



**HIS  
BONDED  
OMEGA  
MATE**

**SWEETWATER PACK  
BOOK THREE**

**JAX  
STUART**

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BONDED  
OMEGA  
MATE

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For Finn, because I promised you this book since Raina got  
the last one, even if you don't understand mpreg



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Life in Sweetwater was supposed to be a fresh start for Roan. A new family, friends, and an important job. However, remaining behind during the beta sickness put a target on his back. While fighting for his life, he happens upon his fated mate, but there's a complication. He's emotionally bonded to two betas and wants Roan to accept the three of them.

Time is running out for Hiroshi. He must find his fated mate before he is forced into an arranged marriage with an alpha known for not taking no as an answer. With the goddess on his side, he meets Roan, his fated mate and an alpha that seems willing to give their unconventional mating a try.

There are unforeseen consequences for shifter kind when the four try to bond that could change things forever.

**His Bonded Omega Mate is book #3 of the Sweetwater Pack series and should be read in order. This book is slightly darker than the previous two, with more instances of violence and some off page, though discussed on page, coerced consent. While there is MMMM content, this is not**

**a poly romance for Roan. In this series, men can carry babies and also lactate.**

# ABANDONED

## Roan

If someone had told me five years ago, hell, even a year ago, that I'd be working for the Alpha of the Sweetwater pack as assistant and bodyguard to the Alpha Mate, I'd have laughed in their face.

Then, if they'd told me that the Alpha Mate had been my betrothed, my one and only love, Ryder Hayes, I think I'd probably have punched them in the face.

Yet, here I was, nearly six years after that fateful day that changed our lives forever, working for my once mate-to-be, the only man that I'd ever been with, ever loved. Except Ryder was no more. In his place was Kade, a stronger, sharper version of the boy I'd loved.

Now I thanked the Goddess that I was by my best friend's side. I'd always love Ryder, in that first love way, but I adored Kade as if he was the sibling that I'd never had.

I'd watched over Kade from the shadows of the light he gave off for over five years. The last year had been particularly difficult to endure for us both. There had been times that I

wanted to step in to protect Kade from himself. To let him know he had me, even if he still hated me.

I vowed I would never leave his side. I kept that promise, until the beta sickness hit the pack, and we were forced apart.

“But Blake, I need Roan. Why can’t he come with us?”  
Kade almost pleaded with his mate and our alpha leader.

“Kade—“

“Blake, Roan hasn’t got anyone here aside from us.”

“He has Axel and Chase. Dalton too. We need him here to run the office and relay calls. Roan is important to you. I know that and I’m sorry we can’t take him with us, but your safety comes first and Deke is the better fighter in both forms. The house is too small to have three alphas in it. I really am sorry, Kade.”

I listened to the conversation from my desk across the vestibule area from Dakota’s desk outside Blake’s office. Kade had already gone through the same conversation with his papa and Dakota. I knew his loyalty to me was the reason for him trying to get his own way. He’d agreed with Jasper already about leaving.

Rationally, I knew both Blake and Jasper were right. Having so many alphas in Kade’s old, small, two-bedroom house was a recipe for disaster. Deke was the better fighter, just as I was better at stealth and observing.

Being offended was a waste of time and energy. I still had a lot to prove here. I’d only been with the pack a couple of

months, and many doubted my place was by the side of the Alpha Mate, which was a coveted role. Especially with my background.

It shouldn't have taken me by surprise that my history with Kade had gotten around the compound quicker than... fuck, something hella quick. Really, gossip was currency in the Sweetwater pack. There were no secrets between shifters, especially in Sweetwater, which was possibly the closest pack I'd ever seen. There was no back story they wouldn't all uncover. They could sniff out all the things you wanted to keep to yourself in Sweetwater.

Like your secret shame.

They'd figured out my history with the Hayes pack before I'd had time to settle into my room in the mansion I now called home.

It wasn't in my nature to complain, honestly I deserved half of what people said about me. For years I'd gone along with what my alpha, Rincoln Hayes, Ryder's father, had told me to do.

Rincoln and my father, Xavier, had been friends. Emphasis on the had, since Rincoln was dead and I had no idea what my father was doing. I hadn't spoken to the man in years.

When Kade, or Ryder as he was then, started having heats, they decided I would be the best alpha to help him through them. Together, Rincoln and Xavier had forged a pact that Kade and I would be betrothed and mate formally at twenty-one when it was legal in the eyes of the shifter council.

Neither of us got a choice in the matter, but it helped that we had been close friends for a long time. I doted on my omega friend and was honored that the alpha had chosen me for such an important role.

With having no Alpha Heir, Rincoln had effectively made me his heir apparent and had begun training me in the skills that I would need to run the pack properly. The man had been in his late fifties, still young in the eyes of shifters, and showed no sign of retiring from the pack that he had rebuilt to suit his style of leadership, so I'd known that I would be just another enforcer with slightly elevated status. It would be decades before Rincoln gave up leadership of the pack, since I'd been unlikely to challenge him for it.

As such, people assumed that I'd been aware of the abuse that Jasper, Kade's papa, had endured at the hands of his mate. I hadn't and would swear on The Luna and my alter that it was only towards the end, when Rincoln became increasingly desperate to control Kade and Jasper, that I had any suspicion.

It didn't make any of my actions better. Didn't absolve my conscience or ease my guilt. I should have acted sooner. Reported Rincoln to the council, though at that time, the council was rife with sympathizers to Rincoln. He'd had half in his pockets, so perhaps that would have made it worse.

Whenever I thought about that time, my mind went around in circles about what I should've or could've done. Before I remembered I had been a man of just twenty-one that was completely in love with the man that was my best friend, and

I'd been blind to the faults of my alpha. I had so little power. Rincoln could have taken Kade from me, ejected me from the pack, caused harm to my family, if he'd perceived any slight from me.

Every interaction with him towards the end was a case of dancing on this invisible line I knew I couldn't cross, but seemed to keep moving with every sentence that came out of Rincoln's mouth.

The final straw had been seeing bruises on Jasper. Hearing that Kade had been kept isolated in his room. I had tried to see him. We hadn't been allowed to live together until we completed our mating and the guards on the door had turned me away. It hadn't mattered to them I was the heir apparent. Rincoln had banned me from Kade.

Later that day, the one etched into my memory, Jasper came to me, still covered in bruises, and said Rincoln planned to give me a fertility boosting potion. He'd tried to smuggle Kade a contraceptive potion, but had struggled to find a witch willing to make one. The reason that Kade was isolated was Rincoln had caught Kade with heat blockers and beaten him. The first, and last, time that he would lay his hands on Kade.

I'd wanted to dispute that my alpha would do such a thing, yet when I downed the potion just hours after the warning, it tasted different to the usual contraceptive I took to prevent Kade from falling pregnant. My heart had sank. The realization of how low my alpha, a man that I'd looked up to, had dropped, landing like a stone in my gut. I still couldn't

believe that he'd been willing to trick his son and his mate to be into an illegal mating because of a pregnancy that neither of us was ready for. With Kade being months away from being twenty-one, the pack likely would have escaped sanctions, but that said nothing about the mental and emotional harm that the potion would have caused.

So, I'd fled.

Once clear of Hayes' pack lands, I'd called the council, praying for a progressive alpha and finding Councilman Ford. A man who had rescued me from punishment and given me a chance at redemption.

I'd taken the bottle as evidence for my trial, tossed what little I could stuff into a bag, and run.

For my shame, I'd never considered taking Kade. I'd rationalized it, thinking that once his heat had started, I could have gone into a rut and we would have ended up in the situation that we wanted to avoid.

Only later, when the council detailed the injuries that he had suffered, did the full force of my guilt crush me.

In his time of need, I hadn't been there. I'd left and hadn't looked back until I was safe from the reach of Rincoln. It was a shame that I would have to live with for the rest of my life, even if Kade and Jasper had both forgiven me.

When I'd been sent back to Rincoln's side after my trial, sentence in place, I'd made up an excuse, the council had even faked a car accident, for missing Kade's heat, my hatred for



the man in front of me, the man I was, making me convincing enough that Rincoln had believed me.

Then I'd worked in the periphery of Kade's rebuilt life to protect him from the man that was his father, while pretending that I, too, was looking for Rincoln's missing son.

I'd happily balanced my guilt and duty to Kade, paying penance for my crimes without complaint, until I saw just how much the man I'd loved was fading.

Just as Rincoln arrived in Sweetwater, I'd been about to put in another request to the council. For years, I'd worked with Councilman Ford and had begged him repeatedly to allow me to reveal my presence.

Kade was struggling, with no one in his life he could really rely on. I'd requested permission to approach him, to write to him, anything, just to let him know he wasn't alone.

Then he'd let in Dakota. Met Blake, his fated mate. And everything changed.

The pack was understandably wary of me for all of my history with the Hayes pack. For being the promised mate of their beloved Alpha Mate. They worshiped Blake, well, most of them did, and obviously wanted what was best for the young alpha. That was not the ex of their Alpha Mate spending all his time with him and the Alpha. Or being given a position of responsibility so soon after being accepted into the pack.

Not that Blake had asked their opinions when he and Kade had set me up as Kade's assistant and guard. I'd just been happy to be accepted into Kade's new pack, to be near my friend, so I'd gone along with it without complaint or objection.

I loved my job. No two days were ever the same. There were always fires to put out, metaphorically speaking, though with regular visits from witches, real ones were possible.

Being around Kade properly again was a gift. I was a free man. Pardoned by the council, I could go anywhere I wanted, start my own pack far from here, start fresh somewhere new, but I wanted to be with my best friend.

While I wasn't in love with him anymore, I still loved him. He was the most important person to me, the only family that I had, and it broke my heart that he had to leave me behind. Even when it was for the best.



A week after Kade had left the compound, and I was running on fumes. Exhaustion weighed my limbs as I locked the door to my office in the minutes before midnight. The end of another stupidly long day. There were never enough hours to get it all done, to keep all the cogs in the machine that was the pack going in the alpha's absence and all of our betas still in coma like states.

Every single one of them, on pack land or not, had fallen to the sickness and had been sleeping for the last week.

The remaining alphas and some of the willing omegas had stepped up to fill in working at the pack businesses. Since it was summer, the children didn't have school and Georgia looked after some of them so that their parents could help out.

It wasn't enough. So many things were being put off because we simply didn't have the people to do the tasks.

Being left in charge of the office meant that all the mansion tasks were being left to me. Tasks and demands on my time pulling me in every direction from when I rose with the sun until I could crawl into my bed for a couple of hours' rest.

All I'd done for every minute of every day for the last week had been ordering unwilling alphas and cajoling equally tired omegas into keeping everything sort of running.

Tempers were fraying, and I'd lost any sort of reluctant respect from the other alphas in the pack. They fought me on every decision I handed down, regardless of whether or not it had come from me. I was sick of the whole thing. Blake and Deke were aware of the situation and had been trying to help. Only that made things worse.

All too quickly, the subtle disdain and dislike had morphed into something akin to hatred. These alphas were wild and dangerous without Blake at the mansion to control them.

I trudged up the stairs towards my room at the end of the corridor near the family rooms of the alpha. I yawned, completely drained, my wolf silent as he tried to soothe my worries with just his presence.

They caught me completely off guard. Which was the reason for what came next. With a little warning, it likely wouldn't have happened.

“Grab him!” came the shout, something muffling the voice, distorting it.

My reactions were far too slow as I tried to lurch out of reach of the hands that took hold of me.

They clutched at me as I struggled to get away. We tussled on the steps until they took hold and dragged me to the ground. I rolled down stairs as they kicked at me, connecting with my legs, ribs, and head.

I landed awkwardly with a thud, my head smacking against the floor; the breath knocked from my lungs. My arm screamed in protest as it was forced into an unnatural angle with my landing. Struggling to rise, I'd just gotten my legs under me when they shoved me back to the floor.

It was impossible to tell how many of them there were. My wolf was too frantic, calling out for pack mates to help me as the men kicked and punched me.

Then there was silence. I couldn't reach him. My claws wouldn't unleash themselves. I was defenseless against the onslaught.

There were at least three of them. All big. One was a wolf for sure, another feline, but it was all too confusing for me to identify them properly. I had an idea for one.

They shouted obscenities at me as they continued their abuse on my body. Told me I didn't deserve my place in the pack. That I shouldn't be around Kade and needed to leave. To take this for what it was. A warning.

For endless minutes, they kicked and punched what felt like every inch of my body as I curled in on myself, trying to shelter some of myself from the abuse. I begged for my wolf to help me even as I felt a void where my wolf usually lived.

Eventually, their assault ended, the culprits fleeing as someone rounded the corner coming from the kitchens.

“Roan? Roan! Are you okay?” The familiar voice of Larken called, pulling me out of the darkness that was descending, consciousness slipping away with each stuttering breath.

“Lark?” I whispered.

“Stay awake, Roan. I think you've got a head injury.”

One eye cracked open, the other swollen shut. I saw my friend's hand come away from my skull, covered in blood.

“Don't —“

“Where's your phone? I'll call Aldrin. You need a healer.”

“No,” I weakly protested, “help me up.”

“You're seeing a healer. Stay here. I'll call him.”

“You can't!” I protested at his retreating back.

I think I lost my battle with unconsciousness because when I roused, they had moved me to the large sectional sofa in the living room.

Aldrin was perched on the coffee table next to my head, hands hovering over the worst of the injuries there. “Stay still,” he cautioned as I moved to sit up. “I’ve got the worst of it. Cracked skull, three broken ribs, broken humerus, ulna, clavicle, tibia and fibula fractures. All on the right side. Not to mention countless contusions and lacerations.” Aldrin pulled away, taking his healing light and warmth with him.

Cautiously, I moved to a seated position, slowly taking in the concerned faces of the pack healer, his mate, and my only awake friend in the compound.

James rushed forward to hand me a steaming mug. “This will help with the remaining pain.” He wrapped a blanket around me as I clutched the mug and took a tentative sip. The liquid tasted of honey and lavender. It was immediately soothing, taking some of the pain that lingered. I felt weary to my bones.

I took a moment to observe the healer and his mate. Both looked exhausted. Signs of age that hadn’t been there before had crept along their faces.

“Are you okay, Aldrin?”

The large bear shifter wobbled in place, his face ashen. James rushed to his mate’s side, steadying him. “He did too much.” James chided his mate.

“Not enough.” Aldrin corrected. “The fractures aren’t finished healing, and the breaks are more like fractures. You’ll have to rely on your shifter healing over the next few days to do the rest, I’m afraid.”

“Thank you. Both of you. For coming.” Words were difficult to get out. “I appreciate it.”

“Are you going to tell us what happened?”

I groaned as I turned too quickly to meet the eyes of Larken. I turned away as I lied. “Fell down the stairs. Hit my head on the way down.”

“Meh!” He made a weird noise. “Try again.” Larken immediately called out my bullshit.

“There’s nothing to tell. No point.”

James perched on the sofa next to me, wrapping an arm around me. “We know it hasn’t been easy here for you recently. We could scent pack mates, though they’d tried to conceal their scents. Do you know who it was?”

I shook my head, lowering my face and staring into the mug, hoping it would have the answers. I couldn’t do what those alphas wanted. There was no way that I would abandon my pack to their lawlessness in Blake’s absence.

If I was honest with myself, I understood their hatred. I wasn’t one of them, and Blake had put me above them. We were all struggling under immense stress and I’d had to pass out some orders that hadn’t sat well. Not that Blake had other options.

“Look,” I raised my head, meeting Aldrin’s eyes. “We need to keep this between ourselves. Blake can’t know. *Kade* can’t know.” I stressed my best friend’s name. If Kade found out about this, there would be no stopping him from coming here,

risking his babies, to make those alphas hurt. If they thought Blake was scary, they hadn't seen a pissed off Kade.

“But —“ James protested.

Aldrin nodded. “As you say. The alpha mate mustn't find out about this until after the babies are here, or the betas are awake. Not until it's safe for them to come home.”

My body sagged with relief. “Thank you.”

“You can't seriously think you can hide this from them!” Larken was furious. “Roan, you are still covered with bruises and cuts! If they see you —“

“Then they won't see me until I've healed from the worst of it. I just need a couple of days.”

“As soon as Kade gets wind of this, he'll be here to make it right as best he can. His omega instinct won't allow for anything else. Especially for his best friend. If he does that, the stress could put him into early labor. One of the babies could get the sickness.” Aldrin put words to my thoughts. He knew Kade well.

Larken slumped into an armchair, defeated. “I get your point. It's just —“

“It isn't fair.” James sympathized with my friend. “It feels like the ones that did this will get away with it. They won't. I swear. I'm going to find out who they are, and when it's time, they will get what's coming to them.”

James was scary. My wolf huffed in agreement and I thanked the goddess for my alter. During the attack, they had



cut us off from each other. *I'm sorry*, he told me and I reassured him there was nothing to be sorry for.

“I smelled magic. In the hall.” Larken clarified as we looked at him, confused.

“My alter —“

“Perhaps a spell to hide their scents?” Aldrin mused.

“Not just that,” I said. “The whole time it was happening, I couldn’t feel my alter.”

Larken rose from his chair. “I’m going to find traces of the spell and tomorrow I’m going to find me a witch to help.”

# BITTER HEAT

## Hiroshi

The tell-tale prickle of my heat beginning blazed a path down my spine as I finished my last checks on Tate and Asher for the night. Every time I looked at them, my heart sank. They remained unchanging. Staying exactly the same as they had been for the last two weeks. My precious betas were sick with the beta flu like we'd heard in the stories from other packs.

As the healer for the Northarbor pride, my alpha had granted me permission to house our only sick betas in my small two-bedroom home while I cared for them. Otherwise, their presence in my house night after night would have attracted too much attention.

We kept our relationship on the down low. Logan, our Alpha, was fair, but there was only so far I was willing to push him for fear of him enforcing the mating pact with his youngest son, Jared.

I loved my men. Tate and Asher filled my heart with love and hope. I just prayed to the goddess that she would send me

an understanding alpha and not ask me to part with them. Jared wouldn't be that alpha.

A shiver raced down my spine at the thought of being mated to Jared. I took a deep breath and tried to calm myself or I'd never be able to go through with the plan.

I'd been stuck with an impossible decision for my heat. With Heatwave closed and my betas sick, I'd finally relented and agreed to Jared and his two best friends taking me through it. I could have gone it alone with some toys and magical help, or tried to find another alpha, but Jared had made it damn hard to approach anyone else in the pack. I was a pariah, thanks to him.

Jared was young, twenty-three, to my forty-one, and had never taken an omega through a heat. Hence the help from his beta henchmen. Them being with us was the only way I'd agreed to it. I'd spent as little time as possible with my betrothed and hardly knew him. His reputation preceded him, though. He was known to be rough and demanding. Hopefully, having the betas acting as a buffer would prevent serious injury.

Hunter and Xander were the young alphas' guards and babysitters and the betas tasked with helping him through my heat. It was impossible to tell if they genuinely liked Jared or just tolerated him. I couldn't imagine he was the easiest to deal with and they'd been stuck with the job after Jared's last faux pas nearly started a war with the aviary. I mean, it wasn't hard to offend those prickly bastards. Even so, he had inherited

none of the diplomacy his father, Logan, or his older brother, Jameson, showed daily.

I needed to find some cheer, to paste on a smile and pretend that every day wasn't on the verge of breaking me. What would I do if Tate and Asher didn't come through this? The smile I'd mustered slipped slightly. They wouldn't recognize me if they saw me now. Tate called me sunshine, but I was having trouble mustering any warmth and light. Everything seemed so pointless without them next to me. Neither would want me wallowing. It was just hard being alone with so many enemies lining up to take a shot at me.

The doorbell rang.

Another deep breath and I left the sickroom to answer the door.

A cramp halted me in the hallway, and I heard Jared's impatient tone from outside. My tiger bristled at the audacity of the boy complaining. I had to side with my tiger on that one. Jared was a boy pretending, and we'd never allow him to manipulate us into a mating. Veering off the hallway into my small kitchen, I found the potion that I'd purchased the day before. Poppy had assured me it was the strongest contraceptive that could be brewed. I popped the cork and swallowed it down, thanking the goddess and Poppy for the sweet mint taste.

My gaze flitted to the sick room housing my lovers. I prayed they would understand me doing this, that it wouldn't

damage our relationship. One that was already fraught with issues.

Maybe it was selfish of me to sleep with Jared and likely Hunter and Xander too, but they had backed me into a corner. I'd wanted to stick to toys since Dakota wasn't available now that he had his mate. Jasper was one hell of a lucky omega. Dakota was gifted in bringing omegas pleasure. There wasn't anyone else from Sweetwater I could trust. My own pack was a no go.

Jared had been keeping track of my heats, more than a little creepy, and knew Tate and Asher were sick. He'd seen me with my men one night that we'd risked a date and had threatened to tell his father and get my betas banished from the pack. While I knew it was unlikely, I wasn't willing to risk it.

Asher would tell me to just get this over with. He wasn't as driven by emotions as Tate was. He kept a firm leash on his lion. My sweet raven would feel betrayed, though rationally he'd know this was for the best. It wrecked me that I was about to do this.

Usually with my heats there was a low burn of arousal for the days leading up to it starting. I usually started them on my own terms, preferring the control that it gave me over my body. That was gone this time. I'd been so busy with my betas and the few other sick shifters of the pack that I'd neglected myself completely. Now I just felt sick to my stomach that it was here.



Hours later, I lay on the bathroom floor and retched into the toilet for the second time, still unable to purge the taste of Jared, or the feel of him inside me.

I got up on shaky legs, flushed, and started the water for a shower. Steam billowed through the room as I got into the cubicle and turned the water as hot as I could cope with. The water cascading down on me blistered my skin, but I still felt nothing. Numb to the pain that I was causing myself, wanting so desperately to feel anything but him.

My tiger surged to the surface, and the warning from my beast had me turning the water back down. The blessed alter knew of my hurts, both emotional and physical, and steered me towards healing. My gift wouldn't work on myself, but I had spells from Poppy that aided my shifter abilities.

I took stock of my body, wincing at aches and pains as I shifted on my feet. My legs and what I could see of my ass were covered in fingertip sized bruises from where Jared had held me too tightly.

After the first round of sex, Jared rutting pretty ineffectually above me, I'd given up telling him to lay off, or to not hold me so firmly.

He'd ignored my every word. I ended up being grateful that Hunter and Xander were there. They kept the young alpha from being worse. Alone, Jared would have likely ignored my cries of pain.

That had been the worst heat that I'd ever endured, which included my first one where I used the toys my mother had researched for me. I'd hardly known what to do, how to properly give myself pleasure, that I'd ended up a sobbing mess. Mother had sent for a male omega to assist me from another pack. Together we'd gone through the rest with him giving me tips on angles and such. The omega hadn't touched me sexually. The idea of omegas with omegas was abhorrent to most packs.

Since then, I'd learned more about what worked for my body, how to sink into that mental space that allowed my body to relax, heightening my enjoyment. I'd needed all of that with Jared. Xan and Hunt had helped, each touching and kissing my body, distracting me from my betrothed's rutting. Without them, I would still be a heat soaked mess on my sheets.

I washed three times to be sure that all of his scent was scrubbed from my body, then got out of the shower, wrapping myself in the fluffiest towel I owned.

My bedroom stank of sex, sweat and the unwelcome alpha male. There was no way I'd be sleeping in there for the next few days. I cracked the window and stripped the sheets from the bed, chucking them in the trash so the scent wasn't inside my home any longer.

The whole space felt violated as much as my body did. All I wanted to do was curl up with my betas and hide from the world. So that's what I did for a few hours.

Tate and Asher were sharing the bed in the spare room. I'd thought about asking for hospital beds or having them stay at the clinic, but I knew they would prefer to be with me. I dumped my towel and crawled onto the bed, situating myself between the two betas.

Out of the two, Tate was my comfort. Asher pushed me, challenged me to be stronger, better. So it was Tate that I curled up against.

The tears came easily. In my anguish I prayed to The Luna like I'd never done before to save me from my fate. I couldn't be mated to Jared. I'd run. Flee from Northarbor before that could happen. I'd literally die mated to the man. First in spirit, then in body. My alter stirred at my maudlin thoughts, their presence comforting in the early dawn light.



I woke later to the sound of my phone ringing. My heart sank because it could only be a call from my alpha and I'd have to lie. It was better to attempt it over the phone, but there was no way that I'd manage that convincingly.

The device was on charge in the kitchen and I stumbled towards it, hoping I'd miss the call. It stopped ringing, making me think I'd gotten my wish, but started up again straight away.

Logan, the Alpha Leader, just like I'd thought.



“Morning, Alpha,” I greeted, trying to inject some enthusiasm into my voice.

“Hiroshi.” His voice was clipped. Fuck. What could I have done to piss him off now? Had Jared ratted me out now that he’d gotten his way? “I owe you an apology.”

“Excuse me?”

“I have a report here from Jared’s guards. They are concerned that though the pair of you came to an arrangement, that it wasn’t fully consensual on your side.”

“Um —“

“There are also concerns that he was too rough. I apologize, but Hunter took some photos without your permission, showing several bruises and marks covering your body.”

What the hell? I couldn’t decide if I was angry about the violation, or comforted that they were worried about me, enough to report Jared to his father.

“This cannot stand.” My heart dropped. Was I in trouble? “My son has acted unforgivably. Omegas such as yourself are precious to a pride. I need to think about an appropriate punishment.”

“The betrothal?”

There was a sigh on the other end of the line. “Hiroshi.”

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.”

“They tied my hands over the betrothal. Nothing short of your fated mate will stop the match from happening. You’ve

got eleven months left to find him. I just pray to The Luna that she makes that happen for you.”

“So —“

“No, Hiroshi. I see what my son is. His mother spoiled him. The entire tiger clan that she came from doted on him and turned a sweet boy into an entitled prince.” Logan’s voice gentled. “I value you as a person. Your position as our healer is important. I want you to follow your heart, but those betas aren’t your future.”

“But —“ He cut me off. Again. I was getting sick of this one sided conversation.

“No, Hiroshi. Your former clan wants cubs from you. That means you need an alpha. Preferably a tiger like you.”

“There are no tigers like me. That’s the problem,” I said wryly. All too aware that I was one of just a few Japanese tigers, a species long since extinct in non shifter animals.

“Jared is a tiger, too,” Logan reminded me. “You’d only have to mate for long enough to have a cub. Hopefully, it would be the right type to calm your family’s clan.”

I snorted. “And just how long will that take? You’ve seen the birth numbers, read the research. Forced matings never work to breed a species back into being. There’s just too few of us for this to work.”

Logan sighed heavily. “I know.”

“Then I’ll be stuck with him for decades until I’m too old to give him cubs. What then?” My bitterness leaked out.

“Hiroshi —“

It was my turn to cut him off. “It isn’t fair.” Tears welled in my eyes, spilling over and down my cheeks.

“No. It isn’t. I’m sorry. I really am.” He was silent for a second. In the background, I could hear the sounds of his office. He was rubbing his face. “The alternative is war. You know this. The pride and your old clan negotiated for years for this betrothal. If you don’t play your part, they will use your perceived mistreatment as an excuse to go to war.” I wanted to rage that Jared had mistreated me. I still had the marks hours later, even with accelerated shifter healing. “They’ll say Jared didn’t court you properly, that I didn’t guide him correctly. Not to mention the other alphas in the pride will take any excuse to take control from me for losing you. If I don’t make this happen, they’ll see me as weak. It all ends in war.”

“So what do we do?”

“Once your betas are on their feet, you need to end it and look for your mate properly.” Unseen, I flinched. I hated the idea of giving them up. “Hire a witch, get a seeking spell.” He made it sound all too easy. His voice gentled. “I want you to be happy, but eleven months isn’t long enough to undo twenty-three years of spoiling. Of course, I’ll try to coach him to be a suitable mate. It’s just not enough time.”

“I know.”

“Hiroshi?”

“Yes, Alpha?”

“I’ll do everything in my power to free you from this. I swear it.”

# NEW ALLIES

## Roan

“Are you sure you want to go down to the office?”  
Larken asked carefully, as I limped out of the bathroom, my arm clutched to my chest. The other alpha had been hovering over me all morning. I’d slept later than I’d planned, knocked out after a healing draught Aldrin had insisted I take to help boost my healing. When I awoke, Larken had been in the room waiting for me.

Larken and I shared a room. Less than ideal, but with the medical staff hired by the council and all the betas taking up space in the houses surrounding the mansion, we had to make do. As roommates went he was pretty decent, and over the last few weeks, he’d become a close friend.

“I need to get some work done, or Blake will get suspicious.” I answered, dodging the real question.

“Kade’s already wondering where you are. Your phone’s been blowing up.” He tossed my phone so it landed next to me on my bed.

“Fuck!” This was the last thing that I needed. Blake wasn’t as naturally suspicious as Kade was. He’d also understand me

needing to get some sleep from the extra hours I'd been working. Kade would just wonder why I wasn't answering my phone.

I sent Kade a message telling him I'd just woken and would head to the office shortly. I kept it brief, trying not to make him suspicious.

My stomach growled. I'd be expending more energy with the healing that my body was undergoing. I needed to refuel it. Larken had taken over the kitchens, and I was hoping I could bribe him into making me breakfast.

“Are you going to manage today? Doc said it'd be a few days before the fractures heal and the cuts disappear.”

“I just have to get downstairs. Most of what I need to do is on my laptop. I'm hoping my roommate will feed me.” I grinned at him, wincing at the pull on the cuts on my face. My lip re-split, blood pooling in my mouth. Grabbing a tissue, I spat blood into it.

“Dude.” Larken grimaced as I chucked the tissue in the trash.

“What?”

“You can't leave this room in that state! I'll get your laptop, anything you need, and bring meals in here.”

Part of me thought that was a great idea, but my stubborn side wanted to resist. “If I do that, then those alphas win.”

“If you do that, then someone will report back to Blake. Give it a day. Please,” he begged.

“Lark —“

“What if they try again? You couldn’t fight anyone off in this state. I’ll get some wards delivered so we can sleep in peace.” It was only then that I noticed the dark circles under his eyes.

“Have you had any sleep?” Guilt warred with anger at the situation.

He rolled his eyes. “Aldrin wanted me to monitor you after the head injury.” I vaguely recalled Larken rousing me every so often through the night.

“Thanks, man. I —“

“Save it. You’d do the same for me, right?”

“Damn right.”

“Okay, so I’ll bring up some food and your laptop and catch a nap while you’re working, if I can get the wards up.”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit overboard?”

“No,” he said bluntly. “Our pack mates attacked you. On pack land. For doing your job.” I’d never seen him this serious. Underneath, there was a tinge of anxiety. This had rattled my friend. “Roan, there are protocols for unhappy pack members. They could have taken it up with Deke since he’s head enforcer. This. Whatever last night was, isn’t right.”

My stubborn side wanted to argue, but really, was it worth it? I felt like I’d been run over. Every part of me ached, and I didn’t even want to think about trying to get downstairs.

“Okay. Fine. I just need to get to work. Kade’s asking why I was sleeping so late.”

“Tell him you watched a movie with me after you finished or something,” he called as he left the room.

I cringed, hating the idea of lying to Kade, but while he was pregnant with the triplets and separated from the pack, I didn’t want to add any stress to him. It was vital that I hid this from him and Blake for as long as possible.

Goddess, I hated that Kade was away from the pack. From me. I hated that I couldn’t keep an eye on him properly.

Each day that went by, he spent less and less time messaging and calling. I got that he had to focus on himself and the babies, but aside from Larken, he was my only friend that was awake in the pack. It was lonely without him.

Blake was cool, a great Alpha, but there was a natural distance between us, seeing as I was his mate’s ex. Normal shit. I didn’t resent him and his place in Kade’s life. Far from it. He’d been the one to save Kade’s life. To repair his heart. He gave Kade what I couldn’t, and as someone who loved Kade, I could never deny him that.

Dakota had his hands full with the businesses as Blake’s assistant. He and Blake spent half the day on calls to each other, from what Kade said. Not to mention that he was stuck at his house with the twins, Jasper’s friends and his daughter, all down with beta sickness.



Axel, Chase, Dalton, Winter, Melody. All my usual people to hang out with were down with the sickness, too. The whole compound was eerie with the lack of people wandering about or working on tasks.

I typed back a vague reply about being exhausted after a bunch of long days and left it at that.

Kade: *\*thumbs up emoji\** *Hope you got plenty of rest. Call me later?*

I sent him an okay gif and locked my phone as Larken came in with a tray and my laptop bag. “I grabbed some files, too. Anything else you need?”

After rifling through the bag, I shook my head. My focus turned to the food, the smell making my mouth water.

My wolf stirred with interest at the plate piled high with crispy bacon and fluffy scrambled eggs. A side of well-buttered toast with them and a glass of orange juice.

While my laptop booted up and I started looking through emails, I shoveled food into my mouth, barely chewing in my haste to fill my aching stomach.

“Easy!” Larken chided. “Doc said there had been some internal bleeding. Part of why he couldn’t heal all the breaks.”

Slowing, I raised an eyebrow and chewed carefully. “Better?”

“Yes —“ His words were cut off with a call to his phone.

I tuned the conversation out and read the latest update from the council instead. More sick. More dead. With each day, the situation seemed to get worse.

“Just heading to the gate. The delivery is here from The Spell Shop.”

The pack used the witch run store in Northharbor for most of their spell needs. We had a great relationship with Poppy, the new High Witch for the area. My relationship with her was improving now that she could see my position in Kade’s life would not be an issue or prevent him from being with his true mate.

Larken returned with the wards. “There’s a note from Poppy. She thinks she knows who is responsible for the spells used. I’ve sent what they left back with the delivery driver so she can check them. Poppy’s some woman.” He searched the large paper bag. “Fantastic! Some pain relief poultices, too.” He set the wards carefully, following the guide to the letter, then crawled into his bed and fell asleep. The guy could fall asleep instantly where I often had problems sleeping, unable to switch my brain off.

My eyes fell onto Larken’s sleeping form. The shifter in the bed next to mine was a bit of a rarity. As a Komodo Dragon shifter, he was part of a rare shifter tribe from Indonesia that had left their lands to prevent them from dying out.

Reptilian shifters were the rarest of all shifters, with wolves being the most prolific. Another reason the shifter knot theory that Rincoln had taught Jasper made sense to me.

While Larken slept, I worked my way through my inbox. He'd been sleeping for a few hours when there was a disturbance from the main floor.

“Roan!” I heard my name shouted from a few voices.

Putting my laptop down, I got up from the bed, wincing at the pain in my leg, roused Larken and headed for the stairs.

“Easy,” said Larken, as he wrapped an arm around me.

It seemed to take an age to get down the stairs. My body stiffened from hours of sitting in one position.

There were a couple of gasps from some mated omegas that helped around the mansion as they took in my condition.

I observed the crowd with narrowed eyes, my wolf trying to sniff out the scent of guilt. Within seconds, I had it narrowed down to a group of five alphas that may have been involved. The scent of anxiety clung to them and they shifted on their feet.

“Lark —“ I whispered.

“I see them,” he muttered back. I squeezed him, thankful for his friendship and support. If it wasn't for him, I'd have considered leaving the pack, taking lodgings in Sweetwater proper, anything to get away from the compound and the toxicity that had risen in the alpha's absence. My initial stubbornness had waned in the light of these injuries. They could have killed me.

“Roan.” Micah, a red panda shifter, stepped forward. “There are elves here that say they are to discuss arrangements for

care of the betas with you.” He turned with an embarrassed glance at the female elf. “I’m sorry. I didn’t ask for your names.”

The female stepped forward with a careful grace that no mortal could emulate. “I am Teagan, and this is Hakeem.”

A huge male with darker skin moved to her side. “You are Roan?” He looked unerringly at me.

“Yes, Sir.”

His lips twitched in amusement. “Sir is unnecessary. We are to be friends, you and I.”

I couldn’t help my small smile in response. “Welcome to the Sweetwater pack mansion. I apologize, but our Alpha isn’t here to greet you.”

“No apologies required, Roan. We met with Alpha Blake earlier today and discussed the council’s pact with the elves. We are here to assist you in the treatment of the afflicted betas. If possible, we will also try to locate the source of the sickness. How it is passed and such.” Teagan had a melodic voice that put me at ease.

“In fact, we were able to be with your alpha when his brother woke,” Hakeem said.

There were murmurs around the room.

“Who’s awake?” I asked.

“Chase, I believe they said. We believe that the infection is lower risk and Dakota has gone to see his mate. Blake is

visiting with his brother at the moment.”

My head spun with all the information. If Chase was awake, it was possible others were waking too, wasn't it? “Has anyone checked the other betas?”

People bustled out of the house, leaving me with the two elves, Larken, who was helping me stay standing and Micah, who looked unsure what to do.

“Micah, could you see to a couple of rooms for our guests?” I spoke to the elves. “I presume you are staying here?”

“Please, though, two rooms are unnecessary. Hakeem is like my brother at this point.” Teagan giggled, and I relaxed.

“If there isn't room in the house, check the beta houses, or the omega compound.” Micah nodded, and the other alpha left to find the accommodations.

“May I ask how you came to have those injuries?” Hakeem asked as he stepped closer.

I was tall, comfortably six feet, but Hakeem was massive. He wasn't intimidating, though. My wolf relaxed as he came nearer, running a hand inside my personal space.

“That's right, calm. I'm reading your aura.”

His words had me tensing.

“These injuries are fresh. I thought as much from their appearance. You underwent some healing?”

“He did,” Larken answered for me. I was coiled too tight to answer. “Just last night. There were breaks, fractures, and

some internal bleeding.”

I turned my head to glare at my friend. He shrugged in response, jostling me.

“Peace,” Hakeem soothed. “Your healer is gifted, but the damage was extensive. You’re lucky to be alive. Without your strong wolf, you would certainly be dead.”

He said the words in a matter-of-fact manner, making the message much more stark for it. Dead. I was right, those shifters could have killed me. All for what? Because they didn’t like the position I had in the pack, the responsibility that their Alpha had put on me? It was a load of bullshit.

As for Kade, fated mates couldn’t cheat, so there was no point in pining after a man that was incapable of wanting anything with me. Besides, I’d fallen out of love with him the instant that I’d seen him with Blake. There was no coming between what they had.

To me, Kade and Blake were the perfect example of what I wished I had for myself. I wanted to preserve their bond because it was beautiful. They were my family. The idea of hurting them made me feel ill.

Hakeem interrupted my musings. “Do you know who did this?”

It took me a second to answer. “I have some ideas. Not that it matters right now.”

Hakeem frowned. “Why —?”

My phone started dinging with countless messages and then a call. Blake.

“Fuck!”

“What?” Larken leaned in to see the screen. “Fuck, dude.” He guided me over to a bench seat so I could get off my feet.

I took a deep breath and answered the call. “Hello, Alpha.”

“Roan? Are you okay? Why am I hearing that you look like you’ve been beat to shit?”

How did I handle this? I tried to play it off. “Maybe because I was beaten to shit. I’m fine, Alpha. Aldrin healed me up.”

“You were WORSE?” Blake sounded furious.

Oh shit.

“I’ve seen pictures of you, Roan. You can’t stand by yourself!”

“Pictures?”

“Roan —“

“Blake, I’ll be fine, okay? There’s nothing to be done about it right now. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to have to lie to Kade.”

“Fuck. I can’t lie to Kade.”

“I don’t think anyone can. Forget intuition. I think his superpower is people being unable to lie to him. Chase detects them. Kade stops them in their tracks. How’s Chase?”

“Don’t think I don’t know that you’re changing the subject. I need names of who it was and what the plan is going forward. I can’t protect you right now, and I hate it. Not just because Kade is going to be furious, but because you are supposed to be safe in the pack, Roan. My word is law and you are a trusted member of this pack.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you know why?”

“They don’t like me being next to Kade since I’m his ex.” Goddess, I felt like I was telling tales out of school. “They resent my position since I’m so new and was in Rincoln’s pack.”

“Roan...” Blake sighed at the other end of the line. “You have to know I have you with us because you are useful to the pack. Not just because you are Kade’s friend. You saved me by killing Rincoln. I don’t know how many people know that.”

“They don’t need to —“

“They do if they are questioning your loyalty to the pack. It’s insane to think you are loyal to Rincoln somehow when you were the one that dealt the killing blow.” Blake’s voice was angry. I’d hardly heard him raise his voice in my weeks with the pack. He was always calm and collected.

I winced at the reminder. “Look, there’s nothing that can be done right now. We need to focus on the sick. Kade can’t know because he’ll want to deal with it himself. He can’t come here, Blake.” I heard the fear in my voice.



“Give me names and I’ll get Deke to deal with it.”

“But —“

“No, Roan. It has to be done now.”

Larken’s phone buzzed with a text. “Poppy says it was who she thought it was. The same witch that sold the potions to Jake and Sebastian. The ex High Witch.”

Fuck. My. Life. This complicated things. A witch with a grudge was selling off dangerous spells.

“She’s reported it. He’s tricky to find.”

“Roan?” I turned my attention back to my alpha.

I let out a sigh and tried to resign myself to what was coming. It could go one of two ways. Either it sorted it and the people that did this stopped. Or it made it worse. I didn’t have hope for the former.

“Roan —“ Micah skidded to a halt in front of me. “Oh, you’re on your phone. Melody and Winter are awake!”

“Blake —“

“I heard. Let me deal with what happened. I’ll try to keep it from Kade until it’s handled. Go see our awake betas.”

# AWAKE

Hiroshi

It took a month before my betas awoke. A month without the loving caresses, teasing smiles and joy that each of them brought me.

The benefit of it taking so long to see their eyes land on me was that I had time to heal from the ordeal of my heat. Physically, at least.

Jared had left a lasting mark on my psyche and it showed in most of the interactions I had with the pride since. With them, I was quiet and withdrawn as they smiled at me, unwilling to tell the truth of that night, though some must have suspected. My betrothed had told plenty of our pride about our night together. Boasting that it was a sign that we would bring our mating forward.

I'd die before I ended up mated to him.

The longer we got between the events, the more sure I was about my decision. If the pride or my former clan insisted I mate Jared, I'd put an end to things. Dramatic maybe, but my tiger was silently supporting my decision. We would never survive that man.

So, with a couple of weeks between my heat and Tate and Asher waking, I tucked my resolution into the recesses of my soul and made my peace with it. I tried to regain my sunny side again.

Aware of my agreement with Logan, I had to help my betas get well, then end things. I needed to be more proactive about looking for my fated mate. He was out there, somewhere. I knew it. He felt closer than he had before, and I wondered if Poppy at The Spell Shop had any handy spells I could use to draw him to me.

Seeing Tate's eyes open after a month of being closed took my breath away. His eyes were a bright cornflower blue and sought me out immediately.

"Hiro?" His voice was croaky from disuse.

"I'm here. Hold on, let's get you up and get some water." I fussed over Tate, keeping half an eye on Asher. Tate drank greedily, his eyes never leaving my face as I sought to avoid his gaze.

As if he knew I was watching, Asher's eyes cracked open. Deep, warm chocolate pools found me. His eyes shifter bright. "Hiroshi?"

"I'm here. I can't believe you're both awake!" My voice cracked with emotion. Tears ran down my face. I wasn't ready for this. Though I'd missed them dearly, with them awake, our time was running out.

“How long?” Tate asked as I helped Asher drink some water.

I sat on the bed and watched them. Perhaps unconsciously, they had reached for each other, their fingers twining. “It’s been a month since you fell into a deep, coma-like sleep.”

They stared at me, and we sat in silence as they digested the news. I should have reported to my alpha that they were awake, but I just wanted to enjoy this moment for a bit longer.

“You okay, Sunshine?” Tate looked worried, a frown marring his pale face.

“It’s been a hard month,” I hedged.

Asher looked like he was thinking about something heavy before the answer came to him in a flash. “Your heat.”

I felt sick. This was the last thing that I wanted to discuss with them. They’d only just woken. It wasn’t the time for it.

“Handled. It’s fine,” I said dismissively. “Let’s check your vitals and then I’d better tell Alpha Logan that you’re awake.”

Tate let me check him and write observations in my notebook. Asher caught my wrist as I went to take his pulse. “Please. What happened? Something’s wrong.”

“Asher —“ Tate started warningly.

“No, Tate. There’s something not right with Hiroshi. He’s hiding something.” His eyes rested on me. “We understand if someone had to take you through your heat, okay? We weren’t here and the toys suck.”

I attempted a little chuckle, but it came out as a sob.

Arms reached for me, and they pulled me between them. “Tell us, baby,” Asher crooned into my ear.

Between sobs, I told them the whole thing, including the conversation with Logan about ending our relationship.

Tate clung to me as I cried, curled up against Asher. “We won’t give you up. We’ll just put more distance between us in public. See you less. It’ll be okay, Sunshine.”

“You can’t know that!” I wailed, letting weeks of frustration out.

“No, I can’t. All I can say is that I love you and I believe The Luna put you in our lives for a reason,” Tate soothed.

My attraction to the betas had happened instantly. I’d come from a brief visit to my family in Japan three years ago as part of the pact with my clan. Having done healer training, I was well traveled. Healers were in demand in packs all over the world. I’d been working in Europe before I’d gone home for a quick break, unaware that they had sold me. I was proud that my services were in high demand because of being a powerful healer. Yet my parents had valued my ability to make more Japanese tigers over my goddess given ability to heal the sick and injured.

I’d been resentful of being treated like a commodity, but had found peace in the pride with Logan as our alpha. Until I’d met Jared, of course. He’d been too young to mate then. His mother had him with her at her birth pack, where she’d

returned after her mating to Logan had ended. He arrived in the pride just before his twenty-first birthday, the age of maturity in shifters and had been charming at first with the pack elders about. Our first meeting hadn't gone well, so I'd been keen after his first impression to delay our mating for as long as possible.

Weeks of back-and-forth negotiations occurred, and I bought myself four years. Just four years to find my fated mate, then my betrothal would dissolve with no fault for either side, something vital to prevent a war between my clan and the pride.

With no fated mate, I'd be stuck with Jared until I'd produced two cubs. Only then could I break the forced mating. It was a crummy situation to be in, but as an omega, especially in my clan, I'd had few rights. We weren't badly treated as such. We were supposed to be coddled baby makers, not have careers and hopes and dreams of our own.

Thankfully, Logan was keen to have me in his pack. Gaining a powerful healer and a mate for his youngest son in one person was a pretty sweet deal for him. He was a pragmatic man. Knew the faults of his son and often apologized for the position I was stuck in.

With the deal in place, we were both stuck. The consequences of breaking the deal were much too heavy to consider. Logan could lose everything, the pride, his family, potentially his life, for letting me go.

My parents just wanted more cubs, so our kind wouldn't die out as they had in the non shifter species. I had disappointed them by being an omega. Both had wanted an alpha cub after the birth of my omega sister. If I had been an alpha child, then they could have almost guaranteed a Japanese tiger cub, with only one in four babies taking after the omega parent. Perhaps if I'd been an alpha, I'd have saved my sister from her arranged match too.

The clan had done extensive genealogy research to find Jared. He wasn't Japanese, far from it, but the tiger was a recessive trait from an ancestor. With him being an alpha, chances were that he'd create Japanese tiger cubs with whoever he mated with.

However, being mated to me meant Japanese tiger cubs were guaranteed.

I lay between my betas and prepared for the time that I'd have to say goodbye. Jared had shown me a dark streak ran through him. Before I thought him a pampered prince, now I believed he had the potential to be really dangerous. I had to get myself, and my betas free of the pride.

# HIS CHOSEN

Tate

**E**ven weeks after waking, I would still dwell on that day. The way that it changed everything for us. In some ways, it brought us closer. Before, Hiroshi wouldn't have relied on us emotionally like that. Then it made us all too aware of the consequences of what we were attempting. How much was at risk. Not just our hearts, but our lives.

I paused, setting up the heat room, thinking about the distant memory of that space, the place in between sleep and waking. It felt important. All I could remember was leaving the strange void that I'd inhabited with my raven, for the last however long, was waking to the sounds of Hiroshi bustling about.

I'd known it was him immediately by his sweet honey scent. It covered everything in the room I'd been sleeping in, so it could only have been his home. Weeks later, I still longed to be covered in that scent. To be tucked up with our omega in his home. They watched ours too closely to risk it.

It had warmed me to my toes even as I slid from unconsciousness to waking that he'd kept us close to him. Our unconventional relationship was fraught with difficulties, but



we fought with everything that we had to stay by his side. I could still remember sensing Asher next to me, his breaths slow and even, signaling that he was asleep, even if our bond hadn't already told me so. The bond had been there, as it still was now, as strong as it usually was. A gentle hum of awareness that was soothing.

I recalled hoping to have that bond with Hiroshi. It was something I still wanted. I just wished, deep into my soul, that we could find an alpha that would accept us, along with the sweet omega that we loved. That was the dream.

The lingering effects of the sickness had both Asher and me bedridden for another week. Housebound for another after that. Then we had to leave. To end things or at least make it look like it was over.

It was awful to be away from Sunshine and to only get glimpses of him. We attended regular healings because even just under three months after waking, there was some lingering weakness in my muscles. Those were days I lived for. Just to spend some time with Hiroshi.

I'd begun spending more time in my alter form, keeping track of Hiroshi from afar. It was often the only way that I could see him.

As far as Logan knew, Hiroshi had kept up his side of their bargain. He'd ended things with us publicly and we snuck away together as much as possible. It wasn't much, but it had to be enough until we came up with something better.

It pulled at the bond that I had with Asher. Sometimes he didn't feel as committed to Hiro as I was. I wondered if he was only going along with things to keep me happy.

Sweetwater was where we could be free. Our employers had taken us back at Heatwave, the heat club there to serve omegas in heat, though they understood that we still weren't ready to help omegas sexually. We'd never be ready as there wasn't another omega for us but Hiro.

Often Hiro would sneak into Heatwave and we'd have some stolen moments. He'd linger at the bar and we'd just talk. I missed him so much.

He was trying to find his fated. All our hopes fell on one that was understanding of the love that we shared and our desire to bond. It made everything more complicated with the fact that I was already bonded. Asher and I would have to break it, a temporary measure, so we could bond with Hiroshi and his mate if they were still willing after finding each other.

That was all that it hinged on. Would Hiroshi change his mind about us when he met his fated? Would that bond sweep away any feelings he had for me and Asher?

Still, he had no choice but to look for this mysterious alpha. The months to the deadline were steadily slipping away from us. Hiroshi was slipping away. Each day, he retreated further into himself. Hiding from the stress and fear that mounted at every failed date and interaction with an alpha that wasn't his fated mate.

His heat was upon us, and he'd assured Jared that he was going to handle it alone. He couldn't mention Heatwave since everyone knew that we still worked there. They just didn't know it was as security and bartenders.

Our manager was aware of the situation and was letting us slip out to some rooms that were kept for omegas that were more wary of alphas. They had never been used as far as I was aware, yet they were kept immaculately clean and prepared, just in case. We even had an alpha friend, one of the regular club alphas, that would help if Hiroshi was okay with that.

Nathan entered the room that I was checking. "All right?"

"Yeah. Thanks for doing this."

"No worries. It's not a hardship. I've been with Hiroshi before." My mind stalled.

"You have?"

"Yeah, way back, before Dakota caught his eye."

"That's a relief. He'll be more likely to go for it."

"Here's hoping. Hey Asher, you guys 'bout ready?" Nathan called to my mate, who was putting the finishing touches on the bedding.

"Yeah, looks like it."

"Fuck, I'm really sorry about this." Nathan said mournfully as he allowed a couple of shifters by him. He closed the door, and I heard his retreating footsteps as he left us behind.

"What's this?" Asher asked.

“A warning.” A meathead alpha growled as he advanced on us. I didn’t know who these guys were. Didn’t recognize them from the pride.

“What kind of warning? We’ve never seen you guys before.”

Asher tried to pull me behind him as the tension ramped up in the room. There was a knock at the door and the meathead opened it. Several shifters entered the room.

A low rumble escaped me at the sight of Jared. His guards, Xander and Hunter, stood behind him. I couldn’t decipher their expressions.

“Did you think I wouldn’t notice a raven everywhere my mate went?” Jared drawled, looking smug. “Or him sneaking off to meet you two?” He spat. “It’s time you learned your place. You are both exiled from the pride. Dad will send your things.”

My heart lurched. I couldn’t be cast out again! I’d already gone through the agony from having my place in my birth pack stripped. There was no way I could cope with it again.

I looked to Asher for support. His expression was resigned. He clutched me to him as the shifters filled the room.

“I mean, if you survive, that is.” Jared smirked as he exited the room, his guards following. Leaving us in a room with six angry looking shifters and to our fate.

# DANGEROUS HEAT

Hiroshi

**T**ime was running out for me to get to the club in Sweetwater in time for the first wave of heat. I felt the faint prickle of heat already building. I'd been irritable all day, having to close the clinic early because I just wasn't able to give my patients the proper care that they deserved.

Jared had been hounding me the previous week, but had gone strangely silent. It was another worry that I had to push to the back of my mind.

Logan had called me into his office and thanked me for ending things with my betas. Clearly, the sneaking that Tate, Asher and I had been doing was paying off. I wondered if we were truly fooling anyone, or if Logan was happy to pretend along with me.

I parked not too far from Heatwave, but in an out of the way street, hopeful that no-one would recognize my car and rat me out. I'd lied to Jared to get here. Thinking I was being followed, I'd changed routes, circled back on myself, anything to make it look like I had no fixed destination.

My fingers paused on the door handle and I second guessed my gut for all of a moment. My grandmother's words came to me "always trust your intuition," so I reached into the glove compartment and took out the bottle there.

After my last heat with Jared, I'd gone to see Poppy, the new High Witch of the area in her shop, and bought the strongest contraceptive potions I could get my hands on. I had them stashed everywhere. My home. My car. The clinic.

Shifters gossiped by nature. With being able to scent things, there was always speculation on who was sleeping with whom, or who had crushes and stuff. So we'd all heard and soon found out the reason for the last High Witch being removed from that position. The council had caught him selling controlled potions and overcharging for them.

The council liked to restrict the magic that shifters used to prevent abuse. They only granted fertility boosters to pairings that were having issues conceiving. Pack bond stripping potions were tightly monitored so that alphas couldn't just capture and strip shifters from their pack bonds, leaving them vulnerable.

There were things that a shifter could take to end a pregnancy, and the council controlled them too. Abortions were allowed only after assessment and counseling. It was rumored that the council would do just about anything to encourage the omega to go through with having the child. There was no shortage of beta couples willing to adopt, but it wasn't a situation I wanted to be in. Hence the contraceptives.

I didn't want to risk an alpha faking taking his, or getting trapped somewhere whilst in heat and being attacked.

My fertility was one of the few things I had control over. The council freely allowed contraceptives to be sold despite our low birth rate. So I swallowed down the potion and headed off to find my men and the alpha they had found for us to play with.



The club was in full swing. Lights flashing, music pounding and people, shifters, witches, and even humans, danced together on the floor. Gregor, the owner and manager, knew I was coming and had set up space for me and my betas to go, I'd been told.

When I approached the door, the bouncer ushered me through without a word. Inside, Nathan was waiting for me. He looked slightly unsure, but slung an arm around me.

“Are you being my alpha today?” I asked, looking up at him, detecting a fine sheen of sweat on his face. It beaded his upper lip with it and it turned my stomach slightly. I was hoping he wasn't the one Tate and Asher had picked, regardless of my past with him.

“Not today. They asked me to take you to them.” Nathan guided me down and along to the back of the building. We left the main club and approached a couple of squat buildings. I picked up the faint scent of my men. Hours old and faint.

Nathan didn't guide me into the place where their scent was strongest. He took me to the one next to it. He must have seen my puzzled glance. "Scent blockers to throw people off."

"Ah." I was growing uneasy about how he was acting. His tension rolled off him. Alarm bells rang in my mind.

The door opened with a tiny push and I walked into the dark space, my eyes adjusting quickly. The door slammed closed and locked.

Fuck.

A lamp switched on, illuminating a comfortable room dominated by a large bed, on which Jared sat grinning at me.

"Found ya."

Goddess, help me. How was I going to get out of this situation?

"Hey, Jared. What're you doing here?" I asked inanely. He knew, and I was so totally fucked.

"Well, sweet mate of mine, it's your heat, so I'm here to perform my duty to you as your betrothed."

"I thought we agreed that I'd go through this one alone and next time I would go through it with you." I pointed out, trying to stay calm. My voice betrayed me, wobbling slightly.

"Well," he paused. "There's a problem with that. You weren't planning on being alone. You had those betas sniffing about you. So since you broke your promise, I broke mine and came to find you."



“Jared... I —“

“It’s fine, sweet thing.” He was aiming to sound pleasant and was failing, sounding threatening. “Come here and you can make it up to me. Leave this room and, well, I can’t be responsible for what happens to you out there.” He shrugged casually.

I gulped back vomit. I had to get out of there.

A rap at the door had my gradual retreat halting. “Yo! Jared, we having some fun with that omega of yours?” came a shout.

Jared smirked at me. “So what is it, mate? Me? Or them?”

My tiger sensed five, no, six, shifters outside of the door. Was the plan to pass me around like a toy if I said no to Jared? I wouldn’t survive that. Once my heat peaked, I’d be able to check out mentally, but my body would suffer. I got the impression they wouldn’t be caring and gentle like Dakota used to be.

I felt a flash of shame for cursing Dakota’s mate for a second. Without him, I’d be safe and cared for. Fated mates were a gift from The Luna, and I was grateful that she had sought to gift one to Dakota. He was a worthy alpha and a fantastic friend. He deserved it.

Closing my eyes, I steeled myself for what I was about to do and stepped forward.

“Good choice.” Jared grinned.



I couldn't sleep, too uncomfortable from the marks and bruises that littered my body to recline properly to drift off. It wasn't safe, even with Jared snoring next to me. I looked at him in disgust.

Now was the time that I should slip away while he slept, except I was at my most vulnerable. Another wave could come at any moment, leaving me at the mercy of any unattached passing alpha.

A door opened while I pondered my situation. Xander and Hunter entered the room from what must be the bathroom. They approached Jared, Xander injecting him with something before discarding the needle.

"You've been in there the whole time? And what the fuck was that?" I seethed.

"Jared wouldn't let us stay in here and we had to be close to protect you." Xander whispered, throwing glances at Jared, still fast asleep on the bed.

"Protect me?" I whisper shouted. "Look at me!" I pointed to all the grazes, bites, and bruises I was covered in.

Hunter rolled his eyes at me, and I wished a plague on the dickhead. "Could've been worse," he drawled.

"Fuck you!" My eyes filled with angry tears, making me even more furious. I hated looking so damn weak.

"Dude!" Xan chastised his fellow beta. "You go through all that shit, then tell him it 'could've been worse' insensitive fucker. Hiro, we're getting you out of here."

“What? How?”

Hunter shrugged. Xander shoved him. “I swear, dude, you can stay here and explain to this shithead why his ‘betrothed’ isn’t here when he wakes up.”

“He’s not waking up for hours. That sedative is made for shifters. Logan said so.” Hunter said in reply.

“Logan? What the fuck is going on?” Another wave of heat had me growing slick.

The betas scented the change. “Here.” Hunter tossed me a dildo and a potion bottle. “A new model. The knot spell is better. We’ll go bring the truck around and get your betas ready.”

“What? My betas?”

Xander perched on the corner of the bed. “Look, Logan has had us keeping tabs on Jared for months. He knew he might try to force your hand, and we had to do whatever it took to make you safe. Jared has burned all his bridges with the pack.”

I squirmed, getting really uncomfortable. Xander caught wind of my predicament and flushed scarlet. “I’ll, uh, turn around and explain while you use that .”

“Xan, I’ll go help Tate and Asher.” Hunter left like his ass was on fire and not like he’d witnessed me having sex with Logan’s son more than a few times.

With no other choice, I used the toy, wringing an unsatisfactory orgasm from myself, the disappointing finish the result of too much stress and pain.

“Jared bought a fertility booster.” My hand slipped on the toy.

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, hence the contraceptive.”

“I already took one.”

“Take this one too. It won’t hurt. That witch makes the boosters really strong. Charges an arm and a leg for them too.”

“Right.” I swallowed it down.

“With Jared breaking council laws like that, he can take action and end the bonding. He’s letting you leave the pride and suggests you ask another pack for protection. Sweetwater is the closest and probably the strongest.”

“What about the consequences for the pride?”

“The clan has a clause that a forced bonding will cast shame on the mating. Jared is supposed to make you happy. Not own you because he put a baby in you.”

“What? They did that?”

“Your grandfather did.”

I rarely missed my family, but grandfather was special.

“Once you are finished with this wave, we are getting you to the truck and away from here. Jared had Tate and Asher beaten. Not killed because he wanted to send a message. He wanted them to see you pregnant with his kid, knowing they can’t do that for you.”

“Oh, fuck.”

I wasn't sure if it was the adrenaline crash or what, but his words doused the wave. I got up on shaky legs and found my clothes. "Let's get out of here."

The truck wasn't far, but it felt like forever as I walked the distance to my men. I could smell blood and urine on them. My outrage shocked me. "They pissed on them?"

Hunter curled a lip in distaste. "Help me strip them. I've got some spare clothes they can wear." All shifters kept clothing in their vehicles, a just in case measure.

They groaned as we moved them, peeling off clothes as I gave them as much healing as I could. The heat wave that was coming tampered with my ability, making it more difficult.

Xander drove the truck as I tried to nurse my betas, Hunter watching for anyone following us.

The gates of the Sweetwater pack compound were a new and so welcome sight.

"We can't go further than this. We have to leave you at the gates." Hunter warned. I nodded, showing I understood. Tate, Asher and I were now pack-less. Hunter and Xander still belonged to the pride. They would see going further as an act of treason or aggression, depending on the side.

"Thank you for getting us this far," I murmured, before turning my attention to the people at the gate. "Please, can you help us? Is Dakota here? We need sanctuary."

# A NEW LIFE

Tate

“**W**ould you stop fussing, please?” Hiroshi let out a frustrated sigh from the kitchenette where he was making breakfast. I felt a prickle of annoyance in return. Looking out for him was my job. I was concerned he hadn’t dealt with everything that had happened. Instead, choosing to forget.

