



The Fancy-Free Fox's Alphas (Male-Order Mates #15)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: I'm not a guy to put down roots. Most of the foxes in my den were born there, found their mate there, and will take their last breaths there. Not me. While other teens were fixing up cars, I found an old mini-school bus and turned it into a home. The second I graduate, I leave, wanting to see more of this country. And for ten years, it's the life I dreamed it to be, but now? Now I want more.

When my bus breaks down in a small town, I take it as a sign that maybe it's time to stay in one place for a while. I expect to get bored and ready to move on once it's fixed, but the longer I'm around the owners of the motel I'm staying in, the more I want what they have—a family. When they tell me about how they met, I sign up for the Male-Order App right away. It's not like I have to say yes to anyone, right?

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Heath

“Nearest place that can fix a bus like this is...”—the tow truck guy took off his dingy cap and scratched at his sweaty hair—“about an hour away. I’ve got a friend up there. He can fix anything and has a big enough shop.”

Two hours away and off my path.

Wasn’t like I had a choice. My bus had broken down on a stretch between two small towns: one with a gas station only and the other a grocery store. The clerk there tried to sell me a jar of off-brand peanut butter for three times the price of gas.

No, thank you.

“Then let’s tow it there, please. Can I ride with you, or should I order an Uber?” I asked, hoping a little bit for the latter. Riding two hours with a stranger wasn’t my idea of a good time.

Then again, neither was breaking down on a road walled in by trees taller than mountains.

“You can ride with me. Grab whatever you need for the ride while I get this hooked up.”

“Thank you.”

I grabbed my backpack and water bottle and waited on the side of the road under the

cover of a tree, watching my house and my mode of transportation get tethered with heavy, rusty chains. Not part of the plan, but I didn't find myself as upset as I thought I would be. After all, it was an older bus. Hiccups happened along the way, but I had become a decent mechanic as I fixed the bus up to take me across the country.

But there were some things even I couldn't fix.

"Hop on in," the man said. The stitched-on name patch on his shirt read Randy.

"Thank you, Randy."

As expected, the cab of the tow truck smelled like old fast food and more engine fluids, all underneath the cloud of the air freshener apple hanging on his rearview. Randy flashed me a smile as he threw the loud truck into drive and headed toward the mechanic shop.

Along the way, I pulled out my journal, intending to keep a record of this, but my thoughts drifted back to my den as they often did. My fox needed a den, but the one I came from didn't quite fit. My parents didn't understand this fact, never had. They claimed that foxes stayed in the dens they were born in—raised in.

From early on, I realized the difference between myself and the other foxes. They were content with living in one den their entire lives. Finding a mate in an alpha or an omega close to home and then having as many kits as possible to fill up a village.

Inside me was a passion to explore and reach out into the world, searching for a den of my own, not one inherited or settled for.

My fox craved a mate or two far from the alphas around the den I came from. Instinct would tell me who they were, of course. In the meantime, I traveled. My parents thought I was searching for myself; that's the story they told people.

The truth was, I already had a good head on my shoulders. There was no reason to find myself when I already had, the moment I saw my bus. That bus, now being dragged behind this tow truck, was the catalyst for what my life was now.

Some people didn't understand the reasons I had to do this, but they didn't have to. It was my life, not theirs.

Still, I'd made that decision ten years ago. Over the last two or so years, my drive had evolved from seeing this country and all its wonders, to finding a place to settle down—find a mate or mates—and have some kits of my own.

There was no pinpointing the exact time my goal changed but it did without my permission.

“About thirty more minutes,” Randy said, tapping his finger on his phone. He had navigation app open, telling him all the turns and roadblocks. I had the same app. Sometimes I simply turned it off and roamed without aim.

“Thanks,” I said, snapping back to the present moment. The pages of my journal were blank as I'd spent the drive reminiscing instead of writing.

I watched as the long winding road, hugged by towering trees, came to an intersection and a town became visible up ahead.

“There's the shop. Rob's Repair.” Randy pointed out the windshield to an open garage with several cars taking up all the parking spaces outside. There were cars on lifts inside and a couple of men in coveralls with their hands and most of their bodies under the hoods.

Randy dropped me off before maneuvering my bus into an adjacent lot. I paid for the tow before talking to Rob. The R names around this place got confusing.

“How long do you think?” I asked, knowing his ballpark would probably double once he got a look at the engine.

“A week? Maybe more.”

That’s what I thought.

“Is there a place to stay around here?” I asked. “A place to rent by the week or a motel?”

Rob nodded. “Yeah. Down the block and north about two more blocks.”

I tipped my chin and looked at him down my nose. “And for the directionally challenged?”

He laughed, wiping his blackened hands with a dirty rag. “That way, one block. At the diner, take a left and walk up two blocks. The motel is on the corner. Big neon sign that says motel.”

I let out a laugh. “Thank you. I’ll be there if you need me, and you have my cell.”

“I’ll be in touch,” he said and walked back to the shop.

Taking in the sights of the small town, I followed Rob’s directions, noting where the diner was as well as the general store. When I got to the motel, I paused outside. My fox stirred inside me, alert and expecting something. Not in a defensive manner but aware. Very aware.

This place was beautiful with gorgeous views of mountains and trees. The trails weren’t far away and if I judged correctly, the ocean was only a few hours down the road.

Huh. This place would be perfect to settle down in.

“Welcome,” a man said as I opened the door. “Would you like to book a room?”

“I would. Thank you. Just a single, if you have one.”

“We actually do. What’s your name?”

I gave them all my information and they put my credit card on file. Another male came in and kissed the first one on the temple. He had gardening gloves on and, from the outside and the lobby, it looked like they kept this place immaculate.

Damn. What I wouldn’t give for a loving alpha to be sweet to me.

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Oren

“Are you coming to karaoke night?” Stan, my coworker asked for the fifty millionth time.

It was our department’s once-a-month, everybody gets together and acts silly and has a good time outing. It was the whole part of the office being-like-a-family thing the company was into. For the most part, I called boloney when it came to initiatives like that. Work was work, and family was family, but with my group it didn’t feel toxic and, honestly, it was something to do, and we always had fun. So who cared if it ticked a box for the upper management?

“Still, yes.” I rolled my eyes, and he chuckled. “I just have to finish this one file I’m uploading, and I’ll meet you there.”

“I knew you wouldn’t let us down.” He turned to leave then said over his shoulder, “We’re gathering in the lobby.”

So much for meeting them there. I didn’t mind that they were waiting. It was nice that they wanted to, but my computer was being a butt, and I didn’t want them to have to wait.

“And I’ve got plans.” He winked.

I just waved him off, knowing very well that the plans were some song he thought we could all sing together, forgetting that no one in the office could carry a tune in a bucket or could even find the bucket. But we did always go and have a good time. So

there was that.

Once my file finally did its thing, I shut the computer down and looked around my office's four walls. Somehow, at my young age, I had managed to get an office with four walls and a door. Not only that, but it was a job I could leave at five o'clock and not be married to the place. And super bonus: my coworkers were nice. We got along both inside and outside of this place.

Sure, they weren't shifters, so I couldn't totally be myself with them, but I had some shifter friends from my apartment building I got together with once in a while for a fur out. Being a deer, I didn't have that predator nature, and shifting wasn't something I needed to do as often as others. In a lot of ways, it was more stress than it was worth. Between human hunters and natural predators who thought of me as dinner, staying on two feet on concrete felt like a better idea.

I wasn't a pack kind of guy. Sure, deer had herds, but that wasn't part of my history. It had always been just my parents and me. Then I grew up and went to college, leaving it be just me. And not once did I feel like I was missing out because of it.

By the time I got to the lobby, everyone was there and ready to go. I wasn't surprised I was last. Not with the problem child file from Hades. We made our way across the street and into the already crowded bar.

Not only was it karaoke night, but, from five to six, you could get BOGO drinks, which made it extra popular earlier than most other watering holes nearby. It would thin out as soon as the music started, the BOGO drinkers ready to move on to their next stop, leaving only those of us who were there for the music.

Or, more accurately, the lack of musical talent.

We all went to the big table in the back corner, where our waitress, Sally, was already

pouring waters, putting down coasters, and getting ready for us. Unlike some groups that came in, we always treated her like royalty, and in return, she treated us that way back.

Many shifters thought of cities as places where no one ever knew anybody or where it was easy to get “lost” or one can never be themselves. But I didn’t see it that way. You just had to find your pockets, and I’d found mine. I lived in an apartment building where everybody knew each other. I had a job where everybody got along. Even at karaoke, people knew who I was. It was not lonely, or like being one of a thousand in a room full of strangers. I liked living in the city, and my beast did, too.

We went around and ordered our drinks and our food, but just as Sally got to me, my phone buzzed in my pocket. I’d normally turned it off by now, but I didn’t remember today, and when I took it out to shut it down, I saw a number I didn’t know, but I recognized the name on the caller ID.

“I gotta go outside and grab this,” I told them, and I went out to answer the family lawyer’s call.

The last time I’d spoken to him, it had been about my parents’ estate. I’d honestly thought that would be the last time I had any contact with him. I wasn’t the having-a-lawyer type of guy. But here he was, calling me during Thursday night happy hour.

Amazing how quickly everything changed with one phone call. I went from going to hang out with my work friends, getting ready to sing a song very poorly and loudly, to discovering a relative I didn’t know existed had left me a cabin in the middle of nowhere.

“That’s fine. I’ll just sell it. It’s not like I’m attached to this. I don’t even remember his name,” I mumbled to myself as I headed back into the bar after a half hour, one I remembered not much from. He said he’d email me the details, and that was good

because they had long since left my brain.

It wasn't even like I knew my uncle. But still, there was a sadness to hearing of his loss and, beyond that, of hearing that my family had an entire human being who was a secret. On top of that, it was too late to ask my parents anything about it. And maybe that was the sadness, being hit once again with the reality that they weren't there.

"You're back!" Stan jumped out of his seat. "Just in time. I signed us up to sing 'Get Low.'"

At least he didn't pick a ballad.

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Archer

My life was never going to be what I'd dreamed unless I made a change.

That much was clear, but other than that I didn't have a plan. As the son of the pack alpha and his very driven omega mate, expectations were high for me from the day I was born. All the best education and even a law degree—which meant attending university beside human students who had no idea they were sharing a classroom with someone who could turn into a wolf at any time he chose.

Those years were difficult since I had to hide who I was from nearly everyone at school. My fathers were adamant that if anyone learned about me, I would lose the scholarship I'd earned going to...yes, human high school.

Weirdly, my friends there did know about me, and in fact, some were shifters, but when I crossed the country for my Ivy League education, my heritage, my very genetics became a big secret. It made for some rugged times freshman year, far from home and adrift. I was barely maintaining the GPA required to keep my scholarship when I met a rabbit shifter, also very much in the fur cave, and we became friends. It gave me a touchstone and someone who understood what it was like to be different. My grades rose, and I gave my friend a lot of the credit. Not only was he a shifter but academically a rock star.

The wolf and the rabbit. Not a friendship my fathers would understand, so I didn't try to explain.

Since passing the bar, I had been working my way up in one of the biggest law firms

in the country, which had not been my fathers' plan. They had anticipated my returning to be the representative for the pack, but I'd like to see the new attorney who turned down the offer I received.

And while it was incredibly generous, it did not decrease the brutal hours expected of me as a new associate. Luckily, hard work was never a problem and I shut out most of the other parts of a normal life to focus on the need to earn. My firm had no problem with that, piling the work on, as much as I could possibly handle.

A partnership would be opening at the end of the year, and I had every intention of getting it. Had been working so hard, sometimes I didn't know what day it was until I glanced at my phone for the information. Others had told me it was not uncommon for associates to suffer all kinds of health problems from overwork, but my shifter heritage gifted me with a strong constitution and immunity to most kinds of human ailments. So as we closed in on jury selection for the biggest case I'd been allowed to participate in, I built steam and narrowed my focus even more. I'd been given hints that this case and my performance thereon was a test and could lead to that big promotion.

All my energy went into my part of things, and I was geared up for the likelihood that I would be seated at the defense table and taking a prominent role. This was not offered to any other associate at our firm, at least not when the client was someone with not only wealth but celebrity. Not only would my performance possibly give me a junior partnership but, if I did not do well, it could easily end my tenure here.

No pressure.

After a late night working on case prep, I woke to an email requesting my presence in the conference room at ten thirty. Something had happened with the case...and the message gave me no more information than that. My stomach churned —something that never happened until I started to climb the career ladder at this large firm.

It was extremely easy to get lost in the pack, so to speak, here, with literally dozens of associates at the various branches. Some never had the opportunity I'd been given, and as I showered and shaved and dressed, I ran over all the possibilities of what might have happened to necessitate this meeting. I was probably overthinking things, something my fathers always warned me about.

Driving through for coffee, I continued to overthink.

This was the most important case of my career so far. Maybe ever if it led to my becoming a partner. I'd be the youngest in the firm. Ever. I parked in the basement garage and entered the elevator, pressing the button for the top floor. Maybe we were just going over some things one more time. It was an important case...

"Archer? They're waiting for you." Sandie, the receptionist who'd always been extra nice to me waved toward the hallway. "Better hurry."

I pulled out my phone and glanced at the time. "I'm ten minutes early." If they were waiting...not good. I had been doing a lot of work at home this week so hadn't actually planned to be here at all.

Sandie shrugged, and I hustled down the hallway, prepared for I knew not what.

Half an hour later, I stumbled out of the conference room and headed for my office. I'd imagined all sorts of possibilities, but the information that had awaited me when I entered the conference room was not even on the list.

Dead.

