



**B.A. STRETKE**

# **DOMINATING THE WOLF**

**BAY HARBOR WOLVES**

**VOL. 8**

Dominating The Wolf  
Bay Harbor Wolves Book 8

B.A. Stretke

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# CHAPTER ONE

Chris tried to open his eyes, but they wouldn't respond. All he could see was darkness. His body was also not responding. He could feel the binds on his wrists and ankles, and he could feel the bed beneath him, but his limbs would not move. Whatever Logan had given him this last time had incapacitated him completely.

Panic started to course through him when he heard the basement door open, and someone descended the steps. Logan was back, and he was talking crazy, calling him all manner of horrible, degrading names and telling him the painful things he planned to do to him. How in the hell did he end up like this? They were talking about having dinner in Logan's dining room, and he offered him a lovely glass of red wine, and soon he was in the basement agreeing to things he shouldn't have.

They'd played before just a little light bondage and spanking, nothing too harsh. Chris liked a controlling partner; until now, Logan had been respectful of his boundaries and limits. He thought he knew him well enough to be able to trust him, but the moment he allowed Logan to tie his wrists, everything went south.

Logan became instantly cruel and callous exacting punishments for every perceived offense or error. The game became dreadful and scary, and the fact that no one knew where Chris was raged through his mind.

He was at Logan's mercy; unfortunately, Logan had no mercy. The cuffs and the drugs prevented him from shifting, and now he found that he couldn't even move. Would he survive, and if he did, would he be whole? His chances weren't looking good.

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Eli Marshal was the eldest of five sons of Paula Marshal, the new owner of Paula's Café, a thriving business just off the highway in Eastport. They're a clan of bear shifters who recently moved into the area with the permission of Henrik Vaughn, the Alpha of the local wolf pack, and

Emmanuel Cabot, Master of the local vampire coven. Both the Alpha and the Master ruled the area of Eastport and beyond and welcomed the small familial Clan of bear shifters into their territory.

They'd previously resided in rural Tennessee, but the heat was becoming unbearable, so they decided to relocate further north as a family. Eastport felt right the first time they visited, and then they set about making the place their home.

The other paranormals in the area didn't bother them as a rule, but there were times the boys were called on by the wolf pack to assist in situations where a bear's sensibilities were useful. It was a give-and-take relationship with the wolf pack, and so far, the arrangement had served both communities well.

All the brothers helped out in the Café. Still, the three younger brothers, Beau, Wes, and Hugh, worked primarily with their mother in the Café. The two older, Eli and Dax, also had their own business Marshal Construction. They did renovations, remodels, new builds, roofs, masonry, and most anything construction-related. Beau and Hugh helped them out when they were needed. The family felt settled and secure and were thriving.

It was five o'clock on a Sunday morning, and Eli had volunteered to open the Café and get the coffee started and the grill heating. They opened at seven every morning except Sunday, and on Sunday, they opened at six. Paula would arrive at five-thirty while Hugh and Wes, who together handled the kitchen, arrived at six. Eli would have the place revved up and ready to go by the time they arrived.

He and Dax were scheduled to meet with a potential client to discuss timing and costs later in the afternoon, but he was free all morning, so he decided to help out with the Café. Their mother was not getting any younger, but she refused to stop working or to even simply slow down a little, so they all helped out and tried to lessen her burden whenever possible.

He'd just finished arranging the chairs around the tables and at the counter when he saw Edward at the door.

They weren't open yet, but he had a look about him that indicated his visit had nothing to do with coffee or breakfast. Eli went to the front door, unlocked it, and let Edward in before relocking it. Edward walked over and took a seat at the counter while Eli poured him a cup of coffee.

Edward was a wolf shifter and lived at the Bay Harbor Pack House. He was the Pack House manager and took care of everyone living there. He was a good man with a big heart. They'd met at the Café about a year ago, and although they weren't close friends, they were on good and friendly terms.

"What can I do for you, Edward?" It was obvious he needed help but also obvious he was having difficulty spelling it out. He took a sip of his coffee and looked up at Eli.

"I need your help."

"You got it." He respected the older wolf and would gladly lend a hand with whatever he needed.

"It's complicated."

"Explain it to me." Eli leaned his arms on the counter and gave Edward his undivided attention. Whatever was going on, it was eating the man up. Edward closed his eyes for a few seconds and then, with a heartfelt sigh, began to explain.

"Do you know Christopher McShane?" He asked, and Eli shook his head. "He and his parents came to the pack a little over a year ago. He's a landscape architect, and his parents run one of the hardware stores downtown. Chris and I are friends, and he's done some impressive work on the grounds of the Pack House. I've gotten to know Chris quite well, and he trusts me." Edward was dancing around the subject, but Eli stayed quiet and let him go at his own speed.

"He has shared a lot with me since he and his father do not get along for many reasons." Edward stopped and took another sip of his coffee. "What I'm going to tell you must remain between us. It is Chris' business, and I wouldn't be sharing it if I didn't fear for his safety."

"I understand," Eli swore his silence and waited for Edward to continue.

“Chris has a tendency to gravitate toward dominant partners, and in the past, he has made some very unwise and unhealthy choices. He has been seeing someone recently, and it is obvious to me that the man has been abusing him.” Edward paused, probably wondering how much to share.

“He had made plans with this man for Thursday night and was supposed to meet me Saturday afternoon to discuss the placement of the garden walls that Henrik had requested. Chris never showed, and I have been unable to contact him.” Edward was genuinely worried.

“Do you know where the man lives?”

“Yes, I went there last night, but he denies that Chris is there. I know that he is there. Chris and I are close enough that I know his scent, and it was all over that house. The boyfriend is Logan Franks, a cougar shifter. I need someone to get Chris away from there before that maniac kills him.” Edward’s calm control broke for a moment, and Eli saw his fear.

“Give me the address, and I’ll take care of it,” Eli stated straight away, he would get the young wolf out of there, and no asshole cougar shifter would stop him.

“Thank you, Eli; I wouldn’t have asked, except I didn’t want to embarrass Chris, so it needed to be someone not connected to the pack or Chris’ family. His privacy is important, and his father can never know. Leonard McShane is neither a tolerant nor forgiving man.” Edward handed him the paper with the address written on it. It was a residential area on the south side.

When Paula walked in, Eli explained that he had to leave but would call her later and asked her to top up Edward’s coffee. Paula poured the coffee, pulled out a pie from the fridge, and cut him a piece. “You go ahead, Eli, and I’ll take care of Edward.” She said with her usual smile. Edward was in good hands.

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Eli quickly jumped into his truck and headed to the south side. There was plenty that Edward hadn’t told him but



shared just enough to paint the scene and make the danger clear. Chris McShane liked to play with fire, and if he were reading the situation correctly, it would seem that he got burned in the process more often than not.

He pulled into the driveway behind a black SUV. The car and the exterior of the home and grounds were well cared for. All indications were that the resident was upper middle class.

His neighbor's homes were similar and situated close enough to hear trouble if it were to erupt. Logan Franks probably did not wish to be the focus of controversy and gossip among his neighbors, so with that figured out, Eli decided he'd enter loudly and with purpose putting the guy on edge right from the get-go.

Eli bounded up the steps to the front door and began pounding with the flat of his fist, demanding entrance. It wasn't long before a tall blonde muscled individual answered the door wearing a pissed-off expression.

"What the hell do you want?" He asked through a clenched jaw while his eyes took Eli's measure.

"I want the wolf," Eli stated clearly and loudly. Logan took a half step back and squinted his eyes in that pretense of not understanding. Eli had, had enough. It was Sunday morning, and he had a full day ahead of him with little time left to play games with this joker. He hit the man square in the chest, knocking him backward and away from the door. Eli then stepped inside and closed the door.

The cougar tried to grab him, but Eli hit him with a right hook connecting with the guy's jaw and knocking him back again. He looked tough but wasn't presenting as such. "He's mine." The cougar righted himself and puffed out his chest, but there was uncertainty in his eyes.

"Where is he?" Eli pinned him with a threatening gaze and waited with his fists balled and his shoulders out and ready. The stance told him what to expect if he continued to stall or lied. Eli knew that Chris was nearby. The scent of wolf filled the house, and so did his panic and pain. The essence of

the man was everywhere and was beginning to sink into Eli's mind affecting his thoughts and emotions and turning his desire to find Chris into a slow, burning rage.

"The basement," Logan stated and took a step toward Eli, feigning a challenge. Eli did not hesitate and swung, hitting the guy square in the face bloodying his nose and splitting his lip. The cougar surged to the surface at the assault forcing a shift to defend the man, but Eli's bear soon had it cowering in a corner. Logan regained control of his cougar, shifted back, and then moved to the far side of the room.

"Take him; I don't care. He's useless and pathetic." Eli turned his back on the man without comment. He wasn't worth a response. Eli moved quickly over to the door beneath the stairway. He wasn't sure how he knew this was the basement, but he knew.

With one tug, he tore the door off its hinges and tossed it toward the kitchen that was to his left. Eli hadn't meant to react so strongly, but his bear had no tolerance for whatever was happening here, and he demanded that they reach the wolf quickly.

The scent that overwhelmed him the moment he began to descend the stairs to the basement made his bear's eagerness to save the wolf perfectly clear, and his anger surged with this new awareness. He felt his insides clench and knot up with each step he took as the growing importance of his mission solidified his determination to find the wolf and get him to safety. This was turning into much more than a simple rescue mission.

The basement was dark, but he could clearly see the thin figure stretched out face down on a wooden plank, naked and abused, chained in place to make shifting impossible in what looked like a crude dungeon. It was a rough-looking malignant space filled with darkness and cruelty.

This was not dominance or the act of letting go. This was not the equality the lifestyle was built upon. This was straight-up abuse and torture for the gratification of one.

Whatever Chris was looking for, he was not going to find it here.

Eli pushed from his mind the rage and fury over what he was looking at in order to keep his mind on the needs of the helpless wolf. He was barely conscious and unaware that Eli was in the room with him. The smells coming off him made it clear that he'd been drugged with substances strong enough to render a shifter insensible. Such things were not readily accessible and something Eli would look into later after his mate was safe.

Eli pushed his bear down as he broke the cuffs and found a blanket to wrap Chris in. He was covered in wounds in varying degrees of healing which showed he'd been abused repeatedly over the past few days. This was another revelation that had his bear surging to the surface and demanding blood for the deplorable treatment of his mate.

Eli was on board with that idea, but the cougar had left and ran away, no doubt, after he realized he was coming up against a bear. He was fine brutalizing a young wolf half his size but chickened out when he was faced with someone his own size.

What worried Eli was that his mate was there voluntarily. Was this the type of relationship Chris was looking for, or was this a terrible mistake? Eli had no problem being the dominant, but he would not hurt his mate. He again pushed the arrant thoughts from his mind and focused on Chris. All his questions would be answered later.

Right now, he needed to see to his mate's needs and get him out of this place. He saw clothes and personal items tossed on a side table and assumed they belonged to Chris, so he gathered them up along with a thin blanket that he found in a cupboard. Carefully he rolled his mate to one side, placing the blanket beneath him, and then rolled him back, being watchful of the wounds on his back, arms, and legs.

He bent down, pushed the light brown hair back from Chris' face, and spoke near his ear in hopes that he would hear and not be frightened. His heart was breaking for the man and

for himself. “My name is Eli ... Edward sent me to get you. I’m going to pick you up and carry you to my truck. I’ll try not to hurt you ... I’ll do my best, sweetheart ... I promise.”

Chris struggled to speak, but he could only gasp and try to clutch Eli’s arm. He had no strength, and his eyes remained closed. The panic the wolf was feeling washed over Eli, and his helplessness gripped Eli’s heart. “I’ll keep you safe.” He told him and then added. “I’ll take you to my place, and you can recover there. No one will see you.” He knew that fear of others seeing his embarrassment threw him into a panic, so Eli wanted to take that fear away.

Eli wrapped the blanket tightly around him, tucking his things into the folds to keep them secure, and with one arm under Chris’ upper back and the other at his knees, Eli lifted the limp, nearly lifeless little man into his arms.

The sudden rush of feelings that bombarded him had Eli pausing and closing his eyes. Having Christopher in his arms sent his bear into a brief euphoria, and the need to protect was overpowering, engulfing his mind and giving him a single focus.

Eli quickly mounted the stairs with his mate wrapped up in a blanket and tucked in his arms. When he reached the main floor, it was obvious the cougar had taken off, which was just as well. If the bastard had been nearby, Eli would have finished him for the shocking treatment of his mate. He would deal with the cougar later. Right now, he needed to care for his suffering mate.

## CHAPTER TWO

Chris tried to open his eyes, but it was impossible to lift his eyelids any more than a sliver. Whatever Logan had shot into his veins last night had really fucked him up. He'd told him no and even begged, but that had gotten him nowhere. Logan had wanted to fuck him up, so he did, and Chris' opinion on the matter was inconsequential.

He'd planned on one evening and then agreed to spend the night, but Logan refused to release him and kept him cuffed in that horrible basement of his. Logan bragged that he had a cutting-edge dungeon set up but what he had was maybe cutting edge a hundred and fifty years ago. It was nightmarish rough, and dark, and more than once, Chris had feared for his life while taking the beatings Logan had dished out.

