



*Rocky Road*

**RENDEZVOUS**

BAKE SALE BACHELORS SEASON 5

JENA WADE

**Rocky Road Rendezvous**  
**Bake Sale Bachelors Season 5**

Book 1

Jena Wade

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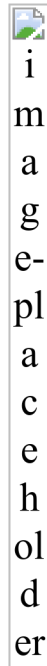
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# Chapter 1

## Pascal



The stage was set. The cue cards were written and in order. I double- and triple-checked. There would be no mistakes on my watch.

Everything was running smoothly.

Nearly all of our bachelors had checked in; those who hadn't at least called to let someone know they were either late or not coming.

Every time we did this fundraiser, there were at least a handful of bachelors who signed up that didn't show. But that was why

I had bachelors on reserve who I could depend on to step up in a pinch. In recent years, it had become the bachelors from the Blue Flames motorcycle club I hung out with, who I could call on to be auctioned off. Hell, my own name was on the list—the absolute last resort list.

Becoming friends with a motorcycle club had been a trippy turn of events in the past few years. Straight-laced-Pascal befriending Devon, the shy children's entertainer, who was now married to the president of the motorcycle club... I had somehow stepped into the role as an unofficial member. Many times, I worked as their community liaison. They were some of my closest friends and most amazing supporters of the events I facilitated.

Being that my job at the hospital was community outreach specialist, and I headed up several different fundraisers throughout the year for the hospital, as well as partook in several other charities as a board member, it should be no surprise that I was a part of the club doing something quite similar—anything for a good cause. The club felt the same.

If only a certain member of that motorcycle club wasn't causing me such a flipping heartache. Even if it was my own fault, it was frustrating. Not a day went by that I didn't think about Anvil, the club's vice president.

I scanned the crowd for his face, not for the first time that night. I had checked the RSVP records more than once to see if Anvil had replied. He never did. He never returned his place card for any of the other fundraisers he had been invited to

either. Anvil simply showed up when he wanted to or didn't show up if he didn't want to.

*Stupid. Stupid. Stupid*, I chastised myself.

Since becoming close with the club, I had somehow struck up a friendship with many of them, but with Anvil, it was different. Way different. I had run into him at a bar one night. We'd started a conversation that lasted well into the evening. Admittedly, we'd had a lot to drink, but not too much that we didn't know what we were doing. Then I'd gone home with him because how could I not? The man was a wet dream come to life. He'd been very clear that it was a one-time thing, no relationship for him. He had zero interest in repeats or dates. And that was fine. I had agreed to that. But then it happened again. And again.

Each time he continued to be clear. This was not a relationship, just the two of us having fun, and I had agreed to that even as my heart grew more and more attached to him. Even as I realized that he was the perfect alpha. He was sweet and fun. We could talk about pretty much anything.

Dammit to hell, my stupid feelings got involved. And now it had been several weeks since I'd seen him. I didn't know if he was avoiding me because he saw how I felt for him or if I was avoiding him because I didn't want him to let me down gently. And I knew he would be gentle about it. Anvil wasn't cruel. He was a fantastic alpha. Anyone would be lucky to have him.

I hated that I'd gone and caught feelings for the man. It wasn't fair. Why couldn't I catch feelings for someone who was



emotionally available? Or better yet, not catch any feelings at all because who wanted a relationship? Sure, I wanted one eventually. Ever since Devon and Sinclair had settled down and started having kids, I could see the joy it brought them. I wanted that. Someday.

Then I thought of Devon and Hammer and how freaking adorable the two of them were. Maybe I wanted someday to be sooner rather than later.

I wanted a relationship; I just never admitted it out loud.

“We’re ready to get started,” Matt, my right-hand person said to me. He had been working with me on these events for a few years now, and I couldn’t do it without him.

I hadn’t even sat down for dinner yet, but it seemed that most tables had gotten their plates. Guess I was missing out. That was typical.

“Oh, and Greg Ballenger called. He got sick. Is there any chance you can fill in?”

“What?” I said. This was the first I was hearing of this. I’d already maxed out on my omega fill-ins.

He shrugged. “Well, you’re the closest match to him, and we didn’t have any omegas on reserve. We should replace them with another omega to keep the numbers balanced.”

I sighed. “Yes, that’s fine. How long before I’m on?”

“First up.”

Of course. At least then, I would get my purchasing out of the way. Perhaps the bidding would go fast since no one wanted to purchase the first bachelor on the stage.

Matt handed me the information about my date. The date I would be going on was at a local restaurant, one of my favorites, so that was nice. Thankfully, it was just dinner and nothing elaborate like some of the others, like a trip to the zoo or the museum that would take hours to get through. I could sit through dinner with anyone.

I watched from behind the stage as alphas bid on the date with the omega described as “quite a catch” and “outgoing and spontaneous.” Not a match to me at all, but that’s okay.

I fetched a nice price, at least. More money for the Children’s Hospital. Our goal this year was bigger than ever, but with donations rolling in from people who didn’t want to purchase a date but still wanted to give, we would hit our goal easily enough.

Again, I scanned the crowd to see if Anvil was out there. I knew where the Blue Flames were seated. Sure enough, he was there next to my friend Devon and his alpha, Hammer. He wore his Blue Flames leather jacket and a pair of jeans. Somehow he managed to make it look sophisticated. His dirty blond hair was slicked back. He had the long at the top, tight on the sides, look down.

Before I knew it, the bidding was done, and I was free to go find the alpha who purchased me. I left backstage, leaving the walkie-talkie with my assistant, who could get a hold of me if

anything went wrong. But generally, at this point, if the bidding started, then the night was free and clear of trouble. Unless people took off without paying, but that was outside of my organizational skills. There was a team for that later on in the evening. We had done this enough times that it ran pretty smoothly now.

Time for me to mingle with the crowd. I had no choice but to glad-hand with the donors. I was the outreach specialist, after all, and people expected me to go out there and make conversation.

“Your date is named Albert,” Matt said, and he handed me the information. “Are you going to introduce yourself?”

I groaned. Now, I was a reasonable man, and I appreciated anyone who donated to a good cause. But Albert was kind of creepy. Anytime I’d had a conversation with him, he stood too close and looked too hard at me.

*No matter. It’s just one date,* I reminded myself.

“Great,” I said. “I’ll go meet him.” Maybe he would be disappointed it was me. He tended to like the young, twinkly omegas, and while I was slender, I was not a twink.

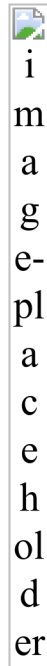
“Have fun, boss! It’s going to be another record year,” Matt said.

He was right. I pasted a smile on my face and reminded myself this was for the kids. I could endure a date with a creepy guy for the kids.

I could smile and nod along as I talked to the MC members, all while ignoring Anvil because it was for the kids.

# Chapter 2

## Anvil



I arrived at the bachelor auction late, per my usual. If there was one thing constant about me, it was that I was constantly unreliable.

As usual, I had gotten lost in my artwork, and time passed without me realizing it. When I finally looked up from the sculpture I was working on, it had gotten dark outside. I barely had time to get dressed in clean clothes and go to the auction before the first bachelor was auctioned off.

However, I'd had time to look at the dessert table to see if there were anything on the menu I would be purchasing that

evening. If I were being honest with myself, I was looking for something that would indicate Pascal was being auctioned off. But the anonymity of the bachelor auction made it, so I had no way of knowing if he was one of the omegas for sale. And I couldn't exactly ask Devon, at least not without raising any suspicion because, after all, Pascal and I weren't friends. We were fuck buddies. Friends with benefits.

But I couldn't tell his best friend that. It was complicated.

The omega had drawn me in from the first moment I'd seen him when he attended a club event with Devon. Since then, I'd run into him accidentally and on purpose several times, resulting in a nearly year-long affair I was not willing to end anytime soon. Of course, it wasn't as if we could be serious. I had tried serious before in college while getting my art degree. It had been hard enough having to show up to classes on time when all I wanted to do was lose myself in my work. And I sometimes did. I would spend hours on end in the art studio the students had access to. Adding the responsibility of having a boyfriend on top of school stress... it was doomed to fail before it even began.

I had loved being with the omega I dated in college when I was with him, but he could not deal with my schedule. "If you can't manage your time Anvil, then I guess there's just no room in your life for me," he'd said. "You're a flake. You don't prioritize anything but your art."

He had been right.

I wasn't going to stop doing my art. I couldn't control when my muse would strike, and I would lose myself in my work. I tried to. I tried my best to communicate, but alas, I had been young. Since then, I knew better than to try anything real or even remotely serious.

Pascal, though... pushed all my buttons. All the right ones. He was sexy, smart, giving, kind, and fucking glorious in bed. He was my kryptonite. From the first night in the bar when we'd talked, I knew I was hooked. At first, I thought I was making a new friend, but as our conversation went on and on, lasting hours, I knew talking wasn't going to be enough. I convinced myself that one night would be enough. It was not.

"You're quiet tonight," Devon said.

"Just taking it all in, I suppose." I flashed him a grin. Since college, I'd perfected the mysterious artist vibe. Pair that with my role as the vice president of a motorcycle club, and I was a magnet for omegas. They couldn't resist my charms and mystery, and they loved the idea of sleeping with a famous artist.

Devon could resist. But only because he only had eyes for Hammer.

"Will you be bidding?" Devon asked.

I shook my head. "I donated a sculpture that will be auctioned off toward the end. Plus, I made a sizable donation without purchasing a date." It was still weird to me that my art made enough money for me to live and live well. People wanted the work I did or work done by my club brothers.

Partway through the auctioning off of omegas and alphas, I saw Pascal make his way through the crowd. He wore a tux I'd seen him in a few times now, but that didn't stop me from drooling. He wore it well; the fabric fit him like a glove. He stopped at a table and spoke with an alpha there, one I recognized as the owner of the dry cleaners about a mile from the shop. Pascal smiled at the alpha, putting a hand on his shoulder. How did those two know one another?

That was a silly question. Pascal knew everyone. His job was to organize and do work for the community. Of course, he knew many business owners. This guy, though, was a bit of a sleazeball. I'd seen him at the bar before, pawing after omegas even when they'd asked him to stop. I'd also been behind him at the coffee shop, where he was rude to the barista. The man was a dick.

Pascal handed him a business card, then walked away. He waved at a few people and kept his smile in place while he talked with others. Damn, he was magnificent.

“That steak do something to you personally, Anvil?” Hammer asked.

I looked down at the steak I had been slicing through. It was mutilated now. Still edible but mangled to bits.

“I got lost in thought,” I said.

“Thinking of your latest piece? You have been pretty locked down in your studio lately.” Hammer narrowed his eyes. He always did know more than he let on; that was why he made a



good MC president. He was always taking care of us. I didn't need to be taken care of, though.

Art had been the last thing on my mind tonight, especially now that the piece I was working on had begun going more smoothly. "Yep," I said because, well, that was what was expected. I tried not to pay attention to where Pascal was, but I knew the moment he had gotten close to our table. It was as if the electricity in the air spiked.

"Hey guys," Pascal said. "Thanks for coming."

"We wouldn't miss it for the world," Devon said. "Even if Hammer won't let me be auctioned off anymore, we still want to offer our support."

Pascal laughed. "I could have used you today, too. Unfortunately, I had to step in. I didn't plan on being on the menu, but alas, here we are."

"Oh really, which one were you?" Hammer asked.

"The first. I think my dessert was Rocky Road. Which reminds me, I need to go snag a piece from the table. It sounded good."

"Oh," Devon said. "Who bought you? Anyone good?"

Pascal laughed. "An alpha by the name of Albert. He owns the dry cleaners. It's about a mile from the shop. Do you all know him?"

I dropped my fork to my plate with a clang, and everyone at the table stared at me. Thankfully the rest of the room kept the volume up, so I didn't draw too much attention. So that was why Pascal was talking to him. It was on the tip of my tongue

to warn him that he was not a great guy, but Pascal could take care of himself. I didn't have to defend him. But I wanted to.

Had I known he was being auctioned off, would I have left him alone or bid to win?

"Be careful with him," Hammer said. "He's an okay guy but a little pushy."

That was being entirely too generous. There was nothing "okay" about the guy. I made a mental note to thank Hammer later. At least Pascal would have some warning.

Pascal laughed. "Oh, I can handle a handsy Alpha."

Sure he could, but he shouldn't have to.

"I'll catch up with you all later. I have to work the room and all that, but it was good seeing you all. I'll be meeting up with you this week for the charity ride."

"Of course," Hammer said.

Pascal nodded. "See you later."

Once he was away from the table, I turned to Hammer. "I don't like the idea of him on a date with that guy."

Hammer shrugged, being too nonchalant, in my opinion. "He can take care of himself. They are only going to dinner, and they will be in public."

I gritted my teeth. Hammer might be right, but I didn't have to like it.

"Pascal's been working super hard this year on this event. I feel bad that I couldn't help much," Devon said. He sent a

pleading look toward his alpha.

Hammer sighed. “What do you have on your mind, love?”

