eyes, holding some of the kids and rocking Lachlan and Dominick at the same time when I thought no one was watching. Me laughing with my brothers.

The way I looked at my mate.

He sent me one moment where he and I were locked in an embrace. Not a strip of clothing between us. We moved until Sloan lay beneath me, but I could see the entire scene from his point of view. There was nothing but lust and love in my eyes as I looked down on my mate.

I want that, too,I said to him. I want all of you or any piece you're willing to gift me, omega.

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I felt better than I had in I didn't even know how long, and it was partly because my body healed. I still needed to get checked out by the healer to make sure there was nothing stitched back in place incorrectly, but I could move my hand freely for the first time. I used that newfound freedom to grab my mate's hand. He intertwined our fingers, and we headed to Tyrus' meeting after a pit stop to check in with the others.

My mate was the other reason I was feeling so much better. Just being around him made my day brighter. There was so much left to figure out, but, with him by my side, everything was going to be okay.

I hated the collar and what it represented, but I'd had no true understanding of how much it impacted my body. The pain from my injuries masked so much of its power. Having that collar off had made such a difference, not only in my physical body but in my ability to sense my mate. As intense as things had been getting with him before, now that I could sense him fully, it was...wow. People who talked about their mate and how all-encompassing the emotions were hadn't been exaggerating.

After a quick check on the kids, who were having a blast with a craft activity that had far more glitter than I'd ever seen in one place, we settled in a room with all my mate's coworkers. I still didn't fully understand what they did, but, from the bits and pieces I'd picked up, they had thought they were working for the good guys only to find out maybe they weren't so good after all. I understood that feeling all too well. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. It came with such a blanket of guilt.

I sat down, both nervous and ready. It was time to figure out what was going to happen next. I wasn't worried about me. I had my mate, and all the details could and would be worked out. But the kids? They were counting on us, and I refused to let

them down.

“Can I start this meeting off?” I wasn’t trying to cause waves, but there were so many things bubbling up inside me, and I had to get them out.

They looked at me, a few nodding, and I took it as a sign to continue. “I just wanted to thank you for coming and helping us, for giving the children a safe place, and for being welcoming.”

I closed my eyes, needing them to know this next part but unsure if they would all believe me. My mate took my hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“I started working at Shifter House because I thought I was doing right by them. It sounded like a great job, helping kids who didn’t have anyone until they could find their forever homes. What could be better? I loved them and gave them my all. And maybe I wasn’t seeing the signs, or maybe there was a change when the guys who hurt me came over, but...” I sucked in a breath. “What I’m saying is, I need to be sure these kids have the best life possible. There are no other options.”

“Well, that’s one of the reasons we wanted to have this meeting,” Hammer said. I was starting to figure out who was who and what their jobs were and paying attention when someone called them by their name. We’d probably already been introduced, but that collar did a number on me.

“We’re trying to figure out exactly what all you know because it didn’t take much scratching the internet’s surface to figure out Shifter House isn’t the only one. And we don’t really know where to go from there.” Mav grabbed the back of his neck.

“There are more schools?” My stomach threatened to revolt.

“Yeah, and anything you can tell us will help.”

I told them about how I got connected to the job, why I took it, the things I saw while there, even the little things that at the time didn't seem important, but, in this new light, might be. Then I went on to describe when I felt a change, and ended with the day they rescueded us. I really didn't have a ton of information. A couple of first names, but no last, the types of beasts, and a timeline. Not much more.

Then they shared what they knew with me. In the end, it turned out, they knew more than I did. They assured me my information was valuable, that I was able to give them some fresh leads.

“Obviously, we need to do something,” Hammer said.

“I hate to be the one to say it, but there are so many children here,” Mav said. “We’re doing the best we can, but if we’re going to get more, we’re going to need to figure something different out. And honestly, at this point in time, I don’t think there’s anybody left I trust. This is all on us.”

“Gods. I hate how true that is.” Pop-Tart pressed the heel of his hand into his forehead.

We all hated it. How could anyone not? At the end of the day, the kids needed us to step up. They deserved better than they’d been given. They deserved a normal, happy, healthy life, and we needed to be the ones to give it to them because everyone else had failed them in the most epic of ways.

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“He’s lovely,” Aziz said, coming to stand shoulder to shoulder with me. “You’re a lucky man.”

I let a bit of a growl come out, but he would never touch what didn’t belong to him, or what was mine. Nor would any of my brothers here. We all had each other’s backs—had to. But even if we weren’t here, trying to fight off some invisible villain who only seemed to get stronger the harder we struggled, they would be my brothers in this life.

He chuckled. “Now, now. I’m only admiring. I’m happy for you.”

I chuffed, never taking my eyes off Sloan. “He doesn’t know who I am. What I’ve done. When he finds out...”

A grunt came from the hyena. I’d once mistakenly called him a scavenger, but he quickly corrected me. They were hunters, but only in times of starvation did they feast on the carcasses of animals others took down first. “When he finds out, he might be upset, and that’s okay. A good omega like that forgives if the alpha deserves it. Besides, you’re not so bad. You smell like a fucking bear, but I forgave you for that a long time ago.”

I chuckled. We had all given each other our fair share of digs over our differences but learned over time that our similarities were greater.

Aziz didn’t know what I was talking about exactly. No one knew.

My team didn’t know about my side excursions because I made sure they didn’t

know. Even Hammer was in the dark.

I reeled my thoughts back to my mate. He seemed to flourish anywhere. Even in the direst of circumstances.

Sloan was sitting on the floor while the kids crowded around him. He showed them how to play some card game. They hung on every word that came from his mouth. Two little female cubs were in his lap, helping him give directions, while the others played a mock game, learning all the ins and outs. They looked to him as a cub would a father.

Gods. He would make a fantastic father.

“Just like we all forgave you for being a hyena. I can’t wait to bust your nuts once you find your omega.”

Aziz inhaled deeply. “I’m not an alpha who has an omega, Tyrus.” Before I could respond, he pulled out his phone. “I’ve got to make a supply run. Call if you need anything that isn’t on the list.”

I watched Aziz march out of the warehouse. He’d been acting strange lately but, then again, he always kept his walls up and made sure there was intangible space between all of us and him. But, like me, if he wanted others to know his secrets, he would tell us.

As I was watching him, the hair on the back of my neck prickled. Someone was watching me. I scanned the room to find a young teenage male pretending to read a book but, every once in a while, his gaze would fall on me.

When I caught his attention, I crooked my finger at him, asking him to come over.

“Hello, I’m Tyrus. I don’t think we’ve met,” I said, extending my hand. He was an alpha. Probably didn’t know it yet considering he’d been through hell and back. No time for paying attention to things like that when you are being held prisoner. He was thirteen, maybe fourteen. He would know soon. And, by the scent, he was a wolf, just like my omega.

“I’m Abel. I’m sorry if I was staring.”

“Were you? I hadn’t noticed,” I said and winked at him. No reason to embarrass the guy.

“It’s just that...there was once someone who looked exactly like you. He helped me at one of the other keeps. He would sneak bread and cake to me at night when we didn’t get enough to eat from the bad men.”

My skin broke out in goose bumps as I realized what he was saying. Of course. This was why he was staring. Anyone would if they’d seen a ghost.

“Tyrone?” I asked. He nodded. A smile rose on my face. It always did when I discovered my brother had made an impact on someone’s life. He did that when we were little and continued in his adulthood. “He was my twin brother.”

“Was?” The young man’s face fell. “He died?”

I nodded. “He did. I’m sorry. I’m glad that you got to know him.”

“They took me from that house about five years ago. I used to count the days. But no one wanted to adopt me. Now I’m too old. That’s what one of the men said.”

I hugged him around the shoulders. How could I not? His words were filled with sadness, and his scent had a desperation about it. I was sure Sloan did his best with



every child he came into contact with, but this male was in great need of a friend and a mentor.

Parents who would love him and teach him how worthy he was.

Gods. I wanted to strangle every asshole ever involved in all of this.

Every. Single. One.

“I’m sure Tyrone loved you and, just because some random person didn’t want to adopt you doesn’t mean no one wants you. How about this afternoon you and I train in the gym? Learn a few fighting techniques? Now that you’re eating properly, maybe get some weight on you.”

He chuckled. “Are you sure? You would do that?”

“Absolutely. Tyrone wasn’t the only one with the nice streak.”

“Thank you, Tyrus.” We’d corrected all of them when they first arrived. Calling us sir. Bullshit. Sir was my father, not me.

I turned, deciding to go back to researching some tips when Sloan broke from the group of kids and came over. Much better than looking at my laptop. He put a hand on my arm, and my body reacted like he’d fisted my cock. Tingles flooded my skin, starting at my head and not stopping their onslaught until they reached my toes.