Then, as if the nightmare could not get any worse, the most handsome man he'd ever seen walked in. Even with limited vision, the effect of this man's presence was powerful. The man was there to save him from his own idiocy. The unbelievable embarrassment just kept coming.

Chris had expected judgment and condemnation, if even by tone and deed, but instead, he got a concerned expression and, unfortunately, pity ... yes, a heavy dose of pity from his savior. Chris stopped trying to open his eyes, for it was too painful to see what his life had been reduced to. He wanted the earth to open up and swallow him take him away from this degradation.

His name was Eli, and he spoke to him in a calm and reassuring tone. His touch gave Chris a sense of peace and security that he did not understand but cherished in the moment. He felt himself being wrapped and carried as Eli told him he would take him home to recover.

The thought of his family or pack seeing him in this condition sent a jolt of fear through him, but Eli assured him that no one would see and he could recover at his place. Chris hoped he was being honest, but there was nothing he could do about it. He was at Eli's mercy. Chris tried to speak, but the

drugs were still too heavy in his system, and moving was also an impossibility.

He felt himself carried outside and placed into a vehicle. Chris wondered fleetingly what had happened to Logan, but he didn't really care. The last two days had been the worst of his life, and he never wanted to cross paths with Logan, the cougar shifter, ever again.

Eli sat close, pulling him over so that his head rested on Eli's thigh and his hand rested on Chris' shoulder. He felt safe and protected and allowed himself to drift off, trusting that Eli would not betray him. The man smelled so good he took a deep breath and drifted off.

...

Eli held Chris close, still cocooned in the blanket, with his head on Eli's thigh. It was where he wanted to keep him. The realization that he'd just rescued his mate settled into his mind slowly. The fact that the cougar still walked and breathed did not sit well. He deserved more than the few punches Eli had delivered; he deserved to feel the pain that he'd dished out to Chris, along with the fear and the torment. Eli promised his bear that they would revisit the cougar and set things to right.

He felt Chris stir beneath his hand and then settle back, his distress swelling, heaving, and then going quiet. He had a long way to go with his new mate, but he would do whatever was necessary to heal and make him whole mentally and physically once again. The turmoil that plagued his mate's soul was making its way to Eli. His messed-up feelings and confusion invaded his own thoughts.

"It's going to be okay, Christopher." Eli tried to assure his frightened mate but knew he was falling short. Chris didn't know him or understand his level of determination, so his words were probably a comfort but not a promise. "I live alone, but my family, my mother, and four brothers live close by. We're a bear clan, and you're welcome. I will help you heal, Chris. Lean on me."

Eli wasn't sure if Chris could hear him, but he wanted him to get used to his voice, so he continued talking calmly

and even about his family, his business, the restaurant, his mother, and anything that would help Chris feel connected to what Eli hoped was to become Chris' eventual home.

The tension in the truck seemed to lessen, and the stiffness in Chris' body began to release. He was hearing him on some level and relaxing, which gave Eli hope that the process of getting him to shift and cleansing his body of the substance might be easier than anticipated.

Eli would talk him through it, and once shifted, his wolf would take over and heal and cleanse his system. His mate would be well in a few hours. But that was just the physical; how he was affected mentally and emotionally still remained to be seen. It didn't matter; Eli would see him through and be there for whatever he needed for however long he needed it.

The fact that Chris was his mate was sinking in, and with it came profound happiness. Knowing that his forever was in the truck with him leaning on him and that he was able to be there for Chris when he needed him the most eased the burning pain he felt at finding his mate in such a situation.

Seeing him like that had been devastating, and his bear wanted to rage to kill the cougar and destroy everything he represented. Eli had never felt such a level of pure frenzied fury, and even now, with his mate safe, he still had the urge to explode.

He wasn't going to try and second guess Fate's timing, but he would have preferred meeting Chris before he was taken in by that piece of shit cougar shifter. Three days sooner, Chris would have been spared that pain and suffering, but it wasn't for him to question Fate's plan. He was there now to protect and defend, and Chris would never suffer such degradation again.

The Café was situated not far from the main farmhouse, separated by a lawn and a parking lot. His home, a one-floor ranch house, was on the opposite side of the farmhouse, about one hundred yards away and set back. His driveway snaked behind the house to the garage, and he

parked on the other side of the garage, hoping to hide his mate's condition from any onlookers in the farmhouse or Café.

His backdoor was close by, so in one fluid motion, he slid out, grabbed Chris, and held him secure in his arms as he quickly went from the truck to the house. He was inside in seconds and immediately took Chris to his bedroom and closed the door. For some reason, he felt the need to keep all prying eyes away until Chris was awake and could make his own wishes clear.

Eli laid him out with care upon his large bed. It was much larger than any standard bed since bears needed a lot of room. Chris looked even smaller and more defenseless and vulnerable there in that huge bed. He stood and stared for several minutes, taking it all in and committing himself to this small, defenseless man.

“I'm going to remove the blanket and give you a sponge bath.” He talked to his mate, explaining his actions as he went about caring for the man. Eli needed to get the stench of that place off his mate, but Chris was in no condition to handle a bath or shower on his own.

In the bright light of day through his windows, it was much easier to see the extent of Chris' injuries than when he first saw them in that dark basement. His wrists and ankles were seriously messed up from the restraints, and his attempts at escape the picture that came to mind had Eli's bear seething with hatred all over again. He should have killed the cougar when he had the chance; letting him go did neither of them any favors. Eli swallowed his rage and continued to tend to his mate.

He spent the next half hour bathing his mate with a basin of sudsy water and a soft cloth. The wounds tore at his heart, but he kept his mind on the job, get him cleaned and comfortable, and then he'd let his bear connect with the wolf and push for Chris to shift.

Chris wouldn't heal properly until he shifted, and it shouldn't take long since, from what he could determine, the injuries were plentiful but superficial, with no breaks or



internal damages. Chris' face was covered in bruises, but his beauty did not dim, for the man beneath the marks was gorgeous. Eli looked forward to seeing the man beneath all of this torment.

"I'm going to lift you up and turn you over so I can see to the wounds on your back." He told him and picked him up in his arms, and held him for a few seconds before lying him down on his stomach. When finished, he returned the basin and cloth to the attached bath and returned to remove the blanket and dispose of it. He planned to burn it, not wanting anything there that would remind him or his mate of that basement and that wretched man.

"You're clean and in a fresh bed and surrounded by sunlight, my love. It is time that you shift and heal yourself." Eli pushed the dark curls away from Chris' face and gently kissed his lips. There was a slight reaction to the kiss, so he did it again and repeated his request for Chris to shift.

Eli pushed his bear forward, and together they got the message across, and slowly Chris began to stretch and shifted into the most beautiful chocolate-colored wolf. Still, he remained unconscious, but the healing would begin.

Eli moved to the living room to make a few calls but left the door open in case his mate needed him. There were a few people who needed to be updated. His bear bristled a little at leaving the bedroom and not having eyes on Chris. The threat was still real, in his bear's opinion.

"He's here with me, Edward." Eli began. "He has shifted but is still unconscious, and I trust he will heal soon." Edward was still at the Café, and he asked about seeing him, but Eli put him off, promising to have Chris call him once he is able. Edward trusted him enough not to pursue it further.

Eli answered his questions without getting too much into Chris' personal business, although Edward already had an idea of what Chris had gotten himself into. Eli felt it wasn't his place to elaborate, so he stuck to the basics.

"Thank you for getting him out of there and away from that man," Edward told him, and Eli was pleased that he

sounded relieved.

“He should be up and around in a few hours.” Eli offered.

“Call me if he needs a ride home, and I’ll come for him.”

“I’ll take care of him, don’t worry.” He didn’t share the fact that Chris was his mate but continued to assure him that Chris was okay, and they said their goodbyes. Eli slid his phone back into his pocket, walked to the bedroom door, looked in on his mate, and stood there for several minutes, watching him breathe. After seeing that he was well and still sleeping soundly, he returned to the living room, sat down in the recliner, and made his second call.

His interaction with the cougar shifter and Chris being a member of the Bay Harbor pack dictated that he must report his actions to Alpha Henrik Vaughn. If it had been a vampire, he would be calling Master Cabot. His Clan resided in this area at the pleasure of Alpha Vaughn and Master Cabot, and proper deference needed to be paid.

Eli explained briefly what had happened and that Chris was in his home recuperating. “I will send someone immediately to collect him, and thank you for seeing to his care.” Alpha Henrik did not mince words, but Eli had to make his position in Chris’ life clear so that he wasn’t suddenly spirited away.

“Christopher McShane is my mate, sir.” Just say it and move on was Eli’s approach. There was a brief pause before Alpha Vaughn responded, obviously processing that piece of information.

“Does the cougar shifter still live?” He asked.

“He ran away, so yes, he is still alive ... for now,” Eli answered.

“You may deal with him as you see fit.” The Alpha gave him permission to end the cougar and then added. “Congratulations, and if we can assist you or Chris, do not hesitate to ask.”

“Yes, sir” With that, he closed the call and stuck his phone back into his pocket. Eli returned to the bedroom and moved a chair to the side of the bed to watch his vulnerable mate while he slept.

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Chris felt the soft bed beneath him, and the scent of wild strawberries filled the air. It was an aroma that soothed and quieted his mind and his body. It was such a switch from what he'd endured the last few days at Logan's place.

How he ever trusted that man was a mystery? Was he really that desperate that he'd allow someone to brutalize him? That question brought with it a sinking feeling of depression which he fought hard against. Logan wasn't the first mistake he'd made. He just turned out to be the meanest.

He kept his mind on his current location and the peace surrounding him. He shifted back to his human form, having healed adequately but remained still with his eyes closed, not ready to come awake just yet. The mood and the smells in the room were all he needed to feel safe and warm, and he didn't want to let go of that just yet.

Someone was talking to him. He recognized the voice. It was low and smooth, touching his nerves ever so slightly and easing his mind. The sound was amazing and familiar. He couldn't remain apart from the sound calling to him, and he forced open one eye and then the other taking time to adjust to the sunlight in the room but focused on the man sitting next to the bed.

“Eli?” The name came to him suddenly from the fog of his mind, and he knew it was him, the champion from his nightmare. He was there watching him, his lovely dark eyes filled with concern. He smiled when Chris spoke his name, and it was beautiful.

“Yes, love, I'm here with you.” Eli squeezed Chris' hand, and it was then that he realized Eli was holding his hand, his grip so light and so natural. Chris returned the squeeze and tried to smile, and it must have been okay because Eli chuckled, and the good vibes just kept growing.

This man was so nice. Chris felt drawn to him needing him to smile and craving his touch. The wild strawberries filled his senses, and life seemed to brighten. A gradual appreciation brought to him the real meaning of his feelings and the significance of the man sitting next to him.

“We’re mates.” Chris was incredulous, and just as the elation and joy began, he was swamped with what his mate had just endured. His mate had found him in that basement tied and bloody, having been abused and mistreated in a drug-addled state of mind. The humiliation overloaded every other feeling, and he was besieged with embarrassment that was near crippling.

Eli’s smile dropped, and he moved quickly to the edge of the bed. Chris knew he was feeling his sudden change, but he could do nothing to stop the terrible realization that his mate had seen it all. His dehumanization at the hands of the cougar, a need for dominance that led to the worst days of his life. He agreed to go to the basement and agreed to be tied, and then all permission ended, and Logan became lord and master. Eli saw it all.

“What’s wrong?” Eli ran the palm of his hand along Chris’ arms and down his chest, then up to cup his cheek and push the hair back from his face. “What is it, Chris?” Chris didn’t know how to answer; every response sounded so bad in his head. How did he apologize for being a piece of shit?

“I’m sorry.” He managed to say and quickly closed his eyes, willing the day away. Why did he have to meet his mate this day and in this manner? He was absolutely mortified and couldn’t understand why his mate was so gentle and kind after what he’d seen. It must have been horrible for Eli to realize the mess on the bed in the basement was his mate.

“Stop!” Eli stated one word forceful and clear. “I have a pretty good idea of what you are thinking, and you will stop it right now.” That command surprised him, and he instantly ducked his head and apologized again.

“Do not apologize. What happened in that house was not your fault. You trusted him, and he betrayed that trust.” Eli

placed a light kiss on Chris' lips, which felt wonderful, but he didn't deserve it. "Nothing you've done or think you've done will ever drive me away. I'm not that delicate, babe." Eli said with a finality that hit Chris as truth, but he was afraid to believe it.

"I have proclivities that some people might find objectionable." Chris was trying to say it in the most neutral fashion possible, but it just came out sounding stupid.

"You like to be dominated and like a little pain with your pleasure," Eli said as if answering a simply benign question.

"Yes, I like to hand over control in the bedroom, but I never expected Logan to take it so far. I didn't like what he did to me, and I didn't like his brand of control. I don't know if I would have survived if you hadn't found me." Chris' fear began to spike as he considered how close he came to serious harm and the fact that it was entirely his own fault.

"I'm glad I found you, Chris." Eli smiled softly, which looked sweet on the man's hard features. "I was doing a favor for a friend and ended up finding my eternity."

"Who sent you?"

