



Wrong Number, Right Valentine (Dial M For Mates)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Sometimes the wrong number is the exact one you need.

Being set up on a Valentine's date by your co-worker has to be the epitome of patheticness, but here I am about to go on a date with someone I haven't met. I didn't even tell my boss they could give out my number. But they did. Are they returning my calls? Of course they aren't. I should stay home and pretend the message was never received, but I'm up for a big promotion and apparently "No" is not in my vocabulary.

Only when I get to the restaurant, it isn't a date at all. The place is packed and the owner is the one who misdialed my number. He doesn't want me here for a night of romance, he needs a last-minute fill-in after their dishwasher broke an arm—the dishwasher with the same name as my boss. Talk about getting everything wrong.

I have two choices, leave or do dishes. Leaving is the obvious choice, but there's something about the smexy alpha who accidentally called that has me not ready to leave. I can do dishes for one night, right?

Wrong Number, Right Valentine is a sweet with knotty heat MM Mpreg romance featuring an omega human turned dishwasher, the alpha wolf who accidentally called him, a chaotic night at the most romantic restaurant in town, a Valentine's Day to remember, true love, fated mates, an adorable baby, and a happy ever after. If you love your alphas hot, your omegas strong, and your mpreg with heart, download your copy today.

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BANKS

My interfering boss set me up on a Valentine's Day blind date.

And I was going because he was right, I hadn't been on a date in a while, and I needed to put myself out there. A blind date on Valentine's Day was a little odd, but I pushed that thought away.

I backed up to a few days ago when the boss and I were having an informal meeting over lunch.

We usually did this at the beginning of each month to map out our plans for the next thirty days. We had a long-term strategy, but Foster, my boss, liked to drill down to months, weeks, and even days. Sitting in his large office, one of us on the sofa, the other in a comfortable armchair, we'd eat and discuss our plan of action.

His phone had beeped, and it was a reminder to book a restaurant for him and his husband for Valentine's Day. It must have been my shocked face and my mouth shaped like an O that had him questioning whether I was a romantic.

I'd screwed up my face and said I wasn't sure of the definition. One person's romantic was another's indifferent. I definitely wasn't into the commercialization of the day and avoided hearts, chocolates, flowers, and dinner dates when the price of a meal was ten times what it would be the following day.

Cynic was perhaps the best way to describe me.

“You should try a dating app, Banks.” He patted me on the shoulder. “That’s how I met my husband.”

I’d shrugged, and he said no more.

But talking wasn’t the problem because he had obviously done something about it and set me up with some guy!

What the everloving...!

And how did I know what Foster did?

Because of a voice message that was on my phone when I finished work today, February 14. I’d worked a half day, as I had to renew my driver’s license on my way home. The message had been timestamped last night but just populated, which would not be a big deal if the person on the other end wasn’t calling about today.

“Foster gave me your name, and I’m so pleased you agreed to come Valentine’s Day.” There was a pause and clearing of the throat before he continued. “Sorry, come isn’t the right word. Glad you accepted to be here on Valentine’s Day.” The guy ummed and ahed for a bit. “I’m not very good at this, but I’m so grateful.” There was a long silence. “In case you don’t know the address, it’s 1739 Harrisville Avenue. You can’t get lost.” He cackled.

It was a red flag when someone said that because I was sure to get lost. Not that I had any intention of accepting the date when I first heard the message.

“But Sizzle and Chill is famous, and any passerby will give you directions.”

A tapping erupted through the phone suggesting he was drumming his fingers on a hard surface.

“Please be here at three. Oh, and wear comfortable shoes, though you probably guessed that much.”

I wouldn’t have. Was he suggesting a hike? Maybe an escape room? A marathon? Caving? Kickboxing? My mind came up with a list of activities that I couldn’t do in what? Flip-flops? Slip-ons? Slippers?

But he’d said to meet him at one of the most popular restaurants in town. Perhaps we’d eat our starters, race outside, and perform an activity that would leave me sweaty and exhausted and return to the restaurant for the main course. I’d be on the floor by that point because it’d been a while since I did much exercise.

I was tempted to arrive really early and wait across the street to work out what we’d be doing that necessitated comfortable shoes.

Standing in front of my mirror an hour before I had to meet the guy, I was conflicted about what to wear. Casual pants, jeans, or dress pants? I went with the latter as I liked how my butt looked in black. I paired it with a white shirt and a jacket which I could ditch if it was too formal.

Under my pants, I wore running shorts and a tee just in case, and black sneakers completed the outfit. I was prepped for anything the guy could throw at me!

I had to stop thinking of him as the guy. My date would be more appropriate. Or I could use his name. It’d been mangled and cut off on the message, but I’d caught “Reg.”

Pondering what his full name was, I’d only come up with Reginald. It sounded as

though I should salute it, maybe bow or get on bended knee, and it would better with a “Sir” in front.

I slapped my brow. My imagination was running away with me.

“I’m coming, Reg.” I giggled as I rewound the message and listened to Reg tripping over the word “coming.” I’d very much enjoy coming at the end of the evening, though if our date evolved into any other energetic activity, the type that needed comfortable shoes, I might not be up for it.

Nah, I’d be up for anything that involved coming.

I did a final twirl in front of the mirror. My butt looked rather delicious and hard to resist. I hoped Reg was starving because I would yank my pants down so fast...

Damn! Maybe my boss was right and I should date more. Reg might be a jerk, a bore, or have bad breath. He could run out leaving me to pay the bill, assuming we were having a meal at some point.

I was picturing getting undressed when he could be a serial killer.

Slow your roll, I told myself.

No matter what happened, I had a cute butt. And no one could convince me otherwise.

Grabbing my keys and phone—no need for a wallet, as I paid with my phone—I locked the apartment and strolled to the elevator.

It was weird that Foster had set me up. It had to be someone he knew well or he wouldn’t have arranged the date. Would he?

Before starting the car, I wondered if I should phone a friend and arrange the get of my date call.

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REG

Owning the hottest restaurant in town was great. I never had to worry about my boss being a dick, my bills were always paid, and I got to do what I loved every single day. Sure, it also had its share of stress, but the payoff was worth it. Besides, what job was perfect?

This time of year was beyond chaotic. Valentine's Day was nearly upon us, and it was by far my busiest single day of the year. This year it was slated to be even more so. Someone had done a social media review of our restaurant, and we ended up having to add additional seatings to fit all the people wanting to come and woo their Valentine with a romantic dinner that "tasted like it had been infused with love," whatever that meant. It was slated to be our busiest night since we'd opened, and I was ready for it... almost.

The phone rang, and I jogged over to the hostess station to grab it. We'd thought about switching to an online reservation system, but there was something so impersonal about that— not to mention the horror stories I'd read online about accidental double bookings and disappearing tables. But even with that, after today, I was starting to think that maybe giving it a try might be for the best.

As I reached the phone, I saw a sticky note saying that all but one of our seatings were already full. Hopefully, whoever was calling on the other line was flexible. We really couldn't add more seatings at this point. People would be eating their romantic dinners at lunchtime or into the early morning if we kept on inserting more, and the

staff? We were hardworking, but everyone had their limits.

“Sizzle and Grill, how may I help you?”

“Hi, we were hoping for a reservation for two for Valentine’s Day.” The man sounded like a ball of nervous and excited. My guess was this was a first date or a special occasion, and even if we didn’t have spots, I was going to try and figure something out. It drove the staff bonkers when I did this, but I was a softy at heart and was all about true love finding its way.

True love never seemed to find itself to me, but that was mostly my fault. I lived at the restaurant and have since it opened. Sure, I had a place of my own, but I spent nearly all of my hours here. At first it was to make sure it got off the ground, and now? Now it was habit, and where else was I going to go? I’d all but shut down my social life when I decided to follow my dreams. I had zero regrets, even with some really lonely nights.

And besides, I was a romantic kinda wolf. I believed in the whole your fated mate will find you when it's the right time fairytale. Had that happened to anyone in my birth pack? Not that I knew of, but neither I nor my wolf was interested in much more than friendship with anyone that wasn’t meant for us. It would be pretty fantastic if fate hurried up and introduced us already.

“Sure, let me see what I can do. Options are limited, but I bet I can squeeze you in.”

“Thank you so much.”

I found two tables left for the entire night. One of them was not ideal and I tried not to fill it if I didn’t have to. It was closer to the bathroom than anyone wanted to sit. It was great to have in a pinch, but far from the most romantic seat in the house.

“I have one for you.” I gave them the details, and they were thrilled. “I just need your name and number.”

I filled in the reservation, noting beside their name that dessert was on us. If this was as special as my gut said it was, I wanted it to be perfect for them.

The second I hung up the phone, it rang again. I assumed they had forgotten to give me some information and were calling back. I was wrong. It was Hank, by all accounts my best server, and one of my original hires.

“Hey, Hank, what’s up?”

“I got bad news for you.” I did not like the sound of that at all.

“Please tell me you’re going to be in today.”

“I’m not, but that’s not the really bad part. Junior has the flu and pneumonia. I won’t be in for the rest of the week.”

I couldn’t even be upset with him for calling out. His son came first, always. That was how family worked. I did feel horrible for poor Hank. The flu was never good on its own and adding pneumonia to the mix had to be miserable.

“Oh no, is there anything I can do?”

“No. Not now. Thanks. We are in General, and they’re going to keep him for observation overnight, and then if his oxygen levels stay the way they are, he’ll go home in the morning. But as you can guess, I’m not leaving his side.”

“Nor should you. Promise me you’ll call if you need anything at all and don’t worry about this place. We’ve got this.”

Even as I assured him, I wasn't so sure. I could pick up extra tables, do less back of the house than I normally did on the fancy days. It would be hectic, but we'd get it done. But even if there was no way we'd be able to handle any of it, I'd never let him know. He had more than enough on his plate.

"Thanks."

A crash came from the kitchen, and I bolted. It didn't sound like somebody dropped a tray or a prep dish. It sounded far too loud for that. When I went in, I was right. Foster was lying on the ground, not moving.

"You okay?" Obviously he wasn't, but it was the first thing that came out of my mouth.

"Yeah, yeah. I just... I just need a minute."

Foster was my dishwasher and chef-in-training. He had aspirations to go to cooking school, but the cost kept him away. I might not be a cooking school, but I did my best to teach him on slower days and sometimes before work. He was a good kid and had started working for me when he was still in high school.

From the way his foot was twisted, I doubted a minute would be enough.

"I was the one who spilled it. Sorry," he said. "I was going to get some rags to clean it up. it wasn't like I didn't know it was there."

It took my brain a few seconds to catch up. He had slipped on some oil or maybe dish soap. It was hard to tell from my angle.

"Let me help you up."

“Okay.” He didn’t sound so sure, and he was right to be nervous.

Holding my hand, he stood and cried out in pain. I quickly told the chef we were going and took Foster straight to the hospital. It didn’t take long to discover that he had broken his foot. He was going to be off of dish duty for a while. I could find some things for him to do so he could still work when he was up for it, but dishes were going to be a no go for weeks.

I wasn’t sure what we would do next as far as the restaurant, but I knew we’d figure it out. There had to be someone who could wash dishes for us. If not, I could do it. It wouldn’t be easy, but that wasn’t something I wanted Foster to even think about.

After dropping him off at home, I headed back to the restaurant, where chaos had fully ensued. I immediately jumped in, washing dishes for tonight. Valentine’s Day would be the real test, but at least if we could get through tonight, we might be okay. Or maybe we wouldn’t—but there was only one way to find out.

As I was scrubbing a particularly stubborn pot, my phone buzzed. Foster had left me a message. He said his friend was willing to help us out and asked me to call him with the details.

Normally I had an entire interview process, but not today. If Foster trusted them, so did I. I immediately dialed and was sent to voicemail. I quickly explained the details, thanked him for helping, and gave him the restaurant’s address. Problem solved. I’d follow up with a text if I didn’t hear anything by morning.

Of course, I couldn’t get off that easily. As I turned to see what the chef was asking me, my phone slipped out of my hand and landed directly in the sink—submerged in soapy water. No follow up text would be happening. Please let him just come in.

I groaned, pulling it out and shaking it dry. Not that getting the water off would help.

The thing was already probably fried. I'd toss it in rice, but the water was extremely hot and gross. The odds were not in my favor. Well, I supposed it was better to have a ruined phone and someone coming to help than a fixed phone and no help at all.

Please let Valentine's Day be better than today.

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BANKS

As I turned the ignition, I was filled with doubts.

What was I thinking going on a blind date based on a rambling phone message?

I sat unmoving, my hand clutching the key. Ignoring the message was a possibility. I could pretend I never received it, it did populate late, after all. Reg and his comfortable shoes would have to solo Valentine's Day. That was a good option, because the one thing more odd than me accepting the date was for Reg to call out of the blue because my boss said I worked too hard.

But I had to be pragmatic.

I was due for a promotion. It had been hinted at during the cozy lunches I shared with Foster. He thought he'd done me a favor by arranging this date. By not turning up, it'd be a huge F U.

Unless... unless... My Scrambled brain tried to grasp the thoughts as they flitted in and out. What if this was a test? If I bowed out, or chickened out might be a more appropriate term, what did that say about my ability to head a division at work?

Damn. I'd be screwed if I didn't follow through.

And what was the worst that could happen if I met with Reg? A lousy date that went

nowhere and I went home alone.

I had to do this, so I swatted away any remaining questions and drove to the restaurant. It was a little early for dinner but perhaps that was the purpose of the comfortable shoes. We'd do whatever first and eat later.

Peering in the window, there were middle-aged and elderly couples dining. They were probably retired and preferred to eat early. I kinda liked the sound of that and looked forward to it when I no longer had to worry about work, a promotion, and pissing off the boss.

But none of them looked like a Reg, and besides, they were coupled up.

Oh. Ohhhh! What if Reg had a partner and they'd decided that on Valentine's Day they'd ask a third person to join them. Interesting but not my thing.

Standing inside the doorway, I perused the pink balloons, the roses, and pink napkins on every table, along with pink candies. My tummy ached from all the sweetness.

The host asked if I had a reservation, and his tone suggested if I didn't, who the heck was I trying to barge in when everyone else had booked months earlier.

This was a little awkward because Reg had probably booked a table using his given and family names. I stumbled over "Reg," hoping the host would check their tablet and lead me to a table in the corner where a sexy Reg sat alone, sipping a glass of expensive champagne, just waiting for me.

The host looked me up and down. Oh gosh, did Reg have a sidekick who checked his dates, and if they didn't measure up, they got booted? I glanced at the door. It was close enough that I could dash outside and be in my car in under a minute, and I could forget tonight ever happened.

“He’s in the back.” The guy spoke into the mic attached to his headset. He called me “some guy looking for Reg.”

Some guy? What the? Reg must have had a number of dates meet him here, of which I was the most recent. But it was weird that the host was asking for Reg on the staff network.

The doors leading to the kitchen swung open and a man strode toward me. I gulped. He literally took my breath away, and my brain had to remind me to take air in and out of my lungs. He was dressed much the same as me, with smart pants and a nice shirt.

But he wore a tie, and I bet there was a matching jacket over the back of whatever chair he was going to park his butt in. My hand went to my pocket where I’d shoved a tie at the last minute.

“I...I can p-put this on if you prefer.”

“Not much use where you’ll be spending the night.”

Oh my gods, he was saying I’d be naked and flat on my back. I’d made a small leap or perhaps a gigantic one, and him saying I didn’t need a tie led me to bed, naked, and cock time.

“And a T-shirt would have been better.” That was accompanied by a smile, but when he got closer, his face contorted as though he’d smelled something bad. He reeled back, and I froze, wanting to sniff under my arm, but my body refused to obey the signals from my brain.