Devon grinned. “Since we’re here... and we have a sitter for Oliver... Why don’t we stay late and help Pascal clean up? He always has no shows for the clean-up crew.”

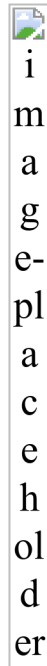
“I can help,” I said without thinking.

Devon looked at me like I had grown an extra head. “You will?”

“Sure,” I said. “I love to help.” Help keep an eye on Pascal.

# Chapter 3

## Pascal



I hate how disappointed I was that I didn't get to spend more time with Anvil. I would settle for talking to him, maybe even just being acknowledged by him. Ideally, I'd like... to what? Get picked up by him again so I can have another booty call?

*No.*

Bad omega. That was exactly what got me into the situation in the first place. Having feelings for the alpha, who has made it very clear he does not want a relationship was bad. Bad, bad, bad.

I gathered up the last of the dessert items that had been left over from the event. There were some of the Rocky Road, unicorn bark—which looked like a color explosion—and raspberry meringue kisses, one of which I grabbed and popped into my mouth. I was going to be here working for a while, and I needed the sugar. So I couldn't help but sample a few other things, including the unicorn bark. Now that the stress of the evening had dissipated since it was over, I realized I hadn't sat down and eaten any of the dinner, which was pretty typical for me.

Maybe a high dose of sugar wasn't the answer, but that was tomorrow's problem. Tonight I needed energy.

There were only a few of us volunteers left now cleaning up. We had a lot to do. We had a system, though.

All we had to do was take down our decorations and any supplies we'd brought. The hotel staff would handle the table mess. They were already working hard. Once I was done sampling the goods, I carried a box with me and went around to each table to pick up the printed materials and centerpieces we'd left out on the tables. Those were custom designed by the children at the hospital. It was a piece of artwork placed delicately in a glass bowl surrounded by flowers. I might just take one for my desk at work. I was always looking for cute things to have in my office.

The ballroom's double doors opened up, and Devon shouted, "There he is! Come on, let's see how we can help."

I looked up to find Devon leading his husband, Hammer, and Anvil into the room. The three of them were still dressed as if they were at a party. Hammer and Devon wore suits, but they'd lost the jackets. Anvil looked like he just came from the local bar, yet he didn't look out of place.

"Hey guys, I figured you all left." I smiled at them even as exhaustion weighed on me. I hoped they didn't want me to hit the town with them tonight. I was too old for that today. Though, I did appreciate the friendly faces.

"We did. We double-checked that Margaret was set with baby, and then she offered to keep him overnight, so we figured, hey, let's get crazy," Devon said.

"By showing up here and doing what exactly?"

"Helping you, of course! And then we can take you out for drinks!"

I grinned, a real one this time. "Oh, Devon, I love that idea. I do. But I've been on my feet all day. I've been here since nine this morning. Drinks aren't happening."

Devon's lip curled in a pout. Hammer kissed his cheeks. "I told you, if you want a night out with your friends, we can do that. But maybe tonight is not the best time for Pascal," Hammer said softly.

"When am I going to have a babysitter again?" Devon said.

Hammer rolled his eyes. "Literally, anytime you ask for one. Margaret has asked several times if she can babysit."

“Let us know how we can help,” Anvil said to me. He scanned the room as if looking for something he could take on.

“Ummm.” I looked around the room at the tasks left undone. I was finished with the centerpieces. They were stacked near the wall. “We might as well pick up the leftover menus people didn’t use, and then I will need help boxing up the desserts. Then we need to take everything to my car. After that, we’re done.”

“Great. Anvil, help with desserts. Hammer, come with me,” Devon said.

Hammer and Devon headed off toward the far end of the room while Anvil and I went to the dessert table. There was a stack of dessert boxes ready for us to fill with the leftover treats.

“Where do these go?” he asked.

“In whatever box they fit in,” I said. I tried not to look directly at him. Instead, I kept myself busy emptying plates of candies into the boxes and labeling them with a permanent marker.

Anvil laughed. “No, I meant, what do you do with them when we have them all boxed up?”

“Oh, um, I usually take them to the various nurses’ stations at the hospital.”

“That’s nice of you,” he said.

*Okay, I bargained with myself after working side by side with Anvil, smelling his intoxicating scent for the past several minutes, if he invites me out, I’ll go. One more night won’t hurt.*

I'm already head over heels in love with the dude. What does one more night with him matter after that? I couldn't fall more in love with him. That wasn't possible.

Or at least, I thought I couldn't. But then Anvil picked up a peanut butter buckeye and closed his lips around it. He moaned as he licked the melting chocolate off his fingers. "Oh man," he said. "That's good. I am a sucker for peanut butter."

I swallowed thickly. "Me too. Though, I'm partial to marshmallows as well."

"Oh, like that Rocky Road stuff?"

I nodded.

"Funny, that was the dessert your date was attached to, and you didn't even pick it."

"Right," I said. I smiled at him for a moment, getting lost in his eyes. Then I forced myself to look away. There was work to be done. I was too tired to fight this attraction, and even if I wanted to go home with him, I doubted I could stay awake long enough to enjoy it.

Alas, apparently it was not a situation that was meant to be because despite working with each other with a bit of light flirting thrown in, at the end of the night, when we packed the last bit of stuff into my car, he gave me a look.

"You good to drive?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yeah, I'm tired, but I'll make it home."

Anvil nodded. "All right, then. We'll see you around," he said.



“Yeah,” I said, my voice growing thick. “Thank you for all the help. I appreciate it.”

He grinned and shot me a wink. “It’s the least I could do for the kids.”

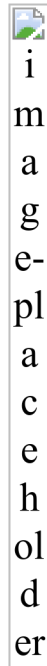
“Yeah, for the kids.”

With that, he was gone. Devon and Hammer had left earlier because, despite wanting to be out late, they were still two parents who were exhausted with a child who still wasn’t sleeping through the night despite being nearly a year and a half old.

I was kicking myself as I got into the front seat of my car. I started it up and drove away. Off to my empty apartment. Alone.

# Chapter 4

## Anvil



I scrubbed my hands in the sink in the backroom of the shop. It was early in the evening, just after five o'clock. I had arrived at the shop just before nine, which was humorous. I was keeping bankers' hours these days.

"His date is tonight at seven. You promise that alpha's not going to be a dick?" Devon asked.

I looked over my shoulder. Devon and Hammer were in the office just across from the washroom. I'm pretty sure they'd had sex in there more than once.

“The alpha he is going out with is a dick, but Pascal can handle him.”

That perked my interest. So tonight was the date, huh?

“Ugh. I don’t like it. Why does Pascal insist he actually has to go on a date with the guy?” Devon asked.

Hammer sighed. “It worked out for us.”

I didn’t like that line of thought. Yeah, it did work out for Devon and Hammer, as well as Sinclair and Rock, but this was Pascal and a scumbag. He wasn’t going to find his happy ever after with that slimeball.

I finished washing up, waved goodbye, then went out to my car. I didn’t plan on doing anything with the information that Pascal was out on his date. But then, when the time came to plan what I would have for my own dinner and from where, I found myself pulling up the website of the restaurant where Pascal was currently having dinner with the asshole alpha. The fact that I planned on picking up my meal right in the middle of their date? That was a coincidence, of course.

Because what the hell was I going to do?

Pascal was on a date. I would walk in, grab my meal and then leave. I probably wouldn’t even see him.

Yes, and I had some beachfront property to sell you, with a bridge right here in the midwest.

I arrived way before my food was ready, but that didn’t stop me from standing at the hostess’s table, peeking around the

restaurant for a certain omega. As if what? What was I going to do when I saw him besides look like a creep?

My mind was not operating at full capacity; I blamed the lack of sex. Had Pascal not been so utterly exhausted the night of the auction, I would have offered to take him home. Hell, I wanted to take him home just so I could pamper him and make sure he got a good night's sleep. But that wasn't our arrangement. We didn't just hang out. We weren't dating.

"So, what is it you do for a living?" an alpha's voice I recognized boomed from the corner table, which was just behind an opaque partition, thick enough that I couldn't make out exact figures but thin enough to could hear through.

"I'm the Community Outreach Director at the Children's Hospital. I think I said that when we first sat down." Pascal's voice was kind, though if I were him and was repeating information I already said, I'd be annoyed. Not Pascal. He had patience for days.

"Right, yeah. Fundraising and whatnot. Party planning."

I bristled. I couldn't imagine Pascal enjoyed having his job broken down to party planning. It was so much more than that. He worked hard to fundraise and provide fun events for the kids going through really rough times and helped their parents with the financial burden that their care often came with. He built a community within the hospital and the people who supported it.

"So, what do you say we cut this dinner short? I've got a really nice penthouse apartment on the east side. There is a bottle of

wine there with your name on it.”

Was this guy for real? They just sat down.

Pascal laughed nervously. I could hear the tension in his voice, and I pictured the set of his shoulders that went along with that. My omega was uncomfortable. “We haven’t even eaten yet. Can we maybe have dinner?”

“Right. Yeah. Good choice. But then surely you must come back to my apartment and see the view. I’m on the top floor, and the view is to die for.”

I rolled my eyes. What the fuck kind of view did he have in Cleavale, Minnesota? We weren’t exactly a booming metropolis.

Pascal gave another nervous laugh. “Yeah, I’m... that’s probably not going to happen. I don’t know where you got the idea this was that kind of date, but I’d like to keep things less intimate than that.”

“Well, we’ll just see how it goes then. How’s that?”

Asshole wasn’t going to take no for an answer.

Pascal said no twice. Albert clearly wasn’t going to get the message.

“Your dinner will be right out,” the hostess said to me. “Should only be a few more minutes.”

Perfect. A few more minutes where I could listen to this dickwad talk to my omega this way.

Their conversation went on for a little longer like that. Every few sentences, the alpha mentioned coming back to his apartment, and Pascal would decline firmly each time, but the dude was not getting the picture. Each time Pascal's voice got shakier and shakier.

I couldn't take it anymore.

I pulled out my phone, found Pascal's information, and hit send, stepping over to the corner of the room so that he wouldn't hear me.

"Um, just a minute," Pascal said. "I've got to take this."

I stepped out of the restaurant, and within a few more rings, Pascal answered.

"Anvil, what's going on? Is something wrong? You never call," he said.

"I thought maybe you could use an emergency to get out of your date," I replied. I should have thought this through. How was I going to explain why I was here?

"Wait, what?"

"You know you really should have a friend call thirty minutes into your date to make sure you don't need a quick escape. That way, if the date is going horribly, you can get out of it." Not that I went on a lot of dates, but I'd heard people did that.

"Who says my date is going horribly?"

"Come on, Pascal. You can be honest with me."

He let out a long sigh. “It is going so horribly. Unfortunately, he picked me up at my apartment, which was dumb. I will never do that again. So, I’m stuck here. I can handle him, though. I can fake sick after we get our food and have him take me home.”

No. I didn’t like the idea of Pascal in a car with that guy. I had no doubt Pascal could handle himself, but I didn’t want him to have to. “It just so happens that I’m here. I can take you home.”

“Wait, what? You’re here at the restaurant?”

“Yeah. I was picking up my dinner. Tell your date you have to go and you’ll take an Uber home. I’m parked out front. I have my bike, but I’ve got my spare helmet with me.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously. If Albert gives you any trouble, I’ll be right there. All right? I’ll give you five minutes.”

“Okay.” Pascal hung up the phone.

I thanked my lucky stars he didn’t want to argue the point. I stepped back inside the restaurant. He didn’t see me, but I watched as he returned to the table and overheard as he told the dickwad alpha he had to leave. The alpha tugged at Pascal’s arm.

“Are you sure you have to go?” he asked.

“Yes. It’s an emergency. Luckily my friend is just outside. He was in the neighborhood.”

The hostess came back with my bag of food. Pascal saw me as he rounded the corner, his eyes going wide. He didn't say a word, though, as he followed me out the door.

I tucked the to-go bag into my saddle bags and pulled out the extra helmet. I sat on my bike, and he settled behind me.

"There. Feel better?" I asked.

He groaned as he pulled the helmet on and latched it. "Yes. Oh my god. I didn't know how I was going to get through that dinner. He was relentless."

"He was an asshole."

Pascal sighed. "Yes, he was. I will have to exclude him the next time we do this auction. I can't imagine having another omega go through that. As much as I hated it, I'm glad it was me. What were you doing here anyway?"

I shrugged. "Getting dinner. There's enough to share," I said. I winced. "At the risk of sounding like the jerk you just ditched, would you like to come back to my apartment?"

Pascal grinned. "Well, I do owe you."

I shook my head. "No, you owe me nothing. I can take you directly home if that's what you want. I'm asking right now what you want to do, where you want to go."

"With you," Pascal said with a smile. "With You. My apartment is closer, though."

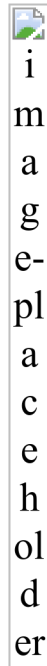
I kicked the bike on. "So it is. Let's go."



Pascal tightened his hold around my waist, and I faced forward, a smile on my face.

# Chapter 5

## Pascal



I knew better than to do what I was doing right now. Where was my common sense? It had flown the coop, and the only person driving was a horny omega who didn't know what was good for him.