"Edward." He figured as much since, of all the people in his life, Edward was the only one who knew his secret. He'd noticed bruising around Chris' throat on a day they were working together designing the new back lawn for the Pack House, and after a few probing questions, Edward got the truth out of him. He didn't judge but urged Chris to be careful who he trusted. He was worried, that was obvious, but Edward never preached or pushed.

Chris was suddenly overcome by the intense desire to go home, hide, and disappear for a while until the horrible feelings of embarrassment faded. This was his mate, someone he yearned for and now all he wanted to do was hide. "I'm sorry." He couldn't help it. He had to apologize, and he had to keep apologizing. His mate deserved so much better than the man that he was.

“You’re scaring me, Chris.” Eli leaned closer and threaded his fingers through Chris’ hair, cupping the side of his head and holding him gently. He moved closer and stared into Chris’ eyes, holding him immobile. He couldn’t look away, and he couldn’t speak. Eli’s bear was forceful and dominant and demanded Chris’ complete attention.

## CHAPTER THREE

Eli could feel Chris pulling away, and he would not allow it. The situation that brought them together would not be what defines them or their relationship.

“I understand that you are embarrassed, but I am your mate and will never judge you or condemn you, just as I know that you will never judge or condemn me. I don’t care what you did before the moment we met. Besides, I’m no angel. The only thing that matters is what we do now and forward. This moment, you and me, we honor one another.” Eli let his bear take over, reach through the mist, and touch the wolf within Chris.

The connection was instant, and Chris’ eyes opened and in their depths was the same yearning that Eli felt. Their beasts were on the same page, and now all he had to do was get Chris there. “No more telling me that you’re sorry. You have nothing to be sorry for. This is you and me, and this is our beginning, fresh and new, a clean slate for both of us.” Eli smiled, pushing his peace and contentment to Chris, who remained stiff and ridged in the center of the bed.

“Clean slate,” He stated and then paused, “I like that idea.” Chris finished with a tremulous smile and a fearful glance. He was trying to trust, but his old fears were obviously preventing him from believing. “Would you lay here with me for a little while?” He asked, and that was a request that Eli was more than happy to comply with.

Eli kicked off his boots and stretched out beside his mate, pulling him into his arms and pressing his sweet, firm body to his. They fit together perfectly, with Chris’ head tucked beneath Eli’s chin and his face pressed to Eli’s chest. It was perfect.

He kept the blanket around Chris, for he did not trust himself to hold his naked mate so close without his body and bear reacting. Chris needed time, and he didn’t need Eli to be making demands before he was ready to oblige.

“You feel so good in my arms, babe,” Eli commented softly, and Chris gave a satisfied groan while wrapping his arm around Eli’s middle and pulling him closer. They were mates, and the draw to be one would grow stronger with every minute they spent together.

Chris was in a delicate frame of mind right now, and Eli wasn’t about to push things too far too fast. But with that said, he wanted his mate and would do everything in his power to stay close and help Chris work out whatever demons he needed to work out.

“I’m a mess, Eli,” Chris whispered as if reading Eli’s mind. His sweet breath fanned across Eli’s throat, tickling his flesh as he breathed in the pure sweetness of his mate.

“I can give you what you need, Chris; trust me, we were made for one another.” Eli dropped a kiss on Chris’ forehead and held him as he drifted back to sleep. Eli understood Chris better than he knew, for Eli was not unacquainted with the lifestyle and had frequented the clubs and other subcultures within the leather scene before moving to Eastport. He liked to dominate, particularly in the bedroom, and he was more than prepared to give Chris the control and guidance he craved.

Once moving to Eastport, finding like-minded partners was handled less openly. No bars or clubs specialized in the practice, but it was possible to find those agreeable. Eli was a large bear in both his beast and human form and was never left wanting when looking for company for an evening. Now his interest was singly focused, and no one but Christopher McShane would ever satisfy him.

Fate paired them well, even if she didn’t do well with the timing. If he’d met Chris before he began experimenting with random men, he could have saved him this pain and humiliation. But they were together now, and never again would Chris suffer such degradation.

He cleared his mind of the past, not wanting to influence his sleeping mate with his own anger and irritation around the fact that the cougar still lives. The man was smart



and had left town, so finding him would not be easy. He should have killed him when he had the chance, but the needs of his mate took precedence. Now that Chris was safe in his arms, his mind kept going to the monster that took advantage of a vulnerable young man. If they ever crossed paths again, Eli would end him.

He dozed off until he heard someone knocking at his front door. Carefully without waking Chris, he slid out of bed and headed to the door. The knock was soft so as to not agitate or disturb, so it was most likely his mother. The brothers would be either knocking the door down with their pounding or not bothering to knock.

As he got closer to the door, he clearly scented his mother and something else; she brought food. “Did Edward share the situation with you?” He asked, wondering how much she knew.

“Not all of it, no, he was careful with his words, but his worry was palatable, so I filled in the blanks myself.” Paula came in carrying a tray of sandwiches and fruit and set them on the dining room table. She was still a strong and formidable bear even though she’d gotten older, and there were traces of gray in her hair. She ruled the family as the matriarch but did so with love and understanding.

“I can tell by your bear that this man is very important to you. Never has your bear felt confrontational, especially not with me until now.” She added with a knowing smile. There was little he could hide from her. “He’s your mate?” She asked, but she already knew the answer.

“Yes, it was quite a surprise, a welcome and wonderful surprise.” She took him in her arms and hugged him while planting a kiss on his cheek.

“I’m happy for you, Eli, and can’t wait to meet your mate. I’m sure he will be a fine addition to the family.” Her happiness was captivating, and Eli found himself smiling and agreeing with everything she said, including the part where Chris would soon join the Clan and become one of them. It sounded great to him.

“He’s sleeping right now, recovering and getting stronger.”

“I’m sorry he was hurt, honey, but you will see to his needs, and he’ll be on his feet in no time. It’s the way with mates; closeness breeds health and wellness.” She patted him on the shoulder and then turned back toward the door. “Don’t keep me waiting too long, Eli. You’re my first to find their mate, and I am beyond excited.”

“I won’t make you wait too long, Mom.”

“Good boy.” She said over her shoulder as she left, closing the door behind her.

Eli stood there for a few seconds, thinking about what his mother had said and about the future. Chris was a wolf and a member of the Bay Harbor pack, so they would have to decide whether Chris moved in with him or he would move in with the wolves.

He couldn’t see himself comfortable among the pack, but if it was Chris’ wish, then he would try to handle it. As soon as the thought struck him, he dismissed it, knowing full and well that he would never be comfortable in a wolf pack, and they would not be comfortable with him. Chris was new to the Bay Harbor Wolf Pack, so leaving would not be too much of a hardship.

In his heart, he hoped that his mate would choose the Clan. They were small, but they were family. That was something for them to discuss at a later time. His mate was in no condition at the moment to make any life decisions. He called his youngest brother Wes who was much smaller than the rest of the family, having yet to reach his full bear shifter height and weight, and asked him to drop off a change of clothes for Chris.

Wes and Chris were similar in size, although Wes was taller. He didn’t want him to put on the clothes that had been strewn around that basement floor, and Eli’s things would be much too big for Chris’ small frame.

Wes didn't disturb him when he arrived but rather left the things in a bag on the porch and texted him that they were there. He added a congratulations, which let Eli know their mother had spread the word, and it brought a smile to his face. He had a great family, and soon Chris would discover that too.

When he stepped back into the bedroom, he saw that Chris was awake and watching him. Eli took a seat on the bed next to him and ran his knuckles down the side of Chris' face before bending and placing a brief kiss on his lips. Chris was a temptation that was impossible to ignore. He pulled back and searched Chris' eyes and saw uncertainty and hesitation still lurking in their depths.

"Talk to me, Chris." He urged, and when Chris sat up, the blanket dropped to his waste baring his chest and shoulders. Chris was a good-looking man. This wasn't the first time he'd seen his mate's body. Still, the first time he had the opportunity to simply gaze and admire. Now that the injuries were healed, his purity and gorgeousness really shined through.

"I want you, Eli. My wolf is tearing at me with want of you, but I need ..." His voice fell off, but his eyes told him everything.

"You need time." Eli finished the sentence for him. It wasn't what he wanted to hear, but he understood and would give Chris whatever he needed except release. Chris was his mate, and now that he had found him, he would never release him. "I will give you time, love but remember that you are mine; Fate has brought us together. You are the bear's mate."

Chris smiled weakly, but it was genuine. "I won't forget." He dropped his gaze to the cotton coverlet gripped in his fist and then brought his eyes back up to meet Eli's. "You're the best thing to ever happen to me, Eli, and I'm going to try very hard not to fuck it up."

"You're fine, babe." Eli pulled him forward and kissed him on the lips, a firm kiss that marked his territory and made his intentions clear. "Focus on yourself, get better, and everything about you and I will fall into place." Eli could feel

Chris' insecurity but also his desire which was coming in strong waves every time he looked at Eli. The pull was doing its job, but Chris was too vulnerable to be pushed like this, so Eli knew he would have to let him do what he needed to do for now.

"I should go home. I have to speak with my parents. They're probably worried, and I'd like to have some time to process ... everything." He dropped his head again, and Eli did not like the defeated attitude it signaled. He wondered if the change of mood had to do with his parents. He tucked a finger under Chris' chin and raised his face back up to look at him directly.

"You do whatever you need to do." He told him. "I understand."

"This is all so sudden and so stunning I can hardly believe it is really happening." Chris gave another tremulous smile, but Eli could see his strength beneath.

"It's real, and yes, it is overwhelming but in the very best way possible." Eli smiled, reached over the side of the bed, and brought up the bag of clothes Wes had dropped off. "My brother Wes brought you over a change of clothes. You're similar in size. Your things are in a bag by the door. I didn't think you wanted to put them back on." Chris shook his head vigorously at the suggestion.

Eli then explained that he'd spoken with Edward and Alpha Vaughn, telling them the bare minimum and letting him know that he would need to touch base with them soon. "They know you were injured by the cougar, but they don't know any details. I also told your Alpha that we're mates."

"Thank you, Eli." He said, and Eli nodded and stood up from the bed, giving him space.

"Go ahead, shower, get dressed, and then meet me in the kitchen. My mother brought over a tray of food, and we must have some, or it will hurt her feelings." He was piling it on a bit, but Chris agreed readily, so it was all good. "I'll drive you home when you're ready." Eli turned toward the door, but when Chris spoke, he turned back immediately.

“You’re a good man, Eli.” He said, and Eli winked at him.

“I try to be.” He responded and left the room, closing the door behind him.

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Chris crawled out of bed feeling refreshed but also slightly let down by knowing he had to go home. There were things that needed to be attended to, and he needed time to get his head straight. Being with Eli was easy, and he preferred staying and working on their bond rather than going home and facing his parents.

He smiled softly at the thought of spending the rest of the day in bed with his mate. If only his life weren’t a crazy fucking mess. Between the cougar and his father, his life had been truly fucked. The shame he’d originally felt was dissipating with Eli’s steady acceptance and the power of the bond. His mind and emotions were clearing, but he feared that thoughts of his father would soon have him cowering once again.

The bear clan moved into the area a few years ago, but he had yet to visit the restaurant that their mother ran. He’d planned to on many occasions, but something always came up. Now he wished he’d made time that way, he’d have likely met his mate already, and the shame of the last few days would not have happened. These intrusive, nonproductive thoughts plagued his mind as he showered and dressed.

The clothes were near perfect except for the pant legs, and the shirt sleeves were a bit long. He rolled them up, and the jeans and flannel shirt were rather comfy and homey. He slipped on his boots and then looked around Eli’s bedroom, just getting an idea of the man from his most personal space.

The room was large, as was the man. It had plenty of floor space, hardwood with several wool rugs. The colors were woodsy browns, greens, and tans, very calm, just like the man. The space was warm and welcoming to him, and he wished he could curl up in that bed and stay there for days or maybe forever. He grabbed his wallet and cell phone from the dresser,

stuck them into the pocket of his borrowed jeans, and headed out into the main room.

The kitchen was off to his left, and the living room/dining room was to his right. Eli was at the counter watching him as he entered, and seeing his smile was a daily experience that Chris wanted to have. Just having the man near made Chris feel worthy and whole; those were two things he hadn't felt in a long time.

Between issues with his parents, particularly his father, and issues with his social life, he'd found himself strung pretty tight mentally and emotionally. He fell into a habit of pleasing everyone except himself.

"Lunch is ready; come and sit with me, Chris." Eli beckoned him forward with that same smile and lovely disposition. He wanted this man, his mate, so damned bad. Eli was a such a large man, so strong and forceful and kind, just the man he'd always dreamed of meeting one day.

He was head and shoulders above any man from Chris' past. Eli was solid, stable, and, most of all, appeared to be thoughtful and understanding. He was the perfect man and the perfect mate. Now all Chris had to do was not mess it up. His wolf was already in love with Eli's bear, and Chris was nearly there as well.

Chris stepped into the kitchen, and Eli made him comfortable at the breakfast bar with coffee, water, and a sampling of sandwiches and fruit. He picked up a sandwich and took a big bite loving the roast beef and sauce. It was flavorful and hardy, and he wanted more.