"Archer, the client died last night. He tried to do harm to a sex worker once too often, and this one was prepared to fight back. I sat down at my desk and dropped my head on my folded arms, reeling.

I'd spent months preparing to defend this member of one of America's most prominent families. Going to do whatever it took to get him off for a really despicable crime. I had convinced myself that he was not lying when he said he was innocent and had not killed the previous sex worker. Hell, after the meeting we'd just had, it was apparent I had been the only one who believed him. How many others had he harmed? Killed? We were going to argue that not only was the evidence circumstantial, but why would someone so wealthy pick up "cheap" streetwalkers when he could easily afford the most expensive prostitute. Hell...why would he have to pay anyone for sex?

But the bastard did it. And had that woman last night not carried a knife for self-defense, I might have contributed to his doing more harm in future.

I sat up and picked up my phone, scrolling through it to distract myself from what a fool I'd been. An ad from a company called the Male-Order App popped up and I was about to get rid of it when suddenly I didn't want to. I'd put every bit of myself into this case... I'd been so sure this was what I wanted to do with my life.

And I had nothing else.

Not even a mate.

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Heath

The motel served a nice continental breakfast. The notice was on my key card as well as noted on a small sticky paper on the mirror. I laughed as I saw the smiley face at the bottom. The people here ran this place like a quaint and intimate bed-and-breakfast. No complaints from me.

I went to the lobby after a good night's sleep and a hot shower the night before and one again this morning. The one thing I missed about living in a place with four walls was a shower and the occasional bath.

An occasional hot bath with Epsom salts and perhaps some essential oils could cure just about any problem, I was convinced.

"Good morning," a male called at the same time the bell above the door rang out. "Hope you had a restful night. Please, help yourself."

I caught the scent in the air. He was an alpha but not the same one as the day before. I toasted myself a blueberry bagel and smeared it with cream cheese before grabbing a cup of coffee and sitting down at a small round table near the window. Some people came in and got breakfast to go, and others looked over the offerings and decided against it altogether.

Usually I set up a camp stove outside the bus and cooked something like pancakes for breakfast, but sitting here, enjoying someone else's fare, even if it was a simple toasted bagel, seemed like a treat.

The side door to the lobby opened and in came two males, a little girl, and a boy who couldn't be more than one year old. I watched as they approached the other alpha, each of them sharing a kiss. Huh. A throuple. Man, I envied that omega. What my fox wouldn't give to have two alphas dotting over me. Loving me. Giving me the care and support I so desired.

"Daddy Rip, I want to go to the garden," said the little girl, more like a fairy princess with her tulle-skirted dress. She even had a wand and some fairy wings strapped onto her back like a backpack.

"Not this morning. I've got something cooking out there just for my princess. You and Daddy Zeus are going to pick up some treats at the store, and Percy needs diapers."

I shouldn't have been eavesdropping, but I couldn't help myself. These three males had what I wanted, and I needed to know how they achieved it.

The omega glanced in my direction and chuckled. "Something we can help you with?"

The lobby was now empty with the exception of the beautiful family in charge and me, still nursing my breakfast. "To be honest, I'm a bit jealous. Where does one find two alphas? I can't even get a date."

The omega whispered some things to his alphas, who took the kids and left. The omega came to take the chair across from me. "Between us omegas, it was an app. It's called Male-Order Mates. You download the app, answer some extensive questions, and then they match you with others."

I scoffed. "You can be poly? I mean, my fox wants two alphas, like you have."

He nodded. “Yeah, that’s part of why it’s so great. All of your preferences and needs are taken into account. And theirs. The alphas you would be matched up with would be open or looking for a polyamorous relationship. No surprises.”

“An app,” I repeated, thinking it sounded entirely too easy and potentially weird.

“I had the same reaction at first. But I know from experience that it works. Those two alphas are my fated mates. I couldn’t have asked for anything more. I know we’re taught that the right mate will simply come along but, in my opinion, this is giving Fate a bit of a helping hand, that’s all.”

I blew out a breath. “I appreciate you sharing, but I don’t think that’s for me.”

He nodded. “My name’s Fyn. If you have any other questions, feel free to reach out. I know it’s scary, but you know what’s scarier?”

Shrugging, I replied, “What?”

“The thought of never finding them. Of never having met my mates.”

He walked off and went about cleaning up the breakfast. The rest of the day, I took a walk around the town, taking in the quaint sights and charms. I stopped in some shops but didn’t buy anything. Room was scarce in the bus.

When I got back to my room, I saw some twinkle lights and heard music from the direction of the garden I’d seen out the window this morning while I ate my bagel.

I walked over and stood on the edge of the garden. What a sight. There was a unicorn fountain in the middle, spouting water from its horn and around all of it were perfectly placed flowers and twinkle lights of all colors. Some of them even looked like icicles.

Around the pathway, the little princess from the morning pranced between the flower beds and statues and under the arches, proclaiming spells and enchanting every one with a singing voice. She twirled and danced around, a whimsical giggle on her lips when she almost toppled over. One of the alphas caught her and he swung her in a circle.

Over on one of the benches with their little one between them, Fyn and the other alpha shared whispers and kisses. I could smell the lust in the air along with joy and satisfaction. They were happy. Happy with each other and clearly very much in love.

Gods, I craved love. Sure, I had the love of my parents and others in the den back home, but I wanted the love of a mate or two. Yeah, definitely two.

My phone buzzed in my hand, some notification about weather or road conditions, I suspected but, as I looked upon my dream of a life, the phone got heavier in my hands.

The app.

Fyn said all I had to do was sign up. Sign up, and the app would match me with who I wanted, two whos if I wanted.

And I did.

I went back into my room, sat on the edge of the bed, and signed up, sending a prayer to the gods.

Send me two alphas.

Please.

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Oren

When I first called the Realtor, saying I was interested in selling the new cabin, they told me it was best if I came to look through it first. At the time, I was frustrated. Why couldn't I just sell it? Why did I have to drive all day to look at a place I didn't care about.

But once I got here, I understood. This place was filled with memories—not necessarily my memories but memories from my uncle, which included memories of my father. Memories I was just discovering.

It was also in disrepair. So much disrepair. In the condition it was in, I'd be lucky to get someone who wanted it for the land. It wouldn't take much to fix it enough for market, but most people wouldn't see that. I only did because my father was a fixer-upper kind of guy and taught me everything he could. I barely used the skills in my daily life, not with a super who was in charge of all that, but here? Here, I could put it to use and build myself a nice little nest egg out of the profits.

What started as "I'll be there for a couple of days" turned into me calling work and letting them know that I needed to be remote for a while. Or at least, I would be working once the internet was installed.

The longer I stayed in this cabin, the more photos I saw of my father as a child, the more I uncovered wooden trinkets carved by my uncle, the more I discovered about the family I never knew. I needed to do this right for him. No slapping on a coat of paint and hoping no one would look past it. These repairs needed to be as solid as this unintentional time capsule he'd created for me.

When the lawyer had called him an uncle, I had assumed he meant my grandfather's brother or something along those lines—something more removed. My dad had never told me he had a brother. It was just him as far as I knew.

I fell back into the recliner, overwhelmed by the task in front of me and feeling a little bit antsy. I was used to being surrounded by people and noise, and sure, there were noises in the woods—like birds chirping or animals running—but nothing quite as calming as the sound of cars going below your window or even horns honking in the distance. It was very lonely here.

Closing my eyes, I made a mental list of all I needed to buy until the list became too long to not be on paper. It would have to wait until tomorrow. I needed air.

I stepped outside onto the back porch and decided to shift. Maybe stretching my legs would help. Only, when I scented the air, I scented a bear—and not a shifter bear and potential new friend. No, it was a wild bear and I wasn't sure, but I had a feeling this place had grizzlies. I was fine not coming toe to toe with them. If I was going to stay here, I was going to have to mark the territory. Wait, what? Stay here? No, I wasn't going to do that. What was getting into me?

“You know, bear, if you just left this place, I could get my antlers on.” Even if they were there, they wouldn't have understood my words. Still, I repeated myself, this time louder.

I took out my phone and wandered until I got a decent signal—my service provider wasn't the greatest for the area—and pulled up the internet to look for things to do locally. It was going to be a lot easier once the internet got connected tomorrow, but for now, this would do. There was a bar, a national park, and an art gallery. That pretty much summed it up.

The bar could be fun, I suppose, but was that the kind of fun I wanted to have? Going

there alone, not knowing a soul, and definitely not looking like I fit in? Would they all stare? Probably. Would they be social? Probably not. Ugg.

A pop-up filled my screen. Normally I hated them, but this time, it was a hookup app and I couldn't be mad at it. Maybe that was what I needed— a night in the sack with a hot omega or alpha even. I wasn't picky.

I put all my information in and hit enter. "Try expanding your search field." I growled at the phone, and I wasn't even a growly kind of beast. "It's fifty miles. I hardly was asking for someone within walking distance."

I tried another one with the same result. And then, because I was now determined, yet another one. This one didn't even let me get past the zip code. And after three more attempts, when I was finally ready to tap out, a pop-up for a male-order app filled my screen. The odds of that person being local given their premise? Nonexistent. But since I wasn't having any success anywhere else, I decided I might as well try it. Maybe people from here were looking to get out of here because there were no hookups around. Not really, but the thought amused me. At least this poorly formed plan of mine was fending off boredom and keeping me out of my head. That was something.

Wouldn't you know it. This time was different. When I typed in all my information, it connected me with not one but two people. And both of them seemed like people I might want to get to know.

Before I thought too hard on it, I shot them both a message. Maybe I could stave off the loneliness after all. It was worth a shot.

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Archer

This was all happening way too fast. But when the case fell apart, when our client was killed by a sex worker in self-defense, I questioned all of my choices to date. My fathers had not wanted me to take the job with the big law firm, and I'd attributed that to their wanting the pack to have free legal advice, but by the time I got home, I was rethinking that opinion. As well as everything I'd done so far in my life.

My phone with the app I'd downloaded in it sat on the seat beside me. I hadn't done more than that because I wanted out of the office as soon as possible. A very short time sitting at my desk left me itchy and uncomfortable. Of course, attorneys defended the guilty as well as the not guilty. Everyone deserved a solid representation of their side in court. And, in my limited experience, most defendants were less than transparent with their representative. It was up to us to use what we got from the client, from the court, and from any opposing side that might exist to best advantage.

That, according to my law school professors, was how it worked. We did our own research as well, but our goal was the best outcome for our often ragingly guilty defendant. I got that. I could accept it.

What was not acceptable in my book was an entire office full of people who knew that not only was this man guilty of the crime he'd been accused of, the weasel had murdered several women for the crime of being willing to have sex with him for money.

They knew this and yet made sure he got bonded out onto the street to continue his serial killing. It absolutely could not be expressed any other way. There would be

fallout, the renewed investigation hopefully uncovering what was necessary to reveal what other crimes he'd committed. He might not have had any care for life of those he, according to the partners, considered worth less than his, but those women had families and friends who deserved to know what happened to them.

Since all I had was hearsay, I could only hope that the partners would do the right thing and make sure the detectives had an easier job of it. There would be a subpoena for them anyway. Dead men had no rights. Not even rich assholes who finally got what was coming to them.

At home, I poured a tall lager and carried it and my phone with me into the bathroom. Five minutes later, I was sitting in a steaming tub and examining all my life choices to date. Everything in me wanted to quit the firm immediately, but that would submarine my entire career path. I had to figure out what to do, and going back to my pack to be their legal beagle was not it. I had been giving them free advice all along, and that would not end, but I was not going back into the office anytime soon if ever.

I wanted a fresh start and maybe even someone I could come home to at the end of the workday. Someone who would be sitting in the tub with me or even on the closed toilet seat helping me sort out my future. My dads would have been glad to help, but I already knew what they'd say. Come home.

Tail tucked between my legs...not likely. I still had a little pride.

My phone chimed, and I reached for it to find a message from work. It chimed again and again. I considered ignoring it but couldn't bring myself to do that. My attempt to relax in the warm, soothing water was not going to be work. I opened the company messaging app and read.

Archer, you are hereby assigned to work from home for the next month. And if you want that home to be the Caribbean, charge it to your company card. Please delete

after reading.

I clambered out of the tub and skidded on the wet floor. My helpful nonskid bath mat remained folded over the hamper where I'd left it in my jumbled mental state. Fortunately, flailing arms and a wolf shifter's natural athleticism saved me from landing on my bottom on the slate floor.

Grabbing a towel on my way out of the bathroom, I wrapped it around my waist and plopped down on the couch to see if the local news would confirm what I suspected was happening. If they wanted me out of the way, ready to pay for a month's luxury accommodations out of the country, they had a good reason.

A raid. The local field reporter stood outside our building while law enforcement flooded in and out carrying boxes of files and computers and other things. Yeah...this was going to be huge. We had been defending a serial killer, and police, sheriffs, and what looked like feds in polo shirts and khakis with logos on the shirt pockets had descended en masse.

As the only one who did not know what had been going on for the past—had it been a year—I didn't understand why they'd clued me in at the end. Perhaps they'd been so completely thrown off, they forgot I didn't know? Or didn't think I'd read between the lines on some of their comments.

Either way, I was delighted to stay at home and do low-level lawyer stuff for them while I considered my options. Beginning with checking out the Male-Order Mates app. An hour later, still wrapped in the bath towel and sitting on my couch, I downloaded, signed up, answered all the questions, and ended up talking to an alpha and omega that same night.

And...instead of heading for the Caribbean on the company dime, I boarded a train for a small town near a national forest, remaining available for work and neglecting

to inform my bosses of where I would be working from. I'd probably never have had the nerve to leap into the possibility of two mates this way if my bosses hadn't screwed me over and, on some level, made me responsible for crimes while our client was out on bond.