We went up to my apartment, and Anvil unpacked the dinner he had ordered. It really was enough for two. Just how far in advance did he plan this whole thing?

He pulled out a container of macaroni and cheese that smelled divine. I had debated on ordering that just before he'd rescued

me. He also pulled out a second entree, which was labeled sirloin steak.

“Did you know my date was going to go so terribly?” I asked once I had a plate full of three-cheese macaroni with grilled chicken.

He shrugged. “I didn’t *know*. But I suspected it wasn’t going to be that great. He’s a dick.”

“He really is.”

We ate in comfortable silence. Anvil told me a bit about the work he was doing in his studio, and I filled him in on the latest events I was working on. For example, I had recently begun consulting with another organization looking to put on a bachelor auction similar to the one we did for the children’s hospital.

Anvil hadn’t thought to order dessert, but that was no matter. If I had my way, I’d be having him for dessert.

We cleaned up the mess from our dinner. Anvil lingered in the kitchen while I wiped down the counter.

He had his hands in his pockets, not quite meeting my gaze. “Well, guess I better—”

I put a finger over his lips. “You and I both know you aren’t leaving here tonight.”

He smiled. “I didn’t plan this. This was a no strings attached rescue.”

“My hero.” I fake-swooned and batted my eyelashes at him. “Surely my knight in shining armor deserves a reward?” I closed the remaining distance between us and wrapped my arms around his neck. My fingers threaded into his hair. Past encounters told me how incredibly sensitive his neck was.

“You know, I made a full suit of armor once. It was a project in college,” he said.

“Really? You’ll have to show me sometime.”

“Later,” he said, and he pressed his lips to mine.

He tasted faintly of the cider beer he’d had over dinner. This close, I could take in the scent of him. Perhaps it was the nature of his work, but I swear the man smelled like hot iron and steel. His touch burned into me and left me scorching.

I kept my lips locked on his as I pulled him down the hall. We separated long enough to drop our clothes along the way. This was a routine we were familiar with. Whether it was my apartment or his, we found our way to the bedroom.

Anvil was no stranger to my apartment, nor was I to his. We’d hooked up at both places multiple times. It was a dance we already knew the steps to.

In my room, I thanked my lucky stars I had cleaned the sheets.

Anvil opened the nightstand and grabbed the lube and a condom. “Last one,” he said, lifting out the empty box and shaking it to prove his point.

“Really? Damn, I can’t even remember when I bought those.”

Eep. That probably revealed too much. *Distract!*

I lay back on the bed and stroked my hard cock, letting Anvil get a good look at me while he covered his own with protection. My strokes were slow and leisurely. I wasn't aiming to come anytime soon; I simply wanted to tease him.

“Do you wish to do the honors?” I asked. “Or would you like me to?”

He handed me the lube. “I want to watch you open yourself for me.”

I squirted a generous amount onto my fingers and pressed against my hole. My legs were open wide, giving him a full display of me. He stared with hunger in his eyes. Considering how turned on I was simply because this was Anvil in front of me, it didn't take much to get me ready for him. I had myself stretched with nearly three fingers, thanks to the slick pooling at my entrance.

“You're tight for me, omega?” His voice was husky with lust.

“Yes. Almost ready, alpha. Need you to stretch me with your cock.”

Then he covered my body with his own. His lips went to my neck, and his hands gripped my wrists and held them above my head, pressed against the mattress.

“Stay there,” he commanded.

I nodded.

I opened my legs for him to settle between, and my pucker pulsed with need. I longed to be filled by him. It had been too

long since I'd felt his body against mine, and I craved. He didn't leave me waiting long.

He pressed the head of his cock against my entrance, and I arched my back as he entered me. I moaned, the feeling of fullness setting in, and it was as if I was complete. I needed him like I needed air to breathe.

"Fuck, yes!" I whimpered. He was larger than my three fingers had been, but I needed the burn, needed to feel him.

He sucked on my neck, licking the skin and breathing hotly against my ear. "Goddess bless, you fit me perfectly, omega. It's like you were made for me. Made to be mine."

I groaned, my eyes rolling back in my head as he pulled out of me and thrust back in. I itched to move my hands, to slow him down so we could savor this. But we had all night. We often fucked more than once in a night, and I ached to be filled with his cum.

"So close, Pascal." He grunted. His movements became erratic and hurried. "Fuck, your body is a dream."

Anvil gripped my hips. I yelped as he rolled us over. He was flat on his back now, and I hovered over him.

"Ride me," he commanded.

I complied, rocking my hips, not missing a beat. His cock slid in and out of my body.

Anvil closed his hand over my shaft and pumped to the rhythm I moved.

“That’s it, baby,” he said. “Come for me. Come on my chest. Paint me like a canvas.”

I wasn’t going to ignore a request like that. I couldn’t if I tried. Cum erupted from my cock and landed on his chest; within a moment, his hips bucked, and he released inside me.

Now came my favorite part. The short amount of time I got to spend locked in Anvil’s embrace while his knot held us together.

Anvil rolled us again until we were on our side, his cock still inside me. He kissed my lips, taking his time now that the wave of pleasure had passed. Like it always was after we came, our senses were heightened, and it was as if I could feel all the places our skin touched. Little marks where his fingertips had bit into my hips, and my back burned. I wanted the marks to show for all to see, but they never did. It wasn’t enough. It was never enough.

He nuzzled into my neck. “Tired, baby?”

“Mhmm hmm,” I replied. My eyes drifted closed.

He kissed my cheeks. “Sleep. I’ll clean us up in a minute.”

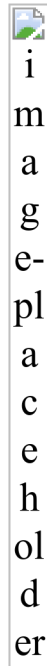
If it was up to me, he’d clean us up never. I’d live in his embrace if it were allowed. But alas, our time together was short. This could possibly be the last time I was this close to him. It needed to be. My heart wouldn’t survive many more of these nights locked in Anvil’s embrace when daylight came, and we separated. Not even our closest friends knew about us. To them, we were pretty much strangers. Yet it was Anvil who

perhaps knew me best of all. After all, he had my heart in his hands.



# Chapter 6

## Anvil



“Oops!... I did it again,” played on repeat in my mind as I woke up staring at a ceiling that didn’t belong to my apartment, but wasn’t an unfamiliar sight. Normally, if I woke up after a one-night stand, I might itch to get away as fast as I could. But not with Pascal. Never with Pascal. And that was why I should be running away faster than ever. The fact that I wanted to be with him always, was not good.

I’d slept like the dead after cleaning myself and Pascal up. I’d pulled the covers back and climbed in next to him like I owned the place—like I belonged there. My phone was on silent, and

I'd shut off the alarms that usually brought me out of my sleep. I set myself up for a long night curled against Pascal's side. It was the only one I was going to allow myself to have, and I needed to savor it.

I had. It was a glorious night, albeit over too quickly.

I knew—I saw it in his eyes—all I had to do was say the word, and it would be me and him dating exclusively. Dare I say we could be boyfriends, lovers, partners. But I couldn't do that to him. I couldn't allow myself to fall for him, to have feelings, knowing that my actions would inevitably end up hurting him. Bitterness would grow between us the more time I spent in my studio. And I really did not want to see the disappointment in his eyes the way I had with so many other people. It seemed that only my club brothers understood my artistic side. They put up with the eccentricities that came with it. I couldn't ask an omega who deserved so much more to do the same.

Pascal pushed himself up and looked around the room. "You're still here," he said.

"Yeah, I guess I fell asleep." As if I hadn't done that on purpose.

He grinned at me, and it was as if hope fluttered inside him and filled the room. I needed to dash that. Better to squash it now before it bloomed into anything else I could ruin. I could take a piece of metal and mold and craft it into the most beautiful sculptures in the world, but hand me a human heart, and I was sure to destroy it.

I was sure to shatter it like mine had been shattered all those years ago. The pieces had long since been scattered to the winds. There was no putting it back together.

“You got big plans today?” he asked.

“I probably need to spend some time in the studio. Eventually, the guys might like me to work on a few bikes, you know, since I’m a mechanic at a mechanic shop.” Realistically, I would spend the weekend at my apartment trying not to think about Pascal. If I went to the shop, I was bound to run into someone else, and my feelings were too raw right now. They would be written all over my face.

Pascal snorted. “Pretty sure you do mostly artwork now, right? When’s the last time you even touched a bike?”

He wasn’t wrong; even though I was part owner of the motorcycle shop where we worked on bikes and custom builds, I spent most of my time on my art. The other guys also dabbled a bit, and they had sculptures that were commissioned and sold. But I was the one who spent the majority of the time at it. Art just called to me, and nothing else could compare.

“What are you working on next? I heard a lot about your current projects, but you didn’t mention anything that you’re going to start. I know you have ideas in that head of yours,” he said. He propped himself up on his elbow. The scene was a cozy one, with the two of us laying in bed together, enjoying a leisurely, slow morning in which we woke up in each other’s arms and shared small talk.

I shrugged. “Just this and that.” I had recently gotten a commission for a sculpture that would go in the town square, but I hadn’t yet told anyone except for my club brothers about it. It was one of the bigger pieces, and I was pouring my heart and soul into it. This town meant a lot to me. The acceptance we’ve gotten here from the club and the work we’ve done in the community meant a lot, and because of that, a lot was riding on this sculpture being successful and good. “I need to spend some quality time with my sketchbook before I decide what to pick up next.”

“You want to grab some breakfast or something? Or I can throw something together here,” he asked.

Fuck. I wanted that so much. But I shook my head. “I shouldn’t have even stayed the night,” I said. “I really need to get home.”

“Yeah, of course.” Pascal took a deep breath.

For a moment, I thought he was going to say something. Maybe he wanted to ask me out or ask me what the hell we were doing. My heart squeezed and beat loudly in my chest. My throat closed. Shit. I couldn’t let him put himself out there. I did not want to hurt him in that way. I did not want the temptation of saying yes to something I would inevitably ruin. Because if he asked if we wanted to make this a real thing... could I really say no?

“You’ve been out to the Rush club recently?” The words burst out of me.

Pascal's brow furrowed at the change in topic. "No. Clubs have never really been my scene."

Mine neither, but I usually went as a wingman to some of my club brothers. "You should check it out sometime. It was really busy last weekend when I was there. Lots of guys to pick from. Like a buffet."

Pascal wrinkled his nose. "Well, that's great, makes things nice and easy," he said, pasting on a smile that was completely fake and not at all him.

I knew what I'd said hurt him. Fuck, I was such an asshole. It had to be done. This was a goodbye. This last time I let myself stay the night, which was something I should not have done and never would do again. I was better off letting Pascal find someone way better than me.

"Well, I've got a lot on my agenda today. I'm going to take a shower. You know where the door is," he said. He walked away from the bed, then gave me a little wave as he closed the bathroom door.

If I were drinking, man, I would drown myself in a bottle right then. I felt about two inches tall, but it was for the best. This thing between us had to end. His best friend was married to my best friend, for gosh sakes. If the two of them found out we were messing around, they would either be completely pissed off or planning our wedding—neither one of which I wanted to deal with.

Maybe time had dulled the pain, but it felt like today crushed my heart more than my college boyfriend ripping it out and

tearing it to pieces. Maybe because this time, it was self-destruction that did me in. I was the cause of this mess. I shouldn't have let it get this far.

What a piece that would make. My heart—or any heart—being broken into hundreds of little pieces, never to be repaired again.

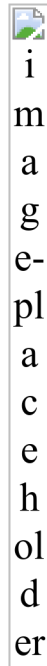
My fingers itched for a sketchpad and charcoal pen. I could see the art clearly in my mind, and now I needed to put it on paper. Better yet, I needed to mold it. Copper would make a great medium for that. Too bad I should be focusing my time on my commissioned pieces rather than something like that. A personal piece like that wouldn't be sold.

I pushed myself up, pulled on my clothes, and left, telling myself again that I needed to close the door on this chapter in my life. This... I couldn't call it a mistake; no time with Pascal was a mistake. I cherished the moments with him, but he deserved better than me. Someone more stable, who could give him the love and attention he deserved. Not someone who locked themselves in a studio and forgot to eat.

No, Pascal deserved better than that. Better than me.

# Chapter 7

## Pascal



Over the years, I learned how to maintain a proper work-life balance. At the beginning of my career, when I was climbing the ladder and networking throughout the community, I worked dozens of hours, largely unpaid overtime, because I was in community work, after all. Everything I did was to help the community. But I couldn't help the community while burned out, and I learned fast how to make that not happen.

These days though, I knew better than to burn myself out with too many projects. One, I was way too old for those kinds of things, and two, I'd already built the connections. I learned to

communicate and delegate when necessary and glad-hand with business people and community leaders rarely.

I had a whole team of people at the children's hospital who were fully capable of helping me to complete projects. But in the month and a half since I had last seen Anvil since he had basically thrown his other conquests in my face—probably as a purposeful reminder that he had plenty of other options out there—I buried myself in my work. I did not want any free time to dwell on how pathetic my life had gotten. I was pining over a man who made it clear that he was not into a relationship, and that was a new low for me. Unfortunately, it was one I had gone into, eyes wide open.