While I was grateful we’d been given sanctuary and their healer had finished fixing us up, I was sick and tired of being in the same little house with nothing to do. If I was occupied better, I wouldn’t feel so pathetic. My mind kept circling back to the same thought. I couldn’t stop Hiroshi from getting hurt. What use was I?

Once we’d arrived at the pack house that was now home, Hiroshi had snuck into the bathroom and finished out his heat alone and miserably using the toy Jared’s guards had given him. Asher had stood with me, feeling utterly useless and broken. We were lone shifters once more. Heatwave was no longer safe for us since the pack didn’t run it, so we were jobless, too.

The heat club had to be out of pack ownership legally, a new, frankly stupid, rule from the council, so that there were no chances of it being abused. Then look what had happened to it? Abused by alphas that had likely bribed other alphas into harming a precious omega. Heatwave was unlikely to reopen after what had happened to us.

It made me wonder, what did we bring our omega apart from pain?

The pack had dozens of little homes for omegas in a closely defended part of their compound. It was ingenious how they kept them together and safe. Only mated alphas were allowed in this area, so it was safe for single omegas to go through their heats there. Though it also meant we were isolated from the goings on in the pack and I was bored out of my mind after a week here.

“Tate... I know you love me. That you’re worried, but I’m going to be fine. It’s just a lot to adjust to.” Hiroshi circled his arms around my waist and pressed his head against my heart. “I’m just happy to be here with you.”

I relaxed. Holding him close always helped with the guilt over the choice that he’d had to make. If it wasn’t for me insisting that we wouldn’t be caught, Hiroshi would have just gone through his heat alone at home. He wouldn’t have had to choose Jared over the unthinkable.

Hiroshi growled. “Quit it!”

“I’m sorry. I just...”

“Think I should be a crying mess?” Hiroshi pulled away. “I’ve processed my feelings over it, but you haven’t, and you need to before you drive a wedge between us.”

“I think we all just need to get out of here for a while.” Asher played referee before I could get into another fight with Hiroshi. Asher kissed my lips and then Hiroshi’s cheek, making the omega smile.

He took over at the small stove, throwing out the overdone eggs, and searched the refrigerator for more. “We need to get some groceries.”

“We need jobs,” I reminded him. “We can’t rely on the pack forever.”

Hiroshi made a sound of distress whilst checking his phone, making me and Asher go to him. “Everything okay?”

“Um... we have a meeting today. In like an hour. With Alpha Blake. Alpha Logan will be there.”

I felt the color drain from my face. Was this Logan coming to take Hiroshi home? We’d been told that all of us were no longer part of the pride. The part of me where a pack bond used to reside was empty. Inside, there was a lack of the gentle hum of awareness that a pack bond caused. Was that only because we were so far away? Would we be allowed to return with him if he was going back?

My mind spun with all these thoughts and about a million more while we each got ready to face the alphas. My hands shook as I dressed in a borrowed shirt. None of the clothes I



wore were mine. The pack provided everything. Even the clothes that we had arrived in were new after the thugs that beat us ruined our own clothing. We owned nothing.

We made our way towards the pack mansion with Sam, the beta guard we'd met that first night, leading the way, an elf at our backs. "Is that necessary?" Hiroshi asked.

Sam gave a pitying smile. "Things have been rough here. The alpha is making too many changes for some and after so many were sick, they see the pack as weak. We aren't. If anything, we are stronger than ever."

This pack was something else. I wasn't sure what to make of it. They all seemed to adore the alpha pair. As outsiders, they didn't mention the babies much around us, but I got that. Being suspicious of us was understandable. Babies were so rare and having had three at once was practically unheard of, so they had to protect them, whatever that took.

"This will feel a little strange, but once you enter the house, you won't smell anything. We had a scent blocker put down so our people can't be tracked. You can't follow what you don't know." Sam beamed. "Magic is so cool."

Sure enough, when we crossed the threshold, there was a stinging slap over my skin and all the scents vanished. I rubbed my nose, wanting to sneeze.

"Yeah, sorry about that. Takes a bit of getting used to." Sam gave a sheepish grin. The beta was a sweet guy. Asher had struck up an easy friendship with him since he was the one that came to our house the most often to check on us.

The pack had assigned him to us as a sort of welfare officer. He would check in on Hiroshi and keep us up to date with as much of the goings on as he could. I liked him well enough, considering he was our babysitter.

“Will we get to meet the Alpha Mate?” Hiroshi asked.

“Ah —“

The elf stepped in to answer the question diplomatically. “The Alpha Mate, his guard, and parents are in the omega community center. I advised them to avoid this meeting. They hope to meet you soon. However, the stresses of new parenthood mean that they struggle to keep appointments. I hope you can understand.”

“Oh! Of course. I just wanted to say thank you in person for all the clothes and things that they’ve sent. The note, too, was lovely.” Hiroshi hid his disappointment well.

They led us into a large room, a massive desk the focus of the space, though there was a plush looking couch and chairs grouped together.

Logan sat on one of the comfortable-looking armchairs next to what could only be Alpha Blake. I’d forgotten just how young the alpha was. We all looked younger than our actual ages. Asher was fifty-five, I was thirty-eight. Hiroshi looked like he was in his early twenties but was forty-one! Blake, though, was in age and appearance, only twenty-two.

There were guards in the room with us. Two looked like Blake. I’d heard that his cousin was the head enforcer, so that

was probably one of them. The other could only be his brother. They looked too alike. Logan had brought a couple of alphas from the pride but their names escaped me.

I'd only been in the pride for a couple of years after leaving the aviary when I bonded with Asher. I was told to leave the aviary or face punishment and exile... they had old views on matings. Unlike the aviary, the pride was okay with mixed matings, especially beta pairings, since we couldn't have children.

The alphas were chatting comfortably as we walked in. "Jason and Eva picked a hell of a time to visit family and take a vacation. They got stuck in quarantine and couldn't come back at the height of the sickness here." Alpha Blake spoke with a quiet confidence and some affection for the missing former alpha of the bears. I'd heard that the Sweetwater sleuth had returned to the Sweetwater pack at the time Kade consented to bonding with his fated.

"I'd heard it horribly afflicted your pack, the condition, I mean. It makes me wonder about the reasoning for it." Alpha Logan mused. "The Luna has blessed you in so many other ways. Perhaps this was the price?"

"I've spent far too many nights wondering this same thing."

Sam announced our arrival, ushering us properly into the room. My nerves jangled at being in front of two strong alpha males. My raven wanted to bow down, grovel before them. Instead, I bared my throat in the polite show of submission.

With a brief nod of acknowledgement to end our display, Alpha Blake stood to greet us. “Sorry for not coming to say hello before. There’s been a lot to sort out.” He gestured to the sofa, and we all sat.

“That’s okay,” Hiroshi assured him. “We understand there’s a lot going on here.”

“Thank you. We want to reassure you that anything said here today goes no further without permission. Alpha Logan is not here to take you back to the pack, but to formally disconnect you from the pride.”

“So we are still members?” Asher asked, leaning forward, his arms on his knees.

“Yes.” Logan finally spoke. “I needed to ensure that we were clear, that there was no issue, before taking that bond away. They also advised waiting to allow you to finish healing before we attempted it, as it can be painful.”

As he spoke, I searched for the bond to the pride and found it withered and stretched. The distance must have silenced it. I didn’t know that it could do that.

“So are we? Clear, that is?” Hiroshi asked. His voice was filled with tension. There was fear in his expression.

Logan sat forward, reaching for Hiroshi’s hands. “I will never keep you where you don’t want to be. My son... Goddess, I’m so sorry, Hiroshi. It shouldn’t have happened.”

Hiroshi withdrew his hands and sat back, shutting down. “I’d rather not talk about that.”

Logan bit back whatever he wanted to say. His face filled with regret. “As far as things go with the pride, we are in the clear. I’ve packed some of your things. I’ll arrange for the rest to be brought here since it’s clear you are safe and settling here. Your birth clan is taking no action against us. They feel satisfied that you upheld your part and that the actions of my son were out of my control.” It felt like he was hiding something, but the pride was no longer our business.

“I’m glad. I don’t blame you, Logan. What he did —“ Hiroshi broke off and seemed to deal with whatever emotion rose by squashing it down. “I can’t hold you to account for that. I just can’t come back to the pride knowing he had help to hurt me, to hurt Tate and Asher.”

Logan’s expression shuttered, though there was a brief flash of disappointment. “I hoped that we could come to some sort of arrangement with the pack here, so that you could come to the pride to perform your healing duties a couple of days a week.”

Blake sat forward. “As much as I’d love to help you with that, I cannot allow Hiroshi to go back to a place he could be in danger.”

“Jared is no longer in the pride. He’s fled to his mother’s people.”

I blinked in shock. He was just out there? “Are they going to hand him over to the council?”

Logan’s lips thinned. “No. They say they don’t know where he is. He got to his mother and vanished.”

“So they’re hiding him?” Blake surmised.

“Yes.”

“Well, you can appreciate that the only place Hiroshi is safe currently is here on the pack lands. Since he is a healer, I have a job for him at our clinic.” He smiled at Hiroshi, who immediately sat up straighter. “Tate and Asher, there is plenty of work, from security to the factory. Please play to your strengths.”

The relief was staggering. Blake was willing to take us in and make a place for us. There were opportunities for employment.

“I, uh, I’m a raven. I’d like to do security if I could. Flying around the compound would be great.”

“We have another raven shifter, Jake. He and his mate, Sebastian, are enforcers. I’d love for you to help them with monitoring the skies.”

“Jake is here?”

“He is. Do you know him?” Blake asked.

“He’s my cousin. We’ve not seen each other since...” The thought of having just a small part of my family again nearly brought me to tears. Hiroshi reached for my hand and clenched it. Then the second part of his statement registered. “His mate?”

“I’m sorry. I forgot the aviary didn’t allow contact between you and your family.” It was more that my family cut me off, but I didn’t correct him. “Jake also ran into trouble with the

aviary. He's here and safe. Sebastian is the reason that they fled, with it being a forbidden mating, according to aviary rules. Those don't exist here. You can meet with him later once we swear you into the pack if you would like?"

My mind spun as I spoke. "Thank you, Alpha." I couldn't quite wrap my head around the fact that I had family here already, outside of Hiroshi and Asher.

"Logan," Blake spoke to the other alpha. "Perhaps we could work out a system for our healer, Aldrin, to come to the pride to assist your clinic healers with their patients."

Logan looked at Hiroshi with a complicated expression. I saw regret and longing there. The entire situation had to be difficult for the man. Hiroshi should have been a part of Logan's family. Jared, his youngest son, caused all this grief and pain. He'd lost the pride a talented healer. "I'd be grateful if that was possible. I've heard good things about Aldrin Flemming. He's a highly respected scientist too, I believe."

"He is. At the moment, he is trying to focus on working with the elves to find the source of the beta sickness and the long-term effects of it. Without saying too much, the betas are different from what they were before. Most are quieter, more driven."

Hiroshi sat forward. "So he'd be happy for me to start as soon as possible?"

Blake laid a kind look on Hiroshi. "When you feel ready to meet your new pack. Today we will end your connection to the pride and if you feel up to it, you can swear to the pack. Until

you've sworn in, you cannot be allowed to move freely within the pack lands."

I nodded, expecting as much. There was no reason to delay joining the pack. In fact, I felt amped up for the first time in days. My worries just up and vanished, whisked away with a few words from the young alpha. I wanted to go and see about becoming an enforcer or working some security job. Then I'd track down my cousin.

"Hiroshi," Logan stood, Hiroshi following so that Logan could lay a hand on his chest. "I renounce our pride bond freely. You served your pack well." Hiroshi gasped as the connection was broken and Blake stepped up to take Logan's place as our old alpha repeated the speech with Asher.

"Thank you, Tate, for your time with the pride. We couldn't give you the new life that you deserved. For that, I can only say that I'm sorry. I only hope you can find a new start here. I renounce our pride bond freely. You served your pack well."

Afterwards, I couldn't remember swearing loyalty to Blake, only the feeling of connection and joy as our new pack cheered for us.



The next day, there was a hesitant knock at the door of the house we'd been given. With Hiroshi being an omega, that was where he belonged. Asher and I should have been housed with the other betas either in the big house, or in some cottages



that surrounded it, however, Alpha Blake had agreed that it was in Hiroshi's best interests to keep us together.

Hiroshi was at the clinic, Asher at the factory, both learning about their new jobs. I was going to be training under Deke, the head enforcer, and Alpha Blake's cousin, but wouldn't be starting the training for another day or so.

I headed to the door, checking the peep hole out of habit. A familiar face was on the other side. Throwing the door open, I nearly tackled the other man. "Jake!"

He laughed against me; the shakes turned to sobs. I just held him and tried to keep my own tears back. We hadn't seen each other in years. No one in my family, close or distant, wanted to risk expulsion from the aviary for being seen with me. They didn't even text.

"I missed you. I'm so happy you're here." Jake said against my neck. He pulled away and scrubbed his face. "I felt you join the pack yesterday and wanted to come visit, but I had to patrol. Then it was late..."

"It's fine. I thought about heading to the main house today and looking for you. I'm not sure what to do with myself today. Since I don't have training yet."

"So you're joining us?"

"For sure! Flying more often, feeling free, just sounds amazing!"

"It is. Come on, throw some shoes on and I'll take you on a tour. I want you to meet Seb."

“That reminds me! Congratulations on your mating!”

We shared stupid grins. We’d always been close as kids. As close as siblings rather than cousins, but I hadn’t wanted to risk his standing by keeping contact with him. “Congrats on yours. How’s Asher?”

I grabbed my shoes and jacket. We chatted about family, our mates, even my complicated situation with Hiroshi as Jake took me on a tour of the compound. I met the peregrine falcon shifter that my cousin had fallen for, and had risked everything for. Together they told me about the form locking, the High Witch that had swindled them out of sheer greed.

Their story gave me hope. They had found a new family, a new start, here in the Sweetwater pack. There was every chance we could do the same.

# UNDER ATTACK

## Roan

“That’s the babies down for the night. I’m just going to crash for a bit, okay?” Kade’s face split with a yawn. I had nothing but sympathy for the man. Even his dark circles had dark circles.

“Go catch a nap. Blake’s in his office, so I’ll stay here with them until he comes up,” I assured him, ushering him towards the bedroom of their suite.

“Who’s on guard?” he asked sleepily. The man was dead on his feet. The last couple of weeks adjusting to life with triplets, plus the added shock of an alpha female being born, had taken their toll on my best friend.

He was still on parental leave, or supposed to be, yet I often found him working next to Blake. It had gotten to the point I didn’t fight him on it anymore. Just scheduled as little as possible in his diary and made sure his papa was there for grandpapa duties.

“Larken. When Blake comes up, I’ll sit out there with him.” My other friend had been sticking closer to me since the birth of Elliotte. There had been some rumblings from the pack

about me being so close to the alpha princess with my Rincoln connections and past. It had gotten so bad that someone had leaked that I'd killed Rincoln, and those mutterings had shut down fast. It still didn't stop some looking at me with suspicion. I hadn't needed my alpha and Chase to do that, but I appreciated the gesture.

“I don't know if we need guards at the door. Isn't that overkill?” Kade frowned.

“Isn't it better to have and not need them?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Fair point, but when will you sleep?”

“There's a shift change in a couple of hours.”

“Right. I'm gonna go —“

“Get some rest. I'll watch them.”

Kade wandered over to where the babies were sleeping and looking lovingly down at his sleeping children. The pure joy in his expression made me long for that, too. Only with someone else. I wished for a mate of my own. A feeling that I'd thought would be years off. I was only twenty-seven. There was plenty of time for a family, yet seeing all the babies around had me hoping that I wouldn't have to wait too long for my own.

After a last kiss to each baby, Kade tiptoed into his room and I shut the door behind him, blocking out his glare. I knew he preferred the door open, but he was exhausted and needed some uninterrupted sleep.

Although the rooms were large, the bedroom didn't quite have space for three cribs, let alone the extra large one to house the three pups. It was handy that they didn't like to be separated. The alphas liked to wrap around their omega brother, sleeping for longer if they were together.

I settled down on the couch next to the crib and looked through the endless emails, pausing at every snuffle or snort from the crib. It was my job to check on the applications from the elves that wanted to come and stay near the babies in Sweetwater, either in the compound if we could house them, or the town itself nearby. The elves were keen to come here to be around all the children, having missed their own young. They had gone over fifty years without any being born.

The elves seemed to take the pack security more seriously than the council, who were slow to act to the revelation that female alphas had been a thing until male alphas tried to kill them all.

An hour passed with the sleepy sounds of babies breathing, occasional snores from Kade, and the tapping of the keys on my laptop as I caught up with some work.

My stomach growled, and I checked the time. There were still a couple of hours until shift change, though I wondered idly if someone in the kitchens would bring up something to eat.

Putting my laptop away, I approached the door to the suite when there was a muffled commotion outside.

I warily opened the door, gaining a glimpse of Larken sprawled on the floor, a bloody cut on his forehead, when a force barreled into me, knocking me off balance. I landed hard on the floor, as someone pushed by me.

There was no time to shout or raise the alarm before they lobbed a potion at my feet. It broke, a haze of fumes rose into the air.

Instantly, my wolf was cut off. Again. This was the same feeling that I'd had when I was attacked just months before. The feeling of déjà vu had me off balance for a fraction of a second. I tried for the pack link too and it was gone. Nothing but silence when usually there was a low grade buzz. A feeling of comfort and safety just gone in an instant.

They threw another potion, and I yelled for Kade. The sound coming out muffled and distorted. The new spell must have tampered with the acoustics of the room, making the sound stay in place.

I got to my feet shakily, the suddenness of being cut off from my wolf, the attack affecting my equilibrium.

Once up, I rushed at the man heading for the crib, shoving him into the wall of Kade's room, shaking it with the force of the blow.

I slammed a hand up into his face and followed that with a hook to the side of the head, knocking him out.

Turning to check on the babies, I saw an accomplice reaching into the crib and grabbing Elliotte.

Racing for him, I tried shouting again, hoping that someone would hear me and come help.

Where was Blake? He had to have heard Larken's attack, or sensed something in the pack link.

The house was quiet as I chased the large man along the corridor, down the stairs, and out into the yard.

In the back of my brain, it registered that no one was standing guard. There was no one walking about. Everything was eerily quiet and still.

The entire mansion smelled of magic. The tang of it was heavy on my tongue, the scent muted with the familiar presence of my wolf gone.

I closed on him as we reached the grass at the edge of the house. Praying I wouldn't hurt Elliotte, I charged into him, wrestling her out of his arms.

We tumbled, Elliotte tucked against my chest, and landed in a heap of limbs. I cried out, the sound still muffled. The spell's effect on me and not on the area.

The assailant grabbed for me, claws extended, and I twisted, putting my shoulder up to defend the baby in my arms as I rose to my knees.

Pain. Sharp with a burning fire like nothing I'd ever felt before rushed through me. I screamed, the sound still distorted and echoing back at me. I heard my own agony in the sound.

My brain struggled to catch up with what was happening. All I could understand was that they had hurt me, my mind

shutting down to shield me from it, keeping me in the moment. My task was too important to lose focus. I had to protect her.

I was bleeding. Blood gushing from a wound over my shoulder. My thoughts were constantly replaying. *Push it away, think of it later. Pay attention. Elliotte. Guard the child.*

It tried to steal my breath, to pull me under into the cold and dark, but I couldn't let it. Couldn't let him have Elliotte.

She was unnaturally quiet in my arms, and I wondered distantly if they had placed her under a spell to keep her asleep until her attackers had fled with her.

My thoughts whirred in the back of my mind while I fought the dizziness to stay awake.

*Why? For what purpose?*

He came at me again, slashing with razor-sharp claws, face twisted and looking feral.

I launched up to my feet, taking him off guard, my head clipping his chin, making the world turn black for a second, but preventing another slash of those wicked claws.

The unknown shifter recovered quickly, coming in for another attack.

Twisting, I darted towards the house. There had to be someone awake somewhere. If they couldn't hear me, I'd make sure they could see me.

Kade came racing out of the house screaming, "Elliotte! Roan!" His voice rang out loud and clear. The houses nearby



roused. Lights switching on.

The attacker caught me in my distraction, taking us to the ground. I wrapped my body around Elliotte as best I could.

Claws pierced my shoulder, pulling down to my back, wresting another wail from me. My stomach tried to empty itself as the pain overwhelmed my system. Black flitted across my vision.

Teeth brushed my neck, and I prayed to The Luna that this wouldn't be the end for me. That I would protect the precious alpha female in my arms and make it to see her grow up.

The weight was suddenly gone, and I turned to see Kade standing above me, glaring at the form on the grass meters from me.

There was a scoff from the alpha in the grass, and he rose to face Kade, smirking.

No one should ever get between an omega and their young.

Kade's protective instincts were overriding everything, flooding his system with adrenaline and making him look wild.

He shifted, just partially, something I'd seen no one but an alpha do, but heard about when omegas had to protect their young. "Is she okay?" he growled. His mouth was full of sharp fangs.

Though it made me cry out, I twisted, my arm hanging limply, to see the precious bundle in my arms. "Still sleeping. I think there was a potion." Blood soaked her blanket, so I

peeled it away, checking that there was no injury to her. “Not a scratch,” I confirmed.

Kade spared me a glance, his eyes filling with horror. “I’m going to make this quicker than you deserve so I can see to my friend.” The alpha’s grin faded when Kade continued. “Oh, by the way, the other guy is already dead. Cut his throat myself.” Kade gave him an unrepentant grin.

The alpha cut his losses and turned to flee, but Kade was on him quicker than I could blink. Claws ripped flesh. Cries and screams filled the air as Kade fought with everything he had.

“Kade, no!” Larken appeared on the lawn. “We need him alive to question.”

I saw the moment that sense filtered through to Kade. He kicked the fallen alpha to the ground, sparing his life and taking his consciousness with a vicious punch to the head. “Out cold. He’ll survive. Sadly.”

My best friend’s chest rose and fell with the exertion. He approached warily, his claws withdrawing. Carefully, he took my charge into his arms. “Roan?”

“I’m okay. I’ll be fine.”

Briefly I saw a look exchanged between my friends, and then I passed out.

# HEALER

## Roan

I woke with no awareness of how much time had passed, just that it had. It was a disconcerting feeling. Quickly I took stock of the important things.

I was in the clinic, the place familiar from the days of the beta sickness, when I would come and check on people and order supplies. They had painted the walls a soothing ocean blue. The floors were made of a heavily lacquered wood, the footsteps of the staff squeaking as they walked between beds and the nurses' station.

A comfortable bed supported my ravaged body. My healing seemed to have kicked in a little, the bleeding slowed and the worst of my injuries were covered in bandages. Yet everything ached. Fire raced through my arm as I strived to wiggle my fingers.

They wouldn't move.

Panic had ice flooding my veins. From my elbow down, there was no sensation. I ran my other hand over my damaged arm, I felt nothing at all. Would I lose my arm?

Dismissing the idea was difficult. On the back of that thought came one where I wondered if I'd lose my place in the pack if my arm wouldn't work. I wouldn't be able to protect Kade any more. I'd be next to useless.

My wolf huffed. *Not useless. Family. Pack. Assistant.*

His thoughts were succinct as usual. It was just a relief to hear that internal voice after being cut off. It had to mean that they had given me a magic canceling potion while I was out.

He felt my relief and rubbed along my mind, radiating affection for me. *Fine. Better soon.*

While I wished my wolf was a better communicator. I kinda liked how he got his thoughts and feelings across.

I waited in the room; the pain fogging my thoughts until Aldrin and James bustled in.

“Sorry, Roan. We got you stabilized and had to check Elliotte. I'm sure you understand.” Aldrin looked harried in a way I'd never seen, even at the height of the sickness.

“I get it Doc.”

The alpha bear shifter glowered at me. “I'm letting that pass because you saved my great-granddaughter.”

James choked back a sob. “I can't even think about what they were planning to do with her. She's just a baby!”

Aldrin wrapped an arm around his mate and turned his focus to me. “Thanks to you, she's safe. You've spared her that fate.”

“I did what anyone would do.”

Aldrin shook his head sadly. “One attacker was from this pack. We haven’t identified the one Kade spared.

“Kade!” I shot upright, yelling out a curse from the torturous sensation that wrought its way through my body.

“Is fine.” James rushed to my side, making me settle back down in the bed. My face twisted with pain and he noticed. “I’m sorry. We couldn’t give you anything to ease things. We tried some healing potions and they must have interacted with the magic on you already. You had a seizure.”

I looked at Aldrin for confirmation. He nodded. “We nearly lost you at one point. It’s too risky right now to try any more potions. Luckily, we have more help now, so I’ve sent for the new healer instead. As much as I’d like to do more, I’m exhausted.” Aldrin looked gray, rather than his usual healthy tan color.

“Another healer?”

“You remember the omega that joined the pack a couple of weeks ago? Hiroshi? He’s a very talented healer. In high demand. Been around the world working with other healers. He’s been helping at the clinic.”

“Oh,” was all that I could say. I hadn’t met the omega that Dakota knew intimately. He’d been his heat partner for a while before Dakota had met his true mate in Jasper.

“He won’t be long. His betas went with him to check on the prisoner so Blake could interrogate him later.”

“What happened? Why did no one come or hear anything? How did Kade know?”

“The attackers likely had at least one other accomplice.” Deke explained as he entered my room. Axel trailed behind him. I looked for the elf that was often with him. “They set sleep spells around the compound. You and Elliotte were in a silence bubble and they cut your connection between your wolf and the pack. It was powerful and expensive magic. They made it so you couldn’t call for help and didn’t have your wolf to fight with.”

Axel shared a look with his cousin, the healer and assistant. “The elves are sending for help.” Axel looked faraway for a second, clearly using his family bond, and returned his concerned gaze to me. “I can’t believe someone tried this. We are so grateful to you, Roan.”

Deke and Axel placed hands on my shins, about the only part of me that didn’t ache something fierce. I felt my wolf basking in our pack’s attention as he worked to shield me from the worst of the pain. He needed the comfort almost as much as I did.

I scented him before I saw him. Grapefruit and honey.

*Mate.*

Everyone in the room turned to me in shock, and I realized I must have spoken it aloud. My wolf stilled, waiting in anticipation. Everyone in the room paused as the door opened.

A man swept through. A short, stunning omega of maybe Asian heritage. I couldn't be sure. With shifter bright liquid dark eyes and floppy black hair, he entered and owned the room immediately. All our eyes went to him and it seemed like the room held its breath. Two betas flanked him on both sides, but I struggled to take my eyes off my mate to get a glimpse at them. One was a few inches taller than the omega, with blond hair and cornflower blue eyes, the other was taller still, with warm brown skin and rich chocolate eyes, he kept his hair in short locs.

The omega's eyes landed on me, and I noted when he caught my scent. A small gasp escaped pouty lips that quickly twisted into a breath stealing flirty grin. He looked up at me through long, dark lashes. "Hello, Mate."

It was my turn to gasp. I wasn't quite expecting him to be so forward and accepting of what I was to him. Especially with me in my current state. Everyone in the room disappeared from notice.

"Uh, hi. You must be Hiroshi."

"And you, my mate, are my patient? Roan is it?" His accent was impossible to discern, not completely American, though there was an inflection. There were traces of what was likely his homeland, but I heard something European, maybe French, in there.

"Uh." Goddess help me, why couldn't I speak without stammering? "That's me."

Aldrin jumped in to rescue me from myself. My wolf was howling in triumph. We had found our mate, or rather, he'd found us. I heard Aldrin tell Hiroshi the details of my injuries with a ton of medical jargon.

It was crazy to me he'd been living in the compound for the last couple of weeks and we hadn't bumped into each other or caught a scent. Then I remembered that he'd been assaulted and was likely still recovering. I felt my face twist.

"Uh-uh!" Hiroshi chided, his focus falling completely on me again. "Wherever your mind went just now, get back from that thought."

"Um —"

"If it was an alpha worrying about a damaged omega mate, you can quit that right now. I've had enough of that from these two. I don't want to be pitied." How had he guessed? He pointed over his shoulders with both hands to the betas standing guard behind him.

They glowered at him and one spoke, the blonde. "What you went through was horrific, Sunshine."

"I know, Tate. You and Asher keep reminding me. But it's only that bad if I choose to see it that way. I'm not sparing it one more thought, especially now that I've found my mate. That man has no power over me anymore." Hiroshi looked smug. Pleasure making his dark eyes glitter.

Hiroshi turned back to me as he approached my injured side. "May I look?"



“Please. I heard you were a famous healer.”

His grin lit up his face. “Yeah, I’ve been to so many places. Have to say I’m enjoying Sweetwater the best.”

We shared smiles, and he finished unwrapping the bandages. The blood seeped slowly down my arm again.

“We didn’t stitch him, thinking that you might heal the severed nerves and tendons better than I could.” Aldrin explained at Hiroshi’s worried look.

“I’ll do my best, but this... this... I’m not sure if I can save the arm.”

His words hit like a punch. Dread weighed down my stomach, and I thought I might pass out again. I couldn’t lose it.

“Roan? It’s okay, I’ll do what I can to save it. I need you and your wolf to let me work, alright?”

I just about managed to nod. The panic of possibly losing my arm had me hyperventilating.

“Roan, breathe,” Hiroshi soothed.

Following my mate’s words, I took a deep breath. I copied him, letting it out again.

“Okay, let’s do this.” Hiroshi came closer to my side.

*Belongs, mine*, my wolf chuffed. *Ours*, I reminded him.

“You’ve got this, Hiro.” Asher stepped forward, placing a hand on Hiroshi’s shoulder.

It was strange, but there was no twinge of jealousy from my wolf. None from me either. I'd heard about Hiroshi and his men, how he was determined to keep them even after he mated, but that didn't seem to phase me or my happy wolf who was still bounding about in my mind, his joy infectious.

Then it hit me. These men would be mine too if I accepted Hiroshi as he wanted; a package deal. How would I cope with three partners? Would that even work? Did I want that? I glanced at the men. Both were attractive in different ways. Neither as beautiful to me as my mate, but I'd be interested to see what happened with it all.

I wouldn't dismiss this. I truly believed in fate and the gifts given. There was no telling what The Luna had in mind for her shifters. She moved in mysterious ways. All I could do was try to be honest with Hiroshi, and give this a shot if that's what he wanted.

I thought about Kade and Jasper. Both had fought their matings, and I didn't want to fall into that same trap. Fate had a way of making things happen.

Looking again at the trio, I realized I'd be lucky to be tied to them if that's what they wanted.

Blood loss and pain was making my thoughts fractured. All I could really focus on was my mate. He'd moved too far from me, earning a whine from my wolf.

Almost like he had heard him, Hiroshi returned to my side, giving me a gentle smile. "The healing might burn a little. I have to push a lot of power into you. Could I hold your hand

to ground myself? My tiger is saying that we need extra contact.”

“Anything you need.”

His smile was blinding. “I think you and I are going to get on great. Don’t you agree?”

“I do.” The words were simple and honest, a hundred percent the truth.

With careful hands, he touched me, his healing light flaring to life and engulfing us. I distantly heard the others in the room shout in alarm at the strange sight. The power was overwhelming, the burn instant as Hiroshi sought to return everything back to where it should be. He knit my arm back into place. I was finally aware of how close I’d come to losing it.

We stood like that for a while. Time had no meaning with Hiroshi holding onto me. His hand was warm on my back, just below the worst of the pain. I felt his tiger simmering just under the surface, looking for their mate. My wolf rose to meet them and our eyes connected, our alters greeting each other as old friends.

Slowly, I felt his hand in mine as feeling returned to my fingers. Repaired. Whole or as close as they could be.

Skin knit together as Hiroshi moved his hand lower, getting the slashes on my back to close. His grip on my hand tightened as his golden skin paled, freckles on his cheeks stark. He wobbled, and I tried to push energy into him. “Oh!” he

exclaimed as color returned to his face. “Wow! That’s never happened before.”

“Are you alright?”

“Me?” Hiroshi huffed out a laugh. “I’ll be fine after a rest. Let me look you over.”

I mourned the loss of his hands on my skin as he looked at his handiwork. He frowned. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I’m really sorry, Roan, but there’s some scarring. I can’t seem to heal that away. There might have been magic contaminating the wound. It just won’t heal right.” He sounded frustrated, like he was on the verge of tears.

“Hey, it’s alright. See, I can use my arm.” I wiggled my fingers and reached for him. “I can feel you. So I don’t care about some scars, okay?”

Hiroshi gave me a pleased smile. “Okay.”

“Can I hug you?”

Aldrin stepped forward. “We are going to head out and leave you to talk.” He scanned over my healed flesh.

“Remarkable. I wonder why it was so powerful?”

“I’ve heard the healing is stronger for mates,” Hiroshi said.

“Huh. We can discuss this another time. Let him get some rest and he can leave tomorrow into your care. Take tomorrow off!”

My mate turned to face me, a beautiful smile on his face. “I believe you wanted a hug?”

“Get up here.” I opened my arms for him. He climbed onto the bed, nestling in beside me like he’d always been there.

# SOMETHING LIKE ACCEPTANCE

Hiroshi

Carefully climbing onto the bed, I gently maneuvered my way into his arms. I relaxed for the first time in so long. Before all the mess of the sickness, before deadlines and threats.

Home.

This was where I belonged. I just hoped that Roan wanted me, too. I knew I came with complications, not just my betas, but the betrothal to Jared and my history there.

Coming through the last few months unscathed was impossible. I knew that. Therapy was probably a good idea at some point soon. Yet I slapped a brave face on it and carried on, regardless. Tate wasn't buying my bullshit. Would Roan call me out on it, too? Would he accept me for who I was?

The biggest question was if he'd try to bond with my betas like I wanted.

Tate and Asher were a vital part of my life. I couldn't imagine what I'd be like if it wasn't for them. If I hadn't had

them to fight for, to hold on for, I wouldn't have made it through all of everything with Jared. They were my hope.

If Roan would just consider attempting a bond with them, that would be enough for me. Just not dismissing it out of hand would give me the sign that he was right for me.

Something deep in my soul told me they were necessary to my future happiness. I had to keep them with me somehow and I loved them so much. Together they made me better. Tate had me reaching for my positive side. Asher made me want to be a better person, to not grow hard or bitter. Both had been through a lot to even be together. Then they'd risked their lives to be with me. I couldn't let them down now.

I pulled closer to Roan, soaking in his scent. It was a delicious mix of ginger and petrichor, that fascinating scent of rain on the air after a dry spell. My tiger chuffed at me, perfectly content to be next to our mate. My tiger was obsessed with the dark wolf they had gotten a glimpse of. It moved me, the moment that our alters connected. I hadn't expected them to meet so soon, without a shift forcing the issue. It was an intimate experience. One that I would remember for the rest of my life, no matter how this turned out.

The healing had gone in such a strange direction. My light had never flared so brightly. Then for Roan to push energy back into me? Unheard of. It was something that I'd have to discuss with Aldrin and James. If I could tear them away from the research with the elves, that was.

“Are you okay?” Roan asked softly.

“Me? What about you?”

“You are such a healer at heart. I can tell already. I’m fine, Hiro. Can I call you Hiro?”

“You can. Thanks for asking.”

Roan gave me such a sweet smile. “So are you okay? You used a lot of energy there. At one point, I thought you were going to pass out.”

I thought about how to answer. I didn’t want him to feel guilty, but also, didn’t want to start out by telling lies, even if they were tiny little white ones.

“Hey, where’d you go? You can be honest with me. I never want you to sugar coat things with me.”

“It was dicey for a second. I gave too much in the healing just to repair the most significant of the damage. You’re right about passing out, it was a close thing. What you did? With pushing energy back to me? I didn’t know that was possible, especially with us being unbonded.”

“That’s something else we should talk about, I guess.”

I tensed, and Roan pulled me closer, making me relax. “Do we have to?” I could hear the whine in my tone. Tate chuckled, reminding me of their presence. “Oh Goddess! I am so sorry. How rude! I forgot introductions.” I hastily introduced Tate and Asher to Roan.



“Hey, so this is awkward, right?” Tate gave a sheepish grin. Asher just nodded, remaining silent and watchful.

“Just a little. Look, Dakota spilled the beans on you guys when you came for sanctuary.” He cupped my face, so I was meeting his emerald eyes. They were so vibrant, it took my breath away. “It’s unconventional.” I went to interrupt. “No, it hasn’t been done before, but that doesn’t mean I’m not willing to try. Why is it so important to you?”

I took a deep breath before answering. “I love them. A part of me doesn’t want to lose what I have with them when we bond. There’s also something telling me I have to keep them close. They are supposed to be with me for a reason.”

Roan stroked my cheek gently and nodded, then let go. Immediately, I missed the touch. “Then that’s enough for me. I trust your judgment.”

“Just like that?” Asher asked.

Roan studied him before answering. “Just like that.”

“But why?” Tate blurted before correcting himself. “It’s great that you will give this a shot, but usually people question Hiroshi about it.”

“Other people haven’t seen how fate pushes people together the way I have. What were the chances that Kade would meet his fated mate at the exact moment that he needed to, so he could heal? Not to mention it was at the time his father appeared in Sweetwater.” I wanted to brush them off as coincidences, not fate like Roan was keen to attribute them to.

“Then Jasper came to town to see Kade and immediately met Dakota. If Kade and Blake hadn’t met, Jasper and Dakota wouldn’t be expecting their little boy in the next couple of weeks.”

“It’s so cute that Angelica named the baby!” I burst out. Kids were so precious and I wanted a ton of them. Just on my own terms and not as a baby maker for my family. With my fated mate, as The Luna intended.

I daydreamed a little about what my kids with Roan would look like. Would they have my golden skin or match their father? He was a beautiful man with dark smooth skin, I wanted to trace my fingers over. Those gem-like eyes and thick lips that I wanted to nibble on. He was much taller than me, which wasn’t hard since I was a half pint at barely five-six. He was muscular in a way that made me feel safe and not threatened.

Since he was shirtless, it was possible to see he had little body hair. He kept his tight curls cropped close to his scalp, in a no-nonsense style. Everything about the way he watched everyone in the room and evaluated what he said suggested that he liked things straightforward.

Roan was a protector and put himself last. With those qualities, he’d make a fantastic father. “Do you want children?” I asked before I even thought about it. Here we were, just talking about being open to bonding and I was asking about kids. We’d only just met.

My tiger made a huffing sound that sounded suspiciously like laughter. I grumbled mentally at them. I deserved their mirth for being an idiot.

“I do, actually. It’s been great seeing Kade through part of the pregnancy.” At my confused look, he clarified. “They sent the pregnant omegas away just in case at the start of the sickness. Unfortunately, it wasn’t in time for one mother. She lost the baby.”

“Oh, Goddess, no!” My cry was almost lost in similar exclamations from Tate and Asher.

“We all grieve with the parents, but still believe we got off lightly, which I’m sure is no comfort to the families that lost people. The Luna blessed Sweetwater with a lot of babies at the same time she caused so much pain.” He was silent for a moment. “Y’know, I was just thinking, right before the attack, that I wanted what Kade and Blake have for myself. Kids too, if the Goddess is willing.”

“Really?” Hope rose inside me.

“Sure. A bunch of them if we can. I never had a sibling, so I’d like to give my child what I didn’t have.” He paused. “Can I ask you something?”

Tate and Asher exchanged a weighted look with me. Was this where it all fell apart? Did Roan have a condition that we couldn’t accept?

“Sure,” I asked cautiously.

“Like I said, I’m willing to try a bond with us as a group, if that’s what you want. You’re my fated and I trust you. The thing is, I want to stay in Sweetwater, as part of the pack. In the compound.” He rushed the words out, like he was worried about their reception.

“That’s it? You just want to stay here?”

“Yes...” He dragged the word out hesitantly.

“Oh, that’s fine with me.” I looked at my betas. “You guys too, right?”

“Absolutely,” said Tate. “I’m training to be an enforcer. Being able to fly is useful here. Plus, my cousin is Jake. He’s bonded to Sebastian.”

“Oh, that’s right. I like Jake. I’m glad he came through the sickness alright.”

“And I’m working at the factory and learning a ton. Sweetwater has been pretty great to us. Accepting like we haven’t had before,” Asher added.

“You’re working with Aldrin?” Roan asked me.

“I am. The clinic is great here. Much better facilities than we had in Northharbor. Logan tried, but the pride is complicated. Most of the elders wanted me to be making babies instead of being a competent healer.”

The door shoved open, breaking the little bubble that we had going on.

“Roan! Are you okay?” Poppy asked as she approached the bed. She gave me a quizzical look at me sharing the bed with Roan. “What’s going on?”

Tate stepped forward, grabbing her a chair so she could sit next to the bed. She took the seat gingerly.

Poppy was looking radiant. The pregnancy certainly agreed with her. It had been a couple of weeks since I’d last seen her, just before my last heat, a time I wanted to forget. Since then, her stomach had rounded further, just a gentle swell that made it clear she was expecting.

“Hey, Poppy. Did you go see Kade?”

“No, I did not! I heard they had hurt you when they asked me to come check on the magic used. Then I came straight here to check on you. Kade was so worried. Said you’d nearly died because of the magic. Are you okay?”

“Pops, I’m fine,” Roan reassured her. “Hiroshi here fixed me right up.”

Poppy set ice-blue eyes on me. “And what’s happening here?”

Roan looked at me for permission. “Hiroshi is my fated mate!” I loved the enthusiasm in his voice. There was no faking it. He was genuinely happy that we were mates.

“Really? Oh Goddess, this is amazing! Congrats you two.”

“Four,” I corrected. “Tate and Asher are going to be bonded to us as well.”

Poppy faltered for a second, her smile dimming. “Is that possible? I mean, poly relationships are common with witches, but I’ve never heard of it with shifters. Certainly not with fated mates. I didn’t think a fated could see anyone like that.”

It was Asher that stepped forward, abandoning his position propping up the wall. “Tate and I were going to ask for help to end our bonding. We thought that if we all re-bonded simultaneously, then this might work.” He looked between me and Tate. “We’ve talked about this a lot and think it’s worth the risk.”

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Poppy asked Roan. “How’s your wolf coping with the idea of your fated having two other mates?”

While her comments and questions were rational and calmly stated. They still stung. We were going to get this a lot, and the only way we could prove people wrong was by trying it. With Roan recovering and Tate and Asher practically strangers to him, bonding now wasn’t ideal. I wanted to try it after Roan had time to get to know them, grow to care for them, a little first.

“Strangely, he’s calm about it. I’m not sure if it hasn’t sunk in yet, or what, but for now he seems to accept that our mate comes with extras.” He gave a quick grin. I smiled in return.

“Still... it’s risky,” Poppy stated.

“We know,” Tate said more patiently than I could. “We just want to try.”

“Well, I can give you the potion. I’ll get some sent over with the new wards.”

“Thanks,” I managed, still hurt by her doubt, as reasonable as it was.

“So, Poppy. Why are you at the compound?” Roan asked, changing the subject.

“Oh, um, Alpha Blake wanted me to see if it is the same witch that’s been selling potions all over the place. It was Basil for sure.”

Tate and Asher both scoffed. “Basil?”

Even Roan had a smirk.

Poppy’s lips lifted, though she prevented a full smile from taking over her face. “Hardly the most intimidating name, is it? His brother is Thyme, so I guess he can’t complain. Anyway,” she said, stressing the last word, “Basil used to be the High Witch. He’s talented and powerful. Don’t underestimate him. Even now, we believe he’s still selling potions illegally. We just can’t seem to find him.” Frustration marred her pretty face briefly.

“So, what’s the plan after this attack?” Roan was on high alert. He wasn’t an enforcer from what I’d heard. He was the alpha mate’s assistant and guard. My mate was close to the alpha pair.

“Are you worried about the safety of the babies?”

Roan laughed. “I should be, but you didn’t see Kade when he came storming out of that door. I think I peed my pants a

little.”

The room erupted into laughter. Roan successfully lightened the mood.

“I can’t even imagine Kade standing up to someone like that.” Poppy mused.

“You should’ve seen him, Pops. He partially shifted!”

Mouths dropped. Even my own. “A partial shift?” The words were out without thought.

“Did you think those wounds on the alpha were from me?”

I nodded. It hadn’t even occurred to me that Kade had been responsible for all the slashes and gouges on the mangled alpha. “Moon above. Kade almost tore him apart.”

“So I’m sure the babies are protected, but we need better protocols in place. More magic, searches, guard checks, and stuff. Blake and Kade need to sleep at some point. They are exhausted as it is.” Roan spoke with familiarity and affection for the pair. It didn’t stir any jealousy in me. I’d heard the stories about what Roan was to Kade. That was clearly over for them both. I couldn’t sense any lingering love aside from friendship or family.

With Poppy in the room, it felt a little strange to be sitting on Roan’s bed. I made a move to get a chair like Tate and Asher, but Roan clung to me. We exchanged a look, one where it felt like he understood my concerns and tried to reassure me.

I’d only just met the man, my alpha and mate, and he was already exceeding any expectations I’d had. Well done, fate.



Well done.

# RESERVATIONS

## Tate

Everything was moving so fast! We'd only just begun to get settled into the pack. Hiroshi with the clinic, Asher at the factory, and me in my training to be an enforcer, and here we were, faced with Hiroshi's mate. I couldn't keep up.

It was exhausting, adjusting to everything. I had pushed my body to the limit with all the training and flying needed to get into shape for enforcer duties. Deke, the head enforcer, loved to put me through my paces. It was like he got some sort of sick pleasure out of torturing me day after day. He had my cousin, Jake, and his mate, Sebastian, out flying with me at every opportunity. I had no idea how they kept up with patrols, along with my training.

There were only three bird shifters in the Sweetwater pack since my arrival, and we desperately needed more. Jake and I were both ravens, an all too common type according to the Northharbor aviary. There, they treated my family and the other corvids, like we were less than everyone else. Sebastian was practically shifter royalty, being a peregrine falcon. The only

thing that would have elevated his status more was being an alpha instead of being a beta.

Someone from the aviary had caught Jake and Seb together and, under duress, they had confessed to their relationship. The elders of the flock had punished Jake by locking him into his raven form. Only Seb, selling everything he could to get his hands on the necessary magic, had saved him from a terrible fate.

When the aviary had caught me with Asher, a lion shifter and new to the pride, they had given me a choice; leave willingly before they exiled me or face the consequences of mating outside of my type. I got off lucky. My family had cut all ties, and honestly, I didn't miss them. If they would put up with all that bullshit about sticking to species when it didn't fucking matter, then they deserved to be treated like shit. Did they think that with siding with the elders and the dickhead of an alpha eagle that they would be magically treated better? Were they that deluded? Whatever the case, they weren't my problem anymore.

This thing with Roan could be a problem, though. Hiroshi was clearly smitten with the man. He was sharing a bed with his mate within an hour of meeting him. Okay, so it was platonically, almost. They were just cuddling, and wolf shifters needed that. All shifters did, but wolves especially. It aided with their healing just by settling their wolves.

I didn't know what to make of Roan. He was a great-looking guy with a shed load of charisma. He was obviously

captivated by Hiroshi if he was willing to take us on, too. The man hadn't even questioned it, just offered to try, whatever that meant.

It just didn't make sense to me. Wolves were extra. They were highly possessive, dominant, and overbearing. Roan seemed sweet. He reminded me of Alpha Blake, who didn't like being called Alpha Blake every second, "just alpha if you must, but I'd prefer my name." I could see why he inspired so much loyalty.

Roan was similar. He had a quiet strength about him. I got the impression that he would allow Hiroshi to dictate the pace. I had to set some boundaries.

It took a while, but eventually I convinced Hiroshi that we had to allow Roan to get some sleep.

"How about we get you some clean clothes and you come to our house? There's room for us all." Hiroshi suggested with hearts in his eyes. It was going to be a nightmare to slow things down if I didn't do it soon.

The way I saw it, if Hiroshi and Roan bonded, and tried bonding with me and Asher too, and it didn't work, then I was stuck. I wanted to stay with the pack, but I'd have to find somewhere else for me and Asher to go.

As an omega, Hiroshi should have the little house that we were working to make our home. Like he'd promised, Logan had sent more of our things. The space was really starting to feel like a home.

It was more than that, though. I didn't want to be faced with Hiroshi and Roan every day if it didn't work until my heart could get over it.

I felt like me and Asher had to get to know Roan too, so that we could form a bond. Maybe if we had that base, if it all fell apart, then we'd know that we tried and that Hiroshi was in safe hands. At the moment, I could only go with guesses and intuition. Not nearly good enough for my sweet tiger. He needed love with someone worthy. Fate said Roan was that, but I wanted to be sure.

On the flip-side, if the chosen bond worked, and we didn't get on or weren't compatible, that would make everything strained. Would Roan make Hiroshi cut us loose?

"I, uh, I'd like that,." Roan stammered out, a faint trace of a blush spreading over his cheeks, his smile wide. Damn, he was hot.

"Okay, we'll go get some and come back for you. Maybe have a nap. Then you can shower if you'll let Asher help you."

"Um, will I need help?" Roan looked nervous.

"You suffered significant blood loss. Your shifter healing will help with that, but Roan, you had a seizure, too. You'll have to take it easy for a couple of days."

"Since we are new to the pack, we can't take time off so soon from our jobs. Maybe you could shadow Hiroshi tomorrow, get to know each other better?" Asher suggested. It

had been the first time he'd spoken in a while. Not unusual, but it had me wondering what was happening.

*You okay?* I tried using the bond. Asher had it locked down tight. I frowned. I'd have to take my mate aside later and get his thoughts.

Hiroshi leaped on that idea. "Oh! I love that idea, Asher! What do you think, Roan?"

"Yeah, ah, that would be great." Roan grinned, perfect, white teeth on display.

"Okay." Hiroshi darted forward and kissed Roan's cheek. "Be back soon."

When Hiroshi turned and dashed through the door, his face was aflame with a blush. I'd never seen him turn red for anything. I didn't think he could get embarrassed!

I tried looking at Asher to see what he made of it, but his face was unreadable. A mask in place.

We walked towards the mansion. "Sunshine?"

"Yeah?" Hiroshi was hesitant.

"Could we have time to get to know Roan first before you bond? To see if he fits us, too. It'd be awkward if he loves pineapple on pizza or something and we just had to deal with it since he's the alpha."

Hiroshi laughed. A relieved sound with a tinge of hysteria. "Sure. I'll slow down. Isn't he just perfect, though? Stunning and sweet. And. Most importantly! He's willing to try!"

“He seems great. I’m happy for you, Hiroshi,” Asher said calmly.

“What about you and Tate? Do you think it’ll work?”

“I think you can make anything happen that you want to happen,” Asher said diplomatically.

“Do you want it, though?” Hiroshi frowned. “I want you to want to be in this with me.”

I saw Asher weighing his words. “I think Tate’s right, we need to form at least a friendship bond, so if this all falls to shit, we at least know you are in great hands.”

Hiroshi’s face crumpled, and I rushed to his side, folding him into my arms and kissing the top of his head. “He’s great, from what I’ve seen. I’m sure we’ll all get along and it’ll work out how it’s supposed to. All we can hope is that fate is on our side.”

Hiroshi pulled away after one last squeeze. “Thanks, Tate. You always make me feel better.”

“You’re welcome, Sunshine.”

The mansion loomed ahead of us, a sprawling building that seemed more intimidating than the last time we had visited as a trio. I was there daily, training, but had never seen it so busy with people.

The door was heavily guarded when we approached. More than the day before. “Hey, Tate!” Melody called. “Everything okay?” She surveyed my companions. Hiroshi cuddled up to my side, Asher on the other, an arm around my waist.

“Yeah, all good. We’re getting some stuff for Roan. He’s going to stay with us for a couple of days to finish recovering.”

“Cool, well, he rooms with Larken, so I’ll call him. He’ll have to drop the wards to let you into their room.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Melody made the call. Using the link was pointless because Larken could be out of range, and soon one of the enforcers I’d seen before was approaching. I hadn’t met the guy before and part of me was glad. He looked fierce.

“Hey, so you want into our room?” Larken looked us over.

“Hi, so I’m Hiroshi, and I’m Roan’s fated mate!” Hiroshi’s smile was blinding.

Larken faltered for a second, a complicated emotion flitting over his face. “That’s wonderful! Congratulations. I can’t wait to get to know you better, Hiroshi. Come on, let’s get some of his stuff. Is he okay?”

They chatted about Roan’s condition quietly as they climbed the stairs, me and Asher following behind him. I reached for the bond again, finding it still closed. It was getting worrying, not being able to sense him. I needed to get inside that brain.

“So he’s really okay?” Larken whispered, with genuine concern.

“Oh, absolutely. We just want to get to know him better before we try our bonding.”



I was glad we were safely inside the wards of the shared bedroom, the door firmly closed, as Hiroshi said the words. Larken stopped dead. “What? What’s wrong with your bond? Why wouldn’t it work?”

“Well, because we want all four of us to be bonded,” Hiroshi said simply.

Silence filled the room and I could see Hiroshi growing uncomfortable.

“And Roan is on board with this?” Larken finally asked.

“He said he’s willing to try, which is more than any of us expected,” I said plainly. The jury was still out on if all this would work. I had my reservations over the entire thing. I just knew that I couldn’t give Hiroshi up just yet. Whatever happened, I needed him in my life.

“Try.” A pause. “Being in a poly bond?” Larken asked haltingly.

“I know it’s unusual—” Hiroshi began.

“Unheard of, but you know what? It isn’t any of my business. If that’s what Roan wants, then that’s what he should do. You need to know something, though.”

There was an edge to his tone that had me on my guard.

“What?” Hiroshi was nervously biting his lip.

“Roan has enemies in the pack. We still haven’t proven which ones were in on the attack on him.”

“Attack?” Asher straightened up from where he stood leaning against the wall.

“During the beta sickness, other alphas of the pack attacked and badly beat Roan. They left him on the floor a mangled mess.” Larken slumped onto a neatly made bed. “We identified three of them and they were exiled, but there are others out there.” Larken’s eyes met Hiroshi’s. “Having lost three members for Roan hasn’t exactly made him popular. Those guys had friends here that might not have been a part of it, but they are holding grudges for lost friends.”

“So we need to watch out for the other alphas? Is that what you are saying?” Hiroshi asked, his voice small and unsure.

“What I’m saying is that Roan is Kade’s ex. He was in the Hayes pack, so people are cautious about him. He killed Rincoln, preventing Blake from getting hurt, so that’s a point in his favor. Mating as a group just puts another target on his back.”

“How so?” I finally spoke up, hating that Hiroshi looked devastated.

“Anything that has him standing out right now is bad. You need to keep him from being gossip. You know how shifters like to talk. The pack already believes he gets special treatment from the alpha.” This alpha cared about Roan deeply.

“Do you believe that?” I demanded. I hardly knew Roan, and here I was defending him. Spending just a short time with

him made me aware of how gentle the alpha was, so unassuming.

“Goddess, no! Look, saving Elliotte will help his image —“ he held a hand up to stop my words. “Not that it was the reason he did it. He loves those babies as if they were his own. Kade is like a sibling to him these days, however weird that sounds.”

“So, what’s the solution?” Hiroshi whispered, looking overwhelmed.

“Keep it as quiet as you can until you know it’s going to work. Keep an eye out for each other. Roan’s one of my only friends here, so I’ll help keep him safe as best as I can.”

The Sweetwater pack was supposed to be a fresh start for us. Just what had we walked into? A pack attacking members, traitors trying to steal babies, and an alpha that I was pretty sure was in love with his best friend.

# EXPERIMENTS

## Roan

A week of being pampered sounded like heaven, right? Wrong. I was about to climb the walls if I couldn't go to the gym or work off this sexual frustration.

By some sort of torturous planning, I'd slept in the spare room of the small house Hiroshi shared with the betas. They all slept, or didn't sleep, together, every damn night.

In the early hours of the morning, I'd wake to moans and sighs. The creaking of bedsprings would keep me awake as Hiroshi giggled and groaned.

All I could imagine was the filthy things that both betas were doing to him, and to each other from what I could hear. I longed to join them, though I felt hesitant about my welcome.

I'd thought when Hiroshi suggested I come stay while I recovered that I'd be sharing with him since he was my mate. But no. They didn't want to hurt me while sleeping and Hiroshi was a snuggler.

Spending time with my mate was fantastic. It overjoyed my wolf to have such a sweet and intelligent mate. Hiroshi was

everything that I could have asked for. Super cute, being smaller than me so I could manhandle him all the time, if he was up for that, of course. He was kind and caring, often thinking of others' needs before his own. Hiroshi was loving and funny and within just a week, he'd stolen my heart.

It didn't get any better when I was finally allowed into his bed at the start of the second week. Being close to him, touching him, holding him as he slept, was wonderful. Everything that I hoped for, but there was the awkwardness of having two other people in the bed.

The first night we slept in the same bed, the betas had slept in the spare room to save the awkwardness. However, Hiroshi really couldn't settle with just me in the bed. He loved being held and squished between the betas and while being close to me was great, he just missed them and hardly slept. The next night I'd sucked up any lingering weirdness and asked them to share the bed with us. There was room. We all fit comfortably on the bed, but it was still strange to share my mate.

There was literally nothing I wouldn't do for him by the time we hit the third week. This meant that I had to suck it up and see how I could make this bond work with the three of them. My mate literally needed the betas to be fully happy.

I knew it might not work and it would hurt everyone's feelings, but I feared the not knowing would do more damage than if it fell apart. Giving it a solid go would show Hiroshi that I would put him first always.

So, with that in mind, I left the clinic early, where I'd been working alongside my mate, and walked across the compound to the shared house to speak to Tate and Asher.

"Hey, is anyone home?" I called as I entered.

"Kitchen," Asher answered.

He was the one that I couldn't get a handle on. Tate worshiped both Hiroshi and Asher, but with Asher I sensed a distance. He was more cautious and sensitive. I wondered if part of it was his awareness of what Hiroshi had gone through over the last few months. It was certainly part of why I was taking things slowly with my mate. He wasn't broken, but there were fractures.

"Tate around?" I asked as I took a seat at the small table.

"On his way. He said you wanted to talk?"

"Yeah, I think we maybe just need some boundaries and expectations going forward."

Asher made a non-committal noise.

"We all want Hiroshi to be happy. I just feel like we won't all get what we want out of this unless we lay everything out there."

"We do. Tate's my chosen mate and I love Hiroshi." I wasn't Chase. I couldn't detect lies, yet I got the impression that I was missing something. Asher might love Hiroshi, but there were many kinds of love. I loved Kade, I just wasn't in love with him.

“If you aren’t into the bonding—“

“I’m fully committed to this,” Asher cut in sharply.

“Okay,” I held my hands up. There was no point in pushing the issue. All I could focus on was my part of things. “I’m just checking in.”

“Babe?” Tate’s voice came from the entryway.

“In here!” Asher called back. He gave me a warning look before focusing on the contents of the fridge, and I rolled my eyes at his turned back.

Tate greeted his mate with a kiss on the lips and me with one on the cheek before slumping into a chair. “Enforcer training is hard!” he complained.

I gave him a commiserating look because I knew it well. Deke had certainly put me through my paces both before and after the sickness. The time after the attack, Deke claimed it was because he wanted to check my fitness after my injuries. My fingers clenched automatically when I recalled that time.

“Worth it, though. Deke asks for a lot, but the guy is motivated and the best fighter I’ve ever seen in both forms.”

“Yeah? You’ve seen him fight?”

“Many times when sparring with him. He was also there when we went to get Kade back from his father.”

“So you’ve had the training, too?” Tate asked, leaning forward and showing his interest.

“Had to. There was no way that Deke or Blake would let me guard Kade with what I’d picked up. I did boxing to keep fit and trained alone in the years I was watching over Kade, but that isn’t the same as fighting another shifter.”

Asher placed a freshly made sandwich down in front of his mate, along with a large glass of water. “Thanks, babe. So what were we needing to talk about?” Tate took a ravenous bite of the sandwich and chewed quickly as I framed my reply.

“We need to be on the same page about trying the bonding. I dunno how much longer I can keep my wolf back, especially with staying here. He’s going crazy being near our mate and not claiming him. My duties guarding Kade start back in a couple of weeks. I know he’d prefer it if I went into the office, but if we mate, we will need some time off because of Hiroshi’s heat.”

“Do you think he’s ready for that so soon after the last one?” Tate asked Asher, of all people. Wouldn’t it be better asking the man himself?

“Look, I don’t think we can choose that for him. Hiroshi is his own person. We just need to figure ourselves out so we are in the best place to make it work.” I tried to stay calm.

Tate was still chewing his second bite, so Asher took over. “What do you mean? Is there something you think that will make it work?”

I could feel heat rising on my cheeks. “This is just a theory, but we should maybe see if there is any chemistry between us. I’ve only ever been with Kade. Being with someone else is



intimidating, let alone three other people. Maybe if we can work physically, it will give us a basis for a deeper bond, friendship, if nothing else, to grow on.”

Tate swallowed, took a gulp of water while holding up a finger for me to wait. “Is that a fancy way of asking to fuck? See if we fit sexually?”

I wanted this conversation to be over so badly. Nodding, I answered, “Yes.”

Tate and Asher had a silent conversation. Rude normally, but these weren't normal circumstances. Tate then fiddled with his phone.

They took a couple of minutes and finally Tate took a deep breath, letting out a long sigh. “We agree we should check we are compatible physically. For instance, Asher doesn't mind bottoming, but it isn't his preference. Would you be up for trying it?”

What the fuck? They were so casual about something that had taken me all day to work up the courage to say. My mouth gaped. “I, uh, hadn't thought about it. Yeah,” I dragged the word out. “Why not?” I shrugged.

“Asher and I also agree that we don't want to try getting all in our feelings just now. Friends, yes, anything more? No. We don't want to risk catching feelings for this to all go wrong.”

Smart. Safe and sensible. I liked both guys. Maybe I could love them given time, but I didn't want to risk a broken heart

right now. “I agree with that. It would be bad enough having to give up Hiroshi, so I think that’s a good idea.”

“So, how’d you want to do this?” Asher asked.

The door flew open. “Wait for me! I wanna watch!”



I followed Hiroshi into the bedroom, the two betas behind me. “I’m just going to sit over here. Are you sure it’s okay I’m here?”