Chris didn't realize how hungry he was until Eli had served him another plate full and began preparing his third. The food was fast disappearing, and Chris regretted not visiting their restaurant after sampling what Eli's mother had brought over.

"I should slow down, but this is delicious. Please thank your mother for me." Chris took a long sip of his coffee, rich and black, just as he liked it.

“There’s plenty, so enjoy.” Eli set another helping in front of him, and Chris dug in. He felt himself getting stronger with every bite, or maybe just sitting so close to Eli was revitalizing him either way, he was feeling himself again. Eli poured him another cup of coffee and one for himself.

“How do you know how I take my coffee?” Chris was not aware that he’d shared that information.

“I took a guess. You look like a man who likes it strong and dark.” Eli winked at him and sat down very close, so close their thighs were touching, but he didn’t push for more just contact. There was an innuendo there, making Chris blush and Eli chuckle.

“Strong and dark, the only way to go.” Chris blurted and then stuck the sandwich into their mouth so he didn’t say more. They ate and talked of simple mundane things that put Chris at ease and settled the turmoil that had been taking him over.

He learned of Eli’s construction company that he ran with his brother Dax and the projects they are planning. Chris told him about his job as a landscape architect for Alpha Vaughn primarily but recently had taken on other jobs. It was interesting, and they found they had quite a lot in common.

Eli explained his family dynamics with four brothers and a mother who had raised them all alone. His father had died in a turf battle many years ago when they were all just young cubs.

The family was close and yet respectful of one another, and Eli was the eldest. As he listened, Chris wished his family had even a modicum of the regard and acceptance that was obvious in Eli’s family. It was just him and his parents, no other children or extended relatives; still, it felt like too many people were in the relationship.

It was his idea to relocate to Bay Harbor, and when he mentioned it, he was hoping to have a fresh start on his own terms, but his parents were not ready to let go. They relocated with him and entered the pack as a family unit. It was not his plan, but there was nothing he could do about it without

looking like an ungrateful child. He just wanted his own life, and now the opportunity was presenting itself again in the form of a very sexy bear shifter.

“Tell me about your parents,” Eli asked, and it was the last thing Chris wanted to discuss, but how did he not when Eli had been so forthcoming.



## CHAPTER FOUR

Eli felt the change in mood once again as soon as he ventured a query into Chris' family life. It was clearly a sore spot, but Chris was struggling to respond. His words were slow and measured each one placed with care, and Eli wondered what the truth of the matter really was, as he described a father distant but supportive, ambitious, career-focused, and holding strong opinions on a variety of subjects. It told Eli absolutely nothing, and he assumed that was his aim.

“What about your mother? Are you two very close?” Chris hadn't mentioned his mother apart from stating he was an only child and his parents were still alive. It was basic and heartless, without depth or any real connection. Eli was beginning to see the source of Chris' insecurity and lack of self-esteem.

They would be dealt with if they presented themselves as a problem between him and Chris. Parents or not, Eli would not tolerate anyone getting in the way of their bond or affecting the happiness of his mate.

“My mother does as she is told, and although she tries to be decent and kind at times, she is often not. Their marriage isn't exactly a loving marriage, but it does appear to suit them.” Chris finished his sandwich and the remaining fruit and took a long drink of his water, nearly emptying the bottle in one go. He was buying time trying to figure out his next words.

“You don't have to leave. You are welcome to stay here with me. I'll send for your things, and our life can begin now.” Eli was making a big leap, not knowing how Chris would react but wanting to give him an option and let him know that his life was with Eli and not with his parents. Maybe it was too forward, too soon, but he needed to put it out there for consideration now and later.

Chris stopped and stared at him for a moment, looking puzzled, and then quickly, the confusion cleared, and he

smiled that same soft shy smile that broke the grave intensity of his previous mood. “There isn’t anything I’d love more than just moving in and starting a new life, but I have responsibilities that I must attend to first.” Eli could feel the truth of his statement and also the regret. It was pleasing to know that his mate wanted to stay even though he believed that circumstances made it impossible.

Chris moved closer and reached out. Eli quickly moved in, letting him know whatever he wanted, he could have. Chris cupped the side of Eli’s face and pulled him down for a kiss. Eli gave Chris all the control and received the sweetest kiss of his life. It was explorative, needy, and adoring, and Eli hated to see it end, but Chris finished too soon and pulled back while still holding Eli’s gaze.

“Will you drive me home?” Chris asked, his voice once again faint and unsure. It was going to take time getting Chris’ confidence back. Eli knew he was up to the job and looked forward to supporting his mate and watching him grow and flourish.

“Yes, of course.” Eli placed the dishes in the dishwasher and wiped down the counter. Together they’d finished what his mother had brought over, so there was nothing to be put away. Eli was happy that his mate was full and he’d been able to provide for him. His bear was satisfied for the moment, which was important because soon he would be dropping his mate at home, and leaving him would be a trial indeed.

“I live in a small housing unit on the Pack lands in Bay Harbor, and my parents live in one of the larger units on the ridge. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the layout of the Pack lands.” Chris moved toward the door, and Eli quickly fell into step beside him, taking his hand in a loose grip.

“The small units are more central, and the ridge, if I remember, has some lovely, impressive homes. Your father must have done well for himself to afford one of those homes.” Eli commented as he opened the door for Chris and grabbed his bag from the floor.

“Yes, he always does well for himself,” Chris responded in a clipped tone and headed out the door. Eli wanted to ask so many questions, but it wasn’t his place to dig out the information. Chris needed to be ready to share.

His brother Beau was pretty adept with the computer and access avenues, so he would ask him to look into the McShane family and get him whatever he could. It wasn’t the best way to learn about your mate and his family, but it would be expedient. He wanted to know what his mate was dealing with and how best to help and be a support for him.

Eli stowed Chris’ stuff in the back and opened the door for him. He seemed surprised by the move but didn’t question it. Eli helped him get seated and then buckled him in before going to the driver’s side and settling in. he started the engine and then turned to regard Chris.

“I understand your desire to go home and get things straight in your mind, but I need you to understand that you are my mate, and I will wait, but I will not wait for long.” Eli made his meaning clear. “Do you want me, Chris?” He hit him with the most important question of the day. It was hard to ask, but he had to hear the words stated honest and true ... or not.

“Yes!” Chris did not hesitate and abruptly reached over and grabbed Eli’s hand. “I want you so badly my body is trembling, and I will not make you wait. I have to settle a few things, and then we can be together. I just need tonight, just one night. I want you, Eli. Don’t ever doubt my desire or my need. This ... you and me, this is the best thing to ever happen to me, and I will not do anything to jeopardize what we have.”

“Okay, but like I said, you’re mine, and you can lean on me and call me. I’ll be there. Trust me, I will never abandon you.” Eli placed his hand on his heart. “You’re here now, and you will never leave. Am I making myself clear?”

Chris nodded his head. “I feel the same, Eli.” He placed his hand on his own heart just as Eli had. They sat in silence for a few seconds before Eli put it into gear and pulled out of his driveway, and they were soon on their way to Bay Harbor.

They remained silent throughout the drive, but the sexual charge within the vehicle was electric and grew more intense with each mile. Taking Chris home was beginning to feel like a bad idea. The need that he and his bear were suffering was becoming extreme. How the hell was he going to be able to walk away from his mate, even for just one night?

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The pain at soon being separated from his newly discovered mate was starting to make itself known. Chris could feel the knot forming in his stomach and a sense of panic that seemed to embrace him. It had been his choice, his request, and now he was questioning its necessity. He just couldn't seem to make a decision to save his life. He still held fast to Eli's hand, and the warmth was a soothing balm to his ravaged nerves and frantic thoughts.

Chris kept stealing glances at Eli as he drove through town to the Pack lands on the outer edge of the bay. He was taking him home, and suddenly Chris did not know why. He wanted to speak with his parents and let them know he was okay as well as Edward, but did he need all night to accomplish these things? The more he thought about it, the more he did not wish to leave his mate, not even for one night.

They pulled up to the gates of Bay Harbor and were waved through. Eli was apparently well known. "Which way?" He asked as soon as they entered the town proper.

"Straight ahead until you come to the playground, and then turn right on Red Rabbit Lane. My place is #12 on the left." Chris rattled off the directions, and too soon, they were pulling into his drive, and to his horror, the minute they shut the engine, his father came out the front door, followed by his mother, neither looking particularly happy. '*Not now, not in front of Eli,*' was his pervading thought as they exited the vehicle.

Chris hurried over to intercept his father before he began a litany of questions directed at Eli. But Eli took a step half in front of Chris, shielding him from what was sure to be his father's wrath. Eli must have felt the anger radiating off his

father, and although Chris appreciated the support, he feared his father's reaction would be worse for having been denied direct access to Chris.

He tried to move out from behind Eli, but he kept him shielded. "Stay there." He said with such authority that Chris was naturally inclined to obey. He stepped back and let Eli take the lead. As much as he knew this was not a solution, he still felt relief at having someone take his side for once.

"Where in the hell have you been?" His father's voice boomed, and he pushed himself forward, trying to get Eli to move, but Eli did not move. There was a large height and weight difference between them, and Eli used it to his advantage.

"Eli, this is my father, Leonard McShane, and my mother, Shirley McShane. Mom, Dad, this is my mate, Eli Marshal." Eli having manners, nodded in recognition of the introduction, but Leonard McShane merely snarled, forgoing the use of proper manners. His father never let civility stand in the way of his controlling anger.

His father tried again to push past Eli, but he was effectively rebuffed with Eli staring down at him. Eli's dark gaze made Leonard take a step back, but he was still full of bluster and began shouting at Chris, saying all manner of rude and unkind things. Chris felt himself shrinking, mortified by the scene playing out in his front yard.

"You wouldn't answer your phone; you were gone for two days whoring around, no doubt just to embarrass us, just to antagonize your mother and me. I found what you kept hidden. I know what you've been up to." It got worse and then abruptly ended when the taunts became too personal. "Were you with this bear, were you fucking this worthless bear?" In a move as sharp and fast as a whip, Leonard was shut down when Eli grabbed him by the throat and lifted him off his feet.

"Christopher belongs to me," Eli stated, firm and clear. "I know that you are his father, but you will not, do you hear? You will not speak to him in this manner." Eli kept eye contact, and Leonard kept nodding his head while pulling at

Eli's fingers to no avail. Chris just stood and watched for several seconds, shocked and strangely pleased by the action. No one had ever defended him before, but his father was now gasping for breath, and his mother was screaming, so perhaps he should try to intervene.

"Let him go, Eli. Don't hurt him." Chris placed his hand on Eli's upper arm, and instantly Eli's gaze shifted to him. "Let him go," Chris repeated.

Eli slowly set Leonard back onto his feet but did not immediately release his throat. He gave him a stern shake and pushed him away. Leonard stumbled backward and bumped into his wife, who struggled to keep them both on their feet. Chris tried to move from behind Eli, but he stopped him.

"Stay behind me. I don't trust him." Eli ordered, and Chris complied.

"How dare you touch me, you filthy shifter." Leonard didn't know when to leave well enough alone and where he could get away with speaking to Chris in such terms it did not fly with Eli. Eli made a move on him, and Leonard ran to the edge of the property several feet away, and Shirley followed. She looked confused and unsure about what was happening but knew enough not to get on the wrong side of Eli or her husband. She said nothing but joined Leonard at the edge of the property.

"I do not accept this union, Christopher. You will not bond with a bear shifter; I forbid it," Leonard spoke like his opinion mattered. In the past, Chris had often capitulated to his father's wishes simply to avoid fights and keep the peace, but this was different. This was his mate, and no one was going to tell him he couldn't claim his mate. Chris took Eli's hand and held it, and he could see the anger seething in his father's expression at the bold move.

"You do not make decisions for Christopher and I warn you, don't try to come between us, for it will end badly for you." Chris loved the formidable way his mate took charge and set Leonard straight without raising his voice. Chris had

often feared his father's words and moods which gave the man a sense of power that was not really his.

This was a time long coming, and Chris wished he'd dealt with it sooner wished he'd made the break from his parents. He loved his mate for standing up for him, but he hated how small this interaction was, making him appear in the eyes of his newly found mate.

He did not fear his father today with Eli there. He saw Leonard for the petty little coward he was and saw his mother as the dutiful mouse she'd always been. This could still go south for him, but he didn't care. It was worth whatever might come after finally seeing his father put firmly in his place.

"You'll regret this, Christopher." Was Leonard's parting shot as he jerked Shirley by the arm, and they left, cutting across several lawns to where they'd parked their car. Both he and Eli stood still and silent, watching them leave, and once they were truly gone, Eli turned to Chris with a look of hope and sadness, a combination that tore at Chris's heart. This was his mate, the most important person in his life, and he had just subjected him to the embarrassment that was his parents, Leonard and Shirley McShane.

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Eli was shocked at the behavior of Chris' parents. He thought they might have reservations about his being a bear shifter, but he never expected them to be outright bigots, loud and proud. He turned to Chris and saw the pain etched all over his face. The poor man had been through so much in such a short period of time. He moved closer and put his arm around Chris, moving him toward the front door, which stood wide open from when his parents had stormed out.