“I’m sorry.” I undid the top button and pulled out the cotton fabric. “Got a tee already. Does that help?”

“Ummm.” Reg was also having trouble breathing, and I wondered if he suffered from asthma. He was studying my chest. I was a little pale, not having been in the sun much. “We’ll find you an apron.” He checked out my shoes. “Your feet might hurt by the end of the night.”

Apron? Perhaps we’d be working with clay.

Reg righted himself, and I noted the pink blush on his cheeks. “Thank you for coming at such short notice. Tonight is one of our busiest nights of the year.”

My eyes alighted on his name badge. He was definitely Reg, but he was also the manager. That couldn’t be right. He wouldn’t be going on a date when as he said, it was a busy night in the restaurant.

“Our regular dishwasher broke his foot. Lousy timing on Valentine’s Day.” He turned and beckoned me as he walked toward the kitchen doors. I did my best not to ogle his butt, but damn, it was fine. “I don’t know what we would have done if you hadn’t turned up.”

Shoot! This wasn’t a date. It was a job. He needed me to wash dishes.

I opened my mouth to explain the mix-up, but he glanced over his shoulder and his smile warmed my heart. Gods, it was his secret weapon, and I’d agree to anything if he continued grinning at me.

“Glad I could help.” I rolled up my sleeves.

4

REG

It was all I could do to tear my eyes away from his arms as he rolled up his sleeves. Banks wasn't even trying to be sensual. At least nothing he did gave any indication that he was. If anything he looked confused and a bit overwhelmed. Maybe Foster told him we were a small establishment, which by industry standards, we were. But today was the day all the people came out to eat, so there was nothing about the tasks we faced that felt it.

My wolf scented Banks the second he walked through the door. It was our Early Bird Valentine's seating, and pretty much all of our customers were elderly. At first, I wondered why fate would pair me with an elderly person who was part of a couple because everyone here was paired up. But then I saw Banks.

There was nothing elderly about him. He had to be about my age, his jawline begging to be nibbled, his ass calling to be squeezed, and those lips—yeah, I needed a taste of those. My wolf had other plans, of course. He wanted to sink his teeth into his shoulder and mark him as ours. My wolf didn't understand the niceties that came with humans, and make no mistake about it—my mate was human.

I didn't know how he knew Foster and had been at a loss for words when he came in. My autopilot boss came through, saving the day, but inside, I had zero confidence in what I should do next. One thing was for sure, he couldn't know Foster very well, because I'd never caught so much of a hint of his scent on Foster. Had I, I'd have recognized it instantly and found him long before now.

We were about to close out one seating, and there was no time for me to stand here staring at the man. Not that staring was productive or getting me any closer to him. No one wanted to be ogled while they were working, and having Banks think of me as his creepy boss wasn't in my plans for the day.

You could tell this wasn't his normal job. No one familiar with kitchen work showed up as well dressed as he did. Either he was doing a favor for Foster, or he needed the cash. Maybe both. Either way, I was grateful because it meant he was here.

I went to the front of the house, touched base with a few customers about their meals, wished others a happy Valentine's Day, and helped get everyone checked out. I assisted some people to the door or their cars, depending on their needs and if they wanted my help. Some of the regulars always asked, and I was honored by their trust.

Truth be told, I'd always loved hosting the early-bird seating. A lot of restaurants had moved away from it, not liking the idea of offering the same meals for less and having to come in early. But I loved seeing all these happy faces and couples coming in year after year, many celebrating their 40th, 50th, or even more Valentine's Days together.

I helped bus the tables, bringing piles and piles of dishes into the kitchen. Somehow, Banks kept up and wasn't the least bit grumbly about it. We hadn't discussed money, but he was going to be well compensated. I didn't like thinking of him as an employee. He was my mate, my equal, my everything. Or he would be if he accepted me as his. If he was another shifter, we'd have probably already had the conversation and possibly our first kiss, but he wasn't. Human courting took time and held the very real possibility of resulting in rejection. I refused to think about that now. There was too much to be done.

"I'll grab the silver." I took the bins from him. They were a pain in the ass, and he had enough on his plate already.

I went to the adjacent prep table to dry, avoiding the inevitable spots air-drying left. We had enough set up for the next seating, but I wanted to get some of the side work done before things got hectic again. Anything we could do to make the real rush of the day smoother was a win in my book. Being able to watch my sexy mate while doing so was simply an added bonus.

“Where do you keep the extra rags?” Banks asked.

“I’ll show you.” It was much easier than explaining it, and besides, it was away from the soapy water, and I’d be able to scent him better.

I led him to the storeroom where we kept the cleaning supplies and spare dishes etcetera. I should’ve shown him all this before he began, but I’d been so distracted. My mate was one sexy omega, and thinking things through hadn’t been happening.

“Rags are here, dish soap here. If Chef asks for anything for the grill, it’ll be over here. Extra dishes, in case we run out, coffee stirrers, placemats—you can see it’s all right here.” Ideally I’d be helping Chef tonight, but there was too much else needing to be done, and he could handle it. He was going to say I owed him one or a thousand, and I would, but he could clear tickets like nobody’s business.

Banks brushed past me, his body grazing mine, and my wolf pushed forward. I squeezed my eyes shut and told my beast to back off. Be patient, wolf. This is not the time for that.

My mate grabbed a few rags and went back into the kitchen. I stayed still for a few seconds, willing my stirring cock to be less... active. We had a lot to do, and I didn’t have time for a stray boner.

The second seating was about to begin, and with it came a much different crowd. Wine bottles needed opening, and the kind of attention they required was more

formal. This was where I'd be serving more than helping in the back. I only hoped we didn't overwhelm Banks, because the last thing we needed was for him to leave—not just for the business, it would suck, but we'd figure that side of things out, but because I wasn't ready to let him go.

Not now. Not when I'd just found him.

Fingers crossed he felt the same.

5

BANKS

“Are you okay?”

I jumped at the voice at my shoulder and the warm breath billowing over my neck. With the noise of people shouting and the clatter of pots and pans, I hadn’t sensed Reg approaching.

Besides, I’d been lost in dreams of him approaching me naked.

Dishwashing was a horrendous job, but it didn’t require much brain power, and I was able to lose myself in sexy ramblings that involved hands on my hips, yanking down my now filthy and wet pants, and a hot hard cock ramming into my slippery hole, caked with slick.

Having the real-life Reg steal up on me, I squealed, thinking if he could peer into my dreams, he’d toss me out of the kitchen. Maybe phone the police. Though what would he say?

“Arrest him, Officer. I looked inside the guy’s head and he was picturing me naked and inside him.”

Nah, that couldn’t happen. Sweat trickled down my spine. Not that I wasn’t covered in sweat from head to toe and the tee stuck to my back and chest. But I shivered at Reg’s voice, and I was running both hot and cold. I felt my brow with the back of my

hand but ewww. I'd forgotten I was wearing gloves. Gross.

"Hunky dory!" Shit. Who said that? That expression was more befitting an old guy sitting on a porch smoking a pipe while watching passersby.

I did, and I wasn't hunky dory. Bone tired was how I'd describe myself. But also exhilarated that I'd been thrown into an impossible situation and I hadn't fled. Instead, I manned up and helped Reg.

There was an ulterior motive to my madness in that Reg was insanely hot, and I hoped that by sticking this shift out to the very bitter end, we might meet up sometime. Reg might want to thank me, and I'd be into that. He might be into me if we did!

"You have your dishwasher face on."

Yikes. Shimmering with slimy sweat. Not a good look.

"I can see you're far away, thinking of maybe lying on a beach, the sun beating down." He grinned. "I get it. I used to wash dishes years ago when I was in college. It's the only way to get through a shift."

Oh, how wrong he was. Instead of me getting a suntan or dashing into the ocean to cool off, Reg was in my daydreams. And he wasn't wearing any clothes.

"You must be pleased with how the night turned out." Judging by the mountain of dishes that had passed through my hands, the restaurant was packed.

And despite his manger label—which he was—Reg was also the owner. He must have washed a lot of dishes and wiped down countless tables to end up owning a restaurant like this.

“I am.” He indicated the rest of the kitchen staff. “But it was a team effort. I couldn’t have done it alone, and tonight you were a member of the team.”

“Thanks.” Cleaning crud off pots was hardly a talent, but I was glad he was happy with my scrubbing skills.

“You need to eat.”

I did, but how did he know? Was I drooling? Staring at his butt too long? Eyeing his crotch? I’d done all the above but hoped he wasn’t paying attention.

“How did you know?” My face burned with embarrassment, but the whole of me was overheated from being in the kitchen and having Reg so close.

“Chef.” He jerked his head at the man for whom the kitchen was his domain. “Told me you haven’t had a bite all night.”

I snapped my teeth shut, trying to shove out the image of me nibbling on Reg’s cock.

“I’m—”

Reg cut me off. “Don’t tell me you don’t need a meal. You’ve done the work of three guys this evening.”

“That’s kind of you and Chef.” I glanced at the chef, caught his eye, and bobbed my head.

“Good. Order whatever takes your fancy.”

Sweat slithered into my briefs and coated my butt. That would be Reg on a platter, an apple in his mouth and his legs spread wide, his cock standing straight and tall.

“Okay. On one condition.” Sassy wasn’t a good look for a dishwasher, but I’d bet Reg didn’t engage with the regular guy as he had with me tonight. Not that he thought he was above such things, but there were too many demands on his time.

He probably thought I’d mess up and kept an eye on me.

Reg raised a brow.

“That you eat with me. You’ve been bustling in and out of the kitchen all night. There hasn’t been any time for you to put something in your mouth.”

I shouldn’t have said that. It was an awkward way to say eat, and poor Reg shuffled his feet and his eyes grew dark.

“I could eat. What would you like?”

I’d heard orders being called all evening, and I chose the linguine with clams. Reg agreed and Chef told us to sit while the staff prepped the food. Though I wasn’t a fan of Valentine’s Day before coming here this evening, I was hoping there were some cupcakes left over, slathered in pink icing, or the chocolate-coated strawberries.

Who was I? A cynic flipped to a romantic after being elbows deep in sudsy water?

And with both Reg and me eating pasta, I imagined one or both of us with a strand of pasta dangling from our mouths. Hmmm, no, that wouldn’t work. One of us was eating while the other’s mouth gaped as his companion sucked pasta between his lips.

It was too early to do that silly let’s suck either end of the pasta until we kiss routine. I’d always groaned when watching that on screen. But now I’d do anything to share that moment with Reg.

“The linguine is that good. I can tell by your face you’re anticipating the dish being put in front of you.”

“Exactly.” I managed to get out the one word. But I was lying. I was envisioning something else.

6

REG

There was still a lot to do before we could call it a night, but when Banks asked me to join him, there was no way I was turning him down. Spending even a second with him that was focused on food and each other was too good to pass up on. Thankfully, Chef saw me taking a break as an opportunity to make food for everyone, ensuring others weren't picking up my slack so I could get to know my mate.

“How about we go into my office, get away from the noise?” I didn't mind the noise. I doubted he did either, but I was looking for some excuse—any excuse—to have a little alone time with him. For a split second it looked like he might decline, but then he grabbed his plate and told me to lead the way.

My office was small: a desk, a chair, a filing cabinet. Nothing fancy, definitely not the type of setup a “business professional” might have, but it worked. We sat on opposite sides of the desk, eating.

I didn't like him being that far away from me, but it was probably for the best. He didn't need his boss groping him, and it would be hard not to brush against him or ask him for a kiss. He was human, and I needed to remember that humans didn't move at warp speed. That was just shifters—and not even all shifters, only those lucky enough to find their mates.

Despite what others in my birth pack believed, true mates weren't fairy tales, and the goddess had looked down upon me and deemed me worthy of one. Now, it was my

job to make sure this story ended in a happily ever after. There were so many ways I could mess this up, so many ways I could frighten him away, so many ways I could thwart fate's attempt. I needed to tread lightly, as difficult as that was going to be. Having some random guy say, "Oh, by the way, you're mine forever," was the stuff of horror movies—not the way most people decided to date or find their spouse.

"This is even better than it smelled." Banks had a drop of sauce on his lip, and it was all I could do not to lean in and lick it off of him. Maybe this small enclosed space wasn't a good idea after all.

"It's a recipe Chef brought with him. It was his grandmother's." It was the recipe he made for me at his interview, and the job was his on the spot. I loved to cook and went to cooking school for it, but nothing I made compared to his signature dish.

"Well, that woman deserves a statue in her honor, because this is delicious."

He was right—it was delicious. But not as delicious as sitting across from him, watching his lips curve into a smile, his eyes sparkling with the kind of warmth that made my wolf howl in joy. Nothing, I thought, could ever be as satisfying as this moment.

All too soon, our meal was over, and it was time to get back to cleaning up. After a busy night like this, there was a lot to do: finishing the dishes, turning over tables, making sure all of the tablecloths were ready for pickup in the morning from the cleaners, vacuuming, cleaning the bathrooms, preparing the deposit, and closing out the credit cards. It was a lot, but the team managed to get it done pretty quickly. Since we had stayed on top of things all day, even with the intense crowds, we were ready to go sooner than I had expected. Honestly, sooner than I wanted. I wasn't ready to say goodbye to Banks.

My phone was still in the shop, and I wasn't sure if it was going to be repairable, but

either way, I was going to get a phone in the morning—repaired or transferred phone number. One of the two.

The rice hadn't done much, but I hoped it would at least dry things out enough for them to recover the data. If I could get my phone working again, I'd call Banks—not about work, but maybe for a date. And if the phone was still dead, Foster could give it to me again. Whatever the case was, I wasn't going to be pushy tonight. Technically, I was his boss right now and didn't want to make things weird.

I grabbed the envelope of cash off my desk and brought it out to him just as he was gathering his things.

“Hey, I want to thank you for tonight. Here.” I handed him the envelope.

He opened it and looked inside, his brow furrowing. “I don't understand.”

“You filled in tonight, and you get paid. Did you want to be on the books? We could do the paperwork if that's what you're asking. I just thought this would be easier since it was a one-time thing. Foster didn't say either way. He just gave me your number.” And now I was babbling. Way to go, Reg.

“Foster gave you my number to work here?”

“Yeah. He didn't tell you first?” That didn't sound like Foster, but he had been on pain pills, so maybe.

Banks tilted his head, a look of realization dawning.

“After he broke his foot, he said you could cover his shift?” Maybe I had it all wrong.

“What's Foster's last name?” Banks scratched his chin.

I told him, and he looked up at me, his mouth forming a perfect “O.” I could think of much better things he could do with that mouth. I blinked away the thought. This was neither the time nor the place for that.

“I think there was some confusion,” he said. “My boss, Foster, said he was setting me up on a blind date.”

“And you thought this was the date.” Yikes. No wonder he looked so good. Worst first date ever.

He nodded.

“That’s why you were here, looking so nice.”

“Yeah,” he said with a half-shrug.

“Wow, bet you never wanted out of a date as quickly as this one before.”

“I don’t know,” he continued. “I kind of didn’t mind. I got a really good dinner and some nice company. I was thinking maybe we could have a real date soon.”

“Yeah, I’d like that. A proper date would be great.” What I wanted to do was throw my arms around him and thank him for giving me a second go at a date. I had no idea who I had tried to call, but it was officially the best wrong number ever. “Would you mind writing your number down? My phone’s currently living in a vat of rice at the repair shop, but should be back in the morning.”

“Do I want to know?” he teased.

“Probably not—let’s just say you are better at dishes than I was yesterday.”

He wrote his number down, and I put mine in his phone. He'd agreed to our first real date, and I was already giddy about it. He still refused to take the money, which made me feel like a complete jerk, but I figured I'd make it up to him on our date.

I watched him walk out the door and already missed him. Waiting for our date wasn't going to be easy.