My phone rang, my cell phone, not my actual desk phone, and I answered it. It was dark outside, thanks to the early winter sunsets, yet I was still at work, plugging away on jobs I could easily delegate to my team.

“Hello,” I said.

“Please, please tell me you are not still at work.”

“Then I won't,” I said.

Devon's exasperated sigh met me on the other end. “Excuse me, but I can see your car. I'll be there in two seconds.”

If I was here late and Devon could see my car, obviously he was here late too, though I knew his hours were vastly different than my own.

A few minutes later, my office door opened, and Devon came inside. I had to bite back a snort as I took in the sight of him.



He was dressed in a pirate-like costume, full makeup, and some sort of wig or weave on his head. He even had a fake parrot attached to his shoulder.

“No comments from you,” he said.

“New character?”

“The kids requested a pirate, and this was the best I could come up with. The parrot was a random gift Oliver got for his first birthday.”

“It’s pretty great. Are you gonna add it to the regular lineup?”

He shrugged. “I just might. The kids seem to like it. Although I have to work on the accent.”

Devon was a children’s entertainer. He had a whole catalog of costumes parents could book for their children’s parties or events. At the hospital, he spent his time in the children’s ward, doing skits and magic tricks, reading stories, and singing for the kids. They ate it up. He was absolutely fantastic at building the morale of the children there who were battling cancer or severe injuries. He employed several other individuals who also dressed up as different movie characters.

“Why are you here so late?” Devon asked.

“You’re here late, too.”

He rolled his eyes. “I didn’t start work until two o’clock this afternoon.”

“Well, good for you. I have a lot to do.” That was only a small lie. I did have a lot, but there was no reason to get it done now.

“The next big event for the hospital isn’t for months. Usually, this is your downtime when you’re doing your other stuff. So what’s going on, Pascal? Is everything okay?” Devon sat on the chair across from me, his expression full of care and concern like any good friend’s would.

“Everything is fine.” I almost convinced myself. Who knew I could lie so well?

“You’ve been working pretty nonstop for several weeks now. Usually, you’re not so.... I don’t know. It seems like you’re trying to forget about something, or maybe someone?”

He saw me all too well. Not that long ago, I had to pry information out of him and basically force friendship on him. Oh, how the tables had turned. “I’m fine,” I said. “I let myself get a little involved with an alpha and...”

Devon’s eyes got big. “You were seeing someone, and you never told me?”

I shook my head. “No. We were just messing around, I guess. Anyway, he was clear from the beginning it wasn’t a thing. We were not in a relationship, it was just a hookup, and I stupidly developed feelings for him. I’ve ended it, or at least, I’ve avoided him enough that I am sure he has moved on to bigger and better things now.”

“That sucks, man. I’m sorry. Who is he? I’ll kick his ass. Or I’ll ask Hammer to.”

I laughed at that. Devon was not the confrontational type. Hell, he wasn’t the social type. The fact that he was married to the

motorcycle club president was a miracle in and of itself. “It’s fine. I have just been buried in work to try to distract myself, I guess.”

“Why don’t you come to the club tonight and hang out with the guys?”

Oh, how I wish that would help. But it would do the exact opposite. I couldn’t tell Devon that, though.

“I’m telling you, so many of the guys in the club are single. It’d be really nice if we could find Anvil a nice omega to settle down with. He’s been a bear to be around these days. Whenever he isn’t in his studio, he snaps at everyone left and right. He got pissy with Hammer the other day cause they were out of creamer. He needs to get laid.”

That was an interesting piece of information. “Yeah, no, I’m not looking for a relationship. I mean, I wasn’t, and then I met this guy. It’s complicated.”

“Well, you’ll be there tomorrow, right? To talk with the MC about the annual book drive.”

“Right,” I said, taking a deep breath. “Absolutely. I will be there for that.”

The club put on a book drive every year and a ride in which the club and several other bikers in the area came together and drove from one library to another. They could either pay the registration fee for the ride, which was donated to the library or donate a set amount of books to the local libraries and ride along. Usually, bikers did both.

Once they all arrived at the library, there was a huge event with lots of activities. The club had organized it on its own for several years, but I was getting involved this year, and we were doing even more. I was excited about it because it would be fantastic for the community. Not only would we be raising funds and books, but we would be getting everyone together and meeting new people, which were some of the best parts of what we did.

But fuck if I didn't just want to stay home and avoid all of that. The club organized that whole thing without me for several years; they didn't need me.

Ugh. Why had I thought this was a great idea? I had agreed to it *before* Anvil and I had ever gotten together.

"Of course, I'll be there," I said. "I've got all of my notes ready." Or at least I would by the time I actually sat down and looked at them. I guess I knew what I would be doing tomorrow morning.

"Great. I think we're going to get some pizza, and we'll have all the officers there and a few of the other guys who are volunteering."

"Perfect," I said. "Can't wait." I would spend the whole day reminding myself why being with Anvil was a bad idea. I could not waiver on that. My heart couldn't take it.

"Come on. Let's go home."

"All right. That sounds good." I powered down my laptop and tucked it away in my bag. Devon wasn't going to take no for

an answer, so I might as well get going home.

“Check this out. Oliver has been running all over the place,” Devon said. As we walked out to the parking lot, he pulled up his phone and showed me countless videos of his son running and playing, having a great time. He’d grown so much.

“He’s adorable. I need to come over and see him.”

“You really do. I swear he learns something new each day, and he says sentences now.”

“Really?”

“Well. One sentence. He says ‘Me want cookie.’”

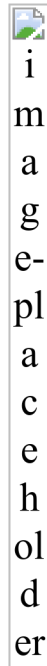
“He’s a genius,” I said with a grin.

Devon laughed. “Hammer seems to think so. He’s quite the proud papa.”

I loved that the two of them were so happy, and I was only slightly jealous. Okay, maybe a lot jealous. Seeing my friend experience his happily ever after showed me it was possible, just not with the alpha I wanted it to be with.

# Chapter 8

## Anvil



Objectively, I knew that Pascal would be at this meeting. He was, after all, a part of the committee that was putting together the book drive we were doing. We had brought him on as an expert. After our last book drive was massively successful, we knew there was more we could do, but we needed a more coordinated effort. Thankfully, Pascal had the expertise we needed and was willing to help. It was for the kids. For the community.

But knowing he would be there and then sitting down next to him at the card table we had set up was an entirely different

experience. We generally kept our meetings relatively informal at the MC. They were all after hours at the shop with the bays cleaned out and the floor cleaned. We could set up several tables and sit down to talk. The smell of grease and oil filled the air. It felt like home to me.

Devon had most certainly gotten used to it, Sinclair as well, though he wasn't attending the current meeting. Instead, he and his little one were stuck at home with a winter cold.

Pascal didn't seem to mind the grease and grime, but what did he really think? It was one thing to go slumming it and say you slept with one of the Blue Flames MC members. Of course, we had our fair share of hangarounds who did that, but I didn't think that was Pascal's MO. Despite the fact that he had a more cushy office job than I could ever dream of having, he didn't have that arrogance to him. I bet he would be just as happy working at a homeless shelter as he was working at the hospital. As long as he was giving back to the community and helping others, that was what was important to Pascal.

He had a binder open, and he reviewed his notes. I was amazed at the detail of it all. The sections were all separated into smaller sections. There was one for set up, during the event, clean up, and whatever "vendor management" was.

"So we haven't heard back from the bounce house people. I called around to see if there was anyone else with openings, and there was not. The original company got back to me today, and they double booked, so we are out one bounce house."

“Well, shit. That was a big hit last year,” Devon said. He was swaying, though I didn’t know why. I looked at him and then looked at Hammer, who was the one holding his son. My brow furrowed. Devon looked down at himself. “I’m doing it again, aren’t I?”

“You are sweetheart, but it’s very cute,” Hammer said.

Devon ran a hand through his hair and then sat down. “I feel like I’m losing my mind.”

“It happens,” Pascal assured him.

I didn’t know what was happening. I scooted closer to Pascal, hoping to see his notes, hoping to catch a whiff of his scent. He stiffened. Though we generally didn’t interact much while everyone was around, it seemed today he was going out of his way to avoid me. He hadn’t so much as looked at me since he arrived.

“I might be able to help with the bounce house situation,” Cueball said.

“Oh really?” Pascal asked.

“Yeah, see that there bounce house idea is a pretty sweet gig. You buy one, you rent it out. If you rent it out ten times in the summer, it pays for itself. Margaret and I got to talking about it, and she thought it’d be a fun little treat to have for her daycare anyway. We plan on setting it up once a month or so for the kids to play in. So we bought one. It’ll be here in time for the event.”



“No kidding, Cueball? That’s awesome. Thank you. You’re sure you don’t mind? We will pay. We have the money in the budget.”

Cueball shook his head. “You pay me for it, and I’m just gonna turn around and donate it. Nice little write-off there,” he said with a wink.

I knew Cueball. He was a close friend of mine. Hopelessly devoted to his wife—an amazing woman named Margaret. Yet when he winked at my omega... I saw red.

*Not yours. Abort the mission, not yours!*

“Awesome. That’s great. So, we’ve got face painting, the bounce house, and a craft station that Margaret’s going to manage. We’ll make sure to have a couple of volunteers rotate through that throughout the day. Next, we have plans for having the water stations set up.” Each item he ticked off had names next to it. No doubt, on the day of, he would be keeping track to make sure everyone was at their station. The last item on his list was the sculpture.

“And is everything on track for the sculpture?” he asked, finally looking at me. I had leaned so close to him now that once he faced me, our noses were almost touching.

“Absolutely,” I said with all the confidence that I did not feel.

Hammer snorted. I shot him a glare.

“You haven’t even started it, dude. The event is in like three weeks.”

I shrugged. “My muse will arrive whenever they want. And until then, I will not rush them a moment sooner.”

Hammer rolled his eyes, though I knew he knew exactly what I was talking about. He had his own muse, who was a fickle creature.

“I’m sure he’ll have it done,” Pascal said. I expected to hear at least a waiver in his voice or some hint that he was unsure. But no, he trusted that I would get it to him, and I would. It just might take an all-nighter the day before. Also, I wasn’t quite sure it would look the way I had originally thought. Ideas had been swirling around in my head, but nothing came out of my sketchbook and into clay. Nothing was helping me to make sense of this.

“Do we have a backup plan in case we don’t have it ready?” Rock asked.

I shot a glare him a glare.

He held up his hands. “Hey man, I know you’ve never missed a deadline, but I know Pascal likes to have everything buttoned up and... well, we’d usually have this done by now.”

“I’ll have it ready.” I clenched my jaw. If I had to stand up right then and go work on it, I would. I wasn’t going to let Pascal down.

“What the hell have you been working on every day that you’ve been holed up in your studio?” Rock asked. It was an innocent enough question, and as part business owner, he had a right to know.

I shrugged. “Odds and ends.” A few of those odds and ends were going to sell for quite a bit of money. Now that I had made a name for myself, it seemed like any old piece I threw together would catch a profit from someone who wanted an original Anvil piece. I didn’t love doing that, though. If I put enough junk out there, then all of my pieces would lose value.

Pascal patted my knee. “Anvil will have it ready. There’s no need for any backup.” He put a checkmark next to the sculpture as if he really did trust I would have it done. And I knew right then that I absolutely would because there was no way I was going to let Pascal down. We might not be in a relationship, but we did have a history—a strong one. And I could be honest with myself, even if I couldn’t be honest with him.

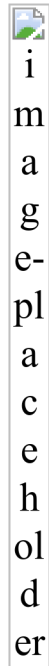
He meant a lot to me. So much so that I wasn’t going to risk hurting him, which meant I would continue to keep my distance.

Not tonight, though. I wasn’t moving from his side because it was innocent enough for me to sit next to him and breathe in his essence. We would keep it PG. We had a crowd around, and no one knew our history.

I eyed Devon carefully. It seemed Pascal hadn’t ever told his best friend about us. If he had, then Devon hid it well.

# Chapter 9

## Pascal



Working with various charities over the years has allowed me to have some pretty interesting meetings, some with stuffed shirts who were all hoity-toity and professional, and some with super low-key hippie types who just wanted to go with the flow and did whatever the energy told them to. But none were quite as stressful as sitting at a table where the man I had been actively trying to avoid for the past several weeks kept inching closer and closer to me, to the point where I was having trouble breathing normally.

Every time I took in air, his scent knocked me over, and I wanted to lean into him and lick his Adam's apple.

*Tone it down, boy*, I reminded myself.

Fuck why did they keep it so hot in here? Only no one else was sweating up a storm—just me. I swiped at my forehead with the back of my hand, and my stomach clenched. I thought I was going to be sick. Which is exactly what I had been that morning, probably because I knew I would be in this position later in the day. My early morning nausea had just been a precursor to me attempting to be in a room with sexy-as-fuck Anvil and pretend we were all just friends.

It was enough to make me vomit with nerves.

“I can help with that,” Anvil said, pointing to an item on my list.