"Let's go inside." He said and Chris began to move slowly, one foot in front of the other. He kept his head down now, and the specter of shame was clouding around him once again. Eli would not have it. His mate would not be brought low by two people wholly unworthy of him. He wanted to say so many things, but first, he needed to get his love inside somewhere quiet and private.

He ushered him into the living room once he closed and locked the door and placed a chair strategically under the doorknob, for he did not trust those parents not to possibly return. He then went to the back and did the same with the door off the back garden. Chris remained standing in the middle of the room, waiting for his return. It was as if he were waiting for direction, and Eli was more than willing to provide.

“Let’s sit, love.” Eli led him to the sofa and had him sit, and Eli sat beside him with his arm around Chris and waited. He could sense that Chris had things to say and just needed time to get the words out, so he gave him the time that he needed.

“I didn’t think they would be here. I know they have a key, but I never thought they’d just let themselves into my home.” He sat up abruptly, suddenly upset and frantically looking around. “I need to check my office. I keep it locked, but ...” Eli quelled his agitated outburst and then stood.

“I’ll check your office. Where is it located?” Eli wanted Chris to stay seated and relax.

“Just down the hall, the first door to your right is my bedroom, and the second is my office. I keep it locked, but locks don’t always mean much to a man like Leonard McShane.” Eli walked down the hallway and took a quick look into Chris’ bedroom everything looked neat and tidy bed made curtains drawn. He then went to the next door on his right, and it was obvious that someone had forced their way inside.

Evidently, the door had been forced open, the doorknob was loose, and the wood was splintered. The door was left ajar, so he didn’t even try to cover his crime which spoke volumes of Leonard’s disrespect for his son and his son’s property. Eli took a look around, and the drawers on Chris’ desk were closed haphazardly, as were the file drawers lining the back wall. His parents had searched the room, but for what?



Eli returned to the living room, and Chris stood when he entered, looking expectant and. Eli simply nodded, letting him know that the office had been breached. “The door was forcibly opened, and the room has been searched. He didn’t bother to be neat or careful, so he doesn’t care that you know.” Eli explained his assumptions, and Chris dropped down heavily back onto the sofa.

“What was he looking for?” Eli walked over, sat beside him, and put his arm around him. Chris melted into him, taking deep breaths and shaking his head. “Tell me what he was looking for.” It took a few minutes, but Chris finally began to speak.

“He accused me of being sexually abhorrent because I like light bondage and domination.” He fell silent again. “He supposedly found out when I was spotted in St. Clair, a town two hours south of here, at a club that caters to the lifestyle. He said a friend saw me and told him about it. I don’t know really how he found out or why he’d care, but he did.”

“What was he looking for in your office?” Eli pulled him a little closer and began a rhythmic massage of his shoulder and upper arm.

“I don’t think he was absolutely sure, so he wanted proof that he could hold over me. I never admitted anything. It was none of his business, but he wouldn’t let it go. He threatened to embarrass me and said he’d get me fired.” This was absurd as far as Eli was concerned. Chris wasn’t doing anything shame worthy or upsetting in the least.

“Alright, this is ridiculous, and just so you know, nothing you have done is wrong. You have a right to your own life, and unless you’ve killed someone in the search for pleasure, you have no reason to fear discovery. You’re not alone in your desires. That’s why they call it a lifestyle. It is wide, and it is accepted.” Eli made Chris look at him as he continued. Light bondage and domination was pure vanilla. There was nothing shameful in the desire.

“I look forward to exploring all our desires and discovering what works best for you and me. Whatever we do

and however we do, it is our business, and I absolutely forbid you to feel shame over any of it. Forget your father he's not worth your upset or concern." Eli found himself growing angry all over again. "I don't care what he thinks that he found or how he plans to use it. Trust me, no one cares. You have nothing to fear."

"I had club information in my desk drawer from St. Clair, Ludington, Manistee, Muskegon. I also had some contact information, and now he has all of that." Chris was calmer.

"I don't care, and neither should you. He can't hurt you, Chris, and if he tries, I'll make him stop. You have my word on that." Eli moved in for a kiss, not long or hard but proprietary he wanted his mark on his mate, and for now, that would have to be scent oriented. He would make sure Chris smelled like him. It would keep people away and keep Chris safe.

"You don't need that stuff anymore. I'll provide everything that you need or desire. You're my mate, and you're it for me now. There will be no one for me except you, and I ask that you make the same promise." Eli made the request, although it came out more like a command. He wanted to ensure Chris understood there would be no others for either of them ever again.

"Only you, Eli, you're my mate, and my wolf would not tolerate anyone else, and neither would I. My club days are over. You have my word on that." Chris pledged.

"Nothing wrong with the clubs, but now you can only go with me."

"Only you."

## CHAPTER FIVE

“I received reports of a situation over at Chris McShane’s place. Apparently, his parents are upset with his choice of mate and are making quite a scene in his front yard.” Henrik mentioned when his brother Derek walked into his office and took a seat on the sofa by the wall.

“Yes, I heard there was trouble, but Eli handled it. Mr. and Mrs. McShane were leaving when I arrived, so I didn’t interfere.” Derek leaned back and stretched out his legs. “Mr. McShane was saying some very incendiary things and tossing out accusations that had Eli reacting in an expected manner and quite effectively putting him on the run.”

Henrik chuckled. “Eli is a daunting individual when not angered, so I can only imagine what he’s like when his mate is being verbally abused.”

“He had Leonard by the throat and incapacitated the man with one hand and with little effort by the looks of it.” Derek then became more serious. “Perhaps it would be wise to look into the activities of Leonard McShane. I wonder if his prejudice is only for the bear shifters or if it extends further.”

“Check him out and keep an eye on him for a while. I don’t want Eli pushed to the point that he has to end him. Not a good beginning for a relationship if you have to kill your mate’s father.” Henrik stated, and Derek laughed.

“In this case, it might prove to be the best outcome for all of us.” Derek always the pragmatist.

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Chris was bowled over by the care and concern of his mate. Eli was proving to be a champion in every way. Eli got him seated in the kitchen with a cup of coffee while he called his brother Dax to load up the truck and come over. “He’ll be here shortly, and we’ll fix your doors and change all the locks. I’m also going to reinforce your windows to make sure no one decides to try and break in.” Chris tried to minimize the threat, but Eli wasn’t hearing it, and truth be told, Chris was happy

for the reassurance that his home would be safe once again. It wasn't long before there was a knock on the door.

"Your home will be secure before nightfall, I promise," Eli told him while ushering his brother into the kitchen and making introductions. Dax was large like Eli, but his hair was lighter, and his eyes were a deep honey color, but they both had the same caramel complexion. Maybe it came from working outside.

"Pleased to meet you, Dax." Chris stood and shook his hand. "Thank you for coming." He added.

"No problem, we'll have this place set to right in no time." Dax smiled largely, and his face lit up. "Congratulations, you two, and welcome to the Clan, Chris." He added and then headed to the living room. They started on the locks first. Chris asked if he could be of any help, but Eli told him to rest, sending him to his bedroom and tucking him in before placing another heated kiss on his needy lips. Eli left, closing the door and plunging the room into silence apart from the muted sounds from the outer room.

Chris took the opportunity to call Edward, keeping his voice low. He thanked him for worrying and sending someone like Eli after him. "I didn't know he was your mate when I asked him to extricate you from that house; that fact just turned out to be a lovely bonus for you." He chuckled. "That Logan character refused to let me see you, so I had to find someone strong enough to get you out but also not someone from your family or social circle. I respect your privacy, and that is why I chose Eli Marshal."

"I'm glad you did." Chris found himself choking up over the events of the day and how his mate stood up for him, saved him from Logan, interceded with his parents, and continued to take care of him. Eli was so much more than he deserved, but he was so glad he was in his life.

"He'll be good for you, Chris." Edward pressed, knowing Chris' tendency to isolate.

"He already has been much more than just good to me. He saved me, Edward, and now I need to buck up and try to be

a proper mate for him. I want to be good for him too.” Chris was once again getting emotional talking about Eli and their future.

“Just relax and be yourself. Fate brought you two together, so your bond is meant to be. Don’t fight it.” Edward had been his first friend when he came to Bay Harbor and proceeded to become his closest friend. There was little Edward didn’t know about Chris. Edward did not preach or condemn him for his choices but rather advised and attempted to guide him away from trouble, but Chris seemed to have a natural ability to find trouble no matter what.

“My father made a right ass of himself in front of Eli, and most of the neighborhood; it was quite unpleasant,” Chris informed.

“I heard,” Edward responded and then quickly added. “It has not cast a shadow upon you but rather your father. He is considered narrow and perhaps slightly unhinged.”

“Well, that’s a positive anyway. I was sure I would end up the bad guy or Eli, and Eli did nothing but defend me.” Chris got a little dreamy. “As you know, my father can be forceful and exhausting when pushing his own opinions, but Eli cut him off and refused to let him continue with his rant. It was so nice to see him back down for once.”

“Eli is there for you, Chris; lean on him. He can handle it. Your father only has the power that you give him, so stop giving it to him.” Edward had given him this lecture before, but he never thought it really possible to extricate himself from his parent’s control until Eli entered his life.

“It was simpler to let him have his way than trying to fight him, but now I have a reason to fight.”

“Yes, you do.”

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Eli shared the encounter with Chris’ parents with his brother, and Dax was rightfully appalled by their behavior. Dax asked how he had met Chris since last night when they’d parted for the night. Eli didn’t have a mate, and when Dax

woke up this morning, Eli had a mate. He understood his brother's curiosity, but there was only so much he could tell him because it was Chris' business and not for public consumption.

He played it off as doing a favor for Edward and that Chris had been a party to a date that had gone wrong. He agreed to help out Edward and found his mate in the process. He'd left plenty of holes in the account, but Dax did not persist and accepted the limited explanation he was given.

"You're the first Eli, and when one finds their mate, the others are not long to find theirs, according to Mom." Dax laughed. "She's very excited about your Chris and even more excited about the possibility of more mates in the family."

"She does love a big family." Eli joined.

They finished the locks, replaced the door to Chris' office, and added a new lock and a deadbolt that could be engaged from outside. No one would get into his office again unless they used a battering ram, and even then, it would take some work.

They finished by barring the windows because Eli did not want to take any chances with his mate's safety. They used decorative spear point window bars that protected and gave the place a regal look. It was nearing seven in the evening when they finished, and Eli hadn't heard a peep out of his mate for several hours. He was still in his bedroom and sleeping. Eli could hear his rhythmic breathing and steady heartbeat and was pleased that he was able to sleep securely because Eli was there to protect him.

"I postponed the meetings until the end of the week and spoke with Beau, and he'll give me a hand for the next few days so you can stay with your mate. We'll work on the deck and patio project at the Belvin's estate and finish the sauna at the Indigo Hotel. I know you want to be involved with the tile work that's scheduled for the library, so I'll push that till the end of the week as well." Dax rattled off the week's plans.

"Thanks, Dax."

“No problem, just take care of your mate, and I look forward to him joining the Clan.” Dax stowed the last of the tools in the back of his truck and turned to Eli. “You’re a lucky man, brother.” Dax stared at him with just a touch of envy in his eyes. “Good luck, and if you need me call, we’re all here for you.”

“I know, and I appreciate it.” Eli loved his mother and brothers and hoped that Chris would also come to love them. He watched his brother drive away and then headed back inside to check on Chris.

He knocked lightly and then opened the door. Chris was just waking up, and he was about to sit up when Eli took a seat on the edge of the bed and helped Chris into a sitting position. “How do you feel?” He asked, pushing Chris’ hair back from his face.

“Much better until I start to think about all the humiliation I’ve suffered today.” He smiled when he said this, so Eli knew he was indeed feeling better.

“That’s all in the past, my love,” Eli said and kissed him lightly, something he did often, and Chris found himself expecting it. The kisses were reassuring and soothing, and he loved every one of them. “Your home is safe and secure. Now I put the new keys on the kitchen table and labeled them.”

“Did you take a set for yourself?”

“Not yet.”

“I want you to have keys. I have no secrets from you.”

## CHAPTER SIX

“Do you want me to leave so you can think and process the events of the day?” Before the issue with his parents, Chris had stated earlier that he wanted some time alone, so Eli had to ask. He hoped the need for alone time had passed and that he was as eager as Eli to see their relationship start to take shape and their connections begin to grow.

“I don’t want you to leave Eli. All the crap I said before was just fear that this was too good to be true, and I thought I needed to be sure.” He reached out and held onto Eli’s upper arm, knotting his fingers in the cotton of his t-shirt. There was desperation in that touch, and Eli liked it.

“Are you sure?” Eli glanced at Chris’ hand and then over to capture his steely blue gaze. Those eyes were sharp with need and determination. Chris was coming back to himself what Eli saw now was the real man. This man knew what he wanted and was willing to ask and demand. This man was not self-flagellating with doubt or shame. The wolf was healing.

Eli took Chris’ hands and helped him to lay back against the pillows, then took his hands and placed them above Chris’ head, gripping the spindles of the headboard. “Stay like that, sweetheart, don’t move.” Chris nodded. The excitement in his eyes fueled Eli’s need.

Chris stayed still as instructed, and Eli watched as Chris watched him strip slowly, revealing skin a little at a time, feeding the desire so plainly on display the arousal in the air was delicious. Eli removed his t-shirt, dragging it slowly over his head and tossing it across the room.