7

BANKS

“Sorry, Banks!” My boss poked his head into my office.

Having a name that was also a noun describing a type of business lent to so many confusing and awkward exchanges. As a kid, my friends had teased me in the playground, making jokes about banks stealing money, their folks were changing banks, and how people waited in line at banks.

It was tiresome, and I railed against my folks’ decision to give me that name.

As an adult, people didn’t usually make derogatory comments, but situations could get messed up.

Like right now.

Was Foster making a general statement about banks? Probably not, but I had no clue why he was apologizing to me.

“Hope your Valentine’s Day wasn’t messed up.”

“Ummm, no.” That response gave me some time to figure out what he was talking about. Or he might disappear and the conversation would go nowhere.

“Tommy flaked, and my husband told me I shouldn’t set any more friends up on a

blind date.”

“Good advice.” I begged the universe to send Foster away so I didn’t have to reveal I was at a loss as to who Tommy was.

“Glad you’re not upset.”

“On the contrary. I had a great night.”

Foster made an odd clicking sound and vanished. I let out a long breath, thankful he’d decided matchmaking wasn’t the way forward.

I sent a silent thank-you to Tommy for not doing what he was supposed to, which was calling me, I guessed.

I checked my phone, thinking Reg might have texted. We’d exchanged numbers last night or very early this morning, but the guy was probably still asleep, and even if he was awake, that didn’t mean he’d rushed to the phone repair shop.

But we did agree we had to go on a proper date and not one after both of us had worked a long shift, and in my case, a dirty and sweaty one. When I showered last night, I scrubbed my skin trying to get rid of the kitchen smells from my pores.

It was mid-afternoon when the phone beeped. Reg! Every time I saw his name, I pictured me kneeling before him and him knighting me with his sword. A giggle burst out of me because he wasn’t holding a weapon made of the finest steel. Nope. He had his cock in hand.

How are the hands?

Itching to do something other than fly over the keyboard . That was ambiguous

enough that he could take it any way he chose.

I have a solution .

Goody. I held the phone close, thinking he might send me a not-safe-for-work image. Hoping he'd appear at my door wrapped in pink ribbon, my hands trembled as they grasped the phone.

But instead, he called.

“Hi.” I didn’t wait for him to reply. “When are we going on our date? Tonight?” I hated the big are-we-or-aren’t-we routine, where alphas and omegas danced around one another. Besides, we’d agreed to go on a date. Showing how eager I was... that was a good thing, not something to be embarrassed about.

A chuckle burst through the phone. “Let me see. I’d have to check my diary. How about... tonight? The restaurant is closed, so we should take advantage of that.”

If hearts could sing, mine would be trilling right now, higher pitched than any bird or musical instrument.

“Yes, please.”

Reg laughed, and I wished I could see his face. But work called—literally—and he said he’d pick me up at seven.

I made sure to leave the office at five. No staying late to get ahead. I had to shop for a new shirt, shower, and wait by the door for twenty minutes anxiously hoping no disaster prevented us from going on our date.

There was a menswear store not far from the office, so I zipped in there, hoping the

perfect shirt would leap out at me.

A sales assistant hovered at my elbow. Usually, I preferred choosing clothes alone, but I gushed that I was going on a first date.

He eyed me, as if judging my size, but he could have been thinking about his dinner.

“This color is not for everyone, but pastels are big right now.”

I nodded as if I paid attention to the menswear collections and the hot models that trotted down the runway.

The guy pulled out a pastel pink shirt, and I fingered the soft cotton fabric. Who was I, the guy who hated pink and disliked all pink associated with Valentine’s Day? Last night I’d shared chocolate-coated strawberries with Reg, and we’d agreed they were the best thing ever. Especially when his lips were smeared in chocolate and he licked it off.

I gasped as the memory came to the forefront of my mind.

“I agree it is a bold choice.” The sales assistant led me to a changing room.

It fit perfectly, and the guy steamed it for me so I could wear it without a wrinkle.

Dashing into the shower at home, I washed my hair and lathered myself in my favorite body wash.

Thirty minutes before Reg was due to arrive, I dried my hair and got dressed, making sure to wear my tightest briefs. He might not see them and keep his hands to himself, but I couldn’t take the chance and wear boring old gray ones.

My ass looked so good in the dark gray pants I'd bought earlier this month. Checking myself out in the mirror, I pronounced myself ready and went down to the lobby. While I didn't know what car he drove, I'd leap out at the first vehicle that pulled up. I'd probably scare a dad and his kids, or someone coming home from work, but I didn't expect Reg to get out and come get me.

My palms were sweaty, and I had nothing to wipe them on, so I waved them in the air, hoping the gentle breeze created by flapping my arms would dry them. People coming into the building gave me odd looks, but I didn't care.

A red car pulled up. It was so Reg, and I waved my arms over my head as I made it to the passenger side.

"You're here."

"Right where I want to be."

REG

After our plans were set, I Googled date ideas, trying to figure out what the best one for us would be. Of course, dinner came up near the top of my search, but we'd just had dinner together the night before, and after working in the restaurant all night, he might not want to see the inside of one for a while. Another popular choice was going to a show or a movie, but something like that wouldn't give us a chance to talk. It was also too cold for most outdoor activities like a trip to the zoo, a picnic, or even miniature golf.

There had to be something we could do that would give us time together, allow us to communicate, and still be fun. Thankfully, Hank called to give me an update on his son, who was doing much better. When he asked how the night had gone, I told him about the dishwasher confusion after Foster broke his foot, and how I now had a date. He laughed at the irony of me putting Banks to work on what he thought was a date. In hindsight, it was funny

"Just take him to the town ice rink," Hank suggested. "It's still set up, and there are lots of little shops around if you get cold. Plus, it's not as crowded this time of year."

He was right. When the Christmas fair was in full swing, that place was packed. But now that most people were all ready for spring, it was often near empty.

"You're a lifesaver, Hank. Thank you."

“Nah, no need to thank me. I’m just glad everything went smoothly for Valentine’s Day.”

“Please tell me you didn’t spend the whole day worrying about it.” Even if the night had been a disaster, I still wouldn’t want him to feel bad about it. It wasn’t like he called in to go skiing or be a slug.

“No, of course not... Just part of the day.”

We chatted a bit longer, and he shared the details of his harrowing day at the hospital with Junior. I was glad to be a shoulder for him. Being a single omega father wasn’t ideal, but fate didn’t give you a choice. In Hank’s case, his husband had passed away in an accident when his son was a baby, leaving him to raise their son alone. He was an amazing dad, but it had to be hard.

After our call, I went to the store and picked up some warm gloves, scarves, and hats. I wanted to surprise Banks with the ice skating and didn’t want him to get cold because I hadn’t properly explained what he needed to wear. This was the best way to ensure he’d be comfortable and have a surprise.

When I pulled up to his place, he was ready, coming right to the car. It wasn’t romantic or traditional. It was so much better. He wanted this date as much as I did, and he didn’t try to hide the smile on his face.

“You didn’t tell me where we’re going.” He buckled his belt.

“You’re right. I didn’t.” I pulled away from the curb. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

“Fine. Be that way.”

His scent filled the car, and for a split second I considered opening a window to help

me keep my focus.

I drove through town to the commons that the city flooded every year to create an ice rink. Some years, it stayed up for months; others, it barely lasted a few weeks. It all depended on the weather. This year had been a good one for ice. Not so good for staying warm.

“What do you think? Want to go ice skating?” I pulled into a spot.

“I haven’t been since I was a kid. Let’s go.”

We rented skates, and I helped him put on the hat and scarf I’d bought. I liked doing that for him, and my wolf did too. Little gestures like this had him prancing around inside me, thrilled at the chance to take care of our omega.

“Fair warning,” I said, lacing up my skates, “I haven’t been ice skating since... well, I don’t even remember. Maybe elementary school.” And back then we called racing on the frozen pond ice skating, even though there were no actual skates involved.

I hadn’t thought that part through before deciding on the date, but we were both equally horrible at it in the beginning, so it worked. We held hands, more to keep each other upright than anything else, stumbling and laughing as we tried to find our balance. Slowly, we got the hang of it. Round and round we went, feeling the cold on our cheeks and bouncing to the music playing over the rink speakers.

Eventually, a group of local teens—probably from the hockey club by the sounds of it—showed up. They were having fun, but being surrounded by kids wasn’t ideal for a romantic date. We decided to call it and skated off, returning our skates and wandering toward the nearby shops.

“I don’t get out to this part of town very often.” Banks gave my hand a squeeze.

I didn't need it to hold me up anymore, but I wasn't ready to let go of it either and appreciated the gesture. "Yeah, me neither. It's got a lot more than I realized."

"Oh! Look over there."

I followed his gaze to a small shop across the street. At first, I thought it was a café, but on closer inspection, it turned out to be a hot chocolate bar.

"I didn't know those existed." But now that I did, I was all about trying it.

"We're going, right? We're going, right?" he asked, as if that was in question.

"Oh yeah, we're going."

We crossed the street and stepped inside, greeted by the smell of chocolate and a menu so large it took up the entire wall.

"I don't even know which kind to get." Banks leaned into my side.

"That's easy. I'm just going to ask them to make me their favorite." As a restaurant owner, that was frustrating, but right now it sounded like a brilliant idea.

"Me too." He pulled off his hat, his hair ruffled, begging for my fingers to run through it.

That would have to wait. It was hot cocoa time.

BANKS

“Yum.” I sipped the rest of my hot drink, hoping I had a cocoa mustache and Reg would lick it off as he had in my imagination.

“You’re talking about the cocoa, right?”

I liked the direction his mind was headed.

“Maybe.” I fluttered my eyelashes, something I’d poo-pooed when watching actors do it on screen. But there was something about Reg that had me falling under his spell. And all those romantic clichés like roses and hearts were now endearing rather than unappealing.

“Would you like more yum?”

I leaped up, almost spilling the remnants of my drink on Reg. My hand shot up, and I yelled, not caring who heard or stared, “Me, me. Please!”

“Someone’s hungry.”

“Starving, famished, ravenous!” I tossed the empty cup in the trash and hooked my arm in his. “Where to?” There were two options, maybe three. His place or mine. Or if we wanted to splurge, we could get a hotel room.

“The restaurant seems the logical choice.”

Not what I was expecting. I furrowed my brow, thinking back to Valentine’s Day and the restaurant’s storage rooms. I hadn’t ventured into any. Perhaps Reg stayed there sometimes if he had to be there early the following day.

A horrified thought took hold of me. What if he didn’t have his own place? Buying the restaurant was a huge financial undertaking, and he might not be able to afford rent. Poor Reg. He’d given up everything for his passion which was the restaurant.

“Sure.” I was conflicted because I could suggest my place, but he might be offended, thinking that his room in the back of the restaurant wasn’t good enough for me. So, I went along with it, hoping he had a soft mattress.

Sizzle and Chill was so different compared to the other night. There was no one loitering outside, and all the pink had been removed. Instead, its windows were shadowed, and I imagined it sleeping, its arms wrapped around the building.

Glad I’d worn my tight briefs and Reg could eye them before he got naked, I tugged at my belt as light flooded the restaurant. Reg headed to the kitchen with me stumbling behind as I tried to undo my belt. I tripped and almost fell headfirst onto the kitchen floor.

“Oof!” My pants puddled at my ankles and Reg stared at me as my arms flailed. It wasn’t the most romantic of environments, nor the safest, but his room must’ve been nearby, and if I could make it there without going headfirst into the fryer, I’d consider it a win!

“Might be time for new pants.” Reg wielded a frying pan.

I’d used toys during sex previously, but the frying pan was a puzzle. What was he

planning on doing with that?

“My belt,” I mumbled. I staggered to him, arms outstretched.

“What would you like? As long as it’s quick, I can do it.”

Hmmm, this sexy time sure wasn’t what I’d thought it would be. Reg wanted it to be over quickly so he could what? Watch TV? He was less of a romantic than I was and disappointment pooled in my belly.

“We can have the linguine again or something else.”

Pasta. He was talking about food, as in the yummy stuff you put in your mouth and swallowed as opposed to a cock and cum.

Damn. I’d fucked up. He didn’t want sex. He was hungry and thought I was too. I was, but I would have ignored my rumbling tummy for naked time.

“Ummm, anything.”

“My favorite is a very simple dish. Rice, green beans, and salmon with a yogurt herb sauce.”

My belly gurgled, telling me it was hungry, and just as well we were eating food and not cock.

“Sounds great. What can I do?”

Reg had me chopping herbs, slicing lemons, and gathering other ingredients for the dressing while he put on the rice.

“We’re going to be lazy and use one pot for the rice, salmon, and beans so there’s little washing up.”

Less time doing dishes meant more time for other activities, but I joked that I was disappointed I wouldn’t resume my role from the other night.

“I can dirty a few dishes if you’re longing to scrape and scrub.” He nudged me, and I giggled.

“Nah. I’m good.”

A mouth-watering aroma filled the kitchen as Reg added herbs to the salmon. We both tasted the yoghurt sauce, and Reg declared it the best ever! I was chuffed, even if it wasn’t true, but it was yummy.

We ate in a corner of the kitchen, and I was so hungry I was tempted to pick up the plate and shovel the meal into my mouth.

“You were starving.” Reg was much more restrained, forking a mouthful of salmon and rice and stabbing beans.

“Ice skating is thirsty work.”

Reg let on that he didn’t have much time for leisure activities. “When you have your own business, all your energy goes into making it a success.”

“You should be proud of what you’ve done with the restaurant.”

He shrugged. “It’s a fickle business. One day you’re the best thing in town, and tomorrow, you’re yesterday’s news.”

He put down his fork and asked if I was still hungry. Not wanting to assume he was talking about sex, I nodded, but told him I could make myself a sandwich. No way did I expect him to cook again.

“Pfft! A sandwich? Absolutely not.”

He brought out four cupcakes, some left over from the other night. The pink icing shining in the bright kitchen light.

“Tuck in.”

This scenario was part of my daydream, or my nighttime ones. Or middle of the day imaginings. There’d be pink icing on his lips, and I’d lick it off. Or vice versa.

“Mmmm. There’s something about pink icing that makes it better than any other.”

A dollop rested in the corner of his mouth.

Gods, all my dreams were coming true!

10

REG

“I’m not ready to go home.” Banks was blunt and forward.

I appreciated it because I was feeling the same way and kept putting on the brakes every time I wanted to lean in for a kiss or place my hand on the small of his back. When his pants dropped in the kitchen, it was nearly impossible for me to regroup. If I hadn’t been standing behind the prep table he’d have seen just how true that was.

“I’m not ready for you to go home or for me to go home.” I was botching this up. “What I mean is, I want you, Banks.”

He leaned in and licked a dab of pink frosting from the corner of my lips.

“I want you, too. Which of us lives closer? Let’s go there.” He was already heading out the back door. He meant business, and I was here for it.

It was a short drive to his place, and we raced up the stairs. We might not have known each other for long, but I felt like I was waiting for this moment for forever. I wouldn’t mark him, not without his consent, but enjoying his body? Yeah, I was all in for that.

My heart raced with anticipation as I followed Banks into the apartment. As soon as the door closed behind us, his irresistible scent filled my nostrils—the sweet, tantalizing fragrance of my omega, the one the goddess put on this earth, just for

me... I couldn't hold back any longer.

I pushed Banks up against the wall, crushing my lips to his in a hungry, desperate kiss. He moaned into my mouth, his body trembling against mine. Gods, I wanted him so badly, and if I wasn't careful, I was going to come before we even got started. My cock was rock solid, begging to be set free.

"Reg," Banks gasped as I kissed along his jaw and down his neck. "Please..."