“You okay?” I probably asked him that a million times a day. It was our thing.

“I am. That was sweet of you. Abel has been through hell and back.”

I nodded. “I gathered that. He knew my brother. Had seen him at another holding

place.”

“That must’ve been weird.”

I shook my head. “Not weird. It was good. Tyrone gave as much love as he could while he was on this earth, no matter what the circumstances. I have to do the same. Plus, kill all the fuckers who did this to you and Abel and Tyrone and the countless others.”

Sloan snorted and got on his tiptoes so his mouth was near my ear. “Do you know how sexy it is when you threaten to take down all the bad guys?”

I would’ve answered, but the words were stuck in my throat. Sloan giggled, obviously knowing the effect he had on me, and walked away. And, damn it all, the omega knew how to walk away.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

I woke up next to my mate, having just had a dream walk. Only it wasn't Tyrus I had shared it with. I wasn't really sure it was a person at all. That made the entire thing even more complicated.

For some reason, I got it in my head that since I was mated, my dreams would all pretty much reach out to him, whether intentional or not. So, when I first realized I was on the grass in a place I'd never been before, I looked for him, felt around for him. He wasn't there. As far as I could tell, no one was.

It wasn't like the dreams I had before. The lack of people was huge, but it was more than that. Something about this place felt wrong, dangerous. Had it simply been a nightmare, I'd have brushed it off, but this was a real place, and someone or something brought me here. It was my job to figure out why.

In the distance was a building. By all indications, it was abandoned. Nothing about the place hinted at it being inhabited, but there were people there at one time. The old sign with missing letters suggested the mountainside ski lodge had closed decades ago. And the old ski lifts? The wires that ran the chairlifts up the mountainside were either missing or hanging down, snapped in two.

"Go back to sleep, love," Tyrus whispered. "We still have time before breakfast."

It was so sweet that he was sleeping here with me. He didn't have to. He had his own room with his own bed. It meant so much to me, probably more than he knew.

"I just have to do something real quick," I whispered. I climbed out of bed and headed toward the bathroom, grabbing a notepad and pencil along the way.

I needed to get my dream out on paper before it faded away. I sketched it, trying to incorporate every detail I could pull from my memory. I wasn't the best artist in the world, but I was pretty good and, when it was complete, it resembled my nocturnal destination to a T. Sketching it out was better than trying to describe it in words. I'd have missed far too much.

My hopes that putting it on paper would help me figure out the importance of the old lodge were squashed. I was no closer now than I was when I woke up. There was a tiny chance that this was nothing but a normal dream, that the place didn't exist. My gut, however, told me that not only was it real, but it was important. Right now, it was nothing more than a scene and it would stay that way until I could figure something else out.

I tore out the paper and folded it up and went back to my sleep spot, leaving the notebook back where I found it. Sliding the paper under my pillow, I lay there and listened for my mate's breathing, trying to see if he was still awake and when I determined he was, I whispered, "Good night," and allowed myself to fall back into slumber.

When it was time to get up, my mate's phone made sure I knew it. I was on kitchen duty today. They hadn't said I had to do kitchen duty. In fact, they told me I should take my time and adjust to the place first. But I wanted to give back, and this was one way I could do so.

I hadn't dreamed during the last few hours of sleep, so I woke up fairly refreshed. After getting cleaned up, I checked the kids to make sure they were starting to get up and got breakfast going. I made my kids' favorites, baked French toast and bacon. The ovens weren't big enough to cook for everyone all at once, and I had to work in batches, which was fine. My biggest worry was that the others might not like what I'd prepared. I grabbed a bunch of cereal out of the cupboards and sliced up a few melons. Worst-case scenario I could throw some toaster waffles in for those who

were picky. One thing was for sure; anyone going hungry was doing so by choice.

There were many more kids here than I was used to cooking for, plus omegas and Tyrus' crew. I'd call them a pack, but they never did. The closest I heard from them was family.

I loved how everybody was working together to help give the kids everything they needed. The biggest obstacle, aside from time, was that this warehouse had a lot of square footage, but it really wasn't designed for this many people to live here. There weren't enough bathrooms, and the kitchen could sure use doubling.

Something had to give. They either needed to find a full-time living space for everyone or invest in a second kitchen and some plumbing. Probably a mixture of both.

Hutch helped get things ready and, between the two of us, we were ready when the kids came in to eat. The food was a hit with everyone. It was reminiscent of being back at Shifter House with the kids and I all eating together, chatting about what our day was going to bring, telling stories of things they did the day before, and asking what was for lunch before the dishes were completely cleared.

I loved this time together, but this could only be a layover for the kids. They needed to find real homes with families who could love them and give them the undivided attention they needed. They needed forever.

## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

I could watch Sloan with the kids for hours on end. He'd taken to teaching them how to make cookies and, although the place was a fucking wreck after they finished, the looks on the kids' faces made it all worth it. They had accomplished something and were praised by everyone for their hard work.

After they'd had their freshly baked cowboy cookies and cold milk, Sloan gathered them up and, to my surprise, in less than an hour, the kitchen was spotless—almost like they'd never gone in there.

He'd come out of Deacon's area earlier that morning, grinding his jaw, and stopped to take several breaths before I could get to him. Once I embraced him in the hallway, he let me know it had been a tough session with the counselor, but he would be okay.

My touch soothed him, which made my bear's whole day.

Once Sloan greeted the kids afterward, I watched his jaw loosen and his shoulders release their tension. Any stress leftover after my touch helped him was washed away by the sight of the kids.

My phone vibrated making me tense up at the feeling in my back pocket. Everyone who usually called me was right here in the warehouse, so I could pinpoint with great probability who was sending me a message. I'd never hoped for spam more than that moment.

I stepped back from the rest of the guys and leaned against the far wall before pulling my phone out. Sure enough, when I looked at the screen, it was from the unknown contact.

It was always an unknown contact. I'd once tried to call this phantom number only to be sent directly to voicemail and, conveniently, their inbox was full.

We had some knowledge of who we worked for, but mostly we understood the why. To save omegas. To stop the breeding rings. To stop the abuse and kidnapping of innocent omegas. To put an end to all the abuse.

Still, over the last few months, with all the developments and discoveries, I worried about our so-called bosses and what their intent was. Some days, I wondered if our intent and theirs lined up at all anymore.

Sloan had again busied himself with the little ones, so I decided to go to my bedroom and have a moment to myself. I had a lot to think about. It wasn't just me in this life anymore. I had a mate. A male who made me feel love I didn't know was possible.

Maverick had only recently confessed to us that he had taken out several people deemed guilty by someone without a face or a name, much like I did.

When he found his omega, Hutch, he'd decided he didn't want that anymore. Didn't want to be a killer and didn't want to put his life at risk when his omega leaned on him.

And yet, as I looked at the instructions that came through by text, I knew that this one had to be done. This male was wanted for killing omegas. Killing and torturing.

This is where things got difficult. If Maverick wasn't going to kill these guys anymore, then that left me.

And anyone who killed and tortured omegas didn't deserve another breath of our air.

So I had to be a killer.

I had to protect my omega.

And yet, in the process, those things made me unworthy of Sloan.

But like hell I could stay away from him.

I plopped down on the love seat and scratched my scalp, thinking about the situation and what in the hell I was going to do. I shut my eyes tightly and sent my worries to any god that would listen to someone about to end another's life.

When I opened my eyes, clear on the fact that I had to complete the mission, I saw a sketch on the bed that caught my attention. I reached for it and saw an S on the bottom. I'd seen Sloan do some art projects with the kids, but this was professional looking. My omega was talented. The drawing was like something out of a museum but, when I realized what I was looking at, I stood up at the shock.

Sloan had drawn exactly the picture that was texted to me. The building this horrific alpha was in. The one I was supposed to kill.

Sloan knew about my mission?

He drew it?

Did he have a vision about it?

Why didn't he share it with me?

Did his gifts go beyond sharing dreams? I mean, clearly they did.

Fuck. Did he already know about me? That I wasn't the kind and gentle alpha he claimed me to be?



That inside me was a killer?

I let out a loud roar, shaking the walls around me. Not knowing what else to do, I stripped off my clothes and made a beeline for the shower and cranked the water on the cold setting. There was so much tension inside me. Frustration. Stress. Need for my mate. Conflict. Confusion. It threatened to break through my skin and spiral out of control in my head.

It was too much.

Once the shock of the cold water made me gasp, I was able to breathe again. I had to do this. I had to be the alpha Sloan needed, and at the same time, retain the part of me that slayed monsters. I could be both, couldn't I? A lover and a fighter? A contracted killer and a gentle mate?