Honestly, it felt better having a reminder of why I was doing this. Nerves formed a ball in my stomach. Both of the betas were acting casual about this. They were used to sharing Hiroshi with an alpha, but this was a big deal to me. “I’m glad you are here. I just don’t think I could control my wolf if you were involved.”

“Why are you doing this again?”

“Hiro.”

“I know. This is a lot. You don’t have to do anything to make me happy. You being open is enough.”

Hiroshi perched on a chair in the room’s corner, facing the bed. I reached for him, leaned down, and brushed a kiss across his lips. He pushed closer, connecting our lips fully, and we both sighed into our first kiss. It was as perfect as he was.

The kiss lingered for a minute before I pulled away.

“Bonding is almost always sexual. We need to see if anything

is there between us.” It felt like an excuse, and I wondered if he could see it in my eyes.

Being with the betas first was nerve-wracking, but I didn’t want to mess up the bonding with my inexperience. Unlike a lot of alphas, I hadn’t messed around with some betas before Kade. I’d waited for him. After we’d broken up, he’d been with other people, humans and shifters. There had been little opportunity for me. I needed something more than a willing body. I needed a connection.

Asher and Tate were a test to myself. We’d formed a tentative bond over our feelings for Hiroshi. Was that enough?

They started stripping off; the air filled with expectation. Asher threw a bottle of lube on the bed. At my raised eyebrow, he clarified. “We aren’t self lubricating like omegas.”

My cheeks heated. “Right.” Slowly, I followed suit and stripped off, joining them on the bed.

Tate reached for me and drew me into a kiss. He ran his hands over my body, igniting my senses. “Is this okay?”

Asher crawled up the bed, clasped Tate’s chin and tore his mouth from mine to his. They kissed long and deep as I lay sprawled between them, unsure what to do.

Hiroshi made a moan that had my head whipping round to meet his eyes. “You look so beautiful together.” There was a noticeable tent in his pants.

Gathering my courage, I leaned up and joined my lips to Asher and Tate’s in a filthy three-way kiss. Asher cupped the

back of my head, pulling me deeper into it, shoving his tongue into his mouth.

I allowed my hands to roam, enjoying the feel of muscled skin under my palms. Both groaned as I tweaked nipples and caressed my way over their chests. I reached down, palming both of their cocks as they hardened in my hands. It made me feel powerful to elicit that reaction in the betas.

There was a moment of hesitation. I didn't know what to do next with the pair. Awkwardness seeped into the room and the kiss slowed.

“Here's how it's going to go,” Asher said, taking charge. I sighed with relief instead of being indignant or feeling less of an alpha. My inexperience already made me vulnerable. I was grateful Asher was taking the lead. “I'm going to get you ready for my cock and everything I do to you, you do to Tate. Understand?”

I nodded.

“Words. Use words so we know you want this. Use the pack link if you can't say it out loud.”

*I want this.*

“Good boy,” Asher praised. “Now I want you facing Tate as he lies on the bed. Get your ass in the air for me.” We quickly moved into position. “Hmm, that's good. Let me get a look at that hole.”

The words made me gasp. My gaze met Tate's as he was stretched out under me. He was stunning, his usually pale skin

flushed pink with arousal, hard cock straining and leaking, tempting me to taste him. I leaned closer and ran my tongue up his length and over the head, getting my first taste.

“He loves being eaten out. How about you try to copy what I’m doing to you?”

“Yes!” Tate grabbed for a pillow, putting it under his hips. “Please,” he moaned.

“Okay, I can try that.” I was nervous about the idea of being rimmed. It wasn’t something I’d ever done to Kade. I hated comparing him to this, but it was the only experience I had.

Hands grasped my ass cheeks, pulling them apart. “Nice,” Asher muttered. Then a hot, wet, tongue swept over the furred flesh.

I groaned loud in the quiet room, then copied Asher’s movements on Tate.

“Holy fuck!” Tate jerked at the first touch of my tongue over his entrance. I swept over it, around and speared my tongue in as far as it would go as Asher did the same to me. I lost track of time trying to concentrate on what I was doing, enjoying the taste of Tate, while Asher fried my senses with his talented mouth.

There was a click of a cap, and he slowly pushed a wet finger inside me. I groaned around the burn of the intrusion. Slowly, it eased and Asher moved it in and out of me, bringing nerve endings to life.

Tate handed me the lube so I could do the same to him. I petted his hole with a slick finger before easing it inside. This was slightly more familiar, the tight, hot clasp around my finger as I worked Tate's hole. He relaxed around me, prompting me to give him a second. His groan echoed.

Asher added a second finger. The feeling was strange, the stretch and burn distracting but pleasurable. I couldn't help the sounds that escaped me. "More, another!" I cried out.

A third finger eased into me and I stopped my movements on Tate before this was over before it started. It was overwhelming, but amazing.

"I think you're ready for my cock, don't you?"

"Yes!"

"Then make sure Tate is ready. I want you in him as I fuck you. So it's like I'm fucking you both at the same time."

I couldn't control my whimper. Reaching out, I tried to get another finger inside Tate, but he pushed my hand away.

"Give me the burn," Tate demanded. "Get in me."

Slicking up my cock, I pushed inside Tate, taking his mouth in a fierce kiss just as Asher eased inside me.

The burn was sharp. It stole my breath. I turned my head, breathing into Tate's neck as I tried to relax, to let Asher in. He felt huge, the whole thing impossible to fit inside me, yet Hiroshi managed this and he was much smaller than me.

I looked for my mate and found him watching avidly, stroking his cock. “So hot,” he whispered.

The scent of his arousal in the air met my nose, relaxing me and prompting my wolf to make me move.

My thrusts started slowly, gently, as I worked my ass over Asher’s cock and into Tate’s hole. The pleasure was indescribable. Being fucked and fucking together was an overload to the senses. My mind drifted as I focused on the feelings these two were giving me. I sought Tate’s mouth, then sat up, turning my head to kiss Asher.

Tate’s arms reached up and circled my neck. I pulled him up into my arms, settling his ass on my knees as I pumped my hips into him. He clung to me as his kisses turned desperate.

Asher’s hold on my hips turned into a bruising grip. His control slipped, and he pumped hard into me, the force shoving me deeper into Tate. Asher leaned over me to kiss Tate as I gasped for air.

I felt the tingle signaling my impending orgasm. “Close,” I warned. “Do you want my knot?”

“Hmm, yes! Stretch me on your knot.” Tate’s lips met mine again.

Instead of holding it back, I worked my hips and relaxed into the barrage of sensation. Asher was nipping at my neck as his thrusts grew harder and faster. Tate found my nipples and tweaked them.

It was too much and not enough at the same time. Then the scent hit me. Hiroshi's seed covered his fist as he watched us together, his cheeks flushed, pupils blown. My omega's pleasure was all I needed for my knot to form, my release filling Tate with spurt after spurt.

The stretch of my knot triggered Tate's orgasm, wringing a cry from the man's lips. "Goddess, yes!" he yelled. "Oh fuck, that's amazing!"

My hips stuttered, fear of hurting Tate making me shallow my movements.

Asher took over, ramming into me over and over, growling into my neck as I gasped into Tate's. It took only a few minutes, but soon Asher roared as he came inside me. The feeling alien but not altogether unpleasant.

We stayed there for a few seconds, just basking in the afterglow.

He pulled out of me carefully. I winced at the feeling. My shifter healing would help with the pain, thankfully, or I wouldn't be able to walk the next day. Asher helped me adjust my grip on Tate so we could lie on our sides and relax.

"Gimme ten minutes and you can fuck Asher, and I'll fuck you," Tate said, sounding sleepy.

"Make it twenty and you're on. I need to wait for my knot to go down."

"Hmm, okay." Tate lay with his eyes closed, looking satiated.



I'd liked the experience, but wasn't sure about doing it all the time. I had to admit; I was curious about what it would be like with Asher. The other man was a bit of an enigma.

He'd also not said a word. "You down for that?" I looked over my shoulder at Asher. Had I imagined a momentary tightness in his eyes?

"Sure."

# SETTING BOUNDARIES

## Asher

**T**his whole situation was getting out of hand. I loved my mate and Hiroshi, I really did. Had I ever thought that Hiroshi would meet his mate? Not really, no. Yet, here we were. Not only did he have a mate, but one that wanted to try bonding with his omega's lovers.

Fated mates were a big deal, but we all acknowledged that not everyone would meet theirs. When they did, usually the omega, or alpha, would ditch whatever partner they had for themselves to get with their mate. Often, the pull was too strong to ignore and affairs would happen.

Sweetwater seemed to buck that trend. Kade had famously denied his mate, or delayed their mating, taking things slowly, or close to that in shifter terms. Jasper, his papa, had rejected his fated three times. The gossip about the pair was rife around the compound. Shifters, wolves in particular, loved to talk. They loved the pair, but noticed that they were a different breed of omega.

Here was Roan, though, also from the same pack, the Hayes pack that Kade's father had been alpha of, and he differed

from what I'd have expected of a young alpha.

Few alphas would agree to being fucked, especially by a beta. They did the fucking. Yet, here Roan was, willing to do it for me and for Tate.

My mate loved sex in all forms. When it was just us, he bottomed the majority of the time. Bottoming was something I'd suffered through occasionally to make him happy. How did he feel about this?

*You're projecting, love. We need to see how Roan fits with us for the bond.*

*But –*

*No, let him try. If it doesn't feel right, then you don't have to do it again. He seemed to like you being inside him.*

He had. I tried to shut down the bond, to not let my anxiety seep through. I could feel the slow burn of arousal from Tate. He loved being stretched on a knot, something he hadn't experienced properly before, only with spells and toys. Apparently, they didn't quite compare. He wanted that for me, too.

*You got close.*

Dammit. I was still projecting. My lion helped me thicken the mental walls and hide my confusion and doubt.

Roan's knot deflated. He eased his cock out of Tate's ass, a trickle of cum leaking out.

“Wow! That was something.”

I heard Hiroshi whimper. “Are you going to fuck again?”

Roan lifted his head so he could meet Hiroshi’s eyes. “Does that bother you?”

“No.” Hiroshi answered honestly. “I just wish I could join in. I know why I can’t.”

Roan gave him a commiserating look. “If you got any closer, I’d be on you in a second.”

Hiroshi nodded. “I know.” He blushed. “You three sorting your dynamic is important, and fucking hot! I’m happy to watch as long as I get a turn, too.”

“You will,” Roan assured him. He was so good with Hiroshi. “Soon,” he promised.

Hiroshi nodded with adoration in his eyes. Their tentative bond was growing daily.

“Asher, babe. Lie down on the bed. Let me and Roan make you feel good.” Tate said with a cheeky smile.

“You always do.”

“You ready to help me open him up for you, Roan?”

“Absolutely.”

The pair got to work, teasing and tasting my body until I was writhing under their ministrations. I barked out a sound at the feel of a tongue on my entrance and a mouth on my cock.

Roan and Tate kissed in between sucking and licking me. I stuffed pillows under my head so I could watch them together.

Goddess, they made a fine picture. I loved watching Tate with Hiroshi, but this was something else.

My breath faltered as a finger breached me. The feeling was intense and unwelcome. I shoved that thought away and attempted to relax.

“Shh, babe, let him in.” Tate petted me and reached up for a kiss. With him controlling my mouth, it was easy to focus on that instead of Roan stretching me to take his massive looking cock.

Soon I was taking three fingers easily. Two from Roan and one from Tate. “You want another, babe?” I shook my head. If we drew this out any longer, I was going to chicken out and leave Tate disappointed.

“Get in me,” I growled at Roan.

He reached for the lube, fumbling with the bottle and dropping it, before he tried again. He slicked himself and looked at me. “Ready?”

“Hell yeah, I’m going to turn over.” Maybe it would be easier if I didn’t have to watch him. I liked Roan, but he wasn’t my mate.

I groaned loudly as he gently eased that thing, that weapon, inside me. It felt as big as his arm. It wasn’t really, but the intrusion was painful. Breathing deeply into the pillow, I screamed inside my mind, distracting myself. My muscles relaxed, and the ache eased fractionally.

Roan started with shallow thrusts. He was gentle as he caressed my back, my sides, and reached for my flagging cock. With a few strokes, I sighed and the tension in my body eased. My length hardened in his hand.

Tate pushed inside Roan, who moaned and pumped harder inside me.

We let Roan set the pace.

Roan came down over my back, changing the angle of his cock inside me. He reached around, circling my body in his arms and drew me up to sitting so he was pumping up into me. He turned my face to kiss me, owning me in that moment.

All I could feel was him, and I hated it. I panicked, my muscles tightening. Control, I needed control.

I got my feet under me and stood, pulling off Roan. Turning and kneeling on the bed, facing him, I took his lips in a bruising kiss. I was in charge. Grasping his shoulders, I clutched him to me, ignoring Tate's protest as he slipped out of Roan.

*Go fuck Hiroshi*, I commanded.

Tate listened and left the bed. "Come with me, Sunshine. Let's get cleaned up and dirty at the same time."

I shoved Roan down onto the bed, set my dick at his puffy, likely sore hole, and shoved inside him with no care for if it hurt.

Within the space of a minute, Tate sent me a mental image of him inside Hiroshi, our omega plastered to the shower wall,

eyes closed in bliss as my mate filled him. They'd wasted no time at all, Hiroshi wet and ready after watching us together.

Roan didn't fight me as I fucked him like I hated him. At that moment, I did. He wasn't in charge. He wasn't my alpha. Hiroshi and Tate were mine, and he wasn't taking them from me.

I bit at his neck, kissed him savagely as I thrust inside him repeatedly. We were brutal in our touches as Roan fought back to buck against me. I used my bulk to pin him to the bed and shouted as he came, his muscles contracting around my cock.

More, I needed more. Roan bared his neck to me in submission, and that was it for me. My lion roared at the power we held over this alpha. I came, ropes of cum filling him.

Regret filled me at the look in Roan's eyes as I pulled out of him and hung my head. He'd felt my hate, my fear.

"Hey," he reached up and caressed my face tenderly. "It's okay. I'll not do that to you again, okay? When we are together, you can take the lead."

Shame filled me at how easily he read the situation.

I leaned down and kissed his lips gently. "Thank you, alpha." I flopped down next to him and reached for his hand, lacing our fingers together.

"I am not your alpha. I'm your friend, and soon, your mate. We are the same. With Tate, you are the alpha. In time, we'll learn our boundaries."

“How’d you get so wise?” I teased.

Roan laughed, and the tense moment was over.



*What the fuck was that?* Tate demanded over the bond as we all settled on the bed.

Hiroshi settled against Roan, trading lazy, satisfied kisses with his mate. With the way things were developing, our bonding was happening sooner rather than later.

I let Tate feel my shame. He curled closer to me, running his fingernails down my forearm like I loved. *I’m sorry. It wasn’t anything that Roan did. I just freaked out. We’re okay, I think he gets it.*

Tate quickly accepted my answer. He must have been monitoring the bond, the high stress must have had me letting down my walls. *So?* He changed the subject. The reason that I loved him was because he just got me. *What do you think of him? He’s younger than us, but I feel like he’s seen some shit.*

*Yeah, same. I think growing up in the Hayes pack made him that way. I’m kinda surprised that he hasn’t been with anyone since Kade.*

*Me too.* Tate shifted against me, resting his head on my chest, and reached out a hand to smooth Hiroshi’s hair. The omega was blinking sleepily.

“Go to sleep, Hiro,” Roan urged, kissing his mate one last time before he closed his eyes himself.



Together, Tate and I watched the pair drift off to sleep. I was tired, but my brain wouldn't switch off.

*I don't think Roan's had much time to have fun and just let loose,* Tate mused. We kept to the mate bond to not disturb the others.

*Probably. He said he's been guarding Kade for the council since he left the Hayes pack. I imagine that left little time for himself. No vacations. No attachments. No-one would understand why he was watching his ex.*

*A pretty harsh punishment for basically nothing.*

*That we know of.* I reminded Tate we didn't know the full story. Then I winced at his reaction. I was really messing things up.

Tate sat up. *Do you really think he'd sit back and watch someone be abused?* His anger rose to the surface quickly.

I ran a hand through my hair. *Fuck no. I hardly know him, but I know he's decent.*

He sat back down, just with a little distance between us. *I like him, Asher. Can you make this work with him?*

*For you? For Hiroshi? I'd do anything. Roan wouldn't ask that of me. He's too good to use his alpha position over us.*

That was the real root of my problem. My alpha brothers had used their power and influence over me my whole life. It had left me with a bit of an attitude problem with authority. Logan had been bearable. Blake was a thousand times better. Giving us choices, options? He was just something else.

To keep this life I was building with my men here in Sweetwater, I'd go to war to keep it.

# BONDED OMEGA

## Hiroshi

While Roan healed from the last of his remaining injuries, I'd slept apart from him. I knew that once we shared a bed, I'd never want to sleep separately ever again. It was heavenly to sleep wrapped in his arms knowing that my betas were with us, too. This was everything that I'd ever dreamed of. It felt right.

In the night, Tate had moved closer and twined his fingers with mine. Asher was curled up against his back, so I could just see the curve of his shoulder and part of his face. He looked peaceful. His formerly tortured expression settled into something calm.

I wasn't sure about all of what went down when we left Roan and Asher together. I just knew that Tate was feeling some of the stress that Asher was. He was tense in the shower until he'd gotten inside me and shut Asher out. I hadn't feared that anything bad would happen with my mate and Asher. I got that there were hierarchy issues to sort out.

Asher should have been an alpha. He'd had a crappy childhood, from what I could tell, with bullies for siblings that

didn't like his beta status. He didn't talk about it much, but there were clues here and there. I'd been present for calls home that had left me angry but I hadn't heard it all. Northharbor had been his fresh start, having gone through a few packs and prides before he reached the city. We'd found common ground with being outsiders.

Sensing a shift in the air between us all, I decided to go for it. I wanted to try bonding. Taking the day off from the clinic wouldn't be a problem. Asher had time off from the factory. All I had to worry about was Tate's enforcer training and Roan's duties to Kade.

I shook my mate awake. "Roan," I whispered.

"Yeah?" he asked sleepily.

"Can you get the day off?"

"Uh, why?" He was clearly confused.

"I want to bond today," I said simply.

That had him bolting upright, nearly tossing me onto the floor. He grabbed me at the last second and crushed me to him. "Seriously?" He sounded over the moon and pressed kisses to everywhere he could reach.

I laughed. "Hells yes!"

"What's all the noise?" Tate opened one bleary eye.

"We are bonding today!" I sang. "Go shower. Let's have some food and do this! Wake up Asher!" I extricated myself from Roan's arms to run to the kitchen. We needed a fuel stop

before we could bond. Roan and Tate needed to clear their day, as I'd go into heat after Roan bit me.

My mate followed me into the kitchen, his phone at his ear. "Hey, Blake. I know you don't want Kade to know about my mate situation with everything that's happening, but I'm giving you the heads up that we are all going to be bonding today." There was silence while Roan listened to whatever Blake was saying. I loved the relationship that Roan had with our alpha.

"I mean, it's up to you if you tell him, but it might stress him out. Since the attack, he has had enough to deal with. He can't look me in the eye. I get he feels guilty about me being hurt, but I miss my best friend." More silence, and Roan nodded. "Maybe it'll prompt him to visit. Okay, you're the boss, just don't blame me when he pesters you all day." I heard Blake's laugh. Roan chuckled with him, then ended the call.

He kissed my cheek and moved to the fridge. "That's my day clear. Let me help make breakfast."



An hour later, we were all fed and showered and on the enormous bed that dominated the bedroom I'd been sleeping in.

"How's this going to go?" Tate asked nervously.

Glancing at their necks, I saw the missing bite marks from their previous bond. The skin was clear and perfectly healed

thanks to another potion from Poppy. While Roan and I had discussed how things were going to go, we'd let Tate and Asher have time to themselves to dissolve their bond in the shower. It was a private moment, a decision that only they could make. It cemented my resolve, though, knowing that they wanted this so badly that they were willing to take this risk with us.

We knew they could re-bond later if this all went to shit. Only Roan and I couldn't. Fated mates couldn't end their bond.

I shared a glance with Roan. "Well, Roan and I are going to bite each of you first. Then you will bite us both. Then each other. We have to do this quickly. While you are doing your part, me and Roan will exchange bites. I'll go into heat then, so we'll consummate our bonds, however it feels natural."

Asher nodded and pulled off his shirt. "Bite me first, please. If it doesn't work —"

I understood he wanted it to be tested on himself to save Tate from any pain. Together, me and Roan stripped down and moved close to Asher.

"On three. One. Two. Three." Roan guided me to Asher's left while he took the right. We bit down together, making Asher bite back a cry. His blood flooded my mouth. I swallowed automatically. Asher bit my neck, close to the juncture of my shoulder, and a bond flickered to life. I heard Roan gasp when Asher bit him.

*It worked!* Asher's mental voice was slightly hollow compared to his proper voice. *Can you hear this Tate?* I guessed he was checking we weren't just using the pack link. There was nothing from Tate. Not even a sense he was there, just walled off.

"It worked, Tate!" Asher told a worried-looking Tate aloud.

"Me next!" he demanded.

We repeated the process, Tate placing his bite just below Asher's. Mine was on the opposite side of Tate's neck to his bite from Asher and placed below the other man's. Roan had done the same, carefully avoiding the other claim with his bite.

I could hardly believe that we'd managed it. We'd bonded to both of the betas! It was unheard of for a beta/omega or beta/alpha bond to work. The Luna was blessing us with this gift. Now all we had to do was complete our own bond and make the circle complete.

"You ready?" Roan checked in with me before leaning in. The betas had marked one side of my neck, leaving the other clear for my alpha.

"I am."

Getting into position, Roan kissed where he'd place his mating mark before he bit down. I found the spot that I wanted my mark to sit on his skin and did the same. Another taste of blood and the link snapped into place.

It was immediately clear that my bond with Roan was stronger, but I didn't voice my concern. Neither did Roan, for

which I was grateful.

Tate and Asher finished renewing their bond, ending it in a scorching kiss.

The familiar rising burn of heat hit and there was a momentary flash of panic. “Hey, there. It’s okay. It’s just us,” Roan soothed, picking up on my distress. A minute in and he was winning at this mating stuff. He drew me into his arms and kissed me soundly.

I heard Tate and Asher kissing again and broke from Roan. “I’m going to need your knot soon, but how about I play with Asher and you play with Tate until it gets too much for me?”

“Anything for you.” Roan kissed my nose and crawled over the bed to our beta mate to take his mouth in a filthy kiss.

Asher’s lips met mine. I reached for the waistband of his sweats, pushing them down over his ass and cupping the cheeks. “I need you already.”

“Already?” He raised his eyebrows.

“This much sexy in one room? Seeing you fuck our mate yesterday with only my hand to keep me company? Yeah, already. I need you, then Tate, and then finally to feel Roan’s knot.”

“Goddess, Sunshine, you need to feel it.” Tate groaned as Roan opened him up with his mouth and fingers. “His tongue is sinful!”

I wasn’t lying about needing to be filled. The burn was spreading. “Now Asher!” I demanded.



In one thrust, he was inside me, his hard cock hitting all the right spots. He set a punishing pace, knowing just how I liked it after all our time together doing this. “Yes! More!” I cried out.

Tate made a muffled noise, sprawled on his stomach, as Roan took him from behind. I thought distantly that I should feel jealous, but knew my turn was coming soon.

Reaching out, I stroked my fingers over skin, not knowing who I was touching, but feeling so much love in the room. I came around Asher’s cock and felt him follow.

We lay wrapped up in each other, just making out as Roan lay knotted inside Tate.

“Can I fuck you, Roan?” Asher asked. “I don’t think —“

“While Tate fucks Hiro? Sure.” Our alpha was so easygoing. This whole thing would have been too much for most alphas, but the Goddess had ensured they had given me this one. A man that understood my love for my betas. He massaged his knot, making it deflate faster, clearly feeling the peak of this wave of heat approaching. I’d need to get knotted soon.

Tingling began in my toes, working its way up my body, the feeling unpleasant. Tate inside me wasn’t enough. I needed more. Already. This heat was stronger than my last. I brushed that thought aside, unwilling to think about that man while I was with my mates.

I watched as Asher fucked Roan. He went easier on him than he did me, and for that I was grateful. There were tender touches and kisses until Roan declared he was close. Asher reached between them and grasped Roan's length, making him cry out. "Save that knot for Hiro," he barked. His thrusts picked up pace, getting rougher as Asher reached his climax. He growled as he came and pulled out straight away, pushing Roan towards me. "He needs you. Give it to him."

My lips met Roan's as he slid inside me. This was what I'd been needing, my alpha's hard dick inside me.

He made love to me sweetly, covering me in kisses and touches as our other mates cuddled together. Without the potions from Heatwave, it would be a little longer before they were ready for another round.

As the wave peaked, Roan's hips pushed in harder and deeper, quickening in speed. He pushed my legs up to his shoulders, hitting my spot perfectly. I felt the moment the rut took over. He became more forceful as the need to breed me took over. I wanted that. Wanted to be filled with his cum, and later, his child. Distantly, there was a tinge of fear. The rut had hurt with Jared, but Roan kept ironclad control over his wolf and brought me pleasure unlike anything that I'd ever known.

*Bliss!*

When I reached my peak, I milked his cock, his knot expanding to fit me perfectly. The stretch set off another orgasm. We cried out together, then Roan took my mouth, swallowing the sounds.

If this was what being mated to three people was like, then I was doing this forever.

Roan carefully turned us onto our sides, spooning me, and pressing kisses to his mark. I shivered, then drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

We barely left the room for the rest of the day as we strengthened our bond and quenched my heat.

By evening, I just wanted to sleep for twelve hours wrapped up in my men. My beta mates changed the bedding as Roan washed me, holding me against him, since I had no energy to stand on my own.

My heat had finally broken. I was left with that hollowed out feeling and utter exhaustion. Before I went to sleep, I needed to eat.

“I ordered some food from the main house and let Blake know it worked. He said he will have to tell the council.”

I nodded numbly. All that was on my mind was food.

*Roan! Hiroshi, Tate, Asher, I'm coming in and I have food! You better be decent.* Our Alpha Mate was approaching the house.

Roan laughed, setting me off. He grabbed me a towel and dried me quickly. “Get dressed. Tate and Asher will help Kade get the food ready.”

“Thank you.”

“Are you okay with a visitor so soon? I can tell him to go away.”

I pulled back and made a scandalized face. “Our Alpha Mate. How dare you!” Another laugh. I loved the sound and wanted to stay wrapped up in it. “Let’s go face the music.”

## FACING THE MUSIC

**H**iroshi followed me to the door to greet Kade. To be honest, I'd have liked some more time to enjoy being mated first, before the realities of life came flooding in. Kade's only saving grace was that he was bringing food with him.

From the bond, it was easy to tell that Hiroshi was exhausted. A bone weary tiredness that came after a heat. I remembered it easily from when I was with Kade and had slipped back into that protective alpha role easily.

Tate and Asher were tired, too, though they'd had more opportunities to nap. When Hiroshi had reached the peak of his heat, all that satisfied him was being on my knot. They had tried filling him at the same time, but his tiger had scented me all over the room and wouldn't be satisfied without me.

I opened the door, allowing Kade and Deke to enter the house. Deke was carrying a large box with a heavenly scent coming from it. As he passed, he gave me a look filled with fond exasperation at the stiff back of our beloved Alpha Mate.

Kade turned once we were all in the living room. He embraced Hiroshi, Tate, and then Asher, welcoming them to

the family.

Part of me still couldn't get over the way Jasper and Kade insisted I was family to them. I fully expected Jasper to turn around at any moment and tell me it was weird that I was so close to my ex.

Kade chatted happily with my mates as he made sure they all had food, especially Hiroshi. It didn't take me long to notice he wasn't serving me anything. Deke sat with an amused smirk with his bacon cheeseburger in hand.

I didn't dare say anything, though. There was food still in the box. I just had to wait for Kade to punish me some more.

Sure enough, once he made sure everyone, aside from me, had their food and drinks, he turned to face me, giving me the first direct eye contact since he'd appeared.

I'd hurt him.

*Fuck.*

"Why did you keep this from me?" His voice cracked and I fully expected tears.

I went to my knees, crawling over the carpeted floor to land at his feet. I clutched his hands. "It was a stupid decision because it hurt you, but everyone was worried about you after the attack. Kade, you weren't in a good space mentally—"

"I was fine!" he insisted, tears welling.

"No, you weren't," I said gently. "It took days for them to get you out of your rooms, then your papa nearly went into

labor with the stress.” I blew out a breath. I still felt awful that Jasper’s omega instincts went into overdrive like that. He’d been struggling with guilt over not protecting Kade and the babies. He got hyper protective of him. My injuries were the last straw. “It was just something we decided you didn’t need to know until we were sure what was going to happen. If the bonding didn’t work, then we had a mess to deal with. It did, and now you’re here to celebrate with me.”

He was quiet for a full minute. Then nodded and squeezed my hand. “I’m so happy for you all. I might not understand why I was left out of the loop, but I get there were good intentions behind it. The last few weeks have been overwhelming. Even now, while I’m trying to do my council duties, the duties to the pack and to you as my family, I’m wanting to be back with the babies. I know they’re safe. Blake has them and they are well guarded. Teagan and Hakeem are with them. Larken, too.”

A ripple of discomfort worked its way through the bond with my mates. *What?* They exchanged a look and Hiroshi shook his head. I’d have to get that out of them later.

“So can I eat now? Hiroshi needs some rest. He’s exhausted.”

“Sure.” He handed me a huge bacon cheeseburger, and I rushed to unwrap it. “I’m happy your alpha and betas have looked after you well, Hiroshi. So Alpha Mate duties checked. Best friend duties are me saying that I’m thrilled for you, Roan. Your happiness might be unconventional, but you are

alpha enough for your own mini pack.” We shared a smile. My mates and Deke just let us talk as they ate quietly and observed. “Now, council duties. They want to check the bond. I can see mate bites. I had a look while I hugged them all, and everything looked normal. Do you have a bond link?” He asked us all.

Hiroshi answered. “We do. The one I have with Roan is stronger somehow than the one I shared with Tate and Asher. I still hear them clearly, and it isn’t a pack link, but Roan’s just conveys more, if that makes sense.”

Kade nodded. “It does, thanks. The next step will be to get you all in front of a video link to the council to answer questions about how you performed it and how you are all feeling. We need to do this as soon as possible. The traditional alphas are up in arms about it.” He gave us a commiserating look. “As the Alpha Mate, I believe any new mating is a blessing. I really am happy for you. Welcome to our weird family, Hiroshi, Tate, and Asher. Papa is going to lose his mind when he finds out about this.”

“But we are keeping it from him, right?”

“Oh, absolutely. Poppy would murder me if I undid all her hard work, stopping the labor, and with the calming spells she put on him. She blocked part of his memory. He got a glimpse of you and that was too much.” Kade looked ill.

I winced. Although I’d known things were bad, I hadn’t realized just how big an intervention was needed to stop baby



Hayden from being born early. He'd been measuring smaller than Aldrin and James had liked.

"I've said it before, and I'll probably say it a hundred times more, but I'm so grateful to you. Risking your life for my baby girl... I just can't repay that." Tears ran down his cheeks.

*Hug him*, Hiroshi insisted. I felt the others prodding me to action.

I wrapped Kade in my arms. "Look, I'm fine. You've seen me on screen, but feel my arms around you. Whole. Healthy. All because you turned super omega and tore that shit to shreds."

Kade chuckled, snuffling. Laughter filled the room.

"Goddess! You guys saw that scum, right?" Deke spoke for the first time since he'd arrived.

My mates all made comments in the affirmative about how much of a mess he'd been in. "I only healed him enough so he was out of danger, but it took a lot," Hiroshi said.

"I forgot you were a healer, too. How d'you like working at the clinic? Aldrin and James are the best, aren't they?" Kade asked Hiro.

Moving away from Kade, I found a seat and finally got a bite of my burger. I moaned.

*Careful, mate. I'm much too tired for those kinds of noises.* Hiro winked at me. *Maybe after a nap.*

Fuck. He was perfect. There he was chatting with my best friend, being all sweet and super cute, but inside he was made for sin.



Kade soon took the hint when Hiroshi ended up slumped fast asleep against me, that perhaps we needed some rest. He was getting antsy about being away from the babies, so it didn't offend him in the least. Goddess, I missed their little faces.

“Can you come back to work properly in a couple of days?” Kade asked as he left.

“Kade,” Deke warned. “We've had this conversation. We both want Roan back, but he needs a fitness check.”

“Does he? He's not coming back as my guard.”

I wasn't? This was news to me. As far as I was concerned, it was back to business as usual as soon as they declared me fit. Though, I'd have to cut back on my hours. Fuck. Still, I was reluctant to have a job like that taken off me. Guarding Kade was part of who I was. “I'm not? Why?”

Kade looked uncomfortable. “Blake and I decided you were trying to do too much. You ran the compound during the sickness, you kept everything running and since we've been back, you've been helping the elves adjust. Besides, with mates, you'll need a better work/life balance.”

Deke looked thoughtful and nodded. “We have upped the security and are using more spells. You're right, I hadn't

considered how many other things Roan does. It's hardly fair to expect him to be your bodyguard, too." Deke turned his penetrating gaze on me. "You'll still need to stay fit and we'll spar, but let's just get you back to work. Kade's office is a disaster zone."

"Hey!" Kade cried as Deke shoved him out the door.

I smiled at them arguing down the path and closed the door. "Let's go to bed, mates."

Exhaustion made it easy to sleep. I knew it was going to take a while to adjust to having not only one other person in my bed, but three. Though I didn't mind waking up in a tangle of limbs with hair on my face, in fact, it was comforting to have them around me. It was sweet how cuddly both Hiroshi and Tate were. They'd ended up wrapped around me, Hiroshi pressed against me, Tate with a leg over us both. Even in sleep, Asher was distant, all the way over on the other side of the bed, holding Tate's hand. It would take time, but we'd get there.

We hadn't made plans for the following day, wanting to have the time to recover and get to know each other better. It was strange how easy it was to live with them. We moved around each other with no issues. There were casual touches and kisses as we ate breakfast together and chilled out.

I was cleaning up the kitchen when my phone chimed with a text.

**Blake: Could you all come to my office, please? The council would like a chat. I'd also like to congratulate you**

**in person.**

*What do you think?* I used the bond with all of my mates. It still felt surreal to be bonded to so many people.

*Sure.* They sent back, and I sensed they were getting ready to go.

*Babe?* Hiroshi asked from the direction of the bathroom. *Could you wash my back?* There was a teasing element to the question.

*Don't do it!* Tate fired back. *We'll never get out of here.*

I was too curious to ignore Hiroshi. After texting Blake back that we'd be there as soon as we could, I joined my mate in the shower.

Maybe I should have listened to Tate because somehow I ended up with Hiroshi pinned against the tiled wall with me balls deep inside him. We made out as we waited for my knot to go down and the water went cold.

The walk over to the mansion was fairly short. Although we all went, Tate and Asher walked hand in hand behind us to not attract too much attention. As far as I could tell, Hiroshi had only taken on parts of my scent and nothing from our other mates.

Collars and scarves covered our mating marks since the day was cooler. Kade had advised us to keep our unconventional mating on the down low, especially after the issues I'd had in the pack during the sickness.

Blake had been distracted since he'd been back at the compound with the effects of the beta sickness and the babies. He hadn't had the time to expose every alpha that had been involved or aware of the attack on me. I didn't blame him for that. All it would take was time to prove to them I wasn't a threat to the pack. An unusual mating was hardly a mark in my favor, so keeping it quiet would be best.

The mansion was full of its daily hustle and bustle, though all the security was new. We were checked and double checked before we got to Blake's office.

I knocked before I pushed open the door, even though I knew Blake was aware of our approach. "Hey, Alpha, you wanted to see us?"

"Will you ever stop calling me alpha? Come in, all of you." Blake got up from his chair and rounded his enormous desk. He pulled me into a tight hug before pulling back to look at me. "I'm sorry I've not been able to see you bar that one visit —"

"It's okay —"

"It isn't. You're a valued member of my family, Roan. You saved my daughter's life. For that, you deserved a lot more. Oh, and congratulations!"

Blake moved to Hiroshi. "Congratulations! And thank you for healing Roan so well. We'd be lost without him."

I tuned out Blake's words with Tate and Asher in favor of listening to Hiroshi. *You are so loved here. There's no*

*judgment. Is he always like this?*

*Pretty much. Blake is probably the most open and accepting alpha that I've ever met.*

“Hey, so I’ve got a lot going on today. I’ll just get the council back on the call,” Blake interrupted.

The call was nothing more than what Kade had asked us the day before. Checking out our marks, which were healed over but still as clear as the day before. They asked us to describe the bond link and how it worked. We also went through the bonding process with as few details as possible. Not that Hiroshi was embarrassed, he was all too happy to share. I just didn’t want to discuss something so intimate with these other shifters.

While I’d spoken to most of the shifter council during my time as Kade’s assistant, I only knew a few of them well. Councilman Ford had been my contact during my punishment. Though the more distant I got from that life, the more I appreciated it was a way to earn a place in Kade’s life, more than an actual sentence. Guarding him had been an honor.

Blake’s phone rang as the video conference was winding down. “Excuse me,” he said, picking up the phone. He glanced at me with worry as he listened. “Bring him through.” He put down the phone and took a deep breath. “Roan, your father is here. He wants to see you.”

There was a sudden burst of tension in the room, but everything was muffled as I tried to work out what I wanted to do.

My father had been my idol growing up. Mother had died giving birth to another pup, my sister, who had been too early for this world. Father had done his best and quickly rose in the ranks of the Hayes pack, soon becoming Rincoln's second. He'd been proud when I was picked as Kade's betrothed and had impressed upon me the duty to our pack.

It was because of him I'd stayed longer than I should have. Gave Rincoln the benefit of the doubt he didn't deserve.

"Roan? What do you want to do?" Hiroshi asked.

"I guess I better see him. I just... how did he know where I was?"

"When did you last see him?" My mates crowded around me, trying to give me strength. Hiroshi's tone was gentle, having sensed my conflicting feelings.

"Nearly six years ago now. The morning of the day it all went to shit in my old pack."

Tate sucked in a breath, and Asher put a comforting hand on his shoulder.

Xavier Stewart burst through the door, a harassed Dalton chasing after him. "Sir! There's protocol!"

"It's okay Dalton. Roan, I'm going to head to the living room. Once you've caught up with your dad, you and your mates can join us. Xavier too, if all goes well." Blake pushed Dalton ahead of him and closed the door firmly behind him.

We stared at each other for a full minute, cataloging the changes our six years apart had wrought. Dad had changed

little. He was still tall and imposing, with the same vibrant green eyes that gave away our shifter heritage, as mine did. He was just me, but older. I'd heard he had been running what was left of the Hayes pack. Leadership suited him. I just prayed that he wasn't following in Rincoln's footsteps.

“Son... you look good. I heard you'd been hurt. Then you met your mate. Then I heard some ludicrous story that you had more than one mate. Betas, too!” The anger in his tone was clear for us all to hear.

“Dad... I...” Fuck. This was turning to shit too quickly. “I was hurt protecting baby Elliotte. My mate, Hiroshi, is a healer here. He's new to the pack. I hadn't met him before then. Hiroshi was part of a triad, and I was open to trying to bond.” I was trying to keep my tone upbeat. Dad was giving off bad vibes. He wasn't happy about this situation. The little boy in me yearned for his approval. At the same time inside, the adult me was pissed off he had the audacity to judge me.

He rounded on my mates getting up in their personal space like the bully he could be. “Hiroshi? So this is your fault! What kind of omega makes their alpha serve them?”

Hiroshi curled in on himself. His fear ran down the bond. Tate and Asher moved closer, hiding him from my dad to protect him.

The sight of Hiroshi cowering before my father had my alpha instincts roaring to protect our mate. “Back off!” I growled, stepping closer to him. I had maybe an inch on him in height, though he had more bulk. “Hiroshi, Tate and Asher



are my mates. We have a bond that our goddess endorses with a bond link. I went into this knowing what could happen and I'm happy with my choice."

"It's not natural!" he stuttered. Xavier Stewart was a force to be reckoned with when he was in a temper.

"I've not seen you in six years and the first thing you do is criticize my fated mate, and the fact I have more than one mate. You don't get to do that!" I realized I was yelling, likely making things worse for Hiroshi, who was trembling against my back. I needed to get him out of there. "Let's go. We don't need this."

My mates followed me past my stuttering father. I ignored any pleas to stop and listen. "Dad. I respect the man you were that brought me up alone. This man I don't recognize." I marched my mates out of the door ahead of me.

Dalton was waiting at Dakota's desk, looking pensive. "Everything okay, Roan?"

"No. We're going home. Please take Alpha Stewart to Alpha Sweetwater." I was ultra formal, giving Dalton a clue about how things went. The soundproofing wards were likely still in place.

"Of course, Roan. See you soon?"

"I'll be back in a few days. We can catch up then."

I didn't look back into the office, just rushed to catch up with my men.

# STRUGGLES

## Asher

Part of me figured that a week after bonding with two new mates that I'd be used to the sight of Roan touching Tate. I wasn't. In fact, the further we got from the bonding, the more it bothered me.

Roan reached for me and pulled me into a sweet kiss, almost as if he'd sensed my trepidation. I'd purposefully kept my side of the bond locked down tight to prevent any hurt or upset. I leaned into the kiss, pushing my misgivings aside.

Hiroshi was living his best life with the three of us, and after all he'd been through, I wanted to be that safe space for him. To be his comfort. So I kept quiet and hoped that this would all settle.

Breaking from the kiss, Roan pulled Tate from Hiroshi and continued prepping him to take his cock. Although he was acting dominant, Hiroshi had instigated this. The man was insatiable. It didn't help that all we did was work and come home. We had to keep this as quiet as we could while the council investigated the archives of the shifter clans, packs and prides. All the kept records of bondings. We even had the

elves checking their own records to see if there were any stories of poly groups. So far, there was nothing.

Hiroshi crawled into my lap. “You okay?”

I didn’t answer, just kissed him instead. He wriggled, rubbing himself against me. I sensed he wanted me inside of him, probably enjoying watching Tate getting railed by Roan. Hiroshi seemed immune to the petty jealousy that plagued me. He just found it hot.

Pushing at his head, I shoved him towards my dick. “Suck it,” I demanded.

He did as ordered and I watched as Tate maneuvered so that he was under Hiroshi’s hips, taking the omega’s cock into his mouth. He sucked him, making Hiroshi cry out. I pulled away from them before Hiroshi bit my dick and just watched them.

It didn’t take long before Roan was helping Tate get Hiroshi off. The omega’s shouts and moans showing his pleasure. He then collapsed on the bed with a radiant smile.

Unable to bear Roan having all of Tate’s focus for much longer, I swooped in, kissing my mate and working my way down his body until I had his length in my throat. I swallowed around him, making him shout and Roan groan.

Within seconds of each other, Tate and Roan came. The alpha’s knot swelled, locking him inside my mate. I still had the taste of Tate on my tongue as I pushed his leg up, shimmed onto the floor, and used my tongue and fingers to massage the

knot, trying to get it to go down faster with the added stimulation.

Roan pushed his fingers into my hair as I worked him. His groans echoed through me and Tate, making my mate whimper with overstimulation.

Within minutes of my ministrations, the knot shrank, and Roan pulled free. I climbed up onto the bed, claiming my mate's mouth. "Are you okay?" I whispered into his ear, my words only for him.

"Yeah. Just give me a minute."

"We don't have to."

"I want you. I need it."

In the corner of my eye, I saw Roan go to Hiroshi and gather him into his arms. That was how we were supposed to be.

I held Tate close, kissing every inch of flesh I could reach as I held him to me. There was this intense need to cover him in my scent. Get rid of the alpha smell that lingered on his skin.

"Come on, let's go shower," I urged.

Tate got to his feet with my help as Hiroshi climbed into Roan's lap, taking the alpha inside him.

I didn't mind them together. They were right. They fit. I just didn't want Roan with me or Tate. The feeling was growing to the point I worried I'd say something I'd regret. It had to be temporary. Lack of sleep or something.

With Tate in my arms, I eased into the bathroom. Switching on the shower, I waited a couple of seconds for it to heat before stepping under the spray. The water was perfect. The pressure was just right for massaging away all the tension in my shoulders.

“Ash...”

“Yeah?”

“I enjoy it, but it isn’t the same as it was.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, my voice low despite the shower.

“Being with Roan. He doesn’t feel like mine,” he confessed in an undertone. There was no way the others could listen in. They were too distracted by each other.

Not mine. There. That was what I’d been feeling put into words by my mate. My only mate.

“We still have the bond marks, though. We are still a unit.” I heard the confusion in my voice.

“They are changing. Yours are lighter.”

I wished for a clear mirror, the surface too fogged up. Tate sent a mental image of my marks. The one made by Roan was bigger and looked older than the one from Hiroshi, yet both had faded a little.

Tate handed me the soap, and I lathered up, running my hands over his body while I thought. I scanned my eyes over

his marks. “Your mark from Roan is healing over. The Hiroshi one is still fresh.”

He wrapped his arms around me as I pressed my face into his neck. “What do you think this means?”

I turned my head. “I dunno. Maybe we just need to try harder with Roan. Try to deepen our bond.”

“Do you think that will work?”

That was the question I had no answer to.



Even a week later, I couldn't answer him. I checked our marks daily and there was no change, but no improvement. Part of me wanted to ask Roan and Hiroshi to bite us again, except that would make Hiroshi panic he was losing us.

All I could do was throw myself into this mating. Tate loved Hiroshi and so desperately wanted to make this work. For him, I would do anything. So I followed his lead.

I cooked with Roan, trading casual touches. I just didn't initiate any touches in the bedroom. We talked and worked to feed our mates, and slowly, I got to know the man. With each new thing I learned about Roan, the more I grew to respect him. He'd grown up in the Hayes pack, and like our Alpha Mate, was a decent person despite it.

“How are things with your dad?” I asked as Roan helped me put together dinner.

“Alright,” Roan shrugged. His head was down, so it was difficult to see his expression. His tone gave little away. “He apologized again. Said he’s stuck with the pack. They have cases of beta sickness there, so he can’t come visit and do it in person.”

“Do you think he’s truly sorry?”

“Yeah, but more because he looked bad in front of Blake. Kade told me what he said to him in the living room, especially the stuff about Elliotte. It makes me worried about him being around our pups if we are blessed with them.”

“Do you think that’s a possibility?” He looked confused. “Pups, I mean. For you and Hiroshi.” We hadn’t given thought to how children would change the forever shifting dynamic between us. Roan seemed to respect the distance that I’d put between us physically while I sorted my head out.

“I’m hopeful,” he mumbled. His eyes met mine. “You know they would be yours as much as mine. You and Tate are our family. Chosen family is as important, if not more important, than blood.”

His words struck a chord with me. Tate had been my chosen mate since betas didn’t have fated matches. We had stuck with each other through a lot. His rejection from the aviary had hit him hard, as had the subsequent loss of his family, having lost them from their fear of their standing within the aviary worsening.

Meeting Hiroshi and bringing him into our relationship was one of the best things we’d ever chosen to do. I didn’t regret it

at all, even with how confused I was over our current circumstances.

If I was completely honest with myself, I wasn't in love with Hiroshi. I loved him dearly, but he wasn't mine in the way Tate was.

Tate. Everything came back to him. He wanted this bond with the four of us. So I'd make it work.

“You're right. Chosen is better by far.”



# TESTING

## Hiroshi

“**B**abe, I’m just heading into the office early. We have a big meeting. Tate is in training already. Asher is at work.”

“Hmm?” I muttered as he roused me from sleep. Turning over didn’t help me escape the voice.

“I’m heading out. See you for lunch? Don’t forget you have an appointment in an hour.” Distantly, I heard Roan leave the room.

“Kay, thanks.” I waved a hand at Roan, who likely couldn’t see it, and wriggled into the middle of the bed, enjoying the scents of my mates. The front door opened and closed again. Silence fell over the house, and I sighed.

There. A scent that was different. It immediately caught my tiger’s attention. They sat up and heightened my senses to pick it up better. What was that smell?

I pushed my nose into the sheets, thinking it was maybe them, though we’d changed them after the night before. We’d needed to. Our activities had gotten... messy.

Mentally, I tracked back, just over two weeks since we had bonded. Could it be?

I rushed to get ready, scrubbing down quickly in the shower and eating some toast on the way to the clinic. I wasn't even sure if my clothes matched or if I combed my hair before I left the house. It was possible I hadn't even locked the door.

The building was still locked when I approached, my keys in hand, ready to let myself in. Inside, I switched off the alarm and flicked the lights on. Without looking at anything else, I went to the nurse's dispensary and searched for what I needed.

I must have lost track of time as I searched through the closet, not finding what I needed. I searched high, or as high as I could reach, and low, but I couldn't find anything like what I wanted.

"Fuck!" I ran a hand through my hair, feeling its utter disarray. Before I met Roan in a couple of hours, I'd need to shower properly. It felt like there was still shampoo in my hair!

"Hello? Hiro?" James called out.

"In here."

He found me surrounded by a mess of boxes, sitting on the floor and close to tears. James dashed to my side, crouched, and pulled me into a hug. "What's wrong, sweet boy?"

This little quirk that James had of calling me 'sweet boy' had really grown on me. It felt like he really cared about me and not just as an employee of the clinic. I knew my worth as a

healer. Worldwide, I had alphas seeking me out to come to their packs, prides, whatever, to help their sick. I was practically famous.

James, though. He saw me. The person underneath the ability. Not my alter, not my healing gift. Me.

“Can you smell me? It’s different, right?”

I watched as James’s sparkling hazel eyes took on a glow as his bear pushed through, giving their human side stronger senses. Not a partial shift, just concentrating their senses on one sense, this time scent. “Hmm, there’s something there. Do you think?”

“I came here for a pregnancy test, but I can’t find them.”

James got to his feet, pulling me up with him. “Let’s check in Aldrin’s office.” He led the way and unlocked the door for us to enter. “If I know my mate, they will be over here.” He scanned some shelves. “Ah! Yes!” He turned to me with a box in hand. “You okay doing this yourself?” He looked worried.

His concerns were valid. I’d come to him the day after we’d arrived, asking if there was any way to tell sooner if all the contraceptives I’d taken had worked. As a healer, I knew there wasn’t. I’d just wanted someone to listen. To be there for me. While I had Tate and Asher, they had still been healing from their injuries and our ejection from the pride.

James Flemming was an older omega, a scientist, a nurse, and an assistant to one of the most competent healers I’d ever met in his mate, Aldrin. He was also deeply compassionate.

His empathy during the beta sickness had nearly made him sick, too.

He'd taken me into his arms and let me cry it out. All the worry and pain that Jared had caused came flooding out of me. James held me, reassured the broken omega inside me that fate would be kind, but if I needed something more than faith, he had an omega who might just have a message for me.

That afternoon, once I'd gotten myself together, James had taken me to meet Janet, an ancient omega bear that had moved from the sleuth to live in the omega area of the compound where she could dote on the children and be cared for by the omegas that lived there.

Her first words were to me, "so you're the omega that's been giving me funny dreams. Come here, boy, let me get a look at you."

I'd dutifully walked close enough she could reach out a gnarled hand, and with surprising strength and quickness, had me sitting facing her within a second. She gently traced my face with a kind smile. Her eyes were cloudy, sight gone, though she saw me in touch instead.

"It is you! We live close enough that I heard your worries in my sleep." Janet patted my arm. "There's no baby there just now. Soon enough, mind, but not that bastard's."

The relief was staggering. I still didn't know why I believed her. I just did. Deep in my soul I knew her words to be a truth sent by The Luna herself.

James ushered me towards the bathroom, breaking me from my reverie. No matter what came from this test, I knew he would be there for me. Either to comfort or to celebrate.

It took a matter of moments to do the pregnancy test. I joined James in Aldrin's office to wait the few minutes for it to work.

James leaned over with me to look as the timer beeped.

Negative.

“Oh, Hiro. I'm sorry.”

I nodded mutely. The hope had overwhelmed my common sense. Of course, I wasn't going to be as lucky as Kade and Jasper to fall pregnant with one heat with their fated mate. I knew statistically it was more likely with the first heat after bonding, but that wasn't a guarantee of conception. Especially as year on year, it became harder to conceive. The scent was probably fresh soap or something.

Perhaps this was the price for my greed. Maybe my having three mates meant I'd cursed myself into infertility.

Tears pricked my eyes, and I didn't have the strength to hold them back. As I'd hoped, James wrapped me in a tight hug.

“Hey,” he crooned, “it's okay. I'm here. It'll all work out. Plenty of time to try again.”

With someone else, the platitudes would sound empty. With James, I really felt like he meant it. Like he knew that this would happen for me, for us. All four of us.

It took me a few minutes to get myself together. “Sorry for crying, I—”

“Hey, no need to apologize.”

“I know. It’s just, I really wanted this, you know.”

“And there’s nothing to say it won’t happen. Your body has been through a lot recently. This is maybe not the best time for a pregnancy. Three months can change a lot in shifters.”

His words made me feel brighter. I hadn’t thought about it from that perspective. “You’re right. I was just disappointed. I feel like I have something to prove, you know? With having three mates.”

I don’t know if he picked up on some hesitation as I said three, but he asked, “is everything okay there?”

It was tempting to give a white lie. To hedge. That response wasn’t honest and was something I would have done while I still lived in the pride. Here I could be totally honest. “Um. It’s hard to explain.”

“I’m not going to judge you, Hiro. The chances of you getting pregnant during your first heat with Roan were about fifty-fifty. Adding in the complication of extra mates,” he shrugged, “well, we don’t have the data on that. What I do know is that just a month ago, we gave you multiple contraceptive potions. It’s possible your body just needs more time.”

“I mean, I get that. It’s just there’s this part of me that thinks that I’m failing.”

“Failing? How?” James frowned in confusion.

“I couldn’t get pregnant and I can’t keep the group together,” I blurted out.

“Are you breaking up? You still have mating marks.”

“No. I don’t think so. Look at this one.” I pointed at the mark made by Asher. It was above the one from Tate, on the opposite side of my neck from Roan’s.

“Oh. This one is —“

“Fading. We all have marks that are fading. Roan and Asher are dancing around each other. They barely touch. Tate is trying so damn hard, but he only wants me or Asher. Roan —“

“What about him?”

“I worry I didn’t give him more time to bond as friends before I pushed this on them.” I held my head in my hands. “The pull to him was just so strong. All I knew was I had to keep them with me.”

James stroked up and down my back soothingly. “How do you feel about it?”

“Honestly?” My head rose, and I met James’s eyes. “I dunno. I’ve just been following my gut this time. Asher has always kept me at a distance. Maybe part of me knew I’d never keep him forever. I just hope I don’t lose Tate. I need him.”

“All you can do is to be honest. The elves are big on polyamory. They say the first rule is open and clear

communication. But Hiro?”

“Yeah?”

“No one will judge you if it doesn’t work out. The four of you have done the impossible, no matter how long that lasts. Besides, you’ve been blessed with a fated mate. You can’t lose Roan. You won’t end up alone.”



# CHANGES

Tate

C lose to a month after our unconventional bonding, I think I reached my breaking point.

We were all ignoring the elephant in the room. Sure, there had been a few aborted chats, but we needed to face the truth; it wasn't working how we wanted it to.

I loved Hiroshi and Asher. I adored Roan, who was possibly the most patient and caring person I'd ever known. It was easy to see how in love Roan was with Hiroshi, but the interactions between me and Asher with him were forced and uncomfortable for all of us.

We'd all stopped trying in some ways. Roan and Asher kissed occasionally and they would watch movies cuddled up together. Though if I was there, or Hiroshi, then Roan would focus on his mate, and Asher on me. There was a clear division in the house.

It hadn't escaped my notice that Asher wasn't spending any alone time with Hiroshi. There had been nothing but a peck on the lips and some long hugs between them in over a week. Had

I gotten my mate wrong all along? He said he loved Hiroshi, but was it not the same love that I had for the omega?

The whole situation was driving me out of my mind. Why were we doing this to ourselves? The bonds had faded more, to where we could be around the rest of the pack without needing to cover them as long as no one was looking at them closely.

We still didn't risk it, though. If other people knew, there could be more issues, so we stayed away from everyone, only taking visits from people that knew about the situation.

How it hadn't gotten out to the entire pack was a mystery. I wondered if they were just too busy with the increased presence of the elves to worry about what was going on with Roan and Hiroshi. Perhaps they assumed that we just lived with Hiro and that we weren't all mated.

I'd completed my training with Deke, Jake, and Sebastian, meaning that I was a fully fledged enforcer. It was also my day off, so it was time to face another thing I'd been putting off; a trip to see Ívarr.

Over the last few weeks, I'd been experiencing symptoms of something I couldn't explain. Hot flashes, sudden chills. Feeling horny, like insatiable. Then wanting to be left alone. Unable to bear anyone touching me, that certainly made home life awkward. I had a lot of baths until I could get myself together. Often I felt like my skin was too tight, that I'd burst out of it at any second. Clothing hurt to wear at the oddest of

moments. Getting through my training had been excruciating at times because of it.

By using magic and shifter strength, the elves had placed a new building next to our medical clinic for the study of the beta sickness. It was full of shiny new machines the elves had ordered in to examine the many, many samples they had taken over the period the Sweetwater betas were sick. They'd arrived at the compound two weeks into the sickness, the same day as some betas woke from their coma like sleeps.

Any beta that had been sick was required to submit themselves for testing when they came upon strange symptoms they couldn't account for. As far as I was aware, I was the only one having these odd feelings.

I didn't feel special or anything. In fact, I felt singled out. Again. Being a part of the first shifter poly mating on record was enough for me, thanks.

At the reception desk, a young feeling elf greeted me. Elves never looked their age. Both Ívarr and Hakeem appeared to be around thirty-five and Hakeem was over four hundred years old, Ívarr, a little younger. So while this elf looked young, he could be much older than he looked. Yet, he just didn't have the wisdom of centuries in his lavender eyes.

"Hello, I'm Eion. How can I help you today?" He greeted me with a polite, but eager, smile.

"Um... hi Eion, I'm Tate. I was wondering if I could speak to Ívarr or one of the other scientists, please."

“Oh! Uh, of course. If you could just give me a second, I’ll see if he’s free.” The elf’s speech made it apparent he was younger. The older ones didn’t use contractions as much as he had.

I stepped away from the desk, taking a seat across the room so that he could make a call in an undertone. He was clearly used to shifters and their snooping ways.

Within a few minutes, Ívarr and Teagan came around a corner, Teagan looking worried. “Is everything okay, Tate?” she asked, a frown marred her beautiful face. I was happily mated, but I could appreciate beauty.

“Um, could we discuss this privately?”

Ívarr took charge of the situation. “Follow me and we will head to my office.”

Nerves almost got the better of me and had me bolting out the door again, but I followed the two elves, Teagan watching with me in concern.

The office was soothing. Lots of blue and gray tones with warm oak wooden chairs and a large desk. Rather than take a seat behind the desk like I expected, Ívarr took a seat on the deep blue sofa next to Teagan, leaving me an armchair to sit in.

“So, Tate. What can we help you with?” Ívarr’s voice was soothing, and it was easy for me to just lay it all out there.

I started with the issues with the mating. He expressed some concern over it, but acknowledged there was little that could

be done. Either the bond would break on its own, or we would get to the point where we'd break it ourselves. He also mused that if we did that, perhaps there was a way we could re-bond once we had fixed the issues in our relationship. I wasn't so sure it would work again. It felt like a one and done situation.

Once I got to my health issues, he excused himself, rounding his desk to get a folder and a notebook to jot down some notes. He asked a bunch of questions, probing my answers with yet more inquiries.

We must have been there for about an hour before Teagan cut in. "Ívarr, we must let Tate get a drink and perhaps run some tests? These symptoms are unusual. They don't match any illness that I can think of."

"Of course. You are right, Teagan. I have been remiss not offering refreshments." He rose again and made a call from his desk. "Once we have slaked our thirst, we shall move to the laboratory. There, we will draw blood and saliva samples. I would like to run your DNA, Tate, if you find that acceptable. I wish to compare it to the other beta shifters here. You are a raven, correct?"

"I am."

"Wonderful. We have a raven shifter here that I can compare your sample with." Ívarr looked delighted with this.

"Jake is my cousin. Our mothers are twins."

His eyes lit up. He was a handsome elf, though intimidating, until he softened like he just had. "Oh! That is even better! It

will give a better reflection of any changes with a close blood relative.”

“Does this mean you know what is happening?” I asked.

“Not at all. However, the samples and a comparison will assist me in ruling conditions out.”

Right. So again, I was an anomaly.



I was at the clinic for longer than I hoped to be. When I entered the house, Roan was sitting at the kitchen table shoveling pasta into his mouth. He frowned when he saw me and sniffed the air. “You okay? You smell like medicine.”

“I went to the elf facility.” I slumped into the seat next to him, stole his fork and a bite of his lunch. “Where’s Sunshine?” I asked around my mouthful.

“Had a patient to see. Couldn’t get home.” They were so cute and tried to have lunch together every day. I was pretty sure lunch included a quickie and then food. “Are you okay?”

Seemed like my subject change wasn’t enough to get Roan off the topic. “I don’t know, I guess. Ívarr is running some tests. My symptoms —“

“Symptoms?” Roan looked alarmed.

“Relax. It isn’t anything major, just feeling weird in my skin. Temperature fluctuations and things. I’m not sick.”

He relaxed fractionally. “If you’re sure.”

“I am. This is why I have said nothing to anyone about it.”

Roan wrapped an arm around me and I sank into his side, comforted by the simple affection. “Did he ask about the bond?” I stiffened slightly, and he began stroking long fingers up and down my spine. The action was both soothing and arousing, which warred with my discomfort. I didn’t want to hurt Roan, but a theory about my symptoms was the fading bond with Roan.

“They asked and can’t rule it out. None of the rest of you are experiencing it, though, so they think it’s unlikely.”

Roan relaxed a fraction. I looked into those gem-like green eyes and saw pain, longing, worry, so many emotions focused on me. Roan cared about my wellbeing. Cared about me.