I ground my hips into his, letting him feel how hard I was for him and loving that he was just as hard back, the delicious friction of our cocks brushing together sending bolts of need through me. The stupid fabric between us needed to go.

He whimpered and writhed against me, the scent of his slick leaving no room for doubt that he wanted this every bit as much as I did. He might not have had a wolf telling him we were meant to be together, but he sensed it.

My hands roamed his body greedily as we continued making out. I needed to touch every inch of his smooth skin. I slid my hands under his shirt, caressing the lean muscles of his back. He arched into my touch, pressing his body more firmly against mine, it was so much and at the same time nowhere near enough.

I knew I should slow down, that we should take this to the bedroom and breathe for a second. If we didn't, the chances were great that we'd end up exploding in our pants, but I couldn't break away. But I was too far gone to stop now. I needed to claim my omega, to make him mine.

"I'm going to take you right here," I growled in his ear. "I'm going to fuck you until you're screaming my name."

"Yes," Banks panted, his eyes glazed with lust. "Do it, alpha. Take me."

With a low growl, I gave in to the primal urge to possess my omega completely. If it weren't for the sound of neighbors walking through the hall, I'd have done just that. But Banks needed to show his face in the morning. We needed to move this away from the door.

Panting heavily, we stumbled toward the bedroom, our hands and lips locked in a desperate erotic dance that was ours alone. This was really happening. Banks, the sexiest omega I'd ever laid eyes on, the one the goddess sent for me, was finally mine. If this was a dream, I never wanted to wake up.

Tumbling onto the bed, we landed in a tangle of limbs, our mouths still hungrily devouring each other. Hands roamed, touches becoming bolder, more insistent. I needed to feel every inch of him, to know that he was real.

"Reg," Banks whimpered, arching his hips upward, begging for more. The scent of his arousal filled the room, and it was all I could do not to take him right here and now.

"Patience," I growled, trailing kisses down his neck. "I want to savor every moment of this."

"Please, alpha," he moaned, grasping at the sheets. "I need you inside me."

Unable to resist any longer, I reached down and began to undo his pants. Impatiently, Banks helped, kicking them off along with his briefs, revealing his hard cock, glistening with pre-cum. Groaning, I engulfed it in my mouth. His taste was intoxicating, like honey and sunshine.

Banks moaned, his hips bucking into my mouth. "God, Reg, that feels so good."

I worked him over, my tongue flicking over his slit, swirling around the base, until he was thrusting wildly, gripping my hair tightly. "I'm close, alpha, I'm so close!"

Reluctantly, I pulled away, leaving a trail of wet kisses down his inner thigh. “Not yet. I want to feel you around me first.” Although truth be told, I had a feeling we were both up for numerous rounds.

Unable to wait any longer, I quickly tore the rest of our clothing away. He was already so slick, it fueled my desire.

Banks’s eyes widened as he took in the sight of my hard length. “Oh my... Reg...”

“I’ve got you.” I growled, gathering some of his leaked slick onto my fingers. I teased his entrance before gently pushing one digit inside, eliciting a moan from him. “You’re so damn tight. So perfect.

His muscles clenched around my finger, and I groaned. I added another finger, then a third, stretching him just enough to prepare him for what was to come. Banks arched his back, presenting himself further, his need rolling off him in waves.

“Please,” he whimpered. “I need you inside me. Now.”

I couldn’t deny him any longer. I withdrew my fingers and positioned myself at his entrance, the head of my cock pressed against his tight ring. “Brace yourself, Banks,” I growled. “I’m about to give you what you want.”

“Gods, yes.”

Slowly, I pushed forward, inch by excruciating inch, as Banks moaned and clutched the sheets. His tight heat enveloped me, warm and slick, and it took all of my self-restraint not to bottom out right now. Together, we rocked our hips, easing more of my length inside.

“Reg... fuck,” Banks moaned.

“Take me, omega. Take all of me.”

With one final thrust, I buried myself deep inside him, our bodies joined as one.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” I praised. “So hot and tight.”

“Reg... Reg... harder... more... need...”

I withdrew almost all the way before plunging back in, setting a brutal pace that had us both moaning our pleasure. We moved as one, our bodies slapping together, our scents mingling in the air.

Mate.

Ours.

Mark. My wolf was pushing forward, but he needed to wait. This wasn't the time for that. Banks was human. We needed to be patient.

I thrust deep inside Banks, our sweaty bodies moving as one. The heat was building, our breathing ragged. Banks let out a whimper as I hit that spot within him, the one that seemed to send him closer and closer to orgasm, again and again.

“I'm gonna... I'm gonna come!” he cried out, his body starting to shake.

That sent me over the edge. With a deep, animalistic groan, I slammed my hips against him one final time as my cum shot out and my knot swelled, locking us together. I could feel my seed spurting deep inside him as wave after wave of intense pleasure washed over me. Banks too, was coming undone, his tight passage clenching rhythmically around my knot as he reached his own powerful climax.

We stayed like that for a long moment, bodies joined as one, pulses gradually slowing. I wrapped my arms around Banks and held him close.

Mate.

11

BANKS

“This is nice.”

Reg was naked, just as he was in my dreams, making coffee, his cute butt in full view. My semi swelled and I was fully aroused, but I was wearing briefs, so my dick wasn't going to lead me to Reg like a dowsing rod.

“Thanks.” He glanced over his shoulder, and his gaze went to my crotch. He mumbled, “Mmmm.” Maybe I shouldn't have worn briefs and we could have had sex again, with me pinned to the kitchen counter.

Nah, maybe not. My hole was sore after last night. It needed a rest.

“Better than having sex in the back room of the restaurant.” I didn't know why I'd brought that up when it'd been obvious since last night that he had a place of his own.

His hands on the coffee percolator froze. “Is that a thing? My staff would have been shocked if they'd opened up the restaurant and found us naked in the freezer.”

He giggled, and I squirmed, thinking of my shriveled length in the cold.

“Nah, I've watched too many movies.”

I shuffled behind him, pressing my erection on his naked butt, and he ground against

me.

“Mmmm. Now that’s what I like.” He held up the percolator. “Coffee?”

Though the sun was out, it was too cold to sit on the apartment balcony, so we snuggled together on the sofa, covered by a blanket.

“I don’t have to be at the restaurant until this afternoon.”

I jumped in before he could say anything else. “I can make breakfast as a thank-you for last night.”

Furrows appeared in Reg’s brow. “I don’t need a thank-you for sex, Banks.”

Shit. I’d given him the wrong impression. Trust me to mess things up.

“No, for dinner, silly.” I bopped his nose, and the tension in his shoulders and neck released. “But I’m not much of a cook. Toast and cereal?” I rummaged in the pantry and fridge.

“As long as you’re here with me, wearing those super tight briefs, I’m fine with whatever.”

“What? These old things?” I yanked at the waistband and snapped it before dancing around the sofa, making sure to wiggle my ass in Reg’s face.

He growled. Wow! That sure sounded like it came from deep inside him and reminded me of a wolf. Not that I’d ever met one, but I watched wildlife documentaries.

“Ohhhh!” I narrowed my eyes, wanting to stalk Reg like a wild animal, but the toast

popped up and ruined the moment.

“Marmalade?”

“Please.”

We munched on our toast and sipped coffee in silence until Reg said he had something to show me. He’d slipped on a pair of shorts while I made the food, and something about him wearing that tiny scrap of clothing turned me on more than when he was naked. When I was done licking the marmalade from my fingers, I planned to jump the man.

“You’re full of surprises. I thought I’d seen it all last night.”

I outstretched my foot and shoved it between his legs, pressing the sole gently on his crotch. His breath hitched, and his dick swelled.

“You’ve seen nothing yet.” His head fell back, and he closed his eyes as he moaned and grasped my foot, pushing it against his hardness. “I want to be inside you again, but you should get to know me better before we...” He groaned.

“I know you’re a hard worker, a fair boss, a good man, and an amazing lover. I’ll learn more over time.”

Reg sat up, my foot no longer making contact with his cock.

“But I’m different than most guys.”

He didn’t need to explain. I’d dated on and off for years, and most of the men I’d been out with were asshats. I hadn’t had a serious relationship in forever.

“You are.”

Reg’s eyes locked on mine, and goosebumps paraded over my skin as his pupils darkened. If I hadn’t spent two nights with him, one in the restaurant and one on a date and then in his bed, I would have been wary of what was behind that gaze.

But this was Reg, my Reg as I’d begun to think of him, even though we’d known one another a few days.

“When you’re done eating, I’d like to take a drive.”

Okay, this was a little weird. He had to go to work later, and instead of cuddling and being together at home, he wanted to go out.

“Ummm, okay. Why?” He might need food, though he could always eat at the restaurant this evening. I was disappointed that I had to share him with the rest of the world, which was silly because he wasn’t my prisoner. That gave me an idea for when we were together next time. We could role play kidnapper and captive.

Reg took both my hands. “There’s something you need to see. Something important.”

“And I can’t do it here?”

He made a face. “Not really. It would be awkward, and the furniture could get smashed.”

Perhaps my face registered fear. “Don’t worry. This is all me. Nothing will happen to you. I promise.”

Reg’s reassurance did nothing to quell my anxiety. But he was asking me to trust him, and I could take off and never see him again or let him show me this mysterious

whatever it was. If it was too freaky for me, I'd cut my losses and run.

I made it sound so easy, as though I'd shrug and say, "Better luck next time." But my heart would be ripped from my chest if Reg turned out not to be who I'd built him up to be.

He got dressed and handed me the rest of my clothes. He massaged my brow, saying I was worrying too much. "You love me buck naked, right?"

I nodded, not understanding the leap between what we were about to do and him having no clothes on.

"Perfect. You'll get to see me strip in the woods."

We were going into the deep dark forest? In February? Oh no. That changed everything.

12

REG

I wished I'd had time to plan, organize, and come up with the perfect words to say as I explained my wolf side to my mate. But every second that we were together, every second that I didn't tell him the truth about who I was and who he was to me, felt like a second too long.

When I said we were going to the woods, he didn't balk. Did he look surprised? Absolutely. But he got into the car without asking too many questions. I chose to believe it was because he trusted me, though it could've just been his determination to see this through to the end. Either way, I was grateful.

I drove to my favorite place to shift. It was off the beaten path, with a beautiful spring running through it, and it wasn't far from my place, so it never felt like a chore to drive there. Today would be the first day I brought anyone along. Even my parents hadn't been here—they'd stopped by for visits with me, of course, but never long enough to truly share the peace this place offered my beast.

"Where exactly are we going to hike?" he asked. "We passed the state park entrance already."

"Yeah, we're not going there." Nor would I call what we were doing hiking, but that didn't need to be clarified. He'd see it soon enough. "I want to show you my favorite place."

He set his hand on my thigh. “Last night, I could’ve sworn your favorite place was inside me.”

I chuckled. “It is. I meant my favorite place before last night.” I intertwined our fingers, loving how comfortable he already felt with me.

It didn’t take long before I turned onto the dirt road that led to the clearing. Even though it was cold, the snow had long melted, leaving the area easily accessible. If there had still been a foot of snow, I’d have had to figure out somewhere else. The big reveal in an apartment didn’t seem right, but if it had come to that, so be it. Thankfully, it hadn’t.

“Let’s do this thing,” I said, lifting our joined hands to my lips and kissing his. “I’m going to give you the keys now. If at any point you feel like you need to leave, go. Just go, okay?” If he was scared, I didn’t want him to feel trapped.

He took the keys and rolled his eyes. “You’re acting weird.”

“Promise.”

“Fine. I promise that you’re acting weird.” He gave me a quick peck, and we got out of the car.

I led him the short distance to the clearing my wolf loved so much and cupped his cheeks, feeling the warmth of his skin against mine as he leaned into my touch.

“Before I do this, I want you to know that no matter what you see here, it’s always me. And I would never in a million years hurt you.”

I kissed him breathless, then stepped back and quickly pulled off my clothes, shifting before I could lose my nerve. Landing on all fours, I looked up at him, not moving,

not wanting to scare him. To my complete and utter amazement, he broke into a huge smile.

“No way,” he said, squatting down and meeting my gaze. “You’re... you’re beautiful. Can I?” He reached out a hand. “Is it okay?”

I nudged my head under his hand, encouraging him to pet me. After a few tentative strokes, he hugged me close.

“I always wanted this to be real,” he murmured. “As a kid, I read stories and thought, ‘Wow, how cool would that be?’ But it wasn’t real. Except... it is.” He kissed the top of my head, and my wolf’s tail wagged uncontrollably.

“Can you shift back now? I have so many questions.”

I licked his jawline before shifting back into my human form, shivering as the bitter cold hit me. I hurried to throw on my clothes. “How about we go to the car?”

He nodded, and we walked back. On the way, he asked, “Are you a werewolf?”

It was the perfect first question. I explained how shifters and werewolves weren’t the same, that I wasn’t controlled by the moon, that I’d always been this way, and that it wasn’t contagious. The usual things people wanted to know.

Once we were in the car, the conversation turned to something much more important: us.

“Why did you show me?” he asked. “You didn’t have to.”

“No, I did.” Keeping secrets from him was never going to be okay with me.

“It’s just... are you allowed to tell me? In the movies, they get killed for that.”

I didn’t have the heart to tell him that in some packs, that was true in real life too. Instead, I said, “I’m allowed to tell you. You’re my mate.”

The words spilled out before I could stop them.

“What does that mean?” he asked.

“It means that from the second you walked in and I inhaled your scent, my wolf identified you as ours. He fell in love with you that very moment.”

“And what about you?” he asked softly. “The man? Did you fall in love with me, too.”

“One hundred percent, completely, utterly in love,” I admitted. “I know it’s soon, and humans don’t usually move this fast, but?—”

“I feel it too. I felt it from the start, even if I didn’t understand it. It was like I was pulled to you in a way that didn’t make sense. But now it does. I love you, Reg.”

He leaned across the console and kissed me, slightly awkwardly thanks to the console between us. “So, if you’re my mate, does that mean... because we did the thing, we’re bonded now? Or is that just television nonsense?”

“Sort of, but not really,” I explained. “In order to be truly bonded, I’d have to mark you by clawing your shoulder.”

“Wait, is that why I wanted to scratch you yesterday?” he asked, catching me off guard.

“You wanted to scratch me?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t. I thought it was... weird. But now I realize I knew, even before you told me, before I knew what it was. I just knew.”

I cupped his cheek, and he leaned into my hand. “Yeah, you knew.”

There was nothing I wanted more than to mark him right then, but he still had so much to learn. I couldn’t let him jump into this without understanding everything.

“There’s one thing we need to do first,” I said.

“And what’s that?”

“You need to meet my pack—my family. If you still want this after that, I’ll be 100% there. But this has to be your choice, and I won’t take that away from you.”

He laughed softly. “Oh, silly alpha. I don’t think I had a choice from the moment I saw you. You stole my heart, even if you did put me to work first.”

“Hey!” I protested.

He grinned. “I’m not wrong, and I have the dish hands to prove it.”

BANKS

I have to meet the pack. And not any pack, but Reg's.

Tossing and turning in my bed during the nights when Reg wasn't with me, nightmares haunted my sleep. Wolves drooling, saliva coating their sharp fangs, a low threatening growl that came from deep in their belly had me sitting up in bed, lathered in sweat, a scream echoing around the room.

I changed the bedding more than once until I curled up on the sofa with the lamps shining and the TV on, the low hum of voices reassuring me I was at home and not in the deep dark woods with wolves wanting to tear me to shreds.

In the morning light, with the dreams banished, I yawned and trudged over the kitchen floor to make cup after cup of strong coffee. I made light of the images that had filled my head since I climbed into bed.