Fuck. Them.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:47 am

Heath

Rob seemed like a good guy. The price on the repairs for the bus had been at the bottom of my scope of guesses, but I had an inkling about why.

Mr. Small Town Mechanic had only put a bandage on the problem and not really fixed my minibus at all.

The bus was sputtering in a way I'd never heard before, and to make matters worse, a scent of burnt oil came from the engine. I was surprised not to see smoke pouring out.

This was not the time for my bus to act up more than it already had. Granted, I was pushing it harder than ever to get to the train station on time.

My mates were waiting.

Even saying it out loud didn't help my mind wrap around the idea. At any moment, I expected to get a text or a phone call telling me how the joke was carried out and how stupid I was for falling for it.

The only thing that stopped my mind from pursuing that train wreck of thoughts was the way Archer and Oren spoke to me over text. I'd looked at their photos from the app over and over and read their likes and dislikes.

My fox was the one who had made the decision for me. He didn't have the fear and hesitation my human mind did. He trusted his instincts. His instincts spoke to the fact that Oren and Archer were his mates. His fated mates. The alphas we'd been

searching for.

I downshifted the bus, hoping a slower pace might help things, and took my foot off the gas on the descending hills, trying to put less of a strain on the engine.

That strategy quickly backfired.

Once I tried to get back up the next hill, the bus I'd spent so long in tapped out for good. Smoke billowed from the hood. Something in the engine made a gnarly sound that even I couldn't pinpoint, and everything simply died as I managed to let it roll back to a flat part of the road and back it off the side of the highway.

Great.

Checking my phone, I now realized I was not going to make it on time to meet my mates at the train station, even if someone with a Lamborghini showed up and sped me on my way.

Get to mates. Now.

The Canidae inside me pulsed messages of urgency. He wanted to take over and run the rest of the way. His way would have me without clothes or any belongings. I supposed we could put my phone and my wallet in a small bag and carry it in our mouth, but my jaw always hurt after that. My fox was no retriever, but his need for his mates made him more eager than ever to do my bidding.

Things like wallets and phones were silly to him.

But if not for my phone, we wouldn't have met our mates at all.

Before I could weigh the options and make a decision, my fox poured all of his power

into me, overpowering my human will and forcing a shift right there on the side of the road.

He had the decency to let me shift back to put my things into a small bag before pushing the shift again, this time, at least, with my necessities in tow.

Now to get to my mates.

I didn't question the hows or whys of my animal's knowledge of how to get to the train station but as we darted in between patches of forest, I caught sight of a few signs. The damned thing knew where he was going. Perhaps because we'd traveled this section of the country before.

My fox had always been a fast runner but, as he sped along, he continued to send me images of our alphas while I sat in the back seat of our consciousness. He would get to them on time even if he collapsed on the platform once he arrived.

We passed miles and miles of trees before I heard the train whistle and the hisses of the brakes along with the clattering of the train itself against the tracks. We were close.

So damned close.

After a few more minutes, I gasped inside my fox as he leapt over tracks until we arrived on the platform.

He used his nose to scent out our mates even though we'd never met them. I heard a low, velvety chuckle. The hair on my nape rose in response and my fox sprinted toward the sound.

Once I saw the two most handsome males I'd ever laid eyes on, I did what every

right-minded omega in his animal form would do.

I rushed them. Nudged their calves until they noticed me.

“What’s this?” Oren asked, crouching down to my level. He ran his hands through my fur and took a long drag of air through his nose. “Ah, Archer. I think this is the nimble fox we’ve been waiting for.”

Archer kneeled down next, abandoning his large bag in favor of petting my fur. “There you are. I knew you had to be close. My wolf could sense you but silly me, I was looking for an omega in human form. Look how beautiful you are.”

“We’re getting some stares, little fox. How about we take this somewhere else and find out why you chose to run in like this.”

Archer chuckled. “I have so many questions, omega. Come on. Or would you prefer I carry you?”

My fox immediately jumped into his arms and barked one high-pitched happy sound. “I’ll get the bags, you get the mate,” Oren joked. “Let’s get out of here.”

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Oren

When I went to the train station, I was excited. What had started as me wanting just someone to kill some time with—possibly a one-night stand or two—changed over the course of our messaging. In a lot of ways, it felt like I already knew them, and I didn't really understand it. Why did I have this pull to somebody, no, somebodies that I hadn't even met yet? Was it my loneliness manifesting itself and if so, should I tamper it?

Thankfully, I didn't even try to because once I reached the train station platform, everything made sense. They were mine. And I was theirs. Mates. Both of them. I didn't know that was possible, but there was no denying it. The cabin, the repairs, the photos...none of them were the reason I was here. They were all a tool of Fate who sent me a wolf and fox to call my own.

Luckiest. Deer. Ever.

Ours. Ours. Ours. My beast kept repeating it over and over again in my head, but he didn't need to convince me. I knew it too. What that would mean, what that would look like, or where we went from there, I had no idea. But I was more than excited to find out.

After a very quick meeting at the station, we went back to my place. I'd fixed a lot of it up, but it wasn't completely where I wanted it to be.

The cabin had been much better off than I originally thought. There were a few things I had to fix, like a hole in the roof and the walls where water had dripped, but the

extensive water damage I worried about didn't exist, and I was glad. The more time I spent in it, the more I felt like it might be where I belonged. And now that the internet was installed, I could work from there to buy me time while I figured out what was next. Of course, when I started that plan, I hadn't included mates in the mix.

I wished I'd managed to get it all done, though, wanting them to see it at its best. I didn't want them to think of me as the alpha who could provide nothing more than a dilapidated structure in the woods.

As far as it had come, I was nervous as we all walked up to the front door together for the first time. They say there's only one chance to make a first impression, and this was mine. Not that my fox had shifted yet—he was so funny, I could sense his enthusiasm and loved it.

“Should we join him?” I looked to my sexy wolf, and he gave me a single nod.

We shed our clothes, leaving them on the steps, and I shifted first, wanting both of them to see I wasn't afraid of their predatory nature. That was always the risk when you were an alpha of an animal who was, frankly, not the bravest, strongest, fiercest creature in the woods. But I wasn't afraid of them. They were mine. They'd never hurt me.

It was weird to think how easily I settled into the idea—they were mine—accepting they belonged to me and I to them, and we hadn't even had this conversation. For all I knew, they didn't feel it too, but they'd have to, right? The goddess wouldn't mess with me like that. Would she?

I stood there on my four hooves, my fox jumping up onto my back, rubbing into my neck. He was so stinking adorable I couldn't even handle it. The two of us watched our wolf take his form. The power that emanated off him as his paws hit the ground was undeniable. He looked up and howled, announcing to the world he was here and

we were his.

Or maybe that wasn't it after all. Maybe he was telling others to back off—his way of telling the forest around us that I was protected, and I wasn't prey. I'd done what I could to keep the grizzlies out, but the residual scent was still here, so it made sense he'd be aware of it.

I bent down to rub noses with him and then took off into the woods. I wanted to show them both the river. I thought Heath would jump off and run on his own, not wanting to be up so high and dependent on me, but he held on as we bounded through the area until we reached the river.

It wasn't far. I took a little leap over a stump, and bounded down the path, Heath on my back, and our wolf following right behind us. From what I could tell, they enjoyed the run as much as I did. When we reached the river, I stopped to get a drink. Heath jumped down to do the same, our wolf by our side.

Our reflection in the water filled me with such happiness. If any human had seen the three of us there, they'd have second-guessed themselves, but we fit. After our brief break, I led them on a run, showing them the perimeters of our land, and then we went back home. And yes, we owned it, not me. They were my mates, even if we hadn't discussed it yet. This was all theirs as much as it was mine.

There was so much to talk about, but as we reached the porch steps, I wasn't able to say a thing. First, my fox shifted back, and I sensed his arousal. I had heard foxes were like that—the more they shifted, the more heightened their desires became. But to see Heath like that...all hard and slick...

I shifted behind him, my body reacting with similar heightened sensuality.

"Are you coming, Archer?" Heath asked, and Archer took his skin back.

“Not yet, but if you show me inside, I’m pretty sure we could fix that.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” I ran up the steps to the door and turned the handle.

“Welcome home.”

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Archer

Everything happened fast. I'd always heard that when I met my mate or, in this case, mates, everything in my life would change, and it had. I'd gone from the worst night of my life to the best in what felt like moments.

From downloading the app to meeting my mates at the station...to shifting together...to now, I just didn't know how to process it all, but then I realized I didn't have to. These were my mates, a gift of Fate, and they were everything I could ever ask for. Perfect for me. For once, instead of analyzing, I needed to let go, and it was so much easier because we hadn't bothered to dress again when we shifted back from our fur.

My mates were magnificent in both forms, and as we raced inside the house, pheromones were thick in the air. Both the alpha and omega wanted me as much as I wanted them, and I only hoped I would be able to please them.

But I would—because they were my mates.

We fell onto the bed in a flurry of kisses and caresses, the darkness hiding who was touching whom and which hand stroked whose body, but that was fine, too. Because I didn't need to see to know that Oren was kissing me or that Heath lay on his back, a fine sheen of sweat covering his skin. Our scents mingled in a foresty sort of scent, clean like after a rain, and I scooted down to find Heath's cock and close my fist over it. I wanted to taste him, and after peppering kisses on his flat abdomen, I licked his cock from base to tip, savoring his gasp as Oren straddled his face.

Our sucking and licking were loud, as was our breathing in the otherwise quiet room. I sucked him slowly at first, enjoying the tremor in his limbs, but soon he was moaning around Oren's cock, begging me to go faster—at least that was what I thought he said and it was what I did. I licked the tip and cradled his ball sac in the palm of my hand then lower, fingering his slick, tight hole, scraping my teeth lightly over his shaft until he went rigid and streams of salty cum splashed into my mouth. I didn't want to waste a drop and deep-throated him. Swallowing as fast as I could, I took, I savored his taste and scent, my mate's first time coming in my mouth.

It would be the first of many.

Then Oren cried out and his ass cheeks flexed, barely visible even with my shifter vision in the darkness but insanely sexy nonetheless. He rocked his hips faster and faster then sagged over our omega's body, spent.

I knelt between Heath's legs, loving the sight of my mates and the incredible scent of their cum mingling in the air. Pushing his knees up to his chest, I prodded my cock at his hole and past the ring of tight muscles. His slick eased my passage into his body, the walls flexing around me, driving me higher and, urged on by my mates' soft and very naughty words, I sped up, driving in again and again until with a shout, I spilled inside him, wishing I could see more of both of them in this first moment of joining. When my knot swelled, I bent and sank my teeth into Heath's throat, forever marking him as mine.

"Archer," Oren asked softly, "have you ever taken an alpha's shaft yourself?"

"No. But I would like to try. We have no lube though." Still attached by my knot, I couldn't even go buy any. It was a silly thought, probably, but I'd never wanted an alpha to impale me until now.

"Our omega has slick to share. If you're willing?"

“Yes. Please.”

I tensed though, when he came behind me and reached between Heath and me for the slick. Would it hurt?

“It might hurt, but if you want me to stop, just say so,” he whispered as if he’d heard me thinking. Sometimes mates did.

“Just do it.” I was still knotted to our omega, and the idea of him taking me while I couldn’t move held an extra bit of thrill, one that saw me through when his head squeezed into my virgin hole, followed by the rest of his cock. Impaled was right, but somehow, although it hurt, it also felt good, more than good, and I kissed our omega senseless while our alpha fucked me. Would it have been like this with anyone else?

No way.

With each thrust, he stretched me wider, murmuring encouragement, telling me to relax and driving deeper until finally his cum spurted into my body, burning the stretched-out tissues and sending me into an unheard-of knotted orgasm.

At least, I’d never heard of one.

He leaned past me to place his mark on our omega and then we all lay together, tied by two knots and resting because already I wanted them both again.

My mates.

So fast, but so right.

Heath

The smell of pancakes hit my nose first thing, followed by the scent of my alphas. Each one of them had a distinct, oaky, musk smell, but my fox must've been starving. He woke me up with the first whiff of breakfast.

I opened my eyes to see Archer's sleeping face near mine. My gaze drifted down his body. He was still completely naked, only a corner of the sheet making a tent across his groin.

"Keep on looking at him like that and you're guaranteed not to have any pancakes while they're hot." The bed depressed as Oren lay down behind me. He smelled like maple syrup, pancakes, and fruit. He'd been up and cooking early, it seemed. The sun had barely risen outside the window. The sounds of birds singing their morning songs entered through the window.

I chuckled. "Then I'm getting up. I'm starving."

Oren patted my ass. "We worked up quite the appetite. Come on and eat. I have a feeling Archer needs his sleep."

Leaning forward, I kissed the tip of Archer's nose and he swatted at his face as though my lips were a fly. I had a feeling Archer was a bit silly when he was relaxed. He had laughed a few times while we were making love the night before while we tangled up limbs and sometimes got caught. I took it as a good sign. Mates should be able to laugh and have fun while they were having sex.

I rolled over to find Oren with his hand outstretched, waiting for me. He helped me down from the bed, and I slid down the front of his body until my feet hit the chilly wood floors of the cabin. He was ready for more as I was but instead of taking me once again, he shook his head and dragged me into the kitchen after I grabbed a pair of shorts.

“If I didn’t get you out of there, we might not ever leave. And my wolf feels the need to feed you. Can’t have you lacking in energy.”

Oren made me sit down while he talked about how I was feeling and how great it was I’d shown up in my fox form. I’d explained a little to them but not all of it.