I splayed my hands on the shower wall and let the cold water pour down my back.

I had some decisions to make.

But first, I had to kill this asshole before he did more damage.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

Making cookies with the kids was a blast. I always loved to see their faces as the science of baking came to life in front of their eyes—and in their bellies. I did my best to explain how each ingredient had a job and what that job entailed. Some of it was obviously for flavor, and they picked those elements out right away. But others had to do with the crispness or the fluffiness of the cookie, how much it spread out on the sheet, and how moist the final product would be.

We measured, dumped, and mixed ingredients together as I talked about different ways we could change up the recipe to fit our moods. Today, we were going with standard chocolate chip cookies, the kind that were more soft than crisp. They were already making plans to bake some that would snap if you bent them later this week. Apparently, Abel believed it had to have a loud pop as it broke or it wasn't really a cookie. I disagreed. I was under the belief that all cookies were good cookies...except the ones with walnuts. But no child was going to fight me on that one. Not any in this group of them anyway.

What I didn't like about baking with kids was the cleanup. Sure, I could have had the older ones help and do it with me, but they had been asked by one of the omegas to come do a game when they were done. I wasn't going to make them give up fun because the kitchen was dirty. They had their whole lives to be responsible. And, frankly, anything that put a smile on their faces right now, I was for.

"Need some help?" Pop-Tart came in and grabbed a snack out of a bin that was set there just for him.

The guy was always snacking—probably how he got his name. I never asked. I should have, but as much as I felt at home with Tyrus, I still wasn't quite there yet

with everyone else.

My life was too unsettled. Where were the kids going to go? Who was going to take care of them? What would I do once my purpose was gone? Our entire lives were up in the air. If I didn't have Tyrus to tether me, I wasn't sure how well I'd be doing.

"Naw, I got it. Want to make some cookies?"

He grabbed one from the plate I indicated and popped it in his mouth, not bothering to finish chewing it before asking, "You want to do the floor as well as the dishes?"

"Oh, I can sweep. No big deal." I didn't look up from the sink I was filling.

Pop-Tart cleared his throat and, when I glanced his way, he was pointing to the floor. An egg had cracked under the table. My guess was that it rolled off and no one noticed. With the amount of flour, someone could probably make pasta right there.

"All right. You can do the floor." If he wanted to deal with that, I wasn't going to argue.

Pop-Tart laughed and got straight to work. He was someone who'd gone out of his way to make sure that I felt welcome and to make sure the kids felt safe. I appreciated it. There was no one here, with the possible exception of the dark healer who only came by once, who had me feeling uneasy about anything. But, with Pop-Tart, it was different. Almost like he was my brother or a cousin.

I finished washing and putting the dishes away about the same time he was ready to mop where I had been standing. I was soaking wet and covered in all sorts of yuck—a side effect of being hugged by Sally. But it had all been worth it because she had looked up at me and said, "Thanks," clear as day.

It was the first word I ever heard from her, and I tried so hard not to make a big deal of it. I wasn't sure I succeeded, but she was beaming on her way out, and that was good enough for me. She still had a long way to go, but it was such a promising sign.

I went back to Tyrus' room to take a shower, only to discover it was already occupied. I knocked on the door and called out, "It's me?"

"Come in."

I did and was surprised by what I found. I'd expected the room to be steamy, but it wasn't. Not in the slightest.

"I was going to take a shower. I can wait out here or maybe join you?"

He turned the hot water on. "Obviously, there is only one right choice. Come in with me."

I wasn't going to turn that down. I barely caught a glimpse of him, the stupid design on the shower curtain in the way, but already I was hard and needy for him. I was guessing there was a reason for the hot water, but I'd ask later. It probably had to do with working out or something. I secretly hoped the something was him thinking of me and this was that kind of cold shower.

I undressed quickly and stepped inside.

"Gods, you're gorgeous." He looked me up and down, not pretending to hide his appreciation.

"I was thinking the same thing about you," I reached up tentatively in an unasked question. Gods, I wanted to run my fingers up and down his body. "So gorgeous."

He slammed his lips to mine, his body pressing me against the back of the shower, our hardness between us. That answer was all I needed.

We explored each other's bodies with our hands, but the cold water cut through, ending things far too early for my liking. According to Tyrus, it meant we had less than two minutes before everything went completely cold. Just enough time to lather up and rinse off.

Stupid small water heater.

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*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

Once Sloan and I had dried off and put on clothes, which was a shame given how dangerously sexy my omega was, I needed to talk to him about the sketch. I would have in the shower, but we were distracted in the best way possible.

“You drew this?” I prompted, picking up the piece of paper to show him.

Sloan sat down on the love seat and nodded. “I did. Didn’t know you were mated to an artist, huh?”

I took a seat across from him on the edge of the bed. “I didn’t. You’re very talented.” I looked over the scene on the paper, again surprised at how the pencil strokes mimicked the exact picture I’d been texted. “Is this somewhere you’ve been?”

Droplets of water fell onto his forehead. I reached forward and brushed it away with the towel next to me. “Tyrus, that was a scene I saw in a dream.”

My chest constricted. He didn’t share this dream with me, but I had to put that aside for now. My omega dreamed of a place where an evil man still lived despite my orders. “Did you feel anything in the dream?”

“Impending doom. All succumbing danger and evil. There’s something awful in that house and it’s not only recent. Bad things have happened in that place for a long time, Tyrus.”

I blew out a breath and gathered my bravery. Funnily enough, I could make sure hits on bad men were carried out but hesitated in telling my fated mate the truth about myself. In some ways, I thought myself courageous but, in front of him, I was

nothing but a shivering cub. “I need to talk to you about something, Sloan. Something I’ve been keeping from you and from the others.”

“Come and sit next to me. That will help you.” I moved to the love seat at his gentle command. He put his hand on the back of my neck, and finally I could breathe again. “I know you are aware that I research the tips for the breeding rings and others so we can take those down, but there’s another part of my job that not even Hammer realizes. I’m scared that once I tell you what I do, you’ll want nothing to do with me.”

He nodded. “Let’s not jump to conclusions. Go on and tell me.”

“Sometimes I get texts or phone calls. Always from an unknown number and name. They have me...me and my bear...we carry out assassinations of people who are abusing omegas. Your mate is a killer, Sloan.”

My beautiful mate looked at the ceiling and closed his eyes. This was it. The end of the road for us. The end of this slice of happiness I allowed myself to have. Beads of sweat broke out along my hairline, and my throat turned into a desert. I gave him a moment. He was a thinker, my Sloan. He took pause before speaking, always careful with his words. He knew more than anyone how they could be more lethal than a sword.

“Tyrus, you only kill people who have done horrible things, right?”

“Yes. Only people who I’m told to kill and, of course, anyone who threatens or attacks the team when we go on raids.”

He turned those brilliant green eyes on me. “Then that makes you a warrior, not a murderer, mate.”

Mate. After everything I’d told him, he was still calling me mate?

“It’s all the same. I have to take lives sometimes.”

Sloan crawled into my lap. “It’s not the same. You kill to avenge omegas who can’t fight for themselves and to save the lives of your brothers. Not the same. I have to admit, it’s not a career path I would choose for you but, given our circumstances, I would rather you be who you are than some of the asshole abusive alphas I’ve met in my life.”

I swallowed and tried to fight back tears. He knew the darkest parts of me and saw through them. “I don’t deserve you, Sloan. I thought you would leave me once you knew.”

He shook his head. “Not for this. Not for doing what you needed to do. Cheat on me and you’re gone, mister.”

I barked out a laugh. We cuddled and kissed for an hour before my mind went back to the business at hand. “I need to call Aziz and have him get on the research for this place. I have coordinates. He’s the best at stakeouts. Sly and quiet as a shadow.”

“Let’s go.”

I moved with weightlessness now that the anchor holding my chest down had been removed. All I had to do was tell him everything, and we would be okay.

“Aziz,” I said, walking up to his desk.

“Whatcha got?” he said as I was trying to hand him a piece of paper with the sketch on it.

“I texted you the coordinates for this place and my... Sloan had a dream that something evil was in there. Can you stake it out for me? Get the intel.”



He stood and looked at the sketch but didn't take it from my hands. "I can. Been too long since I was in my element. I'll report back when I can."

I turned to Sloan. "I want you to sleep in my room tonight. Me and you."

Sloan bit down on his bottom lip. Clearly, he was conflicted. "The kids?"

"They will be fine. See? Already asleep for the night. Unless you're not ready?"

He fisted the front of my shirt. "I've been ready since I first saw you."