I don’t know which of us reached for the other. Our lips met in a gentle but passionate kiss. It was beautiful and sad. It felt like a goodbye.

Roan pulled me off my seat and onto his lap. He broke from my mouth to ask, “is this okay?” When I nodded, he lifted, taking me into his arms and leading us to the bedroom.

My lips met his again, and I was loath to separate long enough to get our clothes off. We left a trail of fabric down the hall to the bed, where we all slept night after night.

He laid me down gently, blanketing me with his body as he reached for the lube. He kissed along my jaw and neck before tugging my earlobe between his teeth. I groaned at the

sensation. “You sure?” he muttered against my collarbone. I nodded frantically. Desperate to be filled.

With slicked up fingers, he teased around my hole, making me clench and groan. Slowly, he pushed a finger inside and I panicked. “No!”

Immediately, Roan pushed off me, moving to the other side of the bed. Just a glance at his face had tears spilling down my cheeks. “I’m sorry, Roan. I can’t!” He looked terrified.

His face softened. “Hey, it’s okay,” he soothed. “Can I hold you? Nothing else, I promise.”

My throat was too clogged with emotion to allow words to pass, so I nodded.

Carefully checking my face, Roan moved closer, pulled me into the circle of his arms, and held me while I cried. In a halting burst, I poured out my feelings. My worry over the bond, my inability to be intimate with one of my mates. The feeling that I was to blame, that I’d pushed Asher into it and we just couldn’t all work.

“Hey, slow down,” Roan whispered into my tousled hair. “We all knew going in that it might not work. All we could do is try. Now we have.” He sounded so resigned.

“What are we going to do?” I don’t know why I expected him to have all the answers.

“There’s nothing to do. We just have to follow where fate guides us.”



# ALTERED BOND

## Roan

I felt guilty leaving Tate alone at home to go back to work, but I had so much to do in the office that it was impossible to take the afternoon off. I sent Asher a text to let him know how Tate was.

**Roan: Tate is upset. He went to the elf facility for tests.**

**Asher: Why?**

**Roan: I'll let him explain. Look, we tried to get up to stuff, and he panicked. I think he needs you.**

**Asher: You were trying to fuck him??? What the hell??**

**Roan: Not like that. Look, go check on your mate if you can.**

**Asher: I'll ask if I can leave early.**

Goddess, Asher was exhausting to deal with sometimes. More often than not recently, he was prickly and quick to anger. Sure, we had our sweet moments, ones that made it easier to deal with a testy Asher, but those were becoming fewer and farther between.

We'd all been mated for a month. I couldn't imagine not being as a group, though it had worked out differently than I'd hoped. If I really thought about the dynamic, I didn't have two other mates. I just had Hiroshi, but that was fine, because he had Tate who worshiped him. As long as my mate was happy, perfectly content with his life, then I was doing my job as his alpha.

Did I think I was missing out on not having the two other mates? No. I didn't. That was the honest truth. When we'd gone into this entire thing, I had been aware that it could all fall apart, and quickly, too.

Slowly, over the last few weeks, the bond marks had lightened, and the cracks showed. First, it was Asher being unwilling or unable to be with me. That was fine with me. I cared for the guy, but I had my hands full with Hiroshi. Then I'd noticed that he never instigated affection with Hiro, likely because he didn't want to have sex with him. Asher hadn't touched Hiro once after the initial bonding that I could remember.

All Asher did was concentrate on Tate. He was fine when Hiro and Tate were together, and they were. A lot. Honestly, I didn't mind that either. Seeing Hiroshi truly loved for who he was helped ease any feelings of jealousy. I didn't think I could handle him on his own. Having Tate there certainly helped.

The mansion was abuzz as it usually was, with people milling about. We still required security as we walked around the mansion. No one was to go anywhere alone inside it with

so many places for an attack to take place. I was lucky with my potential guards. Larken escorted me to my desk.

“How you been? Hardly seen you.”

I felt a prickle of guilt. I’d stopped hanging out with my friends so much since I’d mated. “Hey, I asked you to come over.” Larken looked uncomfortable. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. Just adjusting to you being mated is all. Movie later this week? Maybe off compound?”

“Sure.” I thought about asking if Hiro could come too, but sensed that Larken just wanted to hang out with me. Maybe then he’d say all he needed to. There was a growing distance between us. I just wanted my friend back.

Larken gave me a bro hug and left me with Kade.

“All good?” he asked, scanning my face.

It hurt to lie to him. “Absolutely.”



The house was still when I got in. At first I thought it was empty, but Hiro was in the kitchen stirring something in a pot.

“Hey, you. Asher and Tate have gone out for the night, so it’s just us for dinner.”

Relieved, I joined him at the stove, wrapped my arms around him, and took in his scent. He still had that sharp grapefruit smell that made my mouth water. I bent my head and mouthed along his neck, making him arch.

“After dinner!” he chided.

With a last kiss to his cheek, I let him go and laid the table for him.

“Roan?” he asked cautiously as we finished up with our food.

“Yeah?”

“What happened today? With Tate. Asher seemed pissed.”

Dinner threatened to rise back up. I took a deep breath and explained what happened with Tate as quickly as I could.

Hiroshi slipped from his chair and kneeled at my feet, fingers stroking my leg in comfort. “Hey, it’s okay. You did nothing wrong.”

I met his eyes, seeing only compassion there. “It isn’t working, Hiro.”

The beginnings of tears lined his dark eyes. “I know. I don’t know what to do.”

“Can we not think about this for a little while? Maybe go watch a movie? Just enjoy being together?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

We kept it fairly PG during the first movie. A silly action movie badly taken from a graphic novel. Seriously, the book was always better. I had Hiroshi wrapped up in my arms, sitting between my legs, head resting on my chest.

During the second movie, he wriggled around. Soon he was higher, resting on my thigh and pressing kisses under my jaw.

I paused the movie. “Hey! I was watching —” I took his mouth in a hard kiss, pouring my frustration into it.

Our tongues tangled, and hands roamed. I hadn’t meant for it to go so far. Just making out would have been enough for me. Before I knew it, Hiroshi was on top of me, grinding down on my hard cock, still trapped in my pants.

“Need you,” he muttered. He peeled off his shirt and pulled at the buttons of mine. I took over as he opened his jeans and wriggled out of them. Hiroshi hated wearing underwear. He sat proudly naked above me.

“Goddess. Look at you!” I loved the lean lines of my mate’s body. Every inch of him was perfectly formed from his dusky nipples, hairless chest, down taught abs to a slim cock.

I must have paused in undressing as he took over, frantically pulling the fabric out of the way. He moved down the sectional as he pulled down the zipper of my pants and drew me out of my underwear. I gasped as he took me into his hot mouth, sucking me down to the root in a practiced move I couldn’t replicate, no matter how much I’d tried to learn.

Within seconds, I was fully hard and worried about knotting his mouth. As hot as that would be, because we’d tried it already, I wanted in his ass. I was aching to feel him around me, to fill him with my release. My wolf knew he couldn’t get pregnant. It had disappointed us he wasn’t after the last heat, but we had years with our mate. Pups would happen. Until then, we had plenty of time to practice breeding him.

*Now. Want inside you.* I used our bond, unable to form the words, as I held my breath and pushed my orgasm back. Hiroshi always had me on a hair trigger.

“Off!” he demanded as he pushed at what remained of my clothes. He rose long enough for me to push the pants off. He didn’t wait for my underwear and it tangled around my ankles.

Hiro took a firm grip of my cock and guided it into him. He sank down slowly with a pleasure filled sigh. I gripped his hips to keep him in place as I thought about garbage and ugly things, willing this to last longer than a few seconds. I’d been too on edge all day.

Finally under control, I released my grip, allowing Hiro to rock. He ground down, lifted his body up and down my length, taking what he needed from me.

He was stunning in his passion. The dim light of the room bounced off sharp cheekbones, making his beauty even more stark. He looked otherworldly, and he was mine.

Soon he was tired, unable to catch his breath. Frustrated, he let out a growl. I flipped us, so he was under me. I lifted his legs to my shoulders and entered him, setting a punishing pace as he jerked himself.

We came together just minutes later. My knot formed, tying us together. “Hmm, that was fantastic,” Hiro muttered sleepily.

“Have a rest and I’ll take you to bed after.”

“And go again?” He opened an eye and looked at me with a grin.

“Maybe.” I arranged us carefully on the sofa as Hiroshi took a nap.

I used his t-shirt to clean us up when my cock finally slipped out of him. There was a blanket on the back of the couch, so I wrapped him up as I watched him sleep. He was so peaceful. I wished for this always.

It wasn't possible to tell how long I'd lain there with him. I think I'd fallen asleep too. Sounds of people entering the house had roused me.

“Shh,” Asher whispered. “Just us. Come to bed.” He hiked Hiroshi up into his arms, but when I stood, he handed him to me.

“Everything okay?” I looked between the two men that were supposed to be my mates, only feeling a growing distance I couldn't bridge.

“All good,” Tate said as he brushed a kiss on my lips. “Let's go to sleep.”

Asher kissed me, too. There was a finality to it I didn't like.



I always set my alarm for the butt-crack of dawn because things in the office were always stupidly busy. Reaching up, getting free of Hiro, I pressed snooze and snuggled into my pillow for another ten minutes of sleep.

My wolf caught the scent of something off.

Hiroshi's scent was all over me and the entire room, which made my wolf happy, but there was something foreign in the room. I sat up to take a deeper whiff of whatever it was in.

The scent of another alpha near our mate.

Not only that. There was another omega in the room. There was a sharp sweetness in the air that suggested that not only was there an omega in the room.

There was one about to go into heat.

It was still dark in the room, so I flipped on the light. The three bodies in the bed grumbled as the light woke them.

“What the fuck, Roan?” Asher griped. He sat up, exposing his nakedness and the unfamiliar scent I'd detected. He was the alpha that I could smell.

“You. You're different!” I got to my knees, getting closer to him, taking in more of the alpha odor. It wasn't unpleasant. A fresh outdoorsy tinge to the typical Asher scent.

He pushed me away. Angry. “Fuck off!”

I toppled back onto the mattress, jostling Hiroshi.

“Hey, what's going on?” he grumbled. He ran a hand through his hair, pausing as he caught the scent of it, too.

“Asher?”

Tate sat up next, his nose twitching, a flush to his face.

“What's happening?” he shrieked.

Hiroshi looked at me in shock. “Asher's an alpha! And Tate is in heat!”



I grabbed my phone. “What the hell are you doing?” Asher barked. His pupils had dilated in response to the pheromones Tate was pumping out. As a mated alpha, I wasn’t affected, but Asher was, since he was bonded to Tate. Soon he’d go into a rut.

This was beyond bizarre.

“Calling for help.” The call connected. Though it was early, Ívarr sounded alert. “We need help. Asher is now presenting as an alpha. Tate is an omega. He’s gone into heat.”

# BOUNDARIES

## Tate

Waking up to a light shining in my eyes was bad enough, yet it only got worse from there. Asher was pissed. Like furious for no reason. It was ridiculous. Roan was saying something about being different. And why was it so damn hot in here?

Really, it felt sweltering in the room. There was no air. I felt like I was going to melt into a pile of goo, and it was early in December. We had snow on the ground outside, for fuck's sake.

My eyebrows nearly met my hairline when Asher pushed Roan over. I wasn't proud of my shriek when I sat up and caught the scent of an omega and alpha in our bed. What the fuck was going on?

"Asher's an alpha! And Tate is in heat!" Hiroshi was locked in a stare with Roan.

*What?*

*No.*

This couldn't be happening. I was an omega? In heat for the first time?

I took stock of my body. There was a fine sheen of sweat covering me. I felt overheated and super horny. Not for Roan's cock, though. Just Asher's. I wanted him to get inside me. To knot me. To breed me.

*What the fuck?*

Breed me? My raven was hopping from spot to spot at the thought of laying eggs for our alpha. Eggs? Was that even possible?

While I distantly paid attention to Roan making a call to Ívarr, I noted the other changes. I was slick. Down there. I had self lubing parts! It felt like I was leaving a puddle under my butt where I was sitting. I shifted uncomfortably, reaching for Asher to reassure me. He pulled away, too deep in his own feelings to see mine.

My mate was in a panic over the situation. I couldn't blame him. I hardly knew what to make of it myself. All I knew was that it was hurting. I needed to fuck and be fucked right then or I'd die.

Prickles ran up and down my limbs, a stinging pain I didn't know how to handle. That, with the increased temperature, had me crying out for Asher. "Please! I need you."

Roan ended his call and slung an arm around me. Asher growled low, flung the arm off me, and pulled me close. Skin to skin with my alpha felt amazing, the prickle dulled to a

hum. A brief reprieve. “Yeah, that’s what I thought. There’s nothing that Ívarr can do until this heat breaks. We just have to hope that Asher has a knot if Tate needs one, because there is no way in hell I’m touching Tate. Asher will take my head off.”

I gazed up at Asher from where I was cradled against his chest. Asher was looking feral. He was glaring at Roan for even suggesting he be the one to knot me. “Mine.” The word was a low rumble and had more slick leaking from me. Damn, that was weird.

“Tate, are you okay with Asher taking you through this?” Roan asked warily. “We can get you toys and Hiroshi can help you.”

“No, thank you, but no. I want Asher. I need him.”

The words were barely out before I was flipped onto my front, Asher tearing my underwear off my body. Holy fuck, that was hot. He adjusted my position roughly. It was making the ache worse. I needed him so badly. With one thrust, he was inside me, hips snapping out a brutal rhythm. Had he gotten bigger? Fuck, he stretched me perfectly. Each movement pegging my prostate and soothing the burn.

Sweat was pouring off me as Asher drew my orgasm closer, and closer as he railed me hard. He’d never been this rough, this dominant. I loved it, even while part of me was worried about it. He was surely leaving marks on my flesh with his tight grip.

Hiroshi got to his knees and shuffled over, tenderly wiping my face and pushing back my sweat soaked hair. His eyes caught Asher's over my shoulder, but the new alpha made no move to stop Hiroshi from touching me. I reached for him, needing his softness and comfort.

His lips met mine in what felt like a goodbye kiss before he pulled away. It was too much like the one with Roan the night before. My hand moved up to touch my neck, knocking me off balance. Hiroshi held me steady, Asher still working his cock deep inside me. The mark from Roan was gone.

My fingertips traced higher. The one from Hiroshi was still there, though it was light, faded. What did this mean? My mind whirred as I asked questions there were no answers too. All I could do was feel.

The other omega's eyes met mine, and I lunged forward, planting my lips on his as one hand reached for his dick. He was hard and leaking. The scene me and Asher made had him aroused, dark eyes all pupils.

Hiroshi wrapped a hand around me when our kiss broke, stroking me in time to Asher's thrusts. It was exactly what I needed. I came, my channel milking Asher.

"Knot!" I gasped as I felt it stretch me. I caught Hiroshi and Roan staring wide eyed at us.

Asher roared, sounding more like his lion than a man, as he filled me with his seed. "Holy shit!" He tried to slump back, but the motion tugged the knot on my rim, making me wince. "Sorry." He petted me consolingly.

The rut must have broken for him as he trailed kisses up and down my spine. It frustrated me, though. I wanted to push him off me.

Instead, I reached for Hiroshi, some nameless side of myself in the driving seat. This wasn't my raven. They were satiated now that our alpha had filled us with cum. No, this was a deeper sense. I cupped his cheek, ran kisses along his jaw and down his neck, over where Asher's bite had been, gone now likely because my mate was an alpha. Yet my mark was still there.

I bit down. Re-marking him, making sure this was permanent. He gasped, pulling away to meet my eyes. Something wordless moved between us, and he leaned in to bite me, too.

Neither of the alphas reacted as we omegas reaffirmed our bond to each other.

Within seconds, a flush came over Hiroshi's cheeks. He squirmed in place.

"Can I fuck you?" I whispered.

"Please," he panted.

"Here." Asher adjusted us so we were lying spooned, with me lying half on my side. Hiroshi crawled into my lap, took me in his hand, and eased me inside him.

If there was anything that felt as heavenly as being filled while being inside my other mate, then I didn't want it. This was the peak of pleasure. My heat simmered gently as Hiroshi

took what he needed from me. Asher grunting occasionally as I thrust up into my omega mate.

Two. I had two mates. Just as Hiroshi did. An alpha and omega. Nothing could part us now. This was what we were always meant to be.

It didn't take long for Hiroshi to climax, drawing another orgasm from me. My cries were loud and uncontained.

“More, I need more!” Hiroshi begged.

Roan scooped him up off me, making Asher growl for coming too close. The other alpha dipped his head in acknowledgement before adjusting his hold on his omega. He pinned Hiroshi to the wall and fucked him hard. The demonstration of strength had me hard again, just as Asher's knot shrank.

Asher stroked my body and murmured sweet things into my skin as I watched my other mate with his alpha. There were no stirrings of jealousy. I just hoped he would get his wish and have a cub or pup from this. Did I want that for myself? I had no idea. I'd never thought to wish for it.

Both our heats were intense that day. Throughout the day we had sex, ate, washed, napped. It felt natural to be inside Hiroshi almost as much as Roan was. I would start each wave with him, until it got too much for him to bear, then Roan would take him to his peak again, then stay close as our Sunshine napped, stuck on Roan's knot.

The heats ended together, just as the dawn light was rising. Every part of my body ached, and I was exhausted. Wrung out. If this was what being an omega was like, I wasn't sure I wanted it. Unfortunately, I didn't think The Luna meant for this gift to be returned.

Hiroshi and Asher were passed out. I caught Roan staring at me. "Are you okay?" His concern was touching. Though I knew our bond was gone, I mourned his loss. We'd tried hard, but it hadn't worked out. He was a worthy alpha for my Sunshine. He just wasn't mine. The goddess had put him in our path for this reason. With him, we had transformed.

"I dunno. It's a lot," I told him honestly.

"Yeah, I get it." He sighed long and loud in the still room. I watched my mates sleep, unable to switch my brain off until he spoke again. "I'm not sure where we go from here. Neither of you are my mates now, but I couldn't even touch you, even in a nonsexual way, without Asher biting my head off."

"I think that was just the rut," I defended my sleeping alpha.

"No. It really wasn't. Check this out." He reached a hand out across Hiroshi and smoothed my hair back from my face. The touch was comforting, innocent, but Asher's eyes snapped open. His growl was ferocious, setting goosebumps over my skin. My raven reacted with fear, a natural response to a much larger predator.

Hiroshi would never feel that sharp bite of terror over his mate. As fated mates, Roan couldn't harm my Sunshine. Just



as Hiroshi couldn't hurt Roan. They could not cheat or physically cause unwanted pain.

As bonded mates, chosen, I didn't have that luxury.

Roan withdrew his hand like he'd been bitten and apologized. Asher's eyes drifted closed again. Only then did my heart rate return to normal.

Fuck, that had been scary.

"See?" Roan whispered.

I nodded. "What do we do?"

Roan reached for his phone. "I'm going to text Blake and Ívarr. They know you both have changed, but they need to know about this aggression. We need to see if it is just me, or any alpha. You can't go to work if he's going to be like this. It could be dangerous."

Fuck. I hadn't even thought about my enforcer duties. Could I still be one with my new designation? "Um, Roan? Do you think I can still work for the pack?"

I saw the dawning realization. "It shouldn't be a problem, right? It's not like you are unmated." He reached for me, but thought better of it. "I'll ask. Try to get some rest. I'll keep watch."

When I woke again, Hiroshi was cuddled up against Roan, murmuring. Asher was awake but lying silently apart from the rest of them.

“Oh! You’re awake. How’d you feel?” Hiroshi ran his healing light over me, erasing bruises. I pressed a kiss on his cheek as a thank you, being careful not to get too close to Roan.

“It’s strange. I don’t know how to feel. My body aches, but less now you’ve healed me. Thank you.”

“Alpha Blake, Ívarr and some others want to come to the house to do some tests. Is that okay with you both?” Roan asked, sitting up, moving further away from us and drawing Hiroshi with him. The omega looked confused for a second.

*Roan can’t be close to me. Watch.* I used our new bond, relishing how clearly everything came across. This was a similar link to the one I shared with Asher. I could feel Hiroshi’s every emotion.

I reached out and touched Roan’s ankle, just giving it a pat. “Sounds good. Thanks for contacting them.”

A snarl ripped through the room. Hiroshi’s eyes widened. He shrank into Roan, who drew farther back, so they were on the edge of the bed.

“I’m going to start breakfast. Hiro, would you help me?” Roan asked.

“Sure!” His tone was falsely bright.

*If you’re scared, just let me know. I’ll tell Roan. We can, I dunno, arrange for some enforcers to come with Alpha Blake.*

*To do what?*

*I dunno. Tate, I'm scared for you. This isn't right.*

Asher moved silently and wrapped his arms around me. “Come here, baby. You smell too much like them.” There was a low rumble through his words that had me thinking that his lion was close to the surface.

Rather than have me relaxing into him, my first response was to stiffen. If he felt it, he didn't acknowledge it, just held me tightly, a little too tight for comfort.

My new alpha mate nuzzled my neck, nipping and kissing along it, covering me in his scent. He rubbed my lower belly. “I hope I've put a cub in you. Otherwise, I'm going to have to keep you on my knot until there is one in there.”

“Babe, if I'm a proper omega, I won't go into heat for another three months.”

“I could bite you again.”

“It doesn't work like that. Our bond is stable again. I've worn your mark for years now. I know what it feels like. It wasn't the same as Hiroshi's mark.”

“We could break it again and re-bond.”

He sounded unhinged. “That kind of magic comes with risks, which is why people don't do it all the time. Besides, what's wrong with waiting three months for another heat? That's even if I'll have another one, or can even get pregnant at all!”

“Oh course you can. I could knot, so you can carry my cubs.”

Asher sounded so certain. I wanted to believe, but also, wanted to hope that my being an omega didn't mean I'd lost all autonomy. "What if I don't want a cub yet? We've only just become this. It's a lot to take in."

"Why wouldn't you want one? Cubs are a gift. I'd look after you both so well."

"What about my job?"

"Well, you can't be an enforcer anymore. Too dangerous, especially if you're carrying my cub."

His cub. Not our. Was I already just an incubator to him?

"Ash, you need to slow down. I'm probably not pregnant." I tried to pull away, the conversation making me uncomfortable.

"Are you hoping that you aren't?" There was a darkness in his tone that I didn't like.

"No, I'm just struggling to adapt. The last month has been a lot with all of us bonding. Yesterday we had three mates, well sort of, but the marks were still there. Now I have two. You just one."

"Oh." He was silent for a minute. "So it's Roan then?" His fingers flexed against my side, where he had me locked against his body. "He's the reason you don't want to have my baby, isn't he? You want it to be his, but he's already mated. Do you want him to bite you again, or will any alpha do it for you?" The grip got tighter to the point it was hurting. Claws pricked my flesh. Rivulets of blood running down my side. "Should I just find another one to bite you? I won't let them

fuck you. I'd put him in the ground before I allowed that to happen." He said the last with another terrifying snarl. Holy fuck, I needed away.

*Hiro? Get some help. I think Asher is about to lose it. Get Roan out of the house.*

*Tate? Are you okay?*

*I'm going to get out of this room. Just be ready to run.*

"N... No," I stammered. "Just you. You're my only alpha."

"Good. I will not share you. Even with Hiro. We're going to have to move."

What I said next, I would regret for the rest of my life.

"I can't leave them. Hiroshi is my mate, too. We need to be together." I wriggled free of his hold to look him in the face.

"Then he needs to leave Roan. I won't have you around another alpha you've fucked." He almost sounded like he was being reasonable. Probably why I continued to dig a hole for myself.

"But Hiro can't leave Roan. They're fated," I said simply.

"Then you need to choose. Them or me."

"Ash, it's not that simple. I'm only mated to you and Hiroshi. You can't ask me to choose."

"I can. You need to answer me."

I got up from the bed and backed up towards the door.

"Asher, this isn't right. You aren't being fair."

He stood and started a slow approach. I squirmed through the ajar door into the hallway. “So that’s how it is.”

My raven pushed the change on me. Within a blink, I was airborne in feathers. Asher’s lion snapped his massive jaws at me as I cawed in fear.

“Tate!” I heard Hiroshi shout from outside. He’d left the door open in his hurry to get out of the house. He and Roan were standing huddled together. It looked like Roan was holding Hiroshi back from running to me.

*Stay back!*

Asher lunged at me again, missing me as my raven cleared the house and flew higher.

He caught sight of Roan with Hiro and barreled towards him. They both shifted seamlessly, a massive tiger next to a charcoal wolf.

The lion dismissed the tiger, going for the wolf, snapping enormous jaws of sharp teeth at him. They circled each other, Asher trying to get close enough to use those sharp claws on Roan. The wolf was keeping him at bay until he stumbled.

Asher shoved Roan to the ground, teeth just missing his neck. Roan scrambled, his paws cutting into Asher, making him roar.

They were a tumble of limbs and fur. I heard Roan bark in pain. Hiroshi darted in to help his mate.

*No!* I landed on his head, giving him a peck to the ear.

Hiroshi paused as Roan pushed with his back paws and flipped, running clear of Asher's teeth.

Suddenly, Hakeem was there, holding Asher's head in his hands. "Peace," he ordered. There was a visible reaction from Asher's lion to the word. He slumped, aggression fading.

Our alpha, several enforcers, and Ívarr surrounded us. Their voices all blended together as I focused on Hakeem and Asher.

Where did we go from here?

# CONFRONTING THE TRUTH

Hiroshi

I was torn. Both of my mates needed me. Which one did I check on first? I looked between them. Tate was a wreck, but unharmed physically. He flew in small circles overhead. *I'm just going to check Roan. Stay there.* I told him using our bond.

Dashing over to Roan, who was still in wolf form, I pushed my tiger back. They relented easily, allowing me to take my human form so I could use my ability.

My healing light came easily to my fingers as I ran them over my alpha mate's form. His wolf was beautiful. It hurt my heart that this was the first time I was seeing my mate like this. I felt terrible that we'd been neglecting our alters, not even shifting on the full moon with the pack for fear of discovery. We'd needed more time to bond as our alters. Perhaps if we'd done that sooner, it wouldn't have all fallen to shit.

*I'm okay.* He reassured me, his wolf's mental presence close to the surface, but he allowed the man to speak. His alpha instinct to protect wouldn't let him shift back until Asher was



under control. My healing power closed the few cuts from claws and teeth. With that done, I could breathe a little easier.

Being an omega and wanting to look after people all the time could really suck when all I wanted to do was run away from this entire mess. I wanted to take my mates and hide away for a while. Tate wouldn't allow it, his thoughts over the bond screaming in panic over his alpha.

Asher.

Unbidden, my eyes strayed to the new alpha. His eyes were still burning with rage as he watched Tate pace back and forth, now in his human form.

“Um, should we move away from the omega area?” I asked carefully. It wasn't my place to question our alpha, but the alpha designated enforcers weren't usually allowed in this part of the compound.

“Once we get this situation settled,” Blake said.

*Blake is with them, so they can be here. The omegas will stay away, though.* I loved hearing Roan's soothing voice over our mating link. It was never an issue for him to explain something to me, to help me understand the pack dynamic, so different from my birth clan.

Tate looked pained. He appeared to want to go to Asher, but was equally terrified. He stood naked, watching Asher carefully as the alpha stared him down. “Could someone get Tate some clothes?” I called out. “Maybe it'll help Asher calm down.” I watched Blake give a nod in agreement.

Asher glared at me, the look striking fear into my heart, but then he zeroed his gaze on one of the enforcers as they skirted the group of us and dashed into the house. The enforcer returned shortly after with a t-shirt and some sweats, which he handed to Tate with thanks from the new omega. Tate shrugged the borrowed clothing on, nothing fitting right on his lean frame.

The lion roared, head butted Hakeem out of the way and charged towards Tate. My heart leaped into my throat as he closed in on my mate. Asher was formidable in both forms. His lion was white, massive, and scary as he roared with anger at an unknown slight.

Blake stepped in front of Tate, defending him from his mate's attack. "Stop!" Alpha power, unlike anything I'd ever felt before, flooded the area. Everyone, bar the elves, tilted their heads in submission. I noticed then that even the elves appeared to have a reaction to the amount of dominance that Blake gave out, standing more stiffly or just gaping at him. Asher slumped onto the ground, an irritated sound escaping him.

"Shift!" Blake demanded.

He directed the order to Asher, but Roan also returned to his human form. His arms wrapped around me. *Don't worry*, the bond pulsed with affection. *Blake will protect Tate*. I wanted to deny that I was worried about Tate's safety, but that would have been a lie.

The enforcers moved on silent feet to surround their alpha and Asher, each casting dirty looks at us. What was their problem? I caught some muttering. "It's always Roan." What did they mean? "Had to be him. He's a freak." My Roan was perfect and loving. He'd taken me on. I was the freak.

*Hiro, stop.* Roan begged as I tried to step closer to the group, ready to defend my mate. He clutched me to him.

*What do they mean? Why are they being like that, Roan?*

*Later. Let's just focus on Tate and Asher.*

I subsided. Their opinions didn't matter, as long as Blake didn't think any of those things about my Roan.

"Why did you try to attack your mate, Asher?" Blake demanded. His voice had never sounded that hard. It was foreign, seeing Blake be so harsh.

"Wrong clothes." Asher bit out. "Smells like HIM." The last word was a growl, and Asher turned a cutting gaze to Roan.

The enforcers smirked. I didn't hear their muttered words, but Blake did. "Enough!" They were silent.

"Roan is your mate, too. Hiroshi as well." The muttering and glances began again, quelled with another look from Blake. "Why would it matter who Tate smelled of?"

"Not my mates." Asher's words came out clipped as he clenched his jaw, his claws extending in a partial shift.

"Since when?" Blake looked confused.

Ívarr looked at Tate as if asking for permission. My omega mate gave a small head nod. “Tate came to me for testing just the other day. He expressed concerns about the bond fading. Unfortunately, due to the unusual shifter bond, there was nothing we could suggest that hadn’t already been tried. The group would settle or break up.”

I heard gasps as Ívarr mentioned our group mating. The enforcers muttered to each other. Then they shot looks of confusion our way.

“Yes, we were together as a group.” I finally snapped, sick of their judgment. “Roan agreed to bond with Asher and Tate. We all agreed.”

“How’d that work out for you?” One meathead called back, clearly thinking he was the shit. He was not.

*Hiro, please.* Roan begged.

I ignored him, sick of hiding my joy. “Pretty great for me. I have two mates!” I smirked at him. His face fell and there was more whispering among the enforcers.

“Roan, do you have more than one mate?” Larken had approached unseen or heard by the group that still covered the lawn of our little house.

There was silence for a full minute. I could tell that it cost Roan something when he finally admitted. “Not anymore. Just my fated, Hiroshi.”

“What happened?” Larken asked, gently. He wrapped an arm around Roan, and I felt the first flash of jealousy that I’d

ever felt. I didn't get jealous, but here I was, wanting to rip that arm off my man.

Roan leaned into the touch. Stupid, needy wolves always wanting to be touched. I coughed and Larken took the hint. Smart lizard.

“Asher, who are you mated to now?” Blake asked.

“Just Tate.” His claws were still extended, his jaw tight.

“Tate?” Blake turned to my omega.

“Asher and Hiro.”

Blake seemed to mull this over. “So Roan is only with his fated. Roan, how do you feel about Asher and Tate now?”

Roan chose his words carefully. I felt his vulnerability over the bond and wrapped myself around him. Larken placed a hand on his shoulder. I let that one slide.

“I care about Asher and Tate. A lot. We tried to make it work, but almost straight away it didn't with me and Ash. Look, Ash. I want you and Tate to be happy. I'd never get involved with that.”

“So the attraction? Is it still there?” Blake was leading Roan to a point. Making it clear for all.

“No. There's nothing but friendship there. I only see Hiro like that.”

I saw the pained twist of Larken's lips. Part of me felt sorry for him. The other was a tad smug.

“Hiro?” Blake's eyes met mine.

“I’m bonded to both Roan and Tate. Asher and I have always had a unique relationship, and then bond to the one with Tate.” Everyone could smell the sex on us. So I pushed past my discomfort. “Tate marked me again last night and put me into heat.”

Chatter exploded. Roan’s arms tightened around me as I cringed over the chaos my words had caused.

“Enough!” Blake growled. He didn’t have to raise his voice. That little shot of alpha power did all the work. Once everyone was calm, he tried speaking to Asher again. “I don’t see the issue. Roan can’t be anything to Tate now but a pack mate and friend.”

Asher took several gulping breaths before he could speak. I’d never been so scared of anyone in my life! How could I cope with knowing Tate was with Asher? My tiger would never let me sleep. “He’s still there.” He pointed to Roan, fire in his eyes. “His scent drives my lion crazy! He knows Tate’s been with him. He doubts the bond —” Asher’s words were cut off as he roared, stepping closer to Tate. “We can’t stand him in those clothes.”

He shook with the effort it took to keep back from Tate. I wanted to believe that he wouldn’t harm my omega mate, but my confidence shrank with each tiny step he took closer to him.

Hakeem stepped forward, approaching the new alpha lion. The elf exuded confidence and calm as he approached him. Hakeem seemed unbothered by Asher’s open aggression.

“Young alpha, you have much to adjust to. I think some time in our lands will help you find control that you are lacking.” Asher growled, but Hakeem ignored it. “Come with me for a couple of days. Everything will look different in time.”

“What about Roan being around Tate?” Asher bit out.

“In your heart, you know that’s not a possibility. You need to listen to your inner self, and not your riled up lion. He has too much to learn to focus on the truth right now.” Hakeem cupped Asher’s face. The lion’s uncertainty bled through the mask he tried to wear. “Come with me and together, we can fix this.”

Asher looked at Tate. They must have shared something over their bond, because eventually, the alpha nodded and let Hakeem lead him away.

Blake and Ívarr had a short, whispered conversation before the elf approached Tate with an apologetic look. “As much as I’d like to give you time to bond, we need to find out what happened here. How you went from beta two days ago, albeit a sick one, to a healthy omega today.”

“I know.” Tate shrugged, trying to put on a front. “Will he be okay?”

“Asher is in the best hands with Hakeem.”

# MORE TESTING

## Tate

Once Hakeem and a bunch of elves had left with Asher, I could finally take a full breath. I felt gutted to my soul at how things had turned out. Asher was my mate, and I loved him, but after the morning's events, I was also terrified of what he'd become.

Sure, in the past there had been moments where I thought that his tightly wound control would slip, yet I'd never felt any fear that he would turn on me. I guess it only affected me when I thought I might get hurt.

Seeing Asher turn on Roan like that had been like seeing a stranger in my mate's body. That wasn't the Ash that I knew and loved. I just didn't get it. "Will Asher really be okay?" I asked Ívarr. He'd already answered my question, but I couldn't help but ask again, needing the reassurance that the elder elf gave.

Ívarr was patient, as he explained. "Hakeem is the most qualified of our elves to help with shifter behavior issues. It is a declining practice, but some fae kept shifters as pets and slaves. There are still fighting rings that we elves work to



dismantle.” Ívarr’s composed mask slipped, showing his frustration and a hint of helplessness. “When our peoples created our realm, we had not expected such barbaric practices to continue in our new home. Or so our history states.”

The elves and fae had left the human realm around two thousand years before. A dark, bitter time in the history of supernaturals. Without them, the humans, with their new religion, rose against us. We went into hiding, then became myths. Our unveiling only happened a couple of hundred years ago. Still within memory for some vampires and other supernaturals that were immortal, or long lived beyond shifters’ extended life expectancies.

“So, yes, Asher is in the best hands with Hakeem. He’s worked with shifters coming from very... difficult circumstances. He’s written many books on shifter psychology and pack dynamics. Although he will miss studying the pack —“

“He’s studying the pack?” I blurted out.

“Yes,” Blake said with a small smile. “I’d given permission to Hakeem to continue his observations while the elves made Sweetwater their home, at least for the time being.” He turned and gave his enforcers an order to disperse. “Let’s head to the clinic, shall we?”

“Clinic?” I shared a look with Hiroshi and Roan, who were still huddled together looking shell-shocked. Roan was covered with mostly healed injuries and blood. He needed a shower before he came to the clinic with us. “Can Roan get

washed up first? I don't want to go on my own, and Hiroshi won't want to leave Roan behind." Hiroshi sent me a grateful smile.

"Actually," Ívarr began, "we need you all at the clinic to test you all for any contagion, or anomalies that could have caused this sudden change. We will need to establish a timeline of events."

I tuned the elf out. *Is that okay?* Hiroshi's mental presence was soothing. In my mind, I could see his tiger as they laid down for my raven to hop onto their head. I got a flash of memory from when I'd landed on their head before. The impression I got was that the tiger had loved carrying us around like that. My raven jumped up, fluttering his wings. No, their wings. My alter was now as changed as I was. I got a sense of pride from my alter. They loved being an omega, though they, too, were worried about our alpha mate. He did not feel safe to them. They mourned for our bond with Roan, as did I. We both knew somehow that we couldn't re-bond with Roan. That was a one and done situation. Now he was bonded to Hiroshi, there was no mating with anyone else for him.

*Please. I want to check him over. The healing I performed was quick and I might have missed something. I also don't want you out of my sight.*

"Shower and grab some comfortable clothes. We'll wait inside to take you to the clinic." Blake ordered as he ushered us towards our home.

I followed behind Roan and Hiroshi, watching as they went into their bathroom to clean up.

“Tate—” Ívarr called. “Would it be possible for you not to wash?”

“I, uh, Why?”

“Without putting too fine a point on it, you are covered in Asher and we require those samples, too. I can ask Hakeem to get those from Asher. However, I feel that his mental state is not quite right for that.”

Great. “Okay. Let me just put on some of my own clothes.”

“Tate?”

“Yes?”

“Did you mate Hiroshi?” What the fuck was with this questioning?

“I did.”

“Would you be able to provide a semen sample? I assume Hiroshi was knotted by his alpha, too. So any sample there would be mixed.”

Fuck my life. “Why do you need that?”

“It is uncommon for omegas to be the dominant partner, is it not? Therefore, your mating of Hiroshi suggests there are traits in you that need to be explored. Perhaps you are not a full omega.”

My face flushed hot. I’d been an omega a day and was already a fuck up. “Is there any way I could go back to being a

beta?” It wasn’t until the words were out that I realized that was what I wanted. Being an omega was strange and scary. Being a beta was all I’d ever known. It was familiar and safe.

Ívarr’s face was full of pity. “That is unlikely.”

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Taking the semen samples from me was about as uncomfortable as you could imagine. I was swabbed and then sent into a room to jerk off. It was almost impossible to get hard under the circumstances. My surroundings were sterile and just the wrong side of cool.

I must have stood there for a long time with the cup in one hand and my phone in another as I browsed some porn sites. *Need a hand?* Hiroshi’s mental voice was cheeky. *I’d give you my mouth, but I think they want a clear sample.*

*Get in here!* I urged.

Hiroshi joined me in the closet sized room, pressing close to me to get the door closed. He ran his hands over me, his healing light doing a cursory scan. “I’m fine,” I whispered.

“Just checking,” he said before he pulled my head down to take my lips in a firm kiss. “We need to be quick,” he whispered against my mouth. His fingers worked on the button of my jeans, slipping his hand into the gap he’d made and stroking my cock to full hardness as we made out against the wall.

It was easy with Hiroshi in front of me, jerking me off, to just focus on him and push all thoughts of Asher aside for a

while. Hiroshi was my Sunshine. He chased those dark clouds of anxiety and fear away. This was why I loved him.

I kissed him harder, wrapped my arms around him, just enjoying the feeling of his touch, the taste of him on my tongue. I tried to push a hand between us to return the favor, but he batted it away. “Later,” he rasped against my neck.

Hiroshi’s mouth met mine again, and I sank into the feeling. Just shut out the rest of the world and concentrated on my omega mate. Here it didn’t matter that things had gone to hell, I’d done what I’d wanted, and that was mating him, being able to be bonded to him properly.

All too soon, he had me spilling over his hand. I helped him get a decent amount into the cup and cleaned him up before wiping myself down.

“Thank you, Sunshine.” I pressed a quick kiss to his swollen lips. It was blatantly obvious what we’d been up to in here.

“No need to thank me for a handjob, Tate.”

“No, not for that. For treating me like I’m still the same Tate I was two days ago. For not acting like I’m fragile now that Asher is gone.” He squeezed me. “Asher will be back in a few days.” Hiroshi said with a bright smile. He was acting like it was no big deal that my mate had attacked his alpha and threatened me. Maybe to him it wasn’t, but it was more likely that he was just looking on the bright side. He probably believed that it was just Asher’s new alpha nature playing havoc with him. I wasn’t so sure.

There was a knock at the door. “Hiro? Tate? Ívarr is looking for you. I’m finished with all of my samples.” Roan said from the other side in a soft voice.

I opened the door after checking we were decent, not that shifters really cared about that, but still. Roan moved out of my way quickly so that we didn’t even brush our arms. He gave me a sympathetic look. I felt grateful there was no ire there. It would have been all too easy for him to blame half of this on me. Both me and Hiroshi had pushed for this mating and caused all of this trouble.

Roan reached for me like he was going to squeeze my shoulder, but stopped. “Hey, it’s okay, Roan. We might not be mates anymore, but we’re friends, right? Close friends.”

“Of course.”

“Then we can do friend things, like hug, right? I feel I’m going to need one of those by the time this day is over.”

Roan hesitated, then pulled me into a hug, resting his head on top of mine, holding me close. The man gave the best hugs. “I hate how things turned out, Tate. I wanted better for all of us. Us all bonding was great.”

“Yeah,” I said sadly, “it was at first. This is just how The Luna wants it.”

“Maybe. I just feel like I failed you.”

“Failed me? How?”

“Maybe I didn’t try enough. Didn’t want it enough for the goddess.”

I pulled away from him. “You can’t take all the blame for it not working, Roan. We all tried. We all wanted this.” The words rang hollow. “No, that’s not true. Ash wasn’t as invested in this as I was. He tried it for me, because he knew how much I wanted to stay with Hiroshi.”

Hiro wrapped his arms around us both. “We can’t change the past, but we can look at this as the gift that it is,” he said brightly. “Come on, let’s get back to Ívarr.”

“You still think this is a gift?”

“I do. I think The Luna changed you both to keep us together. Sure, it isn’t exactly what we wanted, but maybe that’s for the best. Instead of Asher pretending he was in love with me—”

“Ash loves you, Sunshine.”

“He does. But he isn’t in love with me. And that’s the distinction that we all forgot. We stayed bonded to the ones we love.”

Was it as simple as that? Had the goddess changed us to keep us together? It was a nice theory and certainly made me feel better about how things had turned out.

We were released from the clinic hours later after Ívarr had exhausted all the tests he could do on us. He took blood, semen, urine, and saliva samples. He took strands of hair and miniscule patches of skin. All hoping this was something they could identify.

I wondered if this was something they wanted to replicate. There were now two fewer betas in the world. If I could carry babies, then my value as a shifter went up. Omegas were valuable to a pack.

Was it wrong that I wanted to return this gift and have my simple life back? Not if it meant giving up Hiroshi, though. If this was the price for keeping him, then I'd pay it.



# THE ELVES

## Asher

**H**akeem led me away from my mate without giving me the chance to apologize or even say goodbye. It was probably for the best. My control was paper thin, and I hated the look on Tate's face. His last words to me over the bond had been a plea to listen to Hakeem and go with him. I wasn't welcome at our home until they could trust me not to lash out.

Goddess! His words had cut me to the core. In our years together, I'd had moments of temper. Aggression was something I'd grown up trying to control, but since I'd woken as an alpha, it had been near impossible to put a lid on. I knew, deep in my soul, that leaving was the right thing to do. I would have hated to cause him any more pain.

"Everything will work out. You are not the first shifter I have had to help with their control." Hakeem's voice was soothing. My lion liked it.

"So you've worked with shifters before?" I tried focusing on Hakeem and the elves escorting us instead of the pack I was leaving behind me. Their eyes followed me until we were out of sight.

“I’m old, Asher. I’ve studied shifter behavior over the years, worked with the shifter pets the fae cast aside, helped them reintegrate into society, or just prepared them to return to your realm.”

That sounded like a depressing job. I hated that there were still places where shifters were treated as less than other species of supernatural, or less than humans. The anger lit a spark that flowed through me. I felt a growl work its way up my throat and swallowed it. I needed to change the subject. “You said we are going to your lands. To Abrocaelum.”

“That’s correct. Does that bother you? Being so far from your mate?”

Focusing on Tate had a fire rippling through my body again, rage filling every cell. This was so messed up. My head knew that it was irrational, but my lion roared. He wanted to return to our pack and fix Tate. First by getting those clothes off him, then by knotting and breeding him until he only thought of us.

*We don’t own him.* I reminded my lion. He was beyond words. Not that he was the best of communicators normally. We’d been born damaged.

Hakeem stopped me with a hand on my arm. “Take a deep breath. Tate is safe.” I wanted to scoff. Of course Tate was safe. He had another alpha to protect him. A better alpha. The thought of Roan had dual reactions. My lion raged, while my inner self whimpered. We knew we were too messed up for Tate. We weren’t good enough. Roan was better. He hadn’t been born messed up.

“I know. It’s just hard, leaving him behind.”

“I should not have mentioned him so soon after parting. I apologize.”

“No, that’s why I’m going with you, right? To get a handle on this.”

“It is, but also, I do not want to cause you pain. Right now, I know you are trying to fight your lion, who wishes to return to your mate.”

“That’s true. I’m at war with him. He hates me for giving up and not protecting our omega.”

“But you know that leaving is protecting your mate.”

“Yes. Until both me and my lion can get to grips with Tate having two mates, then we are dangerous to him. Our main problem is Roan.” Even saying his name had the urge to cause pain flaring through my body. Hakeem laid a hand on my arm. It felt like he was performing some sort of magic. We calmed. “While he says there’s no attraction there, and it felt like the truth, there’s a part of me that doubts him. We feel like he’s just waiting to swoop in and steal Tate from us.”

“What about Hiroshi? He’s still bonded to Tate.”

“There’s some lingering anger there. If he and Tate hadn’t pushed for this bonding, then things would be normal. He’d just have Roan, and I’d just have Tate. Everyone would be happy.”

“Would they?”

I didn't answer Hakeem as we had reached the portal that would take us to Abrocaelum; the world created by the elves and fae millennia ago when they abandoned the rest of the supernatural races to our fates.

We walked through, the tingle of magic brushing across my exposed skin. I was still naked, not that I cared, but I wasn't sure where the elves stood on nudity. I didn't know where Hakeem was leading me.

Feeling vulnerable as we walked through a bustling village, I tried to shift and found my lion subdued. He was still there, able to communicate. I just couldn't change forms.

“I performed a geas on you.”

“A what?” My tone was sharp.

“A spell that prohibits you from changing forms. Your lion needs to learn that you are the one that controls where you go in life. His taking over nearly caused irreparable harm to others of your pack. The consequences of that would have been dire.”

That stopped me short. I hadn't really thought about what would have happened if I'd hurt Roan. Would I have been expelled from the pack? Would I have lost Tate? I couldn't even be sure that he would follow me if I left.

“Sorry, I just wanted to be in fur, since I'm naked.”

Hakeem's steps stalled, and he chuckled. “I've been spending too much time with shifters. I hadn't even noticed. My apologies, Asher.” He made a complicated motion with the

fingers of both hands. I found myself clothed in elven materials. Soft loose pants and a tunic style top, both in a pale green color. “Better?”

“Much. Thanks.”

“Just a little farther and we will be at your home for the next few days.”

“What will we be doing here?”

He led me into a small house. It was basically three rooms, an open-plan kitchen-living room, a short hallway that looked like it led to a bedroom and bathroom.

“This is the home we built for shifters like you. This is a place of safety and comfort for you. No other elf will enter unless invited. I have it warded. You cannot leave without a guard.”

“So, a fancy jail cell?”

Hakeem frowned. “No. A haven. The therapy that you will undergo will be intensive. We will spend a lot of time in trances and deep meditation as you confront your lion and regain control. There is also the emotional impact that the last month has had on you.”

“What do you mean?” The words came out strangled. Were there deeper emotions that I needed to deal with?

“Asher.” Hakeem was patient as he explained. “You risked your heart to give Tate everything that he wanted. The fallout of that comes at great personal cost. Let’s start fresh tomorrow.

I'll have someone come by to stock the pantry with food. Get some rest."

With that, he left me alone.



It was official. I hated Abrocaelum. Nothing about this world felt right to me or my lion. Day after day, we battled to gain the upper hand while also struggling with being in a strange place so far from our mate.

On our first day, elves had delivered food and fresh clothing for me to wear. I'd searched every inch of the little house for something to entertain myself and found nothing but a few books and jigsaw puzzles.

Teagan had dropped in to take many, many samples from me, including a humiliating request for a semen sample.

That I'd given, but I'd had to ask Teagan to wait outside of the house before I could even get hard.

Picturing Tate had me locked in a painful partial shift. Later, when I asked Hakeem about the claws that had punctured my skin, I was told that my lion wasn't fully locked away. We needed an indicator that the therapy was working. A partial shift due to rage at the mere thought of my mate in an intimate position was a sign that it wasn't going far enough.

By the end of the second day, it was apparent that I'd be here for a while. The pack planned to have my things sent to Abrocaelum so I could be more comfortable.

Even with my things surrounding me, the house felt like a jail cell. I wasn't able to go anywhere unaccompanied, and they filled my hours with exercises that did absolutely nothing.

I was stuck in a pattern of anger and despair. Longing for Tate filled my sleepless nights, but I couldn't stomach being around him.

The team that Hakeem had assembled to help with my therapy were concerned that being apart from Tate for too long would be dangerous, so with that in mind, they arranged visits.

Straight away, I knew returning home was a terrible idea. As soon as we had cleared the portal to find Tate waiting with a mixture of alpha and beta enforcers, my lion, free from the geas that only worked in Abrocaelum, had burst free and headed straight for Tate.

My mate, unable to guess my lion's intentions, had shifted and taken to the air, circling high above until Hiroshi's tiger had come into view. Roan's wolf stayed well back, observing the chaos.

Once he knew he had back up from his other mate, Tate had landed in his new favorite spot, the top of Hiroshi's head. The tiger had let out a happy chuffing noise at the raven hopping about between his ears.

Hakeem had asked me to name my lion in my sessions with him. He wanted me to define his personality as someone different from me. Giving him a name would help with the separation, he had said. I called him Demon. Probably unfair

to real demons, but I'd never met any, so I could only go by the horror stories I'd heard about them causing havoc.

We had grown to hate each other, him and I. Demon, because he thought I was weak. He thought I should have destroyed all those that came between me and my mate. Including my mate's other mate.

So I hated Demon. There was no way I could harm Hiroshi. I may not have been in love with him, or bonded to him any more, but I loved him. He was my family. My chosen family. Demon didn't understand that harming Hiroshi, and by extension, Roan, would hurt Tate. It was an emotional wound he would never recover from.

We'd left for Abrocaelum as soon as Hakeem and the elves could get me under control.

It didn't get better. Each time I saw Tate's resignation; the hope dimmed with each visit. He endured a few visits to Abrocaelum, but the bond between him and Hiroshi had caused him too much discomfort for him to stay long.

Every time that I saw my mate, there was no progress to renew his hope. We couldn't be intimate because I couldn't be trusted alone with him. I felt him pulling further and further away until I wondered if it was just better to cut our bond loose and let him be free to love someone else.



# Guilt

## Hiroshi

**W**as I selfish that I was glad that Asher wasn't around? It sucked for Tate. I knew he missed his alpha. Their occasional visits were hard on them.

Each time that Asher came here, his lion would burst out, finally free of the geas that Hakeem had placed on him. Tate hated being in Abrocaelum. Our stretched bond pinched at him, begging for him to return to my side. Not that it was very comfortable for me, either, but I tried to put Tate's needs before my own. My omega instincts asked for nothing less.

Life at home was peaceful when we ignored the Asher shaped hole in the room. Tate and I spent many hours together as he learned to deal with the instincts to nurture that came from being an omega.

Tate missed his job as an enforcer. It hurt my heart that he was having to give up something that he had worked so hard for. Being an omega was causing him no small amount of pain.

Blake, in wisdom someone so young should not have, soon realized that removing a shifter that could fly from the enforcer ranks was a bad idea. Sweetwater pack only had three

such shifters, one being Tate's cousin, Jake. He found a new title for Tate, Jake and Sebastian, so that Tate could still guard the skies around the pack in his raven form.

They were now the Wing Guard. Maybe a slightly silly name, but it appeased the enforcers that hadn't wanted Tate in their ranks any longer. I could not do Blake's job.

We waited for a couple of weeks for signs that Asher was ready to return home, so that we could stop dancing around each other and find something that worked for us all.

As the days went on, I hoped that this time my heat had worked. I wanted to give my family something to look forward to.

Ívarr and his team were still working hard to find out what had caused the change and if it was something that they could replicate. More omegas, more alphas, were a win to shifter kind. Especially if they could have children.

Poor Tate was in the clinic every morning to be tested, something that was making him feel like a lab rat. I'd heard talk of scanning him, but they hadn't wanted to get anyone's hopes up that Tate would be like a born omega, and be able to have kids.

It meant that instead of integrating with the pack now that his secret was out, Tate was spending more and more time at home. A home that was far too small for what we needed. Which is why I'd hatched a plan.

Alpha Blake had taken over the rest of the land that the Sweetwater sleuth had owned when the group of bears rejoined the pack shortly after Kade had become Alpha Mate. The land was desperately needed now that the elves were staying here and making homes within our borders.

I'd found us a home. One that was ready to move into as soon as the new fences were finished and wards constructed. The high trees made a perfect cover. Spells and nets made it so that flying shifters, the Northharbor aviary in particular, couldn't spy on us or gain access to our lands. The house had six bedrooms, two reception rooms, a playroom, and a home gym. The kitchen was massive, with a large table dominating the space.

We couldn't move into it without Asher. I wouldn't start our new life in our new home without a member of our family. Just thinking of his suffering through the endless therapy to get back to Tate had guilt spiking my chest.

I sat up, absentmindedly rubbing my chest, and stared at the two sleeping shifters on either side of me. Thirteen days had passed since my last heat, since Tate's heat, and each day made me wonder.

Roan woke, eyes bleary. "What's that smell?" His nose twitched. It was adorable.

I'd been so distracted thinking about Asher and how bad I felt about my part in the situation, I really shouldn't have pushed him into a bond he wasn't comfortable in, that I hadn't picked up on it myself.

It was coming from me.

“Could I—?”

“We’ve got a test, right?” Roan asked.

“Sure.”

I ran to the bathroom and took the test. I’d taken some from the clinic after last time. Then washed my hands carefully before joining Roan back on the bed. We sat, Roan’s arms around me as we waited for the timer to count down.

There. The second line slowly came into view just before the timer went off.

“Congratulations, my mate. We’re having a pup!”

“Oh my goddess! It’s finally happening!”

“Wha—” Tate’s head popped up. “Why are you shouting?”

“I’m pregnant!” I hopped up onto the mattress and started jumping up and down before Roan hooked me around my waist and pulled me into his lap, kissing the side of my head.

“You make me so happy, Hiroshi. Thank you for this gift.” I turned my head to look at him. He looked close to tears. I felt the satisfaction emanating from his wolf.

“I can’t believe that the goddess blessed us. I mean, I hoped it would happen. For the longest time, having cubs was my only task. Then I met you, and I knew you would take me even if I couldn’t give you a baby. It made me want to give you that gift. That mix of us.”

“Aww. I’m so happy for you both.” Tate got up from the bed. “I’ll give you a moment to celebrate.”

“No celebration here. We need to go to the clinic and get Hiroshi checked out. Confirm that the test is right.” Roan moved into alpha mode. It shouldn’t have been as hot as it was. “Then we can tell Blake and make sure that Hiroshi gets any adjustments that he needs for work. I don’t want your healing to be pushed to the limit and hurt the baby.”

Goddess, he was just too adorable. His brain must have been spinning, thinking and planning for our future together.

“Once we’ve seen Aldrin and James, we should visit Ívarr. We don’t know how the bonding will affect the pregnancy. Everything is different in this situation.”

I huffed out a laugh. “Yes, my alpha mate. We’ll do all those things. I want to see the baby if we can. I just can’t get over this!” I felt the pleased grin split my face.

Roan led me to the bathroom and we privately celebrated our news with a super hot frothing session under the warm spray. My alpha was extra careful, as if at any second I would splinter like glass and our miracle would be gone. I understood, but if he thought I was living wrapped in cotton wool for months as I grew our child, then he was mistaken. There was no chance that was happening.

“Could I come with you both?” Tate asked as we dressed for the visit to the clinic. Roan had called Kade and let him know he’d be a little late getting to the office. More and more, his work involved him working at home so that Kade could stay in

his own carefully guarded suite of rooms and protect the babies. It was isolating, Roan and I worried for Kade, so we visited often, but it was a necessary measure for the babies' safety.

While there hadn't been another big attack like the one where Roan had been injured just a few weeks ago, there had been threats and warnings. Each day, Chase was checking the pack for people willing to steal Elliotte from her parents using his gifted ability.

"Of course," I said cheerfully. Nothing could get me down today. Not Asher being away and making Tate sad. No, today was for me and Roan to celebrate the new life that we were willingly bringing into the world. My mate wasn't using me as a broodmare. He would have been fine if this heat hadn't gifted us with a pup. We'd discussed it a few times while I showed him the new house and my plans for it.

I think I was so excited about the baby because it was my choice. Roan had made no demands. There were no expectations there. Willing to wait as long as The Luna thought we should, if she ever gifted us that way. As Kade's assistant, he saw firsthand how bad the fertility rates were becoming. He'd shared his fears with me, deepening our bond.

"I'm going to go see Asher after. I'll break the news if that's okay with you two?" Tate looked worried.

"How do you think he'll take the news?"

"Honestly? I don't know. Asher the man understands that while this is a fucked up situation, he gets I am bonded to him

and to you only. His lion, though? He's a nightmare."

Nightmare didn't quite cover it. I could feel Tate's fear through our bond, sending an echo of his pain down the bond I had with Roan. My alpha held me closer.



The clinic was nearly empty as we walked in. Yet the science center next to it was bustling with activity. I led the way to Aldrin's office and knocked. With the main door open, our head healer had to be inside.

"Come in," he called, his voice low and steady.

"Hi!" I greeted him as I pushed inside the room, my mates behind me.

Aldrin caught the scent right away. "Let me call James."

We sat and waited after Aldrin made his brief phone call. Silence filled the room, but there was a relaxed atmosphere.

It didn't take long until Aldrin's mate, James, joined us. The omega was a nurse and worked with his healer mate to maintain the health of all the pack, not just the shifters, either.

The pack owned several businesses, the main one being the cider company. There was a factory on pack land where the hard cider was produced. They turned apples from their orchards into a drink that could get even shifters with their high metabolism drunk. With so many things going on, the pack needed more labor than the pack could give.

During the beta sickness, Dakota, Alpha Blake's assistant, had arranged for non-shifters to join the workforce. It was a part of my job, along with Aldrin and James, to make sure that the staff had access to decent medical care. Human hospitals weren't the friendliest towards ogres and nymphs. There were also some vampires that we had to keep well fed with donated blood.

Being in Sweetwater had opened my eyes to how isolated other packs had become. Working with other supernaturals had broadened my horizons.

"Oh! Oh! This is great news! Let's get you examined." James was a flurry of movement as he set up a scanner and laid some paper over a padded bench. "Pop up and let's see what we can find."

I always warned my patients that the gel was cool. It was my first time on the other side. James expertly ran the wand over my abdomen, quickly finding a whooshing sounds. "Oh, there's one." he moved the wand over again, hitting a slightly different sound. "And there's the other one. Congratulations to you all, there are twins in there!"

Roan's eyes met mine before he blurred with the tears that made their way down my face. "Two? There's two?"

Aldrin looked at the images on the screen. "Not that James is ever wrong, but I can see both there."

James shared a smile with his mate, who squeezed his shoulder affectionately before sitting back at his desk.



“Now, Hiroshi, we will have to make sure that you aren’t given healing tasks that require too much energy. Your priority is those babies,” Aldrin began.

“Of course,” I interrupted.

He smiled and continued. “I want to put you on supplements. We started them too late with Kade and he suffered early on. Let’s take those lessons we learned there and apply them to you so you can have a healthy pregnancy.”

“Could I have a copy of the pictures?” Tate asked. “I want to show Asher if I can. Maybe make him feel more involved.

Aldrin looked at me for permission. “You can. I think that’s great. I hope your visit goes better today,” I said cheerfully, not having to fake it for the first time in a while.

Tate’s face fell and I felt horrible about it. I shouldn’t have reminded him about how badly the visits had been going.

“I’m going to head out and get someone to take me through the portal.” He gave me a hug, showing there were no hard feelings, and whispered, “congratulations,” to me and Roan.

Roan waited until Tate was gone before he asked, “do you think he’ll be okay?”

# UNEXPECTED NEWS

Tate

**M**y mind was a mess. Whirring images of Hiroshi heavily pregnant filled my mind. We'd discussed the failure of his last heat and his crushing disappointment over it. He hadn't expected to feel so upset over something that had become a duty to him, a chore.

Except with Roan, he didn't feel that way.

I was happy my mate could have pups with his alpha mate, but also devastated that I hadn't been the one to make him so happy.

It made me think about what Ívarr had said about the changes in us. Most of my instincts were of a beta male. We toed the line of the alpha and omega. I didn't quite have the same nurturing instinct that Hiroshi had, or the careful protectiveness that Roan modeled.

If I was a true omega now, would those instincts develop? Would I be able to help Hiroshi raise his pups? With our mate bond, would they feel like mine too? Was that something that I wanted?

What about Asher? Hiroshi had been right to be worried about me visiting. A gaping hole was widening along our bond, some of it the distance, some because of the walls I'd built to protect myself.

I had to face the truth that bringing this news to Asher could set him off. He and his lion were unpredictable right now. This could push him over the edge. He already was worried he was a subpar alpha. Knowing that Roan had given Hiroshi two pups, while I still had none, could cause a major fracture in my bond.