Reg's wolf was nothing like the ones in my head. Sure, he came from a pack, but that was what wolves did, they belonged to a group. Reg happened to choose a life outside the pack boundaries, but he was still one of them.

And he wanted me to meet them. I winced as my tummy reacted to me standing at attention before a bunch of wolf shifters inspecting me, maybe disapproving of a human mating with one of their kind.

I sank onto the couch and curled up under a blanket.

Reg insisted it wasn't against pack law that he mate a human. They lived amongst humans, so it happened, and fated mates would never be shunned. Chosen mates wouldn't either, but they tended to be shifter to shifter. Fate took precedence above all else apart from respecting the Alpha's wishes. At least that was the theory. We were the first fated pair he knew in real life.

I gulped my coffee and welcomed the burn as it slid down my throat. Mates. Packs. Alphas with an uppercase A. The doors had been opened to a world I didn't know existed, but I didn't know the rules other than what Reg had told me.

Marriage wasn't a thing. Instead, mates marked one another. And while that was a little scary—I got lightheaded at the sight of blood—I wanted to do it to prove to Reg that he was my one and only. It wasn't as if I hadn't felt the pull already. It was only when I thought too hard on it that I got squeamish.

Reg was busy at the restaurant and sometimes fell asleep on that couch in the back room I'd fantasised about. I could have met him there after the place closed, but he needed his rest, and I would have disturbed his sleep with my rolling around and screaming about being eaten by wolves. Besides, I didn't want him worrying about my reaction.

Our relationship at the moment consisted of texts and snatched moments where we called one another if he was on a break. The problem with being the owner slash manager was he rarely got time to sit and have a meal or chat with me.

And I had been given my promotion which included a larger office, an assistant, and a heap more work. I preferred staying late at the office rather than going to bed early—alone—and with wild wolves filling my head.

“Hey.” Reg appeared on the screen, shoving the heel of one hand into his eye.

Gods, my mate was so tired. He was considering appointing one of the staff who’d been with him since the restaurant opened as an assistant manager but was still going over the budget, making sure he could afford it. The guy’s first big test would be when we visited the pack and he managed the Sizzle and Chill for a few days.

“I’m sorry to leave you alone every night, especially when you must have so many questions about our kind, the pack, and what to expect when we visit.”

I was overwhelmed with guilt at him worrying about me along with all his responsibilities.

“Of course I have questions.” True. “But a door has been opened, and I’ve been given a peek into a different universe. With you at my side, love, I’ll navigate it with only a few bumps.” I wasn’t fibbing, though I’d left out that some of the questions produced nightmares.

“Hmmm.” He peered at the screen. “And yet the dark circles under your eyes tell a story. One that worries me.”

I could pretend I was tired from work, but our relationship would last the rest of our lives, and I didn’t want to start by lying.

“Some scary wolves have been in my dreams, but that’s because meeting a bunch of wolf shifters is an unknown.” The closest experience that was similar was presenting my thesis at college when my knees almost gave way and I desperately needed to pee. But there was really nothing to compare it to.

“I would never put you in danger.”

Him saying that was similar to holding my hand, a hug, or a warm blanket being wrapped around my shoulders.

“I know.”

We ended the call by blowing kisses. Home didn't seem so scary after that conversation, so I grabbed my laptop and left the office.

There were still wolves on the periphery of my dreams, but they were more watchful than warlike. And I woke up in bed, with the bedding on the mattress and not wrapped around me or thrown on the floor in a heap.

It was a one-coffee morning, and I looked forward to this evening when Reg promised he'd be here.

A knock at the door almost sent me skittering back to that dark place where wolves hid in the shadows ready to pounce, but four-legged creatures didn't knock on apartment doors.

“Reg!” I fell into his arms which he raised because he had coffee in one hand and a bakery packet in the other.

“Thought you might enjoy something sweet for breakfast.”

I slapped his adorable butt. “Are you talking about what's in your hand or your pants?” I was frisky after not seeing my mate for a few days.

“Both.” He winked and leaped out of my way. “Which do you want first?”

“Can I have both at the same time?”

He gave me a peck on the lips. “That can be arranged.”

14

REG

I'd driven home many times before, but I'd never been this strange mix of excited and nervous. I was bringing my mate to meet my family for the first time. They were going to love him—of course they would. But there was still that nagging fear, the tiny voice whispering, What if they don't? What if they meet him and think, "Too human. Not good enough. See ya."

There was no reason for me to have that fear. I'd told them all about him: how human he was, how we met in the silliest way, and how completely smitten I was with him. They'd even seen pictures. If they'd had any issue with him, they would've said something already. In fact, the first thing my dad did when I told him we were coming was to prepare one of the spare cabins for us.

"A newly mated couple needs their privacy," he'd said. That meant he firmly believed that after this visit, we'd complete the bond.

Still, I wouldn't breathe easily until the introductions were over and everyone had met him.

"So, tell me about your brother again," my mate said, pulling me from my thoughts. He'd been peppering me with questions about my family and pack the entire trip, taking notes on his phone. He wanted to do everything right. I kept telling him that all he needed to do was be himself because that was already perfect. But for him, that wasn't good enough, and I loved that he cared so much. I just wished I could take on

some of his worries—though I had plenty of my own. Emotions are funny like that.

“Trenton’s a few years younger than me,” I explained. “He fixes trucks for a living, mostly diesels, though he can work on pickups in a pinch. He’ll probably live on pack lands forever because his wolf is a little ornery and doesn’t like leaving.”

“Your wolf doesn’t mind, though?”

“No, my wolf’s more adventurous than my brother’s. Besides, what I wanted to do couldn’t be done there. I always wanted to be a chef.”

“And own a restaurant?”

“Well, more the first, less the second,” I admitted. “I always wanted to be a chef, and I did it. I became a chef, and it was fine. But I realized that as much as I love cooking, I love the people more. When I became an owner, I found the perfect balance—working the line some nights, running the front of the house others. That’s where I truly found my place. Though, I’ve been excited about possibly hiring a restaurant manager.”

“Why?”

“So I can spend more time with you,” I said, smiling. “And because it’s long overdue. The restaurant’s making enough profit now that I don’t need to work all day, every day. It’s time.”

We pulled into the pack lands just as the sun was setting. I drove up to my parents’ house and parked the car.

“This looks like a neighborhood,” he said, “but not like a city neighborhood. Not really a country one either. Never mind, I’m explaining it wrong.”

He wasn't wrong, though. The cabins were arranged in a way that did feel like a neighborhood. When we split from a larger pack in the '60s, we'd designed the pack lands to be more modern, taking inspiration from the suburban neighborhoods of the time. It wasn't because anything had gone wrong with the larger pack; it had just grown too large. That was a good problem to have. Once upon a time, packs were small, not by choice, but because hunters kept our numbers down, thinking they were eradicating wolves. They didn't realize we were shifters, but the result was the same.

"This is my parents' cabin." I parked the car. "We'll go in there first, but leave everything in the car. We're staying in our own cabin tonight, but it's dinnertime, and Dad's going to want us to eat with them."

I took his hand. "Two things you need to know before we go in. First, they're going to love you. Not as much as I do, because it's impossible, but close." I kissed his hand. "Second, I didn't get my cooking skills from my parents. Just smile and say it's delicious, okay?"

"Okay."

I wasn't sure he believed me about the food. He'd find out soon enough.

We were greeted at the door by my dads and my brother. The three of them immediately hugged my mate, introducing themselves and welcoming him into the home. We were shuffled straight to the dining room, where Banks quickly discovered I hadn't been joking about the food. It was tasteless, yet edible. My dad wouldn't know seasoning if it hit him in the face, but Father liked it that way. There was nothing wrong with the food—it was just plain.

"What are you guys up to tomorrow?" my brother asked.

"I was going to show him around the land. Maybe take him into town." I hadn't

thought that far ahead.

“Wrong,” my brother corrected.

“What do you mean, wrong?” It wasn't like he was the activity coordinator and this was a cruise. Not that I'd been on one. My beast liked to stay on the ground.

“Tomorrow, I'm taking your mate to lunch, and I'm telling him all the embarrassing stories about you as a kid.”

“Yeah, that's not going to happen,” I said, knowing full well he'd try anyway.

“We'll see. Someone's got to let this guy know what he's getting into.”

“I think I'm pretty clear on that,” my mate said, grinning.

My father clapped a hand on his shoulder. “You're good for my boy. His dad and I were getting worried about him being alone. But he insisted, ‘One day, I'll meet the one.’ And look at him. He did. We're so happy you're here.”

“I am too, sir.”

My dad shook his head. “No, no, don't call me sir. You can call me Ivan. Or Father. But not sir.”

“Okay, Father.”

I'd never seen my dad smile as brightly as he did in that moment. My mate had officially won my family's hearts.

He had mine too.

15

BANKS

Though it was silly to think this way, it was kinda naughty to have sex on pack lands. Not that there was anything wrong with it. It was just my head was in a weird place.

I was sort of part of Reg's pack. An associate member might be the correct term. But my mate-to-be was going to put his cock inside me in the place where he was born. We'd had sex many times, and yet there was a sensation... no, wrong word... a power associated with the act because of where we were.

The pack was part of the land. They were in tune with the earth beneath their feet. Not only would it be more memorable than previous cock-in-hole antics, but more significant, bonding us forever.

Not waiting for Reg to get his shoes off, I flung off my shirt, slid the pants over my hips, and kicked them over his head. He grunted, a sound that came from deep in his belly, making heated blood flood my veins. My cock engorged, and after whipping off my briefs, I lay on the bed, legs spread-eagled, my length standing straight and tall.

Reg stalked toward me, his eyes narrowed, and the hairs on my arms stood up. My body hummed with a frantic energy, and I panted, taking in huge mouthfuls of air because the bulge in his jeans was bigger than I'd expected.

He licked his lips that glistened with saliva as slick surged from my hole. Rolling

onto my side, I gave him a glimpse of my hole. He gasped, and I grinned, pleased at his reaction.

But I wanted Reg naked with his dick wedged in my channel while groaning and our sweat mingled with my slick.

“Hurry. Get rid of your clothes. I want you.”

He did as I asked, and faster than a human. Not for the first time I was thankful for his shifter reflexes. Placing one knee on the mattress, Reg raked his eyes over my nakedness. He trailed a finger over my butt, making circles on the skin before sliding along my crack. Goosebumps swarmed over my body, the delicious cooling mechanism contrasting with the fiery warmth churning in my belly.

“Give me your length, Reg. I need you inside me.”

Leaning over, he nuzzled me, rubbing his nose from the base of my throat to my belly button. The heat inside me increased, and I worried I’d come before he fucked me.

Reg almost tipped me over the edge when he stuck his tongue in my belly button. I grabbed his head and yanked it up, while begging him to fuck me.

He flipped me onto my back and crawled between my outstretched legs, reminding me of an animal stalking its prey. I bent my knees and reached for his arousal, bringing it to my puckered entrance and shoving in the tip.

His eyes widened, and his brows shot up before he grinned, a wicked smile that warned of something. Intense pleasure, I hoped.

Reg eased his length inside me. He was huge, and he fit in so snugly I could have come with no thrusting. Bending over me, and with his hands planted on either side

of my body, he licked in reverse from where he'd nuzzled earlier, up to my throat, but continuing on to my jaw and finally plunging his tongue between my lips.

I welcomed him inside my mouth and my channel. As I suckled his tongue, I bucked my hips, wanting him ramming in and out. He withdrew his tongue and flicked my nipple while I grew impatient, wanting more fucking. But my nipple reacted, hardening as Reg's mouth had my body tingling.

"Your tongue deserves a medal."

I peered between my legs as Reg pulled out, his cock shimmering and slippery with slick. He shoved his dick into me again, making me yelp, not in pain but with delight. I lifted my hips as he thrust his enormous cock inside me. Droplets of sweat dribbled from his chin onto my chest, and I scooped them up, the saltiness making my tongue tingle.

Reg slowed his pace, filling me slowly while my fingers explored the texture of the skin on his back. His movements were achingly slow, and I urged him to go faster. But he taunted me, slowing further so I felt him sliding in, inch by glorious inch.

I pulled him close and angled my head to the side while my knees gripped his hips. "I love you."

"Back at you." He nibbled the soft part of my ear, sending a charge of excitement through me.

The muffled sounds from the land and the pack formed a backdrop to our lovemaking, and I dug my nails into his back, clawing at the soft flesh while he plunged in and out of me.

I dragged my mouth over his, nibbling his lower lip and whispering how I adored him

making love to me.

Reg paused, his dark eyes searching mine. “You are the light in my life, Banks. Until I met you I had no idea I had an empty place inside me, waiting to be filled.”

“And I did that?” I blew on his sweat-soaked skin, and he shivered.

“You did.” He pecked my lips before plowing into me.

Our bodies jerked, and we moaned and whimpered as perspiration slid over our bodies and the pungent aroma of slick filled the air. Arching my back, I took him in deeper.

He stuck his tongue in my ear, and I moaned while my body hummed.

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”

I managed a nod and an “Mmmm,” as Reg thrust inside me, and my body jerked while my head hit the headboard. The bed bounced and the mattress squeaked. I giggled, thinking the pack would know what we were doing because of their supersonic hearing

But I didn’t care. I draped my arms around my mate’s neck as he drove into me, each thrust bringing me closer to my climax.

My body stirred, and I bit my lower lip, trying to hold off but also wanted to come. I closed my eyes and gave myself over to pleasure as my orgasm took hold of me. Reg held me close as I shuddered, but when I opened my eyes, he rammed inside me again until his head fell back and he yelled my name.

Cum surged into me and his knot claimed me. But instead of wallowing in the

afterglow, Reg whispered he wanted to mate.

“Here on pack land.”

“Okay.”

His wolf’s claws extended, and he raked them over my chest. I did the same to him with my nails, and Reg lowered himself onto me, his chest heaving as our blood mingled.

“Forever,” I mumbled.

16

REG

The first thing I saw when I cracked my eyes open this morning was my mark on my mate—the one telling the world he was mine. I stared at it for the longest time, loving what it meant: that the two of us were now bonded, a connection that could never be broken. If he wanted to get married, we would. It was a tradition of his kind, and I'd honor it. But in my heart, I knew I would never be more committed to him than I was at this moment. That commitment was absolute.

“Why are you watching me?” he mumbled, still half-asleep.

“Because you're sexy.”

“I have bedhead, and I smell like I had sex all night.” His bedhead was adorable and the scent... I wouldn't trade it for anything.

“Huh. I wonder why that is,” I teased.

He snuggled into my side. “Because my alpha's too hot to keep my hands off of.”

I kissed the top of his head. “You'll hear no complaints from me. But we should get up and get ready. The pack is running this afternoon.”

“Which means we have plenty of time. Let's go back to sleep.”

“As much as I’d love nothing more than to spend a few more hours wrapped in your arms, it’s already past noon.”

“What?” He bolted upright. “How is it so late?”

“Because you were still riding me at five this morning.” We’d taken a few power naps in there, but for the most part, we’d had a very enthusiastic night of mating fun.

“Oh... yeah, I did do that.” He pulled his bottom lip in with his teeth, a guilty little smirk playing on his face. “I guess that means we really do have to get up.”

We climbed out of bed, got cleaned up, and grabbed something to eat. Normally, pack runs were held in the evening, but today was special: it was the first pack run for one of our young cubs who’d shifted for the first time, Josiah.

After dinner, my father had explained that he’d met his wolf far younger than usual for our kind and that a daytime celebration seemed fitting and that we were expected to come. We meaning the pack Alpha had already accepted my mate, sight unseen. At the time it sounded like a great way to spend the afternoon, but that was before I stayed up all night with my mate.

Banks wouldn’t be running, but plenty of others would stay behind with him. I wouldn’t go far—just enough for my wolf to reconnect with the pack. And of course, no pack run would be complete without food. A good time would be had by all, even if it meant leaving our bed.