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

I was done waiting to mate Tyrus. I understood why we hadn't jumped right into knotty time. I was broken when I arrived and then, after that, we had more important things on our plate. We still did, but at least they were under control. The children were in a good routine, we were working on getting them set up for the future they deserved, and Tyrus and I had some serious conversations.

It was time. But also, I wasn't sure to go about asking him for what I wanted. I could literally visit this man in my dreams, get him so hard in the shower, I don't know how either one of us hadn't exploded. I'd let him see my body when it was completely broken, but this was hard for me. I decided to go with the Band-Aid method and just say it. It wasn't like he'd turn me down...probably.

"I want to mate tonight." The door had barely closed, and I just put it out there.

"We don't—"

I cut him off with a finger to his lips. "I want this. Tell me you want this too."

"More than my next breath."

Now that the moment had arrived, I was doubly nervous. Not because I didn't want Tyrus but the opposite. I wanted him so badly, I was shaking. Desperate to finally connect with him in this way. Feel his claim over me. I didn't want to mess this up.

I walked over to the bed and sat down. "How should I—"

"Shh, omega. Just let your instincts take over." He pulled my shirt over my head and

kissed my neck as he fully removed it. “I’m gonna make you feel how much I want you.”

Relief flowed through me as he took over. I might be a strong-ass omega, but in this...now... I wanted him to be in charge. Call me old-fashioned, but it was hot.

“Yes, alpha.” My whole body shivered as his fingertips trailed down my chest and released the button on my pants. “I need to feel you.”

I felt like I was floating as he fully undressed me and then took a step back to admire my body.

“You’re so beautiful, Sloan.” His fingers slid up my thigh and scooped up a generous amount of slick that was there just for him. “And so slick for me.”

“It’s not nice to tease, Tyrus.” I was feeling confidence return. I pressed my feet into the mattress and lifted my ass, making it very clear what I wanted. “Now take me already.”

“Fuck, Sloan.” He held my weight up by my ass and took my cock into his mouth, sucking me to the back of his throat in several quick thrusts before pulling off and lowering me back to the bed. “I could do that all day, but I need to feel your tight hole hugging my dick.”

“Yes!” I grabbed my knees and pulled them back to my chest. “Do that. Please, alpha.”

Tyrus planted one knee behind my thigh and held his weight over me. Looking into my eyes, he kissed me with soft and purposeful movements, distracting me with his intoxicating taste as the wide head of his cock pushed into my slick opening.

My breath hitched at the pressure, but my body easily yielded to him, as if it knew my mate was finally claiming me.

Tyrus continued to kiss me with increasing passion as he fully entered me, stopping only when there was nowhere left for him to go. “You’re so tight for me. So good, omega.”

“Soooo good.” My brain couldn’t focus on words when I had so many other sensations flowing through me.

His scent enveloped me. His taste made me crave more of him, like I wanted to climb right inside and never leave. His cock filled me in the most primal way, and I fucking loved it.

My fingernails dug into his arms as I threw my head back, desperate for more but unable to verbalize my needs. I didn’t know it could be like this, our connection even deeper than when we dreamed together. My alpha knew what I wanted and gave it to me.

He thrust in and out of me, slowly at first and then faster when we were both panting, whimpering, and moaning with the pleasure of it.

There were so many words and emotions jumbled in my head, but I didn’t voice them. I couldn’t. I just let our bodies do the talking as Tyrus reached between us to stroke my hard cock.

It was so much and still not enough. “I’m so close, alpha.”

“I know.” He nipped at my chin and then dragged his tongue along my jawbone until he reached my earlobe. “Me too.” He nibbled the spot right below my ear, a sign of things to come.

My lungs were working hard to pull in oxygen but I still felt like I was only half breathing. Air wasn't enough to sustain me anymore. Only my alpha could do that. His knot. His claim. His mark. "Please..."

Tyrus stroked me faster, increasing his thrusts in the same rhythm as my climax raced toward me. "Come for me, omega. Show me how much you want my knot."

He was killing me in the best possible way. And I couldn't hold back any longer. I needed everything he was willing to give me. "I do want it. I need it."

On a quick inhale, I finally gave in and allowed my orgasm to take over, shooting into his fist and onto my heated skin. My whole body shook as he pushed in even farther and released his cum inside me, his knot growing.

"Mine." Tyrus licked down my neck then placed his teeth against my skin and bit down, marking me on the outside as my teeth sank into him in return, his knot fully expanded inside me, marking me on the inside too. "Always."

"Always."

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

The line between dreaming and reality had been deliciously blurred throughout the night. Turned out, my omega and I could have sex through dreams. Our bodies weren't involved, of course, but it was an experience of strengthening our bond while touching on intimacies the physical world couldn't quite reach.

Of course, we'd made love in reality several times as well. His body reacted so well in my hold. He touched me in ways I didn't know could set all of me on fire.

I didn't foresee a time when I would ever get enough of the sweet omega who accepted me for all I was.

"I smell sausage," Sloan said as he lay against my naked chest, letting out a moan.

"I've never been jealous of breakfast food before," I answered, chuckling.

"Oh, trust me, I would give up all breakfast food before I would give you up, Tyrus."

I turned and pulled his body flush with my own. Our cocks were both hard, and Sloan grabbed onto my hip, rocking against me. "That's a bold statement."

He opened those eyes and, if I wasn't mistaken, they were brighter first thing in the morning. Those little things about him surprised me every day. His beautiful smile. The way he stirred his iced coffee. The way he took careful steps in everything he did, especially with the kids.

I wanted to put a kid of mine in him—immediately.

“Well, I’m a bold omega.” He proved that point by straddling me and taking me once more.

We took our time showering and learning things about each other, even though I knew he was hungry. I ducked out of the room while he was brushing his teeth and grabbed an iced coffee and two plates of breakfast. I got some pointed looks from the team but growled once, shutting them down. Of course, once this morning bubble of ours popped, and we had to step back into our regular responsibilities, I would have to tell them Sloan was my mate. If they hadn’t figured it out already.

They would accept him, I hoped.

Gray and Hutch were part of the team now and even though Jack didn’t have an alpha here, he had become one of us too. Their input and points of view were valuable in making sure we were doing the right thing even though our mixed signals from the so-called bosses confounded us all lately.

Our responsibility was to the omegas first. Not the ones in charge. Especially when their orders and procedures had proven dangerous to the ones we were on a mission to save.

“What a damned shame,” I said as I walked back into the bedroom to find Sloan dressed in a sweater and jeans. Pop-Tart took care to make sure everyone had clothes that fit them and the season. He was good like that. No way in hell I would know what to get or even where to buy it.

He giggled and took the iced coffee from my hand. “I need a break from you, alpha. I mean, I’m no virgin, but you’re packing a lot down there. Your omega is a bit sore.”

“I hurt you?” I asked, my voice booming.

“No. It’s an amazing soreness. You would never hurt me.”

Realization hit me. “I’m packing a lot, huh?” I wagged my eyebrows.

“Oh gods. I never should’ve said that. You’re gonna get that tattooed across your chest or something, aren’t you?”

I shook my head. “No. But I’m already thinking of getting your name across my chest. Let everyone know who I belong to. I saved that spot for my mate.”

My arms and chest, with the exception of the top near the collarbone, were covered with tattoos. One for my brother. One for my bear. Things that were meaningful and a few for fun.

But Sloan’s name on my skin would be the best one by far.

“Really?” he said. “I might get one too.”

I nodded. While I loved his skin just the way it was, it belonged to him. He was a survivor and a warrior in his own right. A tattoo might be empowering for him. “Eat up. You’re gonna need your strength. It’s pantry cleanup day.”

“Tell you the truth, I’ve been itching to organize that thing. I know everyone tries, but with so many people, it’s bound to get in disarray. Plus, I’m gonna need lots of protein to keep up with you.”

We ate together and were almost done when a knock came at my door. “Come in,” I barked, not liking my private time interrupted.

“Ty, it’s me.” Aziz. “I’ve got some updates. Unless you need me to come back later?” He stuck his head in but kept his eyes on the floor.



“Come on in, Aziz. Everyone is dressed here,” my omega answered.

Aziz came in. I was surprised he had intel already. Sometimes the hyena stayed weeks at a place before he had evidence or something to go on. “I have some things on video and pictures. There’s shit going down at that place, and we need to get on it. Meeting in five minutes.” He looked at Sloan. “Omegas too. We all need to see this.”

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I'd sat with the guys before, had a "meeting," but something about this felt so much more official. Maybe it was because last time, I was there more as a witness, giving my firsthand experience, and this time, I was there as a member. I wasn't sure. In any case, this was like a rite of passage to me.