“I still need to call a tow truck to have my bus towed here. I hate to leave it out there. Everything I own is in there.”

Oren set the table and took great care placing all the breakfast offerings in the center. He winked at me as he placed the maple syrup and butter on the table, insisting that I not move an inch from my seat or help him in any way.

“I am perfectly able to grab my own cup of coffee,” I replied after he asked how I took my caffeine.

My new alpha sighed and came over to crouch in front of me. “You are capable, but this is the honeymoon period, mate. I want to learn all these things. How you put butter and syrup on your pancakes. How you make your morning coffee. The way you eat. I’m so hungry to watch everything I can about you so I can spoil you properly. You’ve been waiting awhile for alphas, but I have been waiting a lifetime for an omega. Let me have my fun, okay?”

I nodded, stupefied by his sweet honesty.

He pulled his chair over after delivering my coffee and watched with complete awe as I mixed it up, a little coffee with my creamer. No sugar.

“Huh,” he said and like an animal, sipped on his black coffee.

One bite of Oren’s pancakes put me in absolute heaven. They were fluffy and light, slightly sweet with a tiny hint of cinnamon. When I recovered from my first-bite trance, I found Oren staring at me, and standing at the sink was Archer who hadn’t bothered donning anything but his boxers.

Thank the gods.

I hadn’t even heard him coming in, so enamored by the breakfast.

“What?” I said after swallowing, already looking forward to my next bite.

Archer lifted the cup of coffee to his smiling lips. “Fucking gorgeous,” he whispered before joining us at the table.

I would learn later on that the sound of me moaning did things to them.

Them simply breathing did things to me, so we were even.

“I heard you say something about your bus,” Archer mentioned as we ate.

“Yes. I really need to get it towed and brought here, if that’s okay?”

Oren nodded. “Of course it is.”

Archer stabbed a sausage link. “There are probably a lot of logistics we need to iron out. This will be a change for all of us.”

Oren leaned back in his chair. “We’ll make it work. I inherited this place, so I own it free and clear. I intend to get some kind of job but haven’t thought about where yet. Archer, you work remotely, right?”

My alpha with the piercing eyes nodded. “I do for now. But I don’t plan to stay with my current firm long. Dining room table. On the bed. Floor. I’m good. As long as I have my laptop, I’m fine.”

“I have been living off my savings and my earnings from my YouTube videos,” I said.

They both cocked their heads. Oren placed his head over mine. “You didn’t tell us you made videos, omega. We’d love to see them.”

Shrugging one shoulder, I said, “I had enough subscribers to pay my way and save a little. I suppose a new vlog series would be good with them but only if you two don’t mind being in them.”

“Let’s get your bus back and then we’ll talk about making videos.” Oren chuckled. “We have a lot to plan.”

Oren

From the moment I scented them, I realized there was no leaving them or this place. This cabin was for us to make our home. Everything about it felt right. Except the size, but there was plenty of room to expand.

They agreed, and that meant there was a lot to do. The cabin was great, and it was nearly done as far as repairs went, but, in addition to adding on, it also needed some technology upgrades. My first attempt at connecting to the internet had failed. It was intermittent at best and slow even when it was connected. We had to figure out a way to get wired or possibly satellite internet installed.

All of that took time. Thankfully, money wasn't an issue—not yet—but that didn't mean these things weren't time consuming.

I called my boss, not wanting to have the conversation we needed to hold. He'd been great, letting me stay here while I figured stuff out with the house. But my arrangement wasn't permanent. It couldn't be. Too much of what I did required me to be in the office. The only reason this worked was because I took on a little bit of Stan's work, and he took on my in-person meetings and presentations.

It was a lot to ask of him, and I was beyond grateful for his help. I'd told him when I came back to the city we'd do a karaoke set, just the two of us. At the time, I thought it would be me returning forever. Now, it would be me coming to get my things. How different my life was all because of one pop-up ad.

When I called work, I had no idea what to expect. Would they fire me on the spot?

Would they beg me to come back? Would they pull out some secret bit of my contract that would bind me to them forever and drag me back to the city?

I laughed at myself for turning my life into some really bad rom-com, as if such a contract existed. But luckily for me, real life didn't come close to matching my imagination and my boss was understanding. He was one of the few shifters in the company, and once I said, "mate," he understood. He congratulated me and told me he would see what he could do.

At the time, I assumed he meant he'd try to get me my sick days paid or arrange for me to not have to come back to clean out my office. But then he called the next day and told me he'd found me another job within the company—one that could be done fully remotely. It wasn't the same as what I'd been doing. There was no more clocking in at nine and clocking out at five, but it would be money coming in until I could figure things out, and that worked for me.

Ideally, I wanted to find something local, something where I could become a part of this community too. I loved my mates, and I loved being in a family, but I missed being around coworkers and having that space too.

"What do you think?" Heath turned his computer around.

"What am I looking at?" I'd been spacing out over my morning coffee, my mind flitting between all the things that still needed doing.

"Well, they sell these, like Insta-houses—that's not the right word—but they're not trailers. They come flat, and then you kind of pick them up like a kid's toy, using either a crane or some really strong men. I don't know how it goes together, but look."

I pressed play on the video he showed me, and sure enough, they kind of dropped this

house in place, then picked up all four sides, one at a time, until they somehow pieced it together, and then there was a roof placed on top. The weird thing was, in the video, they actually looked really nice—like sure, they pieced together like a construction toy and not what one thinks of when they think of new construction, but also, they were sold as sturdy and functional. Maybe they were the best of all worlds, or maybe they had really good PR people. Probably a bit of both.

“I’m not saying no, but I don’t know how those would weather here.” Would they stay warm in the winter, cool in the summer? Could they handle the snow? Could I? Everything was so new to me, also.

“Yeah, I was wondering about that too, but they’re really neat.” He tapped the screen right above where the price was. “And if we could find a way to connect it to the house...”

He was right. That was a great deal. It should definitely go on our maybe list.

“Maybe?” Archer came in, eyeing us with amusement. “Maybe what?”

He looked us up and down like we’d been up to something—which, to be fair, was a pretty constant state for us. But not this time. We were just drinking coffee and being influenced by short videos selling buildings.

“We were looking at possibilities for adding on to the house.” I leaned back so he could get a better view.

“Oh, let me see.” He sat down with us, and we spent the next hour going down a rabbit hole of mini easy houses that were very unlike the manufactured homes of old, but also not quite houses either. But really, the houses weren’t the important part, it was the three of us discussing our future together and what that was going to look like.

I leaned into Archer's side, my hand on Heath's thigh. It didn't matter what we decided to do with the house or where I worked. This, right here, was what mattered—Heath and Archer by my side and in my heart.

Archer

Not that we were like “bunnies” or anything. My pack brothers would faint at the implication, but in fact, my new mates and I spent so much time in bed that by the end of our first full day together, we lay there tangled in the sweaty sheets, too tired to cook and too hungry to skip a meal.

“I don’t suppose you can get anything delivered here?” I peeled the sheet from my thigh, grimacing. “And I hope you have another set of sheets.”

“A couple, but I can buy more if this keeps up. I haven’t put in a washer and dryer here yet, and we don’t want to be going to the laundromat in town every third day.”

“Are there hookups?” I grabbed my phone. “I can order them now.” There had to be a good use for the money I’d saved up while being too busy to spend any of it. “Gas or electric.”

“Yes, but you don’t have to do that.” Heath tumbled to the floor next to the bed. “The laundromat isn’t that bad.”

“Maybe not, but having the machine here would be handy.” I tapped on the screen. “I can get an electric set delivered overnight. And no arguments.” And no explaining that I was paying a delivery fee almost the cost of the machines.

Oren grinned at us both. “I agree that it would be handy. And we’re mated, so it’s not like anyone is going anywhere, that is unless we all do. Is electric okay, omega?”

Heath sighed. “Perfect, and I can’t be a complete hypocrite and not admit it will be a relief. Hauling all my clothes and the soap and everything has kind of sucked.”

“Of course it has.” I reached down and pulled him back up and in between the two of us. “Now, I’d like to go another round, but without nutrition I’m going to have performance issues. About delivery?”

“Nothing really,” Oren said. “Particularly at this time of year. The tourists are all gone so there aren’t even any gig workers to speak of. Let’s go to the Grizzly and have some of Stefano’s food.”

“Stefano?” Heath was already up and headed for the bathroom. “Friend of yours?”

“Don’t be jealous, omega. He and his brother own the Grizzly. It’s a kind of bar and restaurant out on the highway, and they met their mates via the app too.” He frowned. “Come to think of it, rumor has it most people around here did. Stefano was a chef at some fancy place in the city, and Giorgio talked him into coming here to open the place with him.”

“Sounds good to me.” I started to follow Heath then stayed where I was. “I suggest we all shower separately to be sure we actually do get to the restaurant before they close.”

“They’re open pretty late, having a bar and all, but the full menu won’t be available too late.”

We took turns showering and dressing then piled in Oren’s vehicle, me behind the wheel, and headed down the highway. It was gorgeous country around here, all the beautiful trees and mountain slopes in the distance. Autumn was showing its first licks, and there were some colorful leaves visible as the last of the sunlight disappeared and shadows took its place.

“Is it very far?” Heath asked, peering into the distance. “My stomach is rumbling.”

“No.” Oren leaned forward from the back seat and pointed. “See the lights up ahead? That’s the Grizzly. Social hub of the whole area, and, now, mostly all locals. You’ll love it.”

We parked in a half-full lot and made our way into the rustic building. A dining room off to one side was full of families finishing their meals, but Heath steered us toward the main bar area. “It’s late enough, they’ll be wanting to shut down the other area soon. We can get everything in the bar.”

As we sat at a table, a bear shifter approached. “Oren, nice to see you. Are you and your friends here for dinner or drinks tonight?”

Oren smiled at him. “Giorgio. Please meet Heath and Archer. I’ve been bragging about Stefano’s food, and we’re all starving, so what are the specials tonight?”

Giorgio shook our hands and rattled off a list of several items that sounded amazing, then he stopped. “I’m sorry I said these men were your friends. Heath, when were you going to tell us your news. Hang on. I have to get Stefano.” He left the table and disappeared through a doorway beside the bar, reappearing with a man who looked a lot like him but dressed in chef’s whites. They were both tall and brawny and likely the grizzlies the restaurant was named after. “Here’s my elusive brother. Stefano, Oren is—”

“Mated.” The chef clapped his hands. “Congratulations!”

“We are going to comp your whole bill tonight.” Giorgio seemed just as excited as his brother. “Tell us how you met.”

“Can’t you guess?” Oren took both our hands and squeezed them.

“The app.” Giorgio nodded. “Another success story. So what will you have?”

“What do you suggest?”

Stefano rubbed his hands together. “Leave it to me. Any allergies or dislikes?” Shifters rarely had allergies, but it did happen.

We assured him we would be happy to try anything he brought, and soon the table was laden with an array of dishes the likes of which I would not have been surprised to see at one of the fancy restaurants where the law firm entertained clients. Other diners and staff came by the table and congratulated us, pulled up chairs, and soon an impromptu mating reception took place.

What an incredible place, the Grizzly, and everyone wanted to share their stories of meeting on the app. The few families left in the dining room came in, too, babies nodding off on their laps as we all got to know each other.

Finally, my mates and I took our leave, but we’d be back soon.

Heath

I wanted to break Archer free from his best friend—the laptop. Sure, he had work to do, but there were times he was so engrossed he didn't hear us. Didn't eat. Didn't come to bed.

More than once, I'd thought that I hoped all of this overworking was simply temporary.

"Archer?" I asked from where Oren and I marinated some meat for dinner later on. Oren's cooking was incredible and I was happy to help him and learn.

There was only so much I could do in a bus. The sheer size of the refrigerator amazed me.

No answer from my alpha sitting on the couch in front of the fire, which was now only a few flames and red embers.

I consulted Oren with a glance but his only response was a shrug.

What my alpha needed was a good distraction, and I had the perfect idea.

"Would you mind if Archer and I snuck away for lunch together?"

Oren chuckled and leaned against the fridge. "Of course not. It's important all of us get time together and as couples and some alone time along the way. It's healthy."

When I didn't immediately do anything, Oren reached behind me and swatted my ass. He did that a lot, and I wasn't complaining at all. "Go on. Go take your alpha on a date."

Anxiety swirled in my stomach as I approached Archer. He was deep into his work until I sat next to him. The lines on his forehead disappeared and his jaw relaxed. Even his shoulders loosened.

Yeah, my mate needed to get away from that blasted computer.

"Hi, beautiful," he cooed, turning his body toward me a bit.

"Hi, yourself. What're the chances of getting my alpha alone for a lunch date?" I asked.

"I..." He looked back at the laptop screen. "I'm right in the middle of something, Heath."

"Everybody has to break for lunch, right?" I asked, running my hand up his thigh.

He sighed. "I suppose so. Sure. Let's go. Did you have somewhere in mind? Is Oren coming along?"

Proof that he hadn't been listening at all.

"Just you and me today," I responded. "Let's walk."

I tugged him out of the house before he could change his mind. Alphas tended to have great work ethics, a tie in to their nature, and wanting to take care of their omega and their young, which I greatly admired in Archer. But he seemed so stressed while working, and that wasn't entirely good.

Forcing him to take a break would have to be my new thing.

Once we left the house, Archer took a long breath and took my hand in his. “Thank you for this, Heath. I didn’t realize how much I needed to get out of there.”

“I had a feeling. I thought maybe we could get some burgers and maybe catch one of those old movies at the theater? I mean, if you have enough time.”

I used my pitiful voice on purpose.

“I’ll make time for you. Burgers and vintage movies, it is.”