We walked hand in hand to the clearing where the run always began. As we arrived, it quickly became clear that my parents hadn’t told us the whole truth about today. Yes, it was to celebrate little Josiah, but sitting in the middle of the table filled with food was a cake that very much resembled a human wedding cake. This was for my mate and me, too.

The wedding-style cake was them doing what they could to make my mate feel welcomed and included. It was the sweetest gesture, and while it shouldn't have surprised me, it did. Probably because I hadn't even considered it.

"Is that a wedding cake?" he asked, eyes wide.

"Yeah." I leaned in and nipped his earlobe. "They know what we were up to last night—it's for us—for our mating."

"I had a feeling most of the pack knows," he said, blushing.

We weren't exactly quiet, and as private as those cabins are, if someone was walking by... well, they'd know.

"So, does this mean we're getting married today?" he asked, not sounding opposed to the idea.

"I don't think that was the plan. I think they're trying to be sensitive to your human customs, showing you they accept you in a way that makes sense for your world."

"That means they like me," he said, grinning as he bumped my shoulder.

"Yeah, they really do."

The Alpha called the pack to order and introduced us as mates. The pack cheered, welcoming him with open arms. Then it was time for the run.

We all shifted, except for some omegas and young children. Before I darted off into the woods with the pack, I made sure to snuggle against my mate, pressing my nose to his neck for a moment to ground myself. I felt bad leaving him alone, even for a short time.

I shouldn't have. When I returned, I found him sitting in a circle with some of the omegas, holding one of the babes and laughing. The sight stopped me in my tracks. Seeing him with a baby in his arms stirred something deep in me, making me wish for one of our own. If the goddess deemed it the right time, it would come.

But for now, having him—just him—was enough.

After shifting back and getting dressed, the Alpha proclaimed it time to feast. We ate until we were full, chatting with the pack and devouring our non-wedding cake like a boss. It was one of the nicest times I'd ever had at a pack event, and I owed that 100% to my mate. With him by my side, everything was brighter, happier, simply better.

"I love you, omega mine."

He wrapped his arms around me, holding me close. "I love you, alpha mine. Thank you for sharing your pack with me."

"Our pack. This is our pack now." We wouldn't live here, our lives already so entwined with our careers far from this place, but it would always be a second home to us, and if one day something happened to me, I knew without a splinter of a doubt that the pack would be there for him, and that was everything.

17

BANKS

“Damn!”

I’d left some notes I’d printed out for today’s meeting at Reg’s place yesterday. Not that I couldn’t print them out again here at the office, but I’d scribbled notes in the margins.

We’d been going back and forth between each other’s places, and while we both had clothes and toiletries at each apartment, neither mine nor his was ours, and we’d been talking about moving in together.

“Can we afford it?” We were at my place as it was Reg’s day off, and he’d pulled up a shifter realtor’s site. Giving up my apartment wouldn’t bother me. It didn’t hold any special memories, and I wanted to live with my mate.

But I didn’t want Reg to agree to finding a together home when all of his available cash had been put into the restaurant.

“You mean me?” He didn’t look up from the laptop. “Yes, we can. The restaurant has been profitable for quite a while, and I’ve invested well.”

He’d mentioned wanting to, but this was the first that I’d heard that he’d actually done it.

“This is exciting.” I snuggled beside him as we scrolled through houses with tiny yards.

We’d agreed we wanted a family, including pets, so an apartment wasn’t suitable. But the places we could afford in town were so close to their neighbors and had a tiny strip of grass front and back.

“What if we looked a little further out?” Reg’s finger was moving over a button on the website.

“It’s fine, but I’d prefer nothing more than a thirty-minute commute.” That was asking a lot, but if we bought a house outside town and we spent hours in traffic, we’d resent the purchase and maybe each other. Plus the time we could have spent together would be sitting in our cars, checking our watches, and complaining we were going to be late.

And it’d be worse for Reg. I could work from home a couple of days a week, though with his newly hired assistant manager, perhaps he could work a four-day week.

We decided to make a list of everything we wanted in a home.

“Three bedrooms.” Reg tapped on the keyboard.

“Make that four.” My reasoning was if we had two kids, there’d be no room for guests. “Or three bedrooms and a den.”

By the end of the night, my vision was blurred from looking at and rejecting so many houses. One of my must-haves was a huge swing in the back yard and a hammock.

“Our dog will love it.”

Reg clicked his tongue. “The one we don’t have yet.”

My mate wasn’t sold on having a pet, saying we’d be out of the house most of the day and the dog would be alone. But with a large back yard and a porch, I figured a four-legged friend would be plenty occupied sleeping, eating, and sniffing.

Over the next few days, we looked at more sites and made a short list of homes we wanted to inspect. But getting a day when we were both free wasn’t easy, and when we finally coordinated, some of the houses were off the market.

Reg’s shifter friend sent us links for other houses, and we spent the next Sunday traipsing from one place to another.

“The kitchen is so small. It’s not big enough for two people.” I couldn’t imagine having two adults, two children, and a dog in that space. Yes, I was thinking ahead and dreaming of us as a family.

We crossed that place off the list.

“Do you smell something?” Reg put his head close to mine as we stuck our head into an ensuite bathroom. “I want to gag.”

There was a whiff of a yucky smell, but as a shifter’s senses were more powerful than a human’s, my mate couldn’t cope with the stink. He said his wolf would refuse to live in that house.

A third place had spots of black mold on the ceiling, and we turned on our heels and walked out.

We drove up to the last place and took one look at the house with the rotting porch and broken gate. Reg and I shared a glance and he kept on driving. We weren’t

looking for a fixer-upper. That house would be perfect for a couple who wanted to do the renovations themselves or had the money to pay for contractors.

Neither Reg nor I were those people.

“Does the house of our dreams exist only in our imagination?”

We were preparing dinner. I was so down, having expected that we’d find the perfect place, snatch it up under the nose of another potential buyer, and live happily ever after.

Reg poured me a glass of wine and told me to sit.

“From everything I’ve heard and read, it can take years.”

“What if we never find our home?” I couldn’t see the future if we didn’t create a place that was truly ours.

“Dreams can be adjusted and swerved in another direction. We could buy a large apartment.” Reg kissed the top of my head. “But as long as we’re together, I don’t mind. We could live in a tent.”

I made a face cause I hated camping and peeing outside, but as a shifter, Reg’s wolf was happy to sleep on the ground or a floor.

“Not a tent, love.”

My mate chortled. “Fine. Wherever we are, there must be a bed.”

“And a toilet.” I wasn’t pooping in the woods.

“I’d add a shower to the list.”

“And preferably a kitchen,” I added.

“Let’s toast to our new home that has a bed, bathroom, and kitchen.”

We clinked glasses, and Reg resumed making dinner. His phone dinged, and he ignored it, saying it was his day off.

I didn’t understand how he could ignore a message. What if there was a disaster at the restaurant or something had happened to the pack?

And when he did read it, he grimaced. “It’s Rory. Says he’s got more houses for us to look at.”

I was torn between wanting to find the perfect home and not wanting to be disappointed.

“Do we inspect them?”

18

REG

I had officially watched too many house-hunting shows on television because, in my mind, the process was going to follow a predictable script. We'd look at a handful of houses, quickly eliminate a couple of hard passes, and then agonize over the final two, debating which one stole our hearts. Reality turned out to be nothing like that.

It felt more like rummaging through a garage sale, searching for the one book that completed a collection, only to find a thousand textbooks on topics you didn't care about. Sure, it was promising at the start, but the reality of how bleak the outcome was set in really quickly, until you wanted to give up.

House after house was a bigger disappointment than the one before. We weren't even asking for much, at least I didn't think we were. We had a decent budget, didn't require a mansion or endless acres of land, and still, every showing felt worse than the last.

When Rory, our real estate agent, called and said she had more houses to show us, I'd be lying if I said I was optimistic. If anything, I was starting to wonder if we should just save up a bit longer and build something instead. But then I remembered that finding the right property would probably be just as disastrous, with our luck. No, we just had to play the game and hope we were eventually dealt a winning hand.

The first house Rory took us to that day was a mid-century modern. Normally, I liked that style—clean lines, open spaces, and a retro charm. But this house hadn't been

updated since it was built. The original electrical and plumbing systems were still in place, and even the carpeting was untouched. You'd think it might have been a good thing, like a preserved classic, but no. The materials chosen weren't high quality, and years of neglect hadn't done them any favors. What could have been a gorgeous retro kitchen was instead a collection of dilapidated cabinets and a bumpy floor. Don't even get me started on the bathrooms. It was an easy pass.

The next house was what Rory called a high ranch, where the first floor was essentially half a basement. You walked in the front door and immediately had to go up or down; there was no true main level. The layout was fine, I guess, but the backyard backed right up to train tracks. I could feel the rumble of an oncoming train long before it arrived, and when it did, the entire house shook. My wolf was not a fan. Another one crossed off the list.

"There's one last place," Rory said. "It just came back on the market. It was pending, but I should disclose that the sale fell through—and not because of financing."

We'd learned that financing was usually the main reason sales fell through. Sometimes the house didn't appraise high enough for a mortgage, or there was some other hiccup.

"So, what was it?" my mate asked, curious. I was almost afraid to know. "What messed the sale up?"

"Well," Rory hesitated, "the buyers got a little scared. During the inspection, they saw a wolf in the woods behind the house."

Woods? That sounded promising. If it was a shifter, we'd make friends. If it was a wild wolf, the second it caught my scent, it would be gone. Either way, it was doable.

"Let's check it out," I said.

The moment we walked in, I could tell this house was different. It had everything we wanted. The bedrooms were a decent size, and the kitchen... Whoever had redone the kitchen knew what they were doing. It was stunning—a perfect balance of storage and counter space, and the stove? A thing of dreams. I could already imagine making my mate a fancy dinner or even a simple breakfast here.

“I think we want to put an offer down,” my mate said, grabbing my hand.

We hadn’t even discussed what the offer would look like, but we were both in agreement that this was the one.

“What do you suggest?” I asked Rory.

“Well, I have access to the previous offer. We can base it off that and possibly shave a little off. At this point, they’re probably very ready to sell.”

Within an hour, we had signed and emailed over the offer. Later that evening, the call came—the one saying our offer had been accepted.

It was going to become our home.

“I can’t believe we found it.” My mate snuggled into my side as we settled into bed for the night. “Rory said we can close in a month. There’s a lot to do before then.”

“And we’ll get it done, or we won’t. It’s not like we’ll be homeless if we need more time to get everything all together.” I pressed a kiss to his head.

“I know, but I’m so ready for us to have a home together. This going back and forth works, but it’s not the same.”

No. It wasn’t.

“Want to talk about paint colors and furniture?” I was ready to figure everything out, but also, it had been a long day, and if he wanted to get some sleep, I understood that, too. It wasn’t like we could do anything right now, even if we picked out the perfect shade for the living room.

“Nope.” He rolled onto his side. “I have something better in mind.”

“Oh really, and what might that be?”

He walked his fingers down my chest... lower... lower... and lower until they grazed the tip of my filling cock. “I thought maybe we could play a little game of enjoying our mate?”

“I think that could be arranged.”

His fingers wrapped around my cock, effectively ending our conversation.

BANKS

“Do we really need two ice cream scoops?”

I was on the floor of Reg's apartment, surrounded by boxes. We'd decluttered, tossed, donated, and sold some of my things. To save money, we'd done the packing ourselves, and we were hiring a truck to transport our possessions to our new home.

But I'd made a spreadsheet of Reg's kitchen equipment and utensils. He had an ice cream scoop and so did I.

“Yes. One for ice cream and one for when we make meatballs.” Reg's eyes lit up. “And we should buy a third for cookie dough.”

I groaned. It had taken long enough to declutter my stuff, and we had to be out of his place by tomorrow morning. I refused to take junk to our new home, just to sift through it and toss or donate things.

What arrived at the new house were things we loved and wanted.

“No to three. We can wash the one and only scoop we have, and it can have multiple uses.” I placed it in the toss pile cause it was old and the handle didn't work well.

“Let's take a break.” Reg plopped onto the floor as we'd already made one trip with the furniture we were keeping, and a new sofa was being delivered to the house in the

morning.

But I had to be the hardass and urged him to keep going. Staying up all night arguing about a set of measuring spoons or glass containers wasn't part of the plan.

"What is this?" I was holding something that appeared to be a giant crayon.

"A pancake pen." Reg took it off me, and his wide grin suggested he was proud of it.

"What does it do?" I peered at the wider end and before checking out the pointed tip. It reminded me of a large baby bottle, but a kid would have to be enormous to get through that amount of milk. Unless Reg enjoyed playing daddies. I'd be into that.

"It's for if we have children." He explained that it was easier and safer for kids to manipulate than plopping a ladle full of pancake mixture into a hot pan.

I couldn't argue with him about his gadget, though I'd have given it away to the neighbors and bought another one if and when I got pregnant.

I rummaged through the box where I'd dumped all my mate's kitchen gadgets and wondered what other weird and wonderful things I'd find.

"This looks like an object of torture." I waved an orange object at Reg. It was used for squirting something because of the spray nozzle at one end.

"A citrus sprayer."

"Oh, of course. They're invaluable." I suppressed my laughter, but my mate knew me well enough and elbowed me. A guffaw burst out of me.

"Liar. You've never heard of them until now."

True. I used an old-fashioned squeezer when I wanted orange or lime juice. But maybe Reg could convert me.

Even though we had hours to finish the packing, I was on a mission to find my mate's most quirky utensils and gadgets.

"Let me guess what this is." It was an easy one. "A lid to something and you're missing whatever it fits into."

"No!" Reg sighed. He pulled the so-called lid apart. "Guess again."

I studied the two sections. "Got it. It's for making cookies so they're all the same size."

"Almost. It's for burgers. But you were close."

"We have to keep it because heaven forbid one burger was slightly bigger than the other."

"Your sarcasm is noted."

We were running out of time, so I dumped the rest of the kitchen items in the box, vowing to do what I said I wouldn't; go through it again when we unpacked.

"This is a trick one." Now that I was done with the guessing game, Reg had taken my place. "Guess and there'll be a blow job in your future tonight."

Normally I'd do anything for his mouth on my cock, but we'd be sleeping on a mattress in our new place tonight and we'd be exhausted. I doubted there'd be a blow job in my future.

But I was intrigued by what he showed me. It appeared to be an electrocution device though it was so small, perhaps it was for a hand or foot.

“It’s to make smores in the microwave rather than a fire.”

I couldn’t figure out how it worked, but Reg demonstrated the graham cracker went on the bottom, topped with chocolate, followed by marshmallow and finally another cracker.

It was the silliest contraption, but I couldn’t wait to try it if we had kids.

“We cannot get rid of this.” I grabbed Reg’s face and planted a kiss on his brow.

“I wasn’t going to.”

Gods, we’d wasted so much time that all my good intentions were trampled underfoot, and we piled things in boxes that would probably not be unpacked for months. But I didn’t care. Our new home would be full of the most bonkers gadgets, and we’d fill it with memories. I couldn’t wait to leave.

It was early hours of the morning when we loaded the last of the boxes into the rented truck.

“Goodbye, apartment. Your new owners are going to have a dog and a baby, so prepare yourself for knocks, bumps, slobber, a lotta noise, and plenty of love.” My mate blew the apartment a kiss and closed the door. After placing the keys in a lock box, Reg got in the driver’s seat.

“This is the beginning of our new life.” I took his hand and squeezed. “Is your wolf awake?”

“Mmmm.”

“Is he excited?” I liked to check in with Reg’s beast because I had no way of knowing what he was thinking or feeling.