Still, I couldn't hide this from him. His nose was better than anyone I'd ever encountered. He could scent Hiroshi on me, like he'd detected hugs I'd had from Roan. He knew Hiroshi's scent almost as well as mine, so he would know the differences straight away.

One elf led me through the portal to the cabin close by that they had set up as their meeting place. Asher's home in the nearby town was too far away from Hiroshi for me to feel comfortable. It sucked having two bonds pulling at me sometimes.

I was early, so I hadn't expected Asher to be waiting for me. There he was, though, sitting on the floor in a lotus position, meditating.

He must have been at it for a while because his body was slick with sweat. The room was warm, but not overly so.

"Hey, babe. I'm just doing the cool down. Gimme a sec."  
He cracked an eye open and sent me a smile.

Despite the last few weeks, I still loved my mate dearly. He was my choice in hard times and good. I just hoped that we could get past this. His reaction to me was a positive sign things were changing for the better. He was so calm, almost cheerful. This was a side of him I hadn't seen in so long.

Asher stretched, giving me a perfect view of that ass as he bent over. He smirked as he caught me watching him, then prowled towards me, wrapping me up in a tight embrace. "Hmm, I missed you," he said, pressing a kiss to my forehead. He made me feel like a treasure.

Our lips met in a sweet kiss. This was the Asher that I'd missed. The one that I needed. Suddenly, that became an urge that drove my hands for his belt. I needed him inside me.

He kissed me back, running his hands all over me. After a long moment, he pulled away, sniffing at me. "What's different?" He drew my scent in, closing his eyes and halting my hands. "I smell Hiroshi, but not?"

"Um, can people outside hear us?" I started working on my own clothes.

"No, they made it so I can't shift at all in here. You can, so they don't need to be so close. Why? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, I just need you. I can tell you after." I got my pants and underwear off, Asher's pupils dilated as he scented my slick.

"Okay," he agreed, untying the laces on his pants. He was naked and hard underneath.

Fresh slick flowed from my hole at the sight of him. It had been too long since I'd last felt Asher inside me.

Ash hoisted me into his arms and pressed me against the wall. He eased slowly into me as he took my lips in another gentle kiss.

This was different from the last time we were together. He put my pleasure first as he rocked into me, showing me with his body how much he loved me.

For the first time in a long while, it felt like he was truly being open to me. I could feel all his emotions over the bond. His love for me, his joy at being so connected, the sorrow at being apart. This was the man that I'd fallen for.

I cried, tears running freely down my face as I came apart on his cock. Asher pumped harder inside me, prolonging my orgasm until I felt his knot expanding, stretching me around him and locking us together.

With great care, he eased us to the floor, making sure not to jostle me too much. I lay in his arms, perfectly content to be held and take in his scent.

Asher seemed to realize that this wasn't the time for talking. He just pressed kisses on all the skin he could reach. Then waited until his knot deflated and he slipped from my body. I winced at the feeling of slick and cum running over my skin.

Reluctantly, he let me go, using his discarded shirt to clean me up. He kept sniffing me as I put back on my clothes.

"What is that scent?" he finally asked.

It was time to rip the bandaid off. “Hiroshi is pregnant. It’s twins.” I tried not to show any feelings about it, not only because I was worried about how Asher would take it, but because I wasn’t sure how I felt.

“That’s great news.” He paused, reading my face. “It is, isn’t it? Does Hiroshi not want them? I’m sure Roan would be okay if he had an abortion. Roan would never —“

“No, not that,” I cut in. “Hiroshi is delighted. Really, he is. He wants them.”

“Then what is it?” Asher looked confused. He wasn’t the only one. Maybe I should have processed my own feelings a little first before I went to see my mate. I’d had some time. I could have rescheduled.

“I dunno. I —“

Asher came closer, pulled me into his arms, resting his head on mine. “We’ve had so many changes so quickly. It’s okay to feel conflicted.”

“That’s all this therapy talking,” I teased. Goddess, it was wonderful to be in his arms with no tension or fear. I wanted to keep this Asher forever.

He laughed, a loud, hearty sound that made my heart feel lighter than air. “I guess it is. Hopefully, I’ll get to come home to you soon. Then we can figure out a way, Roan and I, to make our omegas happy.”

Hope bloomed. “Seriously?”

“Yes. I mean it. My lion is so peaceful today. He says —“  
Asher stiffened.

“What?”

Asher bent and took a deep inhale of my scent. His breath tickled my skin as he paced around me, just sniffing and thinking. He kept shaking his head like he was arguing with his lion. Eventually, he took a deep inhale, crouching at my stomach.

“Ash? You’re freaking me out. What’s happening?”

He looked at me, dual expressions warring on his face. Joy and fear.

“My lion says it isn’t just Hiroshi that’s pregnant. You have a cub in there.”



I stood stock still as I processed his words. Pregnant.

Thoughts flew through my mind. How was I supposed to do this? There were no birds in the pack that could have children. My cousin and his mate were betas like I had been. I couldn’t go to the aviary. They’d thrown me out for choosing to mate with Asher. The pride wasn’t any better. Jason was a good man, but they had few birds there.

Who was going to help me with this?

“Breathe babe,” Asher urged. “Take a deep breath in, let it out slowly. He went to the door and opened it to the guards

outside. “My mate is having a panic attack. We need to get him back to the pack.”

“Can you not use your alpha influence over your mate?” One guard asked.

“No, not locked down like this. Plus, it’s a violation I don’t want to put him through. I’ve not used it before. I might hurt him.” He returned to my side, pressing a hand to my chest. “Breathe, sweetheart. It’s going to be okay. We’ll get you home.”

The guard entered and gave Asher a nod. “Reinforcements are on their way to the portal. We have alerted the other side. Come.”

Asher scooped me into his arms and took off at a run, the guards keeping pace easily alongside him.

Within moments we were through the portal, Asher’s single-minded focus not even letting him pause as the magic rushed over us. He dashed towards the mansion, a contingent of shifters and elves following us.

*Blake!* I heard Asher call over the pack bond. *I need you to help Tate!* His panic was clear as I gasped and wheezed. The little air that I could get into my lungs doing enough to keep me conscious, but that was about it. The world was dimming at the edges.

“Tate!” Asher yelled. “Breathe!”

Blake met us in the mansion’s yard. Dozens of shifters and elves surrounded us. Later I’d be embarrassed at how much of



a scene I'd made, but all I could do at that moment was suck in precious air and stay awake.

Our alpha stopped in front of us, letting out a wave of power as he commanded me to "relax." My lungs no longer felt like they were in a vise. "Breathe for me." Another wave of power washed over me and automatically, my lungs filled fully. He set a hand on my chest as he ordered me, "in, that's it. Hold. Good. Then let it out, slowly."

With Blake's help, my breathing returned to normal. My cheeks flushed as I got myself under control.

Asher was trembling as he held me. "Are you okay, Asher?" Blake asked.

"Yes, Alpha. My lion just wants to get Tate checked out. He's pregnant."

A gasp rippled through the assembled crowd. I tucked my head into Asher's chest.

"This is a miracle. The Luna has blessed us," Blake said with a grin. "Let's get you to the clinic."

I thought for a minute that the entire crowd was going to follow us, but a look from Blake had most of them scurrying away to do whatever tasks they had been doing before we arrived.

The elven guard stayed with us, watching Asher warily. "I'm okay, I swear. My lion just wants to check you are both healthy. He's over the moon."

"Do you —?" I said against his neck.

“What?” Ash whispered.

“Do you think he’ll be okay with Roan now that I’m pregnant with your cub?”

Asher stiffened slightly, then relaxed. “Maybe. He’s still angry. There’s still stuff we need to work out. I swear it, though. By the time you lay this egg, I will be home.”

“Lay an egg? I have to lay an egg?” My voice rose sharply, making my mate wince.

Blake laughed. “Of course. You give birth in your animal form, so that means eggs. Or probably just one egg. You’ll make a nest before it’s time to lay. Then you will keep the egg warm for a couple of weeks before your raven will help the cub out.”

“How —?”

“We’ve had birds in the pack before. A long time ago. I used to go with my mother to the omega compound and speak to the omegas.” He had a wistful smile on his face as he remembered that time.

“I’m sorry, alpha.”

“For what?”

“The scene I caused. Making you think of your mom. You must miss her.”

“First, you’ve done the impossible as a beta. You’ve become an omega and then got pregnant. We have omegas that haven’t managed that. Second, my mother was a lovely

woman mated to a terrible man. She's in a better place now. She's free. While we all miss her, I like to remember her. I hope she would be proud of the alpha I've become because of her."

"I'm sure she is."

"I think you need to spend some time with the other omegas. While you've been staying in their part of the compound, I fear that you've become isolated. It isn't good for omegas to live like that."

"I had Hiroshi, Asher and Roan. It wasn't so bad."

"I wasn't there after you became an omega," Asher pointed out. "I've been gone, and you've what? I bet you've just stayed in the house aside from doing your tasks. Have you seen anyone else socially?"

"We had visits from the Alpha Mate, Dakota and Jasper," I said sullenly. It felt like they were ganging up on me.

"Omegas need a community to thrive. They, more than anyone else, need that socialization that comes from being part of a larger family. They need bonds with other omegas. Hiroshi hasn't had that in so long. He can't provide that for you alone."

"So I need to be with the other omegas now I'm pregnant?" I could hear the petulance in my tone. I really wasn't handling the idea of being pregnant well.

"Yes, but I also think you should visit Janet."

“Who’s Janet?” Asher stole the question right out of my mouth.

“She’s an omega bear shifter. Ancient and often gifted by words from the goddess herself. She told Kade that Dakota needed to be in his life. That’s how he ended up meeting Jasper. Janet just knows things, ask Hiroshi. I’m sure she will have words for you. Scan first though.” Blake said cheerfully as he took me through the door.

“Tate? Are you okay?” James came rushing forward.

“I’m fine, I think,” I got out. Suddenly, I felt super nauseous. “Let me down,” I ordered Asher as I patted his arm. “Bathroom?”

James pointed toward the restrooms. I made a dash for it, only getting the door open before everything in my stomach came up. My knees shook, and I fell to the floor, landing in a pile of my vomit, making me retch again. There was nothing more inside me, having forgotten to eat all day with the shock of Hiroshi’s announcement.

“Hey, it’s okay. Let’s get you cleaned up.” Asher’s words were soft, his arms warm as he hoisted me, carrying me into an examination room.

“Get him stripped down. I’ll call Hiroshi to bring him some clothes. I’m sure he wants his other mate here,” Aldrin said, pulling a curtain around us.

“Is that safe?” I whispered. “What about Roan?”

“I’m sure he’ll keep his distance, but we have to learn to be close to each other for the sake of our mates and our babies. Whether or not he likes it, my lion has to accept that Roan is a part of our family. I’m not promising it will be smooth sailing, but I’ll do my best to be the mate you need before you have that egg.” Asher repeated his vow from earlier, making me believe it wasn’t just the shock of the events making him promise the world.

While my head had been spinning about doing the impossible, Asher had been thinking of the practicalities.

With our mating being unheard of, our blended family would be an experiment. Maybe poly relationships that included omegas and alphas would become normal.

By the time Asher had me stripped and redressed in a gown, Aldrin and James had all the equipment they needed to scan me to check if Asher’s nose was as accurate as I feared.

# REELING

## Roan

**H**iroshi was still stuck on my knot when we got the call. A daisy chain of pack messages finally reached our temporary home in the omega section. “Blake needs you both at the clinic,” was all that we had been told.

If I was honest, I was still reeling from the information overload from earlier. Of course, I was delighted I was going to be a father. Twins had been unexpected, but I’d love them both as the miracles that they were. I just don’t know what I expected.

Aldrin and James had talked a lot about vitamins and diet. Even sex had been up for discussion. Hiroshi was a very sex positive person. I just felt out of my depth around him since I could count on one hand how many people I’d slept with. So, I just sat there, not adding much to the conversation and wishing I could have taken notes.

The heat coming off my face had made James cast pitying glances my way. He hadn’t come from the Hayes pack, Kade’s biological father’s old pack, so he didn’t get it. There, they didn’t teach us much about sex and pleasuring your partner.

My experiences with Hiroshi, Tate and Asher had opened my eyes to just how little I knew about our bodies and the way to make them sing. It had made me feel inadequate until I'd learned my mate's body better.

Hiroshi had been all keyed up when we'd returned to the house, so I showed him with my lips and tongue just how much I appreciated him. The taste of his slick had sweetened to my tongue. I drank it down as I pulled an orgasm from him. Once sated and blissful, I'd made love to my mate gently, all too aware of the tiny lives growing inside him.

Weeks with him had done wonders for my stamina and he was leaking again before my knot grew, stretching him around it. I stroked him to completion as I came inside him.

We were panting and trading kisses when the call came through clearly enough to understand, having been a background noise amid our pleasure. A text chased it.

**Blake: Tate needs Hiroshi. You should both come. Asher is here.**

The text was too vague to understand, but impossible to ignore.

“We have to go!” Hiroshi was becoming frantic.

“Not until my knot goes down. I won't risk tearing something. They can wait a couple of minutes. We'll go in fur to be quicker.”

“Good idea.”

“Besides, Dr. Flemming said you needed to shift more with the two babies.” I reminded him, seriously.

“Since when is he Dr. Flemming? He’s Aldrin.”

“He’s our doctor now. It feels like I should be giving him the proper respect. We should listen to everything he says. Do all he said to do that you’ve noted down.” He’d taken notes during our chat since he was used to treating injuries and illnesses and not pregnant omegas. My face was straining with the effort to keep the smile off my face. While I was worried about Tate, Hiroshi would harm himself in an effort to get to the other omega.

Hiroshi ceased his wriggling and stared at me. “You’re teasing me, right?” He gave a mock glare. “You are!”

I wrapped my arms around him, holding him firmly spooned against me. “I just need you to relax before you damage something. You’ll be no use to Tate if you have to steal Aldrin away from him to heal you up.”

“Hmm, you have a point. I just don’t like the way that the message came through the link.”

“Neither do I, but what can we do?”

Hiroshi shrugged. I felt how tense his body was under me. His omega instincts urging him to care and defend his mate. Honestly, I thought omegas had it harder than alphas in that respect. Omegas would be driven to distraction, to actual harm, by their need to care for their family. I’d seen it with Kade. Even days after having the triplets and being utterly



exhausted, he needed to know everything that was happening in the pack to make sure everyone was happy.

Not having Kade over more often during my short-lived mating to three people had been horrible. It had stressed both of us. Keeping our distance went against our bond as friends, straining us when we both needed the support. Kade was my only family, especially since I wasn't ready to try talking some sense into my father. My dad was going to lose his mind about the babies. I hadn't told him about only having one mate now, or that Hiroshi had two. We hadn't healed enough from our last encounter to share that.

With the two babies coming, I appreciated even more that Kade had new priorities. I could feel our relationship shifting again. Perhaps it would bring us closer together. I would love for Kade and Hiroshi to be closer. I wanted them both to bond as family.

My mind whirred with thoughts until my knot finally shrank, allowing me to pull free of Hiroshi. We wiped ourselves down, then went outside before shifting. The winter chill nipped at my skin until it gave way to fur.

We ran together, my charcoal wolf alongside Hiroshi's amazing Japanese tiger. They had been one of the largest species of tiger in the wild before the animals became extinct. It was amazing to watch him prowling towards the clinic that held his other mate.

*I'll hang back. Asher is in there. I don't want a fight.*

*Okay*, Hiroshi agreed. He reached for the pad that opened the door with one massive paw. *Love you*, he called to me before disappearing inside.

I watched his tail twitch and he came to a stop inside the doorway. *I've never said that before. To anyone. I mean it, though.*

*I love you too. Now go check on your other mate. Keep the bond open.*

*Okay*, I felt his smile and a gentle touch run through the fur at the nape of my neck.

Hiroshi shifted and picked up a robe that was hanging up just inside.

*Alpha, I'm outside.*

*Roan... are you ever going to call me Blake?*

I sent the impression of a shrug. *Maybe. I'm staying back so you can focus on Tate. Is he okay?*

*Asher thinks Tate is pregnant.*

It felt like the world stopped. My former mate. A beta that was now an omega was pregnant. I couldn't even imagine how he was feeling. Over the last few days, I'd gotten the impression he didn't enjoy being an omega.

Still, this changed everything. What if he wasn't the only one that could change? What had caused it? That had lingered in my mind since the morning they both woke as different designations. Was this because of me and Hiroshi? Was The

Luna punishing them, turning them into something they hated for playing with fated bonds?

*Roan? Tate's scent has changed. They are just about to do the scan. Asher says you can come closer. He can handle it.*

Hiroshi beckoned me closer.

I moved inside the door, using my paw to open it like Hiroshi had. Such a useful feature, I distantly thought, everything feeling disconnected from reality. I followed the scent of my mate down the hallway and waited outside a room, the open door allowing me a glimpse inside.

Tate was stretched out on a bed in a gown open to his groin, a blanket over his lap. He looked pale and worried. Asher stood by his side calmly, just holding his hand as if he was the most precious thing in the world.

Hiroshi moved further into the room and asked Asher if he could touch Tate before laying a hand on his shoulder. I watched Hiroshi reach up to kiss Asher's cheek. "I've missed you, my friend."

Asher wrapped his other arm around Hiroshi. "I've missed you, too."

"Are you feeling okay?" Hiroshi asked Tate.

Tate didn't answer, panic lining his features. The poor omega looked terrified. My alpha instinct surged, making me take a step closer. A step too close for Asher to bear.

A snarl ripped through the air. I retreated a step. "Stay there, please, Roan," Asher begged. The fear in his voice stalling me

more than his words could. He hated this as much as I did.

I had talked about it to Hiroshi, how losing my other mates had shredded my heart. That month with them had been difficult, yet I'd held onto hope that we could make it work. That because the bond had worked, then we were meant to be.

Part of it was the failure. A feeling that I wasn't used to feeling since I'd made my new home in Sweetwater.

The rest was my bonds with them. I missed the easy affection with Tate. The banter with Asher. I missed their friendships, the closeness that we had tried building.

I missed not having to be in charge all the time. Asher controlled a lot of our interactions, his personality much more in line with a natural alpha than my own. Ceding control to him was easy.

Things at home were strained without Asher. Hiroshi was Tate's Sunshine, keeping their spirits up, but I knew he felt a lot of guilt over not missing Asher as he should.

Why hadn't they been more open before they'd dragged me into this? Maybe it would have saved us a lot of pain.

I watched from the edge of the room as Tate was scanned.

"There it is. That's your baby. Just one, luckily," James said with a cheerful smile. I caught the pinch of his mouth, causing a spike of anxiety to rush through the bond, before Hiroshi relaxed. He'd clearly seen the same thing as me. "Now, we will have to do a lot of tests on you. I'm really sorry Tate. You

must be sick of being poked and prodded by now. We just need to know what caused this.”

“Why, though?”

It was Aldrin that answered. “To see if we can replicate it.” He was frowning.

“But why?” Tate was getting worked up. Hiroshi’s delight slipped from his face, a trickle of fear working through him and over the bond. Asher became tense. He looked a second away from snapping.

Almost without thinking, my wolf prepared to step in, to be a barrier between Asher and the omegas.

“I don’t think you understand what this means for betas everywhere.” Aldrin spoke gently, clearly seeing Tate on the verge of a breakdown. “So many betas would love to be in your position right now.”

“I wish it was literally any other beta than me.” Tears slid down Tate’s cheeks. “I don’t want this.”

Asher tensed, and I watched his claws break free in a partial shift. He seemed to fight for control of his lion before my eyes.

With him distracted, I slunk closer, nosing Hiroshi’s thigh to get him to move. He gave up his hold on Tate’s hand and moved behind me, fingers in my fur.

“Do you —“ Asher swallowed, then tried to speak again. “Does this mean you don’t want the baby?”

There was a protracted silence. I backed up, pushing Hiroshi out of the room, sensing the coming explosion.

*Protect Tate.* I sent down the pack bond to Aldrin.

He was already shifting, his gigantic brown bear breaking loose of his clothes as Tate said the words I feared he would.

Asher stepped away from his mate, backing into the corner as far as he could as he waited for an answer.

“I don’t know.”



The instant the words were spoken, Asher’s lion burst free. The change was instantaneous, as the white lion roared his pain and rage. Bottles rattled on shelves, the walls and floor shook. All the while, Aldrin’s bear stood firm in front of his patient.

James shifted too, his bear also imposing, making the room feel claustrophobic. I backed out further, pushing Hiroshi into the hall.

*Shift.* I urged. His tiger was bigger, stronger than he was in human form. Better able to protect the two lives inside him.

I felt him drop the robe to the floor before his tiger’s head butted at my side, reassuring me he was safe and well.

Inside the room, the two bears had backed the snarling and hissing lion into the furthest away corner from the poor

omega. A terrified Tate had slipped from the bed, and was shuffling towards us.

The movement caught Asher's attention. He growled. I could only imagine what was happening in the bond. Tate looked stricken and Asher's noises were pain filled.

Within a blink, Tate shifted, taking flight and escaping the room into the corridor and out the open door where Blake stood waiting in his wolf form.

*Move.* I urged Hiroshi, sensing Asher was about to pounce to track down his fleeing mate. Hiroshi heeded my words, following the raven and stopping next to our alpha.

I joined them, wishing that this was just a nightmare and not our reality. Tate shouldn't have to fear his mate in order to have control over his body. If he didn't want the baby, no one would make him carry it to term, right?

My thoughts must have rushed down my bond with Hiroshi and into the pack bond. I felt my alpha jolt. *No, Tate,* he vowed. While he directed his words to Tate, all of us heard them. *If you don't want this child, then we will help you. Your body is yours. Your mate cannot make that decision for you.*

The raven flew in circles above us. *You swear?*

*I do.* Blake promised. *The same as I would never have asked Kade to have our babies if he hadn't wanted them. I won't allow a member of my pack to be treated like an incubator. Yes, this baby is a miracle to us, but if it isn't to you, then I understand. You've had only a couple of weeks to adjust to*

*something that other shifters have their entire lives to come to terms with.*

Slowly, Tate fluttered closer, taking a perch on Hiroshi's head. The tiger doing his adorable chuffing purr I loved when he knew his mate was safe.

Aldrin and James fled the building, having kept Asher at bay for as long as they could. Signs of stress and sweat lining their bodies.

The lion ran for the door, spotting his mate and roaring at how close I was to him.

*Hold.* Blake ordered me. *He needs to get over himself.* Our alpha was pissed off in a way I hadn't seen since Rincoln.

I flinched, but held steady.

*Stop.* Blake barked to Asher. The wave of power rolled over the lion, halting him immediately. *Asher, this is your final warning. Get your lion under control or you will be exiled from this pack. I will petition the council to dissolve your bond with Tate for mate abuse. We have grounds.*

Hiroshi's tail twitched. His fear ran down the bond. I felt some guilt there, though his thoughts were closed off. He clearly thought this would be a suitable solution for the situation. It frustrated my mate that Asher kept putting Tate through misery.

With a gasp, Asher shifted into his human form. "Alpha, please!" he begged.



*No. You have no right to another person's body. Tate gets to choose. Always. If you cannot come to terms with this, then you cannot be a member of this pack, or a competent mate.*

“But Alpha —“

Blake shifted. Standing tall in front of the other alpha as he spoke for the gathering crowd to hear. “No. We have tolerated this for too long. You are irrational and dangerous. You either fix this, and soon, or you leave. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Alpha.”

“Tate?” Blake’s voice gentled as he turned to the raven still on Hiroshi’s head. Tate was shivering with fear. “Take your time to choose. Though you only have a week or two at the very most.”

Tate took flight again before landing softly and shifting. “You’d truly let me choose?”

Blake took in the crowd. “Every omega may choose to share their body with a new life. Babies are a privilege, but not everyone can bring new life into the world.” His tone gentled as he spoke to the frightened omega. “Tate, your bond with your alpha, with your omega mate, is so strained right now. With Hiroshi pregnant, you’d have someone to go through it all with, yet if it’s too scary for you to contemplate, then we support that. We are your pack, your family. Anything you need, we will provide it.”

The former beta chewed on those words for a moment as he brushed his fingers over Hiroshi’s fur subconsciously, both

taking comfort in the action.

He looked at his alpha, “The Luna gave me this gift for a reason. I’d be a fool to throw it away, no matter how it scares me. As my mate, you have no right to tell me who I can be friends with, how I live my life. You are supposed to be my partner in all things. My best friend and support system. I shouldn’t be terrified to tell you I’m unsure about being pregnant. It shouldn’t be up to our pack Alpha to step in to protect me from you. This is your last chance, Ash. Your lion needs to be under control. Get over Roan’s place as my friend and family. Get over yourself.” His words broke off as tears splashed to the ground.

Blake took the omega into his arms, passing on the comfort that I couldn’t give him without fear. “Thank you, Alpha,” I heard Tate say. “I’m going to keep the baby. Will you help us?”

“Of course.”

Asher sagged to the ground. Grief and regret written all over his face. “I swear it, Tate, by the time our baby is here, I’ll be better. For you.”

# ADJUSTMENTS

## Hiroshi

**O**ur home was a tense place to be after we got Tate home from the clinic. None of us wanted to address the elephant in the room, and I found it hard to be my usual cheerful self. Tate needed me to be his Sunshine, to make him feel less scared and alone, but I was so... sad.

When I'd first met Tate and Asher, they had been newly bonded. Still in that honeymoon phase of their relationship until they had slowly felt like something was missing in their lives. I'd thought that had been me.

Then we started our relationship. It was convenient at first, to have two betas that knew my body so well for my heats. Then I just wanted to spend more and more time with them. Since they were always around in the pride, it was easy to strike up a friendship with them. Then it became more.

I loved them. Perhaps not in the same ways. Asher was family, one of my closest friends, but Tate was my heart in the way that Roan was my soul. They were the missing jigsaw pieces of me. They helped form the complete picture of Hiroshi.

With Tate hurting and my fear for his baby, I had to push my feelings aside and just concentrate on me. A dark part of me felt anger at losing this moment where I got to celebrate my babies. I was bitter that I didn't get to share my joy with Roan, just the two of us.

My tiger was quick to make a chuffing noise of disgust at me. *I know*, I told them. *Just give me a minute, okay?* My tiger wasn't a hard-ass. We had a genial relationship. A true partnership, though I had been neglecting them with the bonding and the aftermath with Asher. They seemed to understand the predicament I'd been in. I sent love down our bond in thanks.

"Tate?" I finally broke the silence of the room.

"Yeah?" His voice was broken, the stain of his tears still on his beautiful face. His hair curled in wisps over his forehead. It needed to be cut. Maybe I could do that for him. Pamper him a little.

"I know you said to everyone that you want to keep the baby, but you know you can change your mind, right? If it's not what you want, then I can help you. I just want you to know, either way, I'm not leaving and I won't judge you."

Fresh tears flowed down his crumpled face. He leaned into me, and I pulled him closer, trying to give him some of my strength. "I want it. I'm just scared." He sobbed. "The baby is a gift. It would be wrong to throw it away. I just don't know how I'm going to do this!"

“Hey,” I soothed. “You aren’t alone. I’m here. Every step of the way, I’ll be with you. I have faith that Asher will do as he promised —“

“What if he doesn’t? What if Alpha Blake ends our bond?”

“Then you have us. You also have the pack behind you. Blake won’t let you down.” I rubbed his back and ran a hand through his curls. “We’ll have our new house by then. Then we can share childcare duties. We can let the babies play here in the omega area with the other children.” I smiled at him, trying to reassure him by sending my hope and happiness down our bond. “You are not alone. Blake won’t cast you out for not having an alpha mate,” I said firmly. My faith was absolute in our alpha. There was no way he’d let Tate down.

“I know you’re right, I do. I just worry.”

While I understood his worry and confusion, it really hurt that he didn’t consider our bond in his thoughts. Did he think that I’d just ignore his child because it wasn’t biologically mine? That baby inside him belonged to us all. To this strange, messed up family we were creating. I considered him a parent to my babies. Why didn’t he think of me as a parent to his?

“And that’s fine. It’ll take time and action, not words to make you believe. I’ll be with you every step of the way.” I cupped his face and pressed a kiss to his chapped lips. “Now, how about some pampering?”

A tiny smile flickered along his face before taking root. “I’d love that. Thank you, Sunshine.”

It took a little time, but I soon had everything set up; a silly romantic comedy on the TV, some snacks, a bowl of warm water infused with some baby safe oils to soak his feet in, and some face masks.

First, I trimmed his hair, gave his head and face a massage, before giving him a manicure. A pedicure would follow his soak.

Tate sat and enjoyed the movie with me, laughing at some of the ridiculous things the pair on screen got themselves into. I finally felt that he was relaxed and happy when Roan came home, having had to go into the office to put reports into the council.

I felt Tate's sadness as Roan kissed me hello. *Do you miss him?* I asked him privately over our bond.

*Yeah, he answered sadly. I love Asher, but Roan is a good man. A great mate. He's like Alpha Blake, a gentle alpha male. I just wish it had worked out with the four of us.*

*Me too, but there wasn't enough love there. We rushed it. The sadness was crippling for a second. It stole my breath. It was all my fault. That's on me. I didn't want to wait for Roan any longer and never realized that Asher never really wanted me as a mate. He loves me, he just was never in love with me.*

"I'm going to let you bond. I think you need it. It'll give me time to make us all some dinner." Roan left the room.

Tate sighed. "I don't want our bond to affect your bond with him."

“I can’t promise it won’t, but you and I are a package deal. Our alphas just have to deal with that.”



One Month Later

*Tests and more tests.* Tate grumbled down our deepening bond.

*I know,* I answered, equally frustrated for him. It was almost daily that the scientists and Aldrin were taking samples of blood, skin and hair, to test Tate for everything and anything. Again. His pregnancy had them needing to start from scratch with the testing, which sucked for him. They were testing his genetic make up against that of another raven shifter and his cousin, Jake. The two profiles were useful in trying to pinpoint what had happened. They were getting close to a breakthrough, though that was little comfort to Tate.

“Now that you have passed the point where an abortion is possible,” Ívarr began, “we have decided that the tests must end. This is the last day. All checks going forward will be the usual prenatal exams for your health and that of the baby.”

Tate’s body sagged with the relief that we both felt. I hated he was being used like a pincushion. I was healing away his bruises daily, but he’d developed a fear of the needles that I couldn’t just whisk away. “Thank the goddess!” he exclaimed. He smiled at Ívarr. “I’m sorry —“

“No. It’s quite alright. This ordeal has been more than most could cope with. The Luna must have chosen you for your fortitude.”

“So the baby is okay? Is Tate healthy?” Asher asked from his place across the room. Elves that Hakeem had picked for the task guarded him on both sides. Both were used to working with feral shifters from their land.

Tate frowned but said nothing. I didn’t like the implication that Tate’s well-being was lesser than that of the baby, but I kept my mouth shut and was careful not to telegraph my feelings down the bond or to the room.

My mate had seen his alpha mate just a few times in the last month. It was only in the last week that the elves and Hakeem felt Asher was stable enough to come here to visit Tate and see the progress of the pregnancy.

We hadn’t celebrated Christmas, not that we were Christian, but we liked the winter holiday of sharing gifts and having a meal together as a family. The pack had canceled their yule and solstice celebrations after another threat to the babies. A shifter from an unknown pack had broken into the compound, getting far too close to the house before the elves caught him. Before they could question him, he killed himself with a potion that was either his back up, or meant for Elliotte.

Needless to say, both events had stripped us all of any desire to celebrate any of the winter holidays. We ate and traded small gifts, but it wasn’t the same. We were aware of the gaping hole that Asher left in our lives. The guilt over my



mate being separated from his alpha mate ate at me continually.

While Tate wanted Asher to be involved in the pregnancy, there was a tension that wasn't easing between them. It made me concerned that while Asher might be allowed to play an active role in his baby's life, Tate might never forgive him for his reaction when he thought Tate might not want their child.

I honestly could understand Tate's reaction. Roan and I had spoken about it at length. Roan could look at it from the outside, since he wasn't mated to either Tate or Asher. He saw and understood Tate's fear.

Ívarr looked at Tate for permission. "The baby is perfectly healthy. I am concerned that Tate has been dealing with an undue amount of stress. I've made my recommendation that he stop the flights for the pack —" Tate tried to interrupt. "For the time being only. Just until that blood pressure comes down a little and you put on some of the weight that you've lost."

"You've lost weight?" Asher shot an almost accusatory look my way.

"Hiroshi has been feeding me. Roan cooks for us." Tate gave Asher a quelling look at his disgusted expression when Roan's name was mentioned. "I just haven't felt hungry. That's all."

Ívarr prevented Asher from digging himself in deeper by adding, "that will be the stress. So no flying and some rest for a few days. No more visits to the clinic for another week." Asher looked like he wanted to speak up, but subsided with a

grumble. “I’d also like to get you both to agree to no mate visits for the next week.”

Asher stood. “What? No way! I need to check on Tate and the baby!”

“No. You don’t. I will bring news to you daily. You are the primary source of Tate’s agitation. So, therefore, he needs a break from you as much as he does from work and the testing.” Honestly, I wanted to hug Ívarr for his words. He saw easily what Asher could not.

I felt Tate’s relief and wanted to cry for them both. This entire thing was tearing them apart, and I hated it. Asher was so different from the man I thought I’d loved. Tate was so sad all the time. There wasn’t enough sunshine in me to lift him up out of the dark.

Asher sat down despondently. “Does that mean you’ll recommend the bond is severed to Alpha Blake?” he asked Ívarr.

“No. It doesn’t mean that at all. I’ve been hearing from my people about your progress in our realm. There you are perfectly calm and rational. We need you to spend time here around other alpha males and see your reaction to them. This needs to be done away from any omegas for their safety and mental well-being. We want you to get better, Asher. To be a good alpha mate for your omega. As it stands, you are too unstable.”



I took Tate home after our meeting, having been excused from healing duties for the day. Aldrin and James had cut my hours to part time because of the twins, not wanting me to put them in danger by over exerting myself to heal others when we had Aldrin available and the elven magic to assist him.

The little house was empty. Our belongings had all been packed up, the ridiculous amount of them cluttering the hall almost to the door. It was surreal to think we had only been living with the pack for a few months but somehow had accumulated all this stuff.

We had decided not to wait for Asher to return to us full-time before moving. The pressure that it put on Tate was too much. We didn't want him to feel like he had to have Asher with us before we could move, and we also wanted to settle in properly, buy furniture for the nurseries and find an appropriate room for Tate to nest in well before we got too big to enjoy any of that.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, but I ignored it. I knew it was another call from my mom asking me to return to Japan before I couldn't fly any longer. She had heard about the babies. The entire shifter world was abuzz with the news that a former beta male was pregnant and that I was also expecting twins, the second multiple birth here in Sweetwater in less than a year.

With a fated mate match, there was nothing my family could say about Roan not being a tiger, too. Yet they had

plenty to say about my raven mate. Insisting that I couldn't possibly be bonded to another person.

Accepting that Tate was also my mate was a step too far for my former clan and family. They, like a lot of other shifters, believed that I wasn't bonded to either, and just wanted to cover an unwanted pregnancy with fantastical tales of two mates.

It struck deep, a wound that would never heal that they thought we were lying. That they believed something was wrong with my bond with Roan to allow me to be with someone else.

There were even those in the shifter community that hated what Tate had become. Saying we were playing with The Luna's gifts. We were against nature.

We were getting threats to the little house, another reason for moving, and daily there were requests that the council prove us to be frauds. That we be cast out for being liars and cheaters.

Our move couldn't come quick enough.

My time away from my family, and in the Sweetwater pack, had given me clarity. I hadn't seen that I'd been allowing them to control my life. I hadn't lived with them full time for twenty years, but had still allowed them to dictate who I would be mated to. Why hadn't I found Blake sooner? He could have saved me from the mess with Jared.

Mother firmly believed that father had the right to decide my future because I was an omega. That my grandparents could have a say where I was not.

Still, if they hadn't pushed me towards Jared, I might never have met Roan and I wouldn't be without him now.

"You need to stop ignoring her calls," Tate chided from his place on the sofa beside me.

Sighing, I slumped back in my seat. "You're right."

"Just rip the band aid off. I'll be here with you." He squeezed me close before giving me space.

I needed to be brave. First, I messaged Roan and asked if he could leave a few minutes early so he could join us on the call. If I waited for him, I would chicken out and put it off again. For weeks now, I'd been letting this fester.

After a few minutes, I took a deep breath and fiddled with my phone, placing it on the coffee table, propped so they could see us from the sofa. I decided a video call would be the best. My family needed to see Tate, see my marks, and finally recognize that I was happy with my life as it was. I might miss parts of Japan, the culture and some of my family, but I'd grown and changed from the boy I'd been when I'd left. Sweetwater was my home now.

Mother answered the call, "*Hiroshi-kun, you have been ignoring my calls.*" My mother ignored Tate next to me and spoke in clipped Japanese.

*“Okaasan, I apologize. Where is Otousan?”* I asked for my father, the more reasonable of the pair. *“I would like to speak to him. Could we also speak in English? My mate does not understand Japanese, though he has learned some terms,”* I asked my mother in Japanese, her preferred way of speaking with me.

*“Where is Roan-san? I would like to meet him properly,”* She continued in Japanese.

*“He is on his way, Okaasan. Please speak in English. Tate is also my mate and he cannot speak the language,”* I pleaded again for her to be polite and switch. She spoke fluent English.

“It is impossible for this pretender to be your mate.” This she finally spoke in English, fire in her eyes and a look of distaste on her face.

Tate flinched, his mouth gaped. His shock reverberated down the bond.

*“Okaasan,”* I accidentally slipped into Japanese. “Mother,” I repeated, this time in English, “please. Look,” I inclined my neck, letting my bite mark show, then I did the other side. “Two bites for two mates.”

“Impossible.”

*“Okaasan!”*

“No, Hiroshi-kun. This is madness. This is not the way of our goddess. An omega needs an alpha. Not both. It is one mate for the rest of your life.” Her voice became shrill as she ranted at us. “This is wrong. Unnatural. It will teach those

babies the wrong ways. You must come home before they are born to save them.”

“What about my mates?”

“Roan-san may come with you. This pretender cannot. He is not your mate. He belongs to another alpha. The mad one that your pack leader should put down. Disgrace! Attacking an omega is a crime punishable by death.”

“Did you call for Jared’s death when he raped me?” I demanded, tears welling. Part of me had always known that she would act this way. It was why I’d delayed this call for so long.

“Of course not. He has explained that you consented.”

“*Okaasan* —“ I begged for understanding in that one word. “Mother!”

She seemed to realize that she had crossed a line. “He admitted to being too rough. We cannot have such a precious omega be so badly mistreated.”

“He raped me, Mama,” I begged her to understand that what she believed cut me, my voice wobbling with the strain of holding back the tears. “Coerced consent is not consent. They trapped me in a room with him. It was Jared or the guys waiting outside to use me.”

That made her pause and soften. “We will speak of this another time. Now you have your fated, Jared cannot touch you. When are you coming home?”

“I am not coming back. Roan is my home. His family is here. My alpha mate has decided that Sweetwater is our home. We are moving house so that there is room for Tate and his baby, too. It’s a lovely house. I could send you pictures.”

“We will come visit. To help when your babies arrive.” She was becoming rigid again. Cold and unfeeling.

“Thank you, Mother. With three babies in the house, we will certainly need the help.”

“This other baby is not of our concern. It belongs to the out-of-control alpha and the pretend omega —“ Tate flinched.

“*Okaasan!*“ She seemed less rigid when I appealed to her in Japanese.

My father came into view, obviously drawn by the disturbance. “*Otousan!* Father! Please, come meet Tate, my other mate. Roan is on his way.“ I used my father’s appearance as a distraction and hoped, likely in vain, for his support.

“Hello,” my father said politely. I could never get a read on the man, but knew him to be the more reasonable out of my parents. I just hoped he would pull through for me. He didn’t ask to see my marks or demand an explanation, he just said, “your grandfather has been doing his research.” He looked at Tate this time, no condemnation in his expression or tone.

“The goddess has spoken to him. He believes that this mating is an omen of good fortune. A return to a more fertile time for shifters. Given that you are both pregnant, you, Hiro-kun, with twins, I am inclined to agree.”



Beside him, mother gasped. I flopped back onto the sofa and placed a hand on my stomach. It was already rounding. Tate's arm came around me for comfort. "Thank you, Father. Please thank Grandfather for his support."

"Of course, Hiro-kun. Please don't leave it for so long. I miss you. All the family do. Call soon so that I can meet your alpha mate. I need to speak with my mate or I would wait for him." He reached over and disconnected the call, leaving Tate and I in a stunned silence.

"Wow. Now I see why you waited. Your mom almost makes Ash look reasonable right now." Tate started laughing, his chest heaving with his chuckles, his face red.

Unable to resist his joy, I grinned. A hysterical laugh burbled up, breaking loose as Roan entered the house.

My mate found me and Tate laughing together, his confused expression making us giggle harder.

# RELIEF

## Tate

When Ívarr had told Asher straight that he wanted to give me a break from our meetings and the testing, I was relieved. I loved Asher completely. My mate had been my rock for so long that I think that he'd neglected himself. He'd allowed things to fester that he really should have dealt with. His time with the elves was what he needed to heal from past trauma and recent events so that he could be the alpha that both me and our child needed.

Roan looked uncomfortable as he laid down his cutlery, finished with yet another excellent meal that he'd prepared. He had listened carefully as Hiroshi had explained his call with his family and while I had detailed my appointment at the clinic.

“Look, this house is just too small for us. I... well —“

“Just tell us,” I prompted.

“I know we said we'd do this without Asher, but the plan was for next week. But how about we just get some help from the pack and move what we can tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow?” Hiroshi echoed my words.

“Yeah, I messaged Larken, and he said he’d round up some people. I have to pop into the office in the afternoon, but I can do some of it in the morning. If you both agree, I can hire a van.”

“What about the factory? Could they not loan you one?” I asked.

Roan shook his head. “No, I thought about that, but Dakota said they have deliveries to do. With the extra security, everything is taking twice as long to exit and enter the compound, so they are backed up.”

I looked at Hiroshi. “I’m happy to go ahead if you are. It’d be nice not to have to share a bathroom all the time.”

“Yeah, it’d be great to buy stuff for the babies. My family wants to see our registry, but I couldn’t give them the list until we had somewhere to put any deliveries.”

My heart gave a pang at Hiroshi’s casual talk about his family. I missed mine so much. They would never have understood my love for two different men, especially since both were big cats rather than ravens. They had drunk the kool aid of species purity over in the aviary.

Hiroshi seemed to sense what I was feeling, although I thought I’d locked the bond down tight.

Just the idea of moving had a smile rising on my face. Roan had never made me feel out of place, like I didn’t belong with them.

“Tate, Blake said that he wants you to make up a registry, too. With all the testing and everything that the elves have done, he believes the pack has to compensate you, and that means spoiling that ‘little miracle’, as he calls your baby, with all the things your heart could desire,” Roan informed me from beside the dishwasher. I must have blocked out the end of dinner by getting lost in my thoughts.

“I couldn’t.”

Hiroshi gasped. “Tate! You have to! We can do some shopping while Roan makes the arrangements for tomorrow. Is that okay, Roan?”

Roan gave his mate an indulgent smile. “Exactly what I was thinking. Tate needs to rest and get that blood pressure down. Why don’t you take my laptop into the bedroom and get comfy? I’ll pack us a couple of days’ worth of stuff to drop off in the morning. Our new furniture is mostly in the warehouse.”

I blanked out the rest of what Roan and Hiroshi said. Could I really use money from the pack for my baby? I ran my hand over my slightly rounded stomach, still unable to believe that it was really happening.

Unsure, I reached out to the Alpha Mate. Kade had spoken to me a couple of times, just on calls, or when I’d seen him at the big house with Roan working. He’d insisted that I come to him if I needed anything now that I was pregnant. Aldrin and James, his grandparents, often asked to let Kade know how I was doing and I never denied them. It was nice to have so many caring people surrounding me.

**Tate: Am I really supposed to use pack funds to make a baby registry and get furniture and stuff for the baby?**

It didn't take him long to reply, which was surprising considering how he had his hands full with the pack, a mate, three babies, and a council position.

**Alpha Mate, Kade: Oh my goddess! Please set up a registry ASAP! The elves have been wanting to make you stuff, but they don't know what style you like. They are obsessed with babies - please hire one as a nanny. They will pay you! (I'm kidding, but the pack pays for that if you are returning to work). We are here and anything you need will be provided by the pack and the elves, since you had to endure all that testing. Call it compensation.**

**Tate: Are you sure? It seems like a lot.**

**Alpha Mate, Kade: Absolutely. Please, do me a favor and pick out a full nursery's worth of furniture before these elves drive me to the brink. They mean well, they really do, but it's a lot. They owe you. This is payment. Oh, and I have clothes you can have if you want. I think we are about the same size.**

The Alpha Mate was the sweetest.

I didn't quite see it as they owed me anything. All they had done was try to figure out how this had happened. I knew they wanted to see if what was going on with us was a way to unlock their fertility. They'd been told in a prophecy that the key was with the shifters. They took that literally.

**Tate: Okay. I'll make a list. Clothes might be handy, too. I'm expanding quickly.**

**Alpha Mate, Kade: \*gif\* happy dance**

My laugh burst free, startling both Roan and Hiroshi.  
“Sorry, I was texting with the Alpha Mate. Shall we go do this list?”

Roan smiled at me. “Go get yourself into bed. I'll bring the laptop and anything else you need. Is there anything in particular that you want packed?”

I thought about it for a minute. “Just comfortable clothes. Sweats and things. It won't be long before I need maternity things. Thankfully, Kade said I can have some of his things.”

“I can pick those up tomorrow afternoon when I go into the office,” Roan offered.

“Thanks, but there's no rush. I've lost a couple of pounds with the stress, so I've got time.”

Hiroshi ushered me into the bedroom, getting under the covers with me and snuggling close. “This is exciting, isn't it? I'm so happy I have you to share this with.”

In all my worrying about being pregnant and things with Asher, I'd neglected my omega mate and his pregnancy. It made me feel like shit that my Sunshine had been trying to keep his spirits up for the both of us and I'd hardly given him affection or care.

“How are you feeling? I'm sorry, I haven't been a very good mate recently.” I nuzzled his soft hair, enjoying the grapefruit

scent of him.

“I feel good. Occasional nausea, but only when my blood sugar gets low. Don’t feel bad. It’s been good having a distraction from worrying about these two.” He rubbed his hand over his belly protectively. I’d caught him doing that a lot of late.

“Still. I should have asked more about what was happening with you. Those babies are precious and I’m excited to meet them.”

“You are?”

“Of course.” Roan entered the room, giving us a soft look as we lay together in the big bed. He handed me the laptop.

“They are a mix of two of my favorite people in the world.”

Hiroshi leaned up and kissed me. “Thank you. Now, let’s shop!”

For the next hour, that was what we did. Roan had a couple of tabs open so we could look at some online stores and get an idea of what we liked. I let Hiroshi make some decisions for me, hoping that he would feel a part of this baby’s life as my other mate.

Roan quietly packed some things for each of us, but left us alone, eventually heading to the living room to pack up some remaining things there and watch TV. I felt bad that I was hogging Hiroshi’s attention, but I needed the comfort. Just being cuddled up with him like this was relaxing.

After we exhausted the list of stores to check out and had made a sufficient list, I texted it over to the Alpha Mate and put the laptop to the side. I turned to Hiroshi and kissed him, needing more contact with him.

For the first time in weeks, I felt horny. I needed to be inside my mate. To feel that hot, tight heat around me. I ignored the part of me that wanted to feel stretched on a knot. My omega side wasn't getting a say.

Hiroshi surrendered to my touch, sighing as I peeled him out of his clothes. Soon he worked on mine until we were skin to skin under the covers. I loved the feel of his toned body against mine, but the added little bump was seriously sexy. I rubbed it. "So hot like this," I muttered.

My mate pushed me back down on the bed and came over me, kissing and licking his way down my body. He swallowed my cock down to the root, making me shout out at the sudden pleasure. "Wait!" He pulled away. "I don't want to cum until I'm inside you and I'm really close." I chuckled.

He grinned and slotted our mouths together in a fierce kiss. "Good, because I've missed having you inside me."

I flipped us and worked my way down to his hole. Licking and nipping, I ate at his entrance, loving the taste of his slick. He was open enough for me to fuck him, but I just loved eating him out and making him beg.

"Please! Tate, please!" he wailed, fingers clawing at the sheets. "I need you inside me."



There was a momentary feeling of guilt knowing that Roan could probably hear us and I wondered briefly if I was hurting his feelings by not including him in this, but I needed this connection with my mate. I grabbed a pillow and propped Hiroshi's hips, making him more comfortable.

With one thrust, I was inside him. I took a breath and tried to push my orgasm back, it was on a hair trigger from how long it had been and how sexy my mate was under me, taking my cock.

I rutted into him while I stroked his length. His cries echoed around the room. "Close, so close."

My orgasm was... stuck. I'd been so close before, but now I needed something else. Something more. Frustration built that this wasn't enough and my body was betraying me.

"Wait!" Hiroshi called out. He signaled I pull out of him and I did, sitting back on my haunches. He started rummaging through the nightstand. "Got it!" He brandished a pretty big dildo. "Don't worry, it's clean!"

"What?"

"You need a knot. I can feel your anxiety over it. Your omega side wants a knot. So use this and finish fucking me. Then Roan can knot me. Right, babe?"

Roan appeared in the doorway. "If Tate is okay with that. I won't touch you, at least not sexually."

"Um..." I really hated that my body was betraying me this way. "Okay."

“Okay, so spoon me and I’ll reach back with the dildo and put it in you, alright?”

We shuffled into position and I re-entered him, easing in gently and thrusting in shallow movements.

In a filthy move, Hiroshi raised the dildo to his mouth, gave me a cheeky look, and sucked on the tip. I groaned, resting my head on his shoulder and pausing my movements for a moment. “Fuck, that’s hot.”

He licked it, getting it wet before reaching around me to find my wet hole ready for it. I slung my leg over his hip to make it easier for him to slide it in. He struggled for a second, then pushed it inside. I moaned at the feeling. “Yes!”

Within minutes, Hiroshi tired of the strain of reaching, so I took over and fucked myself as he thrust himself back on my cock. “Close,” I called.

“Hit the button!” Hiroshi demanded.

I did, and the dildo expanded. A knot formed and stretched me. The dual sensations rushed through me and I shouted as I came inside him.

Roan gave us a couple of seconds, until Hiroshi whined, his own orgasm out of reach, then he pulled his omega off my softening cock and thrust inside him, pulling him down into his lap, onto that magnificent length. He truly had a great dick.

I laughed, relaxed and sated as Roan rung an orgasm out of Hiroshi and knotted him. He helped lay them down on the bed and they pulled the covers over us all.

“Better?” Hiroshi asked.

“Much. Thank you. Both of you.”

“We’ve got you. You belong with us.”

# MISSING

## Roan

Navigating a move with two pregnant omegas wasn't easy. Add to that the family pressures that Hiroshi was feeling; the whole thing was a mess. He was still on shaky ground with his mother, though his father and grandfather wanted to make the trip for when the babies arrived so they could welcome them properly.

For that reason alone, I was happy to host them at the new house. They really appeared to understand that Hiro was mated to two people and that his home was with us here in Sweetwater. I wasn't against visiting Japan, but that would have to be done when the babies were older and the situation with Tate and Asher resolved.

Every time I thought of Asher, a rock settled in my gut. It felt like my fault, like I hadn't been alpha enough to keep them all in line, to lead my mini pack and family. His lion saw me as weak. I knew Hiroshi was also dealing with his own feelings of guilt over the situation. He'd been withdrawn whenever they returned from the clinic after seeing him.

Yet, with everything going on, and the added pressures of the threats to the alpha's babies, my mate was being a pillar of strength for his omega, but was neglecting himself. I didn't know how to best help him. Tate needed the support. He couldn't rely on me without angering Asher more, but it wore Hiro out trying to keep spirits high.

With no small amount of guilt, I'd left the two pregnant omegas in Larken's capable hands while I headed into the office. Kade had a list of things that he needed done that was about a mile long. I hated leaving my family to finish sorting the house so that it was habitable, but I felt better that I'd arranged a food delivery and moved the biggest items for them.

The mix of alphas and betas with them wasn't ideal. Half of those pack mates I wouldn't have picked, but we were lucky to have the help at all.

Still, I felt uneasy when I thought about Hiro and Tate alone with them. I reached for my phone, ready to call and check in again.

“Roan. Roan!” Kade snapped.

“Sorry?”

“I've been trying to get your attention. Blake said he got some of the other alphas of the pack to help you move. Is something wrong? Were there not enough or were they late?” Kade looked stressed and tired.

“No, nothing like that. There are plenty of alphas, maybe too many, especially ones that aren’t too keen on me.”

Kade sighed. “I don’t know why. You’re one of the best people I know.” He yawned and stretched a little.

I huffed out a laugh. “Thanks. I think that’s part of the problem. They don’t know me. I’ve been so busy since I joined the pack that they never saw me earn my position. I’m not one of them.”

“So, get to know them.”

“I will. In fact, I’ve planned a delivery to say thank you for the help. Maybe that’ll work on them. I think half of the volunteers just wanted to gawk at Hiro and Tate, which I get, but I don’t want the omegas to feel uncomfortable.”

“You really are a great alpha.” Kade stifled another yawn.

“Have you been sleeping?” I asked with concern.

Kade looked at the triplets playing on a mat on the floor. An elf, Cryabell, was watching over them. “Felix is teething this week. It was Elliotte and Greyson last week. Between that and the constant threats...”

“I’m sorry, Kade. The babies are so precious. I can’t understand why others don’t see them as the gift that they are.”

My best friend slumped into the seat next to me and rested his head against my shoulder. “Can I just rest here for a minute while the babies play?”

I patted his head. “Sure, I’ll just look over the paperwork for the meeting.” He was already asleep against me.

We stayed there for about an hour as I tried to get caught up with the endless paperwork and checked in with my mate and Larken. Both were acting cagey, but since I couldn’t leave until after the meeting, I prayed to the goddess that the brewing trouble could wait until I got there.

On silent feet, Blake edged into the room, trying not to attract the attention of the gurgling babies in the play area of the office. They could crawl already. Elliotte had spoken her first word, “Dad,” to an over the moon Blake. Life should have been nothing but sunshine and rainbows for the alpha pair, but they were struggling under the weight of the changes we’d all undergone because of the beta sickness. I could see it in the pinch to Blake’s mouth as he watched over the babies. Even with the love in his expression, he held so much worry.

Blake looked over at me and Kade with a fond smile. *He fell asleep about an hour ago;* I said over our pack bond.

*Let him rest unless he gets too heavy. He insists on doing too much.*

*You know, Kade, he just wants to be perfect all the time.* I rolled my eyes at Blake playfully.

*He already is.* My pack alpha said it with so much love for his mate, it should have been sickening. It wasn’t. Their devotion to each other was an example of what mates should be to each other. I felt like I was getting there with Hiroshi. Our situation was more complicated because of our beginning

and the fact that Hiroshi had more than one mate, but the feelings were developing, deepening. I loved my mate dearly. One day, we'd be like the alpha pair.

We sat in peaceful silence while Kade dozed on my shoulder, his feet curled up. The paperwork didn't take me long to sort. There were more applications from shifters wanting to join the pack. Most wanted to come and look at the babies, Elliotte in particular.

The little alpha female had the shifter community torn. We were still getting threats. There had been another attempted kidnapping, but slowly, we were plugging the holes in our security. It would never be perfect and she would have to grow up quickly unless more alpha girls were born. We still didn't know if she was an anomaly, or the start of a resurgence of the alpha females.

I knew that Blake and Kade had gone to the omega bear, Janet, to ask for answers. Not just about their daughter, but about Tate and Asher. The old woman was unusually quiet about it. Insisting that The Luna wasn't ready to unveil her plans. There were things we had to figure out on our own. We had to earn it.

With only fifteen minutes to go before the meeting, I roused the still sleeping Kade. Cryabell had just finished feeding and changing the babies, timing their nap perfectly. As Kade rushed around, trying to make himself look presentable in time for the start, the triplets cried. He rushed to them, trying to soothe them all.



“Alpha Mate, they feel your stress. Please, go sit and get ready. I will get them to sleep.” Cryabell insisted in her gentle tone. She calmed each one and cast a bubble of silence around herself and the babies with a little smile and a shooing motion.

Kade slumped into the seat next to me. “She’s a miracle worker. First day and she’s nailing it.” He looked at his mate. “We’re keeping her.”

“Sure. Whatever you want, my mate,” he assured Kade with a kiss on the top of his head before he left the room for his own office next door. “Use the bond if you need me. My silencing wards will be up.”

“Okay.”

The meeting was tedious. They insisted on going over the same things weekly. No, we didn’t know why Tate and Asher had changed. No, there were no others that had changed. We weren’t any closer to figuring out things, and until we had a breakthrough, we had nothing new to report. All they had was conjecture and repetition of the facts. It felt like the meeting could have been an email.

It seemed like they were getting ready to wrap things up when I got a text from Hiroshi.

**Hiro: Could you come to the new house please? I don’t feel comfortable.**

It was quickly followed by one from Larken. I’d left him in charge of things, hoping that he could use that time to bond with Hiroshi a bit.

**Lark: You need to come home. Now. These alphas and even some betas are saying some stuff. Hiroshi looks like he wants to hide. Tate looks scared.**

*Fuck.*

Instead of interrupting the ongoing meeting, I whispered to Kade, “I’ve gotta go. Hiro needs me.”

*Go,* he mouthed.

I shuffled away from view and got up as silently as possible. Giving Cryabell a wave as she sat knitting in her bubble with a serene smile, I headed to Blake’s office.

“Hey,” I said, knocking on the door. “I’m sorry, but Hiro wants me to head to the new house. Larken says he looks scared.”

“Deke,” he nodded to the head enforcer, “could you go with him?”

“Sure. Why don’t we go in fur? It’ll be quicker.”

We headed outside, stripped quickly, stuffing our clothes into bags and shifted into our alters. Deke’s wolf was slightly bigger than mine, darker too. Side by side, he and Blake looked like twins rather than the cousins they were.

I raced alongside him down the new path to the former Sweetwater sleuth houses, where the bears had lived before some had moved on when they had rejoined the pack. We sped by Dakota’s house and deeper into the woods to my new home.

Just short of the house, we stopped and shifted. We dressed quickly, walking barefoot up the path to the open front door. I heard them before I saw them.

“You can’t seriously be happy living like this?” Trevor, an alpha and enforcer, was saying to Hiroshi. “Roan is a pariah in the pack. Look what he’s done to you!” He gestured at Hiroshi up and down. “Are those babies even his?” Someone gasped. Likely Tate. “He’s not strong enough to be your alpha.” He was pacing back and forth, ignoring Hiroshi’s flinch when he got too close. “You should break the bond. There are plenty of alphas here in the pack that would accept you. Maybe not if those are his, though.” He directed his sneer at Hiroshi’s rounded stomach.

“Hey!” Larken yelled as he pulled Hiro behind him. “What’s your problem Trevor? You’re supposed to be helping, not hassling the omegas.”

Deke sighed next to me, the late January wind whipping his hair into his face. He grabbed an elastic out of his jean pockets and tied his shoulder length hair back. “I’ll sort this out. You get the omegas into a room and help them calm down. Tate looks faint.”

I glanced at the other omega and saw him swaying on his feet. Darting forward into the house, I caught him before he could hit the floor. “Move!” I roared at the cluster of alphas and betas that had been watching this unfold.

“Is he okay?” Hiroshi asked, worried and scared. He slipped a hand up the back of my shirt, his heart rate calming at the

skin to skin contact.

“He’ll be fine. The stress was too much for him. Just in case, I’ll call Aldrin and see what he says once I lay him down.”

“We made the bed already. Larken helped.” Hiroshi sent a smile to my best friend who was shadowing us, protecting my back.

“Me and Tate made it,” Larken teased. “Hiro just oversaw the process.”

The pair shared grins, and I took my first full breath since getting those texts. They were okay. I’d gotten there in time to prevent anything from happening. Sure, they were scared and Tate had passed out, but they’d recover. The main thing was that Hiroshi had felt able to call for me when he needed me. He had trusted me to be there for him.

Larken scrambled to get into the room first and pull down the covers so I could get Tate comfortable. I barely looked at the room, more concerned about the pregnant omega in my arms. “I’m just going to go call Aldrin. Hiro, will you stay here with him? Lark, could you watch the door?”

They both nodded and I wandered into one of the spare rooms, a potential nursery, to dial Aldrin’s number.

As usual, James answered. “Hey Roan, everything okay?”

“Hey, something happened at the house. Tate and Hiro got a scare and Tate fainted. I’ve put him to bed. He seems okay, but —“

“We’ll pop over and check everything out. Don’t worry. Won’t be long!” He disconnected the call without letting me finish my sentence.

“Hey, you okay?” Larken placed a hand on my shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

“Yeah, I think so. I knew that our mating wasn’t popular within the pack, but that was just —“

“I know. A couple of them have been saying shit like that all day. Most of it the omegas didn’t hear. Then he started getting inappropriate with Hiroshi, then you heard what he said.”

“Inappropriate?” I wanted to beat Trevor into the ground for upsetting my pregnant mate.

“Just touches that lingered. Saying that Hiroshi deserved more than this. More than being hidden away for most of your mating.” I flinched. “Hey, we know why you had to do that. The pack has shown that some don’t get it.”

“What ’bout you?” I asked gruffly. I was afraid of his response.

“At first I didn’t get it.” Lark pulled away from me and paced the room. “I always knew that one day an omega would come and turn your head, but two betas as well?” He shrugged. “It was a lot.” He met my eyes for the first time. “I see how you care about them. This thing with Asher has you tied in knots, but you still bend over backwards for a pack that attacked you.” His expression was earnest. “You deserve better than that, Roan. You’re the best person I know.”

Unable to resist, I pulled him into my arms and hugged him tightly. “I’m so glad I have you.”

“You’re never getting rid of me.”