This time, it wasn't just the crew that my mate worked with; it was their mates as well. Once again, it gave a vibe of pack. My wolf was thrilled by that. He longed for that kind of structure. I suppose in a way he had it at Shifter House, only there, it was more of a boss/employee situation rather than family above me. And, with the children, I treated them as my own, so that was different too.

I was probably just overthinking all this.

Tyrus and I walked in together, barely on time because...fine, because I couldn't stop kissing him. But it was allowed. We were newly mated, and it seemed everyone had figured that out. They'd probably have been worried if we were early, wondering if something was wrong with us.

Instead of sitting next to my mate, I sat with Gray, Hutch, and Jack, the other omegas. Had I been seeing a snapshot of the meeting, not knowing the people here at all, only their designation, I'd have thought there was some grade A omega discrimination going in here. Only it wasn't about separating us. This was about them fully welcoming me into their fold. It was the omega mates letting me know I was not only wanted there but was accepted and needed.

It was an interesting dynamic, and one I hadn't expected. There was no indication I couldn't sit with my mate. And had I been at all uncomfortable, I'd have done so.

Jack waving me to them had been an invitation and not an expectation.

“We sit back here so that when our mates do something eye-roll worthy, we can shake our heads in peace,” Hutch joked.

Although, maybe, maybe there was some truth to it. The guys could be ridiculous on occasion—all of them, including the ones I was sitting with. They loved to joke around with each other, but they understood when it was time to be serious.

“I sit here because it’s close to the door,” Gray whisper-shouted, earning him a few headshakes of his own. “As soon as this sucker is over, I’m outta here.”

He had me giggling now.

Jack was the only unmated omega here. He’d come rescued from a breeding facility, giving birth on the way to this warehouse...in a van. I don’t know how he did it. He was stronger than I was.

Aziz found his place at the head of the table. Showtime. He’d just come back from spending time staking out the place in my dream and had pictures for us to look at as well as some information. I wasn’t sure how they found it, but apparently my picture was enough to allow them to do so. They were quite clever like that, especially with computers. They found things I didn’t know existed on the internet.

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news,” Aziz said, pushing some pictures forward. “But it’s not abandoned. There are a few kids there, middle school and elementary, maybe? I’m not so good with ages. But no one very young, based on what I could gather.”

Which was the opposite of what I saw at Shifter House.

“I set up some cameras before I left. They are feeding into my computer, and I’ll be

sharing that feed with those of you who are willing to help monitor it. I set the motion detectors to notify me when someone is on the go. It also tells me when fox, birds, and large moths fly by. It's not exactly helpful, but it is better than staring all day."

"And what are you looking for?" Hutch asked. He didn't wait to be acknowledged. He had a question and asked away, no one batting an eyelash over it. This might be more formal than the last time I was here with the alphas, but I'd hardly call it rigid.

"I figure we can try to assess what's happening, possibly find some patterns. There might be people coming and going who are different than the ones I saw? Honestly, I don't know what we are looking for, but, as of right now, there's no concrete proof that these are anything but squatters."

"You know they aren't." Hammer barely contained his growl, his voice not fully human. "Sloan wouldn't have dreamed it if they were."

"Unless they need help?" My comment was probably not that helpful, but that was okay because seconds later, I took it back.

I grabbed some of the pictures, flipping through them. My heart sank as I saw the kids. These weren't squatters, and my instinct was confirmed with the very next picture.

It was him, the man who I thought was the inspector. Or maybe he had been an "inspector," but not the kind I'd thought was coming.

"Mate, you look...are you okay?" Tyrus started to get up.

"No. Stay. It's fine." I slid the paper across the table. "This is the man who put the collar on me." I didn't want to bring up the beating again. They all knew it happened.

Tyrus picked it up and he swallowed deeply. That was weird. It was almost like he recognized the guy. “Are you sure?”

“I will never forget that face as long as I live.” And if it took my dying breath, I was going to make sure he paid for what he did not only to me but who knew how many other omegas and children. The man was a monster.

“I got a tip about him.” My mate set the paper down. “He’s evil. Pure evil.”

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“What I want to know is, how did this tip come up, Tyrus?”

Hammer’s question shot right through me. I hadn’t told them before, but maybe it was time I came clean about everything. These were my brothers. They would accept this about me and, if not, at least I had my mate.

“I received intel from our bosses—whoever the fuck they are.” My words came out without weight. I didn’t even believe them myself. Gods, I had to stop lying to the people around me. And omitting this big fact, in my book, was lying.

Hammer nodded, blowing out a breath. “You know, when I graduated college with my nice, shiny criminology degree, I wanted to become a police officer. I wanted to do good. Then this man contacted me and said I was destined for more. That there were omegas who needed my help, desperately. And now I’ve gotten us all tangled in this web of lies and...tell me, Tyrus, what are you hiding from us, brother? I’ve known you for a long time, and this goes beyond the dreams. We can’t solve this problem if we’re not all on the same page. Tell me how you know about this place and where to send Aziz.”

He was right. Hammer and I had been friends long before this team. I remembered when he approached me, telling me he’d been called by a person with a large financial backing who called himself a philanthropist of sorts—wanting to save omegas from all kinds of brutality.

I never pictured myself a killer.

It sort of happened to me instead of me making the decision.

“The boss, for lack of a better word, has been sending me on side missions. Assassinations.”

Maverick sat up straighter in his seat. “You too, Tyrus? Why didn’t you tell us?”

I cocked my head to the side. “The same way you did?”

Hammer stood up. “Here’s what’s going to happen right here and now.” He pushed a little of his alpha power over all of us. Our team was made of alphas but, as our leader, we allowed him to have some say over us. After all, if there was no Hammer, there wouldn’t be a team in the first place. “Raise your hand if you’ve been doing these so-called side missions for the bosses and didn’t tell the team.”

Maverick and I were the only ones to raise our hands.

Then Pop-Tart raised his slowly.

“Jeremy?” Hammer said in shock. He and his brother shared a look for a while before the youngest sibling lowered his gaze.

“I’ve been asked a few times to transfer money into bank accounts and move things around financially. Haven’t been contacted in months though.”

“Unknown number?” Maverick asked.

Jeremy huffed out a laugh. “Always.”

Hammer let out a string of curses. So much for not saying Fuck anymore. “From now on, we need to stop taking side quests. Let’s lay this all out on the table. Things aren’t the way we were promised they would be. We have sent omegas to places that weren’t safe for them. We’ve taken them from the devil and handed them to the

demons. We've got team members keeping secrets. Safe houses aren't safe." Another string of curses. "I know we have this boss, and so far, they have secured us financially, but I think this is our turning point. We need to start working for ourselves. No one outside this room can be trusted unless they have been proven trustworthy. No more side contracts and moving money and assassinating people unless it's someone out to get us."

He was right, but this one job could not be ignored. "Hammer, not this time. This one has to be carried out. I know you heard what Aziz said. This man and his associates—they are evil incarnate. Let this be my last job."

"After this, Tyrus, you need to walk away. For your own good. Trust me." Maverick then looked over at Hutch.

Hammer crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head. "Let's start acting like more of a team and take a vote. Everyone who thinks we need to take this asshole out, raise your hand."

Hammer requested a lot of hand raising lately.

Every hand in the room was raised except for his.

Even mine. Hammer turned to see none of the omegas moving. "Omegas too. Everyone mated to one of us is a team member. No votes for the babies yet. You too, Jack."

His remark was the one we needed to break the thick tension in the room. We all snorted. No way little Dom would vote for his uncle Ty to spill blood.

All four omegas voted yes.



“I fucking hate this, for the record. I wanted to be a video game designer.”

Another round of laughter.

“Aziz, keep us updated and everyone be ready to move. Jeremy, you and I need to talk.”

Everyone left the room except Sloan. He waited for the room to clear and then approached me, wrapping his arms around my torso and resting his head on my chest. “Are you okay?” he asked. “We voted for you to go out and kill someone. That can’t be easy.”

I rubbed his back. He was mated to a morally gray bear, and he was worried about my feelings? “Are you sure this is who you want to be mated to?”

He raised his head and nailed me with those green eyes. “A warrior? Yeah, I’m damned sure I want you forever.” His sincerity pierced my heart. I didn’t deserve him, but I would move mountains to one day be worthy.

“One more job and then it’s you and me.”

He chuckled. “You, me, the team, the over a hundred omegas and kids on the other side of that wall...”

“Well, yeah. Them too.”

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Now that we knew the place I dreamed of was definitely run by the same person who had taken over Shifter House, we couldn't wait around to find patterns or confirm all the facts. We needed to act.