“That’s all right,” I said. “I can go pick up those supplies the day before; then they’ll be in my car.”

“Right, but you don’t need to do that by yourself. That’s a lot of heavy lifting.”

“I think I can handle it,” I said. “I did this for the last event we had. All it is is a few supplies. Not even enough to fill the backseat.”

“I was gonna see if you’d like to have Jeffrey to go with you,” Devon said.

I whirled around to face Devon. “Jeffrey?”

“Yeah, he’s that nice alpha I told you about. He wants to volunteer.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Anvil roll his eyes.

“Did he volunteer, or was he voluntold?” I asked with a raised brow.

Devon winced. “He said he would try to make it so he could meet you.”

Ugh, the last thing I needed was a setup, especially after what we talked about the day before.

“Please don’t tell Pascal to rely on this guy who might not show up,” Anvil said with more force than was necessary.

“Well, if we tell him that Pascal is single and maybe interested —” Devon clamped his mouth shut as if realizing that setting me up right now might not be the best idea. *Sorry*, he mouthed.

I smiled at him to let him know it was fine.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. This isn’t a dating game,” Anvil said with a growl. “This is serious. We’re trying to raise funds for kids.”

“Libraries,” I said.

“Exactly. For the kids.”

“The whole community, really. Part of the campaign we’ve done this year is to be clear about the fact that libraries are for everyone, not just children. I mean, obviously, kids are a huge component, but adults need them too.”

“Right,” Anvil said.

“Wasn’t that a major theme to your sculpture idea?” I asked.  
“Showing the importance of libraries in all stages of life?”

Anvil scowled as he looked down at me, and damned if I didn’t want to lean forward and kiss the scowl right off his lips.

All of these biker guys were the same. Grumpy scowls up until an omega was there to sweep them off their feet. And that snapped me right back to reality. I was not an omega sweeping anyone off their feet. Anvil was not interested. He had made that clear.

“Either way, the day of would be a better time to pick up those supplies. And you don’t need this Jeffrey guy to go with you.”

“I talked with our supplier. They won’t be ready until the day of anyway, so you’ll have to go then. Not the day before,” Forge said.

I put my pen to my mouth, chewing on the tip of it. “Well, shit, that makes things slightly more difficult. I’ll have to get a move on a little bit earlier then.” I made notes after I flipped a few pages and got to my personal schedule of what the day would entail.

Anvil let out a low whistle as he read over my shoulder. “You should be delegating out some of this.”

“I am,” I said. “I’m delegating out as much as I can. Part of what makes these events successful is that everyone pitches in. Even me.”

“Shouldn’t you coordinate all of it and then just sit back and enjoy the day?” Anvil asked.

“You know that’s not how it works, Anvil.”

“Yeah, man. Lay off of him,” Forge said.

“I want as many of the club members to be able to enjoy the event as possible. I have time built into the schedule for me to participate in some of the festivities. See?” I pointed to the clear block I had between noon and two. Even though I knew I would likely fill that in with something else. The reason I didn’t block off that time is it was during the busiest time of the event when surely we would have some sort of catastrophe happen and I would have to step in to help. A clown would trip and break an ankle, or someone would overheat. The bake sale goods would melt, and we would need all new goodies. Something always happened. The trick was to be prepared for them.

“You’re going to be going on the ride, aren’t you, Anvil?” Hammer said. “You’ve got to ride next to me.”

“You’re not driving the supply truck this time?” Anvil asked.

Hammer shook his head. “Nope. Sinclair and Rock volunteered for that.”

“I’m actually going to be riding with them also,” Devon said. He continued to sway even though he was not holding his child. “We’ll have both kids ride in the back of the truck, and I can be back there in case either one gets fussy.”



“Really? You’re not riding on Hammer’s bike? How is he letting you out of his sight?” Anvil asked.

I raised an eyebrow and looked at my friend.

He shrugged and shot me a wink. “Just lucky, I guess.”

I kept my mouth shut, though; I had a feeling I understood what he was telling me. The other guys could remain clueless for as long as they wanted, but if I had to venture a guess, I’d say that Devon would be popping out another kid here in a few months.

“All right, if we’re all done... I think that is just about everything.” I knew I had to put an end to the meeting. If we overanalyzed anymore, we would get stuck in analysis paralysis. And that was never good for any project or event planning. “Any last questions or concerns?” I looked around to see plenty of heads shaking and Anvil looking at me with a smile on his lips. “All right. Well, as always, I appreciate everything, guys. We’ve got two weeks’ time. If anything crops up between now and then, I’ll fill you all in via the group chat.”

“Perfect, this is going to be so awesome,” Forge said.

I had to agree. It was going to be a great event. We put a lot of thought and effort into it this time around. The past events had been perfectly wonderful on their own. Now they just had even more awesomeness.

“Who wants to hit up the club?” Anvil asked. He had an eyebrow quirked in my direction.

I grabbed my binder, stood up, and pushed my chair in. “I’m going to call it a night, fellas. You guys can keep up with your partying, but some of us have to go to the office tomorrow.”

“If you want to go with Anvil, I can catch a ride home with Pascal,” Devon said to Hammer, taking Oliver from his arms.

Oddly enough, when he had the baby in his arms, the swaying stopped.

“Yeah, if you don’t mind, I won’t be too late,” Hammer said.

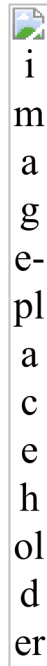
“Sure thing,” Devon said. What was supposed to be a short kiss turned into a lingering, loud, sloppy kiss that had me blushing and the rest of us groaning.

“Get a room! Especially if you’re riding with me,” Anvil said.

“Come on, Devon. We need to go. Good night everyone.” I refused to look at Anvil. I couldn’t look at him. I needed to put a stop to this nonsense and just walk away. And so that’s what I did, even if it hurt.

# Chapter 10

## Anvil



He didn't even look at me. The damn man didn't even look at me.

I'd spent the entire night glued to his side, hanging on his every word, volunteering for everything that I could possibly help with, yet... he didn't even look at me.

Could I blame him? I couldn't get it out of my head.

Pascal walked away from me. A sight I didn't hate to see just because of how delicious his backside was. But damn, I could have gotten a look over the shoulder, maybe a flirty wink,

some sort of longing. But no, and I had no one but myself to blame. I knew that, which was why I was at a club watching too many young twinkies dance around half naked ready to go home with a guy like me if I gave them the right invitation. I was sure of it. Plenty of them had given me a look. I could have sent a drink in any of their directions and had them in my lap within minutes.

“You going to make a move on any of these guys or what?” Forge asked. He had his own fair share of looks and invitations, but he was declining each and every one.

I groaned and shook my head. “Fuck if I know. Why does this have to be so goddamn difficult?”

“What the hell is so difficult?” Hammer said. “Pick up a guy if you want. It’s not difficult at all.” He took a long pull from the beer in his hand.

“You’re in a committed relationship. You’re not picking up anyone,” I said.

“Damn straight, I’m not, but I had a feeling I needed to be here to make sure you didn’t go do something stupid.” He narrowed his eyes at me as if assessing my reaction.

I glared at him. “And just what the hell do you think you know?” I took a swig of my beer. It was the third one I’d had since arriving. I’d lost count of what I’d had at the meeting. Nowhere near enough to make me any more than just a little tipsy, but I was no longer safe to drive. I wasn’t in danger of doing anything stupid, though. I didn’t think. Maybe it was

time to switch to the harder liquor. I bet I could forget Pascal with a few shots of Jager.

I flagged down the bartender.

“Why are you out here picking up random guys or failing to pick up random guys rather? There’s a perfectly nice omega just waiting for you to make a move.”

“What in the hell are we talking about?” Rock said. “What do I not know?” He was barely listening to the conversation, his eyes glued on his phone as he texted with his omega at home.

“Nothing,” I said, glaring at Hammer. “There is no perfectly nice omega out there. Not for me.”

“Only because you’re being stubborn.”

“What the hell do you think you know?” I asked again. Were we talking about the same omega? I was getting confused. “Did he start blabbing about—”

Hammer narrowed his gaze at me, and I cut off my sentence. I knew insulting his omega’s friends was not going to get me on his good side, and I didn’t have it in me to say anything bad about Pascal anyway. Not when I felt the way I did about him. I shut up quick enough. “I’m not interested in anything serious,” I said with a little more calmness to me. “Except for maybe some serious drinking. Two shots of Jager!” I shouted out, hoping the bartender heard me.

“We’re not doing shots with you,” Hammer said.

“None of these are for you,” I said hotly.

He rolled his eyes. “I’m gonna head home. Rock, you’re on babysitting duty; you make sure this one gets home safe.”

“He’s a big boy. I think he can handle himself,” Rock said.

“I’ll take care of it. Rock’s probably going to head out soon anyway,” Forge said.

“Damn straight,” Rock said. “I’m too old for this, and I’m really not getting enough sleep to justify being out late like this.”

“Trust me, guys. I’m not going to do anything stupid. I don’t even have a vehicle here. I will be Ubering home or crashing at the house of some random omega. Both are likely options.” Even as I said it, I knew it wasn’t a likely outcome. The only place I would be crashing would be my own house, and if I did the two shots in front of me, I’d likely be crashing in front of the TV with a bottle of water next to me because I did not look forward to the next day after that.

“Alright, man, just...” Hammer grimaced. “Don’t do anything stupid. All right? Whether you want to admit it or not, you’ve got a thing for Pascal. Okay? We all see it.”

“I didn’t see jack shit,” Rock said. “This is brand new information to me.”

Hammer rolled his eyes. He patted my shoulder as he stood up. “Just don’t fuck it up because you think you don’t deserve it.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, and I picked up the shot and threw it back. Once I had it all swallowed, I

said, “I’m not into Pascal. He isn’t into me. Not everyone wants to settle down, Hammer.”

The two of them left, and I took my shots, sat down at the bar, and watched the party happening around me, hoping that if I sat there long enough, I could forget the gorgeous eyes of the omega that I couldn’t get out of my head or out of my dreams. Nothing seemed to work, though.

“We just going to sit here and drink then?” Forge asked.

I nodded. “Yeah, I’m not looking for much else.”

He clapped me on the shoulder and settled next to me at the bar. “You know we’re all here to talk if you want, right?”

“I know.”

“All right.”

Unfortunately, words weren’t coming to me right then. Plus, I knew what my friends would say. They all loved Pascal; he was a great guy. None of them would be thrilled to find out how I’d treated him. Hell, I wasn’t happy with myself.

Still, it was better than hurting him later. We might have a few months of bliss if we were in a relationship, but eventually, that would wear thin.

“Can you believe two out of the four of us are all settled down now?” Forge said.

I shook my head.

“Hell, it wasn’t that long ago we started the club and the shop. Never thought we’d be able to find omegas who wanted

anything more than a good time with a biker. Cueball, he hit the jackpot with Margaret. I didn't figure lightning was going to strike twice. Then Hammer met Devon. Rock met Sinclair. Seems that even guys like ourselves could find a happy-ever-after if we look hard enough and work for it."

I stayed silent, mulling over his words.

"We aren't going to get the rom-com version or the perfect house with the white picket fence and a nine-to-five job. We're going to have to make something work for us. Hammer and Rock give me hope that it's not impossible, though."

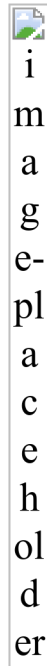
"You really think so?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Got to. The alternative is just too depressing."



# Chapter 11

## Pascal



I loved event days; they were my absolute favorite days on my job. That was when all my hard work and the hard work of my committee members and volunteers finally came to fruition, and we got to see the benefits of everything we had planned and prepared for. Many times it was a fun event for the community to participate in, especially on days like today, where there were activities for children and teens, and it was an all-around great time.

Of course, there were always emergencies and things that came up last second that made my day difficult, but it was all

worth it. And as long as I did my job well enough, I could keep those emergencies and last-minute problems well in hand. But on this particular event day, I wasn't feeling it. Despite having gone to bed early, knowing I was fully prepared for a long day ahead, I woke up feeling as if I hadn't slept a wink. All my i's were dotted, and my t's crossed. I was not stressed about the event, but anxiety settled in my gut like a rock. I had that kind of tiredness that was bone weary and an almost flu-ish-like fatigue, where all I wanted to do was wrap up in a blanket and close my eyes. But instead, I grabbed an extra large coffee and a croissant and started my day.

Before I could even take a bite of my croissant, though, I was met with my first hurdle. A small one, but it derailed me enough that my food was left forgotten on the seat of my car with no time to run back and grab it. Thankfully my coffee was in hand. I could live on caffeine until lunch. There would be plenty of food trucks and other goodies around for me to enjoy; I wouldn't go hungry.

I spent most of the morning with my volunteers. Devon, Sinclair, and several other MC members were at the other location getting ready for the actual motorcycle drive. The rest of us were putting together the things we would need at the library.

Unfortunately, that meant I missed the start of the motorcycle ride. One of these days, I would actually participate in one of those, maybe right on the back of a certain biker's bike.

I scoffed. Like that'll ever happen.