“He says that smores-making gadget is the most ridiculous thing he’s ever seen. A bonfire is a better option.”

“We can have a competition. Smore made outside and ones done in the microwave. I’ll make a spreadsheet.”

“Oh, goody. More spreadsheets.”

20

REG

The second I woke up, I sensed it—a subtle but undeniable change in my mate. As I snuggled against him, my head against his chest, I listened carefully. Faint as it was, I could hear it: a second heartbeat. My mate was pregnant.

It was all I could do not to wake him up right then and share the good news. But my mate deserved more than being yanked from sleep to hear, “By the way, your mate’s wolfy pregnancy detector went off. Congratulations!” No, this moment deserved celebration, not just a rushed proclamation.

Instead, when we woke up, I pretended everything was the same. I made breakfast, we chatted about our plans for the day, and he went to work. As soon as he was out the door, though, I got to work myself, only not for my job—I went into full-on baby announcement mode.

The first thing I did was try to figure out the best way to do this. Wolves always knew right away. We didn’t have any announcements like humans did.

My first step was looking online to see what humans did for pregnancy announcements, hoping for inspiration. Most of what I found was either overly dramatic or so cringeworthy it gave me secondhand embarrassment. Those ideas were definitely out. But one trend caught my attention—many people didn’t believe they were pregnant until they took three, four, or even five tests. It made sense. They couldn’t hear and scent things the way we could, but also, that meant that my mate

might feel similarly.

I went to the store and bought a bunch of pregnancy tests and a stuffed wolf. If my mate needed extra confirmation, I was going to make sure he had it. And the wolf? That was for our baby, because as much as I hated to admit it, the squishy toy looked very much like me.

Next, I visited the bakery we used for special occasions at the restaurant. While we could whip up some amazing cupcakes, elaborate cakes weren't exactly our specialty. When the owner came out to greet me, I asked for a favor: something custom, something celebratory, something today. The baker immediately agreed, telling me he had the perfect idea in mind. I trusted him.

My next step was the grocery store, where I picked up ingredients for tonight's dinner. Despite mocking the cheesy, cringeworthy online pregnancy announcements earlier, I was falling right into that same trap. I was pairing our filet with every baby vegetable I could find. I couldn't help but smile at my own ridiculousness—it was worth it for him.

When I got home, I set the bread dough to rise for the mini rolls I planned to bake and began prepping everything else. Not long after, the bakery called to let me know the cake was ready. When I picked it up, it was perfection. Banks was going to love it. The baker refused to take any money, insisting it was his gift to us.

Moving away from the pack had been a bigger deal than I'd let myself admit at the time. I told myself it wouldn't matter if I lived with a community like the kind I grew up in, but the truth was, it did. The adjustment hadn't been easy, not until I started my restaurant.

Over the course of that first year, the people I worked with had become my new family—a pack of our own, in a way. That was the thing about restaurant life—it

wasn't just a job. We were a team, a community. And that extended to people like the baker, who wasn't full-time with us but still played a vital role in keeping things running.

By the time my mate came home, my surprise was ready and waiting for him.

"What smells so good?" he asked, stepping into the kitchen.

"I made a special dinner," I replied casually, hoping not to give too much away before the reveal.

"I thought you had work tonight."

"I let the new manager take over because we have something to celebrate." We didn't have many people on the books, and it was easy enough to do.

"And what's that?"

"Go look on our bed."

He laughed. "Should I be expecting sexy briefs?"

I didn't pretend to hide the fact that I loved him in his tight briefs, and I'd since given him a few pairs in some fun colors.

I grinned. "I wish I'd thought of that. Go check."

He walked into the bedroom, and I followed behind, standing in the doorway as he approached the box on the bed. He opened the lid and pulled out the pregnancy tests and the stuffed toy, staring for a moment before I heard an audible gasp.

“You don’t think?—?”

“No, I don’t think,” I stepped closer to him. “I know. I scented it this morning, and I can hear their little heartbeat.” I rested my hand gently on his belly. “But I thought you might need proof.”

He dropped the sticks and threw his arms around me while he still clutched the wolf. “I don’t need proof. If you can hear and scent them, they are there. I’m pregnant.”

“You are.” I held him closer. “I love you, mate.”

“I love you too, and I love them already, so very much.”

We held each other for what felt like forever, savoring the moment. Later, we enjoyed our special dinner, shared the beautiful cake, and ended the night making love.

We were going to be fathers, and I couldn’t have been more thrilled.

21

BANKS

What did I know about raising a wolf shifter baby?

Being able to make smores in the microwave and use a pancake pen didn't count.

I lay awake beside Reg in the early hours of the morning, going over what I'd learned about shifters from being mated to one.

There was breathing room because their beast didn't appear until adolescence. But I couldn't bring up our little one as a human. They had to know who they were. Whether they were shifter or human, they would have shifter blood and a shifter alpha dad. They'd belong to a pack.

I brushed away unshed tears as I thought of my mate and child shifting—assuming the baby had a wolf inside them—and leaving me behind, worrying that something might happen while they were in their fur.

Never being able to experience that would set me apart. The teen years were difficult enough with raging hormones. But to experience them with a parent who would never understand what it was like being a shifter might create a barrier between us.

“You're worrying.” Reg rolled toward me and slung an arm over my belly.

“Am not. I just can't sleep.”

“Banks!”

Damn. Reg sensed when I was upset, and I suspected his wolf gave him secret squirrel powers. I really wished I could give his beast a talking to and urge him to turn over that super power.

“Okay. I fibbed.” I placed my hand over his. “I won’t be a good father to this baby because I’m human.”

Reg wrapped a leg over me. “People adopt babies and they have no common DNA and love them as if they came from their own body.”

“That’s not the same.”

“What I’m trying to say is the one trait every child needs is love. The rest will follow. And we will both make mistakes. That’s part of being a parent.”

“Well, this dad is going to fuck up more than most.” I couldn’t pretend to know what it was like to have a wolf inside me.

“You’ve given presentations at work.”

That was a huge switcheroo from discussing me as a parent.

“When standing in front of a group of people, are you supposed to know all the answers?”

Oh, I could see how his mind was working.

“We’ve talked about this. One of my mentors at college always drummed into us that we didn’t need to know everything.” People were terrified when presenting that

they'd be asked a question they didn't know how to respond to. But as long as you were well prepared in your subject area, sometimes an answer could come from your audience.

“That's like parenting. You might have to ask me, or look up something online, ask a question in a dads' group, or call the pediatrician.”

Reg made it sound so simple, but I'd rather give a thousand presentations as my palms ran with sweat and my knees knocked together than be feeling the way I did now.

“Perhaps seeing the baby and hearing their heartbeat might set your mind at ease.”

I was looking forward to our first ultrasound with the shifter midwife, but while the thump thump thump of the baby's heart would reassure me they were healthy, it wouldn't answer the big question: how could I parent a shifter?

Expecting the shifter midwife's office to be in the countryside on their pack land, I was surprised when Reg pulled up to a modern building with ten floors.

“Are you sure this is it?” I craned my neck, checking out the gleaming white exterior.

“That's what it says.” He showed me the location on his phone.

The office was similar to any healthcare facility I'd visited which was reassuring. I'd sort of anticipated a place with animal statues and murals of forests and shifter ancestors.

We filled in the obligatory forms, but my name was called before I completed the questions I'd been umming and ahing about.

Cynthia, the midwife, greeted us. She was warm and friendly, and we chatted about how long we'd been together.

"I'm sure you have questions about shifter pregnancies."

"I've been reassuring him that he'll be a great dad," Reg blurted out.

And there it was, my insecurities laid bare. I hadn't expected to get into that. We were here so the midwife could measure the baby, check the heartbeat, and make sure the pregnancy was progressing as it should be.

"Every parent-to-be worries they won't be a good dad or mom."

"But I'm human. How can I expect to know what's going on in my child's head?"

Cynthia smiled. "You're not female either, but I'm sure you could be a girl dad."

That kinda floored me.

"I can put you in touch with other shifter-human couples. Talking to them might relieve your concerns."

"Thank you."

Cynthia had me lie on the examination table and pull up my shirt. I'd been preparing for the cold gel on my belly, but Cynthia warmed it up. Reg and I had been poring over ultrasound images online so we knew what to expect.

But I was wrong. We both were. The grainy images were just that; a moving blob, but when the heartbeat resonated from the machine and the pounding filled the room, I became more protective of our little one than I had been.

My fears didn't evaporate, but this baby was inside me, growing in my belly. I was keeping our little one safe while I nurtured them.

Reg was right. I clung to his hand and sniffed, not wanting to cry, but Cynthia handed me a box of tissues and both my mate and I grabbed a bunch.

"Our baby, Reg."

"I know," he choked out.

Cynthia measured the baby and said they were growing well and the heartbeat was strong. She left us alone with the image she printed out.

"We can do this." I sat up and rested my head on Reg's chest.

"I was never in any doubt, my darling."

22

REG

It was Saturday morning and I'd woken early. I'd been taking off most weekends to spend them with Banks, and now that I had the new assistant manager, it was rare that I had to go in. Everyone at work understood that family came first, and I appreciated it.

As I poured my morning coffee, I noticed that the pile of baby catalogs on the counter had grown significantly. Before Banks signed up for an online baby registry, I'd assumed all baby marketing would be online, like everything else seemed to be. And then he got the first postcard, then a flier, and now? Now it appeared that good old-fashioned catalogs were all the rage in the baby world.

As I flipped through them, I realized my mate had circled not one, not two, but what seemed like a thousand different items. It wasn't that he wanted everything he circled—if he did, I'd figure out a way to make it happen. No, he was circling anything that caught his eye, marking it to look back at later. My guess was that he was trying to make decisions but was paralyzed by wanting everything to be perfect. I knew this was partly the pregnancy hormones talking—emotions and instincts were strange like that—but also, he had that edge to his personality. This was just that amplified, and I wanted to make it easier for him.

As I whipped up French toast, his craving of the week, I brainstormed a plan. Then it hit me: The Baby Expo. It wasn't just any shopping trip, it was an experience. At least that's what the flier that came said. We could make it an overnight trip to the

city and tomorrow attend “The World’s Largest Baby Expo.” Was it really the largest? Who knew? It didn’t matter. It would have a lot of the items he’d been circling, and seeing them in person might help him sort through his thoughts. Besides, adventure was always fun.

He walked in just as I was plating breakfast, one hand resting on his slightly rounded belly. He still wasn’t showing too much, and if he really wanted to, he could still squeeze into my sweatpants. But he’d recently caved and started wearing paternity pants, and I was relieved—he had to be more comfortable now.

“French toast.” He licked his lips. “You’re the best mate ever.”

“You just like me for my cooking,” I teased.

“No, I like you for your...” He paused, smirking. “Cock, but sure, let’s go with cooking.”

Pregnancy had made him extra flirty—and extra horny—and I wasn’t complaining. It wasn’t like I wanted to keep my hands off him, either. The more his body changed, the hotter he got. There was something about seeing him growing our family that ticked all my buttons.

We ate and chatted about the weather, easing our way into the day, and when he was done, I sprung what I hoped would be the welcome surprise on him. “Pack a bag. We are going away for the night.”

“We’re going to visit the pack?”

“Not this weekend, but we can soon if you want. I had this in mind.” I took out my phone and tapped away for a moment, pulled up the expo’s website, and handed him the screen. “What do you say we get a hotel, go to a nice dinner tonight, and

tomorrow, check this out?”

“A baby expo?” he asked, his interest piqued.

“Yeah. You can talk to people, see new products, maybe bring a notebook to take notes. You know, do the dad thing.”

He grinned. “Oh, I’m definitely bringing a notebook. And for dinner, can we go someplace that serves French toast?”

“Anything you want.” I’d already assumed that was on the menu for dinner and probably lunch as well.

An hour later, we were on the road. The city was perfect this time of year—not too cold, not too hot, with just the right balance of fresh early-summer air. After checking into our hotel, we spent the day wandering the neighborhoods, exploring nooks and crannies, and taking in the sights. And of course, we found a breakfast-all-day hole-in-the-wall for my mate to enjoy his current craving.

By my estimate, he’d be done with French toast in two more days—tops. Then, like clockwork, he’d find a new food to obsess over. Last week, it was egg sandwiches. Before that, pasta. There’d even been a strawberry phase. Pregnancy was undeniably weird.

We had a beautiful day, a sexy night, and the next morning, we headed to the expo after another meal of French toast.

The expo was huge, and we had a blast wandering from booth to booth, entering contests, collecting free samples, and finally narrowing down some decisions for the nursery. He was in his element, taking notes in his trusty notebook, while I enjoyed watching him as he explored all the gear.

On the drive home, he reached over, intertwining his fingers with mine. “Thank you,” he said softly. “For taking me this weekend. It was so nice to spend time with you—and I was definitely helped. I was getting a little obsessive about the nursery. I blame the hormones.”

“No way,” I teased. “Hormones making you act weird? Never.”

“You try having all these hormones racing through you,” he shot back.

“No, thank you. I’ll leave that up to you.”

“Fine, be that way.” He gave my hand a squeeze. “Speaking of hormones... what were you thinking about for dinner? Maybe we could stop for pizza on the way home.”

“No more French toast?”

“Nah,” he said, laughing. “I think I’m good with French toast for a while—or forever.”

I bit back a laugh. He’d burned out a day earlier than I expected. French toast was officially out, and pizza was in.

I couldn’t help but wonder—what would next week’s craving be? Whatever it was, I’d be there ready to make it for him. He was my mate, and he deserved the best of everything.

23

BANKS

“I wish I could join you.” Reg handed me an ice tea as I swayed in the hammock.

It was a beautiful day, and while I wasn’t yet on paternity leave, it was Saturday. The past month I’d been working three days in the office and two at home. Both options gave me what I craved. Being able to work with no interruptions from office chatter allowed me to complete assigned tasks in half the time. But I was energized when surrounded by colleagues and that got my creative juices flowing.

“You could. Ian is prepped and ready to take over.”

My mate put a hand on my belly. “Nah, he’s got his vacation lined up.” The guy needed a holiday before being thrown into managing the restaurant for six weeks while my mate stayed home with me and our newborn.

Reg kissed me on the lips, his unique scent filling my nostrils and turning me on.

“Sure you can’t stay?” I tugged his hand, and he tried to pull away. His strength was superior to mine, and if he’d really wanted to, he could have slipped out of my grasp.

“I’m certain.” He told me the fridge was full and the meals just needed heating up.

“I’ll miss you.” I blew him a kiss, and he “caught it” with both hands.

“Text or call if you need anything.” He disappeared into the house, and moments later, the car started.

I had no plans to move from here other than to eat or pee. My eyes closed as the hammock swung back and forth.

But annoying thoughts interrupted my drowsiness. There were boxes in the spare room we’d never unpacked. Not that they couldn’t stay there, as the nursery was ready and we kept the door closed to that bedroom-slash-storeroom. Out of sight, out of mind. The ridiculous microwave smores device was making fun of me, saying I’d never get around to either using it or tossing it out.

“Forget it. I’m ignoring you and your silly companions.” Reg had never used the citrus sprayer thingy or the baby bottle pancake device. But if we ever had another child, they’d need that room, and battle lines would be drawn.

My mind drifted to the nursery and the pale gray walls we’d painted. But the more I thought about it, the more I didn’t like the gray. Our baby should not be introduced to his world with gray! What had we been thinking when we decided on that boring-ass color?

Heaving me and my belly out of the hammock—which was quite an effort—I traipsed into the nursery and sat on the sofa. Blech. The gray was so dreary, and I had to do something about it.

At this stage of my pregnancy, I couldn’t climb a ladder, and as I wasn’t prepared to endanger myself or our child, I’d paint what I could, and poor Reg would have to finish the upper sections on his day off.