Maybe it was the greasy cheeseburger with the perfectly crisp fries, but halfway through the dinner, Archer came to sit on my side of the booth. We sat there for an hour, even after the meal was finished. We talked about our future and how crazy it was that an app brought us together. Archer held my hand and stared into my eyes while we talked.

“How about that movie?” I asked, figuring the waitress would want her table empty.

“Sounds good. Let me tip her well since we’ve taken up so much of her time.”

I wrapped my arm around his waist while he pulled me tighter against him on our walk to the movie theater. He stopped at an alleyway and pressed me against the bricks to kiss me senseless more than a few times.

The town was fantastic. Everything was within walking distance, even the cabin, though while we were there, it seemed like we were tucked away in our own pocket of wilderness.

“So, I have a question and pay attention because how you answer is going to

determine the trajectory of the rest of the afternoon.”

I gasped a tiny bit. “Do tell.”

“The old gangster movie or the musical?”

Tilting my head to look at the titles, I shrugged. “That’s some heavy decision-making, but I honestly don’t know.”

Archer bent down, a smirk on his face. His lips gently brushed my earlobe, making me shudder. “Which one do you think I could kiss you in longer? Unless you were actually planning on seeing the movie.”

I certainly wasn’t anymore.

“Probably less people in the gangster one.”

He stood to his full height and winked. “My thoughts exactly.”

The theaters were very small, and only my mate and I chose the gangster movie. Once the lights went down, he chuckled. “This is better than I’d planned. What should we do with this private dark room?”

Before I could oppose, which I wouldn’t have anyway, Archer moved the armrest between us and reached for my zipper. “I’ve been wanting to taste you all day.”

He had?

Damn, I didn’t know a blow job in an empty movie theater could be so hot.

Oren

“Do you have any plans for the day?” I handed Heath a cup of coffee and sat on the stoop beside him.

The sun was mostly up, a new day starting. Archer was already talking about some work he needed to do, even though it was Saturday. I didn’t love how much he worked, but I also respected him enough to know he was doing what he felt he had to, so I tried not to push too much.

“Oh, thanks. I needed this.” Heath took a long sip of his coffee. “I hadn’t really decided for today. It was supposed to rain, so I didn’t plan anything outside, but it doesn’t look like showers are in our forecast now.”

“I don’t feel rain.” It was one of the weird things that came with being a deer—I usually felt the rain hours before it arrived. “I’d love to have a job where I got paid to be wrong,” I teased.

And it was true; the weather reports were consistently wrong around here. But that didn’t mean there wasn’t some science behind what they were doing, just that Mother Nature didn’t care what the indicators said. She was going to do what she wanted, and today it looked like that meant sun.

“What are you doing today?”

“I was thinking about heading to the big-box store. I wanted to get another bookshelf and maybe some pantry supplies.” The local stores were not inexpensive, and, while

money wasn't an issue for us, it still didn't feel right spending twice as much as we had to—especially when I could make a day of it with someone I cared about. “Want to come?”

“Absolutely. I was thinking about getting some new sneakers anyway.” He picked up his foot and showed where the bottom of the heel had torn a little bit. “Not even sure how I did this.”

“Sounds like a date.” I loved the sound of that. Even though we were a triad, there had never been this need for us to do all things together all of the time. It had been a minor worry of mine when we first got together. Could we kiss if we weren't all there, or shift or anything, really? But I soon realized that we all had relationships with each other as well as our group dynamic. It was the best of all worlds.

Heath leaned over and gave me a cheek kiss with a smack. “A date. I like that.” He leaned into my side, and we drank our coffee, watching the rest of the sun come up.

The drive to the box store was fairly long, but it didn't feel like it—not when I had my mate by my side. We talked about a lot of different things, nothing too serious. The new movie that was coming out, the lack of good pizza locally—although we wouldn't say that too loudly around any locals. They all seemed to agree that the pizza at the Grizzly was pretty good. It was fine, but it was a little too fussy to be pizza.

We even talked about what kind of flowers we wanted to plant in the spring. Nothing too serious. Just two people, getting to know each other more deeply and having normal, everyday, shared-life conversations. It was fantastic.

When we arrived at the box store, the parking lot was oddly full for the time of day. We each took a cart and headed to the back of the store to grab some sneakers first. They had an oddly large selection, and Heath was able to find a pair almost identical

to the ones he was replacing.

I chose some slippers—slippers with little wolf ears on them. For some reason, they made me giggle, and Heath insisted that we buy them. I could imagine Archer's face when he saw me walking across the kitchen one morning wearing them.

“We have two carts because we're getting two carts full?” Heath asked as I plopped a whole case of green beans into the bottom of mine.

“Yeah, probably. I was thinking canned stuff and boxed stuff in mine. Bookshelf, shoes, possibly some throw pillows in yours.” We didn't need throw pillows, but as we were walking to the shoes, I'd seen some that caught my eye, and it wasn't like we were going to be back here anytime soon.

“This is so different than when I was living on the road.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“Not being on the road and being here with you two is the best thing. Getting used to buying in bulk? That's neutral.” He grabbed a case of beets. “I love them.”

“Noted.” I loved cooking for my men, and even something little like the fact that Heath liked beets was huge for me.

We ended up using half of his cart for the remainder of the boxed goods. It was going to be nice not to worry about having ingredients on hands. Ideally, we'd be canning our own, and next year we could. But to get us through this season, this would work.

It was funny because only a month ago, I was doing my grocery shopping every couple of days, not wanting to lug everything home. And now, here I was, happy as could be, stocking up for what might be a long season hidden away with just my

mates and me. And I couldn't be happier.

We were also able to get a decent bookshelf. It wasn't ideal, but until I could take the time to construct one out of wood, the metal one would do. And the throw pillows? Once we gave them a hug, there was no chance they were staying in the store. They were far too comfy.

"We didn't think this through," Heath said, popping the trunk. "We might not be able to get this all in."

"Oh, sure we can. I'm the Tetris king." And we got it all in, but I did have to take the bookshelf pieces out of the box to make them fit, so it wasn't a complete victory.

"I guess we're not stopping anywhere else on the way home," I chuckled.

"No, unless you want some lunch."

"Lunch sounds great."

Heath put his hand on my knee and slowly brought his fingers up my thigh. "But let's wait for dessert until we get home."

Archer

Private time. When I came here to be part of a throuple, I hadn't put a lot of thought into how that might work. I guess I'd just assumed it would be all for one and one for all. Very Three Musketeers . And, for the most part, we were, but as we got to know one another, we decided that we should, as our wise alpha deer said, "all of us get time together and as couples and some alone time along the way." He pointed out that it would be healthy, and when I thought about it, it made perfect sense.

I'd lived alone since I passed the bar and was amazed at how seamlessly I'd stepped into the living situation with my mates. Waking up every morning, I immediately looked to see if they were in bed or had gotten up. My wolf needed to place them and know where they were at all times. I had to hope this would ease because one or more of us would likely have to leave the premises at some point for a day job. Heath was living off his YouTube savings from his #buslife days, for example, and while my company was still giving me lots of busy work, primarily research that could be easily and more cheaply handled by a paralegal, they still didn't know where I was located, and I preferred to keep it that way. But even with the security on my laptop, if they truly chose to find me, they could. The news about the client they had covered up for was everywhere, and had they not been one of the biggest firms in the country with hands in the pockets of senators and congressmen and governors and billionaires, they would have closed their doors in the face of the publicity generated by the case.

No charges had been filed against any of the partners, at least so far as I knew, and it seemed as if it would all blow over. I didn't have enough information to change that, but I would if I could. Oren and Heath both were supportive when I told them the

story and agreed that I should quit at the earliest opportunity.

If not for my alpha instinct to care for my omega, I would have thrown it all away without another thought. But I set a deadline in my mind for making a move. There was no guarantee I'd earn as much in this area, either. I'd been so focused on earning, for the company, for me...

"Penny for your thoughts, alpha?" Heath rested a hand on my arm before turning his attention back to the road. "Are you trying to decide what kind of car you want?" Our couple date was a trip to a car dealership. Whatever I did going forward, I would need transportation, and one car between three people would not cut it for long.

"Yes...no." I let out a low laugh. "I was mulling over the changes I've made in such a short time. Until the day I talked to the two of you on the app, or maybe the day before I was a driven lawyer of the kind you see on TV. All about the work and no time or energy left for anything or anyone."

"You did mention that." He steered past a particularly beautiful stand of trees, and I drew in a deep breath. "Pretty here, isn't it?"

"Beautiful."

"Is it like that where you come from?"

I had to think for a moment. Where did I come from? I'd left the pack lands many years before for college and law school and my job... How to answer?

"Alpha?"

"Sorry. The pack lands where I grew up were gorgeous, although different than this. Mostly open land for running, for one."

“That sounds nice.” He glanced my way for a second. “Were you going to say something else?”

“I was thinking of the places I lived since. My university where I did undergrad and law school had all the brick buildings and grass and trees, but it seemed like I was never outside to appreciate them.”

“That’s rough.”

“And then I joined the firm, and I’m not sure I even paid attention to the natural world.”

“Your wolf must have loved that.” We arrived at the dealership, and Heath pulled into a customer parking space. He turned the car off and faced me, reaching for my hands. “Alpha, I’m so glad you came here. I was 100 percent sure I’d just continue with my wandering ways, but now I’m here. It’s my home, our home, and I know you’ll find your way to peace in the work world.”

“I have to quit.”

“You do, but not until you’re ready.” He leaned in, and I kissed him, so grateful for the constant support my mates gave me. When we leaned back, he sighed. “Just don’t let it eat you up, alpha.”

A salesman approached us then, and we got out of the car and let him lead us around, showing us various cars and narrowing down what I wanted until we stood by a sleek black sedan. It was the car I’d have bought while living in the city if I’d actually needed one. The car I’d been eyeing for a while. I sat behind the wheel, ready to close the deal, and then I got out.

“I think I’m going to go another way. Can you show me an SUV? Something with 4-

wheel drive and all-season tires.”

Heath gaped at me. “Really? But you looked so happy in that one.”

“I was, for a second, and then I realized how impractical it was here. Don’t you think this will be better for all of us?” I pulled him in to my side. “It does snow here, right?”

“It does, and this will be better.” Heath nodded. “For all of us.”

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 4:47 am

Heath

“Why in the hell am I so tired?” I laughed as Archer took his time massaging my feet. I’d uploaded a vlog, updating my audience on my new setup and explaining how the bus was somewhat dead. Soon, I would find the time to fix it myself.

If I ever stopped being so sleepy.

“You’ve been on your own for a while,” Archer said. “Traveling. Making videos. Everything in your life was on your shoulders alone. Maybe your mind needs rest. When the mind needs rest, so does the body.”

My mate spoke to me, but I had a feeling he might be talking to himself.

“Maybe,” I murmured.

“Sounds like the omega I love is just needing some rest. No need to try and find excuses or reasons. If you need rest, then you need rest. Period.”

The silence in the house was deafening.

Sure, we knew we loved each other. We were fated mates and so bonded beyond words or vows of certificates like humans used, but Oren, as he came in from outside, had muttered the three words I longed for. Didn’t know I longed for them so deeply, but I did.

My heart fluttered uncontrollably. Archer’s hands stopped moving on my feet. We

both froze and then moved our heads to stare at Oren.

The alpha who said the words walked to the kitchen sink and got a glass. He poured some cold water in it and downed the whole glass. “Do we have any plans for the day? I got a good bit done on the backyard.” Oren had been inspired by the landscaping at the motel. While we would never be able to get our backyard close to the oasis theirs was, we would try to make it our own.

I sat up, not believing he was simply going to haze over this huge thing he just said out loud. “My plan right now is to ask you if you mean it.”

“Mean what?” he said, but I didn’t miss the hint of a smile on his face.

“You said the omega I love.”

Archer crossed his arms over his chest. “I’m shocked, Heath. Did you not think we loved you?” He was joking, of course.

“I mean, I know I love both of you, but we haven’t exactly said the words. Words are important to me.” As I spoke, tears slid down my cheeks as my chin quivered with the impact of the emotions.

Oren sped over and kneeled in front of me. “We’ll just have to say it more often then, won’t we, Archer?”

Archer nodded. “Yes. And for the record, I love the both of you.”

Oren repeated the notion.

My heart was full.

“While we are confessing things, I have something I need to talk to you both about,” Archer started, edging toward me on the couch. Oren took a seat between us. I hadn’t heard such a serious tone from Archer before.

“You can tell us anything,” I added while he hesitated.

“I have been taking some things into consideration and...I’m tired of being tired. I’m exhausted from worry all the time and feeling like I’m spending more time on my computer than with the people I love.”

That word again. Best word ever.

“It will be a cut in pay, significant, in fact, probably, but I am ready to make that change.

“What’s your plan?” Oren asked, threading his fingers with Archer’s.

“I was contacted by a friend from law school who works with shifters who are convicted of crimes they did not do. After helping get people off the hook for crimes they did do, I’m ready for a change.” I leaned over and put my hand over their joined ones. “I suppose I should give two weeks’ notice to the company.” His smile disappeared.

Terrible how this job affected all of our lives.

“Quit today,” I said. Archer’s eyes widened. “What? It’s time you did something that suited your heart.”

“We support you no matter what, Archer,” Oren added.

Archer slapped his hands on his thighs and ran for his laptop. When he came back, he

opened it up, a grand smile on his face. “This is going to be epic. I’m quitting. Now. Right this damned minute.”

Oren

The notification on my phone beeped, letting us know that the delivery was almost here.

“Archer! Heath! Come on!” It was safe to say I was a little excited.