“What’s got you rolling your eyes?” Tamatha asked. She was one of my faithful volunteers who worked for me at the children’s hospital but participated in events like this out of the goodness of her heart.

“Nothing. Just laughing about something.”

“You feel on all right?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “Why?”

“You just look a little pale,” Tamatha said. “You look fine. I’m not trying to be rude. I just...”

I smiled at her. “I appreciate it. But I’m doing just fine. Little tired today. I didn’t sleep well last night.” I couldn’t remember tossing and turning, but I must have. “All right, I’m going to make sure the trucks are all parked where they’re supposed to be. I know earlier this year we had a fight about which order they would all park in.”

“Yes, they all wanted premium parking.” Tamatha grinned.

“I tried to tell them there will be enough people that they’re going to be busy and that it didn’t matter which one was first.”

“I’m going to get the bake sale tents set up.”

“Great, thanks!”

I kept busy throughout the day. I must have opened at least three different waters, but I couldn’t remember finishing a single one. Something always pulled my attention away.

Then the real fun began. Though the event started with the ride from one town library to the other, the second half of the event

took place here, where all the festivities would begin after the bikers arrived. Community members started trickling in, lines forming outside the trucks. The bake sale was in full swing. There were lots of smiles. Lots of people were having a great time, which was what this was all about. That and donations, but a beautiful side effect of the events that I put on was bringing awareness to the community at large. It was what gave me quite a bit of joy in my work.

Devon came to my side and pulled me into a hug. “Things are looking great,” he said.

“They are! You’re not on the back of a bike,” I said with a raised brow. Usually, after the bikers arrived, they spent some time with people gawking and wanting pictures with the bikes themselves. They were their own attraction.

He smiled. “Nope, not this year.”

The bikers had arrived with a roar of motors and loudness. Lots of cheers, and the event officially kicked off. Hammer gave a short speech about the MC’s involvement in this event, with a special thank you to me, which I didn’t need but appreciated. Then the librarian spoke about what this event meant to her and their little library. Everyone cheered. Kids played. It was great.

The sun beat down hard on us, and there were many times when I found myself swaying a bit on my feet. I scanned the crowd to make sure no one else seemed to be suffering the ill effects of the sun. I didn’t need anyone passing out and

needing an ambulance for something. That was the exact kind of attention we did not need.

“Everything’s going great,” Devon said. He had Hammer at his side now. “Why don’t you sit down and have some lunch? You look a little...”

I smiled, trying to put some light into my face so that people would stop telling me I was tired. “I’m doing great,” I said. “Look at all this! It’s so much fun out here. You guys should do the caricatures and get your faces drawn.”

“After you eat,” Devon said. He had his eyes narrowed, and he was going all papa bear on me.

“Who has Oliver?” I asked, hoping to change the subject.

“Sinclair took both kids to one of the cooling tents. Eventually, we’ll have to take them home; they can’t be out in the heat all day. Nice distraction, by the way. When did you last eat?” Devon asked.

“It would be a good idea for you to sit down, Pascal. Have you been drinking water?” Hammer asked.

I nodded. Just what did I look like if everyone was so concerned? Before I could worry too much about it, there were lots of shouts of laughter, and a few people seemed to be pushed aside by something I couldn’t quite see yet.

Then it became obvious as a flash of fur ran around, butting its little head into the calves of the people standing. Then there were more flashes of fur.

Goats. The goats ate through their pen. A herd of five goats from the petting zoo pushed through the crowd, butting at knees and causing a bit of chaos.

“Oh no,” I said, laughing at the antics of these goats as they tried to get away from the people who grabbed them. I joined the crowd, trying to corral the creatures back to their enclosure. It took a bit of doing and a lot of nudging on my part. I kneeled down to pet one of the little mischief makers. He slipped from my grasp, and I rushed after him.

Devon, Hammer, and I, along with several others, chased after the creatures. They were slippery little guys and didn't appear interested in the food we offered.

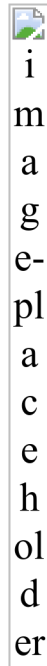
Eventually, we captured all of them. I carried one of the little cuties—a brown and white fella with five-inch horns and a nasty gaze. According to his collar, his name was Spaghetti Monster. They had the monster part right.

I lowered him into the corral that had been reinforced by the petting zoo organizers. When I stood up again, my stomach flipped, and it was as if the blood rushed from my head, and a cold sweat came over me.

*Oh shit*, I thought to myself. It was me. I was going to be the one to pass out and cause a scene. I swayed, reaching my hand out blindly for something, not quite gaining purchase. The last thing I heard was Devon shouting my name.

# Chapter 12

## Anvil



I had to hand it to Pascal; he put on a fantastic event. These events had been fun in the past, and I'd thought we had a lot of activities. The MC knew how to put on a show. But damn, this one went above and beyond.

There were twice as many people and three times the amount of things to do, which meant many more opportunities for donations and fundraising.

Everything was perfectly organized and orchestrated. The flow of people worked out well, so it was crowded, but there were

plenty of things to do. People were laughing and having a great time.

I took a deep breath as I took it all in. It was one of those events that reminded me just why it was I loved this area, this group, and the MC. Everything.

All because of the amazing Pascal.

Forge came up beside me and clapped me on the back. “Looking good, man. That sculpture turned out nice.”

“That it did. I’m glad it will work out well for the library.” The sculpture ended up being a rotating piece that had an image of a child holding a book, and as you walked around the piece, that child grew, and the book got larger, until finally, it was an older woman holding onto a book in their hands with a child sitting next to them. I hoped to convey that the library was for everyone of all ages. Based on the tears that came to the librarians’ eyes when it had been unveiled, I had hit my mark.

Forge and I made our way through the crowd, enjoying some of the baked goods for sale, and a few of the food trucks. I ate more than my weight in tacos. I kept getting glimpses of Pascal as he wandered around, but I never got a chance to speak to him. Or ask him how I could help, which frustrated me. He was a busy man who was very important, and this was his baby. It didn’t help that he seemed to know everyone under the sun.

People knew me but generally only pointed and talked from a distance. Pascal was approachable. People talked to him.



But had he eaten today? Had he been able to sit down at all?

The man couldn't do everything. I was going to find him and ask him just that and maybe drag him to the food trucks for some lunch.

I kept my gaze focused on the crowd, trying to find my omega out of the group. There had been a commotion earlier with a lot of yelling and shouting. Something about goats. Pascal was probably in the thick of that. So far, it wasn't proving to be a successful search for him.

The whirl of the ambulance startled me. "What's going on?" I said to no one in particular.

"Someone passed out near the animals."

"Oh shit. I hope they're okay." I looked then for Hammer to see if there was anything I could do to help. Maybe get the crowd out of the way? They seemed to part easily enough for the paramedics as they came through with their gurney.

Sinclair pushed his way through and landed next to me. "Hey, man, what's going on over there?" I asked.

He looked a little frazzled. "Pascal passed out after we chased the goats. They're having a hard time getting him to come to."

"Pascal?" I said, not bothering to hear more. I pushed my way through the crowd this time. Fuck giving them their space. That was my omega, and I needed to make sure he was okay. Thankfully the crowd had parted enough that I was able to get through.

I made it to Pascal's side just as he was being put onto the stretcher. Devon was holding his hand; Hammer was holding Devon.

"What is going on?" I asked.

Hammer seemed startled to see me. "Pascal passed out." He shook his head. "I should have made him eat or drink something before they went chasing after the goats."

I should have been there. I should have found him earlier.

"I'll go with him to the hospital," Devon said. "Hammer, you can manage Oliver?"

"I'll go," I said.

Devon looked at me like I'd grown two heads.

"I'm going," I said more firmly, not leaving any room for debate. I moved closer to Pascal, picking up his hand and squeezing it. "Pascal, can you hear me?"

His eyes fluttered a bit, but for the most part, he remained unresponsive.

"His blood pressure came down a bit," the EMT said. "He seemed to react to your presence."

Damn right, he did.

"Go with him, Anvil. Keep us updated," Hammer said.

I nodded, then turned my attention back to Pascal.

I had to ride in the front seat of the ambulance while he was in the back, getting tended to by the EMTs. It seemed to take a lifetime until we were on the road. It nearly killed me when

they had trouble with his IV. I wanted to hold him but couldn't reach him from the front seat. I opted to talk to him instead. I doubted he could hear me.

Pascal remained mostly unconscious while mumbling a few things here and there.

Once we were at the hospital and I answered as many questions about him as I could, things slowed down. It was just Pascal and me in the room. He lay on the bed, attached to an IV drip, while I held his hand.

"Should he wake up?" I asked the nurse.

"He's resting comfortably now," she said. "He didn't hit his head or injure himself in any way when he passed out. Seems like perhaps he needs to sleep."

Had my omega not been sleeping? Was he stressed from the event?

"I just want to see his eyes," I said.

She patted my shoulder. "It is always hard on the alphas when their omegas are not well. But he will get the care he needs, and we'll have him back on his feet in no time."

"Thank you," I said.

I gripped Pascal's hand and ran my fingertips over his forearm. It wasn't often that I got the chance to really look at him. All the times we'd been together, it was a frenzied desire to get ourselves off. In public, I couldn't just look at him, else people might start to suspect there was more than just friendship here.

“Come back to me, Pascal,” I said. I tucked a strand of his hair off his forehead, letting my fingers feather through his locks. He looked peaceful. “I should have found you sooner. I wanted to skip the ride and spend the morning with you, helping however I could. I would have made you have breakfast and kept you hydrated. I never wanted to skip a motorcycle ride before.”

I lifted his hand to my lips and kissed it.

“Maybe next year you can delegate the work and ride with me? I really wanted you behind me today. Once you’re better, I want to take you for a ride and show you all my favorite places.”

I’d never taken Pascal on a proper date. Maybe it was time I did that.

He deserved all the pampering and care from his alpha.

My phone pinged, and I found a message from Hammer. I filled him in on the situation, which really wasn’t much of an update since Pascal was still resting, and I was just sitting here with him.

Hammer replied quickly. “Stay with him. He needs you.”

Me? What could I do?

I was going to stay because I, selfishly, wanted to be wherever Pascal was. He was light to me, and I was a moth. I soaked in his essence as much as I could.

But was I doing him any good, keeping him on the tether we had between us? It started innocently enough, two guys

enjoying each other. But feelings began to grow on both sides.  
I knew it. He knew it.

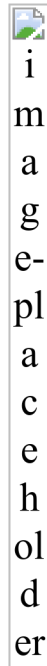
I should be putting more distance between us, so Pascal could  
find an alpha who could be with him a hundred percent.

Someday I would walk away; I had to.

Today was not that day.

# Chapter 13

## Pascal



There were many things happening around me. That much I could tell. I heard shouting and felt lots of movement. People were yelling out numbers, but for the life of me, I couldn't force my eyes open to see what it was that was happening.

Time passed, but I couldn't tell how much.

“Blood pressure is low. I'm going to get an IV started; having trouble finding a vein.”

“He is severely dehydrated.”

“Fuck, stay with me, Pascal, baby.” There was a soft touch to my hand and a squeeze. I moved my head around to tell Anvil I was fine then his hand was on my forehead. “Hush now, just rest.”

Rest sounded great, and so I let myself relent to the darkness.

The next time I awoke, my eyes flew open to find a stark white room with blinding light. Oh fuck, I was dying. Then items came into focus. Not dying. But I was in the hospital.

“Easy,” Anvil said. He bolted up right from the chair he was on across the room. “Take it easy. Do you need something?”

I opened my mouth to ask what the hell happened, but my tongue was plastered to the roof of my mouth. I huffed out a cough.

“Water,” he deduced. “I’m pretty sure you can have water.” He grabbed a cup from the table next to me and lifted it to my lips. I closed them around the straw. The delicious coldness hit my mouth, and I immediately relaxed.

“What happened?” I asked as I collapsed back against the bed.

Anvil pulled up his chair so he was close to my bed. We were in one of the hospital rooms I recognized as part of the emergency ward. There was some privacy, but not a whole ton. The walls were the moveable type. I was thankful that I still seemed to be wearing my clothes; whatever they had to do couldn’t have been too extensive.

“You passed out,” Anvil said softly.

“I did? Shit.” I leaned my head back into the pillow and closed my eyes. “Fuck, I probably scared the daylights out of everybody. Did it ruin the whole event?”

“Devon and Sinclair are a little shaken up, but I’ve been sending them updates. I can let everybody know you’re awake. And no, of course, you didn’t ruin the whole event. If anything, you inspired everyone to donate more.”

“How was it you ended up with the short end of the stick?” I tried to laugh, but my throat was still too dry.

“I, uh, didn’t give anyone a choice. Devon was going to come with you, but I beat him to it.”

I smiled at him. “Well, thanks for coming with me. I appreciate it.”

The nurse pushed the curtain aside and came in. “Looks like you are feeling better.”

I smiled at her as best as I could. “Yeah,” I said. “I assume I can go home soon...” I hoped. I didn’t want to be stuck here for too long. I wanted my own bed.

“Do you remember everything that happened?”

My head ached, but I thought back to my day. “Sort of, yes. I remember feeling lightheaded after chasing the goats... Is that when I passed out?”