He then sensually shoved his fingers through his thick black hair and, while flexing and stretching and the way Chris’ eyes began to bug indicated it was worth the extra performance. He wanted his mate properly excited and titillated before he took him completely and utterly.

Eli kicked off his boots and removed his sox, then popped the top button of his jeans, letting them open slightly,



showing he had nothing on beneath. Chris gripped the spindles of the headboard with a death grip, his knuckles turning white with the strength it took to not let go.

“Spread your legs.” Eli made the command, and Chris followed it immediately. Eli ran his fingertips from Chris’ waistband down across his hardened cock and trailed inside his right leg to his bare feet. He kept his eyes on Chris’ face throughout. He then went back to Chris’ waistband, flipped the snap, and lowered the zipper. Chris was also sans underwear which was lovely.

“Don’t speak or move unless I direct you to do so,” Eli stated, sliding the zipper completely to the bottom. Chris nodded. “Speak.” He said, wanting to hear his agreement.

“Yes, sir.” He said perfectly.

Eli indicated for him to raise his hips which he did, and Eli pulled his jeans down to his thighs, baring his hard, leaking cock to his gaze. He didn’t touch, although it was difficult, he blew cool air across the head and watched his mate tremble. “So beautiful.” He said softly under his breath but clear enough that Chris could hear him. He pulled Chris’ jeans completely off and threw them toward the wall.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out the tube of lube he’d brought with him in anticipation of a moment like this. He placed it on the bedside table next to the lamp before shifting his attention back to the gorgeous man stretched out before him. His mate was magnificent and so obedient he could see many years of exploring and enjoying one another and finding the pleasure points and passions together.

“Release your right hand and unbutton your shirt.” Chris did as he was told, hurrying to get the flannel open. Once finished, Eli helped him remove the shirt, and he threw it in the general direction of the other pieces. Chris was not completely naked, and his body was amazing. Everything about this man, so vulnerable and yet so demanding, made Eli hot and impatient. He wanted inside to own and to claim.

Eli grabbed the lube and covered his hands and his cock, and then added a liberal coating to Chris’ cock. The

moment he touched his mate so intimately, Chris moaned and stiffened, ready to come with just a touch. “Not yet, my love.” He said and gripped him tight, stifling the urge and wrenching another guttural moan from his mate.

“Hands back over your head.” Chris reached up and took the spindles in a firm grip. “Spread your legs and present yourself to me.” Chris again did as he was told, and Eli was learning that he liked direction but not hard control. Little by little, he would learn all of his mate’s secrets. “I’m going to make love to you, fill you full, and fuck you hard, then I will bite you here.” He tapped the Chris’ shoulder. “My bear will bond with your wolf, and I give you permission to do as your wolf dictates when the time comes.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“This is a partnership, my love.”

“Yes, sir.” Oh, how Eli loved the way Chris said, sir.

“You are my perfect love, Chris. You are everything I have wished for.” He placed a loving kiss on Chris’ lips and then trailed kisses hot and wet down his chest, stopping when he wrapped Chris’ cock in a hard grip pumping several times, waking their need and stimulating the craving they now have for one another.

Eli got onto the bed and, with the extra lube, began to stretch and prepare his lover. Kisses covered Chris’ abdomen while he stroked and stimulated him to near insensibility. His mate was very vocal, and for now, he would allow it later; they would use limits and rewards concerning loss or forfeiture of self-control they had many years to figure themselves out.

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Chris thought he would go completely out of his mind before Eli finished preparing him. His thrusts and the size of his fingers were driving him insane the sensations were delicious and thrilling. This was what he craved the caring and the discipline. Being able to let go and experience without having to lead or make decisions. Eli was his lover and his

mate, and Chris would forever be thankful for Fate's perfect judgment.

He wanted to speak, but he also just wanted to feel. No words could describe the sensations radiating and rocketing through him. Eli's touch, so forceful and yet so gentle, kept him on edge but also satisfied his every desire. Eli hovered over him, just inches between their naked bodies and heat radiating between them.

Chris could feel his heart in his throat as the wait stretched on, and the sensations continued to build, and then he was there. Eli was under him, lifting his legs and plunging his hard throbbing cock deep inside Chris' channel, filling him and forcing himself deep, stretching him wide.

His breath caught in his throat, and then he began to pant as Eli pulled out and plunged back inside harder and faster each time flesh slapping and heat building. Eli held him, and Chris strangled the spindles of the headboard, never letting go while Eli ravaged him. It was out of this world exciting. It was made all the more perfect by the fact that they were Fate-destined mates, for it made every inch of their bodies super sensitive and responsive to the other.

Eli was hammering into him with a speed and strength that few could maintain, yet it appeared easy for him. He stroked and pounded, never pausing or slowing, driving them both to the edge with every move and every touch. It all came to a raging climax, the sensations vibrating and the excitement peaking, and they both came. Chris tried to resist, but it was impossible. He saw Eli's small smile, and it made everything perfect. He was falling in love with this man just as Fate had designed.

As the spasms began to ebb, Eli struck, sinking his teeth into Chris' shoulder exactly where he'd indicated. The bite was even more electric than the climax, and both seemed to bleed together, making an experience that was mind-numbing in its intensity.

Chris again could not hold back, and when the pain turned to the most exquisite pleasure, he too struck, biting Eli

on the shoulder, his wolf taking over and claiming their bear just as he'd been claimed. Eli had given him permission to acquiesce to the desires of his wolf, and this was what he'd intended. They stayed connected like this for several minutes letting their beast take control, and then gradually eased themselves down from this absolute pinnacle of pleasure.

Eli released his shoulder and licked the wound until it was completely healed, leaving a prominent scar, and Chris did the same. He wore the bear's mark now, and the bear wore the mark of the wolf; it was perfection. Eli slid out from within the tight grasp of Chris' body and began to massage Chris' hands and arms, easing the tension and soothing his muscles.

"You did very well, my love, and next time let us explore further your fondness for commands and my taste for control. We will take it slowly, and if you are ever uncomfortable or unsure, you must tell me, although, through our bond, I will always know if I am pleasing you." Chris was wrapped his arms around Eli's shoulders and pulled him down for a sweet yet powerful kiss taking Eli's lips in an embrace that melted every doubt or uncertainty. Chris had found his home and would never let go; he would never lose this man.

He'd been searching for someone for so long, and now he was, right here in his arms, giving Chris everything he desired. "You're everything I've ever wanted, Eli. You see me, and you know me, and you know what I want without me asking. No one has ever truly seen me before. How did I ever get so lucky?" He threaded his fingers through Eli's silky black hair and kissed him again, this time with a reverence that soon inspired Eli to take over.

Chris lay back and let his lover, his mate, take over, kissing him deeply and marking him in a way that went beyond physical. This was what a true connection felt like equal and so satisfying with freedom for excitement and curiosity. He could feel Eli's bear in his own mind reaching for his wolf, connecting and accepting their new lives together.

Eli eased back and rolled to lay beside him but kept him in the circle of his arms. Chris loved the feel of his mate's body, muscular and tanned with a dusting of soft black hair

that covered his chest. Chris cuddled up to him, lying his cheek against the softness and running his hands over his warm body. This was happiness in its purest form, just being and finding fulfillment in just being.

They stayed like that for half an hour before a shower became necessary. Again, Eli took care of him showering together and taking time to provide a lovely tactile experience for Chris while getting them both clean. He'd showered with lovers before but never had the experience been so loving. A loving and respectful relationship made everything more wonderful. He'd been searching in all the wrong places for a love that had been waiting for him all along.

After their shower, Eli ordered dinner, ate and talked, and grew closer by the minute. Spending time with his mate just talking and being present, being near was a pleasure all in itself.

"I love you, Eli." He blurted it out between drinks and dessert and seemed to have caught his mate by surprise. "You bring me peace, hope, and exciting anticipation that thrills me to the bone." Chris tried to describe the indescribable because it was all amazing thoughts and feelings that he was experiencing and all brought on by his mate, his lover, who seemed to know him so well.

Eli reached across the table and took Chris' hand in his. "I love you, Chris." He raised Chris' hand to his lips and kissed his knuckles before placing it back on the table and holding it gently.

"I can be bossy and overbearing at times, but know that everything I ask and everything I do, I do with your best interests at heart, be it in the bedroom or in our daily lives together. This is who I am, and I cannot be anyone else. I need to rule and be heard, and I know that you can give me what I need just as I can give you what you need." Chris nodded and gripped tighter to the hand that held his. "We're bonded, and our connection will continue to grow as our lives become entwined and our hearts become one. This is our life now, Chris, our life together, no past and no parents to interfere, just you and me and a future we will make together."

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“Leonard McShane, along with a few others from his neighborhood on the cliffs, have been meeting in secret discussing the influx of non-wolf members of the Pack. Which would explain his outburst over his son mating a bear shifter.” Derek stepped out onto the back deck where Henrik was relaxing with his mate Max.

“What does he have against non-wolves?” Max asked, using the same terminology but with a touch of sarcasm.

“Everything it would seem. He wants to bring back the purity of the Pack.” Derek chuckled and took a seat across from them. The night was clear and the scents clean and fresh, and it was too lovely of a night for such ugly talk, but it had to be addressed.

“Who are these others?” Henrik questioned with a hardness that spoke of little tolerance.

“Jordan Pike and Mayfield Johannsson. They’ve been getting together in town at a pub near the Indigo. The lead bartender there is Loren Makepeace, Julien’s brother.” Derek explained.

“Who is Julien Makepeace?” Max interjected. “The name sounds familiar.”

“He is a vampire and the front desk manager of the Indigo.” Henrik supplied and then indicated for Derek to continue.

“When I started asking questions about McShane, Julien put me in contact with Loren, who informed me of their weekly meetings and their topics of discussion. Although, he assumed they were simply bloviating and not seriously planning an uprising.” Derek paused for a moment.

“Pike and Johannsson joined the pack just after the last purge, as did McShane. They’ve only been members for a few years.”

“Did Loren tell you what plans they are devising?” Henrik’s attitude grew darker by the second. Max got up and excused himself, letting Henrik know he was off to bed and

for him to not be too long. Henrik promised to not be longer than necessary, and with a kiss, Max was off, and the brothers were alone.

“They want to eradicate the outsiders, according to what Loren overheard. They plan to generate more support for their beliefs within the pack and, at some point, make a move against the governing body, which is you, brother.” Derek ended with a similar sarcasm.

“What have they actually done, if anything or is this all just pub talk.” Henrik sat forward in his chair.

“Nothing that I can find apart from the verbal assault on Chris and Eli. I have Koa keeping an eye on Leonard and his compatriots, and he reports back to me. If they’re going to do anything, now will probably be the time, with the mating of Chris and Eli being a catalyst for their hatred to explode.

“If he challenges the bears, he will be in for a world of hurt,” Henrik commented.

“It is very possible that the bears could end up taking care of this problem for us.” Derek flashed a knowing smirk.

“If we’re lucky,” Henrik answered with a bark of laughter. “But if any of them, Leonard or his group of misfits, take a step too far or out of line, finish them. “

“Consider it done.”

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Chris had fallen asleep in Eli’s arms as they sat together on the sofa, watching a movie. He was so peaceful and beautiful that Eli could not bring himself to wake him and decided to just lay there together, watching his mate sleep. He, too, began to doze off until his phone brought him awake checking the screen, he saw that it was Dax and answered immediately.

“We got trouble over here, Eli.” He began, and his breathless state told Eli the situation was dire. Dax rarely got upset.

“What is it?” He asked, getting up as he kept talking. Chris woke and sat silently, listening to the call.

“The restaurant is on fire.” That statement had Eli rushing to the front door with Chris right on his heels. “It’s under control. The fire department is here, and everyone is okay, but we have trouble, and I need you here, brother.”

“I’m on my way.” He stated and closed the call.

“What’s wrong, Eli? What happened?” Chris reached for him, and Eli pulled him into a full-body hug needing the calm reassurance of his mate.

“Someone set fire to the restaurant.”

“Oh my god, no, is everyone okay?”

“Yes, Dax said no one got hurt. I have to go, but I will be back as soon as this is settled. Please stay indoors until you hear from me, I don’t trust your father, and I have an inkling that he’s behind the fire. If he comes here, do not let him inside.” Eli was speaking fast and in broken sentences, but Chris followed him easily, nodding and agreeing to all his requests.

“Call me when you know anything and let me know who is responsible; I need to know if it is him.” Chris pressed, and Eli promised to call as he kissed him hard and then rushed out the door to his truck. He saw Chris in the front window watching him as he pulled away. He hated leaving his mate, but Chris was safe here in his home on pack lands.

Chris was not far from his thoughts as he raced through town on his way home. They’d lived a calm and somewhat solitary life since moving to Eastport, and he’d be damned if he let a lowlife like Leonard McShane take that away from them. As soon as he got close, he could see the plume of black smoke rising and filling the sky. He pulled off to the side of the road and walked the remainder of the distance to stay out of the way of the first responders.

He could see at first glance that the restaurant was a total loss, burned nearly to the ground as the fire department fought to keep the flames from taking any of the other



structures nearby. He jogged up to stand beside Dax who was observing with a scowl and barely constrained rage.