We’d finally decided to get one of the fold-up houses as our addition. Technically, they didn’t fold after you got them set up, but I’d always think of them that way. I still didn’t fully understand the engineering behind them, but I didn’t need to. I wasn’t the designer.

When deciding, we toured the factory to make sure we liked them in real life and not just on the screen. They were even nicer than we’d hoped, and all indications were that they’d hold up nicely in this weather.

Obviously, they wouldn’t look like a cabin at first, but with some “log” siding, it was going to look amazing. And really, it wasn’t the looks that mattered—it was getting everything ready in time. As the season progressed, I really wanted it done both right and quickly. This would accomplish that. We could add a traditional addition on at a later time if we wanted to, but for now, this was the ideal solution.

“How far out are they?” Archer asked, sipping his coffee, nowhere near as hurried as I was.

“Oh, I didn’t look.” I tapped away on my phone, pulling up the delivery notification map. “Ten minutes or so?”

“Excellent.” He pulled out the seat beside him. “Coffee first.”

I loved seeing how much more chill Archer was now that he’d decided to leave his high-pressure position. It had made such a difference for him, both physically and emotionally. I was so glad he was taking the leap.

A few minutes later, he must have sensed how antsy I was because he stood up with his cup in hand. “Let’s drink them outside.”

Archer had given up coffee by this point and had a cup of iced tea that he brought out with him, and I’d been too antsy to even pour a coffee. I’d been the one who pushed for this, and I put a lot of pressure on my shoulders for it to be perfect. Neither Archer or Heath put that on me nor would they want me to feel this way, but I couldn’t help it. I wanted everything to be perfect for us as we began our new lives together.

We stood and watched as the truck made its way to us. It was a lot bigger than I had anticipated and barely fit in our drive. And really, I should’ve known it was going to be like that since it was bringing an entire addition, but spacial memory was weird like that.

After signing the proper paperwork and showing the delivery person where it was going, the hard part began: getting it behind our house without ruining too much of the yard. The driver seemed to have a lot of experience and managed to maneuver it with lots of little baby steps. He never looked worried, and that calmed us down. Once he set it on the foundation we’d had poured, he had us sign again and left.

Now came the fun part.

“The video says it’s not hard,” I reminded them, pulling up the instructions on my phone.

“Not hard and easy are two different things,” Heath yawned. He’d been perpetually tired lately. I didn’t love it, but he assured me he was fine and that his two sexy alphas were just wearing him out. “But I’ll be sure to guide you both.”

As we started to follow step one, we realized this wasn’t a two-person job. It didn’t matter how easy the video made it seem, we needed more help. And even if Heath pitched in, that still wasn’t enough hands. We needed a crew.

“I think we’re in over our heads, guys,” Archer sighed. “So far over our heads we can’t even comb our hair.”

“Agreed.” I pinched the bridge of my nose and tried to brainstorm ways to make this work.

“That’s fine.”

I snapped my head up to see Heath pulling out his phone. He called his friends from the motel and asked them to come over and help, promising to watch the kids and make them food. He’d been getting better at cooking, and hearing him offer meant he was gaining more confidence in the area.

At the same time, Archer took out his phone and called over to the Grizzly to see who was there. Twenty minutes later, there was a whole community of people helping us get everything set up—connecting it to the electricity and water we’d prepared, sealing it to the side of the house so the rain wouldn’t get in, and even putting up the “log siding.”

I hadn’t realized until that moment just how many friends we had in this community. And not work friends who were there during office hours. These were friends friends who showed up when it mattered. I’d never experienced anything like it before in my life and I finally understood the pack thing. There was a time when I thought I did,

but it wasn't until this morning, standing here, taking in the scene happening in front of me that I finally truly understood.

Even though we lived alone in our little cabin in the woods, we were part of something bigger. We might not be a pack or a herd or a den, but what we were was pretty freakin' amazing.

I was happy not only to be a part of it but to be getting ready to start my family here, where our future children could grow up with this as their norm. I couldn't think of anything better than that.

Archer

It was easy to say I'd quit. Easy to tell my friend that I was interested in going to work for the nonprofit he had told me about. A lot of guilt lay on my chest when I thought of all the times I had believed whatever I was told about clients. I didn't think there were any other serial killers in the mix, but I did know that our cases were chosen based on ability to pay our high rates with very few pro bonos to thin it out. Things seemed to have simmered down with the law enforcement situation, and from what the news—and my assistant, who was still assigned to me and went to the office every day—said, two of the senior partners had suddenly retired to the Caribbean. I was sensing a theme here.

I vowed I'd never again do work solely for money again. Not that I could work for free, of course, because I had an omega and an alpha, for that matter, who I always wanted to be able to care for. But as I'd told them, there would be a big drop in pay. A nonprofit didn't have the budget to pay even the associate rate at a big law firm.

After the way I lived my life before, it was such a change. I should be really upset not to make that partnership, to walk away from the chance to make big money, and yet... And yet I didn't feel that way in the slightest. The salary Out of Jeopardy offered me would be adequate for the lifestyle I planned to live and even offer a little extra to build our savings.

Setting up the coffeepot for my mates, I hoped I'd made the right choice. No, I knew I had, but after getting so badly burned at the firm, my trust level wasn't great. Craig, my former classmate, swore they were everything they claimed to be, making it their mission to get shifters wrongfully accused either through a trial to a not guilty verdict

or appealed out of jail—without “outing” them as paranormal. While many people did know about us, many others either did not or chose to pretend they didn’t. Or, worse, didn’t see us as real people, and that was how many of the shifters Out of Jeopardy represented ended up unjustly accused.

It would be a noble job, or at least an honorable one, and maybe help me make up for the fact I was so accepting of everything I’d been told about a client whose body count was still rising as the police and other agencies linked his DNA to cold cases. Gods, what a jerk. I’d only met him a few times and hadn’t had any idea what he was capable of. My wolf had not liked him, but since the beast didn’t like anything about the firm or my work there, I just attributed it to his not getting enough running time lately.

“You made the coffee.” Heath came into the kitchen rubbing sleep from his eyes. “Does it smell right to you?”

“Yes, I think so.” I sniffed the pot. “Just bought the beans yesterday and ground this morning.”

“Must be my toothpaste. Sometimes it makes things taste funny.” He popped some bread in the toaster and yawned. “What are you up to today?”

“I’ve got to quit my old job and sign the contract with my new one.” It hadn’t been a sure thing they’d even want me, with my former association. It wasn’t common knowledge that I’d worked on the serial killer case, but I’d come clean and told them all about it. They didn’t seem too concerned and one of the interviewers even said, “We’re aware of the details of that situation and of your lack of fault.”

They did a heck of a background check.

“Want some eggs, Heath?” I pulled the carton out of the refrigerator. “Maybe

scrambled with cheese?”

“I think just toast.” He got out a jar of jam and a stick of butter. “Not too hungry.”

I put the eggs back and reached for the cream. “Me too, I think. I’m a little nervous about today.”

Oren came in then and poured a cup of coffee for all three of us. “What are we talking about?”

“Archer’s online appointments today.”

“Oh, that’s right.” He took a seat at the table and a sip of his coffee. “So good, mate.”

I arched a brow at Heath who tasted his too. “It’s good. I probably just wasn’t awake yet.” He took his toast and set it on a plate then added two more slices to the toaster. “Everyone want some?”

“Sure.” Oren took another sip. “Did you tell our mate the news, Heath?”

“I waited for you.”

Oren grinned. “Why don’t we show him now then come back and eat breakfast. We are having eggs or something?”

“We were but—” Heath began.

“We decided we weren’t that hungry,” I finished for him. “My stomach is a little nervous with everything I have going today.”

“Oh, okay.” Oren stood up and held out his hand for mine. “Then we can have brunch

after your meetings. Sound reasonable?”

“Sounds perfect.” My alpha mate’s fingers closed around mine. “So, where are we going?”

“Just to your office.” Heath sashayed past us and through the living room. “Of course.”

“What?” I looked from one of them to the other. “When did I get an office?”

“Well, it’s more like a cubicle...you’ll see.” Oren released my hand and stepped behind me, placing his palms over my eyes. “Step forward, forward, forward.” He guided me across the living room and then off to the left.

Our home was not large, and I had no idea where I might have an office until Heath shouted, “One, two, three!” and Oren uncovered my eyes. A cubicle indeed, with screens set up to give me privacy and a desk they must have found on the side of the road. It was old, battered, and loved. My laptop sat on it. I had a chair and a light...and two mates who loved me so much, I was no longer nervous about calling the assholes who’d kept me out of the loop and thought nothing of letting a killer run free.

“Gentlemen, I need to go to the office. I have calls to make.”

I waited for their cheers to die down before pulling my phone out of my pocket.

Heath

I had to drag myself out of bed most mornings now. I didn't like how my body was constantly sluggish.

But this morning, I vaulted over Oren and sprinted to the bathroom just in time to release...not very much into the toilet. The heaving continued until my abs were sore and I released my hold on the porcelain seat to sit against the wall, trying like hell to breathe normally again.

"Again?" Oren came to kneel next to me. I let out a laugh but covered my mouth, not wanting to offend him with my morning-plus-throw-up breath. "What are you laughing at?"

"You never hesitate to get on your knees to help me. To tell me you love me. To...other things."

He chuckled, shaking his head. "You're changing the subject and not so smoothly. Third time this week, Heath. Talk to me."

"Does Archer know?" I asked, not wanting to worry him. Archer had started his new job, hummed around happy as a lark every day. He jumped up out of bed in the mornings, early, to get started. I'd never seen him happier.

"We talked about it last night while you were outside. You've become fond of your nighttime strolls."

I had. Walking at night reminded me of the days when I lived in my bus. Not that I would trade this for another night in the bus, but it was nice to be under the starry sky.

“Yes. The fresh air helps with the nausea.”

He got up and ran a washcloth under some warm water. He sighed as he cleaned up my face. I hated to worry them, but something was going on with me.

“Archer and I have noticed that your scent has changed. Would you be willing to go to the healer, or should I ask if he can come to the house?”

I’d caused enough trouble to my mates. No need to add a stranger to the mix. “I’ll go to them. I’m worn out and sick of this.”

Oren leaned forward and kissed my temple. Another loving thing he did often. “How about you take a shower since you’ve been sweating all night.”

I pulled out my shirt and sure enough, the fabric had been sticking to me. “You can shower with me,” I purred.

“Not this morning, you adorable thing. I’m going to tell Archer and then the healer to make sure he’s in office. I’ll start the water for you.”

“Do you have to tell Archer?” I asked. “He’s so happy lately.”

“Taking care of our mate isn’t going to make him unhappy, Heath. But letting you be sick and not doing something about it will. In the shower with you, little fox.”

When I went into the living room, freshly showered and dressed—most importantly after brushing my teeth—I saw Archer and Oren hugging and whispering. “No one

died. I'm just tired and nauseated. And apparently snappy. Sorry."

They included me in their hug, of course, and we took off toward the healer, which meant walking a few blocks after going down the road from the cabin.

The healer met us at the door and invited us in.

"Let's get you seen. Fill this out, alphas, for the patient, while I ask you some questions." He handed Oren and Archer a clipboard and sat next to me. "Tell me what's been going on."

I told the healer about the tiredness, the lack of energy, plus the nausea. My alphas interjected about the way my scent had changed and how my temper was short—something I hadn't realized about myself until that morning.

"I think there's a simple explanation about these symptoms. I've seen it plenty of times before but we won't know until you take a test."

"What kind of test?" Archer asked, his tone worried.

"A pregnancy test." No one spoke. "Are you willing to take one, Heath?"

"I am."

Neither of my mates spoke as I was given the test and told to go into the bathroom to pee on the stick. We waited until the timer on the healer's phone went off and he went to retrieve it.

"Well?" Oren asked. Good to know he could actually talk again.

"Congratulations, you three. You're pregnant."

For some reason, I looked down at my belly. Stunned didn't even cover it.

“Pregnant?”

Oren

We're having a baby. A baby!

From the time we got together, I always felt like we were on this path. Obviously, we'd never done anything to not be. But to hear those words and to see the look on our omega's face as his hands reached for his belly for the first time, understanding that he was carrying our child—it was everything.

I sobbed as he fell into our arms, the happiness overwhelming me. And that feeling stayed with me every day—whether I was watching him sleep, making him something to eat, or listening to him laugh. He was growing our child, and there was no greater joy in this world.

This morning, I woke up first. Heath was snuggled between us, and I watched them both sleeping so peacefully, wondering—not for the first time—how I ever thought I was happy before this. Maybe I was getting by. Maybe my life was even good. But now, this—us—it was so much more. It was everything.

I kissed them both on the top of the head and climbed out of bed quietly, heading into the bathroom to take a shower. I was happy to see they were still sound asleep when I came back out. My goal was to surprise them with a lovely breakfast.

I had the ingredients to make some muffins with local blueberries we'd picked up at a roadside stand. They were absolutely delicious, and we planned to plant some in our yard after tasting how delightful they were. So much better than the ones in the plastic boxes at the grocer.

The muffins were in the oven, the eggs scrambled for the omelets I was planning, and the bacon cooking when Archer came out.

“What’s the occasion?” he asked sleepily.

“Just Sunday.” I shrugged. “I thought it would be nice to have breakfast waiting for you when you two got up.”

“Well, if this is because it’s Sunday, I wouldn’t be sad for it to be Sunday every day.” Heath walked around and straight into the kitchen. I thought he was coming to give me a hug, but no—he snatched a piece of bacon and popped it into his mouth. “Crispy, just the way I like it.”

That had been the goal. I wanted everything perfect for the two of them. “Do we want to eat inside or outside today?”