It took a lot for my mate to let everyone know not only about his connection to the man in the picture but also about his past. He was so much stronger than he realized. But not stronger willed than I was.

Tyrus was less than impressed when I announced that I was, in fact, coming with them. It was going to be a small mission, as far as we could tell. Small as in there weren't a ton of guards who could get in our way, not small as in importance. When it came to children, there was no one more valuable, more in need of protection. In that respect, this mission was huge.

There were two adult people at the lodge on a regular basis. We hadn't yet been able to get an accurate count of the children. We had to do our best while we were there to make sure we got them all.

Based on the number of guards and the connection to the "inspector," my guess was it was a situation similar to mine—there was someone taking care of them and someone in charge of the entire facility. That someone in charge was the man slated to die.

When I saw his face in those photos, when I discovered he was responsible for yet another facility, I nearly forgot to breathe. How could anyone knowingly be part of a ring that sold children? How? And in his case, he wasn't just a part of it; he enjoyed the power. When he beat me, it was like a gift for him. He savored it. Just thinking about it sent chills running through me once more.

We drove down, Aziz and Mav leading the way in one van. We drove in the other with Pop-Tart and Hammer. Everyone else stayed back at the factory to keep it safe, to get ready for more incoming children, and to make sure everyone there had their needs met. We might be going on “the mission,” but, they were warriors in this battle too.

In and out. That was our goal. No prolonged fight. No risks. In and out and done.

One good thing about it being an old mountainside resort was that we were able to get the floor plans to help us plan using old reviews on the internet from when people stayed there in years gone by. Could they have redone the building? Absolutely. But it didn't look like they'd done anything at all since they closed. Even the drive was all broken up.

“I need you to be safe, Sloan. Promise me you'll be safe.” It wasn't the first, nor would it probably be the last time Tyrus said this to me. He was scared. I didn't blame him. I was, too. But this had to be done, and we were the people to do it.

“I had the dream for a reason.” I gave his thigh a squeeze. “I'm going in and getting the children and leaving. That is all. You know there's something about me that children trust. It's part of the reason why I did so well at my job. There is something about me kids connect to.” I'd been told it was my big face. “It tells them I'm safe, that I care about them, and they respond in kind.”

That had been Hutch's argument for why it needed to be me. And he'd been right. But even if none of that had been the case, I'd still be going.

“I know, omega mine. I know.”

We pulled over to where the stakeout had been. It wasn't the resort, but it wouldn't take much time to get down there. Every minute mattered. If we were walking, they

could see us. Thankfully, the cameras let us know that only the caretaker was here. I wanted the other man brought to justice more than my next breath, but never at an increased risk to the kids. We could come back for him another time. Rescue first. Justice second.

We came up to the back side of the resort, and Mav picked the lock like a boss. Once inside, it wasn't hard to find where the kids were, but only because they had them all sleeping on the floor of what used to be the main dining room of this vacation destination. Sitting at the door was an alpha—one of those we'd seen on camera. In my heart, I wanted him to be like me, not knowing what was happening and here all for the children.

The second I got a decent look, I saw instantly that he was guarding them like prisoners. This was nothing like Shifter House.

My mate went up behind him, put his arm around him.

“Who else is here?” he asked. “Don't think I won't kill you, asshole.”

“This is my profit.” And that answered that. “I ain't telling you shit.”

He sealed his own fate. My mate partially shifted, and, with one swipe of his claws, those became the last words that alpha ever said. We dragged him around the corner so the kids wouldn't see the body. They did, their breathing erratic enough that they couldn't be asleep. They were scared, frozen. Now that I got a better look at the room, every last one of them was on their back, as if that was required of them, as if they didn't even get any choices as to how to sleep.

I went farther into the room and knelt down low. “Guys, listen. My name is Sloan, and these are my friends. We're here to rescue you. We have other children from other places, and we're going to help you just like we helped them.”

No one moved or made a sound.

Tyrus came up beside me, his hand on my shoulder. “I promise you, we’re the good guys.”

An older boy stood up and came over.

“I know you,” he said, looking directly at my mate.

Tyrus shook his head. “You don’t. You knew my brother—my twin brother.”

That made the boy turn around and whistle. And just like that, everybody got up.

“It’s the real deal. We gotta get out of here. Remember that guy I was telling you about? His brother is here. He can take care of us.”

We gathered the kids, not giving them time to take anything with them, although I had a feeling there wasn’t much to take. We led them out the back door we’d come in through, the sound of a car driving up the driveway filling the silence.

Aziz was already on it, pointing for us to go as he jogged around the building, his hand on his holster. I hated the thought of using human weapons, but we had children and needed to do what was best for them.

“I’ll go help,” Tyrus said. “Take them to the van.”

“No, they only trust you, mate. Take them. I’ll stay with Aziz and end this.”

He didn’t like it. I didn’t like it. But we had no choice.

When he heard the guy yell and realized three of the kids had grabbed on to him, he

could see I was telling the truth and that there wasn't time to argue. He led them out, and I ran around the building in time to watch as the man smacked Aziz to the ground then reached for his gun.

Never in all my years had my beast come through my skin as fast as he did then. I pounced on the man, my claws coming out and my jaw clamping onto his neck, holding on until I finally felt his body give way underneath me. If he had seen me, it wouldn't have gone as easily as that, but I had the element of surprise on my side.

Aziz stood up, watching me from a distance. I let go, backed away from the alpha, and shifted.

“Thanks for keeping me not dead. And not for nothing, we are scary as fuck.”

“No one messes with our kids. No one.”

I looked down at the dead body, blood everywhere. It was good he was gone. He needed to be. But why did I suddenly feel like I was just as bad as he was?

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“I’m taking him out of here,” I barked at Maverick who stood over the carcass of the asshole Sloan had just killed. He held his gun, waiting for any twitch worthy of another bullet. We wanted to make sure this one was deader than dead.

“Go,” Maverick answered. “Get him to the truck. We’ve got this.”

I picked up Sloan and carried him like a little one all the way through the wreckage and back to the SUV. My mate was silent—too silent, and I had been exactly where he was. My first kill. His first kill.

It had to have hurt my good-hearted omega. Taking another’s life and breath away, no matter how dangerous and awful that person was didn’t make it easy. It was a horrible thing to carry out, and the aftermath might’ve been worse than the deed—for the person still living.

“Talk to me, Sloan,” I begged, noticing his glassy stare and how he’d gone completely pale.

He said nothing in return but then pushed me out of the way and got out of the car.

“Wait, you can’t go back in there,” I yelled, not wanting him to revisit the scene. What was already ingrained in his head was enough for a lifetime.

He turned. “I’m not. He...I had to.” Sloan took off at a sprint toward the trees on the side of the building, and I heard his heaving before I saw him bent over, spewing his breakfast onto the ground.

“Let it out. It’s okay.” I rubbed his back and reached for a water bottle I kept in my bag. “It’s over now.”

“He had a collar on me,” Sloan said after throwing up until his face was red and there was nothing left. “He killed your brother. The gods only know what he did to countless omegas like me. I had to. I didn’t think. But I had to. He was a terrible person. I couldn’t let him do that to someone else. No more...”

I grabbed him and nestled his shaking body in my hold. “No one will ever hold this against you, Sloan. If there is anyone on this earth who deserved to stop breathing because of his crimes, it was him. I know you acted on instinct, and that instinct was right.”

“But I killed someone,” he croaked, fisting my shirt with both hands while sobs wracked him.

My sweet omega. He’d been so damned brave and strong.

His crying, both audible and not, continued through the cleanup and the entire ride home. When King got into the truck beside us, he wrapped a blanket around Sloan and told him that he did the right thing.

King was my brother. My bear didn’t growl once or feel a single twinge of jealousy as the lion told my mate how strong he was and how that asshole had died immediately. A clean kill. Probably kinder than what I would’ve done. Certainly a better ending than what my bear had in mind.

By the time we got back to the warehouse, Sloan had somewhat calmed down. He let me lead him to our bedroom and even drank a bottle of water and nibbled on some crackers for his stomach.



“Do you think differently about me now?” he asked, chin quivering.

“Yes,” I answered and kneeled in front of him as he sat on our bed. “I think you are the fiercest omega there ever was. You avenged my brother’s death. You avenged your mate’s pain. That took bravery and bigger balls than I have.”

Sloan let out a little chuckle. “No one has bigger balls than you, alpha.”

My bear grumbled. “True, but you did well. And now it’s over. He can’t ever hurt another omega again. Keep your thoughts focused on all the lives and hearts you saved. The trauma you prevented.”

“Is that what you do?” he asked.

I nodded. “That’s what I did. I won’t kill another unless it’s defending my family.”