“Where’s mom?”

“In the main house with Wes, she’s talking him through his shift. He still has difficulty, especially when he’s upset.” Dax stuck his hands into his pockets as Eli crossed his arms on his chest.

“Who did it?”

“Didn’t see them, but they were wolves. Wolf scent was all over the scene and throughout the yard.” Dax was being too wary and guarded.

“Talk to me, Dax,” Eli demanded, and then Dax turned to look at him directly, giving him his full attention.

“Leonard McShane showed up here last night just after closing. Mom and Wes were cleaning and closing up when he started pounding on the door. Mom initially told him to go away and come back tomorrow thinking he was drunk or something, but he wasn’t drunk.” They both turned to look at the remains of the restaurant when there came a loud crash. They watched the last of the roof cave in without comment.

“What did he want?” Eli prompted.

“He told her that he was Christopher’s father and had an issue with the mating and said it was unnatural. Of course, that just got mom’s hackles up, and she threw open the door, and he walked in.” Dax shook his head, his frustration getting the best of him. “The conversation went from bad to worse, and according to mom, Wes came out of the kitchen and charged at the man, thinking he was attacking mom. Wes got cut up pretty bad before mom shifted and put the run on him. By the time we arrived, he was gone.”

“He had a knife on him?” Eli was shocked that Leonard would attack Wes knowing full and well that a bear clan was in the vicinity. “He’s delusional if he thinks he can win against the clan or even mom, for that matter.”

“Yeah, when she shifted, she said he turned white, started to shake, and ran like the wind.” Dax sounded like

himself again.

“So, you believe the fire was also set by Leonard?” Eli asked and then added with a tilt of his head toward the chaos. “It makes sense that someone like him would resort to mindless destruction to try and make his point.” Hugh and Beau came over and stood with them looking just as angry and helpless as Eli and Dax.

“How’s Wes?” Eli asked Hugh, who’d just exited the main house. Beau had been up with the firefighters.

“He shifted, but he really needs practice. It wasn’t smooth or quick. Mom’s got her hands full. Once this is sorted out, we should all work with him and help him get the hang of it.” Beau was always matter-of-fact. Everyone agreed that it was a good idea. Wes had been shifting for about ten years now but not often, and he always found an excuse not to, and now it was clear that it was because he couldn’t.

“Blocks like this occur sometimes, and we just have to be patient and persistent,” Hugh added his two cents worth.

“So, what are we going to do with the wolf shifter who torched mom’s restaurant?” Beau asked.

“Do you know who did it?” Eli questioned him.

“Yes, Leonard McShane, Jordan Pike, and Mayfield Johannsson.”

Eli turned to look at him, surprised by the precise nature of his answer. “How is it that you are so sure? Dax couldn’t identify them, and he has the best nose in the family.”

“See the fireman speaking with the captain?” He asked, and Eli nodded that he did. “That’s Michael Lisbon, a wolf shifter and member of the Bay Harbor Pack. He recognized all the scents surrounding the fire and gave me their names.” Beau pulled out his phone, began searching the names, and found all their addresses.

“They all reside on the cliffs in Bay Harbor.”

“Let’s go.” Eli led the way.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Chris hadn't heard from Eli yet, but it hadn't been very long, so he needed to calm down and wait. He said he'd call, and he would call, but in the meantime, Chris decided to begin sketches for the walled garden planned for the Pack House.

Max had requested a quiet place to read and relax, and Alpha Henrik commissioned a walled garden a play on the beautiful gardens of Europe. He thought about using the lines of the standard but interspersed with the updates of an American influence. He needed a sketch, to begin with, so he should start.

He went to his office with the new door and locks and entered, feeling the pain of knowing his father had rummaged through his things. He pushed the thoughts away, for he would never find himself in such a position again. He sat at his drafting table and began to work. After about an hour, he felt the urge to call his mother. She was never a great supporter, but she never joined in when his father took him to task. She was doing the best she could to maintain her own life and security. She wasn't mother of the year, but she wasn't a monster either. He wanted to know if she was aware of the fire and if his father had anything to do with it. Eli had not called, and he was finding it nearly impossible to wait any longer.

He rang her, but there was no answer which was odd because although she relied on a landline, she always answered unless she wasn't home. If his father was out committing arson, he doubted that his mother would be with him, so where was she? Over the course of the next thirty minutes, he tried her number three more times, and still no answer.

His concern for her safety grew, and he considered driving to their residence and checking on her. Just when he was about to try her again, he received a text from Eli. *'Everyone is fine. The restaurant is a complete loss. We believe that we know who set it. I will be home soon and will tell you more. Love you, Eli.'* It was short and did not tell him who set the fire.

His suspicious mind told him that Eli did not want to upset him by telling him that his father had indeed burned down the family restaurant. Another part of him held onto the hope that it was a random attack and was nothing personal. How would they deal with it if his father was the one who committed the crime? How would his family feel about having Chris around after such a thing? He stopped himself once more from thinking it was non-productive and causing him unnecessary anxiety.

Chris turned back to his sketches and began planning the walled garden focusing on comfort and beauty first and cost and practicality second. He likes to start out with complete fantasy and slowly pare it back to a workable plan. He was startled out of his contemplations when the doorbell rang once and then, within a few seconds, rang again and longer. Whoever it was, they were impatient, so Chris took his time getting from his office to the front door. He was sometimes quite passive-aggressive when annoyed. When he reached the front door, rather than just opening it, as usual, Eli's locks and order that he be cautious made him pause and look out the small window first.

To his shocked surprise, his father stood there ringing his doorbell, looking fearful and frantic, something Chris could not recall ever seeing. His father could be wary, but he had never witnessed frantic before. Instantly he assumed it had something to do with his mother and was about to open the door when Eli's words came back to him. He told him that his father could not be trusted and to not let him inside.

"Let me in, Chris. There are people after me. I have to hide." He said while looking back and forth as if those looking for him were about to pounce.

"I don't want you here go home and let mother take care of you," Chris told him in no uncertain terms, but he was not ready to hear it. Chris was his son, and he assumed he would assist him regardless of his treatment and attitude these many years.

"Open the door and let me in. They're hunting me, Chris. I need to hide." The desperation in his voice was

playing hard with Chris' natural empathy.

“Go see the Alpha. He'll protect you if you've done nothing to warrant the abuse.” Chris was trying hard to follow Eli's instructions, but his father was beginning to break down his resolve. Chris leaned his head against the door and listened as his father begged him to open the door and let him in, and finally, he clicked the lock and opened the door.

He saw the truth too late, and although he tried to close the door, he was not strong enough against the force of two men. It wasn't just his father but also his friend Jordan Pike a like-minded individual and a good friend of his father. They pushed Chris backward into the living room and quickly slammed and locked the front door. Jordan had a handgun, as did his father, but he also carried what looked like a billy club. He held it in one hand and slapped it into the palm of the other like some thug.

“Get out of my house.” He shouted, and his father laughed.

“That's not going to happen. We'll hold up here until your bear friends stop searching.” He didn't make much sense with that strategy.

“Eli will be home soon, and he will make you leave.” Chris stood tall and tried to be forceful, but they both laughed.

“He won't be home for quite a while.” Jordan scoffed. “He and the others are out looking for us. They found Mayfield, or rather Derek found Mayfield, the poor bastard, and that will keep them busy until we can decide our next move.”

“They won't look for us here. Who would believe you'd be stupid enough to let me inside your home. This is perfect.” He laughed and brought the billy club down on the end table, breaking the small table into pieces.

Chris started backing up, hoping that he could make it to his office and lock himself in before they realized what he was doing, but he wasn't fast enough. His father saw through his attempt before he made it to the end of the sofa and

knocked him sideways with the club in his hand. It was when he made contact with the club against Chris' shoulder that he noticed the mating scar and went absolutely berserk.

“What the hell is that on your shoulder?” He screamed. He hit him again with the club striking his upper arm when he did not answer. “You let that animal claim you?” He was repeatedly shouting; he struck out at Chris, but he dodged the blow this time.

“We are bonded.” Chris was not going to deny his mate. “He’s going to kill you and your friend. I assume you burned down his mom’s business.”

“That beast had no right to be running a restaurant feeding the unsuspecting her nasty offerings. It was unnatural, just as her kind are unnatural. I did the town a favor when I burned it, and if I’d had more time, I would have burned their houses too.” His father was ranting and breaking things with his club while Jordan dashed from window to window, checking to see if they’d been discovered. He was ignoring Chris for the most part.

“I can’t believe you did all of this simply because you see other paranormal groups as beneath you. How does a bear shifter, fox shifter, or vampire, for that matter, end up beneath you, a lowly member of a wolf pack? You’re nothing special, and you’ve never been anything special.” Chris was tired of sitting there listening to his father carrying on. He had to get out a few of his own truths.

“They’re not normal; only wolves are normal. We were the first of the shifter populations. All the other shifters came after us. We are the rulers of this world.” Chris scowled at his father’s lies and false logic.

“That’s not true everyone knows that the dragons were the first shifters, and I don’t see them going around killing off the other populations. Maybe learn something from the dragons and live and let live.” Chris told him and watched as his face got red with anger.

“You know nothing.” He screamed and destroyed Chris’ overhead lamp with the club. He was tired of this back

and forth. He wanted Eli, his mate. He needed him there with him, so he began to focus all his thoughts and desires on his mate reaching out to make contact. They'd been apart too long, and Chris was pining for his lover, and to his delight, contact was made rather quickly.

...

Eli and his brothers found the home of Mayfield Johannsson fairly quickly and proceeded to kick down the front door and enter. They discovered him trying to hide in a closet on the second floor and drug him outside to the front yard, where Derek happened to be waiting for them.

Mayfield incorrectly assumed that Derek was there to save him from the bear shifters. "They attacked me for no reason. These oafs have no right to come on pack land and treat me like this." He pleaded his case to Derek, who was hearing none of it.

"They're here for restitution Mayfield," Derek informed. "And information, I assume." Derek stepped back and let the bears get what they needed from Mayfield. He confessed to the arson, although he blamed it on Leonard McShane as his idea.

"He's angry about the mix of species in the Bay Harbor Pack, especially with the mating of a bear shifter and a wolf. He claims it goes against nature and plans to make sure his son never bonds with his mate."

"And how does he propose to do that. The restaurant has no bearing on Eli and Chris." Dax asked the question while Eli watched him for the truth.

"He plans to kill one or both of them, if necessary, to prevent the poisoning of his line." Mayfield seemed pleased with the prospect.

"You feel the same way?" It was Derek who asked the question, and Mayfield visibly quaked as he turned to the dark wolf.

"I believe in the purity of one's line." He answered carefully but was afraid to outright lie to Derek.

“You agree with his plan to kill to prevent the bond?” Derek sounded completely uninterested as he fired off the questions.

“Purity is important, and death may be the only deterrent.” He looked unsure and quickly averted his gaze away from Derek.

“Do you know where Jordan and Leonard are hiding?” Eli stepped up, eager to end this discussion, finish off the threats, and get back to his mate.

“They took off together. Leonard’s wife left him, and he’s on his own now, so he’ll stay close to Jordan.” He was not being completely forthcoming, so Eli took him to the ground with a hand wrapped around his throat. He didn’t shift, so he was caught off guard by the move. “Where are they?” He yelled and squeezed a little harder. It was at that moment that Chris’ call came through to him. His bear reared back, and his mind went on alert as every cell in his body was focused on his mate.

He tossed Mayfield aside, leaving him choking on the ground as he looked around briefly and then took off running. He could get there faster on foot, so he did not wait around to explain just jumped from the side of the cliff tucking and rolling, making his way to the road below as fast as possible. His brothers, all three, jumped into his truck and followed close behind.

Derek walked over to Mayfield and finished him. He was a single wolf without relations, and no one would miss him. He was not to be trusted or released. Death was the only option for traitors like him and his friends. Derek disposed of the remains and put in an order to have his home cleared and cleaned and his name stricken from the rolls.

Eli could feel his mate’s desperation and need, and his bear was on the verge of a shift as he tore up the ground getting to his little love, the center of his universe and the answers to all his prayers. Leonard and Jordan were with Chris, and the realization made a rage tear through Eli that was about to consume him. The need to get there and get there now



made him push faster than ever before, and within minutes he was at Chris' front door, and his brothers were not far behind. He didn't wait to knock. He simply burst through the door, but the scene on the other side had him catching his breath as his heart nearly stopped.

Leonard was there with a handgun pointed at his son's head. The other one, Jordan, was not visible, but Eli could feel him close by. "Don't move, or this young man will get his brains scattered all over the room," Leonard said with a sickening grin. This was his son he was talking about, yet it did not seem to affect him. His brothers were outside, and Eli knew they would be putting a plan together.

"I love you, Eli," Chris spoke, and it made Leonard mad.

"I love you too, baby," Eli responded.

"Shut up," Leonard shouted and pulled Chris backward further into the room and away from the entrance. He didn't stop until they were on the far side of the living room, and Eli stood at the entrance. Eli could see down the hall to the bedroom and office and knew that Jordan was down there waiting and listening.

"Drop the gun and step back. You have nowhere to go, Leonard. Keep this up, and you're going to find yourself dead." Eli started working on his nerves to get him off balance.