She nodded. “You must not have eaten or drunk anything throughout your whole day?”



I grimaced. “I had coffee, and I meant to take a break for lunch. Time just got away from me.”

“And what about the day before?”

“Yesterday? I had spent most of the day getting things prepared for today.” I knew I had had some food. But what was it? “I ate yesterday.” Just don’t ask me what it was.

“You need to be drinking extra water with your condition.”

“Condition?” Anvil and I both said at the same time.

She looked at me and then back to Anvil. “Well, we ran your blood work and... have they not gone over everything with you? We just got all the results back, so I suppose they haven’t come around to let your alpha know.”

“No, I just woke up. What was in my blood work? What condition?”

The nurse smiled. “Oh honey, it’s nothing bad. It’s just... you’re pregnant.”

“I’m what?” I had to have heard that wrong. There was no way.

“Pregnant?” Anvil said.

“You didn’t know?” She looked at both of us.

I shook my head. “Does this look like the face of someone who knew? No, I most certainly did not.” But holy shit, that explained a lot.

“All right,” she said. “Let me let the doctor know that he’s likely going to want to get a portable ultrasound machine in

here and see if we can get a timeline. Unless you can tell me an approximate date?”

The only person I had been with was Anvil, but we had been together several times in the last few months. When had the nausea started that had been plaguing me every morning? Fuck I had no idea. “No, I don’t have an exact date of anything,” I said. I bit my lip.

The nurse patted my hand. “Don’t worry, honey, that’s where modern science is a godsend. We’ll get an ultrasound.”

We were only alone for a few minutes. Neither of us said anything. I couldn’t even look at Anvil at that moment. Instead, I studied the sheet that covered me and fiddled with the edge of it.

His mouth was still open, and he stared at the wall.

A baby. Fuck. I was having a baby.

I opened my mouth to finally say something to Anvil when the curtain was pushed aside again.

“It was just your luck that I was in the area,” the ultrasound tech said as she came in. She brought in the machine. “Sounds like this was a surprise for you?”

I nodded.

“No worries. In a few minutes, we’ll get some growth measurements, and that will give you an idea of when you got pregnant.”

It didn't take her long to have my belly gelled up and the wand pressed to it. I had only ever seen this done in movies. The real experience was... different.

And then there it was, plain as day on the screen—a very baby-shaped object.

Anvil and I both stared at it, and I didn't even think to tell him that he didn't have to be here. I wasn't prepared to be alone at this moment. The baby was his, after all, whether he knew it or not.

“Alright, looks like you're a significant way along. That is most definitely a baby shape and not a kidney bean, like how they start off within the first few weeks. You seem to be almost out of your first trimester—eleven weeks or so. Baby is growing great. Let me print off a few pictures for you,” she said.

Before I knew it, I had pictures in my hand, and she was out of the room.

“I had no idea,” I said. “Thankfully, I've been too busy to go out anywhere and have any alcohol...”

Anvil cleared his throat. He held one of the pictures of the baby in his hand. “Do you have any idea who, um, who the father is?”

“You,” I said, keeping my voice quiet and even. It was a fair question. We weren't exclusive. “You're the only person I've been with.”

He shot me a look. “In the past three months?”

I scoffed. “In the past year,” I said.

“Oh. Okay.”

“I don’t expect anything,” I said. “This is... I’m just finding out about this too, so...”

“Right,” he said. Before we could talk anymore, the doctor came in.

“Pascal?”

“That’s me,” I replied.

The doctor was a friendly-looking omega who had a soft smile and kind eyes. “Besides being pregnant and dehydrated, your blood work was completely normal. The fainting was likely a result of the dehydration and lack of food during the day.”

“Is the baby... Will passing out have hurt them?” I asked.

Anvil squeezed my hand, and I appreciated his presence.

“No, the ultrasound showed them as very active and well-developed. Your body was simply telling you to slow down.”

That it did. “Can I go home? I’ll be sure to follow up with my regular doctor.” As soon as possible.

“We’d like you to stay overnight. We’ll get another bag of fluids in you and make sure you have a good dinner. Just as a precaution.”

“Okay.” I took a deep breath. I could handle that. It was only one night.

The doctor talked for a bit longer but then went on his way to deal with other patients. Then the nurse came in and ushered

me up to a room for the night. This one at least had solid walls.

“I should have told them I could sleep in my office. It would have saved them a room,” I joked.

Anvil laughed. “I hope you can get some rest tonight,” Anvil said.

“Me too.”

Visiting hours were close to being over, and I knew Anvil would have to leave soon. I stifled a yawn.

Anvil knelt next to the bed and looked me in the eyes. “We’re going to figure this out, okay? I’m not going anywhere.”

I nodded.

“Figuratively speaking. I’m actually going to go home because I want you to get some rest, but... we’re in this together, Pascal, okay?”

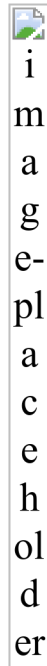
“Okay.” I took a deep breath. That did make me feel better. Then, my eyes fluttered closed, and suddenly his lips were on my cheek.

“I’m going to go. Keep sleeping.”

“I’m not asleep,” I mumbled. But clearly, I was.

# Chapter 14

## Anvil



Holy shit, I was going to be a father.

That was the only thought that went round and round in my mind after I left the hospital.

Though Pascal was doing a ton better, the doctor still wanted to see his vitals improve and his hydration levels increase. So they opted to keep him overnight so he could remain on the IV drip and they could observe him. I knew he wasn't going to get a ton of rest in the hospital because no one ever did. I figured he would at least get better rest if I weren't hovering. I

left as soon as visiting hours were over. Reluctantly. I found I did not want to leave his side.

Once the ultrasound was complete and the doctor had decided he was staying overnight, it was as if Pascal's body went into shutdown mode. His eyes couldn't stay open. I had squeezed his hand and told him we would figure this all out. I didn't know what all this was, but we could handle it. We could be parents together.

A baby. Holy shit, I was going to be a father. With Pascal.

Instead of going home to my empty apartment, I opted to go straight to the shop. I had heard from the guys that the event had been a success. Everything had been cleaned up and put away. We raised a record amount of money that even shocked Pascal when I told him. He seemed sad he missed the event. I couldn't blame him.

I intended to get to work once I was inside my studio, but nothing came to me. I wasn't about to put my hand on some tools and end up with my fingers cut off because I couldn't focus. As much as I wanted to distract myself with something, I was going to have to settle with just my sketch book.

Holy shit, I was going to be a dad.

I had not given a lot of thought to having children. I couldn't even keep a boyfriend for more than a few weeks. So how in the hell was I going to have a child?

Despite that, though, there was excitement there. A child with Pascal.

I couldn't think of a better person to parent with. Pascal was fantastic, kind, patient, and amazing. I was drawn to him again and again, which obviously was how we had made a child to begin with. But yet, how in the hell was I going to be a good parent when I couldn't even keep track of myself? I'd been told before I was a flake. Everyone knew I was good for arriving late or not even showing up at all if I was stuck in my studio working on a piece.

How could I show up for a child? Or would I leave them constantly disappointed?

I'd seen parents disappoint their kids, and that was not the type of parent I wanted to be.

"Sup, man?" Forge said as he walked into the office. He wore his leathers and had his helmet in his hand. I was just sitting in the office chair, staring into space instead of working in my area. I had my motorcycle out with the intent of changing the oil. It had been there for three days. That was just another thing I didn't follow up on. If I wasn't going to work on my art, I might as well get my bike into shape. Only I couldn't bring myself to get out of the chair.

"Nothing," I said.

He raised a brow. "Doesn't look like nothing. Looks like you're contemplating something. Or maybe you're just constipated. Or worried?"

"All of the above," I said. "Well, not constipated."

He sat down next to me. "You want to talk about it?"



I shrugged. Eventually, I'd need to talk about it, but where the hell did I start?

"How's Pascal doing? It's not more serious than you let on, is it? Hammer said he was just dehydrated and needed to stay for observation."

"Oh no," I said. "Nothing like that. He's... He's doing great. The doctors are keeping him overnight just as a precaution. He was real tired when I left. I'm hoping he can get some sleep while they pump him full of fluids."

"Damn. Guy needs someone to look after him."

"He's pregnant," I said, surprising myself. It wasn't my story to tell, but I needed to not be alone with my thoughts.

Forge let out a low whistle. "No shit, really? Who's the lucky father? I didn't even know Pascal was seeing anyone."

I cleared my throat. "It's me."

Forge's brows shot up, and he swiveled his chair to look straight at me. "Say what? I thought you just had a crush on the guy. I didn't realize it was quite so serious. Hell, I'm not sure I've ever seen the two of you interact."

I shrugged. "We have, clearly. Fuck. I don't know what I'm doing."

"You're sure it's yours?"

I shot him a glare. "I trust Pascal. And we weren't together just the one time... It was several times over the course of a year."

“A year? Damn, man. Okay, start from the beginning.”

I ran a hand through my hair. “I’ve always liked Pascal. He’s... well, he’s gorgeous, kind. Frickin’ hilarious.”

“Yeah, he’s a great guy.”

“But a year ago, we kind of ran into each other at a club and went home together.”

“This has been going on for a year, and you didn’t tell anyone?” Forge almost seemed hurt by that. Not that I could blame him. We were a tight group of friends who usually shared our lives with one another.

“It was casual. I was clear with him that it was casual. I wasn’t supposed to have...” I swallowed thickly.

“Feelings for him?”

“Yeah.”

“But you do?”

“Fuck yes, I do. I haven’t been with anyone except him in over a year. He’s the same. He hasn’t been with anyone but me.” Not that I had told him that. I would eventually. “But now we have a baby on the way. I don’t know a damn thing about being a father.”

“Well, you learn. Like Hammer did. Like Rock.”

I shook my head. “They’re different.”

“Why? You think they’ve got it that easy, huh?”

“They seem to have it all figured out. I don’t think they’ve had it easy, but it’s worked out just fine.”

Forge scoffed. “I doubt they feel that way. You should ask them. Relationships are work. Parenting is hard. You’re going to have to work together. Unless you guys are thinking of terminating. Just know that the MC is behind you. You know we’ll help out.”

“We aren’t thinking of terminating,” I said softly. “How... I’m a flake, Forge. I get lost in my work and disappear in the studio for days on end. How can I take care of a child like that? How can I be there for Pascal? Do I have to give up my art? Cause I will... I just can’t imagine being happy doing anything else.” I was an artist. It was part of my identity. That would be like me asking Pascal to stop helping people.

Forge scoffed. “You haven’t locked yourself in a studio for days on end since we were teenagers. Yeah, maybe it was like that when your art first started, but when’s the last time you really got lost in your studio for more than a day?”

I couldn’t remember a time, but still. “Every boyfriend I’ve ever had has told me I’m a flake, that I can’t commit.”

“Did you want to commit to any of them?”

“No.”

“But you want to commit to Pascal?”

“Yeah, he’s... I think so.” Pascal fit me better than anyone. I couldn’t imagine being with anyone else. Hell, I hadn’t been with anyone in over a year, hadn’t even thought about it. Pascal was the only omega on my mind.

“You better *know* so before you do it.”

“Well, we have to because of our child on the way.”

“You ain’t gotta do nothing. But you should do what you want to do. I have no doubt the two of you can co-parent just fine. Give yourself a break, Anvil. Yeah, your career is a little bit different. You don’t work regular nine-to-five hours, and neither does Hammer or Devon, but they make it work. You’re going to be a good dad.”

“Sure,” I said. “I’m gonna try.”

“You gotta believe in yourself more, man. This is serious shit, but you’re up to the challenge. Sounds like you and Pascal got some talking to do. You think he feels the same way about you?”

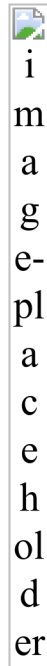
I mulled that over for a minute. “I know he feels something... I may have been a dick the last time we hooked up and implied that he wasn’t the only person I was seeing.”

Forge shook his head in disappointment. “Talking. The two of you need to fucking talk.”

I nodded. “I know.”

# Chapter 15

## Pascal



My phone was absolutely blowing up. Now that it was morning, my friends had apparently given me enough space, and now they decided they needed to know what was going on.

On a regular day, I would be more than happy to tell them I was dehydrated. Haha. How silly of me. Except this time, I was dehydrated, holy shit, and also pregnant. Haha. How silly of me. How could I have gone three months not knowing?

What the hell was I going to do?

I had no doubt I could love and care for a child. But this was Anvil's baby also. How was I going to be a co-parent with a man who was clear he did not want anything more from me besides sex? Yet I was incredibly, irreversibly in love with him. That was going to be a nightmare wretched with heartache.

I gathered my things from the hospital and was ready to get out the door. My doctor had signed off on my release, and thanks to the infusion of fluids, I was feeling great.

Anvil let me know earlier he would be there to give me a ride home.

"I could have called an Uber or had Devon pick me up," I said when he entered my room.

He had been so kind as to bring up the wheelchair required for me to get down to the lobby. As if I couldn't walk on my own.