Or it might never be complete and our child would grow up believing that was how walls were supposed to be.

A quick trip to the hardware store became an hour with me agonizing over a yellow, a green, and a lilac. While I didn't want to interrupt Reg at work, I sent him screenshots of the three colors.

Take no longer than three seconds and tell me which color you prefer .

Lilac.

That was quick. I'd been leaning toward that color, as it was softer, more restful than the other two.

What are you doing?

Damn! Now I had to respond. Just thinking of color schemes .

Don't do anything silly .

I won't .

Back home, I rolled out plastic sheeting to protect the floor and got to work with a roller. But after one sweep over the wall, I stood back and studied the color. I approved, but as I turned around, doing a three sixty, I had doubts about doing all four walls the same color.

Hmmm. Maybe white on three walls and the lilac on one. I should have bought white paint, but which one? There were so many different shades of white. Maybe three gray and one lilac would do for now, and when we were both on paternity leave, we could paint the three white ones.

Good plan. I didn't have as much energy as I thought.

And I couldn't do the top section. Shit, I should have bought a paint roller extension pole.

Okay, back to the hardware store to buy that long-handled thingy, and when I returned home, I was pooped and took a nap. When I woke, it was almost dark and that one nursery wall appeared much larger than it had in the daylight.

I sank into the rocking chair. That one splash of lilac paint I'd made with the roller was pretty small, but it snaked to the right and was about head height. I couldn't hide it behind any furniture.

But we had the original gray paint tins in the room that could not be named. With a clean roller, I covered up the splash of lilac and removed the plastic sheeting. With the little energy remaining, I washed the rollers and paint trays.

My belly rumbled as I finished up. Just in time to heat up dinner and watch TV.

I must have fallen asleep on the couch because a kiss on the cheek and a hand on my belly had me opening my eyes.

"Is it morning?"

"No, babe. But it's late. Let's get you to bed."

I needed a shower, but I was too tired.

"I kinda expected to arrive home and find the nursery painted lilac." He grinned as he helped me into bed.

"What? No. That would be a heap of work, and I doubt I could do it on my own. Besides, who would paint the upper part of the walls?"

“Mmmm, I wonder who.” He brushed my face with his thumb. “Strange that you have lilac paint on your cheek and there’s a roller extension pole in the spare room.”

“Odd. Wonder where they came from?”

24

REG

When Banks said he wanted to have the baby on pack lands, I was a bit confused. He was human. Humans usually gave birth in hospitals. It was what they knew. It was what they were familiar with, and I expected that to be his plan. We hadn't specifically discussed it, but all the people he saw for prenatal visits were connected to the hospital, so it was an easy assumption to make.

Then, suddenly, one night, in the middle of the night, he woke me up and said he wanted our daughter to be born on the land of my family. I thought he was half-dreaming and told him, absolutely, whatever he wanted. I loved the idea, but I'd never hold someone to a sleepy mumbling.

But the next morning, he came home shortly before lunch, letting me know he'd officially begun his paternity leave and that he'd be ready to leave in an hour. When he woke me up, he hadn't been talking in hypotheticals or a dream-like stupor—he meant it. He wanted our baby born on pack lands. My wolf was down with that.

And just like that, we were doing this.

I called my parents, who were thrilled we were coming, and they promised to get one of the cabins ready for us to stay in. We packed up the car and headed home to my birthplace.

The restaurant would be fine without me, and they were thrilled when I called them

en route to let them know I was officially starting paternity leave. If they needed anything, they could call me—but they wouldn't need to. They had this. It wasn't like on Valentine's Day, where we were short-staffed with people calling in sick or injured while simultaneously being swamped. It was just normal, everyday restaurant time, and they were doing fantastic.

We were greeted as soon as we pulled into the pack lands, not only by my family but by the pack healer, the pack midwife, and a bunch of the omegas Banks had made friends with since we mated. All of them were excited about our baby.

"Alpha is having a pack run just for you tonight," my brother said.

"Just for me?" Banks held his hands on his belly. "Or do you mean for this little one?"

"Fine, for that little one." She was already stealing the show, and she wasn't even born yet.

"As it should be." Banks leaned into my side. "As it should be."

The pack run was different from the first he attended in many ways. The temperature was getting colder, and we were going to use the community building afterward for our feast as well as a warm place for people to get undressed before the run. Had any human stumbled upon us, seeing all the grown-ups shedding their clothes and walking out one by one, oh, what they would have thought. But the only human here was my mate, and he'd gotten used to it.

I didn't like leaving him and made him promise to call out if he needed me. My omega dad was there with him, assuring me they would stay with him and come get me if needed. It was a good plan, but not ideal. Being by his side every waking hour was, but my mate was far too independent for that.

Technically, we still had three weeks until the baby was due, but the midwife he normally saw had reminded us at every appointment that babies came when they decided, not on our schedule. That had been drilled into me so much that I was worried he would give birth any second. He wasn't. There would be signs. Right?

I ran with Father, the Alpha, and the pack. We went hunting and took down a deer. There was something about sharing a kill with your pack that sated our wolves. I felled a rabbit, also, to bring back to my mate. The first time I'd done that, he was not impressed, but now he appreciated it for the gesture it was. Thanks to Dad's skills with fur, he now had a nice collection of pelts he planned to turn into something soft and wonderful when he collected enough.

Of course, we cooked up the rabbit. At first, he wasn't sure if he wanted it, but after he tasted my stew, he told me I could officially make anything taste good. Rabbit did taste good, but I took the compliment for what it was.

On my way back to the feast, I deposited the rabbit on the steps of the cabin we were staying in and went back to the party—which was what it was. There were baby gifts on the table and cake. I didn't know how my parents and the pack knew we'd be here, but something gave them the hint, because this wasn't thrown together at the last second.

"Did you have a good time?" I stood behind my mate, resting my hands on his belly, hoping our little one would decide to kick me. She didn't, but that was okay. The midwife had said babies moved less often near the end because they ran out of room, and she was definitely running out of room. My mate was nearly out of his paternity clothes at this point, which was fine. If he had to walk around naked, there would be no complaints from me.

"It's nicer now that you are here." He leaned back into my touch.

“Want some cake?” It looked delicious.

He scrunched up his nose. “I don’t. That’s weird, right?” It was only weird because he’d had a sweet tooth lately. But like all his cravings had been, that was fleeting.

“We can save it for later,” I offered, not wanting the people who put this together to think he didn’t love it. I might be the one eating it, but I’d be fine with that.

“Yeah, let’s do that.”

It was pretty quiet after that. We opened gifts and talked to different pack members. I wanted to ask him if something was wrong, but there was never a private enough moment that wouldn’t draw attention to him. As soon as we were able, I excused us, saying he was tired.

We barely had the door shut to the cabin when he told me. “So, I probably should have mentioned this, but I’m pretty sure I’m in labor.”

That had caught me off guard. “Since when?”

“Since I came home this morning and said we should get to the pack lands.”

“And you didn’t think that was need-to-know information?” Because I sure did.

“I wanted to get here and not make a pitstop at the hospital.” Which was exactly what I’d have done.

“Fair enough.” I took both his hands in mine. “Now what do we do? What do I do? Shouldn’t you be doing the breathing?” It was one thing to know this was all coming. It wasn’t like the baby could stay in there forever. But now that it was go time, my brain went blank.

He rolled his eyes. “Did you pay attention in class at all?”

“Yes?” It came out more like a question than I meant. I had, but all of that fell away somewhere along the way.

“Now, my sexy alpha, we wait. Why don’t you go get the midwife and the healer? They both promised to be here, and we’ll figure it out from there.”

“I don’t want to leave you.” And my wolf liked it even less.

“Well, you have to.” He pointed toward the door.

I wanted to stay and argue, but the longer it took me to get them, the greater the odds that I’d be there too late. I bolted out the door, needing to get back as soon as possible.

It took me a while to find the healer, and when I came back, the midwife was already there with my mate. Before, he’d just looked quiet, but now I could tell he was in pain.

“Is it me, or is this progressing really quickly?”

The midwife looked back at me. “It’s not you. You have a stubborn mate who didn’t want to ruin a party.”

Banks half-shrugged, and I couldn’t even be mad. I’d probably have done the same thing.

The first half hour was fairly uneventful. Still... more than anything, I wanted to take his pain as he dealt with labor. We hadn’t even gotten to the “bad” part and he was miserable. Maybe a hospital would’ve been better. At least there they had epidurals.

Each few minutes seemed worse than the ones before, and I did what I could to comfort him, trying to hide my fear as best I could. If anything happened to him, I wasn't sure I'd be able to handle it. But he had both a healer and a midwife here, there was no better care to be had, even if I wished he had some pain relief.

Banks cried out in pain as another contraction ripped through his body.

"Reg, it's coming... the baby is coming now!" he gasped, gripping my hand tightly. "I need to push."

My heart raced with a mix of excitement and fear. I had to stay calm for Banks. "It's okay, my love, just breathe. You're doing great," I reassured him, placing a tender kiss on his sweaty forehead as the midwife and healer told him what to do and how.

I stayed by his side as the midwife positioned themselves between Banks's legs, ready to catch our pup as it emerged. Banks panted and pushed with primal cries, his face flushed and hair plastered to his head. The overwhelming scent of his labor filled the small room.

"I see the head. Keep pushing, you're almost there." The midwife encouraged him from their position. With a final agonized groan, Banks delivered our pup into their waiting hands.

"Reg. It's quiet." He clung to me. "Why is it quiet?"

And then, before I could answer him, the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard filled the air, the sound of our daughter crying.

"You did it, Banks. Our beautiful girl is here," I whispered in awe, tears pricking my eyes.

A minute later, she was placed in our arms, and I watched Banks cradle our child, an utterly exhausted but blissful smile on his face.

“She’s beautiful, Reg. So beautiful.”

“She’s you, my love.” I climbed into bed beside him. There were things to clean up, people to tell, and I didn’t know all what the healer needed to do to help my mate heal without a wolf, but that was all on hold.

For the next few minutes, it was just my mate and I enjoying the first few minutes with our daughter, Patsy. Life couldn’t get much better than this.

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 11:08 am

One year! Hard to believe it had been twelve months since Reg and I met.

Despite him having Ian as an assistant manager, my mate couldn't take the night off, not on one of the busiest nights of the year.

If we didn't have Patsy, I would have recreated our meeting with me washing dishes in the restaurant kitchen, but I insisted that the three of us were together. We compromised by agreeing our daughter and I could have dinner at Sizzle and Chill.

Not that Patsy was eating restaurant food yet. And because the place would be full of paying customers, we'd have a small table at the back, just where I'd imagined Reg was sitting that first night.

My mate was taking a break for thirty minutes to eat with me. But I arrived just as the place opened, in line with the retirees and other early birds. Patsy was asleep, and because the restaurant wasn't busy, we had a table near the window with plenty of space for the stroller.

"What do you want?" Reg came out with a menu which I didn't bother to look at.

"Something that we can't do in the restaurant." I stifled a giggle, not wanting the other customers to stare.

"Banks, don't do that." Reg fake glared at me, but I wasn't stopping.

"I'm famished, and I really need to eat." I snapped my teeth together and licked around my mouth.

My mate's eyes widened, and he pressed his lips together, a sign he was willing his arousal to tamp it down.

“What's good to eat here?” I grinned, the same smile I plastered on my face as when I was horny.

Reg gulped. “I've heard the linguine is excellent.” He took a deep breath before cleaning his throat. “With clams.”

“Perfect.”

Reg held the menu in front of his crotch as he staggered toward the kitchen. Gods, his cock was so huge I hoped he'd still be up for some evening delight when he got home.

“I'll have what he's having.” The guy at the next table jerked his head at me as he spoke to the server.

“I can recommend it.”

“If it puts a smile on my face similar to yours, I'll come here every night.” He squeezed his companion's hand.

The food would be delicious, but unless he had a Reg in his bed tonight—which he wouldn't—his evening wouldn't be as good as mine.

Patsy woke, and I fed her with a muslin cloth over my shoulder. One of my office colleagues told me a story of how she was at the hairdresser when her newborn woke and needed to eat. She'd had one of these long cloths with her so was able to feed the baby while having her hair done. And now I never went anywhere without one.

“May I join you?” Reg arrived with a server who placed our food on the table and

left. “You’re never more beautiful than when feeding our daughter.” He took my hand and kissed it.

Damn! I was prepared for more eating jokes, but now I gulped back tears. Not quite good enough apparently, as some slid over my cheeks and plopped onto Patsy.

“Babe, it wasn’t my intention to make you cry.” He dabbed at my tears with a napkin.

“I’m happy, love.” I gave Patsy to him, and he patted her back while I took a mouthful of pasta. “So yummy.”

“As good as last Valentine’s Day?”

“The food? Even better, the night will blow my mind because I slept alone last February 14.”

“Me too.”

“And we weren’t parents.” So much had happened in a year.

I wished Patsy and I could stay here until my mate was done or that he could come home with us, but he wouldn’t be finished for hours.

When we’d eaten dinner, I told him I should get Patsy home, but he took the stroller and pushed it toward the storeroom. Memories came flooding back of me imagining him taking me in that room.

Much as I wanted my mate naked and inside me, I wasn't going to put Patsy in there while we rolled around on the floor or the old sofa.

But when he opened the door, the room had been transformed. It was now an office and another larger space was the store room. Reg left a sleeping Patsy in the stroller

and held up his phone with the baby monitor app.

“Where are we going?” He dragged me out the door.

“You told me this morning you wanted to recreate our meeting, so I thought you might like to get wet and dirty and wash dishes.”

I hugged him and peppered kisses over his face.

“I’d like nothing better than to get wet all over.” I wriggled my ass and headed for the kitchen, but not before my mate grunted. I giggled, knowing what I was doing to him.

“It’s our favorite dishwasher.” Ian bowed and so did Chef and the rest of the staff.

They were very generous considering I only performed the job once a year.

The night passed in a blur of me scrubbing pots lined with baked-on cheese and burned potatoes. Patsy slept the entire time, and I joked to Reg that we should come to the restaurant more often.

“Or...” My mate snuck up behind me.

Goosebumps pranced over my sweat-soaked skin as I waited for Reg to tell me what followed “or.”

“We could pretend we’re meeting for the first time on a blind date. That was what led you here last year.”

“Okay. But not here.” Though it was late and everything was winding down, I wasn’t about to wait until the restaurant closed. And I was filthy and exhausted.

“And not tonight.” Reg yawned. “But tomorrow we could role-play after Patsy goes

to bed.”

“I can’t wait.” We shared a kiss as I held my gloved hands out to the side.

“Looking forward to it.” He patted my butt and shimmied across the kitchen, his gorgeous ass swaying seductively.

Hmmm, on second thought, a shower would wake me up. Maybe we could do our blind date role play when we got home.

“I know what you’re thinking,” Reg whispered over his shoulder. “And I agree.”

Sometimes the wrong number is the exact one you need.

When my favorite tree is hit by lightning and falls on my house, I remove it from my favorite list. Now my roof is leaking and there aren’t enough buckets and bowls to catch all the water. I call my cousin’s handyman, and leave a message. Please let them work weekends.

When an alpha shows up at my door saying I phoned them, I’m confused. They don’t know my cousin and aren’t even a handyman. When they show me their phone, I discover my mistake: I misdialed.

He offers to stay, to help me with the job at hand. If the house was the only job I wanted from him.

Wrong Number, Right Lion is a sweet with knotty heat MM Mpreg romance featuring an omega who nearly loses their home, the alpha lion who roars in to save the day, the wrong number that brings the two together, a dog who decides he likes cats after all, true love, fated mates, an adorable baby, and a happy ever after.