Aldrin left the master suite with a faint smile. “Tate is fine. Hiro is looking after him and he’s relaxed now you are home. If you could stay and work at home for the next few days until he settles, that would be best.”

“That’s all he needs?” I asked skeptically.

Aldrin eyed me. “Don’t discount his omega instincts. They would have been firing on all cylinders with all these strangers in his new home and no alpha there to guide him.”

My heart sank like a stone. “I should have been here.”

“No.” Aldrin’s tone was firm. “You can’t take the blame. You aren’t his alpha, just stepping in, likely why there is so much conflict between you and Asher. He hasn’t accepted you as Tate’s back up alpha.”

I led Aldrin downstairs to where James was cooking up something in the kitchen. The place smelled heavenly. “James, you are amazing! Thank you. I sent the delivery to the main house when this all went down. I forgot to feed us, though.”

“You thought about getting a food delivery?” James asked as he turned from the stove to look at me in wonder.

“Yeeesss,” I drew the word out. “Why?”

“You really are a different alpha. Special. No wonder fate chose you for extra mates.”

It felt like a gut punch to be reminded of my brief time being mated to Tate and Asher. I missed that bond. “Didn’t get to keep them, though. I clearly wasn’t enough.”

“Hey!” James’s tone was sharp. “None of that. Everything has happened as The Luna intended.”

“That’s right,” Aldrin cut in as he searched the cupboards for bowls for the stew James had heated. “In fact, the mating and the way it dissolved might be what gives us our breakthrough. We are so close to figuring it out. I can smell it.”

“You really think so?” I helped Aldrin and James fill the bowls and cut some bread.

“I’m no Jasper, but it’s almost like a premonition is just out of reach.”

From the living room I heard Deke’s phone ring and then the muted words as he spoke to someone. Likely our alpha. “Roan, I need to head out,” Deke called, rounding the corner into the kitchen. His body language was tense.

“Everything okay?” I asked.

“Blake just called. The coven has called us. They need our help.”

Immediately, we were all on edge. “Help? Do they need a healer?” James looked at his mate, who nodded.

“Not sure. Probably not. We are going on a witch hunt.”

Fuck. This could be really dangerous.

“Witch hunt? Need a hand?” Larken joined us around the breakfast bar.

“Sure. Roan, you’re needed here. Keep your phone on you in case we need any more support. Blake and a couple of other enforcers are coming.” Deke was already heading for the door.

“Blake is going? What about Kade and the babies?” I wondered.

Deke caught my words and answered. “They are protected. We’ve put more elves on it. Basil has a demon, and we need to rescue him.”

A demon?

What the fuck?



# BREAKTHROUGH

## Hiroshi

**J**ust over a week after we moved into our new home, things had returned to normal. Tate felt smothered after two days of us all being home, so sent Roan back into the office and insisted I return to my part-time work at the clinic.

A few days ago, the elves had taken Asher to our house when they knew no one else was nearby so that Tate could see his mate on doctor's orders. Aldrin felt that keeping them apart after all the stress was a bad idea, especially since Asher was doing so much better with his therapy. Asher could be around betas and other omegas with no issues. Alphas that were stronger than him were still a problem. There was no way we were risking another fight between Roan and Ash. I needed my alpha too much for that.

Tate had been hopeful after their visit and had asked to see his mate more often, which we all took as a good sign after all they had been through. Wanting to see him was good, wasn't it? It hopefully meant that if Ash could get over this Roan problem, that we could all live together in peace.

Maybe I was just dreaming. I was the lucky one. I had both of my mates with me. Roan was stable. No one was talking about sending him away. With our fated bond, we couldn't break up. Our bond couldn't be broken. My heart ached for my omega mate and my friend. Asher was good. I knew it in my soul. It was this sudden shift to being an alpha that was the problem.

The clinic was quiet for a change, allowing me to get too lost in my thoughts. I had no paperwork or routine assessments to do. All the help we had from the elves had made everything more efficient.

My task for the day was to go over the genetic reports that had been filed. I noticed on one patient's form there was a scribble on a post it note. "New marker," it said. They'd drawn a neat asterisk next to one line of DNA. "Compare." Another word scribbled underneath.

The process for figuring out what had happened to the betas had taken so long because while shifters had been studied, it was more about their healing and their fertility. No one had ever studied the strands of DNA that made up a beta shifter before. Then there was the added complication that the animal spirit showed itself in the genetic make up, so that had to be untangled first.

I looked through my own DNA file and looked through the newly isolated designation markers. The genome for being an omega was different to that of an alpha. I studied the pages for a while before looking for the area that the note had said and

found the marker missing. Strange. I needed more comparisons. An alpha would be good. Picking up my phone, I called Roan. He answered immediately. “Hey, sweetheart, everything okay?”

“I’m checking stuff over in the clinic. Maybe I found something, maybe not. I just wanted permission to look over your DNA report.”

“Of course you can look. You didn’t need to ask.” The gentle pride he held in his voice made me blush, which was utterly ridiculous. I was glad I was alone in the office.

“I still wanted to check.” I fell silent while I located the file. Roan listened instead of filling the silence. With the file in my hand, I took it to compare to the other two, mine and a beta’s. I lined up the genomes and there it was again. In both mine and Roan’s, it wasn’t there. “Huh.”

“What?”

“I think... hold on for a second. I need another file to compare. These are all anonymous ones. This person was only asleep for two weeks.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m looking at designation markers in shifter DNA. There was a note —“

I rifled through more files, hoping we had someone who hadn’t had the sickness at all. I knew that the elves, the council, and Aldrin had petitioned Logan to find us samples. After I left, a few of his betas caught the sickness, including

Xander, who had helped us escape Heatwave and the pride. He'd been down for the full month.

“Ah-ha! Found it!”

Roan chuckled. “I’m glad someone is having a good time at work. Everything is so hectic here with the chance that the demon they saved, Toth, I think his name was, wants to partner with the brewery and make a new hard cider.”

That caught my attention. “Partnering with a demon? Is that safe?”

“Well, Poppy’s cousin, Cody, is actually half demon.”

“What? No way!”

Roan’s laugh was lovely. I could just see his beaming face, white teeth glinting. “Yeah. turns out demons aren’t so bad. Plus, Cody and Toth are royalty.”

“Oh, my goddess! Really?”

“Really. Princes. Anyway, Toth has a farm and grows these massive apples, as big as your head apparently, called hell-spice apples. He and Blake want to make a specialty cider from them.” Roan sounded so excited, it was cute. “He and Kade are about to portal there. If everything goes according to plan, we will have a permanent portal to Toth’s farm and the demons will help us with their magic. Seems like Cody is pretty powerful now his demon nature has been unlocked.”

“Wow!” I sat back on my stool, the pages in my hand momentarily forgotten.

“Sorry, I distracted you. I just found out the visit was happening today when I got in. They’ve kept it locked down until it was really going ahead.”

“It’s fine. That’s so cool. Our elders taught us that demons were bad, but if they can have children with witches, then they must be blessed by the goddess, too. Right?”

“Guess so. I’d like to meet them myself, but they don’t want to draw too much attention by so many of us going. You were looking for something. Comparing DNA?” Roan drew me back to my task.

“Well, in this beta, there is a new gene on this strand of DNA.”

“I’m already lost.”

“Trust me, I knew a little bit about DNA before all of this, but I’ve had a crash course in genetics now. Think of it like a code. You have an area in your coding that makes you have the alpha traits, such as your knot.” I shifted, thinking of it. Damn, what I wouldn’t give to be stretched — I needed to focus. “Okay, so you’ve got a gene, one that I don’t have as an omega. Mine is different. You don’t have that one either. The betas don’t have either gene, but in the sick that had the beta sickness for a month, there’s something there. One that neither of us have. I just wanted to check a beta that hadn’t had the sickness, then maybe one that was only sick for a short time to see if it was the sickness that caused this. Like a mutation.”

“Makes sense. Do you think this gene does something?”

“Maybe. It’s strange that we don’t have it and they do. It must be there for a purpose.” Carefully, I lined them up, looking for the correct line. This person hadn’t been sick. “It isn’t there.”

“What?”

“Roan, this person is a beta, and they weren’t sick. They don’t have the new gene.” I stood and started grabbing charts. Flicking through them, I found the one for Chase and the one for Axel. Then lined them up. “Holy shit!”

“Hiro? What’s happening?” Roan sounded ready to run to the clinic at a moment’s notice.

“Chase only has half the gene. Axel’s looks different from this person’s, but it is in the same place.”

I was already pulling more files when he spoke. “Grab more. This is it Hiro! I feel it.”

Without looking at names, I took all the betas that had woken after two weeks with Chase’s. They all had the malformed gene on the right line, which I told to Roan.

Next, I looked at all the betas that had woken up after a month. Some, roughly half, had one gene, the rest another. Both were in the same place.

My eyes filled with tears as realization dawned. “Roan. These are new omega and alpha genes.” My hands shook. My entire body quivering as the knowledge took hold. “Everyone that was sick for a month has them.” I was overcome with

emotion for a minute over this gift that the goddess had bestowed on us.

Sniffing, I pushed the tears away. I needed to check the profiles of Asher and Tate before and after they changed. All betas that had been sick had submitted to genetic testing as part of the investigation. I found the appropriate files.

“Hiro? Are you okay?” I had the phone on speaker on the desk. I wandered over to it, the two files from Tate in my hand. “Oh wow!”

“What is it?” Roan sounded worried.

“The gene, it’s there in the first test after they woke, but it looks slightly different since they changed.” So before we bonded, they had the gene. It was there, clear as day. Then after we bonded, it had altered slightly. I’d always worried that we had caused this, but no, Tate and Asher were the same as all the other betas. They all had the ability to change designation. My mind was blown as the information soaked in. “Do you know what this means?”

“What?” Roan sounded ready to run to me.

“It means it wasn’t us that changed them. We only unlocked it. Tate and Asher were meant to be turned. We have to unlock the gene in the others.”

There was silence on the other end.

“Roan?”

“We didn’t do this? It was meant to happen?” He sounded choked with emotion. For the last few months he’d carried

around all this guilt, knowing that Tate hadn't wanted to be an omega at first. With every day that passed, he seemed to grow into his new role. He was excited to meet his baby.

“No. We just unlocked it. If I'm on the right track, it was likely we unlocked it with the bite. It has a chemical in it that starts a heat. It's possible that it does the same thing on the gene. Our bonding bites were just the key. It seems like it only takes as long as the sickness took to be complete. I mean, these are just guesses, but they feel right.”

“Wow... I... Hiro —“ He sounded as completely wrecked by the news as I felt. I was shaking with the need to share this with everyone.

“I know. Look, I need to tell Ívarr, tell Aldrin, tell everyone what I've worked out. This is huge!”

“It is. Well done, sweetheart, and thank you. I'll finish up and come home as soon as I can. We need to celebrate!”

“You're welcome. Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

We ended the call, then I gathered all the papers up and ran towards the center next door to the clinic, shouting for James and Aldrin to follow. They did without question as I dashed past the elf receptionist and straight to Ívarr's room, nearly running into the elf as I rounded the corner.

“Slow down, Hiroshi!” he chided in his gentle way.

“We need everyone in your office or a bigger room. I know why the sickness happened.”





I itched to get the meeting going, but we had to wait for Axel, as Blake's second, to arrive, along with Teagan and Teárlach. A couple of members of the council were waiting on video call for me to begin.

Axel squeezed into the room with an apology. At his nod, I started.

"Someone had already found the gene. They just hadn't been able to compare it with other samples, or discarded it as unimportant." I broadcast the file onto the whiteboard behind me, highlighting this gene and comparing them to an alpha and omega.

Ívarr interrupted me. "Where is the note from the person who found the gene?"

I looked at my notes, trying to find the post it and the little star next to the correct sequence. It wasn't there. "Um, I can't see it. Maybe I left it back in my office with the other paperwork I was doing." I shrugged it off, determined not to think about it too hard.

"Anyway, it doesn't matter how I found it. We can check that out later. It's clearly there." I pointed back to the board. "As you can see, the alpha and omega do not have this gene. It gets interesting when I do this." I laid out all my information, the two types of genes, and my hypothesis that the bite acted as the agent for the change in designation.

“You are right. This is what we have been looking for,” Ívarr said, marveling at the board. “Well done, Hiroshi. You have solved the mystery.”

We were in that room for another couple of hours, going over what we should do with this information. There were a lot of betas that had been sick and would have to adjust to this if they felt they wanted to change designation. We would have to counsel them carefully, support them as they found someone to change with.

There were still so many questions we needed to answer. Would it only work with an alpha bite? Could two betas bite each other and develop a new designation? What about the betas that were already bonded? Could they break those bonds and re-bond later? Would that work?

It was at the end when Axel took me aside. “Do you know if I have the gene?” His voice was careful and quiet.

“You do,” I whispered.

“Do you know which one?”

I nodded and looked through the messy pile of papers to locate his. I made a note on the paper in pencil. This was so private I didn’t want to speak the words aloud so people could overhear. His eyes lit up when he read the word I wrote and promptly erased it.

“Only you can know for now. Please,” he begged.

“But —“

“No, Hiroshi. This could have dire consequences for the pack if this got out.”

Goddess, he was right. It would have a ripple effect on the entire pack. I nodded. “Of course. Congratulations, Axel.”

With the briefest of hugs, Axel fled from the room.

# A CELEBRATION

Hiroshi returned from the clinic abuzz with his news.  
“Tate! It wasn’t us that made you like this!”

“What do you mean? Like what?”

“The sickness did it. All the betas that had the sickness have a new gene. If anything, our mating just unlocked it.”

Roan came rushing into the house just moments behind him. He grabbed Hiroshi into his arms, spun him around. Roan put Hiroshi safely on his feet before planting a kiss on waiting lips. They laughed together, leaving me watching them completely stunned. “Um... what’s going on?”

“Your fantastic, spectacular, wonderful mate, Hiro, has figured out why you changed! He’s solved the reason for the sickness!”

I felt my mouth drop open. “What?”

Roan and Hiroshi started explaining, each finishing the other’s sentence in a super cute display I couldn’t help smiling at. It took me a few moments to process.

I didn't think anyone could blame me for needing to think about what I'd just heard. In the space of a conversation, my entire worldview changed.

For the last few months, I'd believed that my transformation was punishment from the goddess, but no, she had chosen this for me. This was a path she had put me on as a gift. Given the ability to grow life inside of myself, to no longer be a useless beta in the eyes of so many. I could grumble about why I hadn't been given the gift of being an alpha, but if I'd become one, I wouldn't have either of my mates, and I wouldn't give them up for anything in the world.

"Does Ash know?" I whispered, overcome. My hands cradled my belly. The new life in there was flourishing.

"The elves have gone to explain it to him and bring him back here," Roan said quietly. He was watching me carefully, as if I was on the verge of fainting again. I'd never live that down. "They wanted to do it there to make sure his reaction was safe."

"Why?"

"Well, I thought he might want to see you. Or you see him." Roan was right. I wanted to see my alpha mate. "It's a big deal to find this out. Plus, the pack is having a celebration. We've been given this amazing news and we are partnering with Toth." Roan grinned at Hiroshi, who clapped and cheered.

"Toth?"

“I’ll explain on the way. Come on, we’ve got to meet at the big house.”

We joined what was probably the whole pack, even those that didn’t live in the compound, on the lawn to the rear of the mansion. There were tables, chairs, and heaters set up to combat the early February weather. Spring was hopefully right around the corner.

The tables groaned at how laden they were with food. I craned my head to look through the crowd and spotted Kade’s messy red-brown curls next to Blake. Kade’s dad and papa were also easy to spot. His dad, Dakota, was carrying their son.

The twins, Axel and Chase, were hovering near Blake and Kade. Their cousin and one of the elves nearby.

We ate some food and wandered about speaking to people here and there. Hiroshi was keeping tight-lipped about his news, but he was almost bouncing with excitement.

Hakeem approached me, gesturing for me to join him at the side of the crowd. “Though he has made improvements, Asher isn’t quite confident enough to be near you in amongst the others. Would you mind standing here while I get him? He’s understandably upset by the news today and expressed concerns for your state of mind.”

“Yeah, I’ll wait here.” It dumbfounded me the change in Asher. Had we turned a corner?

Asher approached slowly with Hakeem at his side, a complicated expression on his face. He wrapped his arms around me, settling his head on mine and breathing me in. “I missed you. You doin’ okay?”

I sank into the feeling of safety and love. This was my Asher. “I’m doing good. Better now that we know why. How are you feeling?”

Hakeem gave us a nod and backed away to give us privacy.

Asher took a moment to draw in my scent and hold me close before he replied. “For this entire time, I blamed Hiro and Roan for doing this to us.” He paused. “If I’m honest, I blamed Roan more. My lion sees him as weak instead of seeing the love that Roan has for his mate.”

“What do you mean?”

“My lion has some very outdated ideas on how alphas should behave. He grew up under my brothers. Our pride was full of these forceful alpha males. To him, Roan is too soft for his mate. Doesn’t keep him in line or tell him no enough.” Asher laughed, a bitter sound. “For a while, I agreed with him on that. If Roan hadn’t said yes to this experiment, then we wouldn’t be like this, but that was stupid to think like that.”

I wasn’t sure I was following properly. “Why?”

“Because if we hadn’t tried this, then you and Hiroshi would forever mourn the chance to be as you are. You two were supposed to be together. I believe that deep in my bones.” He stepped away so I could see the honesty in his

chocolate brown eyes. They were brighter than usual. His lion was just under the surface, hoping I would understand. “At first, I went along with it to make you happy. But I was curious about Roan. It felt good to dominate him. To act the alpha in our relationship. He gave up control so well and he’s a decent and kind person. We are lucky to have had him as a mate, even just for that short time.”

“We were. I hate you can’t be in the same room together. I miss us being a family.”

“I’m working on it, I swear. By the time you are nesting, I’ll be home, in the new house with you. And Roan and I? Well... even if we aren’t best friends, we will be civil.” His earnest expression nearly broke my heart. He was trying so hard.

“So, hypothetically, if I wanted to sleep in the same bed as Hiroshi and Roan, you’d be there, too?”

Asher’s lion pushed forward, letting out a warning grumble. He shoved him away with effort. “Behave, Demon.” When he got himself under control, he continued. “It’s going to take time,” he rolled his eyes. “But one day, yes. I want that. We should be able to have a close family bond without fear that he will steal you from me. I trust you. Demon just needs to get over it.”

His new habit of referring to his alter as Demon had me laughing. He’d told me of the name before in one of our visits, but I’d never seen him speak so openly about the alter.

A hush rolled over the assembled group of shifters. I saw the elves become more alert, clearly watching out for trouble.



Asher took my hand and wound our fingers together, squeezing gently.

Blake's voice rang out clearly, perhaps magically amplified to reach all the crowd. "Sweetwater pack. Thank you for joining us tonight. We have a couple of announcements. I wanted to take this time to apologize for the heightened security. You are handling the situation with grace. The safety of my children is of paramount importance and I am grateful for the support of the pack. I can only say sorry that we weren't able to have our winter celebrations."

There were a few shouts of good wishes for our alpha and his young family that Blake took with patient smiles.

"Our first reason for being here tonight is we have just completed a deal to partner with Cody Valentine, of the Northharbor coven, and his mate, Toth, to make a new variety of hard cider that will bring new success to the pack and guarantees more investment and new jobs. While I do understand that there might be some prejudice against Toth's demon nature, I will not accept any bad treatment of a valued business partner."

There were rumbles throughout the group until a stern look from Axel silenced them.

"We shifters have a short memory. It wasn't all that long ago that humans discriminated against shifters. Demonkin are much like us. They are magic users like the witches, have an honor code, they have mates like us. And, like shifters, they have suffered because people do not understand them."

There were a few embarrassed faces. I'd had time to get used to the idea of working with demons, although that would affect Asher more than me. "You okay with that?" I whispered to my mate.

"Yeah, it's like Blake says. They are like us. Plus, the factory really needs some updating, so more revenue coming in will be a bonus. I bet they have some really great fruit in their realm. Abrocaelum has some amazing food."

"The next thing I wanted to speak to you about doesn't come from me. Our healers and the elves that have been working on the beta sickness project made this discovery today."

His words suddenly filled the air with expectation. I could see that some were confused, others eager. Maybe they knew what was coming.

There was a lull as Blake spoke with Ívarr. "Hiroshi is going to explain this. Please be patient with him."

Hiroshi shuffled closer and Ívarr said something to him, obviously a spell, because suddenly, we could all hear him. "Do I have to?" he whined. "Why can't you tell them?"

Ívarr gave him an affectionate smile. "Because it is your find. We still cannot locate those notes you said you happened upon."

Hiroshi glared at Blake, who laughed, and rolled his eyes at the elf before taking in the pack. "Um, so I've been looking at the genetic reports of the shifters that had the beta sickness.

Today I found something huge. To cut a long story short, we believe that anyone that had the sickness and was asleep for the full month now carries a gene that can be activated to turn that beta into either an alpha or an omega.” He cut his words off because, although he clearly had much more to say, he realized how heavy a moment this was for all the betas of the group. I knew that most of them had stayed sick for a month.

“What about those that woke up early?” Melody called.

“Um, well, they have the gene... but it’s like it didn’t finish forming. Like maybe it got interrupted by you waking, perhaps?” Hiroshi looked at Ívarr and Aldrin for support. Teagan was nodding. “I’m sorry that I don’t have those answers for you. I just know that Tate and Asher both carry this gene. We believe that theirs were activated, for want of a better word, by the mating bite when we tried our four-way bond.”

“So you didn’t do that to them? It could happen to any beta with the gene if they mate?” someone called. I couldn’t see the person or recognize their voice.

Hiroshi looked between the scientists and Blake, obviously asking to be saved from having to give the bad news.

Aldrin stepped forward, his voice carrying without a spell. “The short answer is; we don’t know. First, we need to do some testing. What we need from you all is beta pairings that carry both genes that are unmated, or willing to break their bonding, and try again. Or an alpha or omega that will risk mating to a beta that carries the correct gene.”

There was a murmur through the assembled shifters. Sure, betas were good for fucking to take the edge off, but no respectable alpha or omega seriously thought about mating with one, not before Hiroshi came around and met us. I shared an eye roll with Asher at some of the scandalized looks from the omegas. Then I felt bad. Those omegas needed knots for their heats, and while spells and artificial knots helped, not all had the resources for that. They weren't the same. I could say that from experience now.

“We understand that this might be something that many of you aren't ready to consider. You've lived your whole lives as betas. This is a big change and the pack and the council will be here for you if you decide to go through the process. If you choose not to, then that is okay. It's your life and you need to live it as you feel best.”

Blake spoke. “You are all dismissed now. If you want to learn your new designation, please form a line and inform whoever you speak to if you want to play a part in the testing. Thank you for listening. I hope you are as excited as I am about our new future.” Our alpha looked tense, as if he was expecting trouble to break out.

“One at a time, please.” Teárlach called to the crowd. “We have a new spell to keep things confidential.” His assurance settled something in the waiting betas. Having your designation announced in front of a ton of people was upsetting, so I was glad they had invented a way of telling people privately.

The hush that had fallen over the group broke with conversations breaking out all over. I couldn't gauge them and wanted to shift to get a better viewpoint in case there was any trouble. Already people were getting their answers. Most looked hopeful about their results.

My cousin and his mate broke from the crowd. "We were first in line!" Jake said, excitement flowing off him. "The spell was so cool. Only I could see what it said, and poof! Gone!"

"So you're happy with what you could be?"

Jake nodded, sharing a sappy look with his mate. "We've signed up to break our bond and try rebonding! We didn't even have to think about it. Did we?" he asked his mate.

"No. It just felt right. Like that was what we were supposed to do," Sebastian said. He was a man of few words. I liked him for Jake. He was steady and clearly head over heels for my cousin.

"So..." Asher began. "Are we allowed to ask? You seem happy. I don't want to make you feel uncomfortable."

Jake was nearly bouncing. "If this works, I'll be an omega!" He was genuinely happy about this, which made me feel like shit about my reaction. Asher rubbed a soothing hand up my back.

*They had time to get used to the idea. You woke up in heat. That's traumatic. No wonder you reacted like that.*

"I'm an alpha, obviously, since we want to be one of the testing couples," Seb added with a cheerful smile. He slung an

arm around Jake and pulled him close. “Waiting a couple of days until Poppy can get us the spells will be the hard part.”

“We can pretend in the meantime. Practice,” Jake said with a lascivious grin.

Seb kissed him soundly. “I love the way you think. See you guys soon!” He all but dragged Jake away.

The line for information was almost finished by the time we got to Hiroshi. He looked exhilarated, and I wondered how much it weighed on him that all had blamed them for our transformation. I could often feel the prickles of guilt. He hid a lot from me; I knew that. I just hadn’t figured out how deep that wound had gone.

I made a last-minute decision. “Hey, Sunshine, I’m going to go to Abrocaelum and spend some time with Asher. Let you and Roan have some time for yourselves so you can celebrate. Is that okay?”

“What? You don’t have to ask that! Asher is your alpha mate. He comes before me. Go do your thing!”

I was speechless. “I... he... Sunshine, it isn’t like that.”

“No, maybe not. But maybe it should be?” he said it like a question. Did I think we should give priority to our alpha mates?

The more I thought about it, the more it sounded right. It could fix our issues with Asher’s alter. “Yeah, I think you’re right. See you in the morning! Have fun!”

Hiroshi directed a smirk to his waiting mate. “Oh, we will!”

# A PRIVATE PARTY

## Roan

I stood well back from Asher and Tate as they approached Hiroshi. The gathering had passed better than I thought, with only a little grumbling about the news. Any trouble would come later, I was sure of it. Now I had some time to enjoy my mate, just the two of us.

Hiro having two mates wasn't an issue to me. In fact, I was happy that he had Tate to love too. He had a big heart and could love more than one person fully. I think he needed another person to give his love and affection to, otherwise he wouldn't feel complete. I knew he loved me. It was easy to see in his eyes the smile that lifted his plush lips that he only gave to me. He also had a special grin that only Tate brought out. With him, he was more cheeky. Still loving, just different. Hiro had believed he loved Ash, too. Then had mourned for his relationship with Asher much like I'd grieved briefly for him and Tate.

Getting over the pair had been... strange. Asher was easier because there had been a distance between us from the start. He had never really wanted to bond with me or Hiroshi. Tate,

though, well, he had been much harder to get over. He had wanted to please Hiroshi so damn badly that he tied himself into knots to make it work. His guilt had eaten at him for a while until the pregnancy became his rightful focus. I could tell he still cared about me. I loved him, in a friend way, and that was what had been difficult to adjust to. The lost potential romantic love making way for a deep friend love. Asher and Tate, especially the omega, were my family.

Once they had moved away, I approached Hiroshi, who was still buoyed by his discovery. It belonged to him no matter what he said. The notes he said he had found no one else saw, and they had looked. Perhaps The Luna had given him a nudge in the right direction. I liked to think that our goddess was present in our lives even when we didn't see her workings.

As the crowd dispersed, Hiroshi spoke to the elven scientists and his bosses before thanking Blake for getting everyone together. He effortlessly charmed everyone he spoke to.

Winter offered us a heaped plate of food to take home with us with a cheerful smile that looked genuine. He had been one beta that had woken before the rest, taking over kitchen duties from Larken when he could. Part of me worried that his happiness was feigned. Was he truly okay about not wanting to transform into an alpha or omega?

It made me think of the man and the life he had. He was always pleasant, always thinking of others. Winter displayed more of the typical omega traits than some omegas I had met



since joining the pack. He had all the alphas in the pack whipped at just the suggestion he would make cookies for them or some other kind of sweet treat. Actually, being an omega maybe wasn't appealing to Winter after all he had seen in his years with the pack. Perhaps he was just happiest as he was.

It was bitterly cold as we walked to our house from the mansion. Our breaths puffed in front of us in the air. If it hadn't been for the food, I'd have suggested going in fur. I loved seeing my mate's massive alter form. His tiger outweighed the tigers at the pride so he had gotten used to shifting less.

I wrapped an arm around him so that he didn't slip on the icy path as we made our way through the woods to our new home. "Hmm, this is nice," Hiroshi said into the quiet night. The stars twinkled above the treeline.

"You know I have no issue with you having two mates, right?" I wanted to turn him around so he could see my face. It was too cold for that, though. "But I am glad to have some time just us. It feels like we didn't celebrate your pregnancy properly." He squeezed me closer, agreement flowing down our bond. "I didn't get to show you how much it meant to me. You doing this with me so soon after mating."

"It was a simple decision to make. I knew you would always give me a choice."

It truly was as simple as that.



“How about we take this food to bed and have a picnic there?”

Hiro asked with a sly grin.

“You have the best ideas.”

I followed him up the winding stairs, looking at his plump ass the entire way. Pregnancy was a good look on my mate.

He set the plate on the bed and began removing his clothes, setting them in the hamper item by item.

Just watching him get undressed was getting me hard. My mate was beautiful. All lean lines and golden skin. His stomach had rounded in the most adorable way and I couldn't wait to cuddle up to it to listen to the babies.

Hiro distracted me from my thoughts as the scent of his arousal filled the air. He climbed onto the enormous bed, a custom build when we'd all been so hopeful, and unwrapped the plate. Picking up an éclair, he took a bite with a suggestive look. Cream covered his lips. With slow, deliberate movements, he licked them clean.

Quickly I shucked my clothes, not bothering to be tidy like my mate. I crawled onto the bed, coming close to his mouth, before darting back with a cupcake in my hands.

With a devilish grin, Hiro took another bite of his treat. This time, the cream landed on his chest and his lap. He reached a finger out to wipe it up, but I stayed his hand. “Let me,” I said, dipping close to lick the cream off his hairless chest. I ran my

tongue over his nipple and sucked at it before tracing a path lower to the cream next to his very interested cock.

Ignoring his length, I caught the cream in my mouth and rose to kiss him deeply. “Hmm, you taste so good,” I said when we broke apart.

He set the plate aside and ran his hands over my body. “I love we can take our time tonight. No work tomorrow, no guilt about Tate. Just us.”

I brought my lips to his, trying to work up the courage to ask for what I wanted.

“Just ask,” he whispered.

It felt like it took an age to spit the words out. “Would you... top? This time. I... uh... well, I miss it, from when the others did it.” I hurriedly added, “I don’t want it like that all the time, just now and again.”

Hiroshi looked nervous. An expression I wasn’t sure that I’d ever seen on him before. “I’ve never topped anyone before. Would you help me? Get you ready, I mean?”

We shared a smile. This felt like a moment that would work to deepen our bond. “Yeah, I’ll help. Let me just grab the lube.”

“Here, lie back and I’ll get it.”

I laid my head on a pillow and tried to relax. With tentative movements, Hiro smeared lube on his fingers, warming it. I opened my legs, cock so hard just remembering what it felt like to be filled. He petted my hole, coating lube around me

before pushing a slender finger inside just to the first knuckle. He was careful, looking slightly awestruck as he reached further in.

Maybe because I was relaxed, or because it was with him, but it didn't hurt. "You can add another," I said after a few minutes of him moving the single finger in and out of me. Gently, he added a second. "Do this," I mimed a scissor motion, and he copied, making me groan at the stretch. "More," I begged after the burn ebbed. He obliged and soon I had three of his fingers inside me.

"Do you think you're ready now?"

"Yeah, get up here. I need to kiss you."

His nerves were apparent when our lips met, but soon he was pressing closer, his wet cock rubbing against mine. I felt on edge and held him tight so I didn't go off before he could get inside me. Sure, I'd be ready to go again in a few minutes, but I wanted to cum inside him.

Grabbing the lube, I slicked him up. "If you don't like it, we don't have to keep doing it like this, okay? I just wanted to share this with you."

"Okay." He still looked shy and uncertain, so I kissed him and set his cock at my entrance. He'd stretched me well as he slid in with only a slight burn, the feeling more familiar now. Knowing it was my mate, my love, inside me, nearly brought tears to my eyes.

To let him get deeper as he began thrusting, I set my legs on his shoulders. He pumped his hips in slow, deep movements that made me gasp as he hit my prostate.

Closer and closer, he worked us over until sweat was dripping from him and he was close to flagging. "I'm not built for this!" he whined with a teasing grin. "I keep getting close, but I just can't get there."

"Hmm, how about I ride you and fuck you with that dildo you have?"

"Okay, now you're talking!" He pulled out of me and flopped back onto the bed, panting. "Ride me, baby!"

I quickly found the dildo, smeared some lube on it before easing it inside him. "Oh wow! Not as good as you, but better than before." Hiroshi sounded pleasure drunk.

Straddling him, I took his cock in hand and lowered myself onto him. I rocked as one hand worked the dildo and the other caressed his stomach. This was bliss. Seeing my mate overcome with sensation as we both worked towards our release.

"The button!" Hiro cried out. With fumbling fingers, I pressed it, inflating the knot as he started to cum inside me. The feeling set my orgasm off, my knot inflating. Ropes of cum splashed over his stomach and chest as I shuddered with him still inside me.

I leaned down, careful not to put too much weight on him, and kissed Hiro soundly. "Perfect. Just. Like. You." I

punctuated each word with a kiss.

“We need to do that more often. I need to build up some more stamina first, though.” He laughed, causing his softened cock to slip from me. My knot pulsed with the feeling of his seed running down my leg.

“That was so hot. I’m happy you want to do that again. Just because you’re an omega doesn’t mean you can’t fuck me now and again.”

“Noted. Now get up here and let me suck you and get that knot down.”

I shuffled up the bed so I was straddling his head. He took the tip of my cock into his mouth, just savoring the taste. His hands massaged my knot as he licked and sucked. Soon I was spilling down his throat, my knot deflating.

Hiro laughed as I collapsed onto the bed dramatically. I couldn’t help my grin. I loved seeing him so carefree and light. We had needed this badly. I’d let Tate have a night alone with Hiro. Maybe I could bunk with Larken so they wouldn’t have to worry about me overhearing them.

“So glad we brought this up here,” Hiro said as he sat up and picked up the plate of food from the nightstand. He selected a couple of tiny things, popping them into his mouth and chewing with a contented look on his sweet face.

I got up and grabbed a damp cloth from our bathroom. I wiped him up a bit before returning to the bathroom and cleaning myself up.

Pulling back the covers, I got into bed and took the plate from him. “Come on, let’s get you warmed up.” The house was warm, but I was feeling a chill now that the day’s events caught up with me. I just wanted to snack and then sleep wrapped around my mate.

We shared the rest of the food until the plate was empty and discarded on the floor. Something to deal with in the morning.

Hiro cuddled close. “Thank you for giving me that experience.”

“Thanks for being open to it. I know it’s weird for an alpha to want that.”

“It isn’t!”

“It is, but that’s okay. I just want...”

“Want what?” Hiroshi urged me to let it out.

“I don’t want us to be like it was in my pack. My old pack.”

“What do you mean?”

“With the strict gender or designation roles. Just because you are an omega, it doesn’t mean you should have to do the bulk of the childcare and the cleaning. To always be the bottom.”

“But what if I want to?”

“Then I’ll support whatever you choose. But Hiro, your career is important. The healing gift you have is so vital to a healthy shifter community. I can drop my hours, I can take the

kids with me to work. Cryabell can look after them. Or we can get a nanny and both cut back. We have options.”

He started to cry. Big, heaving sobs into my shoulder. “Hey, what’s wrong?”

“Why are you so perfect?” he wailed.

I smiled into his hair and held him as he cried. When he calmed, I kissed him gently and wrapped myself around him so he felt safe and warm enough to fall asleep.



# DISCOVERY

## Tate

“Here, put your hand here. Can you feel them?” I placed Asher’s hand on my expanding stomach so that he could feel the fluttering movement of our baby doing somersaults inside me.

His eyes lit up as a foot or a hand nudged his palm. “Oh! Wow! That’s amazing. Our baby. They know I’m here.”

“They do. Aldrin says that they can hear us. We might even find out the sex of the baby at the scan soon. Do you want to know?” My heart swelled at the gentle way Asher was cradling my stomach and looking at our baby’s movements.

“It doesn’t matter, but it makes things like names and shopping easier.” His full attention was still on my bump. I didn’t mind that. Things were still awkward between us occasionally. With my bond being more stable with Hiroshi, I could be away from him for longer and I’d been taking full advantage of that by having a lot of overnight stays with Asher in Abrocaelum.

Spending more time with Asher was helping repair the fracture in our fragile bond. I felt closer to him than ever

before while also feeling like we were being pulled apart. Each week that went by brought more fear that he'd never heal. Never get over his issues with alphas and Roan.

With preparations underway for breaking bonds and re-establishing them, under careful supervision, we needed Asher at home as proof that the new alphas weren't unstable.

Each time that the testing nearly started, someone brought up Asher, and things were delayed again. Then each time, I got to see my cousin's heartbreak that bit more. I didn't want to cause that anymore.

"We should head to the clinic. It's almost time for our appointment," I reminded Asher, taking his offered hand and getting to my feet. This part of the factory was quiet, away from all the chaos of the machinery.

I didn't know how Asher coped inside the factory. The space was much too enclosed for me. My raven hated the noise and all the moving parts. They hated all the bustling about, the scents and people. They longed for the clear skies, the natural cover of the trees as they sprouted leaves now spring was truly here.

Asher wrapped an arm around me as he ushered us out of the factory and towards the clinic. I doubted the wisdom in my plan, well, the plan I'd made with Hiroshi, to not let Asher know that Roan would be there until the last possible moment.

We were having our scans together. I was desperate to see his babies as much as I wanted to see my own. This moment was important to us as birthing partners and as mates. I wanted

to have Hiroshi there to see the gender of my baby. He'd pleaded with Roan to have me there, Roan having concerns about security, before James had suggested we do them at the same time, then both alphas could be there as well as any guards that were assigned for that day.

The plan was that Aldrin would scan one of us, while James did the other after we got the pesky observations out of the way. Spending more time with Asher was helping steady my blood pressure. The Flemmings could attest to that if our alpha needed the proof. I just needed him to come home so I could focus on building the right nest for our egg.

“Ash...”

“Here we go,” Asher chuckled, a deep throaty sound that sent a jolt to my balls. Damn hormones. Maybe if he wasn't totally pissed at me after, we could sneak somewhere so he could fuck me. “You've been stewing all lunch. What's the matter, baby?”

“Um, don't flip out.”

He paused and looked at me. “I'll try, okay?”

“Okay, so Hiroshi wanted to be at the scan as my other mate...”

“Riiight.” Asher drew the word out, plainly wanting me to get on with it.

“There were concerns about two pregnant omegas, you and a couple of betas. So...”

He stared me straight in the face. “Roan is going to be there, isn’t he?”

“Yes! But before you say anything, I wanted to see Hiroshi’s babies, too. Please, Ash. We need this to end.”

Ash pulled me into his arms and kissed the top of my head. “Just keep us as far apart as possible. I’ll keep the growling to a minimum, I swear.”

I felt a rush of love for him. “Thank you. For trying. I know it’s hard. It shows how much you love us. Me and the baby.”

“I do. Both of you. I know you love me, too. You wouldn’t be pushing this so hard if you didn’t.”

“I wouldn’t! I just want you home.”

“Trust me, I want that as well. This alter of mine is the one that has the issues. Come on, let’s go see our baby.”



The atmosphere in the clinic was stifling. Roan was tucked into an opposite corner from Asher, both of the alphas able to see the screens for their respective mates. The growling had been kept to a minimum, as Roan had kept a careful distance from both me and Asher. Even Hiroshi had stayed away, giving a sad smile to Ash before attempting to climb onto his bed.

There had been a tense moment where Roan had stepped closer so that he could assist his mate. No one had dared

breathe as Roan brushed by me to lift Hiroshi. He pressed a gentle kiss to Hiroshi's temple before retreating.

Aldrin entered the room with a frown, Ívarr behind him. At the sight of the elf, I sat up. Hiroshi struggled to do the same.

“Peace to you both. There is nothing to fear. I do come, however, with some news that might be difficult to hear.”

James and Aldrin did that silent communication that would have got me a slapped hand in my parent's home. Using bonds to speak in the company of others was considered rude in many circles.

It was Aldrin that spoke. “I wanted to wait to discuss this, but Ívarr insists that now's the time.” He let out a semi-dramatic sigh that made Sunshine giggle. It worked to lighten the tension in the room. “After we found the new gene, Ívarr continued to dig into the results, especially with the traits that Tate had displayed as a new omega and his continued bond with another omega.”

“Oh-kay,” I said, little ants of anxiety crawling over my skin. Why did I always have to be different?

“What I found was fascinating!” Ívarr said with the most enthusiasm I'd ever seen from the elf.

I shared a look with Asher, cautious in the face of Ívarr's happiness. This didn't sound like this could be a good thing for any of us.

“What did you find?” I asked, after dredging up the courage necessary.

“Well, it appears you are not only capable of carrying babies, but you can fertilize eggs.”

You could hear a pin drop in the silence that followed.

“Ívarr, what are you saying?” Asher demanded.

“What I am attempting to say is that one of those babies inside of Hiroshi may have been sired by Tate.”

*What the fuck?*



“Babe, you don’t have to go back in there if you don’t want to. We can have the scan another day.” Asher had taken me outside so I could get some fresh air after the shock of Ívarr’s words.

Hiroshi was pale, leaning with his head down when I’d left, a poleaxed looking Roan resting a hand on his back. *Are you okay?* I sent to my other mate.

*I’m confused. Worried about Roan. I hope at least one baby is his. He’s been so excited.*

Well, damn, didn’t I feel like a dick? I hadn’t even thought to worry about Roan. I’d potentially stolen one or both of his children from him. Babies that he was so excited to meet and were endlessly preparing for. His father was even sending things for the twins, their relationship thawing slightly.

“Okay, let’s just do this,” I said, both aloud and over the bond.

Ívarr looked apologetic when we re-entered the room and resumed our positions. “I am truly sorry. I didn’t intend to blindside you with that information.” Ívarr was attempting to update his speech to fit in better. His earnest expression was too endearing to hold a grudge. Also, it was better to know now, rather than find out at the birth.

“How do we find out?” Hiroshi asked.

“I can do a spell with a prick of your blood. Old magic, but harmless to all of you. First, though, let’s check how the babies are growing.”

It was a matter of minutes before we were seeing our babies on the screens. Rather than use smaller monitors, the clinic had a large flat-screen TV to display what was on the tiny monitors in split screen mode.

Hiroshi’s twins were wriggling, making it difficult for Aldrin to get a proper look at their sex. “Here, swap. Tate’s little boy is behaving. You can measure him to check he’s growing correctly.” James got up and swapped with Aldrin.

“A boy?” Ash asked in an awed voice.

“Oh yes,” Aldrin chuckled. “He’s making that quite clear.” He pointed at his evidence on the screen.

“Right, let’s get these twins identified. Come on little ones,” James cooed, “be good for me.”

Hiroshi sighed as the movements on the screen slowed. “You are magic, I swear.”

James smiled at him. “Congrats to you both. You have a healthy-looking girl and a boy!”

“Both? We have both?” Hiroshi’s eyes filled with tears and James hugged him carefully, whispering something in his ear only they heard.

Ívarr stepped closer to my omega mate. “If I may? I would like to do the spell now, so that you can celebrate your news. Regardless of the parentage, these babies belong to you all in your unconventional family.” He looked like he wanted to say more, but stopped, casting a wary glance at Asher.

With a prick of Hiroshi’s finger, Ívarr got the blood he needed for the spell. He called to it and a tiny bead floated into the air, hovering above Hiroshi’s stomach. “May I?” Ívarr asked for a dot of blood from Roan, getting it to hover as well. Then he turned to me.

Asher squeezed my shoulder. “Let’s get this done. We need to know.”

I nodded at Ívarr and allowed him to gather his sample to join the rest. Once in place, he muttered some words in the lilting elven tongue that was like music to my ears. It was soothing, taking some of the anxiety away.

The magic took hold, changing the color of the samples. It was only when Hiroshi’s bead split, merging with mine and then Roan’s, that I understood. The colors matched our eyes. Green for Roan and blue for me.



Green lay over the spot where the girl lay. The blue over the boy.

I couldn't breathe for what felt like a minute before air rushed into my lungs and I laughed and laughed until I was crying.

Asher stood stock still until my need for him to hold me steady broke him out of his shock. "Guess you're going to be a papa and a daddy!" His laughter joined mine.

I caught Roan smiling at us. *Congratulations*, he mouthed. Relief flooded my system, leaving me boneless in Asher's arms.

Hiroshi and Roan had a private conversation. *He says it's okay*; he told me over the bond. *There's no one he'd rather share this gift with.*

That was it, wasn't it? The Luna had given us this responsibility, but along with it came with so much love. Once we all got over our shock that something so impossible before was actually possible, then we'd see it for the blessing that it was.

I got to be the first former beta, the first beta turned omega pregnant, and the first omega to sire a child with my best friend and omega mate.

If we could just get Asher home with us, then it would be perfect.

# A REPTZIEVE

## Asher

**F**inding out that Tate had fathered a child with his other mate opened my mind a little. I realized how limiting my thinking had become for the gendered expectations that came with the designations of alpha and omega.

From the very moment my alter had woken that first morning as an alpha and scented our omega in heat, he had taken all the alpha experience we'd had from our childhood and followed that advice verbatim, forgetting that we hadn't been an alpha before, we had no right to another's body. Tate wasn't a natural omega, born and raised expecting heats and the potential of pregnancy.

Our first mistake had been trying to take his agency from him, demanding that he give us cubs as if they were our right and not just a precious gift.

In her wisdom, The Luna had changed my mate, making him not only an omega, but one special enough to sire children with his other mate. It explained why she had allowed Tate and Hiroshi to stay together, and why I could never tear them apart.

Whether I liked it or not, Roan was my family. My child would share a sibling with Roan's child. They tied us up in a messy knot of family, and we'd have to make it work.

So I tried harder, and it was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do. It made me feel pathetic because, as much as I wished and worked for it, progress with my alter was slow.

By the end of March I was around betas with no issue, even with Tate by my side. Alphas were another problem altogether. My lion refused to tolerate anyone that had the potential to rival us near our mate. He was a problematic little fucker. Now that the pack was partnering with demons and they were moving into the area, it meant I'd had to rename him to Monster. Especially seeing as the demons were far more useful to the pack than Monster was to me and our mate.

With their help, the factory was now thriving, and the old machinery was slowly being updated. We had a regular supply of the amazing hell-spice apples and were working on recipes for the cider. I was a tad fixated on my job as a way of coping with the lack of actual progress. Having an outlet for my frustration in the group of friends I'd made at the factory certainly helped. The ogres were free of the stupid shifter hierarchy, making time with them uncomplicated and trouble free.

The big revelation of Hiroshi's discovery along with Ívarr's quieter one had blazed through the shifter world, and, despite the proof, half were convinced this was an elaborate lie to hide that me and Tate were unnatural.

While arguments broke out and more incursions happened into pack lands, the experiments that they had proposed had halted. No one wanted to risk changing and being attacked. It also opened up the possibility of omega and omega pairings, something that had never been done before. There was much to discuss around it all. It made me glad I'd picked a simple factory job and didn't have to deal with the headache of politics.

I was also lucky I was still living with the elves and didn't have to deal with the extra security that Hiroshi and Tate did because of this new information. Somehow Hiroshi's babies parentage had gotten out and everyone had an opinion.

A guilty feeling bubbled in my stomach as I thought about how simple my life was compared to theirs. It made me wonder if Monster was doing this on purpose. I knew he liked the simplicity of our routine. Each day I portaled to the factory for work. I'd spend some time with Tate and our baby and head back to the little cottage I'd made mine. Occasionally, Tate would come and spend the night. We'd tried me staying in our new home, but it had been saturated with Roan's scent and it had set Monster off. At least that time we had run, rather than scaring our mate.

This far on in Tate's pregnancy, I had really hoped that I'd be back to living with them and able to at least tolerate the other alpha, but worry festered that I'd never cope with his scent around Tate.

The factory was just up ahead, a short distance from the portal, when I got a call from our alpha. “Hello, Sir.”

“Asher, would you mind coming to my office? I’d like to speak to you.”

“I was just about to head into work.” I really didn’t want to go in front of Alpha Blake. In fact, I’d been avoiding the man wherever possible, even offering to work delivery jobs outside of Northharbor and Sweetwater to get that distance from the pack if I knew he was coming to the factory. The man held my fate in his hands. I’d never forgotten his threat to petition the council to end my bond with Tate.

“I’m sure they can spare you for a little while.”

“I’ll —“

My elven guard interrupted, “we can speak to your manager and head to the mansion.”

Guess I wasn’t getting a choice.

It was a silent walk to the big house. The security was tighter than ever, with checks for glamours and pat downs. Inside, they still masked scents to hide the location of the alpha’s children. Fear and Magic filled the air. Unhappiness tinged everything, making me wish for a simpler time, before we’d messed everything up.

My guards stayed outside the house, and Melody and Sam escorted me to the alpha’s office. “Don’t worry,” Melody said with a pat on my arm, “the alpha is in a good mood.” With a parting grin, she and Sam left me at the door.

“Hey, Asher, Blake is waiting for you. Go right in.” When I first came to the pack, I found it amusing that Blake’s father-in-law was his assistant, but no one could handle all that the alpha threw at them like Dakota could. It made sense to have someone he could trust so implicitly close to his family with all the threats against them. Those babies were Dakota’s grandchildren, and he was a fierce alpha bear with their safety.

“Thanks,” I said as I pushed the door open.

Both of the alpha pair were waiting for me when I entered the office. Kade was resting his head against his mate’s shoulder, putting down his tablet, when I entered to give me his full attention. The Alpha had been speaking to someone.

I hadn’t noticed him at first because of the alpha pair.

Roan. The alpha was sitting in the far corner with a tablet in hand, looking pensive as his gaze caught mine. He dropped his eyes quickly and shifted in his seat, making Monster purr with satisfaction.

As if he sensed it, Roan’s eyes met mine again. A hint of steel in those gem-like depths. Automatically, a growl broke free, Monster showing his displeasure at seeing the competition in front of us. Luckily for the furniture and my future in the pack, Tate wasn’t nearby.

“There. That is exactly why I brought you here today,” Blake said with a grim look. “You are making progress, but not nearly fast enough. April is just around the corner and Tate will build a nest within a few weeks. You need to be home.”

Instinct warred with sense. I wanted to bite back at the alpha, but he was right. I'd just been thinking about my lack of progress.

Eventually, I spoke in a quiet, respectful tone, "I don't know what to do."

"Come, take a seat." Blake watched as I chose which seat to sit in. I wanted to be in Roan's eye-line so that Monster might behave if he knew where the threat was. I let him use my peripheral vision to keep him in sight.

"We need to ask you some questions. It feels like we don't really know why your alter is acting like this, so some background might be useful. What was your family life like, growing up?" Blake asked after a nudge from Kade.

"I grew up with alpha brothers in a very traditional pride. They saw no value in me besides that of a punching bag. It was worse because my mother became sick after I was born. The pride didn't allow outsiders in, the healer wasn't powerful. She... she suffered before she finally died. My family blamed me, even though I was a baby."

"So you grew up around violent alphas in a strict pack? They stuck to gendered roles?"

"Yes. They hated male omegas." I felt Kade's flinch across the room. Blake and Roan wore identical frowns. "Believed they were aberrations. It took me a long time to see how wrong that was."

“How did you get on at school? Were you allowed to go to a mainstream school?” This felt like an interrogation by Blake.

“They didn’t want me at the pack school, in case I infected anyone else with my weakness. I had to have schooling, so I went to public schools, spent time at a boarding school, before I flunked out. I got my GED at home and worked for one alpha that could tolerate me.”

“Why did you go to so many schools?” Kade asked.

“I was always angry. Always full of rage and getting into fights over dumb shit. Got me kicked out of a lot of places.”

An extended silence followed my words. I felt my face heat. Embarrassment at spilling so much about my past. I knew my childhood was shitty. I also knew that I wasn’t the only one that had gone through rough times. Alpha Blake had seen far worse and was a hundred times better than I was. Part of the reason Monster never started shit with him.

Life had been so much less complicated as a beta. The Luna had felt that I was worth this, though. I had to make it work.

“I wonder...” Kade spoke finally. “If your alter always felt like this was how he was supposed to be. Maybe he felt he was supposed to be an alpha, and he was influenced by what he grew up with.”

My spinning mind halted. An image of a word in a book came back to me. Flabbergasted. I’d thought the word was hilarious when I was a kid. That there would never be a situation where I’d have to use it to describe a feeling because



it wasn't a real feeling. Here I was, though. Completely flabbergasted. Dumbfounded.

Monster used that moment to rear his stupid head. *Yes, alpha.* He said in a smug tone that suggested I'd been an idiot all my life to only figure this out now.

I'd always suspected he was broken. Not right, but maybe he'd had the foresight to know something we hadn't then.

Just how long had The Luna been planning this? Putting her pawns in place to make up her master plan?



Axel joined us a few minutes later as we all sat, lost in our own thoughts. I was pretty sure I had a manic grin on my face from trying to keep my laughter at bay. The situation was ridiculous, beyond anything I could wrap my head around. Despite his thoughts to the contrary, Monster couldn't have been that self aware that he knew we were supposed to be more than a beta.

Then I was reminded that shifters had other gifts. It really wasn't impossible that he felt something. Felt wrong as a beta. Didn't excuse him being a dick now. Roan was a part of our family. Other alphas didn't want to steal my mate.

“Are you ready to go?” Blake asked his brother.

“I am. Roan, I got some things for you. Hiroshi packed you a bag.”

Roan nodded, looking resigned.

Kade got up and went to his friend and perched on the arm of the chair, his arm around Roan.

Blake watched me take in the scene. Kade was speaking quietly to Roan, who was nodding, his mouth a grim line. “Do you see that I’m not jealous of them?”

“Why would you be? Kade loves you. He doesn’t love Roan any more.”

“No, and Tate doesn’t love Roan. Never has.” He pointed at the pair. “They were betrothed for years. Now they are best friends and I’d trust Kade’s life in Roan’s hands. I’ve put my children’s lives in his hands and he’s proven himself.”

“Still doesn’t help my alter,” I bit out, getting frustrated. I knew I was the one to blame for this mess. Roan had been nothing but respectful of my place in Tate’s life.

“No, it doesn’t, but you need to turn that anger inside. Your alter is ripping your family apart because he thinks he’s better than that man over there.”

“So is this it? Are you going to end my bond with Tate? He needs me. I need to be there for the baby.”

“You do, and you are making progress. A month ago, you were in the same room as Roan and didn’t blow up when you found out that Tate is the father of one of Hiroshi’s twins.”

Goddess, that had been hard. Monster had been furious that we were stuck with them. He wanted Tate to break his bond with Hiroshi and leave Sweetwater for somewhere away from

the alpha that had been with Tate, who had tried to mate bond with him.

“Basically, this is your last chance. Mess this up and it’s over.”

“How?”

“You and Roan are going to Abrocaelum with Axel as a chaperone. The pair of you will stay there until you can be in the same room without your alter wanting to tear him to shreds. I can feel him from here.”

“Is that safe?”

Axel spoke from his place next to me. I hadn’t realized he was there. The man was like a ghost. “We’ve been told that neither of you will be able to shift until you leave Abrocaelum.” When he gave a sinister grin, I knew I wouldn’t like what he said next. “I have the sofa, so that means you two will share the bed.”

# ALONE

Hiroshi

I was expecting Roan home for lunch when there was a knock on the door mid morning. Thinking he'd forgotten to take his key and had come home for it, I went to answer the door without shouting for Larken or Micah first, which was protocol after some of the "gifts" left on our stoop in the last few weeks.

Somehow, it was okay to the council that betas could turn into omegas and alphas. Yay more babies! But hell no, those omegas couldn't sire children! What was the world coming to? Had The Luna made a mistake? I'd rolled my eyes so many times as I was tested and then tested again. Each time it showed that my son was also Tate's.

Honestly, I was still reeling from the information that Tate and Roan had both fathered babies with me. My family, of course, was split down the middle over it. Half believed me, the rest said it was as impossible as our bond. Like the council. They would all change their tune when my son was here.

Tate and I were closer than ever because of it. We had to be together all day, so it was just as well, really. We'd been

getting threats to the house, so we were under guard, with Larken staying with us most nights to have another alpha to guard us, with Asher still with the elves. During the day, while Roan and I were working, though I barely worked part time, we had two alphas chaperone us places we needed to go.

As the knock came again, I hurried to the door and opened it to a surprise visitor.

“Hey, Hiroshi, can I come in?”

Axel Sweetwater was kind of intimidating. We’d had very few opportunities to become friends, especially after I’d shared his results with him. I put that down to us all being so busy. While I wanted to know all the Sweetwaters better, I just hadn’t been given the opportunity. So far, being in this house was as isolating as the old house, even surrounded by neighbors. We just had more room here.

I moved away from the double wide door, super practical with the twin stroller we had been given, and let Axel into the house.

“Come to the kitchen. I’ll make you a coffee or something.”

“That’s unnecessary.”

I ignored his protestations. “Do you like tea?”

“I do, thank you.”

I filled the electric kettle, I’d spent some time in the UK so it was a must buy, and set the water to boil. “Do you want a fruity tea or—?”

He cut me off. “Whatever you are having is fine. Don’t trouble yourself.”

The box was close to hand, so I showed him the peppermint tea. He nodded. “I like it to help with reflux.”

While the tea steeped, we stayed silent. Only when Axel had his hands wrapped around his mug did he speak. “My brother has decided that Roan and Asher need to get over this thing. So Roan is being sent to stay with Asher until they can get along.”

My mug nearly slipped from my fingers. Axel’s hand snapped out and steadied it before any of my tea could spill. “Is that safe?”

“Don’t worry, neither can shift in Abrocaelum. They will be practically human while they are there.” That didn’t exactly fill me with confidence. Axel must have seen my worries in my expression. I’d always struggled to hide what I was feeling. “I’ve volunteered to go along with them,” he admitted with a shrug.

I relaxed and smiled at him. “Thank you. I really appreciate you keeping them safe from each other until they work through this. They’d end up hating themselves if they did some permanent harm.”

“So you think they can figure it out, whatever it is between them?” Axel studied me carefully.

“Yeah. All they need to do is realize that Roan has already given Asher the Alpha role for our family.” I leaned on the

counter and tried to stretch my aching back. The babies were having a party and bouncing on my bladder. “Ah! That’s better.” I chose my words carefully. “In every way that it counts, Roan is an alpha, a strong one too, but he’s also gentle and kind. He deferred to Asher before Ash even changed. Asher’s lion just needs to figure that out.”

“Is that what you think is happening? I thought the lion believed Roan was going to take Tate?”

“Nah,” I waved that thought away. “That was just an excuse. The further we get away from Tate and Roan being bonded, the more ludicrous it becomes that either would betray us like that. My mates are like brother-husbands at this point!” I giggled and Axel’s laughter joined with mine.

“Brother-husbands, I like it.”

“It’s so true, though.” My words halted. “Asher —“

“What?”

“He had a crappy childhood.” I sighed. “He’d had a hard life until he found Tate.” I didn’t know all of it, but it was hard to downplay things. “Since then he’s gained control of things, made something of himself and I think he puts that down to having Tate, but it wasn’t.” I looked at Axel straight in the eye so he would see how serious I was. “Tate gave him something to work towards. He did the work. Now, suddenly he’s an alpha and he’s lost that balance with his alter. So he’s hyper fixated on Tate, thinking that’s how he gets back in control.”

We lapsed into silence, both sipping at our cooling drinks. Finally, Axel got up and took his mug to the dishwasher before checking I was done and doing the same with mine. I thanked him with a tiny smile.

“Would you mind helping me pack a bag for Roan? He’s going straight to Abrocaelum from the office. We don’t want to give either the chance to back out.”

“Um, sure.” I was torn over Roan being sent away with Asher. It was a smart plan, a bit of forced proximity to get over their issues, but I also knew that being without Roan for the next couple of days was going to be hard.

I led Axel up to the room that I shared with Tate and Roan. My omega mate was napping on the bed, but woke when I opened the door.

“Axel? Is everything okay?” he asked.

I quickly outlined the situation as I stuffed some essentials in a bag. Each time I looked at Tate, his mouth was settling into a grimmer line. *Why can't they just come here?* His mental voice sounded huffy, and I resisted the urge to roll my eyes at him. He knew why. He just didn’t like the thought of more of us going away.

Aloud, I asked a question that I was worried about. “Who else are we getting to guard us? Micah stays some nights. Larken practically lives here, but we’ll need someone else. One alpha each and a spare, isn’t that how it goes?”



I wasn't particularly concerned that anything would happen. The threats had been almost laughable. My tiger thought it was ridiculous that guards followed us everywhere when we were bigger than all of them. Still, I put up with it to give Roan peace of mind.

Axel frowned. "Good point. I'll remind Blake, or better yet, I'll text Deke and have him get someone here. I'll also go ask Micah to stay here for the foreseeable, okay?"

Mollified, I nodded. "Thanks."



"Do you want some more pasta, Carl?" My tone was clipped. My tiger growled in my mind. We did not like this alpha. He was strange. In his human form, he still closely resembled his shifter form, a western gorilla. Carl was big, mean looking, and hairy — and not in the cute bear way like Dakota. His skin was the color of curdled milk, like he had seen little of the sun.

It wasn't even that there was this strange alpha in my house. I'd grown to love both Micah and Larken, despite the latter lusting after my mate. Carl was rude and seemed to think I belonged in the kitchen preparing our meals.

When Deke had brought Carl to the house with an apologetic look, I'd reluctantly allowed him into the house. Within fifteen minutes, I'd wanted him gone. Unfortunately, we were stuck with him.

Trained from a young age to be polite and hospitable, I'd kept my mouth shut and fed the brute. To be fair to the other alphas, they had helped with feeding the colossal man since I was a poor cook. He made even my overconfident alter take pause, so it was easier just to keep him happy.

"Please, Hiro." At least Carl sort of had manners, even if he hadn't asked permission to shorten my name. Only my mates did that, and Asher.

I served the last of the pasta before Micah took the pot. "Go get your feet up. You look tired." His concern was touching. We'd bonded over a love of Boys Love manga, which I would translate for him. I hadn't read any in so long, having been made to feel immature for liking the story format.