"If I die, so do you, little whore." He held Chris against him with an arm around his neck. Chris was considerably shorter than Leonard, so it was easy for him to hold him and control him.

"Hurt him, and I will tear you apart. There won't be enough left of you to know who or what you were." Eli delivered the threat deep and cold, and he got a reaction. Leonard stared at him and took another step back without comment. He appeared to be questioning his plans. "Let him go, and I will let you go."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Beau and Hugh rounded the house to the back door and picked the locks to get in until they decided to just break them as quietly as possible. Dax saw the man in the bedroom through the window and was keeping an eye on him, ready to enter if he attempted to move from the room.

Eli was moved closer, not worrying about Jordan down the hall. He knew his brothers would take care of him if he intervened. His attention was on Chris and the man who was holding him, threatening him, filling him with fear. Eli had promised Chris that no one would hurt him again and that he never had to fear anyone, and he meant to keep that promise.

Leonard made a decision. The kind of decision an evil, addled mind would make and turned the gun on Eli, pulling off a shot and catching him in the shoulder. That action set into motion a flurry of actions. Beau and Hugh came through the back door splintering the wood and taking out part of the wall as they rushed to the living room. Dax burst through the bedroom window when Jordan moved for the door with gun in hand. Jordan didn't make it to the door.

When the bullet hit Eli, he immediately shifted, as did Chris, both turning on Leonard just as the man started shooting wildly around the room. He pushed away from Chris when Eli charged him, hoping to have a clear shot at the bear, but he was too slow as hell broke loose in the house. The brothers charged the room, and Chris' wolf turned on his father sinking his teeth into his throat as Eli leapt for the man, taking them all to the floor. He was brought down in grand style.

Eli's bear was ready to kill but seeing his mate ready to tear out his own father's throat to save him calmed him considerably, and he knew he had to stop what was happening. His mate was kind and gentle with a heart that was easily affected, and Eli didn't want to leave him with the memory of killing his father. He shifted back, and clutched at his mate, pulling him gently but firmly away from Leonard.

Chris reacted to his mate and released his grip before tearing out his father's throat. Eli talked him down, pulled him away, and gave Leonard to his brothers, who secured him immediately and drug him out into the yard along with Jordan. It took Chris a few minutes to shift, and when he did, he threw himself into Eli's arms and held on for dear life.

"I'm sorry I let him in. I pitied him, and he used me." Chris feverishly tried to explain himself while clutching at his mate and burying his face in Eli's warm chest. Eli wrapped him in his arms and held him, giving him what he needed to center himself and calm down. "I'll never disobey you again, I promise."

"Don't make wild promises, baby." Eli chuckled, so happy and relieved to have his lover in his arms, safe and protected from those who sought to harm him. After a few minutes, Dax came in and tossed Eli and Chris both a pair of jeans to put on. Eli smiled at the gesture. "I don't think my brothers want to have to look at our naked asses." He said with a smile.

"I love your brothers, Eli," Chris announced off-handedly while slipping on the jeans.

"And they love you too, baby," Eli responded in kind. Once they were dressed, Eli held his mate, and they walked out into the front yard where his brothers stood with Derek, who was holding both men, Leonard and Jordan, by the scruff of the neck, and neither man was moving or talking.

Dax walked up to them and pulled each man in for a quick brotherly hug before stepping back. "Take Chris home, Eli. We'll clean up this mess. You go take care of your mate." Eli nodded to Dax and his brothers, scooped Chris into his arms, and walked over to his truck. After getting him seated and comfortable, Eli jumped in behind the wheel and took off.

Everything in him wanted to get his sweet little mate away from that scene as soon as possible before he saw something that he would never be able to erase from his mind. Eli grabbed a blanket from behind the seat and spread it over

Chris as he pulled him over closer. Chris leaned against him and burrowed into the blanket.

...

Chris was surprised by the fact that he did not feel ashamed or brainless for having fallen for his father's pleas. Eli had a way of taking the sting out of stupid decisions, and he loved him for that and for so much more. Eli was his life, now his love and his rock. The old Chris, with his secrets and fears, didn't exist anymore, and in his place was a man of ever-growing confidence and strength.

"You make me so happy, Eli." He blurted out the thought that crossed his mind. "I can be myself with you, and that is such a feeling." he placed his hand on Eli's thigh and reveled in the radiating warmth of his beautiful bear. "I'm the luckiest man in the world."

The last comment forced a laugh from Eli, but it was a happy, pleasing laugh that filled Chris with a peaceful satisfaction. "I'm the lucky one, baby. You are my perfection personified, and I will stand by you and love you till the end and beyond if that is possible." He turned and kissed the top of Chris' head before turning his attention back to the road ahead.

"I want to join your Clan. Do you think your mother will be okay with a wolf in her bear clan?" Chris asked as he cuddled closer.

"My mother will be thrilled to have you, as will my brothers," Eli assured.

"But I have yet to meet her."

"I would introduce you as soon as we return, but I must have you to myself first. Let us get reacquainted, and then you can formally meet the family." Eli winked at him, and Chris couldn't stop the chuckle that passed his lips.

"Sounds like a plan." He snickered, and Eli squeezed him close and dropped another kiss on the top of his head. Chris was beside himself with happiness at the way his life had evolved. Just when everything seemed to be at its darkest, the light of his very life showed up. He thought briefly about

his father and what might become of him but quickly put the thoughts away.

Leonard would be held to account for his actions, and none of it had anything to do with Chris. It was not his fault or his concern at this point, and the best thing for him was a clean break from both his parents, something he'd tried to achieve in the past, but they had refused to leave him in peace.

“What are you thinking about, baby?” Eli was tuned into him now just as he was tuned to Eli's moods. There was no hiding from one's mate.

“Just thinking about how wonderful life can be.” Eli shot him a side eye, making it clear he didn't completely believe him, but he didn't challenge him either, which Chris appreciated. They were perfect for one another just as Fate had designed.

...

Eli was eager to get his mate home and to reclaim what was his. The events of the day were such that the need to have his mate in his bed and in his arms was raging within him. It seemed like ages before he was finally pulling into his driveway and parking behind the garage.

The restaurant fire was finally extinguished, and everyone had left. The charred remains would be dealt with soon enough, and he and his brother would begin the rebuild, but for now, his mind was on one thing: Chris. Everything else in life could be dealt with later, but Chris needed his attention now.

He helped Chris from the truck and once again scooped him up into his arms and carried him inside and straight to the bedroom before lying him down on the bed. Looking around, he could see that his mother had paid a visit because the room had been cleaned and the bed remade; he smiled at her thoughtfulness.

“I need you, Chris. My bear needs you.” He stated his intent, and Chris understood. He immediately kicked off his jeans and waited for instruction, god he loved this man. Eli

kept his jeans on, walked to the end of the bed, and pointed to a spot in front of him.

“On your knees at the edge, head down and arms stretched out in front of you. Do not move and do not speak unless it is to ask me to stop, understood?” He made himself clear.

“Understood.” He could hear the excitement in his mate’s tone.

“I think we will start with a good spanking. You have disobeyed me several times, and I believe a spanking is in order. Are you ready?” Eli walked up on Chris’ right draping his arm across Chris’ hips to keep him in place while rubbing his sweet round ass with his other hand.

Chris nodded his readiness rather than speaking, and Eli delivered the first sharp clap of flesh on flesh, eliciting an erotic response from his mate. He delivered another and another, reddening that ass to a cherry perfection as his mate writhed under the pleasurable pain. Chris did not speak, but the moans and squeals made his gratification clear.

While he continued bringing Chris’ flesh to a sensitive and tender redness, he began to stretch and work his channel, plunging his large fingers inside his mate’s hole to accommodate him. The need to be inside was growing out of control, so he hurried just a little. Using the lotion on the dresser, he slathered Chris’ hole and opened his jeans, and coated his own cock with enough to make sure he would slide in with ease.

Eli rubbed the tender flesh of Chris’ ass, further stimulating and readying his mate for more. “Keep your head down and spread your knees apart.” He told him, and with a sensual moan of anticipation, Chris followed his orders while also purposely sticking his ass up and out, searching for more contact.

“I’ll take care of you, baby.” He whispered as he positioned himself behind Chris and stepped between his legs. Eli lowered his jeans just a bit to give him freedom of movement and gripped Chris’s hips while plunging inside that

amazing hole, stretching and filling his mate with his hard cock claiming the wolf as his own once again.

Chris was panting hard and gripping the bedspread in tight fists. His focus was on the connection, and fell into rhythm with Eli rocking back as Eli thrust forward, building a sensation of pleasure that was taking them both. The speed intensified, and Eli found himself melting into the heat of the moment taking everything Chris was offering and giving him everything he was demanding. The climax came rapidly, exploding and releasing within the tight confines of his mate's gorgeous body.

Chris came spilling his seed on the bedspread beneath him when Eli sunk his teeth back into the scar on his shoulder, reclaiming what was his and solidifying their bond. It was powerful and deep, and their connection seared between them, bonding them completely and for all time.

Eli finished and pulled out, placing a kiss on the beautiful, ravaged flesh of Chris' ass. "You make me tremble with desire, baby. I need you so badly." Eli rambled as Chris continued to moan with ecstasy. "Speak, baby."

"You fulfill my every fantasy. You are my perfect match." Eli kicked off his jeans, picked Chris up into his arms, and carried him to the attached bath.

"We're going to bathe, and then I'm going to take you again and again and again."

"Yes, yes, please."

## EPILOGUE

Chris and Eli settled into their lives together, with Chris moving into Eli's home and joining the Clan. Alpha Henrik accepted Eli as a member of the pack and told Chris that he did not need to leave his pack.

“Both of you will remain members in good standing with the Bay Harbor Wolf pack.” He announced and allowed them to keep Chris's small home on Pack lands. He saw it as a win by pulling the bear clan into closer community with the pack. They were powerful and loyal, and Henrik wanted to keep them close plus, he wanted to make sure Chris completed the walled garden for his mate Max.

Chris began to work with Eli and Dax adding a landscape architect allowed them to expand and grow their business. Chris also continued to work with the Alpha's construction company that dealt specifically with the Pack lands. For Chris, business was booming, and he loved it.

Chris never questioned what happened to his father or Jordan and resolved to believe that the pack did whatever they needed to do, and he didn't need details. Leave it be said that neither man would ever bother him again or the pack. His mother returned to her birth pack and cut off all contact. Chris recognized that she was afraid and that maybe they might find a way to connect in the years to come, but for now, no contact was fine with him.

Edward became a familiar figure around the clan as the friendship between him and Paula grew. Chris was pleased that his friend was happy for him and visited often. The restaurant was rebuilt with restitution from selling the property of the three wolves who set it on fire. Eli and his brother made it larger and more extensive, adding kitchen space and equipment suited specifically for a bakery, something Paula had wanted to explore.

The mating of wolves and bears was turning out to be beneficial for all parties involved. The bears got the added security and community of the wolf pack, and the wolf pack



got the got the power and loyalty of a bear clan. It worked out well for all everyone.

“We need to be more careful when accepting new members.” Derek dropped the comment as he and Henrik sat on the deck, taking in the morning sunrise with a fresh cup of coffee.

“What do you suggest?” Henrik was aware that Derek had been working on tightening the membership rules.

“No new member for a while. I want to do a background on any new members accepted since the last purge. Those who witnessed and experienced the purge have been fully investigated, but new members like Leonard and his friends came after and without a knowledge of what happens to traitors. We need to get a good and solid picture of the membership before adding new.” Derek might have taken the situation to an extreme, but Henrik felt there was no harm in stalling membership for a few years to get a good read on the pack.

“I agree and leave it in your capable hands.” Henrik sipped his coffee before adding. “Besides, we just added a bear to our rolls and, by extension, an entire bear clan. I think we’re good for a while.”

“Paula is a fine woman with fine sons, and we are lucky to have them in our number.” Derek, who rarely gave compliments, agreed. He then went on to discuss his plan to root out any others within the pack with selfish intent. “The issues seem to arise among those residing on the cliffs, so Leo and I are moving into one of the vacant homes on the cliff to get a feel for the neighborhood.”

“Your presence there will definitely make a difference, but you will be missed at the Pack House, so don’t stay away too long. Get rid of the problems, Derek, for I am tired of dealing with incompetent wolves who think they possess the power to take over my pack.”

“Consider it done.”

**THE END**



# About The Author

**B.A. Stretke**



B.A. Stretke is a Gay Romance and fiction author who publishes through Dreamspinner Press, LLC, and Amazon.com.

B.A Stretke began writing as a hobby. He read his first Jane Austen novel as a teen and was instantly hooked. The age-old dream of being a novelist took hold. Now long into adulthood, and a few years as an editor under his belt, B.A. is a full-time writer.

B.A. spends his days reading, engaging in sarcasm, and plotting the next storyline, often leaving little head space for

much else. He loves hiking through the Northern Michigan woods he calls home, often finding inspiration for his books. Writing and finding that perfect cup of coffee occupy the rest of his time.

B.A. Stretke lives in Northern Michigan.

You can connect with B.A. Stretke on his website:  
[www.bastretke.com](http://www.bastretke.com)

Follow him on Twitter @BAStretkeWriter

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