We agreed on outside, since it was unusually warm, and ten minutes later, we were carrying food out to our small table, getting ready to enjoy our meal and begin our day.

“You know, you don’t have to cook fancy for me just because I’m pregnant,” Heath said, grabbing another piece of bacon. “I’m not complaining, but it’s definitely not necessary.”

“I think it is.” It was weird, but cooking was one way I liked to show my love. And since they both seemed to enjoy it, it was a win-win.

“Well, if you think it is, I’m not going to argue,” Archer said, popping the rest of his muffin into his mouth. “Especially if you keep cooking like this.”

“I’m just glad my stomach’s been doing okay now. I’ve heard horror stories.”

I was glad too. I'd worked with an omega who spent the first part of their pregnancy running back and forth to the bathroom. It was no fun. Heath had some nausea, of course—it was bound to happen—but nothing too severe and nothing daily.

“I was thinking we could add maybe a screened-in room. Not a gazebo because those are funny-shaped but a screened-in room out here. So like a gazebo but rectangular.” It was an idea that had been brewing in my mind but not enough to research it or mention it until now. The mornings were getting crisp, and having a bit of shelter would for sure extend the number of days we could enjoy being out here.

“Oh, I like that idea.” Archer took out his phone and typed away, and, when he turned it around, he had a picture of exactly what I'd been talking about on his screen. “And if we use windows instead of full screening, we could add storm windows and make it a three-season room. It would be great to have a bit of outdoors without the bugs.”

We didn't have a ton, but during the pockets of time when mosquitoes were bad, there were enough to be annoying. I hadn't been here long enough to find out if black flies hit this area, but I was crossing my fingers they didn't. If they did, a screened room would help that as well.

Heath got up and pulled off his shirt. Hardly the reaction I'd been expecting.

“Are you hot?” I asked. It wasn't particularly warm. If anything, it was still chilly, but he was pregnant and that did funny things to temperature regulation. At least that's what my old coworker had said. Maybe it was just a him thing.

“No, my fox needs to come out,” he said. “The healer said it was fine, but I've been keeping him in. Maybe I shouldn't have.”

I hadn't realized he'd been intentionally avoiding shifting. It hadn't crossed my mind. Pretty much every subtle change in him I attributed to his pregnancy, and that might

not be the best idea for the future. Especially not given I “guessed” wrong twice in less than five minutes.

“Looking for company?” Archer pulled off his shirt.

“Please.” He unbuttoned his pants, and Archer and I got fully undressed.

Less than a minute later, we took our animal forms and bounded off into the woods behind our home. First, we ran together and watched our fox mate hunt, then, we took off toward the stream for a cold drink, and finally napped in the backyard as the sun hit its highest point in the sky.

What a sight we must have been—a wolf, a fox, and a deer snuggled up, enjoying the day. The world might have seen an oddity, but I saw perfection. Because this—this was exactly where, and how, we were meant to be.

Archer

“What are you doing?” I asked, coming upon Heath on the couch, tapping away on his phone. “Texting for ice cream?” It was still the time of year where delivery in town was nonexistent, but our alpha mate, Oren, was at the store.

“No, but now that you mention it...” He typed some more. “Chocolate and mango. Yum.”

“Yeah. Sounds amazing.” And far less weird than the bubble gum and peanut butter choices last week. “Why are you still typing though?”

“Oh, putting an ad in the local buy/sell/share site.” He studied the screen, chewing on his lip. “How does this look?”

I took the phone and read the screen. “What? You can’t do this.”

“Sure I can. I haven’t had time to fix it, and with the baby coming, that’s not likely to change.” He patted his belly. “And I don’t think I would fit under it at this point anyway.” He had a point, but...

“We can have a mechanic work on it.”

“That’s not the only reason.” He set the phone down between us and arched his back. “So tense.”

“Lie down on your side, and I’ll work on the muscles.” I helped him get into a

reasonably comfortable position and eased his shirt up. “Poor back, having to take on that active baby.” I kissed him in the sweet divot above his buttocks then went to work on his knots. He’d been having pain there lately, but gentle massage, as shown to us by the healer, really seemed to help. “Better?”

He let out a low moan. “So much.”

“So, let’s talk about the bus.”

“Wait, I think that’s Oren coming home.” Our omega was the best at hearing cars arrive, not to say especially cars that were bringing him ice cream. “Can we talk about this later?”

“We can talk about it after I help him bring the groceries in, but do not put that ad up until we all agree, okay?”

“It’s my bus,” he grumbled.

“And that’s a lot of the point.” I left him sitting there, hoping he would wait until I got back and wanting to have a quick word with Oren before Heath took any further steps.

Oren was just opening the back of the SUV. We all drove it more than Oren’s car, the 4-wheel drive having come in handy over the winter. “Just who I hoped to see. I bought a lot of things. Did you know our mate texted me to add to the list six times?”

“No, but I’m not surprised. I was only there for the ice cream order.”

“Which one?”

I chuckled. “How many were there?”

“Only two. The rest were for fruit and nuts and one for cheese crackers and Spam.” He handed me two canvas bags. “Thanks for coming out to help.”

As he picked up a couple of bags of his own, I said, “Wait just one minute?”

“Anything wrong?” He looked alarmed, and I felt bad for making him worry. “Our omega okay? The baby?”

“No no, everything is fine, but did you know Heath wants to sell the bus?”

Oren set down his bags and leaned back against the car. “No way. He loves that thing. Sometimes I find him napping on his bed in there in the afternoon. Why does he want to sell it?”

“He says because he hasn’t had time to fix it. And that now he’s too pregnant.”

“We’ll get a mechanic on it,” Oren said. “Easy peasy.”

“I don’t think that’s the whole story. I was just pressing him for information, and also pressing the knots out of his back, when you got home.”

He picked up his bags again. “Then let’s go find out.”

When we came in, Heath was sitting up again, and Oren and I took the groceries into the kitchen and put them away then returned to sit on either side of him.

“Okay, omega ours,” Oren said. “I hear you’re selling the bus.”

“It’s true.” He held his face up for a kiss, one Oren was glad to give him. “Welcome home.”

“Thank you, but why sell the bus? And no nonsense about not having time or the waistline to fix it.”

Heath flushed. “The real reason is that I don’t need it anymore. I am not living the bus life and I am happy and settled here. We’ve got the cabin all fixed up, and the bus can go to some other traveler.”

“That’s why?” I kissed his cheek. “I’ve always thought it would make a great RV for the family.”

When Heath’s eyes lit up, I knew I had hit on the right thing to say. “I suppose I could remodel the inside to make it family friendly. A bed we can all fit in and somewhere for the baby to sleep?”

That’s the spirit.” I kissed him again. “Think of the adventures we can have.”

Of course, every day with my mates was an adventure.

Heath

“Heath?” Oren called from the house when he saw me go out into the chill of the morning with only pajama pants on, mostly because I was limited as to what shirts fit me lately. All I had to do was dart into the bus and get my old notebook from the storage cabinet under one of the makeshift couches. One and done.

Except, once I was inside the bus, nostalgia grabbed hold of my waist and anchored me back in time. I was glad my mates had talked me out of selling this bus. They were right. I could easily turn it into a travel bus for our budding family. I got out the notebook but didn’t open it just yet.

I rubbed my hands over my belly and talked to our little one about all the places we would go until I was reminded how cold I was.

“Heath?” I heard Oren call again, but this time my name was followed by the back door shutting.

My mates worried too much.

I had been on my own in every type of climate and part of this country, but they flipped out if I left without a shirt in the cold. I dared not tell them about the time I cold-plunged in Alaska or bungee-jumped off the Navajo Bridge. Of course, I would eventually and I would tell our children but, for now, I was easing my mates in.

“I’m here,” I said, once I heard Oren’s stomps on the steps of the bus.

“It’s cold, my love,” he said and wrapped one of his giant cardigans around my shoulders.

“I know, but I was making plans.”

Accepting his warm embrace, he joined me on the bench seat, the one I’d always dubbed my couch, and we held each other for a few minutes. “Tell me about your plans, Heath. What do you see?”

He reached out and rubbed my belly as much as I had minutes before.

“I need to take out that couch over there and put in some real seats, bolted to the floor so that we can have car seats in here and then seat belts.”

Oren chuckled. “Planning more children already? I like it.”

I flinched. “Did you and Archer only want one?”

Laughing, he kissed my cheek. “Are you kidding me? We have plans to put several inside you, omega. Go on.”

“We are going to need more storage. I didn’t have a lot of things because it was just me, but I could build a bunch of cabinets to go along the top there. I want to bring our baby and babies to the beach as often as possible. I saw an older man once when I was in California. He told me his secret to life was spending time in the ocean. And...” Was I talking too much?

“Tell me. I want to hear all your thoughts.”

I put my arms into the sleeves of the cardigan and stretched it to button over my belly. Clearly, we also needed more insulation in here. We’d talked about how we

would parent our child over the months. We had some different ideas but, mostly, we wanted our babe to be loved and healthy above all.

“No video games. Minimal TV. Lots of books and playing outside and campfires. Homemade food. Running. Laughing. Splashing in puddles. Twirling in the rain. Living this life to the fullest as kids. Carefree.”

“That sounds like an incredible childhood. Good roots.”

“Exactly.” I turned in his arms, in awe that he had reduced my dreams successfully into two words. Good roots. “I have something else to tell you.”

“I already know. There’s a roast in the oven, and it should be done about now.”

Hunger was another recurring theme lately. It was me. I was the hungry one.

“And dessert?” I asked.

He chuckled. “I didn’t make anything. I can if you want me to.”

“No, I meant, you, alpha. You are the dessert I want.”

He chuckled. “I always love being on your menu. Let’s go.” We stood up and got ready to go, but I almost forgot my notebook—the thing that I’d come to the bus for.

Once inside, I feasted on perfectly seasoned chuck roast along with vegetables and baked sweet potatoes. We’d fallen into a routine, all of us. Oren did most of the cooking because he was good at it. Archer loved his job.

“Gods, that smells incredible,” Archer said, coming in the side door.

“It’s delicious,” I answered.

Archer walked over and kissed Oren and then me. “Wasn’t talking about the food.” He leaned down and kissed my belly.

“How was work?” I asked as he filled a plate and sat between us. We never disturbed him when he was in his office.

“It was uneventful and mundane and simple—perfect day if you ask me. What’s this?” Archer tapped his finger on my notebook.

“That’s the notebook where I kept the specs on the bus. I want to redo the inside so it will accommodate our family.”

We spent the evening making plans, the way we spent most evenings. The TV never turned on. No laptops. No phones. Just a fire in the hearth and the one that eventually grew between us as we ended the night.

Who was I kidding? There was always heat between us as there should be with fated mates.

“I’m going to take a long, hot shower before bed,” Archer said, getting up to stretch. His shirt rose, revealing his perfect V that dipped down into his pants. I would probably never have abs again, but I was okay with it as long as we had our family. “Anyone want to join me?”

Oren stood and held out his hand. “I’m in. Omega?”

“It’s about time,” I replied, laughing.

Oren

I shut the door behind me, a bag of five different varieties of olives in my hands. Heath's cravings had usually been very specific, but this time, he didn't know if he wanted green or black or cured olives. He just knew he wanted olives, and I wasn't going to leave his craving unmet. It was the least I could do, given he was growing our baby.

I'd dashed to the store just minutes before it closed and grabbed all the types I could find. Had we been in the city, there'd have been a bunch more in my bag, but this would have to do. Mission accomplished, I came into what appeared to be an empty house.

"Archer? Heath?" No answer.

It didn't take long to guess they had gone out back. I stepped onto the back porch, and sure enough, there they were, sitting on the steps, taking in the gorgeous hues of the sky as twilight settled in.

"Hey," I said softly, not wanting to shatter the moment. "I come bearing olives."

They turned their heads, and their smiles were like beacons guiding me home. Heath's hand rested on his swollen belly. He was getting quite large and, while I had heard him worry over his attractiveness, he didn't need to. There was nothing I found sexier than the way his body changed for our growing child.

"Look at the colors," Archer murmured, his arm wrapped protectively around Heath.

“They’re gorgeous.”

I nodded; they truly were. The olives, the store, the rush—it all faded away.

“Couldn’t agree more.” I took my place beside them, our trio complete once more.

“Got you all they had,” I said, holding up the bag with a grin.

“Thanks, love, but the cravings have shifted,” Heath chuckled as he licked his lips.

“Oh?” Crap. The store was closed now. I crossed my fingers he wanted something I could either create or find at the Grizzly. “And what might you be craving now?”

“Right now?”

I nodded.

“I’m craving my two alphas. Think you could help me up?” This was the one place he had trouble navigating getting both up and down, but it was also a favorite spot of his. We each offered him a hand and he managed to get up first try, which was good. Last time, it took a couple, but he’d sat here for over an hour then, something he decided not to do again without a walking break.

“Careful now,” I murmured, getting the side-eye I deserved in return.

He waddled into the house, and I unashamedly watched his ass as he did. I’d have felt bad if he hadn’t called over his shoulder, “I know you’re looking.”

“Totally am.”

“Me too.” Archer grabbed my hand, and we followed our mate all the way to our

bedroom.

Archer moved forward, his fingers deftly working the buttons on Heath's shirt, exposing the soft skin beneath. He pressed his lips to each new inch revealed, worshiping Heath's body. And what did I do? I stood there and watched, taking it all in, my cock more than happy with the show before us.

"God, you're both so beautiful together." My hand slipped into my jeans, wrapping around my hardening cock.