The red panda shifter smiled at me as I thanked him and went into the den to sink into the sectional with a heavy groan. My feet felt like they were twice their usual size.

Larken looked at me with concern. "You okay?"

I felt my face attempt a smile. "I'm good. Been on my feet too much."

"You know you don't have to serve us, right? Carl can make his own food."

My eyes widened, fearful that Carl would overhear and start something. "It's fine. I don't mind cooking."

Larken perched on the coffee table and lifted my feet into his lap. He pulled off my socks and massaged one foot with firm, sure fingers. He worked over the sole, stretched out my

toes and stroked up to my swollen ankles. I sighed with bliss. “Damn, you are good at that. One day you’re going to make an omega very happy.”

It was the wrong thing to say as he stiffened. “Unlikely.”

I steeled myself for the conversation we clearly needed to have, but Larken switched to the other foot and a groan escaped me at how good it felt. There was nothing sexual in it for me. This was strictly a pack mate helping a pregnant omega.

“Why couldn’t you have an omega?” I finally broached the subject.

Larken fixed me with a look and moved to put my feet on the table. It asked, “are we really doing this?” I peered right back at him, placing my feet in his lap so he couldn’t move away easily. “You know why. I have feelings for someone else.”

He was defiant as we sat there, staring at each other.

“I know you love Roan,” I finally began. It seemed as if he wanted to cut me off. “No, hear me out. I’m glad that you love Roan.”

“What? Why?” His face was a picture of shock.

“Roan has had so few people in his life that have loved him. His only family right now is his ex and Kade’s parents. Roan’s own dad can’t make him a priority, even with the babies due soon.”

“But I don’t just love him. I’m *in* love with him,” he stressed, looking frustrated now.

“I know. I’m in love with him too. Tate tried to be in love with Roan, but for whatever reason, he couldn’t see what we see.”

“And what do we see?”

“Roan’s pure heart. He’s the best person I know.” My heart lifted at the thought of my mate. A man so dedicated to his family’s happiness, he was risking his safety to fix things for us all to be together.

“So that’s why it’s okay that you’re in love with him, because while he might not be in love with you, he loves you, Lark.” Our eyes met. I saw the pain in his heart. The longing that he’d kept at bay so well that Roan hadn’t suspected a thing. “You’re important to him. He trusts you. That’s why he’s had you here living with us. He knows you need him right now, so he’s sharing his new family with you.”

Larken muffled a sob against his hand. I twisted and opened my arms, motioning him to come over for a hug. He came into my arms and cried against my shoulder as I held him. “Why couldn’t he have been an omega?” he lamented against me.

“You wouldn’t have been able to love him the same if he was. Your being an alpha would have kept you apart. Same if you were the omega instead.”

“Stop making sense,” he huffed as his tears slowed.

“If I’ve learned anything over the last year, I would say it is that The Luna has plans for us all.” I squeezed him before letting him go.

Carl interrupted our conversation by coming into the den carrying a tray with Micah and Tate behind him. “It’s come to my attention that I’ve been taking advantage of your kindness and may have caused offense.” He brandished the tray. “So, I’ve come with a peace offering.”

The scent of hot cocoa drifted over me. “Oh! That’s lovely of you, Carl.”

He looked embarrassed. “Micah helped.”

Micah smiled. “He burned the milk for the first batch. Don’t worry, the pot is soaking.”

“Here,” Carl handed me a mug before serving the others and sitting down away from the rest of us with his own.

I sipped cautiously, taking a longer drink when it tasted fine. It was pretty good, actually. Not as good as when Asher made it, but as peace offerings went, it wasn’t bad.

We were quiet as we all drank, all except Carl. “Is yours okay, Carl?” I asked with a frown.

“It’s fine. I just don’t like cocoa all that much.”

What kind of monster didn’t like hot cocoa? It just cemented the idea that I would never be friends with Carl. He was a half decent guard I guess, and as apologies went, this had been almost decent. I shrugged in response and continued drinking.

Moments later, I felt a heaviness in my limbs. It crawled outwards from my middle, making my limbs leaden and fear spark through my bond with Tate.

Across the room my eyes met Carl's, his grin triumphant as one by one, we dropped our mugs to the plush carpet, the liquid staining the light gray fabric.

I flicked a look over at Tate as I tried to call him over the bond. He looked terrified as he slumped into an already sleeping Micah. When did that happen?

“No!” The word burst free from Larken as he staggered to his feet. He made it a couple of steps before he stumbled and landed sprawled out on the coffee table, completely unconscious.

“Just you now.” Carl sneered at me, the semi-polite veneer finally shed. “Drink up and go to sleep, or I’ll make you sleep, and you won’t like my methods. Wouldn’t want to hurt the babies, would we?”

Trying to lift the mug was difficult. My arms weighed too much. Exhaustion was trying to pull me under, only my panic keeping me awake. I wanted to slip away, even if escaping later would be easier if I knew where I was going.

“Here,” Carl moved to sit next to me, much closer than I was happy with. “Let me help you.” With careful movements, he lifted the mug to my lips, allowing me to take a big gulp of the cooling liquid.

There, I tasted the bite of the magic that had been hidden under the chocolate. I'd never look at hot cocoa the same again. *Fuck you, Carl*, I thought.

I scanned my consciousness for my tiger and found them missing. Maybe not missing, but hidden from me. There was a wall in place.

The extra mouthful of my drink worked like a charm. My heart rate slowed, my mind fogged, and I slipped into sleep.



Something wasn't right with the drugs they had given me. Okay, so it looked like I was asleep, but I could hear everything. I couldn't use my pack bond or mate bonds, so whatever they had used for that had worked.

Carl made a phone call as soon as we were all down. He left Larken and Micah on the floor after tying them up. It wouldn't contain them for long, just long enough for him to do whatever he had planned for me and Tate.

"They're all out. Tied up the alphas. Bring the van around." He barked out orders to whoever was on the phone.

I heard a vehicle pulling up, someone getting out and opening the front door. Our wards weren't working. Only people that we'd allowed entry could enter the house. *Fuck!*

Carl picked me up. "Get that one. He wants them both."

The other person grunted. I heard sounds like he was doing as he was told. I was in sweats and barefoot, so the March air

was chilly. The tingle of magic I usually felt just outside the perimeter of the house was missing. We were so fucked.

They loaded us into the back of the van. The inside had been prepared, with soft blankets and what felt like a mattress wedged inside. Clearly, they didn't want us injured. One of them even covered us with the blankets, muffling the sounds a little.

A short drive took us to what had to be the new back gate by the factory. The pack had removed the previous exit from the sleuth side of the compound when they had added the additional security, deeming it a weakness to have three exits to guard.

We must have been in a factory van and the person on watch must have been in on the plan, because no one looked inside before they waved us through.

It was hard to tell where we were going. Even after living here for the last couple of years, I had explored little of the area. I'd been too busy.

When I couldn't scent the sea, I assumed it was away from Northarbor, likely the other side of Sweetwater, a place I knew even less of. I didn't even know the names of the towns near Sweetwater.

The potions were wearing off by the time we made it to our destination. Tate was stirring. I could feel the faintest traces of his mental voice as his raven tried to pull him from sleep to protect him. My tiger was there, furious and ready to gut someone, but I couldn't pull them forward into a shift.



The van pulled into a large building and stopped. I sensed several shifters outside, their scents all mingling. One was all too familiar.

*No, no, no.* This couldn't be happening.

Tate's eyes opened as panic nearly overtook my common sense. I needed out. Needed away.

The door slid open.

"Hello, my mate." Jared smirked. "Glad to have you back."

# DELUSIONAL

Tate

The vehicle we were in was slowing by the time that I came to. The bonds were silent, either by magic or distance. I realized it was magic when I saw Hiroshi next to me.

At least the van was sort of comfortable.

I wished I had trusted my gut when Carl had come to our house. Micah didn't give me a weird squirming feeling, so I was assuming it was the gorilla alpha who looked more ape than shifter. Judging people on their looks was wrong. The familiar refrain from my mother came to mind, but I knew that something was off with Carl.

Maybe I'd been cowardly, hiding out from the strange alpha in our home and letting Hiroshi deal with it. Yet, it was what I had done, still reeling that Asher was on his last chance.

I'd received a message from Asher telling me what was happening and asking me to apologize to Hiroshi because he would be without Roan until they sorted it either way.

My mind was slow. My thoughts felt odd, like my brain was stuffed with cotton wool. Everything felt distant. I was focusing on the wrong things rather than the situation that we found ourselves in.

The shifters that surrounded us weren't pride. I didn't know who they were or how Jared had gotten so many to follow him into this madness. Taking two mated omegas was a death sentence without trial. They would applaud any shifter for killing him on sight. So why was he smiling?

When he called Hiroshi mate, I was nearly sick in my mouth. My mate looked terrified, the start of a panic attack taking hold and wrenching all common sense from him.

"No, no, no. This can't be happening!" Hiroshi scuttled backwards as Jared reached for him.

Ignoring Hiroshi's words, Jared reached in and took his arm in a firm grip. Hiro tried to move free, but Jared squeezed, the skin going red and leaving marks when he let go. "Behave!" Jared's voice was cold and furious.

I wished for the bond so I could tell Hiro to go along with Jared for now. My mate was too fearful to think clearly. Moving closer, I wrapped an arm around him and directed my words to Jared. "Sorry, but he's still coming around from the drugs. He's not quite himself."

"Get out of the van!" Jared barked. He stepped to the side, letting us have our first look at the place.

There was a large house in front of us, with smaller houses flanking it. It looked like a farm or mini compound, as I could see a perimeter fence in the distance.

Getting out onto shaky legs, I took a couple of deep breaths and held a hand out for Hiroshi. He shook his head, retreating further into the van until Carl climbed in and hoisted my mate into his arms.

Terror had Hiro freezing, his eyes wide as Carl carried him into the house. I tailed them, more anxious than I'd ever been.

The inside of the house was richly decorated. There were hardwood floors throughout the first floor and a thick carpet on the stairs, meaning at least two floors to this house, perhaps three. I tried to get an idea of the layout and potential exits, so that maybe I could shift when more of the magic wore off.

“Take them upstairs!” Jared yelled as he stomped towards one of the beautifully decorated rooms just off the entrance hall. I could hear him complaining to someone, but couldn't make out the words, as I followed Carl up the stairs and to a large room with its own en suite. The bed was huge, with a cozy-looking comforter in a pale gray. The room had dashes of green through the mostly gray and cream palate. It looked like a high end hotel room, yet we both knew what it was as I met Hiroshi's eyes. The horror in them telling me we were screwed. This was a fancy jail cell.

“Hey,” I soothed once Carl put him down and left us inside, the door locking from the outside. “It won't be long before we're missed. They'll find us.”

“How? How will they find us? This is all my fault! I should never have given in to Jared.” He sighed. “Or maybe I should have just mated with him and saved us all this heartache. You and Asher would have been fine without me.”

“Hey! You can’t talk like that. What about Roan?”

“I’ve done nothing but make his life complicated. He’d be better off without me. First, I insist on more —“

“Sunshine, you need to stop blaming yourself. The only person to blame here is Jared for being utterly crazy! You didn’t know he’d lose his mind because he didn’t get what he wanted.” I needed to keep my voice down. We had no idea if anyone was listening outside the door. “As for Roan, he loves you. He wanted to try the mate thing. He could have said no at any point, but he wanted to give you that.”

“He’s too good for me.”

“No, he’s just right for you and he’s going to hunt all over for you as soon as word gets out that we are gone.”

“They were using magic, Tate. I can’t feel my bonds with you or Roan. I can’t feel my tiger. How are we going to help our mates find us?”

I looked around the room, weighing up our options. We were on the third floor, so we wouldn’t be able to climb down easily. I just needed to access my crow long enough to shift and get out.

“Eventually, the magic will wear off if I don’t eat anything. I can shift and fly back to the pack,” I whispered.

“But what if they make you?”

“Then we’ll deal with that when we have to. If that happens, then all we’ll have to do is wait. They will come.” I had absolute faith in our mates and pack. We just had to wait this out.



The lingering effects of the sleeping potion had me waking from another nap what felt like a few hours later. I didn’t have any real concept of how much time had passed. I was just guessing with how full my bladder was.

After relieving myself, I scoped out the room while Hiroshi watched me. It felt like he was trying to use the bond to send me something. It was like it was there, but he was shouting into the wind with all that I could hear.

“Sunshine, don’t stress yourself out. It isn’t good for the babies.” I went to the bed and pulled him into my arms, mindful of both our bumps. Neither of us had long to go. Just five weeks. I couldn’t wait to meet my sons and our daughter, because they belonged to all of us.

The sound of the key in the lock had us moving away from each other. “Jared wants you both downstairs. Follow me.” This was a different goon. All of Jared’s men were the muscular alpha-hole type I’d never been interested in. They made my skin itch.

We linked hands and trailed after our new guard down to a well appointed sitting room. I got the impression that this wasn't Jared's house. The decorating taste was too mature for him. There was a feminine energy.

"Is this your mother's house?" I blurted as soon as I saw Jared. Our guard roughly shoved us onto the cream leather sofa.

I watched Jared roll his eyes, "no, my great-aunt's. Mom had to say she didn't know where I was." Everyone had suspected that Jared was being helped by his mother's side of the family. This just proved it.

"Not that it matters. We won't be here long. We have a couple of things to wrap up here before we will travel to our new home."

"What do you want, Jared?" Hiroshi asked, tear-filled eyes nearly breaking my heart. I had to be strong for him. I squeezed the hand I still held. Jared tracked the motion with a scowl.

"You. And those babies." He smiled, his pretty face making him almost look angelic when his soul was rotten. "We have families ready to care for them in Europe once they are born. I don't want to raise another man's spawn. Besides, once we are bonded, we can make more to replace them, so don't be sad. I promise they will be well looked after." Goddess above, he was delusional. Did he really think that Hiroshi would accept him? He had a fated bond with Roan. Nothing could break that. "Tate can keep his with him until he goes into heat again,

then he'll be sold to the highest bidding alpha. I have an alpha ready to train him on how to be a proper omega."

"Proper omega?" I asked. Why did those words sound like a threat?

"To learn how to serve your alpha properly. How to give him all that he needs to be happy. Once Victor has broken you, you'll serve whoever you are told to."

Icy tendrils of fear snaked their way through my body. "You can't make me bond to someone. It isn't how it works."

"It will be possible after Victor gets his hands on you. He's paid me a lot of money for this. Trust me, I've been planning this since I heard about whatever perversion of nature this is." He pointed between me and Hiroshi. "I've planned for everything. I'm going to get my mate as I deserve and we'll be happy away from this place."

"But Roan! I'm mated to him. My fated, Jared. Please. Whatever you have planned, it won't work." Hiroshi pleaded with Jared for understanding.

"Roan is going to have a nasty accident once he goes home to find you gone." Jared said in a painfully chilly voice.

"Nothing is coming between us again, Hiroshi. You're mine." A chill ran down my spine at the callous way he spoke.

"No, please!" Hiroshi sobbed. I wrapped an arm around him, pulling him close and muttering into his hair nonsensical words.



Jared glared at me and I knew if I wasn't pregnant with a miracle baby, he'd have murdered me to keep me from Hiroshi. He'd have broken Hiro's heart to get what he wanted. This could never be love. He was obsessed with my mate.

He got up, ran a hand through his messy blonde hair, and strode over to a bar I hadn't noticed. He picked up a small vial with a glare. "Now, though, we have something for you to drink. Let's get rid of the bonds between the two of you, and between you and your alpha, Tate. You are no use to me bonded to that worthless lion, and Hiro is mine!"

I wanted to refuse, to run away, but he clearly expected that. Carl and another alpha from our pack, Sven, moved from their places at the door to grab me and yank me away from Hiroshi. My mate cried out in fear, curling into himself and shaking. There was nothing he could do with three large alphas against just us.

*Please! Don't fight them. I'm not worth you being hurt.*  
Hiroshi begged me, his voice still sounding far away over our bond.

I almost sagged in relief at hearing him. *I love you, Sunshine. They can't take that.*

*I love you too.*

Carl held my arms pinned to my body while Sven wrenched my mouth open so that Jared could pour the vial into my mouth. Sven closed my mouth with a snap and held my nose closed, so I had no choice but to swallow the foul liquid.

It tasted just as horrible as I remembered from when Asher and I took it before we bonded to Roan and Asher. My heart gave a pang at the thought of my mate, at the idea of Hiroshi being without me.

Carl gave me a rough shove. Hiroshi moved with shifter speed out of the way, just before I hit the sofa.

I felt the stirring of my raven and wondered if I could shift and fly from here before I had to face Hiroshi without our bond.

“Shouldn’t take long to have an effect,” Jared said cheerfully. “Basil charged an arm and a leg for a double strength one. It’ll strip pack and mating bonds.”

Hiroshi began sobbing as we waited for the terrible potion to take hold. Jared watched us the entire time like every emotion Hiro showed fascinated him.

*Hey, calm.* I sent the words, the feeling, down the bond to, I dunno, just leave him with a last impression of me before the potion ripped it away.

Instead of hearing it like a whisper, it sounded clear. Hiroshi jerked, his crying paused. His eyes met mine, equally wide with shock.

Jared’s gaze sharpened. “What’s happening?”

*Do we tell him?* Hiroshi asked with clear stress. He looked a minute away from fainting and I worried about the babies. What would they do if I said it had worked? Would they separate us now?

He must have read those surface thoughts because he answered Jared. “I think your potion is broken. It didn’t work.”

The spoiled alpha let out a scream of frustration, complete with what I could swear was a foot stamp, before striding back to the bar. He tugged on his hair, his anger leaching from him and infecting the room. I felt like I was holding my breath as I waited for an ax to fall.

“I’m going to kill Basil for ripping me off!” He searched for something and came back around the bar with another little bottle. “Princess Poppy made this one. So it will work. I’d bet Carl’s life on it.”

Carl jerked. “Hey!”

“Shut up!” Jared snapped at the alpha, a little alpha power leaking out. Carl’s mouth snapped shut.

Jared stood above me menacingly. “Don’t make me get them to hold you again. Open your fucking mouth and swallow this.”

I did as I was told, too worried about how quickly Jared was becoming unhinged. This potion was just as gross tasting as the previous, leaving a burning trail down my throat.

We waited in silence, a clock ticking the only sound.

“Well?” he demanded.

*Tate? Can you still hear me? Please don’t leave me!*

Hiroshi’s mental voice was one of the sweetest things I’d ever heard.

*I hear you. I'm never leaving you.*

“We can still hear each other,” Hiroshi stated boldly. “It didn’t work. Or maybe better yet, it can’t.”

“What the fuck is going on?” Jared raged.

“I think Tate is also my fated mate now he’s an omega.”

# GET ALONG CABIN

## Roan

When Blake had ordered me to go to Abrocaelum, I'd felt the first ever prickle of anger at my alpha and friend. I resented the idea of being sent away like an errant child. Though, when I thought about it, his plan made sense. The only way for Asher to get over this was to actually confront the problem.

Axel had been to the house and explained things to Hiroshi while getting a bag for me. We had no idea how long this would take, so I needed a few days' worth of clothing. I still called Hiroshi to speak to him as we walked to the permanent portal at the edge of the compound.

Elves on both sides heavily guarded our portal, but the scent of magic was usually enough of a deterrent for curious shifters.

The silence between the three of us as we walked was intense. Mentally, I knew Asher didn't have a problem with me. Emotionally, I couldn't help but feel the sting of rejection each time that the lion shifter growled at me or glared.

As our chaperone, Axel walked between us, ensuring a careful distance was maintained. It hurt that this was what we had come to, when at one point Asher was my mate. I really hoped that there was at least a friendship to salvage from this mess.

My nose itched as we got closer. The heavy, cloying feel and scent of elven magic was oppressive, and I had to fight against my need to turn tail and run home.

Asher was clearly used to it and walked calmly towards his current home. Axel showed no outward signs of a problem, aside from that his shoulders were stiff, his mouth a thin line.

Hakeem was waiting just before the portal's entrance. "I need to perform a new geas on you both," he said, as he took Asher's arm and muttered a few words.

"Geas?" I asked as Hakeem motioned for me to come forward.

"It's a spell that prevents you from shifting. Before, Asher could partially shift, but given what we are attempting here, we do not want injuries from claws, so neither of you will shift at all. Your alters will be there, but you can't let them out."

I understood the reasoning behind it, and it was honestly a relief not to have to worry about Asher's much bigger lion dominating my wolf. In fight training we were equally matched, especially given that I'd had extra training with Deke with all the threats we had been receiving. Asher could always overpower me with his sheer size.

A snarl ripped from Asher as I stumbled into him after passing the threshold of the portal. I held my hands up apologetically. “Sorry!”

Creating a larger distance between us, I circled Hakeem to walk on his other side, now making it so that we had two people between us. I sighed inwardly. It was going to be a long couple of days.



I looked at the bed that I’d just laid my bag on. “This might be a problem.”

Axel chuckled from the doorway. “Yeah, I didn’t think it was this small.”

The bed was maybe a double, so there was no way that I wouldn’t end up accidentally touching Asher as I attempted to sleep. There wasn’t even space for us to build a pillow wall between us.

“So, this... cabin. Is this the supernatural version of the ‘get along shirt’?” I asked Axel.

He laughed. “What?”

Taking my phone from my pocket, I was glad to see some service here. Magic sure was handy. I did a quick search for what I was talking about. Pictures of two people stuffed into one shirt with the words, ‘this is our get along shirt’ blazoned on the front, came up. When Axel saw what I was thinking, he laughed.

“What the hell has gotten into you?” Asher grumbled from just outside the small room. I held up my phone.

“Instead of a shirt, we’ve got a get along cabin,” I joked, trying to break the ice.

Asher cracked a smile, the first in my presence actually directed at me for a long time. “Good one.”

His approval shouldn’t have meant as much as it did, but here we were.

I helped Asher cook from one side of the tiny kitchen, aware that Axel was watching every interaction we made.

Dinner was tense, though the food was good. “This is great,” I praised Asher. “You were always good at cooking.”

“And Hiroshi could burn water,” Asher joked.

I laughed. “True, but he’s been learning.”

Axel’s eyes widened at the exchange. I gave him a quelling look. This was exactly the thawing that we needed. Still, I avoided bringing up Tate or the babies. We stuck to generic topics, like the weather and pack news. Just general bullshit that was light and easy, avoiding any topics that might trigger rage in Asher.

We sat thoughtfully at other sides of the room after we cleaned up from the meal. Hiroshi had thought of packing me a couple of books to read. I didn’t know why he’d picked one of his Boys Love manga novels that he liked, but I guess it was cute because he wanted to share one of his interests with me. It took me a minute to figure it out. “You start from the



back,” Asher pointed out. He moved closer. “Oh, that’s a good one. I’ve not read it in ages.”

I went to hand it to him, “you can have a re-read now, if you like.”

He pushed it back at me, our fingers grazing. “No, you read it first. Let me know what you think.”

I didn’t breathe for a whole minute. I was scared that things would turn with him.

Asher retreated a couple of steps toward his corner.

“Oh! Here, he gave me this series, too.” I held the other book out to him. “Do you want to read this one first? Let me know if it’s good.”

The other alpha studied the paperback in my hands, his eyes widening. “He let you borrow this one?” I examined the book and gave Asher a questioning look, an eyebrow raised. “That’s his favorite. He keeps it in the plastic because it’s worth a lot.”

“It’s worth money?” I turned it over and saw there were few signs he had read before it. My mate must have looked after it well.

“There was a limited print run on that version. Hiro has it on his ereader, too.”

That explained a lot. “Well, I think he’d be okay with you reading it as well, as long as you are careful with it.”

“I just can’t believe he let it out of his sight. He must really love and trust you.” Asher took the offered book with a smile.

It grew dark as we read. The low lights flicked on, powered by the magic of the realm. I grew almost relaxed, letting my guard down for the first time since we had changed Asher.

Asher got up, placed the book carefully back in the plastic and put it on the low table carefully. "I'm getting tired. Think I'll start getting ready for bed."

The tension returned as I remembered the small bed. I gulped, "okay, I guess I'll turn in too." Exhaustion was creeping in. Being away from my mate was hard enough without worrying about what Asher might do in the middle of the night.

We both went through our routines before stripping down to our underwear and getting into bed.

The light was on my side, so I extinguished it, plunging us into darkness thicker than I was used to. In Sweetwater, there were lights around the compound fence to prevent people from getting in and hiding in the shadows.

"You get used to how dark it is," Asher said quietly.

It was strange to lie next to him, our arms nearly touching, aware of the heat of his skin. For the first time that day, we were alone. Sure, Axel could probably hear us. There was no noise here either. It was kind of creepy.

"Roan?"

"Yeah?"

"I hate what we've become," Asher whispered, the confession pained.

“Me too. I thought we were at least friends.”

“We are!”

“Then why —?”

He was quiet for a long time. I got the sense he was trying to form his reply, or was just really thinking things through.

“My lion wants to be the head of our pride. He wants you to submit to me. For you to understand where you come in the pecking order.”

“But it doesn’t matter.”

We lay in thought for a while. I spoke with my wolf, trying to match his needs with those of my own. Did I care who was perceived to be in charge of my unconventional family? No. I knew that my mate loved me for the alpha that I was. Not one that dictated things. My primary concern was the power going to the new alpha’s head, making him rash or dictatorial.

Eventually Asher spoke. “It matters to him. He’s never had power like this before. He just wants to be in control.”

That I understood well. The alpha needed to have control over every situation. Could I hand over the reins to him? My wolf huffed a yes with a hint of exasperation. We’d never been an alpha to impose their will on others.

“I can try. As long as you don’t take it too far.”

Under the covers, Asher reached for my hand, and I took it in mine. Slowly, our breathing deepened as we both fell asleep.



“Hey, sleeping beauties! Time to get up. We have trust exercises to do!” Axel banged on the bedroom door, opening it a little, shocking me into waking. Asher was spooning me, his breaths puffing on the back of my neck. He must have been sleeping deeply to not rouse at the noise Axel was making.

The scent of coffee got him to open his eyes. He stiffened when he realized what he was doing. I patted his arm that lay over my chest. “I missed waking in a puppy pile.” The tension eased from him and he huffed out a laugh.

“We’re going to get there, aren’t we?”

I squeezed him closer to me. “Sure we are. We have five reasons at home.”

“Five?”

“Tate, Hiroshi, your baby, Tate’s baby boy, my baby girl. We have a beautiful family, Ash. We can’t give up on that. Sure, we are going to make mistakes. We’re going to fight. That’s family life. Since you couldn’t be my mate, you can be my brother-husband.”

Asher’s bark of laughter was loud, making Axel pop his head around the door. He grinned and shook his head at what he saw.

“I’m being serious. You are my brother in all the ways that matter. We’ll make it work because we all love each other. Just in different ways.”

This time, it was him that pulled me closer. “I wish we’d never all tried being mates for all the pain it caused, but also not because it gave us you. Despite what my lion thinks, I know you don’t want Tate like that. I know you’d protect him with your life.”

Pushing back the tears that threatened to fall, I choked out. “I would. Just like you’d stand in front of Hiroshi if I couldn’t get there in time.”

“Breakfast!” Axel shouted.

Asher eased away. “I know it’s easy to say all this here while we can’t shift and can ignore our alters, but I mean it, Roan. You giving up control was all that he needed to feel safe. He’s never really had that.”

I felt pain for the confused alter. My wolf instinctively knew what he needed and vowed to commit to letting Asher lead our family from now on. My wolf was aware we were more passive than other alphas, yet knew it didn’t stop our omega loving both of us. We were as The Luna intended. Hiroshi needed someone gentle that wouldn’t quash his loving spirit and would understand his need to give so much of himself to others.

Rounding the bed, I pulled Asher into a tight hug, hoping he could feel everything that I couldn’t say. Things might have ended up all messed up, but one day we’d all be together and happy.

Axel had made bacon and eggs, the bacon on the wrong side of crispy and the eggs rubbery. We still wolfed them down, not

wanting to risk the beta's wrath. There was a reason he was Blake's second in command, despite his beta status. Deke should have had the role of second as an alpha, yet Blake had given him the security team to do whatever he wanted with.

While Axel didn't have an ability like Chase's to tell when someone was lying, or Jasper's premonitions, he was unusually stealthy. He blended into shadows, like he could wrap them around his deep black wolf. Maybe that was his gift from The Luna.

A heavy bang came from the door, almost as if someone had run straight into it. There were the sounds of shouting and a wheezing breath. "Roan!"

I was up out of my seat like a shot, reacting to the absolute panic in my best friend's voice. "Lark?"

"Taken! They've been taken!" he yelled through the door.

Axel dashed to it and flung it open. Larken had sweat, blood, and mud covering him from head to toe.

"What the hell? Are you okay?"

He braced his hands on his thighs as he tried to get his breath back. "No time." He panted and wiped sweat from his brow. He looked like he wanted to be sick. "Hiro and Tate are gone. Carl took them."

The bottom fell out of my world. I wouldn't have stayed standing if it wasn't for Asher's support. I looked at him, needing him to tell me what to do. We needed to get our omegas back. The babies, they had to be okay.

As if he heard my thoughts, Asher launched into a plan.  
“Larken, have you told anyone?”

“I shouted it to people and made a call as I ran straight here,” My friend said, worry plain on his face.

“Good. Axel, call Blake. We’re going to need a few alphas or betas that he can trust. Just in case this is a ruse to get Blake to leave Elliotte, he should stay with the pack.”

“Right,” Axel agreed. “He’ll also have to take people off other tasks just in case there’s an attack while our attention is divided.”

“Yes. That’s possible.” He turned back to Larken, still holding me close to him. “Lark, come take a hold of Roan. He needs the support.”

“What about you?” I finally spoke up.

“My lion needs this. He’s practically purring at getting the chance to prove himself. He won’t let us down. Our mates will be back with us soon.”

“We don’t even know who has them. It could be anyone.” I felt disconnected. Everything felt far away. What use would I be to them like this?

“I’ll call Poppy. Maybe she can do a spell to trace them?” Larken suggested.

“We need to go. Get to the house and see if there are any scents or clues we might recognize.” Asher appeared to be cool and calm, but his hands kept clenching.

I followed him out of his house and into the village. Elves joined us as we ran to the portal, not slowing for anything.

As soon as we were through, we shifted, the geas gone. I took the position on Asher's left shoulder, Larken to his right as the Komodo dragon struggled to catch up. Axel guarded our rear as we skirted the compound to avoid being slowed, and got to our house.

Asher stopped suddenly and sniffed. *Carl and Sven from the pack. There was a large vehicle here. I can see the tracks.*

Axel went into the house, Micah watched us fearfully from the doorway. "They drugged us. I'm so sorry."

I shifted and squeezed his shoulder. "Being kidnapped is becoming a problem in this pack. First Kade, now —" I couldn't finish my joke. Trying to lighten the atmosphere, to have hope, was too hard.

Inside, Axel was finishing up a call. "Good thing we have LoJacks on all the pack's vans and cars. We have a location."

"What?" Hope flared in my chest.

"I always knew that if anyone tried to smuggle anything out of the pack, they'd have to use our vehicles to do it, otherwise people would question them being in the compound. So a while back, I put trackers on them all. I have the last known location of the van, where they stopped for a few minutes before returning to the compound to not be suspicious."

"How?" I heard the incredulity in my tone.



“Dalton,” Axel said, as if that answered everything. I guess it did. That beta knew everything and could find information like no one’s business. “I’ll text Poppy to meet us there. Or whatever witch they send. Someone is coming to help.”

“We have to go now. We can’t wait.” Asher looked scared.

“Don’t worry, we won’t. Micah, you’re with us. Melody is bringing a van round now.”

We all heard the van stop just moments later. Melody hit the horn. “Let’s go cause some pain!” she yelled.

I was going to end whoever thought they could take my mate from me.

# FEAR

## Hiroshi

Glasses smashed, things were hurled, and in front of us, Jared unraveled. I flinched as shards of the coffee table were flung our way as it exploded from a kick from the ferocious alpha.

It was clear to see his tiger was aiding in his tantrum as Jared snarled and ruined the pretty room. Everything that wasn't nailed down, destroyed.

Tate and I clung to each other, trying to protect the other from stray sharp pieces as Jared worked his temper out. As the alpha calmed, I checked Tate over, healing a couple of cuts.

“What about you?” he whispered.

*I'll be fine. Use the bond.*

“It's fine. It's fine. I'll think of a new plan.” Jared was clearly talking to himself. “I'll just have two omegas.” He made a face at that and my hackles raised at the slight to Tate.

*I don't care.*

*I do! You're gorgeous!*

Tate gave a mental scoff, keeping his face carefully blank. We were both trying to avoid getting Jared worked up again with nothing left in the room to hurt but us.

“Let’s go get something to eat and think this through,” Jared said, as if it was perfectly normal to throw such a fit of temper and kidnap omegas.

Still, food was a good idea. It was midmorning. More of the day had passed than I thought. We’d both been drugged and had the babies to consider.

As if I needed reminding, they nudged my hand on my belly. I stroked over the swollen flesh, pleading with our goddess to protect them from this mess. It didn’t really matter to me if I was okay. I could endure Jared if I had to, but they had to be healthy and safe.

*Come on*, I urged Tate, as I got up to follow Jared to the kitchen.

The room was large, with lots of stainless steel appliances and glass-fronted cabinets. *Must be a nightmare to clean*, Tate joked.

Unseen by a distracted Jared, I smiled at my mate, glad he was with me, even as I felt selfish about that. I didn’t want to be alone with the unhinged alpha.

The gorilla that had drugged us, Carl, was there with another shifter, a bear, called Sven. Neither of the alphas were ones I’d had much contact with, but just the sight of them casually sitting in the kitchen after stealing us from our home

made cold fury burn through my limbs. I stalked forward and slapped Carl right across his face, the sound ringing through the room.

Carl turned to me, ready to strike, when Jared barked an order. “Stop!” Carl froze, Jared’s power over him making it impossible for Carl to retaliate.

Jared inspected the mark. “Nice work, Hiroshi. I think you almost popped claws.” Sure enough, three gouges were on Carl’s cheek.

Immediately I felt horror at causing harm to someone, even if I hated the guy. I stepped forward, ready to heal him. Jared stopped me. “No, I think that’s an improvement. It’s a friendly reminder my mate is feisty.”

I shivered at his proximity as much as his words. He was standing so close I could feel his breath on my face. I wanted to step back, but any retreat would please him. Holding my ground even as I shook was a better plan.

Finally, Jared stepped back. He slapped my ass. “Go make me something to eat, mate of mine.”

Shock must have been all over my face because Tate’s laugh burst free. “Oh, you don’t want that!” He ignored what Jared had done, though his concern was clear.

“Hey, I’m not that bad.”

“If you want something burned or half cooked, then yes.”

Tate got to his feet. “I’ll make something.”

This was a perfect way of getting something to eat and drink without it being laced with potions to keep our alters at bay. With each passing hour, my connection to my alter got stronger. Now we were only separated by a gossamer thin barrier. It made me wonder if I would have managed a proper partial shift with their help.

With Tate moving about looking for what he needed, I climbed onto a stool at the island and watched him. I didn't want to sit anywhere near the other alphas. If what Tate said was true and our family was going to find us soon, then I was going to take great pleasure in watching Carl be torn apart. Hell, the way I was feeling? I'd help.

My bloodthirsty thoughts followed me throughout the breakfast Tate hustled up. He got us glasses of water straight from the tap and only used things in unopened packaging, just in case. Likely a paranoid move since Jared wasn't above using force to get us to take his potions.

Jared looked up from his phone. "My second will buy Tate once we check his alpha bond is gone. We can't keep you apart if you are fated and Tate is too valuable to end, so I guess I'm stuck with the pair of you."

Tate looked terrified at the thought of being sold.

"We're going to move houses later today and you will take any potions I feed you," Jared warned. "I will not have you harming yourselves or those babies by trying to escape. Try anything and I'll keep you apart until you beg for me to end it."

A blaring sound echoed throughout the house. “The proximity alarm! Someone’s using magic to get into the grounds!” Sven checked a screen. “There, I can’t see how many.”

Jared rose and grabbed my arm. I took hold of Tate and dragged him with me. “Library! There’s a panic room and tunnel.”

*We can’t go in there!* Tate’s eyes widened. *They won’t get in.*

In unison, Tate and I planted our feet and tried to slow Jared down. He grew frustrated with us and yanked my arm, making me cry out. I pulled free of his grip, the pain making me scream. He got further ahead, so I grasped at his t-shirt, trying to slow him. In his anger, he turned and slapped me.

My ears rang with the blow. I felt blood run down my face.

Taking advantage of my shock, Carl pushed me and Tate behind Jared into the library. “Sit down!” he shouted, making us obey.

I couldn’t make sense of all the yelling and sounds of destruction. I just held onto Tate and prayed for this all to end.

“Where are the others?” Jared pulled at his hair as the sounds got closer to us. He went to the desk in the corner and rummaged around. He returned to us with two vials. “Now you can make this easy, or I can make it hurt. Up to you.” He smirked. “I could really use something to take the edge off, so let me cause some pain.”

I glared at him and opened my mouth dutifully. The potion was sweet on my tongue, the effects immediate. Silence. My alter and my bonds, leaving nothing behind just as I sensed Roan.

Jared grabbed my arm and hauled me up, my grip on Tate failed and before I knew it, we were at opposite sides of the room.

“Tate!

“Hiro!”

“Jared, please, I need Tate.”

“I’m all you need.” He opened a door with a panel next to it after keying a code as I struggled. He let go after I elbowed him hard. I ran back towards Tate, but Jared was faster, getting around me and pulling out a knife.

He pointed the sharp-looking weapon at my stomach. “I don’t want to hurt them, but if you don’t get in that room now, I will stab you, and, spoiler alert, I don’t care if I hit one of his spawn.”

I gulped and sagged. Unless someone friendly from the pack came through those doors in the next thirty seconds, I was going to have to go with him. I couldn’t put my babies at risk. I felt weak and so terrified that I thought I was going to pass out right there.

My knees gave way under the strain, Jared catching me just before I fell. He hoisted me into his arms and ran into the room, slamming the door behind him.

Without hesitation, he went to a panel at the back of the tiny space. They clearly set it up as a panic room, with screens showing scenes from the house and a small bed, with not much else. The hatch opened into a tunnel lit with red lights.

Jared ran down the tunnel for what felt like miles, though we weren't running for all that long. Each movement was uncomfortable. I ached something fierce, but my mind was too full of thoughts of Roan and the babies.

All too soon, the tunnel ended at a gate. Jared put me on my feet and kicked at the door. It burst free of its hinges with a loud crash. Someone ought to have heard that, right? My ears rang with it.

“Come on!” Jared was waiting just outside of the tunnel. I wanted to turn back and head for that room. There had to be a way I could get the door open.

The alpha caught me looking. “Don't even think about it, Hiroshi. I'll catch you, then I'll have to make you pay.”

I whimpered, a truly pitiful sound. There was no way I could outpace him in my condition. The babies weren't moving. I hoped it was just them reacting to stress and not anything else.

“Jared, I'm scared. The babies —“

“Hiro, I don't care about the babies. Just get your ass over here. There's a car not too far away.”

Every minute that I delayed getting in the car was a minute closer to someone figuring out that room or finding me in



these woods.

Slowly, I walked towards him. As soon as I was close enough, he began dragging me, making me trip and stumble on roots and fallen branches.

By the time the trees were thinning and I could hear sounds of the road, I'd cut my knees and hands up and I was crying with frustration.

"Please, don't. I can't go with you!" I pleaded to an unhearing Jared.

There was a crack and panting behind us. Someone was close.

I feigned a fall and landed in the brush.

"Get up!"

"I can't, it hurts!" I wailed, being louder to cover the sound of the approach. Jared hadn't seemed to have heard our pursuer. I adjusted my position, waiting.

He bent as I sprang, my weight knocking him onto his back just as whoever was behind us came into sight.

# RESCUE

## Asher

**M**elody pulled the van over about half a mile from the house that we'd located on the map. Dalton was back at the compound trying to get information for the council on who owned the house and the layout if they could.

We had to assume, since they had used magic to get the omegas out of the compound, that they would use wards around the perimeter of the house. Thankfully, we had witchy back up. The Northarbor Coven had sent a couple of their witches, a quiet man, Oak and a bubbly woman, River.

Their car was on the side of the road when we pulled up. "Hey, I've just finished dismantling the wards. They'll likely know you are coming," Oak said as he held his hands out, examining the magic. "It's Basil's, isn't it?" he asked the woman.

"Oh, for sure! That signature is unique. Also easy to break through if you're used to his ways." River seemed to pluck at some invisible strings. "There's ten people in there, from what I can tell. There could be more, depending on what magic they've used on the house."

“Thanks River,” Axel said. Then he turned to me. “How do you want to do this?”

“We don’t know where they are keeping our mates and with magic, they will probably be cut off from their alters and our bonds. I say, we just go in and take no prisoners.”

We all turned at the sound of a van approaching. Logan, our former alpha of the Northharbor pride, exited and walked towards us. “That house belongs to my ex’s family. This is Jared’s doing.”

My gaze went to Roan, who looked like he was shaking with rage. Right then, I knew that everything that had happened before was done with. My lion was there with his wolf. We needed to protect our family.

Jared. I couldn’t believe that Hiroshi was face to face with his rapist.

“Logan —“

“Try to keep Jared alive. He needs to stand trial so we can root out his conspirators. He’s not my son anymore. Do what you need to do.”

Reasonable. Logan seemed resolved to Jared’s fate. Once he stood trial, they would execute Jared, his crimes too serious for any other action.

“Let’s shift.” I looked at Axel, who nodded in approval. We’d put on sweatpants that had been in the van for driving through human areas. They were less accepting of nudity. We shucked our clothing in the van and shifted. My lion joined

Logan's Amur tiger, Melody, Axel, and Roan's wolves, Larken's Komodo dragon, and an adorable red panda that was Micah.

When Logan shifted, the remaining pride members in the van joined us and shifted to their various cat forms. I didn't have it in me to greet my former pride mates. So many of them had been complicit in allowing Jared's behavior to get out of hand.

At that moment, I truly felt sorry for Logan. He was a good man, a powerful leader, when he wasn't caught up with the pride council. If he didn't have the pride elders dictating, his leadership would be more progressive than it was.

My lion rubbed over Roan, sensing that he was needing the touch. We were both of the same mind for the first time in far too long. Roan had submitted to us. We were the top alpha in our family, and we would protect them all.

Running full out, we entered the house to a strange hush. "Magic! Get down!" Oak ordered.

We took cover as things exploded and shifters came out of hiding. Claws and teeth ripped into flesh as we fought our way deeper into the house.

"They're this way!" River shouted over the chaos.

Roan, Axel and I let the others fight with the guards as we stalked behind Oak and River. The witches encased us in a bubble of protection, debris ping-ponging off harmlessly.

As a group, we entered the library just as a door slammed shut. “Asher, Hiroshi’s been taken! We can’t shift!” Tate cried. Carl punched my mate, making my lion growl.

I tried speaking over the bond, but got silence, so I shifted as we stayed locked in a standstill. Tate was being guarded by Carl and Sven from the pack. There was no sign of Hiroshi and Jared. “Where are they?”

Carl scoffed. “Gone. That’s a panic room with a tunnel. They’ll be long gone by the time you get through.”

Roan shifted and ran at the man, punching him square in the face and taking him to the ground. He pummeled him a few times before Sven pulled him off his friend. “Where does it go?” Roan’s green eyes were wild with panic as he got free of the other shifter’s hold. He and Axel kept eyes on the guards.

Tate sobbed quietly, shrinking in on himself, trying to stay unnoticed. My lion saw how he shook, but otherwise looked unharmed. We left part of our focus on him as I waited for information on our other family member.

Carl got up, wiping at his face. “No idea.”

“He’s telling the truth. I’ve set a compulsion in the air. It won’t last long,” River confirmed. She panted as she held the spell before slumping into Oak’s arms. He put her in a chair as the sounds of the battle halted.

“Looks like Logan has this in hand,” Oak observed. “I’ll get this door open and one of you can track them.”

Roan struggled to get around Sven. “I’ll go.”

“My nose is better.”

Oak began the spell on the door, breaking the current magic lock and the physical one. Just as he got it open, Carl and Sven, on some unspoken order, surged towards Tate.

I was too far away, closer to the panic room door as it swung open. I'd never make it to Tate in time to save him from their attack.

Roan was there.

He flung his body between the gorilla and my vulnerable mate as a meaty fist swung down, crashing onto Roan's shoulder instead of Tate's prone body.

Everything happened in a matter of seconds.

Tate screamed as Roan landed on him, his upper body misshapen. How Roan stayed conscious, I don't know. Carl dealt another blow and ripped at the wound, Roan's agonized cries filling the room.

Sven tried to assist the gorilla, but Axel launched himself at the man, teeth clamping into his throat. Axel knocked him to the ground and snapped the man's neck without pause.

Roan rallied, finding strength from somewhere. Goddess knows where. He shoved Carl back and away from Tate, even as Roan bled over the floor, his dark skin turning ashen. He stumbled as Carl swung again. Axel jumped and latched onto the arm. Using his entire body, he pulled Carl to his knees.

Between them, Roan and Axel took Carl to the floor moments before there was a sickening crunch and Carl was

dead.

I wanted to go to my mate, but the thought of Hiroshi being stolen from Roan and Tate was too much to bear. I had to get him back for them, for myself, too. He was the heart of our family, the one that kept us all together.

*Go!* Axel urged over the pack link. *We'll need Hiroshi to heal Roan. Oak and River can keep him stable until you return.*

“Get Hiro! Please Ash, we need him,” Tate begged.

I looked between the open door, the tunnel ahead, and my mate hanging over Roan’s bleeding and broken body.

*I'll be back for you, brother.*

*I know.* Roan sounded exhausted. Barely holding on as Axel and Tate tore curtains to bandage wounds to stop the bleeding.

Oak and River watched sadly. “We’re both tapped out. The lock —“

In my lion form I had no way of speaking to them, they weren’t pack. Tate would soothe them once he got Roan stable.

*Stay awake. Keep Tate safe.* I ordered Roan before running down the tunnel.



Hiroshi’s scent saturated the tunnel. Within a minute, I was outside and following the familiar grapefruit scent of my

friend.

Hiro had tried to delay and make a trail for someone to follow. I just needed my nose. The petrichor scent of Roan, mixed with Tate's new honey scent, clung to Hiroshi, his path through the woods easy to follow.

Unbelievably, I caught up before they could get to the waiting car. I had to believe that the goddess was on our side.

Concerned Jared might hurt Hiroshi if I went racing in, I waited in the shadows of the bushes and trees, creeping slowly closer to my quarry.

Hiroshi fell. I could smell his blood. Heard him begging and saw the moment he caught that someone was following him. This time, his fall wasn't nearly as convincing. He'd never be an actor.

When Jared lost patience and bent to pick Hiro up, the omega sprang at Jared, knocking him over and sending them sprawling.

It should have been impossible, but Hiroshi's tiger burst free of whatever magical hold they had used.

The tiger landed on the alpha, pinning him in place. They snarled down at him, pleasure at his flinch flowing through the pack bond.

Somehow, not only had Hiroshi's tiger broken the magic preventing a shift, they had reestablished the pack link. Further proof, if I'd needed it, that the goddess watched over Hiroshi.



*We need to get others here. Jared is to be questioned before they carry his sentence out.* I told the omega.

*Hurry before I eat him.* Hiroshi let out another irritated sound at Jared.

I roared, hoping that Logan and his pride mates would hear and find us. We didn't have to wait long. Jared stayed quiet and didn't shift. He'd never been much of a fighter, preferring to use his wealth, influence and brain against his enemies.

Logan was in his tiger form as he approached, flanked by guards. He shifted. "We'll take it from here."

*Come on, Hiro. Roan needs you.*

The tiger followed me on silent feet as we rushed back through the tunnel to the room Roan was being seen in.

Melody must have gone back to the van because everyone had pants on and there were rolls of bandages instead of torn strips of curtains covering Roan's body.

I could hear the man's shaky breaths as he held on. Blood soaked the bandages, pooling on the floor under him. Tate was holding his hand and whispering things I couldn't quite hear.

Hiroshi's reaction drowned all of it out once he saw Roan. He shifted and slumped, nearly hitting the floor as he wailed. I caught him, clasping him close to me, trying to imbue him with some of my strength.

"Roan!" It was heartbreaking to hear the pain and horror in Hiroshi's voice.

“Come, do your healing thing,” I urged, getting closer. “You can fix him right up.”

Heedless of his nudity or the blood, Hiroshi went to his knees next to his mate, immediately reaching for his healing power.

Golden light washed over Roan, stopping the bleeding and reforming the smashed bones.

We all watched the healing in silence even as members of the council, enforcers, and pack mates rounded up any survivors and took Jared into custody.

It seemed to take forever, but soon most of it was healed, and Hiroshi was exhausted. “I can do more. Just give me a minute.”

“No,” Roan rasped, his eyes still closed. “You’ll harm them. I’ll wait for Aldrin, or just heal normally. I’ll be fine.”

“We’re fated,” Tate said to Hiroshi, making Melody gasp and Axel’s eyes widen. I couldn’t process my reaction. Honestly, it made sense. “Take energy from me.”

Hiro drew away. “I don’t want to hurt your baby. We don’t even know it’ll work.”

Tate gave him a patient look. “You are risking my baby if you push on. Roan is stable. Aren’t you?”

“I am.” Roan tried to sit, but a look of agony passed over his face. He froze until I stepped in to help him up.

I hugged him carefully, aware of his damaged shoulder, the same one that had been hurt when we first met him. “Glad you are okay, brother.”

“I’ll be better when we can get back to the compound and have our mates checked over.”

“Good point,” I nodded. “Here, let me help you.” Roan rested his weight on me, his good shoulder leaning against me, letting me lead him to the door.

“Okay, this is weird, isn’t it Sunshine?”

“Nah, just progress. I’m glad our family is finally back together.”

# AFTERMATH

## Hiroshi

“I’m really not happy with this blood pressure. You need to be on bed rest,” Aldrin lectured me as he took my vitals. James was fussing over Tate while Ívarr observed the room.

“I was resting perfectly well at home before I was drugged and kidnapped!” I snapped. My heart was telling me I needed to get back to Roan, to heal him further. The longer he went without detailed healing, the more likely that he was going to sustain long-term damage to his shoulder and arm. He might lose function of the limb altogether.

My head told me that Roan and Tate were right. I was risking the babies further if I did more healing on my mate. We’d already been through something traumatic, been exposed to unknown magic, and waded through the forest after a demented shifter. That was too much for any person to deal with, let alone a shifter pregnant with twins.

Aldrin didn’t take offense, just squeezed my shoulder. “No more healing. I’ll do what I can with Roan. Poppy has made some tea that will help keep your blood pressure down. With

five weeks to go, I'd rather not deliver those babies now. Every week that you can give them is precious."

I nodded. I understood, just felt like I was letting Roan down. With my gift, I'd saved that same arm before. While this injury was worse, crushing injuries left so much damage, I'd hoped our established bond would have boosted my healing.

As I went to get down from the bed, a shooting pain spiked over my belly, a tightening feeling that left me breathless. I stumbled, grabbing for Aldrin.

"What's wrong?"

"Pain," I panted as it continued to roll through me. As soon as it went, leaving a tiny echo behind, I straightened. "I'm fine." I felt the need to shift ripple over me.

Aldrin narrowed his eyes. "No. We're checking that out." He helped me back up onto the bed and hooked me up to a monitoring machine just as it spiked again. A shift to my tiger began and then ebbed, completely out of my control.

"Aldrin!"

"Shit!" Oh wow, I'd never heard Aldrin curse before. "You're in early labor."

"No, no, no. They can't come now!"

Tate came to my side, Asher beside him. "Should we get Roan?" Tate chewed on his lip, looking unsure what was best.

“No. He needs pain relief and to heal more.” I was firm, maybe too firm, as Tate moved away.

There was another spike of pain, a contraction, and the shift lingered longer. As it vanished, Poppy rushed into the room, a baby in a sling strapped to her.

“Eat!” she demanded, thrusting some strange-looking herbs at me. I chewed them dutifully as she made complicated motions over me and intoned strange sounding words. They sounded Russian. Poppy pulled a crystal wrapped in leather out of her pocket and tied it around my wrist. Almost straight away, I felt better, my energy returning and the pain ebbing.

“We caught it in time, but his energy is far too low,” Poppy spoke to Aldrin, then turned to me. “Absolutely no healing for the next couple of weeks. Your energy is all over the place and the babies thought it would be safer on the outside.” She ducked to speak to my stomach, chiding the babies, “news flash, it isn’t time for you yet. Wait in there a bit longer while Papa rests up, okay?”

I wanted to laugh, but I was utterly terrified at the harm I’d nearly caused to my babies.

*Like your omega instincts would have allowed anything else. Nothing happened. You were in safe hands. Roan’s mental voice was soothing.*

*But I want —*

*No. No more healing.*

*Roan, you could lose function of your arm.*

*Then that's what happens. I don't regret saving Tate.*

My eyes strayed to my other mate. He was crying silently.  
“What is it, Tate?”

“I just froze. I didn't fight. Roan is hurt because of me. You went all superhero and blasted through the potions they gave you —“

“And drained himself in the process!” Poppy rolled her eyes. “That kind of shifting is for emergencies, and Hiroshi has two babies to protect. You were with the others, you had them to step in. That's what they were there for, Tate!”

*Come here*, I urged Tate. He came to my side cautiously. I grabbed his face and kissed his lips. “Roan would have died to protect you willingly. He'll be fine —“

“But his arm!”

“Is still there. It could heal, but will he be any less of an alpha if it doesn't?”

“No.” Asher answered for Tate. “Because you all have me to guard you as well.” Asher wrapped an arm around Tate and reached for my hand, which I gave with a thankful squeeze. “Hiroshi is our heart, Roan is our brains, I'm the brawn, and Tate is —“

“What am I?” my mate questioned.

“Our dreamer,” I said. “You keep us hoping for more.”

Once more, Tate's eyes filled with tears. “Aww, that's the nicest thing! Hormones really suck!” A stray tear slipped

down his pale cheek.

Aldrin interrupted our moment. “Hiroshi can stay here until we are sure the labor will not start. He needs to stay with Roan.”

“Can we stay in the same room? I need to be closer to him,” I pleaded.

Aldrin looked at James, who answered. “We have a room with a larger bed. We’ll get you settled next to him. Oh, his father is on his way, he promises to give blood and do anything to help his son.”

I scoffed. “Helpful now, right? Once everything has been done.” I didn’t believe it for one second.

James squeezed my shoulder. “I feel that there’s more to come.”



Sleeping curled up against Roan’s good arm was restful and healing for the both of us. We needed that skin to skin connection not only for us, but for our alters.

The morning sun rising over the horizon roused me from a deep sleep where I dreamed about the babies all playing in our yard while the alphas watched and Tate rested with me. It left me with a peaceful feeling that must have seeped down the bond.

“What were you dreaming about?” Roan whispered, his eyes still closed.



I explained the dream, and he smiled, his emerald eyes catching mine. He was so precious to me. To all of us. “Thank you for saving Tate and the baby. I... I don’t know what I would have done if —“

“Now you never have to know. I didn’t even think about it. My wolf was moving before my human side caught up. Asher would have done the same if it were you. No one else would have found you that fast.”

“I’m glad you two are okay now.” I sat up with some struggle. “You are okay, aren’t you? Ash can come home?”

“Hey,” Roan soothed, his good hand reaching for me. I noticed he hadn’t moved the other one at all. “Of course he can. We just needed our alters out of the way so us human halves could talk. We figured it out. Then by the time we had our animal selves back, it didn’t matter because we had something more important to focus on — you and Tate.”

I turned into his chest and cried. “I’m so glad.” Just being with Roan like this was enough for me to feel better about all that had happened. Knowing that Jared was in custody helped massively. He couldn’t come for me and no one could take Tate from me.

“Did you hear that me and Tate are fated, too?”

“When I was on the floor? Yeah, I heard that and, you know, it makes perfect sense.”

I cocked my head. “It does?”

“Yeah. You were always so driven to have Tate in your life somehow. I know you care for Asher, but it was all about Tate. There was something inside you telling you that Tate was supposed to be yours. It makes sense that it was a mating bond this whole time.”

“Huh. So you’re okay with it?”

“Baby, I ain’t playing with fate. I care about Tate. In another life, maybe we would have all worked out, but it wasn’t time for us. I’m just glad you got to keep him.”

In all the ruckus as the pack came for us and we returned to the compound, I’d almost missed something else. “Tate and Asher must be fated too. They still had their bond in the van and that was after two potions to end a bond. One was Basil’s and the other Poppy’s. I have no idea how Jared got one of Poppy’s potions.”

Aldrin and Ívarr entered the room and checked both of us out. Ívarr must have heard the end of our conversation because he answered. “Poppy was making batches of the bond breaking potion for our testing on the betas. We are finalizing things with the council and should start around the time the babies arrive. We’ve noticed that some potions have been going missing. Yet another reason we had to halt plans for testing. Oh, and Michaella will be on hand to be your doula, as you wanted.”

Roan looked confused. “I thought she was a midwife and a nurse.”

Aldrin gave a patient smile. “A doula is a better term for her services. She guides the omega through the birth and for the time afterwards. I know Hiroshi expressed some interest in feeding the babies himself. Chest feeding, or breastfeeding if you prefer.”

My mate jerked beside me. “That’s possible?”

“Of course, men have breast tissue. It just requires the right hormones to prompt milk supply. As an omega, Hiroshi’s body is primed to provide for the babies. It is a practice that has long since been phased out with male omegas due to gender stereotyping and general male omega oppression —“

I could see that Aldrin was settling in for a long debate over the merits of feeding the babies milk I produced myself. “I want to feed them. To breastfeed. That’s the term I want to use. Michaella is trained to deal with lactation issues and there are so many benefits for us both. My tiger wants it. They have been bugging me about how we will feed two of them, and I did some research —“

Roan touched my shoulder. “Sorry. I didn’t know this was a thing, especially since it’s important to you. I’ll support any decision you make. It’s your body.”

Ívarr gave us an approving look and had a quiet conversation with Aldrin before the healer returned to my side.

“Normally, I would suggest starting you on hormones to get the milk process started. However, with Poppy’s magic boosting your energies and halting labor, I think more chemicals in your body are the last thing you need.” Aldrin

patted my hand. The contact was soothing. I wanted his approval so badly with this. It was another of those things that felt so important to me. My tiger wanted us to nurse the babies and had needled at me no end over it. “You react well to magic, unlike Roan here, so perhaps Poppy, or even Oak, since he seems quite talented, can make something for when the babies arrive. Nothing to be taken sooner, okay?”

“Of course. I plan on keeping them in for as long as possible.”

“Good. Roan will be here for the next few days. I’d like you to stay with him so I can monitor you both, just in case that magic fails. Alright?”

I nodded, grateful that I could stay with Roan. Tate had Asher with him and they could visit. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“Roan!” a voice called from the hallway.

My alpha stiffened. “Dad?”

The massive wolf shifter followed the sound of his son’s voice and burst into the room, agitated gaze finding Roan. “Thank the goddess, you’re okay.” His eyes landed on me briefly. “Both of you are! Where are the others?” Xavier looked frantically around the room.

I tried to get off the bed to calm him down, but Roan stopped me. “Asher took Tate home with some guards. What are you doing here?” Roan’s voice wasn’t exactly hostile, but it was far from warm.

“As soon as I heard, I left the pack. I don’t care if they replace me as alpha. I’m done with them. You need me more. Making things right with you, son, is more important. Xavier’s voice broke as he said, “I could’ve —“ “If we’d have left things like —” He tried to get himself together. “Are you okay? The babies?”

“The babies are fine, Dad. Hiro nearly went into early labor, which isn’t surprising, but Tate’s baby is less eager to meet the world.”

“Thank the goddess that you are all okay. Your alpha said you were injured and might need blood. Anything you need, it’s yours.”

This Xavier was a different man than the one I’d met before. Gone was the anger and bitterness that had kept Roan away these last few months. Would he want to have his father around since he seemed so contrite?

Ever the healer, Aldrin stepped in. “Roan doesn’t actually require blood. Hiroshi was overzealous in his efforts to stabilize his mate. The long-term effects on Roan’s arm, however, even with Hiroshi’s considerable talent...” He seemed lost for words.

My concern about the lack of movement was right, then. Roan couldn’t use it and I couldn’t risk trying to heal him any more than I had or I could undo all Poppy’s work.

“Alpha Blake said you got that protecting your former mate and his baby when his mate couldn’t.” Roan’s steady gaze

locked onto his father, his uncertainty over what he was about to say obvious.

“I’m proud of you, son. I’m sorry that I reacted badly to the mating, but I wish that it had worked out for you all. He’s still mated to Hiroshi, right?” Xavier looked at me and I nodded mutely, still coming to grips with my failure. “Then you’ve got your family to support you, two omegas, another alpha, and me, if you’ll have me.”

Roan’s chin trembled as he fought to keep back the tears in his eyes. “You’ll stay?” His voice cracked, snapping Xavier into motion. In two steps, he was by the bed, taking Roan into his arms. “Dad, I can’t feel my arm right and Hiro thinks he failed me.”

Xavier pulled me into the hug. “Goddess, no! D’you hear me, Hiro? You saved his life. Without you, he probably wouldn’t be here. So what if you couldn’t fix up his arm? He’ll learn to manage if it doesn’t heal.” He looked Roan straight in the eyes, clasping his good shoulder. “It’s his proof that he is the best man that I know.”

# THE COUNCIL

## Roan

“Hey, Roan, I’ve come to spring you from the clinic. We need you for something in the office.”

I wanted to interrupt that I was supposed to be on leave and that we weren’t sure how I was going to manage that job now that I only had the use of one arm. It hung limply by my side, the nerve damage too much for Hiro to heal after knitting so many bones back together. Carl had pulverized my shoulder and arm. I was lucky that they didn’t need to amputate. The blood flow reconnected fine. I just didn’t have the use of it.

“Your dad and Hiroshi can come too. We are having a big meeting with the council. Most of the pack will be there because it’s happening outside the mansion.” Kade looked much too cheerful. He was clearly planning something. “Come on! Do you need a hand with anything?”