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The next morning, I woke up feeling like I was born to puke. The feeling didn't go away; it got worse and worse until I found myself running to the bathroom, barely making it in time. The adrenaline and protectiveness that had come out of me when I killed had felt right at the moment. There was no stopping me.

As reality set in, it ate at me. It was the right thing to do. But now, the guilt overwhelmed me to the point of being sick.

I cleaned the best I could, brushed my teeth, and took a shower. When I came back into our bedroom, I found a hoodie lying on the bed next to a pair of my pajama pants with a note on top.

I thought today you might want to wear my hoodie. I wore it a couple of times already, and it scents like me.

Best fucking mate ever. I grabbed the hoodie so fast if you blinked, you would miss it and pulled it over my head, inhaling his scent and hugging it close.

Tyrus walked in a few seconds later. "I want to talk to you about something, okay?"

I nodded. Talking about last night wasn't on my list of favorite things, but it wasn't something we could avoid either.

"You're gonna think that maybe I'm imagining things or seeing something that's not there. But I want you to hear me out, okay?"

"Okay." He was starting to make me nervous.

“I think you are pregnant.”

And that was the very last thing I thought he'd say.

“I can't be pregnant, Tyrus.” Or could I? “We just got mated.”

“There's no time limit on how long you have to be mated before you are pregnant. You know that, right?” He chuckled.

“Yeah, but I don't show any of the signs either.” I shoved my hands in the hoodie pocket.

He rolled his eyes. “You were just in the bathroom, hurling.”

“Yeah, but that was from guilt, not pregnancy.”

“If you say so. Ready for breakfast?”

“Not yet. Why don't you go take your shower. I'm going to catch a few more minutes of sleep.”

Those few minutes turned into an hour, and it only ended then because my mate showed up with a tray of food.

“I thought maybe you might want to eat here today.”

“Maybe, but I also want to see the kids.” I couldn't help but wonder if everybody thinking he was his brother might be part of the reason why he offered to bring me here. It would make sense, but I trusted him to tell me if that was the case.

Last night, it seemed like them recognizing him was a good thing, like it meant a

piece of his brother lived on. But today was a new day and, at least for me, a lot looked very different.

“Is this edible?” I looked down at the eggs—they were just a little shelly.

“Maybe? A few of the older kids made breakfast for everyone. They’ve taken to helping in the kitchen, I guess. They asked. Pop-Tart couldn’t turn them down.” That very much sounded like Pop-Tart.

“I see.” I pushed the eggs around. As much as I wanted to like them, it wasn’t going to happen.

“Want to sneak out to the diner and have waffles?” Tyrus took the tray from me.

“Suddenly, waffles sound like the most amazing food in the world, and I can’t wait to dive in.” They really did sound delicious and as we drove there, I got more and more ideas on how I wanted to enjoy them, everything from with butter only to à la mode. My imagination was going wild and my belly was in agreement on all of its ideas.

The diner wasn’t very far. We probably could’ve walked. This was good though. I liked being trapped in a small space with his scent swirling around me.

When we got there, it was in between the normal morning rush and the later crowd brunch crew. We were able to get a seat with no wait, which was perfect because my stomach was ready...now. After not being able to decide which dish to get, I ordered not one but three different waffles.

My mate just looked at me with a knowing smile.

“Maybe you were right,” I admitted.

Was it too soon to test though? Probably. I wasn't all up on the science. Either way, I refused to get excited before I knew for sure. But I was already getting excited.

On the way out, I held his hand and used it to point across the street. "Want to go in there more than anything?"

"Heck yeah!"

We crossed over to the pharmacy in more of a jog than a walk. I grabbed every single test that said it was early detection. I didn't want to take the time to read all the boxes and make an informed decision. I wanted to take those tests stat.

"It still might be too soon," I said.

"Understood." He kissed my cheek. "And if it is, we'll retest in a few days."

Tyrus was so sure I was pregnant. And, goddess help me, I wanted him to be right.

When we got back to the warehouse, I ran to the bathroom and took all the tests. I wasn't going to do the one-at-a-time thing. It was all-or-nothing time, and I chose all.

"This is a good thing," he said, wrapping his arms around me. "Even if it's negative, it's just showing us this is what we want."

I hadn't thought about it that way. He was right.

"Thank you for saying that, alpha. I'm nervous, not because I don't want this. I do, more than anything. I was nervous because what if I'm not pregnant? And what if both of us got our hopes up for nothing? But you're right. It just means that we both know this is what we want in our future."

The timer went off, and we walked into the bathroom to see the tests all lined up on the back of the toilet. Looking up at us were two blue lines, two pink lines, one flashing pregnant, and one plus sign.

“That looks pretty conclusive to me,” he said. “We’re going to have a baby.”

“Yes, alpha. We’re gonna have a baby.” And I couldn’t be any happier.

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Pregnancy looked good on my mate. As sexy as I thought him before, he was triply sexy now. There was something about his rounded belly, knowing he was nurturing our child, giving it a safe place to grow until he was ready to enter this world.

“What?” He looked at me as if I had the answer to his question, but I had a feeling I was missing something.

“Say again?”

He belted out in laughter. “I guess it’s nothing too serious, then.” His hand was resting on his belly. “Your daddy’s silly.”

“Clueless alpha here.”

“You were looking at me, is all, and it felt like you were trying to tell me something.”

“Oh. Was I staring?”

He nodded.

“I was just thinking you are hotter today than you were yesterday, and I didn’t think it was possible to be that sexy. That’s all.” I leaned down so my mouth was close to his belly. “Daddy’s not silly. He just has good taste.”

“Speaking of taste, Abel and a few of the older kids made dinner.” My mate pushed himself up to stand.

“I have been assured that plenty of supervision was given.”

“Well, if we’re going to have a special dinner, I probably should shower.” He grabbed my hand. “I’m going to need some help.”

“I’m an excellent back rubber,” I assured him.

“I was more thinking you could help something I haven’t been able to see in weeks, and I don’t mean my toes.” He mouthed the word dick, just in case I missed his not-so subtle hint.

I had not.

Once we were in the bathroom, I set the shower and helped him get undressed. He climbed inside, and I yanked my clothes off, more than ready to join him.

“Tyrus, I have bad news.” My poor mate suddenly looked so dejected. “I don’t think we’ll both fit. I’m even bigger than I was yesterday.”

“You mean sexier. And there’s plenty of room. I’m coming in.” And I was going to make my mate feel as sexy as he was.

“You can try, but I basically take up the entire shower.”

I grinned and scooted in behind Sloan, making sure the warm water stayed mostly on him. “No matter how big that belly gets, I’ll always squeeze in with you.” I wrapped my arms around him with one curled over his bump and the other underneath, holding up the weight that was putting more pressure on his back every day. “How’s that?”

He leaned against my chest and rested his head on my shoulder. “So much better. Can



you just walk behind me all the time and hold up this little one who isn't so little anymore?"

I kissed his temple. "I wish I could, omega. You know I'd carry the weight for you if I could." The hand on top of his belly slid down to his cock. "But since I can't, this is the best way I can help relieve your burden."

"Mmm, okay." He sounded sleepy, but from the way his arm snaked back and reached for my thickening cock, I knew he was wide awake and ready for me. "This works too."

I lazily stroked him as he did the same to me. We were always ready to make love, but it was getting harder to find positions Sloan could hold for more than a few minutes. And although we didn't always need more time than that, I always wanted to make sure he was satisfied. My omega's pleasure was always my priority. "Are you okay to stand, or would you like to get out of here?"

"Stand." He leaned forward and braced his hands on the tiled wall. "I need your knot, alpha."

Fuck yeah, he did.

Once he was in position, I held his belly up again and then rubbed my cock over his leaking hole, slicking it up so he could take me quickly. His body was always ready for me, but I didn't want to waste time going slow.

I needed my omega as much as he needed me.

"Brace yourself, Sloan. This is gonna be quick."

"Hurry up, Tyrus. I'm not getting any smaller." He turned back and winked at me just

as I pushed inside him. That smile morphed into an open-mouthed moan as his eyes drifted shut. “Yes, alpha. Knot me hard.”

My whole body buzzed with need as I pulled out and quickly thrust back in, working him from both the front and the back. As I pushed into his slick entrance, Sloan fucked into my fist. When I pulled back, so did he, chasing my cock as we both got off.

Seconds passed in slow motion, and it wasn't long until we were both panting for relief and desperate to come.

“Yes, yes, yes.” Sloan got a burst of energy and moved quicker than he had in months as he came hard, splashing over my fingers and coating the wall while his channel tightened around me.