Heath's eyes locked onto mine for a brief second before his eyes traveled lower and he saw exactly what I was doing. Not that it would be a surprise. As he got larger, we had taken to more one-on-one lovemaking. He was horny all the time but quickly went into sensory overload with the hormones racing through him. Neither Archer or I minded. Heck, there were days like today when it was a dream come true. There was nothing more of a turn-on than seeing my two mates enjoying each other's bodies.

Heath's voice was thick with arousal. "You like this, don't you?" He knew I did, but hearing him say it this way? Yeah, that was foreplay, and gods was it good foreplay.

I nodded.

"Tell me what else you would like."

Gods, I loved this game.

"Would you like to watch me suck our mate?" He shifted, the swell of his belly moving with him. "Or see him suck me?"

The images flooded my mind, each one more tantalizing than the last. I could feel the

pressure building, the tightness in my pants becoming almost unbearable.

“Maybe you want to watch him fuck me while you jerk off and come all over me?”

Gods, he was perfect.

“Fuck,” I hissed.

“Yes, that,” Archer’s voice cracked as he spoke. He was just as turned on by this conversation as I was.

“Tell our mate what to do.” Heath licked his lips. “Tell him.”

“Archer, fuck our mate. Make him come.”

Archer’s gaze met mine, and he gave a single nod.

Together, we guided Heath gently onto his side on the bed so his ass was near the bottom of it. As hot and sexy as this was, we couldn’t forget that our mate was very far along in his pregnancy and he didn’t have the agility he once had.

He grabbed his thigh and lifted one leg, creating the perfect angle for Archer to stand there and drive into him, while I watched.

I stripped away my remaining clothes, not wanting to miss a second of the show. Finally naked, I positioned myself where Heath could watch me, just as I could watch the two of them. When I was in place, my hand jerking slowly, Archer lined his thick cock up with our omega’s slick entrance and slowly entered him.

Heath’s moan of pleasure filled the air and I nearly came right then. Archer stilled, making sure that Heath was both comfortable and ready, before slowly moving in and

out of him.

As Archer moved in and out, faster and harder with each thrust, Heath's eyes locked onto mine.

"Oren," Heath gasped, and it was all the encouragement I needed. My hand worked my shaft, matching Archer's movements.

Heath moaned and whimpered, not holding back as our mate made love to him. At first, he watched me intently, but as his orgasm neared, his eyes closed, almost as if he was trying to hold it back, to keep this going just a few seconds longer. When he opened them again, his fox was shining through them.

"Oren," Heath breathed out, his voice laced with lust and adoration, "you're so...damn sexy."

I could only grunt in response, lost in the raw sensations of the moment.

"Archer...you feel incredible," Heath moaned, his eyes still on me, the angle not allowing for much else.

"I'm so close." His eyes closed again, his voice strained. "Come with me—both of you."

I stepped closer, unable to deny his plea, my orgasm slamming into me as I came on him only seconds after he cried out with his own pleasure, followed quickly by Archer doing the same.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," I teased, as Archer and I tried to help our mate up to a better, drier spot of the bed without Archer's pulling too hard.

When we achieved that goal, the three of us snuggled up together. The mess would still be there when Archer's knot released, but, until then, I wanted to enjoy this time, just the three of us ridiculously in love and completely spent.

Archer

Heath's due date loomed, and we had not yet started the nursery.

Of course, the due date was a bit of guesswork, the healer telling us that a mixed species child like ours did not follow the rules of any of the species who were part of them. But in any case, our omega had a bump bigger than I remembered anyone in the pack having, and he swore the baby was coming any day. I tended to believe him, which was why I took a few days off from my newish job to work for my family.

We'd painted the extra bedroom a soothing almond color over a month before, but somehow had all been so busy with other things, we hadn't taken any more steps forward. Heath never complained, but I saw him glance at the closed door a couple of times, and guilt my least-favorite emotion, raised its gnarly head.

"Oren, psst." I motioned him over to me while Heath was engrossed in the latest streaming series he'd gotten hooked on. As he got bigger, he spent more time in front of screens, only getting up to go to the bathroom, to fill his water cup, or to take a walk outside. I drew the deer shifter with me into the kitchen.

"What's up?" he asked, getting a glass from the cabinet. "Why all the secrecy?"

"Because we are a matter of weeks away from letting our omega down in a big way."

"We are? How?" He set down the water glass he'd been filling and turned to face me.

"What does he need that we aren't taking care of?"

“The nursery.”

“What...we?” He paled. “We’ve been so busy.”

“I know, and our mate hasn’t asked us even once for some reason, and I am afraid he just doesn’t want to ask.”

Suddenly a big smile spread across his face. “I have an idea.”

“You do?”

“Last time we went to the big-box store, he was looking at the baby furniture display they had. I say we take a road trip. Maybe even let him think it has been planned for a while. The only possible flaw in the plan is if they don’t have the line anymore. You know they are always changing what they carry.”

“Then in that case, maybe we don’t tell him why we’re going until we get there and see if it’s still there. If not, we’ll figure something out.”

Heath hadn’t been going on many errands lately so I was a little concerned he might protest, but he said he needed some air and headed for the car without any argument. We stopped for lunch along the way and made a day of it, and when we got to the big-box store and went inside, he did the same thing as before, slowed to look at the baby furniture.

“Pick it out, mate,” I whispered in his ear. “It’s time to get the nursery ready.”

His kisses were never sweeter and a lovely old couple even applauded our little family...and everything fit in the back of the SUV I was so glad I’d bought instead of the sedan.

Heath

The moon was full as I took my long evening walk. Archer followed me, about ten feet back, as he did lately. I was far along in my pregnancy, and the healer said the week before that I would be having the baby any moment now.

That night, Archer began to follow me on my walks. Overprotective, caring alphas are what I had, and I wouldn't ask them to change for anything in the world.

I pulled the collar of the cardigan closed against my neck. A biting wind pushed through the trees and at my face as I paused to bask in the glow of the moon goddess above me. Closing my eyes, a swirling rushed through my belly, settling in the small of my back.

A whooshing pressure made me reach out to hold on to the nearest branch, which snapped at the pressure of my grasp.

"My water," I whispered to the night. Archer's footsteps quickened and he reached me in seconds.

"Omega, your water broke. Let's get you inside. The baby is coming."

"No," I said, putting my hand on his shoulder. "My fox. He wants to be outside. I don't...I want to be out here."

"Let's get back to the house and call the healer. Then you can decide. We will do whatever you want, but...let's go."

Instead of letting me walk, Archer scooped me up in his arms, and we made it through the back door just as Oren was putting the last dish on the shelf.

“What happened?” Oren asked, his eyes wide.

“His water broke. Can you call the healer?”

“Of course.” Oren rushed over and checked me head to toe while he phoned the healer. “He’ll be here in a few minutes.”

“I need a quick shower, and I want to be outside.”

“Outside!” Oren barked. “It’s cold outside. It’s...” I put my hand on his cheek as one long pain gripped my back. “Yes. yes, of course. Whatever you want, little fox.”

My animal had convinced him somehow through our bond.

I took a quick shower but only put boxers on to wait for the healer. Oren helped me through that process while Archer got some blankets and set them on the table. He had a cup there and urged me to drink up the electrolyte solution he’d stirred in.

“Hello, everyone,” the healer said as he came into the house, not bothering to knock, which was fine.

“He wants to have the baby outside,” Oren proclaimed.

“That’s fine. Some animals don’t like the confinement of a house when birthing their babes. It’s normal.”

“But it’s cold outside,” Archer protested.

“Your mate is a strong and capable shifter. It’s important during this time to listen and heed his instincts. His fox will be close during the birth. Our animals know best, after all.” He came over and touched my belly. “Now, let’s get you outside. We’ll bring the babe inside if it’s okay to wash them up and get them settled. One of your mates will always be with them.”

I nodded, grateful he was on my side. “That’s fine. Oh...” Another punch of pain landed right in the center of my spine, near the bottom. “That’s a second one in less than two minutes.”

“Then, let’s go outside. Archer, can you spread out those blankets for us?”

My alphas worked quickly, spreading out blankets while I took my boxers off. The healer examined me and found me fully dilated and ready to push. I transitioned to my hands and knees. It seemed more natural, and my fox was demanding it.

“I need to push.” I bore down, not waiting for permission from anyone.

“A couple more and we’re there, Heath. You’re doing so well. I can see the head.”

Two more pushes, the last one draining me of all my strength, and the wails of my babe filled the air.

I collapsed onto my side and Oren held me close. “He’s perfect, Heath,” he whispered.

The healer placed our crying babe onto my chest, and his cries ceased immediately. Oren was right. He was perfect. He had Archer’s jawline and my nose and Oren’s bright eyes.

“What’s his name?” Archer asked, coming over with a blanket to cover our little

one's back as he lay across my chest.

"I want to name him Silas. It means man of the forest," I stated. It was one of the names we'd decided on, so my alphas already liked it.

"Silas, welcome to our family," Archer said, stroking the babe's back. "You are so loved."

The healer came over after silently examining me. "Can one of your alphas come with me so we can clean Silas up? Are you ready to come inside and get clean as well? Your choice, Heath."

"I'm ready for all of this," I said. "Let's go."

Oren

“Thanks for doing this.”

We were taking a detour on our first family vacation to stop at the town where my uncle had spent his teen years. I discovered, during my searches, that not only was my uncle older than I realized, at least compared to my dad, but that he had a different alpha father. They weren't brothers but half-brothers.

Growing up, I thought my grandparents referred to each other as mates, and I'd always assumed they were fated mates, but maybe I was wrong. Maybe they were simply a love match. That would explain a side omega, right? If that's even what he was. There was so much I needed to learn.

And I'd learn soon enough because we were on our way to meet my uncle's omega father—the closest thing I had to a living relative. I wasn't exactly sure how I felt about meeting this new quasi-grandparent, but Archer had encouraged me to at least find out all that I could. What better time than while we were on our first vacation? We could stop in, chat, then be on our merry way. Easy peasy.

Heath was driving the bus, Archer was co-pilot, and I sat right behind them with Silas. We'd had to redo the bus a little bit to make it possible to safely transport our son, but it had been worth every hour spent and every penny poured into it to be able to do this.

We'd already stopped at two places on our trip. One was a campsite for shifters, and that had been a lot of fun. The other was a state park where it was just the four of us.

Both were a lot of fun and really highlighted how important this vehicle was for us. Sure, sometimes we'd want to stay at a hotel, especially when Silas got a little older and was interested in things like pools, but this bus had its place in our life as well.

"It's the next exit," Heath called back. "And for the record, I'm more than happy to help you learn what you can about your uncle. But, if you're having second thoughts, I can find a place for us to hang out instead."

I let out a long breath. "This is good. This is what I want." I might sound unsure, but I wasn't. I needed the answers and maybe, just maybe, a connection to my past. I'd figure out which soon enough.

Ten minutes later, we were pulling up to a house in a cul-de-sac—or at least I thought it was a standard cul-de-sac. I later found out that it was part of the herd and how they organized their housing, where all the houses could see each other.

"Come on, Silas, it's time to get out." I unbuckled him and changed him quickly before coming out of the bus to meet my mates. I hadn't realized there was already a man on the front porch watching us. I gave a little wave, and he waved back.

"I've got Silas," Archer said, grabbing my shoulder. "I'll give you a few minutes, and if you want us to join you later, just say the word, okay?"

I nodded, letting him take the baby as I walked up to the front steps.

"Hi, I'm Oren," I started, but before I could say more, the old man's arms wrapped around me.

"You can call me Pop-Pop. I always hoped you'd come around. Want to come inside for some tea, or would you rather stay out here with the breeze blowing and your mates in eyeshot?"

“Tea is good.”

He led me inside and told me how he had loved the man I knew as my alpha grandfather, but that it wasn't a true mate situation. And when my grandfather met his true mate, they settled down and had my dad, leaving my uncle and his father mostly out in the cold. They hadn't been dicks about it, letting the brothers spend summers together, but it was hardly what anyone would call a typical situation.

For a few seconds, I worried that my existence would be upsetting for Pop-Pop but soon saw the truth of it. As much as he was my only sort of relative, I was his.

He treated me like I was his grandson, telling me all about my uncle, about the summers they spent with my dad, and how it broke his heart when the family severed ties. I had a ton of questions but already had far more answers than I could process.

In a weird way, we both kind of needed each other. We were the only family each other had, even if we were relatives of relatives.

“Do you want to meet my mates?” I asked.

“More than anything. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't hoping for a little baby cuddle.” He got up from his seat. “I'll make them tea.”

My mates came in, and we all talked, sharing bits about our lives together, with Silas taking to Pop-Pop immediately. While I had no interest in being connected to the herd at all, meeting him and spending this time together was pretty amazing. We ended up staying for a few days, camping out in the woods behind the herd. We laughed, we played endless games of cards, and, when it was time to go, there were tears and promises of visiting again in both directions.

“I hope he really comes,” Heath said later that night. “We could even set up a little spot in the back to make him feel welcome.”

“I’d like that,” I replied, snuggling into his side.

“And if you want a connection to your herd, we can arrange that too.” Archer was swaying back and forth in front of us, holding Silas as he was falling asleep.

“I already have my herd—my family—back home.”

And I did too, which made for such a great little community for our family. I didn’t need anything else. I already had everything an omega could ever want—and more.

“I love you both so much, I sometimes fear I’m going to wake up and discover this is a dream.” And if it was, I very much didn’t want to wake up.

“I know the feeling.” Heath wrapped his arm around me. “Fate sure does know what they are doing.”

“You can say that again.” Archer set our sleeping son into his mini crib.

“Fate sure does know what they are doing.” I grabbed his hand and pulled him to us.

“They really do.” Archer got up and held out a hand for each of us. “And I do too.” He winked and led us back to our bedroom where he showed us how true that was.