I carefully pulled a light jacket over my useless arm to the shoulder. Kade was there to help me get it on the rest of the way. Instead of snapping at him, my first impulse, I smiled. He was only being his omega self. The need to care for others was

strong in him, and with Blake's love and care, Kade was shining.

Kade called Dad and Hiroshi to meet us at the clinic doors, since they were at the house helping my father settle in.

My father turning up and basically refusing to leave had been a... surprise. A nice one, I guess. After everything that had happened. From feeling close to death on that library floor before Hiroshi got to me, well, I guess I just decided that life was too short to hold a grudge.

When it had mattered, when he thought he could lose me, my father had traveled hundreds of miles to be here for me. He had given up his pack, willing to take the stain on his honor as Alpha, to break that bond with no notice, so he could put my family first.

It wasn't just that he'd come all that way and said all the right words. Xavier Stewart, the proud alpha, had gone to Blake and asked to join the pack so he could be close by, even if we didn't accept him into our lives.

Dad spent the day with us, just getting to know each other properly as adults, until Asher took him to our house. My sneaky mate had been in contact with Tate to ask his thoughts on Dad staying with us to give us a hand. With three babies in our family, and after seeing Blake and Kade struggle, I agreed that we'd need the help, especially now I was without the use of this arm. I wasn't sure if my father was the man for the job, but I wanted him to prove me wrong.



“Is it weird having your dad here?” Kade asked carefully. “Blake won’t accept him into the pack later if you don’t want him around. If things change —“

“Blake will kick him out?” I couldn’t help my laugh. “I believe that. Your parents will have my dad packed and out of the compound in record time if he sets a foot out of line.” I ruffled Kade’s hair. “Even though we have our own families, you are still my family, Kade. You chose me when others would have sent me away.” Emotion thickened my throat, making it difficult to get the words out.

Kade rested his head against my chest. “Don’t make me cry! I love you, you idiot. Of course I’d choose you. Now let’s go drop some truth bombs.”

Truth bombs?



The lawn to the side of the mansion looked amazing, press conference ready, with chairs, a long table at the top, to which Kade led me so I would sit on his right-hand side, Blake to his left. Axel and Deke stood behind the alpha pair, Chase sitting to Blake’s left.

Hiroshi squeezed my thigh from his place on my right, my dad on his other side. Tate and Asher just down from him. I noticed that Teagan, Ívarr, James, and Aldrin were all at the table, keeping Kade and Blake firmly in the middle.

The omegas had been re-inducted to the pack before they even left the clinic, both wanting the link for their safety. Dad would make his vow to Blake after this meeting if there was time. I wanted him to stay.

Blake waited for the council members that lived in the compound or in Sweetwater to take seats before he nodded to Melody to bring the stream to the members elsewhere.

As one, the pack quieted, waiting for their Alpha to speak. “Afternoon, Sweetwater pack and members of the council. We have brought you here today to make an announcement about the pack going forward.” Blake paused and Kade took his hand and stood, taking over speaking.

“As of today, I will no longer be a member of the council. I enjoyed representing omegas, particularly male omegas and highlighting their needs, but feel that my purpose is to guide my pack into its new future. I need to be more present for my children and the omegas of my pack. They need me here, not stuck in meetings and filling out paperwork. I am grateful for the opportunity given to me, but it no longer fits my life.”

Kade sat, looking carefully composed, but he squeezed my hand under the table. “Get ready,” he said under his breath as Blake stood.

“From today, the Sweetwater pack will no longer be affiliated with the shifter council. We are announcing our intention to break free from our problematic government system and will adopt other measures to ensure that I am held

accountable for the lives of my pack mates as Alpha of the Sweetwater pack.”

The council members all looked between themselves, a ripple of movement in an otherwise silent crowd. The pack knew their alpha wasn't done, so they waited to speak.

“At the moment, we don't know what that will mean. Perhaps we will have representatives and make our own council with me at the head. The time for discussion will be later once we solve the most pressing problem — the council in Sweetwater.”

I could almost feel everyone hold their breath as Blake braced for what he was going to say. “The shifter council is to blame for the events that nearly lost us one of our own. They are to blame for the kidnapping of two of our omegas.”

Alpha shifters from the council launched from their seats and voiced their protest. Blake raised an eyebrow, and as one, the enforcers for the pack moved, pushing the council back into their seats.

“You will listen,” Blake said calmly, a wave of alpha influence flowing over the assembly. “We have evidence that shows the council knew who had taken the bond breaking potions. They allowed Jared to roam free despite knowing where he was and the danger that he represented. He has been given too many passes for far too serious crimes. The alphas on the council have ruled for too long and are no longer welcome in Sweetwater.”

Blake locked eyes with one of the council leaders in the crowd. “The council and their anti-female rhetoric they spout to any alpha or beta male that will listen to their hate is the reason for the continued attacks on my daughter. They are the very reason we lost alpha females before. To protect future alpha females, to promote fertility and prosperity in the pack, The Luna has advised us to break with the council. Visions from the elven seer support us.”

Gasps rang out from the pack, but none argued with our Alpha. The council looked between themselves uneasily aside from a few, like councilman Ford. He looked... proud?

When everyone settled, Blake spoke again. “We have thought about this long and hard since the attack that nearly lost us Roan. Going forward, we will look at each member of the pack individually since so many shifters here helped aid Jared. There is too much hate here for us to live happy lives. We have to stand united against it. I will not allow prejudice to thrive. Kade and I want a forward-looking pack, where each member is valued no matter what they contribute.” Blake looked like he had more to say, but kept that information to himself. For now.

Blake sat, and Kade rose again. “We want to thank the members of the council that helped us in our time of need by providing guards and medical staff. However, we know that information from our pack was fed to others in the area, creating tension where none should exist. Our friends in the Northharbor pride will arrive shortly to escort everyone affiliated with the council off the compound. Access to the

compound to retrieve remaining possessions will be granted on an appointment basis only.” Kade looked slightly smug, yet I could see him tremble. I took his hand, Blake taking his other.

“Pack, we are going into lockdown until we find the traitors. Until we can guarantee the lives of the innocent will not be put at risk by men that hold too much power over our lives. Men with an agenda. I have faith in my pack. We will get through this.” He paused. “Council, you have one hour to pack.”

# NESTING

Tate

“Wrong, it’s all wrong,” I muttered to myself as I reorganized the blankets and cushions that covered the floor of the master bedroom.

“We can move your nest to the nursery,” Asher suggested carefully as he watched me move a throw somewhere it had already been.

“No, it doesn’t smell right in there. It has to be here, so our egg is with everyone.”

Michaella had been coaching me, letting me know what to expect from laying the egg and what came after. She had suggested it was time to make my nest because my raven might get fussy over it since it was my first time making one. Our doula knew it was going to take me a few tries to get anything close to right. Then I would need to saturate it with my scent.

My alter pulled at me at the thought of only having one scent in the nest. We needed the entire family, maybe from Pops, Roan’s dad, but we really needed Roan, Hiroshi, and Asher to cover the nest with their scents too.

I gave a frustrated growl and threw everything to the side. Time to start over. I started with a soft blanket base, then a perimeter of cushions, then a layer of blankets, more cushions, and so on.

Stepping back, I let my raven examine it. *Shiny*, they told me. My raven was a slut for shiny things and wouldn't be happy until our baby had gifts of random things that caught their eye.

“We need to go treasure hunting,” I informed Asher.

“In the house, or outside? Because Blake still wants you both guarded while the council is clearing the last of their things out.”

A week on from the announcement and Blake had lost several enforcers that no longer held beliefs that matched those of the Sweetwater pack. Essentially, these men, mostly alphas, had been poisoned against their alpha. They now thought that the beta sickness was a punishment and the alphas that came out of the testing would be unhinged like Asher was. They didn't think I was truly pregnant or mated to Hiroshi; it was all an elaborate farce to them.

Checking with my raven, I answered Asher. “Inside for now. We might have to visit the main house if Blake will let us.”

Taking my arm, Asher guided me around the house. Walking about with this bump was uncomfortable. It was more of a waddle, which made me laugh. My raven was indignant that I looked like a duck.

My instincts took me down the hall. I knocked on the door of Xavier's room. "Pops, can I come in?"

"Hey, kiddo, how are you doing today? Thought you were making your nest?" Xavier opened the door wide, letting us enter the tastefully decorated space.

Xavier's pack had cut him loose, knowing that his focus was divided now that things with Roan were better. In truth, Xavier had thrown us all for a loop, doing a complete one eighty from the first time we had met him. He wanted to not only be in Roan's life, but ours too. A sort of surrogate father to us, and grandfather to our babies. He'd basically claimed us all.

Now he was officially living with us, he had made the space his own. A heavy wooden framed bed in a dark color with blue and green soft furnishings that complemented it dominated the space. He had a full bookcase and a desk in one corner.

"Um..." I finally said, looking around me and not at the man whose room I'd invaded.

"What do you need, kiddo?" Xavier was so calm, his green eyes vibrant like those of his sons.

"My raven wants trinkets. Shiny things for the nest. They want something from everyone that lives here." Larken's room was next.

He extended an arm. "Have a look and see if there is anything that catches your attention."



Straight away, I saw it. A gold-framed picture of a super young Roan. “How old was he here?”

“He was four. It was just him and me then. He was my universe until things got out of hand with Rincoln.”

“Could I borrow it?” I asked quietly.

“Babe, no. That’s —“ Asher cut in.

“No, it’s fine. You’ll take care of it, and I have copies just in case.” He took the picture off the shelf and handed it to me.

“Here.”

“Thank you.”

We left his room just after the frame clutched to my chest.

“Larken?” Asher asked.

“Yeah.”

We all were worried about the alpha. He hadn’t wanted to return to the main house after our kidnapping, and blamed himself for what happened. Part of me thought it was mostly the trauma of nearly losing Roan. There were unresolved feelings there. However, Hiroshi had asked him to stay and, as Roan’s only mate, his opinion mattered the most, aside from Roan himself, obviously.

It helped to have another alpha about the house while Roan adjusted to his disability. He still worked for Kade. He typed one handed, or recorded notes and turned that from voice to text. Kade not being on the council really cut the paperwork, and Roan could help omegas alongside Kade just fine with his tablet.

Larken didn't answer the door. His scent slightly faded. "I think he must be in the kitchen. We were in the bedroom for a long time."

Sure enough, the alpha was cooking up a storm with Hiroshi, the pair laughing at something Roan had said from his place at the counter.

Roan saw us first, the other pair too busy with food prep. I knew they were hoping to batch cook some meals so that we wouldn't have to cook so much when the babies arrived. Hiroshi wanted to learn how to cook better, embarrassed at his lack of ability to care for his mate. His alpha didn't care for that kinda shit. Roan was aware Hiroshi had other talents.

Still banned from healing well over a week after nearly going into labor, Hiroshi was supposed to be resting. He took the advice well, though, surprising all of us. Hiroshi had pampered himself, allowed others to care for him for a change. His relationship with Roan had never been stronger for it. He'd also bonded well with his father-in-law, the man helping fend his parents off from coming for a visit for now. The stress would have been too much for all of us.

"I thought you were nest building?" Roan remarked.

"We were, but Tate's raven needs shiny things from each of us to line the nest. It's important."

I flushed, embarrassed at my raven being a diva. They had never exercised their will so hard, so it inclined me to go along with it.

“I might have something.” Roan got up and went into the living room, coming back with a wolf figurine in his hands. “My mom made this. It was one of the few things I took when I left the Hayes pack.” It looked like they carved it out of onyx, the dark stone matching Roan’s wolf perfectly.

“Oh, Roan, that’s too precious to put in the nest.”

“No, I think it’s perfect. I think my mom would like to be watching over you and the egg.”

Tears welled, the sudden emotion catching me off guard. “Roan —“

“Please,” he begged.

“Thank you.” I took the treasured item, looked at Asher to check he’d be okay with it, then went to Roan, wrapping an arm around him as best I could with my bulging stomach.

Asher hugged Roan next. It was strange seeing them like that after the months of animosity from my mate towards the other alpha.

“Larken? Hiro? Do you have anything you’d like to add?” I asked hopefully. My raven was itching to get this bit done. The next was a little more complicated, and I wasn’t sure how Asher was going to cope with what I had planned.

“Oh, um, I think I have something that will work. Gimme a sec.” Larken looked confused and perhaps humbled to be asked. He was Roan’s best friend, aside from Kade, and also our guard. It wasn’t his fault that our own had betrayed us.

“Mine arrived the other day. My mother had them made and shipped. One for you and one for me.” Hiro searched for the packet that had arrived. “She’s really trying. I think the kidnapping and what happened to Roan really made things hit home for her, y’know?” Happiness filled the bond suggesting he’d found what he was looking for. “Ah-ha! These are Omamori, they are charms that ward off evil, a sort of good luck thing. I want the babies to grow up with parts of my culture.”

He handed me the teeny silk cloth bag. Hiro pointed at the stamp. “That’s from the temple she got it from. There’s a prayer inside for protection.” My mate looked embarrassed, a rare look from him. “I know we are shifters and don’t believe the same things as the humans, but there’s power in words and actions like this. It’s like a witch’s blessing.”

I curled my hand around his. “I believe that too. Thank you. This is perfect.”

Larken rejoined me as Roan took over watching the food and supervising Hiroshi’s efforts. “Here,” he handed me a pearl wrapped in silver wire on a strip of leather. “It’s a freshwater pearl from my home. There’s a farm there where they are cultured.”

It was beautiful. “Wow! This is lovely. Are you sure it’s okay to borrow it?”

Larken shrugged, sheepish. “It’s brought me good luck before. I figure it could help you now.”

“Come on, let’s get your shiny things back to the nest.”  
Asher ushered me back towards the stairs.

In our room, I carefully laid the borrowed heartfelt treasures around the nest, my raven feeling better for having them. Our alpha mate was quiet as he watched me. It hadn’t escaped my raven’s notice that he had given nothing for the nest.

“I have something for you. Don’t you worry about that. I had planned on giving it to you after our miracle is born, so maybe keep it in the box?”

Out of the nightstand came a black velvet box. “I didn’t think they’d make it in time. It was custom, but... here, have a look.”

I opened the box that he handed me, a gasp leaving my lips at the platinum band inside. It was etched with leaves with four stones, an emerald, topaz, onyx and a brown stone.  
“What’s this one?”

“It’s brown jasper. I wanted a stone for each of us. I meant what I said about making our family work, and this is the proof of it. Humans do this thing where they give a ring to their spouse when there’s a baby. I liked the symbolism of it, especially since we are all represented.”

I couldn’t hold back my tears. “Ash... that’s... I don’t know what to say. It’s stunning. I’m so grateful that fate gave us all this. I didn’t think I would be a few months ago, but what we are building is so special.”

“It is. Come on, let’s feed you for the next part of your nesting plan.” He gave a sly grin. Nothing got past my mate.



“You want our scents all over the nest?” Hiroshi was confused, his head tilted. I could just picture his tiger doing the same thing and had to stifle my laughter.

Anticipation was making it difficult to sit still. I was half hard already, though surprisingly, no one seemed to have noticed. I put it down to us all being keyed up and needing to reconnect.

“Yeah, Sunshine.”

Roan grinned, catching on quicker. “Will that be okay with you, Ash? We’ve all been sleeping together, but this might push your lion too far.”

Hiroshi’s head whipped around to his mate, his eyes narrowing. “What?” Then it dawned and his face lit up. “Sexy time smells!” Then his face fell. “But I’m not allowed to have sex.”

Roan leaned forward, whispering seductively in his mate’s ear, “there are other ways to have sex that don’t involve penetration.” He finished his words with a nip to Hiroshi’s ear.

My omega mate shuddered. “Okay, let’s do that.”

I’d stripped some blankets off the nest and laid them on the bed, just in case they agreed to my plan. My raven was getting

antsy, hopping and cawing inside me. This needed to be done soon.

Asher closed the gap between me and took my mouth in a soul-destroying kiss. For that moment, he owned me. His shifter strength kept me on my feet as I melted into him. Mouths still connected, he walked us to the bed. He took his lips from mine to whip my t-shirt off, then kissed his way down my body until he was on his knees.

Hiroshi and Roan were on the bed making out, hardly any clothes between them. My Sunshine had a determined look on his face. Being on a sex ban had really ticked him off.

Ash worked my pants down my legs, I'd gone without underwear and was aware that a trickle of slick was running down my thighs. Asher nosed at my groin and moaned. "Fuck! I love the way you smell." He ran his tongue over my hard cock, licking the bead of precum that had gathered there. Taking me in hand, he drifted lower, mouthing my taint and sucking on my balls.

"Ash, please," I begged.

"Turn around, bend over the bed."

I laid with my chest on the bed, ass out for Asher to admire. "Goddess, your ass!" He ran reverent hands over it, opening me so that he could tongue my hole, tasting the slick I'd made for him. He ate me like I was his favorite treat, complete with moans and groans.

Just this, my alpha lavishing all his attention on my ass, had me leaking and desperate. “Ash, please.”

“Get on the bed,” he ordered, voice gruff. I scrambled to obey as he undressed behind me. Getting comfortable on the bed was difficult. I was too round to sleep on my back, my stomach was out. “Here, get on your side.” Asher put a cushion under my stomach and spooned me. “This way, I can do this,” he shifted my leg, opening me to him and eased in slowly.

I sighed as he rocked into me, kissing, licking, and biting over my neck.

“Come here, Sunshine,” I beckoned. He shuffled closer, hand reaching for my cock as his lips met mine. “Hmm, yes!” He stroked me as his tongue massaged mine. Our kiss broke as we tried to get an angle so we could touch each other. Stupid pregnancy bellies ruining all the fun.

Hiroshi giggled, and turned his feet near my shoulders, our groins lining up nicely. With his head off the bed, he could suck Roan off, the alpha’s bright green eyes blazing as he watched his mate enjoy himself.

I wrapped my hand around mine and Hiroshi’s cock’s, the precum and slick easing the glide as he rocked against me.

It was heavenly to have my mate thrusting carefully inside me as Hiroshi was against me. I’d have preferred to be inside him, but this was almost as good.



Roan eased from Hiroshi's mouth, kissed his mate, then joined us on the bed. He used his mate's thighs to bring himself to orgasm just as Hiroshi came all over me.

Asher thrust harder, his knot stretching me. The dual sensations of Hiroshi's release over my cock, plus the pleasant burn of the knot sent me over the edge.

I slumped as I lay knotted and sated. My raven was ecstatic that we had successfully covered all the blankets in the scents of our family.

# EGG TIME

## Asher

Once Tate had finished fixing the nest for the fifth time, we settled into bed, hopeful for a few hours of sleep before Tate had to shift and lay this egg.

To say I was nervous was an understatement. I'd never expected to be a father, let alone one to three babies. My lion had claimed the ones sired by Roan and Tate, since they belonged to him, too. As far as we were concerned, we were a unit, we would tackle the challenges of parenthood together.

My lion woke me at signs of distress from my mate. He was still asleep, his muscles twitching with a shift as he lay dreaming. Seeing the signs that he was ready, I got my phone and called Michaella and texted Aldrin. The witch had promised to be on call when we spoke earlier in the day, when I'd noticed Tate was off and hyper focused on the nest.

When I was finished with the call, I went down the hall to Xavier's room and knocked.

"Come in."

I opened the door and let him know our doula was on the way and to expect things to get weird. Xavier had never seen anyone lay an egg, but we weren't close enough to allow him to witness it this time.

Michaella, Aldrin, James, and Ívarr all arrived together, just as I'd roused a sleepy Tate and got him in the nest. I shifted, relying on the pack bond with Aldrin and James to communicate as I settled curled up around Tate in the nest.

Our mate had made it perfectly. It felt safe, warm, and smelled of happiness and family.

*Shift, baby.* My lion spoke to his raven mate, the alpha power a gentle caress.

He obeyed, turning to his feathered form in the space of a blink. The raven cawed, the sound waking Roan and Hiroshi.

The pair dressed quickly and joined us at the edge of the nest. My lion side eased at having the other alpha there instead of getting angry. His willingness to die to protect Tate had broken the strange hate he had for him. Instead, we saw him as a brother. Each time we saw him struggle with a task because of his arm was a reminder of what he had sacrificed for us.

Michaella was whispering to the raven, coaching them as they cawed and flapped. "Asher, use your power for their pain."

As she had coached me, I caught my omega's gaze and pushed my will into him. My intention was clear: breathe, let the pain ebb. Tate relaxed, his raven letting out a pitiful caw.

It didn't take long for the raven to show signs of bearing down to push the egg out. I kept myself wrapped around him; the contact easing his stress. Hiroshi held a bowl of water so that Tate could drink when they got overheated. Roan swapped between smoothing Tate's feathers and rubbing his mate's back.

I was awestruck as I watched my mate endure the pain to bring our baby into the world. While I knew that the egg wouldn't hatch straight away, it was still something special to witness.

Tate was so brave as he and his raven worked in unison, the human side struggling to give into his animal's instincts. Once they reached an understanding, it seemed easier on them both.

Aldrin, James, and Ívarr were only there to observe, allowing Michaella to show how competent she was. They would take notes on the egg and how the birth went for their studies on the new omegas and alphas. The testing was going to start as soon as we had healthy babies.

For once, I was going to be positive. The Luna had intended this to happen. She had put Tate in my life, my fated mate, when we couldn't tell that we had that bond. We fought to stay together and risked things to mate with Hiroshi and Roan. They were the catalyst to finding our true selves and unlocking our fated bond. Without them, we wouldn't have our egg or a happy family life.

Eventually, the aqua colored egg was free of Tate's raven body. The bird slumped against me, exhausted at passing such

a large egg. It was speckled, and I'd seen nothing so beautiful in my whole life. Tears welled in my eyes and I gave a prayer of thanks to our goddess for giving us this gift. For giving me a family I could treasure forever.

In front of my eyes, the egg seemed to expand. I looked at Michaella in a panic. She smiled gently. "It's the shifting magic. The egg isn't hard, it's elastic at this stage. It will grow to accommodate the baby inside and harden as it is time for them to hatch."

I curled around my exhausted mate as they fussed over the egg, moving it to one position, then another. When Tate's raven was happy about the placement of the egg, they settled over it, keeping it warm.

"You'll have to take turns keeping it warm," Michaella warned, yet again. She had been thorough in her coaching. "If need be, you can do it in your human forms, but the heat you give off in your shifted forms with the magic is better." The witch turned to Hiroshi. "Since you need to shift daily, I'd recommend you taking a shift on the egg to allow the fathers —"

I shifted quickly, needing my voice to clarify things. "Other fathers," I interrupted. "We consider this baby theirs as well."

"Just as Hiroshi is carrying our babies," Roan motioned to the four of us. "A unit, a family."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to imply." Michaella looked mortified.

“No, it’s fine,” Hiroshi smiled at her, placing a hand on her arm in reassurance. He had such a gentle way with people. Michaella relaxed. “It’s a change for everyone. We discussed it at length and I’m sure we’ll be reminding people for a long time, or until poly families are more common in shifters.”

Tate’s raven cawed, seeming to agree with us. I shifted back, my lion holding the tired bird up. *Sleep, baby*, I urged. The alpha power took hold and pulled the raven into a restorative sleep.

“Well done, Asher,” Ívarr praised. “May I attempt to measure the egg, just to check it over?”

“You’ll have to let it be for at least a few hours,” Michaella told the elf. He looked disappointed, but soon his calm manner returned.

“Of course. The baby has to come first. I cannot help the excitement I feel. I am beyond honored to be allowed to witness such an event. Thank you.”



The course of the next week helped us prepare for what was to come. Each of us spent some time in animal form around the egg, keeping it warm as it slowly expanded and the gorgeous blue shell hardened.

Tate hardly spent any time in his human form, only shifting to eat and shower. He explained he felt uncomfortable in his human form, especially when he was away from the egg. If it

were up to him and his raven, they would eat every meal in bird form as they sat on the large egg.

In raven form, Tate was about twice as big as a natural raven. Yet the egg was about half as big as him. It would move occasionally as our baby let his presence be known.

We sang to him, told him stories of our childhoods, obviously child friendly ones. Then we taught him about our pack and what life would be like for him when he arrived.

I was grateful that the pack allowed us all to be on leave. Roan was stubborn and still worked, taking notes for Kade and sending emails. The council had withdrawn gracefully, but we weren't the only pack to cut the cord from them. Soon, other shifter groups followed. Voting with their membership against the current setup.

Having betas and omegas on the council had been a good step forward. I was proud of the shifters that had answered the call. Yet the remaining members were too old, too set in the ways of alpha leadership to really represent all shifters. We needed more alphas like Blake and Roan. A new type that valued every shifter. More and more of the alphas in the younger generations seemed to be more forward thinking, perhaps why The Luna was making changes now.

Therapy had really done a number on me. My lion would have been embarrassed at my mushy thoughts had they not been completely smitten with our egg. He was honestly obsessed with looking at it, smelling it, and keeping it protected. He had allowed Pops to rest on it after Roan had

gotten uncomfortable. Our brother had sat for hours, allowing Tate a proper rest, until compensating with the other shoulder became too painful to hide.

Roan was struggling, and we all were trying to keep his spirits up as he came to terms with it. However, his first shift with the egg was also his first shift into his wolf form since the kidnapping. His wolf was lame in one leg and brokenhearted in what he saw as a failure.

The wolf believed he could not protect his family in his wolf form. Xavier had stepped in, almost taking a bite out of Roan's ear to show that the wolf was still quick, still agile.

My lion, while concerned about the brief fight's proximity to the egg, understood the message that Pops was trying to impart to his son. When the older wolf took over from Roan, the younger wolf rested his head against his father's in thanks.

A calm settled over the house as we all got ready for what was to come.



# HOT AND BOTHERED

Hiroshi

“Now that your due date is only two weeks away, I think it is safe for you to resume your usual daily routine. You can heal some patients if you want to return to the clinic, and of course, you can have penetrative sex again. Just tell your mates to be gentle, won't you?” James winked at me, and Aldrin laughed at his mate.

“Yas! Okay, bye!” I got up carefully, my massive stomach impeding my progress.

James laughed. “Where's the fire?”

“I have a mate that owes me some lovin',” I joked. Roan was on a call in the waiting room waiting with Larken. Even with the council gone, most of the traitors weeded out, we still didn't walk anywhere alone.

My mate's guilt at missing my appointment was eating at him. More and more I was worrying about him sinking into a depression. The first few days after the incident that I liked to forget about, he had been fine. He'd seemed to accept what had happened with grace beyond his years. I was in awe of

how he was coping and didn't begrudge him feeling badly. I just wanted to support him if I could.

Then he suddenly seemed to be upset more often than he was happy. He avoided shifting and became irritated easily when he struggled with things he could do easily before. I understood. I was worried about his mental health.

I'd asked around and found a witch that was a therapist. They had counseled me that a season of depression was common even after initial acceptance, as the reality hit. He was doing so well, but it was only natural that he mourned for his old life.

"Here," Aldrin jumped up to help me out of the door. "Call us as soon as those babies want to come."

I nodded, "of course."

Roan got to his feet and ended his call quickly when I entered the waiting room. Larken was reading something on his phone, attempting to give us a moment.

"They have given us the green light!" I said. I would have been bouncing on my feet had I not weighed the same as a hippo, and my ankles weren't swollen. "Can we go home now?"

My mate gave me a pinched smile. "Yeah, let's go home."

Alpha Blake had bought golf buggies for driving around the compound now that the hell-spice cider was in production and the pack wasn't paying tithes to the council. The witch-demon, Cody, might have used some magic to speed things along once

they completed the recipe. I was jealous of witches and their powers sometimes. Not that healing wasn't great, it was, but I wanted to be more useful to my pack.

Lark drove us home, and I sighed with relief to be off my feet. Roan could have driven. It was possible to steer over the paths with one hand and very little traffic in our part of the compound.

Soon, the house came into view. Roan remained quiet. His part of the bond was locked down tight. When we got into the house, I was taking him to our room and we were talking this out. He should have been as excited as me. I was well enough that the babies were safe enough if we had sex.

I'd missed the feeling of my mate filling me, of him knotting me, and I needed that before these babies made an appearance and upended our lives.

I couldn't wait for them to join our family properly. I wanted to see what they looked like, Roan with his dark chocolate skin, Tate pale and creamy. Our babies were going to be super cute if they took on my mates' characteristics. Hell, if they looked like me, then I knew they'd be pretty. I knew what I looked like. I was a prize!

Roan's sullen behavior was due to his arm. I knew that. I guessed maybe he thought I'd see him differently now that he was disabled, but I didn't. If anything, I loved him more. Desired him more because of what he'd done.

How could I not want a man that had risked his life to save my other mate? It was a sign of his strength that he was even

with us at all. A lesser shifter would have died from those injuries while Asher came to rescue me. I might have used all the power I could to heal him, but he had held on until I could.

Larken went into the kitchen when we entered the house. I took Roan's hand, the same arm that he couldn't use to show it did not repel me, and pulled him behind me up the stairs.

Asher and Tate, both in animal forms curled around their large egg, woke from a doze when we entered. "I can have sex and I'm going to if my mate is willing. You can watch." I really didn't mind if they were there.

Roan made a noise of protest.

"Which part do you object to? The sex or them watching?" I tilted my head and examined his response.

"Both?" Roan answered it like it was a question.

"Why?"

"I dunno, Hiro." Roan's voice was getting louder. "Maybe it's because of this stupid arm. I feel like half a person!"

I went to him and wrapped my arms around him the best I could. "Half a person? Your arm is still there. We don't know if it's permanently damaged, but even if it is, you can live a productive, happy life without the use of it."

"Doesn't it put you off me?"

"What?"

"The scars, me not feeling much of anything from it?"

"Honestly? No. It makes me proud of you."

*Every time I see those scars, I'm reminded of what you did for Tate. You are a hero, Roan.* Asher used the pack link rather than shifting.

“Now, come over here with me and let me show you how sexy you are.”

I got him to sit on the edge of the bed so I could perch in his lap and fuse my lips to his. He opened to my kiss, letting my tongue slip inside and massage his. I ran my hands over both shoulders, down his arms, placing his hands on my ample ass. Seriously, pregnancy had done a number on it.

One hand squeezed, and Roan groaned against my mouth.  
*Your ass is amazing!*

Roan hardened under my touches. I slipped his shirt off, peeling off mine next. Then I slipped from his lap and ditched my pants and underwear, kicking them into a corner. Roan laughed and then gasped as I got to my knees and unbuttoned his jeans. He rose a bit to allow me to remove them, his underwear too.

I ran my hands up his thighs, enjoying the muscles bunching under my touch. I licked and kissed my way to his groin and mouthed over his heavy balls before working up his cock. Taking just the tip into my mouth, I sucked and enjoyed the musky taste of him.

*Do you mind if I help get you ready for him?* Tate asked, using the pack link. *I want a taste of that hole.*

*Fucking hell!* Xavier cut off the pack link abruptly. He must have used a ward to cut the link, or shut us out soundly.

*Wards, have to find somewhere warded?* Larken seemed to be speaking to himself.

The pair vanished as Asher laughed. *Get him ready for that monster cock, baby.*

Roan grinned down at me as I took him deeper, a gasp falling from his lips as I worked him, my hand jacking the base. He was too big for me to take all the way in this position.

Tate shifted and came up behind me. Kissing my neck, he circled my entrance with a finger. He eased it inside. “Goddess! You are so wet already.”

He lay flat on the floor, my ass over his face, and ate me out with glee, one hand stroking himself. “Fuck, you taste amazing! So sweet.”

“Damn, that’s hot,” Roan growled, his eyes brightening as his wolf surged forward.

It didn’t take long before I needed something inside me. Impatience made me wiggle and suck Roan’s dick harder.

“Hiro, I’m going to cum if you don’t slow down.”

I pulled off. “I need you!”

“Hands and knees, sideways so they can watch.” Roan demanded.

Goddess, he was so hot when he took charge. I couldn’t wait until he was inside me. It had been too long. Having him

curled around me each night with nothing more was torture. I gave another final suck with a moan as Tate speared his tongue inside me.

Tate moaned loudly, the scent of his seed filling the room as he came over his fist. “Wow, just that image and the taste of you!” He kissed my thigh and shifted, returning to his mate’s side.

I climbed onto the bed, grabbing a pillow for underneath my bump and waited as Roan admired my ass. He ran his hand over it, then gave it a spank. “Just a slut for dick, aren’t you?”

Fuck! The dirty talk was new, but I loved it.

“I love your big dick.” It was true, that thing hit all the right places at once.

He didn’t leave me waiting for long, entering me in one long thrust. “Goddess, it’s been too long since I’ve been inside you.” Roan echoed my earlier thoughts. “Won’t last long.”

I didn’t need it to last, just to really feel it. I wanted Roan to feel desired.

With each pump of his hips, I got closer and closer to that peak. Roan circled me with his good arm and pulled me against him, driving him deeper. He tweaked a nipple, and that was it for me. I came hard all over myself, totally untouched.

“Fuck!” My muscles clamped down on Roan, milking him. His knot tied us together, my knees shaking, sleep wanting to pull me under.

Roan wriggled, getting his legs under me so I could sit in his lap with a little maneuvering. He held me close. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”



Breakfast was a little tense after our sexcapades last night being shared in the pack bond. It was easy to forget that we didn't have a family bond and couldn't just communicate as if we were all still bonded like before.

Roan knotted me again after that first time, after Tate had fucked me while our mates had watched. I'd felt so sexy under the gaze of my alpha and omega. They'd made me feel desirable despite how big I was.

Now all I felt was grumpy. I'd hardly slept, unable to get comfortable as my stomach and back ached. I knew I was in early labor, but kept thoughts of it away from my bonds because I didn't want to stress anyone out.

Roan was smiling for the first time in so long; genuine, easy smiles that lit his handsome face. I just wanted to look at him for a while and not think of what was coming.

I picked at my food. Larken had made a yummy breakfast omelet, so I felt bad for not having an appetite. He had been teaching me to cook because I wanted to feel less useless in the kitchen, so I knew the effort that went into making food for so many people, shifters in particular.



Xavier was taking a turn on the egg so we could eat as our mini family, minus Pops. The egg would hatch at any time, the shell turning harder and more brittle with each passing day.

I knew that the pack, and our allies were desperate for baby news. Both of Tate's babies, the one he'd carried, and the one he'd sired, were miracles that other packs wanted to recreate. There was a long list of betas that wanted to try it here.

Eventually, I pushed my plate away. Roan caught the motion straight away. "Not hungry? You feeling okay?"

"I'm fine. Just not feeling it today, sorry Lark." I tried to play it off, but Roan caught the evasion.

"Hiro?"

"Roan, I'm fine."

My tiger chose that moment to lunge forward and wrestle control. *Babies coming!* They told both of my mates.

The clothes that I'd been wearing shredded into ribbons as the shift took over. I shattered the chair I'd been sitting in with my tiger's massive bulk.

*We've gotten fat*, they rumbled.

*You demolished that chair*, I chided.

They chuffed in indignation at my thoughts.

I didn't get time to fire back at them. A pain ripped through my stomach.

"Upstairs!" Tate yelled. "To the nest. Ash call Michaella and Aldrin."

“Thanks,” Roan said as he guided me up the stairs. “I’m so glad you have another mate to take control.”

*Me too. I’m too much for one person.*

“And that’s why I love you.”

Xavier moved out of the way as I slunk into the room. I took his place curled around the egg.

Roan stripped and shifted as Asher and Tate entered and closed the door.

“Can I stay, please?” Pops asked, wary of being rebuffed. It was in his posture and voice.

Roan looked at me. *I’d like him to.*

*Me too.* I nodded at Xavier. My tiger was happy that our family was close. Our alpha nudged my head as he hopped into the nest.

I adjusted my position, lying on my side so Roan could warm the egg as I got ready to push these babies out of me.

The pain came in waves over the hours. Roan managed it as best he could with his alpha power, and like I’d done with Tate, my omega mate made sure I drank plenty. Asher ensured Tate didn’t wear himself out worrying over me.

Michaella timed the contractions and Aldrin and James took notes.

“Sorry I am so late!” Ívarr burst into the room just as our first born made his appearance, his eyes wild as he took in the sight. Our first born — an alpha Japanese tiger. My tiger

roared in triumph at the gift The Luna had given my family and my people.

Roan's wolf rubbed his head against mine. *Well done. He's strong like his Otousan.* We'd agreed on the Japanese term for Papa for me. My tiger chuffed with pride.

*Of course he is,* they said.

Together, Roan and I cleaned up the little tiger cub and nuzzled him. *Tate? He's yours. Did you want to name him?*

There was a long pause as Tate swallowed down the emotions written all over his face. "Noah. His name is Noah. Thank you, Sunshine."

James took him away as I pushed out his sister, weighing and checking him quickly, then handing him to Tate to hold for the first time as my omega cried. "He's so beautiful."

His sister was causing some issues. I shifted positions to help her on her way. It didn't work. She was stubborn, hopefully not a sign of things to come.

I saw Aldrin and James shoot Michaela worried looks the longer it took. I was so exhausted and prayed that my daughter would arrive safely and soon.

"Just a little longer and then I can grab her. Give me one big push in three... two... one. Push!" Michaela caught hold of the wolf cub and brought her to my head. She was her father in miniature, with charcoal fur, bright green eyes, and also an alpha.

# ALPHA RISING

## Roan

**P**recious. Our new babies were the most beautiful things I'd seen, but our girl was extra precious for being an alpha. Here she was, as proof that Elliotte wasn't an aberration. She was meant to be here as an alpha female, as surely as our daughter was.

Once properly cleaned, she blinked knowing emerald eyes up at us. Her sight too good to be that of a newborn.

*Jewel*, Hiroshi whispered along the pack bond, a sense of awe in his tone. *I think her name should be Jewel. She has your eyes, your everything.* His tone was a little dry.

*I'd say I'm sorry, but you already have a mini-me.*

*True.* So smug. *I wonder who Noah looks like when he's shifted?*

*I don't suppose it matters, does it? He'll be perfect no matter what.*

*I think so too.* Hiro sounded tired but exhilarated.

*I love the name Jewel. It suits her.* I nuzzled along his jaw, silently thanking me for this gift. Nothing meant more to me

than our family.

They gave us a few more moments with her before James stepped forward to take her. Neither of us took our eyes off the tiny bundle in his arms until she was weighed and checked, then returned to us. Her brother squirmed in Tate's arms, so he brought him over.

"Here, Noah, meet Jewel out in the world for the first time." Tate looked like he was hardly keeping it together.

We placed the babies side by side next to the egg and a lump rose in my throat at the thought that soon these babies would all be playing together.

Reality hit that we were about to have responsibility for three new lives, and one was even more challenging because of something she couldn't change.

"Hey," James soothed. "We've already contacted Blake and Kade to tell them the news. Expect visitors in a few hours, okay? We'll get more protections all over the house."

"Don't worry, son. You've got me and Larken here as well. You know we'll do everything we can to protect you all, not just the babies."

I knew that and it doused the flames of panic that had taken a choke hold on my breathing. Ever since I'd lost use of my arm, I'd struggled with the idea that I was useless, or less than the other alphas. I knew it was going to take me time to find my feet, to find a new purpose now that we weren't working with the council.

Now that two of the babies were here, both alphas, I had something new to focus on: being an excellent role model for them. I would raise them to see the value in each designation. To see that we were all shifters and had to live peacefully with other supernaturals and humans. We were more than our alters and designations. I wanted them to know that gender roles were outdated, so of course our daughter could have it all without having to do everything better than her male peers just because she's a girl.

I ate up each little move the babies made. Their yawns and cute little snuffles were so adorable that I felt myself falling deeper in love with them. It didn't matter that I hadn't created Noah. He was my son, too.

Jewel got closer to the egg, and my wolf went to nose her away when she began barking at it. Noah swiped a clawed paw at the egg, making Tate freak out and shift.

*The egg!* The poor raven was frantic as the siblings yipped and growled at the egg.

It was only then that I noticed that the egg was rocking slightly. *I think he wants out,* I remarked.

Asher turned frantic eyes on the medical professionals in the room. The only one of us still to shift. "Will that be okay? The other two are fine, aren't they? Does he need to cook a bit longer since he's in an egg?"

*Cook? He's not an omelet, Ash.* Tate sounded irritated with his mate as he flapped around the babies and tried to protect

the egg, tracking the progress of the growing cracks. *Besides, I don't think we have much of a choice. It's happening now.*

Aldrin was the voice of reason. "He'll be fine. I have every faith that he's perfectly ready and was just waiting for his siblings to be born."

*I think he's stuck!* Tate's panic ratcheted higher.

"Then help him. Use that beak and make a hole," James said firmly.

The raven darted forward, assessed the egg quickly, head tilting from side to side as those beady eyes took it in, then pecked three times, creating holes near the top.

*Ash.* Tate summoned his mate to his side. *Use your fingers. I don't want to hurt him.*

The other alpha got to his knees next to the egg, and carefully picked at the holes, widening them to the wriggling, now squealing cub inside.

As more of the egg fell away, we got to see more of the baby inside. A little white lion cub and an omega male. His eyes were the bright blue of his omega father's, and I knew he was just as perfect as the other two.

"Hello, Maddox." Asher cradled the tiny cub in his big hands. "I'm so glad to finally meet you."



My wolf urged me to shift so that I could help look after the babies. I was desperate to hold and kiss each one.

“Thank you Hiroshi, Tate, for giving us this. It’s more than I could have ever hoped for,” I said, emotions overflowing. I was overwhelmed, exhilarated, scared, and so tired, and I hadn’t done all that much.

*You helped me with your power. You were there every minute,* Hiroshi chided.

“What he said,” Asher said, still staring at Maddox with a goofy smile on his face. I’d never seen the alpha so relaxed and happy.

Tate returned to his human form. “That was kinda intense there, but I love how the babies were with each other. His eyes flitted between Maddox and Noah. “I can’t believe I helped make them. They belong to all of us. I just can’t believe that they are half of me.”

“I know what you mean,” I said, looking down at my precious Jewel. The pup was curled up with Noah on the floor of the pretty overcrowded nest. We really needed to move and clean up.

Michaella checked over Hiroshi and then urged him to shift back if he could. Jewel watched her otousan shift and then yipped at her brothers to do the same.

Maddox shifted first. He was adorably chubby with caramel colored skin, a shock of dark hair and his bright topaz eyes. The stone on the ring Asher had given Tate matched his and



his papa's eyes. I wanted to hold him close and get a hit of that new baby smell. My wolf wanted to sniff each one and gather their scent so he'd always be able to find them.

Jewel sounded annoyed with Noah as he took his time shifting, yawning as he did so. He had the same dark, glittering eyes as his otousan, the color of onyx, with short nut brown curls. He was the perfect mix of Tate and Hiroshi. It was amazing to see a person who two omegas had created.

Maddox watched his sister patiently as she shifted for the first time. Those emerald eyes still saw too much on a face with an adorable button nose. Like her brothers, she was a perfect mix of me and Hiroshi. She would have my dark curls, but had tawny skin, making those eyes really pop. I just knew she was going to be a force to be reckoned with.

"We really made some stunning kids, y'know," I said to my family, still in shock at how quickly things had progressed. We believed we'd have at least a few days between the twins being born and Maddox hatching, but no, they wanted to share a birthday.

"You did," My dad agreed. He'd stayed silent, just watching everything from the sidelines even as each one emerged. He sounded a little choked. Had he been crying? Long gone was the stoic second in command to Rincoln Hayes, Kade's birth father. I adored this side of my father. My mother would have been proud of her mate's about turn, his humility when admitting he had been wrong, and the lengths he had gone to in order to make it right.

I scooped up Jewel, awkwardly holding her in the crook of my right arm. I couldn't really feel her, but I held my left hand under her. She grasped my thumb and stared straight into my soul, forging a connection that would last a lifetime. "Here," I said, passing her to him, "Jewel, meet your Pops."

The smile that graced his face took years off him. His grief and loneliness after losing mom had aged him, and I was grateful to give him a new purpose. He had an online consultancy business that brought in plenty of cash, but my dad needed connections to those around him. He needed to be needed. Now he had four sons and three grandchildren to keep him busy.

"Hello little queen, my Crown Jewel. Aren't you just precious," he cooed. "I'm gonna need to hold all those babies."

Jewel tolerated the fuss until she got hungry. Her first real cry was pitiful.

"Oh, the potion! Poppy made me a potion that she said would work straight away." Hiroshi motioned to his dresser. "Top drawer please, Roan."

I handed him the vial that he swallowed down. He flushed a deep red. "Oh, that's a weird feeling. Pops, could you bring me Jewel?"

"How about you put some pants on and come sit in the rocking chair?" he suggested.

"Good plan."

We got Hiroshi situated with Jewel on one side so she could latch, making space for Noah to take the other side. Michaella helped him with the positioning so that both babies could feed at the same time and not hurt my mate's nipples. His face lit with wonder as Jewel sucked, her little fists unbunched as she relaxed.

Not to be left out, Maddox's hungry cry soon split the air. That boy had some lungs on him. I could see Asher's amusement fading as panic set in. "Where's the bottles?"

Parenthood was going to be an adventure.

# EPILOGUE

## Asher

“Thank you, Alpha, for coming to visit. Hello Alpha Mate, I hope you’re doing well,” I greeted the alpha pair formally, letting them into the house.

My lion was pushing at me to take charge of the family, to present a united front full of domestic bliss. He feared that if we were any less than perfect, our Alpha would take us away from our mate and the babies. His heart beat for Maddox, though he loved each baby differently. Noah was part of Tate, our beloved mate. Jewel belonged to our brothers and was so fierce, she demanded you love her. Who were we, my lion and myself, to resist?

“No need to be so formal, or worry so much, Asher. You are stuck with the Sweetwater pack. In fact, Shelby is hoping you’ll come back to the factory soon.” Shelby was a nymph and the manager at the cider factory here in the compound. “They’ve missed you at work.”

“Are you sure it’s safe to go back so soon?”

“Oh, Blake doesn’t mean now. In, like, a couple of weeks. Let the babies wear you out first. Then you’ll want to go back

to work just to have naps on your breaks,” Kade cut in, making us all laugh.

None of us had really slept the night before. Still too euphoric after meeting our children to truly rest. The omegas napped between feedings. Tate had asked to try breastfeeding too, for that extra connection. We worried he might not manage, but his milk had come in quickly, his face flushing like Hiroshi’s as a sign of the magic working.

“But to answer your question, yes, I think it will be safe enough for you to go back to work soon. Roan will be returning to his duties helping Kade assist the omegas. Hiroshi will be returning to healing part time, and he will be a part of the testing. Tate will be needed with the wing guard when he feels ready to leave the babies, but we will work all of that around you.”

My mind was honestly still stuck on the idea that I was wanted in the pack, that I still had a job after these last weeks away from the factory, my absence when I first started my therapy with the elves. I really thought that I’d end up having to look for a job outside of the compound since I couldn’t risk my lion around the other alphas of the pack. We had a special relationship with Roan, Xavier, Larken, Aldrin, and even our Alpha, Blake. They were all different from the usual alphas that made up the enforcers, but since things had calmed with Roan, and I knew I had him as backup, my lion had chilled out.

There was a reason I'd never picked up an enforcer job. My lion was too angry for me to risk the safety of others. I didn't want to overreact to something because I'd grown to love fighting and only saw violence as the answer. I didn't want to give in to my lion's need to hurt others. Since we had changed designations, that burning rage had cooled, but not enough to test it by working as an enforcer, especially with the risks to the babies for being what they were.

"Come through and meet the babies." I followed behind them, going straight to Tate's side as he finished feeding Maddox. He handed me a muslin and our son to burp.

With sure hands, I raised him to my shoulder and patted him gently as my family talked with our alpha pair.

I'd never felt so content, or so loved, in my life.

*Thank you for waiting, for trusting that I'd get through it and fulfill my promise to you.* My mate smiled at my words.

*Thank you for keeping your word.*



*Tate*

There was nothing hotter than my mate holding our baby son. He did it with such ease; it looked like he'd been doing it his whole life, not just half a day.

I was beyond tired, though, so no sexy times, even if my body wanted it. Turns out the stress of watching your other mate go through labor, then helping an egg hatch, and then

breastfeeding on top, made for an exhausted me. I was still buzzing on the high of seeing our family complete. If we never had more children, then that was fine with me. These three were blessings I would thank the goddess for over the coming decades. A lifetime of thanks for such gifts.

The alpha pair sat and Larken offered them drinks, which they declined.

“We actually wanted to see if you would be up for leaving the house,” Kade said, surprising us all.

“Leaving the house?” Asher asked warily.

“We’d like to get Poppy over to do a formal blessing on the babies in front of the pack. The demons are here to extend wards and we even have an assassin checking for gaps in our security.”

What the hell? “Seriously? Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“What part concerns you?” Blake leaned forward to ask.

“Will the babies be safe?” Worry ate at my gut, and I shared a look of understanding with Asher. If I didn’t feel it was right, he’d back me on it.

“Janet just called,” Hiro announced as he entered the room. “She said we better get our asses over there so she could squeeze those babies.” He laughed, sounding carefree. It eased the knot in my stomach.

The omega bear was ancient and well loved in the pack. Hiroshi had told me how she had helped him in the first weeks

that we were here. So, if he trusted her judgment, then I would, too.

“Okay, I could do that. I need to shower first, though.”

“I think we could all do with showers, babe. You have vomit in your hair,” Asher announced calmly.

What the fuck? I pulled a bunch of hair to my nose and sniffed. Holy fuck! I was sitting here, in front of the Alpha and his mate and was reeking of baby vomit!

Whatever he saw on my face had Kade nearly rolling. He was laughing so hard! “Go, the pair of you! Just gimme the baby first!” he demanded.

*That okay?* I asked Hiroshi. Maybe I was being rude, but I needed to check he was willing to head out right then. He might have wanted to sleep instead.

*My tiger is too restless. They want to show off.* I could almost feel his eyes roll down the bond. It continually grew and deepened, just as my love for him did.

*I love you, you know. Our babies, too. I could never have dreamed of this life.*

*Me neither. I love you too.*

“Okay, shower time. Roan and Hiroshi can go next.”

Asher took my hand to help me up from my seat. I was so stiff and tired. He then handed off Maddox to a delighted Kade and whisked me up the stairs in his arms.

“Are you happy, Tate?”



“I’ve never been happier.”

We showered in super quick time, Hiroshi and Roan joining us while Xavier and Larken showed off Jewel and Noah to our Alpha. Xavier was wrapped around Jewel’s little finger, but I knew there was nowhere he’d rather be.

As a family, with the babies in slings, we walked towards the mansion where all the shifters of the pack were gathered, a party in full swing.

“What a welcome, huh, Maddox?” I whispered to my son.



### *Hiroshi*

*Damn hormones making me leak tears and milk*, I grumbled as we walked. Noah was tucked up against Asher, and of course, Jewel was with Xavier. Roan hadn’t wanted to risk carrying a baby with his arm as it was. He was concerned about being hampered further if there was an attack.

I felt good about the visit to the main house. My tiger was preening at our beautiful family and I trusted Janet. The omega bear had all the right connections with our goddess and wouldn’t put our family at risk.

The sounds of the party reached us before we could see them, the joy quickening my steps. I wanted to be among the gathered shifters, to celebrate this new chapter, and was excited that so many had come to see the new additions to the pack.

Patients from the clinic, the elves we'd seen weekly, all the factory staff, enforcers, and mansion staff greeted us. It was almost like being royalty. I grinned at Roan, and he smiled, squeezing my hand and kissing my hair.

My love for my mates felt never ending, but in just a day, my heart had expanded to love all the babies so deeply it almost scared me. I hadn't known how terrifying it was to love someone so small and helpless. Through the night I hadn't been able to stop watching them until my eyes burned and my alpha had pushed me into a sleep. My tiger had been grateful to him for that show of power.

I greeted people I knew, but kept my mates and children in my eye line the whole time. The scents of the food drew me to a snack table. Roan loaded a plate for me. "I'll carry it, you eat. You need it for feeding time." I'd heard that feeding took a lot of calories, but had underestimated how much I'd need to eat. Thankfully, I had a diligent alpha to make sure I looked after myself.

Whatever came next, I was happy that I had my men by my side. They'd be with me when my family visited and get me through the chaos that would cause.

Noah's sweet face was caught on the crowd, his expression one of wonder. He had no idea that he was the new prince of the Japanese tiger clan. A baby my mother had said was impossible was the very thing they had hoped for with Jared.

A shiver ran down my spine at the thought of him. As we'd all figured would happen, he'd escaped the council's holding

cell, an inside job, and now was evading recapture. And they wondered why so many shifter groups had lost faith in them.

Jared was still out there, but he had fewer allies this time. Less power over me, too. Next time we met, I wouldn't be pregnant and vulnerable.

I would end his miserable existence.



### *Roan*

Watching emotions flit over Hiroshi's face never got old. My mate was expressive and could never hide his thoughts from me. I felt his joy and wonder at all the people celebrating with us.

Asher and Tate stood next to us, keeping close. There were so many people. For Hiro's sake, I ignored my discomfort. It was getting easier to come to terms with my arm being as it was, but I still had a ways to go before genuine acceptance.

Many people, even alphas and betas I was sure had resented me or had bought into the lies others had spread about me, came to congratulate me on my wonderful family and the risk I'd taken to ensure everyone got home safe.

If they resented me for Carl and Sven's deaths, then they were wise enough not to let it show.

There was a makeshift stage area set up, and Blake called the pack to order from it. "Sweetwater pack, we are here to

bless three new lives, three more shifters that have joined us. A miracle from our goddess.”

The crowd parted to let us join him on the stage along with Poppy, her wife Zinna and their baby, a little girl called Sage, on her hip. Poppy passed the little one off to her wife as we approached so that she could hug us all. The crowd chatted among themselves as we greeted Blake and Kade; the babies making a rare appearance in public with a heavy elven guard.

Above us, Jake and Sebastian flew, protecting us from the air.

To the side, a large purple demon stood next to a man wearing a nice suit. “Roan, come meet Cody and Toth,” Kade urged, pulling me away from Hiroshi, who was still chatting to Poppy. “Sorry we haven’t been able to introduce you all before.”

“That’s alright, it’s been a busy time for all of us,” the man, Cody, said, while the demon muttered something about “Mori and Damon,” that I didn’t really catch or understand. Cody elbowed the demon. “Behave, Toth. Some shifters are wary enough of you like that. Why don’t you put them away?”

“Thought you liked my wings, and my tail?” Said tail had wound around Cody’s waist, pulling him against the demon.

“You know I do, but we need to fit in.” Cody’s face was bright red.

With some more grumbling, the demon changed and gone were the horns, tail, wings and pointed ears, leaving an

attractive man in his place. Cody kissed his cheek. “Much better. Let’s do this, shall we?”

Blake called the crowd to order again, a hush rolling over the assembled shifters. Poppy took her place beside him.

“Thank you for coming to welcome these babies to our Sweetwater family. High Witch of the Northharbor Coven, Poppy Birchwood, will give a traditional witch blessing. Then Cody Valentine, our business partner, with his demon mate, Toth, will impart a demon blessing. Finally, Ívarr will give a welcome from the elves.” Blake was quiet as a murmur went through the crowd.

“These babies represent a new chapter in the lives of shifters. Not only do they show The Luna is with us by increasing our fertility, they show the true purpose of the beta sickness. Thanks to the safe arrival of these children, we will begin testing on the betas who have volunteered tomorrow.”

There was a cheer from the betas. Hugs were given, and Blake smiled genuinely at them. Our alpha was a good man. I’d known it before I even met him, which is why I’d been happy to trust Kade to him. My best friend had flourished under his care in a way I’d never seen in him before.

Hiroshi cuddled into me. “This is amazing, isn’t it? I’m so excited to see more betas change and be who they were really supposed to be.”

“Me too.” I meant it. I hoped that each of my beta friends would find happiness in the months to come.

Kade whistled. “My mate wasn’t done.” He laughed. “We are so happy to have another alpha female in the pack. The Luna honors us with these girls. They are going to need the protection of each and every one of you so that they can grow to be the queens that they are. We have too many enemies out there to risk them.”

I felt the trickle of fear. None of us liked the reminder that the fractured council was now fully against us.

“News has reached us that the Northharbor aviary has declared war on the Sweetwater pack and our allies, the Northharbor pride. They believe shifters should only be with their alter types and that we have perverted the beta designation. That the beta sickness is a punishment and not a gift.” Kade was trembling with rage. “This is a pack that locks their supposed wrongdoers in their alter forms, leaving them open to being attacked and even killed.”

People looked angry now instead of scared. Betas looked determined to weather this storm whatever came.

“We believe in the elves and their visions. Janet has never let us down, and she has a message from the goddess that we are on the right path. The only way forward is through. Together.”

Resolve settled over the pack as each of the babies was blessed by their Alpha, the High Witch, a demon prince, and elven royalty. Ívarr had hidden that bit well.

The pack cheered for the babies, and I finally felt at home here. Sweetwater was where I belonged with my mate, his

other mate, and my brother. As a family. Whatever came next, we would face it together.

The end

The Sweetwater Pack will return in Axel's book, tentatively titled His Impossible Elven Mate

# AFTERWORD

Well, I finally got there. For a while, this book was going to take a completely different turn. Asher nearly didn't make it. That man tested me to the point I was ready to kill him off or banish him to the elves for keeping.

Asher owes January Blues for his continued existence. Seriously, I took a break and wrote the novella, and that just seemed to unlock something. Asher and I finally clicked, and the ending became clearer.

I hope you like where the Sweetwater Pack is going. Some former betas will be getting their stories soon, starting with Axel of course.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my alpha team, Janet and Jacqueline, my beta team, Jenny and Kelly, thank you for reading and all the comments!

Thanks Jen, my editor, and Sarah, my proofreader, for making this fit for reading.

Thank you to my family for putting up with all the hours I spent trying to get this ready. I owe you a dinner out.

Another thank you to Janet, for being the best PA I could ask for. You keep me right, make pretty graphics for me and give me time to create these worlds. I'd be lost without you.

I also need to say thank you to Saya and Saya's husband for picking through my Japanese terms in the conversation Hiroshi has with his family. I wanted to get that right, and with the help of Saya, I think I've done that.

Finally, thank you to you, the reader, for picking up my books, for loving my characters and taking a chance on me.

*If you enjoyed this book, please consider leaving a review.*

## ALSO BY

### **His Reluctant Omega Mate, Sweetwater Pack Book 1**

<https://mybook.to/HisReluctantOmegaMate>

Kade Turner doesn't need an alpha in his life. He's on the run, in hiding, from his power obsessed father.

Blake Sweetwater wants to prove that he is better than the alphas that came before him, and that he can be the one to heal Kade, both body and heart.

### **His Forbidden Beta Mate** <https://BookHip.com/BWSACAG>

An under 3k short that links in to the Sweetwater Pack but does not have to be read as part of the series. Does not contain mpreg

### **His Rejected Alpha Mate, Sweetwater Pack Book 2**

<https://mybook.to/HisRejectedAlphaMate>

Jasper arrives in Sweetwater to reunite with his son after five long years, only to find he has a fated mate: his son's best friend.

Dakota thought that he already had a fated mate, yet Jasper proves him wrong.

Could an accidental pregnancy and a strange threat to the pack push them together or tear them apart?

### **January Blues, Northarbor Coven**

<https://mybook.to/JanuaryBlues>

A spin-off from the Sweetwater Pack series. No mpreg in this story though it does occur in that world.

### **So Worth More, Second Chances Series #1**

<https://mybook.to/SoWorthMore>

*An M/M second chance romance, Andy ends his friends with benefits relationship with his co-worker, Will, when he realizes that while it has plenty of benefits, it's light on the friends. He's sick of Will's rules and poor treatment but agrees to be friends, minus the benefits, because he's still hung up on the guy. Will gets the wake-up call he so desperately needed when Andy ends things and discovers that maybe Andy's feelings aren't one-sided, but he's got a lot of healing to do before he can be the man that Andy needs.*

*So Worth More has some allusions to domestic abuse, mentions of former partners cheating, and a whole heap of family drama. While Andy does deserve better, Will does get there in the end. Told in dual pov with HEA.*

***So Worth More: The Wedding, Second Chances Series #1.5***

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An extended epilogue and features Andy and Will's wedding!

**For All It's Worth, Second Chances Series #2**

<https://mybook.to/ForAllItsWorth>

Charlie's best friend, Max, gives him an ultimatum – get help or their friendship is done. After a near-death experience and a stint in rehab, Charlie returns to pick up where they left off.

Only Charlie has realized that Max is everything he's been looking for all along.

Friends-to-lovers, second chances, a dose of redemption and family healing, and a kiss with a not so straight new friend.

*Trigger warnings for discussions of alcohol addiction and a brief violent scene.*

**It's Truth For Love** <http://mybook.to/ItsTruthForLove> (**Not in KU. Also on Smashwords**)

On the surface, Jonas Temper has a perfect life - he's rich and has a successful acting career. In truth, Jonas is hiding the man he loves from the world until Dale decides he doesn't want to live as a secret anymore.

When Dale ends their relationship, Jonas hatches a plan to take off the mask he hides behind and out himself to the world and show Dale that they can have it all - a life living their truth while still having their careers.

The plan ends up turning into a social media attack on Dale, making him return home to Whitehills, and Jonas has to decide what's more important - his love for Dale, or his career.

*Could Whitehills and Dale be a way for Jonas to live and love in a way that is true to his heart?*

***It's Truth For Love is a 20k novella and was previously free with the Class 21/22 Giveaway. There is no additional content.***

### ***Growing Love***

<https://claims.prolificworks.com/free/KxiWrlQM>

What started out being a short prompt for flash-fiction ended up being more of a serial. A Vet, a gardener and a garden

center. Features a rescued hedgehog and is written in British English.

## ABOUT AUTHOR

Jax Stuart is a Scottish-born author, mum of two and owner of a menagerie (two cats, a tortoise and 3 fish tanks of fish!).

She started writing her first book at age eleven, but gave writing up for years. A big birthday prompted her to finally go after that publishing dream.

When she isn't writing, Jax is an avid reader and likes to spend time with friends and family.

You can find her on;

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