“Fuck, yeah.” I pressed all the way in and held in place, my knot expanding, locking inside my omega as my seed filled him. If he weren't already carrying my baby, he would be now because I unloaded in several convulsing thrusts. “I love you, Sloan.”

His forehead pressed against the back of the shower, and he sighed heavily. “I love you too, Tyrus. You're my everything.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

“You’ve got to be kidding me? Now?” I asked, staring at Tyrus and the others. There was a clear puddle beneath me, and some of the team had already started to move. Aziz quickly came back into the room with towels and blankets, and Jack was saying something about getting me to the bedroom.

They all sounded so far away.

“Sloan!” Tyrus said, putting his face right in front of mine. “Are you with me, sweetheart?”

His bear reached out to my wolf and we snapped back into the moment. “Yes. The baby is coming, right?” I asked even though the thought of giving birth had become all too real in seconds. It was one thing to read about it in a book, but quite another to feel things moving inside me. “Oh!” I cried out, bending over with the sheer force of the first contraction. My back tightened with more pain than I’d ever felt and, after everything I’d gone through, that was saying something.

“Come on,” Tyrus said, scooping me up in his big arms and carrying me toward our bedroom. Jack laid out towels. Gray and Hutch were there, but no one else but my new omega friends and my mate.

“Let’s get you undressed, okay?” Jack offered. “Remember that your body and your wolf know what they are doing. You have to step back and let them do it. Slow breaths. Everything is going to be fine.”

Tyrus snorted. “Jack should be our resident doula.”

Jack looked at my alpha. “That’s honestly not a bad idea, Tyrus. Thank you.”

“That’s a g-great...” Another contraction hit me hard. Tyrus helped me out of my pants and boxers, and I leaned back on the bed, just trying to ride the waves of pain. I felt a shifting inside me and a great drop.

“I think...I think he’s in the birth canal now. I...”

Jack moved in front of me. “Can I check if you’re dilated? Quick check, I promise.”

He really would make a fabulous doula. Jack checked me and his eyes widened. “What?” Tyrus and I asked at the same time.

“The baby is crowned. Not long now, Sloan. You’ve got this. What position is your body telling you to get in?”

I reached inside me to commune with my wolf. “I think on all fours. That’s what my wolf is sending me.”

“Good. Let’s get you on the floor, then.”

Tyrus helped me get down on all fours, and no sooner was I there than my back entrance turned to fire as the baby pushed through.

“Breathe through it,” Jack encouraged as the others did.

A whooshing feeling came over me and I pushed, bearing down on my bottom and spreading my hips. Gods, that hurt. Tears spilled from my eyes, and I fisted the towels all around me.

“A couple more,” Tyrus said, caressing my legs. “A couple more, and we’ve got our

babe.”

That became my focus. Seeing our babe for the first time. So I yelled out while pushing and soon, my body released the babe and a surge of relief took over.

“There we go!” Tyrus called out. “He’s beautiful, Sloan. Just like you. We have a son.”

While Gray and Hutch cleaned the baby up, Jack walked Tyrus through birthing the afterbirth and cleaning me up. Then they lay me in the bed and picked up, removing all the bloodstained towels and blankets.

This was what family was about. And I was damned proud to be on this team.

An omega of a warrior alpha.

“We’ll leave you to it,” Jack said as they all filed out, blessing us with well wishes on their way. “Call if you need anything. Anything at all. I’ll bring back some food in a few. You’ve got to be starving, Papa.”

Papa. He was talking to me.

“Thank you, Jack,” Tyrus called out and then gently sat on the bed next to me holding our babe.

“Name him, alpha,” I said since my eyes were closing, but I didn’t want to fall asleep before our son had a name.

“Can I name him Joseph Tyrone?” he asked. “You like Joseph and...”

I nodded. “That’s a good name for a strong boy,” I answered, stroking the soft down

on the top of our baby's head.

“Rest now, omega. You've made me the happiest alpha on the whole damned planet, and I'll love you forever.”

I tried to tell him that I loved him just as much, but sleep dragged me down into darkness.

I had a family. A son. An alpha. A home. A safe place to live.

Finally, I could rest.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 6:17 am*

“Are you sure about this?” I asked, swaying back and forth in the sunlight, my baby toddling around the grass in front of the ski lodge. The one that, not long ago, had imprisoned shifter children, now felt like a different place entirely. It was filled with hope and promise.

When King went through all the paperwork for the place, trying to trace it back to the man Sloan only knew as “the new boss,” we found nothing that would lead us back to him. There weren’t even any cold leads. No leads at all was more accurate. He was still at large, and I hated it. We all did.

While weren’t able to catch him, to bring him to justice, it wasn’t all for naught. King uncovered something wonderful—this place was being put up for tax auction and slated to be sold for pennies on the dollar. As it was now, it was useless to most people. This area was no longer very touristy, and the mountain it sat on wasn’t ideal for skiing. Once upon a time, people didn’t travel the distances they were willing to go today to find the perfect slopes. The skiing part of this mountain would remain a part of history, nothing more.

But I didn’t want it for that. The problem was, I didn’t have any money. When I brought up my idea at a meeting, everyone agreed it was a great idea, and they all pitched in to buy it. Now came the hard part—turning it into the space we needed.

“Yeah, I’m sure. It’s time. We can’t all be living at the warehouse forever. It’s not good for me. It’s a constant reminder of...well, before.”

Before referred to the breeding farm they rescued me from. I had a weird relationship with that trauma. It haunted me daily, but, at the same time, it was what made me a

dad, and no part of me could be upset about that.

“Well, I think it’s a great place,” someone said as we started toward it. The guys said it was safe structurally, so we could go in. This was our first time touring it. “With lots of potential.” Also known as hard work.

I picked up my toddler and put him in my backpack carrier. I liked him having freedom when it was safe. Where we were going was definitely not toddler proof.

I followed Sloan inside, King taking up the rear. He insisted on driving us and coming along. As far as I knew, he didn’t have any plans to move here once it was ready, but he was invested.

We entered a big lounge with a fireplace the size of a small condo. At one time, it was probably filled with people sipping their hot cocoa, talking about how fancy they were for being able to afford such a vacation. Times had changed though. Even if the place were still open, the crowds of yesterday wouldn’t be here. The time for this kind of a resort had come and gone.

To the right, there was a desk for checking in, and behind it a few offices. We continued on down the hallway, past what had once been a pool. It was now in such disrepair, I doubted it was going to be useful again. On the other side, a laundry facility and some conference rooms.

“I’d like to meet the employer who’d approve of a meeting here,” King teased. “I promise. We are going to get a lot of work done, really. Nope. No one on the team skis. Promise.”

He had a point.

We explored all the rooms. Each unit had a bathroom and a bedroom, but nothing else was doable. We could make this happen. We would make this happen. This place



was going to become Shifter House 2.0. Only, this time, it would be a family—no selling children, no dishonesty, no fear. Just forming our own little pack, for lack of a better word.

“All right, we better go. Everybody’s waiting,” Sloan said. We wandered back to the car and drove a short way down the road to the state park, where we were meeting the others. Somehow, Pop-Tart had gotten us a bus—a full school bus.

It had been remarkably handy, especially with our current numbers. And today? Between the bus and the vans, we were able to get everybody to the park for our celebration of when the first omegas came to the warehouse. It happened to also be my sweet child’s birthday, and the kids thought that was perfect. Apparently, birthday parties were more fun than anniversary parties for the young. Me? I’d take any party that had cake.

As we pulled up, we could hear kids screaming that we were here. I guess they really were waiting for us. We got out of the car, and the kids swarmed us, wanting to know if we could sing happy birthday already. They didn’t like hearing that birthday songs and cake came after real food.

Abel and Sally were excited about their part in the meal. Abel was grilling, and Sally was sure to inform us she was the “helper.” When she first came, I didn’t even think she could talk. Now she was talking nonstop. She was one of the kids I thought who would do well at the new house. There was still a lot to be done on it, but we were getting there.

“Everyone needs a good helper.” Tyrus came up to his mate with grabby hands. “Come to Papa,” he said, taking his son in his arms.

Seeing Sloan and Tyrus so happy, seeing all of the mates so blissfully happy was everything. It made all that we had been through worth it. I watched as the two of them walked toward the party and couldn’t be happier for them. They’d both found

their person, the one who made their lives complete.

Once upon a time, that was my dream also, but now I was a father, and there were other priorities.

“You okay?” King asked.

“Yeah, I was just thinking how lucky Sloan and Tyrus are.”

My little one ran toward the party.

“Gotta go.” I ran after my little sprinter, catching up with him as he reached our family. We might not have the typical family, but we had this, and it was more than enough.