"Nonsense. I figured you and I might want to do some talking, right?" he said.

"Yeah, I suppose we have some things to discuss."

We didn't talk about them during the drive home from the hospital to my apartment. The air was thick between us, heavy with the weight of the upcoming decisions to be made. Anvil had brought me a smoothie from a place I liked; it was waiting in the center console when we got into his car. How he knew I liked it, I'd never know, but I appreciated it.

He pulled into my driveway, turned off the car, and raced around to open the door for me. I had a feeling that would be

something he was going to do more of—little things to help me out. I couldn't even find myself being mad about it.

Once inside, I collapsed on the couch, relaxing into the familiar envelope of the fluffy throw pillows.

“Tired?” he asked.

I nodded. “The hospital didn't have near enough comfy stuff. I only had one pillow.”

“You could have asked for another.”

I shook my head. I was buried under my pillows now. “I didn't want to bother anyone. I'm bummed that I missed the whole event.”

He gave me a half smile and sat on the edge of the couch so we were close to one another. “I know you are. I'm sorry. There will be more of them. Hammer thought it might be a good idea to do an event every six months instead of just annually. Maybe not something quite that big, so if you have any ideas, I bet he'd love to hear them.”

“I might have a few,” I said.

Anvil grinned. “I thought you might. Devon took a lot of pictures.”

“I saw a few of them on the Blue Flames Instagram account yesterday.”

Anvil lifted a hand and brushed the hair off my forehead. He studied me for a moment as if trying to read my thoughts. “Do you want to get some sleep?”

“Eventually. I didn’t sleep too terribly in the hospital. It could have been worse, but I am tired. I called my doctor this morning and set up an appointment for next week. If you’d like to go, you are welcome.”

“Yeah, thanks. I would really like to go. If it’s okay I’m there?” His brow knitted with uncertainty. I wasn’t used to seeing Anvil as anything but cool and confident. This whole situation had both of us tipped on our side.

“Yeah, of course. You’re a part of this too.”

“Right.” Anvil cleared his throat and stared intently at the carpet. “About that...”

“Oh,” I said. My throat grew tight. “If you don’t want to be a part of this, that’s okay too. I mean, I’m not—”

“I do.” Anvil’s gaze flew back to me, and he shuffled closer to me. “I take it you’ve decided to keep the baby?”

I nodded.

“Yes. Great. That’s great. I... I’m with you one hundred percent.” Anvil faced me now and grabbed my hands. “I think we should get married.”

“What?” I pushed myself upright, tossing the pillows onto the floor. Anvil nearly fell off the couch. Of all the things for him to say, that was not on the top of my list.

“We’re gonna have a baby. We should be together, right?” He leaned closer to me, and I scrambled away.



I held up a hand. “Last time we were together, you told me about going to the club and picking up other guys, and you’ve been very clear that you do not want a relationship. Has that changed?”

“Not exactly. I’m shit at relationships.” Anvil’s face pulled tight as he grimaced.

“Right. Okay. So that’s going to be a no from me. But thank you for asking.” I wanted to laugh, but if I did, I was afraid I would break out into tears. Marry him. If only it was a real proposal where he put some thought into it and meant it.

Oh and if only he actually loved me.

“I want to be there for you throughout all of this. You’re not in this alone.” He was back to staring at the carpet now. “You do mean a lot to me, Pascal.”

“Thank you, Anvil. That’s great to hear. I know you’re supportive, and I know you’ll be a good dad. Hell, I’ve seen you with Devon’s son and Sinclair’s siblings. We’ll figure this out together, but we don’t have to be married to do it. Plenty of people co-parent.”

“Is that what you want for us? For our child?” A muscle ticked in his jaw, but at least he was looking at me now.

I glared. “Don’t come at me with that. Of course not. In an ideal world, we would have made the choice to have a child together. We would have done things in a different order. We would have actually been dating. But mistakes happen, and we’re going to make the best of it.”

“But still, you shouldn’t have to do this as a single parent.”

“We won’t be. We will be co-parents. We will both be in the picture. We’re just not going to be married.” Even if that was something I would like. Anvil with me every day, waking up next to him in bed and spending our spare time together. It would be wonderful.

“I think it would be—”

“We’re not getting married unless you are going to stand there and profess your undying love for me. It’s not happening. The answer is no, Anvil.”

Anvil sat up straight then, scooching away from me. “All right, I see.”

Great, now I felt like a dickhead. But I wasn’t about to have my heart stomped on even more by telling him how I felt and how I wished he felt the same. I’d save that embarrassment for a different day.

“Can I just... I’m going to take a nap, I think. Maybe I am more tired than I thought. ”

“All right,” he said and got up. He pulled the fleece blanket off the ottoman and covered me with it. Next, he closed the blinds and set the TV remote next to me. “I’ll call you later.”

“Thanks for being there for me, Anvil. I really appreciate it. Eventually, we should tell, you know... everyone,” I said. “But maybe let’s give it a few days.”

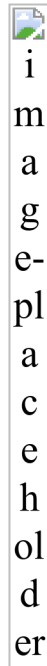
“Sure. Yeah, we can do that.”

My eyes fluttered closed, and I jumped when the door closed, the finality of it all hitting me.

Closing the door on a relationship with Anvil, at least a romantic one. But we were far from done with one another. Nope. This was the beginning.

# Chapter 16

## Anvil



Leaving Pascal alone was hard. I retreated to my studio, as I often did when I needed to think. I needed all the thinking time I could get, and I wanted to finish the piece that had been weighing on my mind for days now. I had started it months ago, way back when I first hooked up with Pascal, and now I knew just the thing needed to make it complete.

I wasn't closing the door on the idea of Pascal and me together. But perhaps I'd gone about it the wrong way.

My hands worked quickly, the image in my mind coming to fruition with each cut of wire and molding of the pieces. I was

using a copper alloy for this project, which was a highly malleable metal. It meant the final product would be incredibly fragile, but that was by design.

This piece represented fragility in so many different ways but also a strength in how the pieces came together and supported each other.

I spent hours working. I only knew what time it was based on the notifications reminding me to drink and eat a protein bar that went off on my phone and the light that filtered through the dirty window behind me.

When it was dinnertime, and I needed to eat something more than just a bite of an old protein bar, the door pushed open. I threw a sheet over what I was working on. It was nearly complete now; a few final touches, a few tweaks, and I would be ready to unveil it. But the only person who was going to see this, at least right away, was Pascal, and maybe not even him if I lost my nerve. One rejection was enough for me.

“Hey man, we ordered pizza. You want some?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I’m just finishing up in here.”

I came out to the main area of the shop, surprised to see that it was emptied out of everything. All of my friends, the officers of the club, were there. Rock, Forge, and Hammer were sitting at the card table we set up for game nights.

“Is this an intervention?”

Hammer laughed. “Does it need to be?”

I squirmed a little. “No.”

“Good because it’s not. At least not really. We don’t think anything’s wrong, but we know something’s not quite right. We’d really like to know what it is if you want to share.”

I groaned. “Forge, did you say something?”

“I didn’t say a word, man.”

“You don’t have to talk, Anvil. There’s no pressure here. If you don’t want to talk, then we’ll just play games.” As if to prove his point, Hammer tossed a deck of cards onto the table in front of him.

I laughed nervously. I was used to attention, but not this kind.

“What made you guys think something’s wrong?”

“Well, that was the longest stretch of time you’ve been in your studio holed up like that. Playing sad music through the speakers. We finally had to disconnect them so everyone else could listen to something more upbeat.”

“I frequently do long stretches in the studio like that.” I waved away their concern as if it were true.

They shot me a look. “Not really, man. Not like when we were young. When you were trying things out with your art, you spent longer in there, but now that you know what you’re doing, you keep pretty regular hours.” This was coming from Rock, the quiet one among us.

“I do?”

“And usually, you at least come out and socialize. You’re not up against the deadline, are you?” Rock asked. “You got a project we don’t know about?”

“Something’s going on with you and Pascal?” Hammer asked. He wasn’t beating around the bush.

I dished out a slice of pizza for myself and sat back in one of the folding chairs. I hadn’t had a decent meal in two days. “This stays between all of us. I don’t need any gossip happening. I mean, everyone will find out eventually, but I haven’t talked with Pascal about it. So until then, it stays here.”

“Okay,” Hammer said. Though he made the promise, I knew anything I told him would get back to Devon pretty quickly.

Rock nodded.

Forge already knew what I was going to say.

“Pascal’s pregnant. It’s mine.”

Everyone’s brows shot up.

“No shit?” Hammer smiled. “Devon’s going to be excited to hear that. Hell, man, we’re happy for you. Doesn’t sound like it was planned, but you guys are going to do great. You’ve got all of us to support you.”

I nodded. “Thank you. Yeah, we know. And that makes it less scary. Still terrifying but little less so knowing we’re not alone.”

“Not alone at all, man. We got you,” Rock said, lifting up his fist. I bumped it with mine.

“So, you and Pascal? How did that happen?” Hammer asked.

“I knew you had a thing for him, but I thought it was a crush,

not something already happening.”

I sucked in a breath. “That has been going on for a while. About a year.”

They all let out low whistles.

“Y’all been seeing each other for a year and didn’t think to tell us? No wonder you never wanted to go to the club, or when you did, you always went home alone,” Rock said.

“Yeah. It’s called being in denial. I think I’m realizing that now.” I leaned back in my chair, taking in their faces as I geared up for what I was going to say next. “I asked him to marry me for the baby’s sake.”

Hammer winced. “He didn’t like that?”

“No, but fuck guys, I’m shit at relationships. I don’t tell time. Hell, I have to have timers on my phone to let me know when to eat. How the hell am I supposed to take care of a child and an omega?” I scrubbed my hands over my face. The grit from the piece I was working on bit into my skin.

“Well, I don’t know how to tell you this, man, but this isn’t the eighteen hundreds. You don’t have to be some sort of superhero, breadwinner alpha. Being married, parenting together, or co-parenting, whatever it is, it’s a partnership. It’s about communication. Hell, it’s hard sometimes with the hours that Devon and I keep. I work late at the shop. He has late gigs. It’s hell finding daycares. And neither one of us want to sacrifice our careers, so we compromise. He’s had to cancel a



few gigs. I've had to cancel a few late nights. We just make it work. It's a give and take."

"I know that, but—"

"Is this about that damn omega who wanted all your fucking attention and claimed your art kept you from having real relationships? Anvil, come on. That was bullshit then, and it's bullshit now. Do you want to marry Pascal because of the baby, or do you want to marry him because you love him?" Hammer crossed his arms over his chest and looked over at me.

The fight went out of me. The excuses were lame, and the obstacles in my way were all weak and easily broken down. At the end of the day, it boiled down to how I felt and how much it terrified me. "I love him," I said. "He's so fucking kind, generous, caring. He's gonna be an amazing dad. He lights up when he talks about his work. The things he does for the community is amazing. And I love being around him, and I'm so fucking scared I'm going to screw that up."

"Did you tell him that?"

I shook my head.

All of them rolled their eyes and threw crumpled-up napkins at me.

"Fucking tell him you, doofus. He probably feels the same way."

"I, ah... I'm going to show him. I wasn't honest with him when we were together or when we found out about the baby.

First thing I need to do is talk through that.”

“Finally, you’re starting to get it,” Forge said. “Is that what you’re working on? Something for him?”

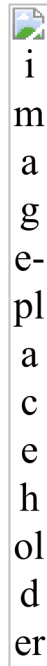
I nodded. “No peeking, either. That’s for his eyes only. And even if it is some of my best work, if he smashes it to pieces and tells me to fuck off, I’ll respect that.”

Hammer snorted. “Fuck, he ain’t going to do that. This is Pascal we’re talking about. Have some faith.”

“I do.” My omega was amazing. There was no doubt about that. But fear was a strong emotion, one that kept the two of us apart for far too long. Only now, there was more than just our two hearts at stake; we had a third little heart to consider. And I was going to do right by our child and Pascal. I’d show him I could be the alpha he needed.

# Chapter 17

## Pascal



Stress made me an overplanner and made me overanalyze things that should be pretty simple. It was how I learned to be as organized as I was and how I was so successful in organizing the events I did. As long as I had a plan, I didn't stress, but right now, I didn't have a plan, and because I had lived in denial-ville for so long, I only had six months to come up with a plan instead of the usual nine.

Cue panic mode.

I printed out my budget information and sat on my couch with my sheets in front of me on the coffee table, a calculator, and a

pen to take notes with. My laptop was out for any research I needed to do. I quickly learned that was a terrible idea. I got so far as researching daycare costs before I wanted to throw in the towel. I didn't dare think about how I would balance the time off I needed for appointments. Plus, my job wasn't exactly high-paying, and I kept odd hours.

On a whim, I sent Devon a message.

*How soon did you reserve a place in your daycare?*

I knew he and Hammer had looked around for daycares before ultimately settling on utilizing Margaret. Instead of a response, there was a knock at my door.

I debated on ignoring it. I wasn't in a social sort of mood, and having all my business out in the living room wasn't a great conversation starter. But alas, I wasn't going to ignore anyone. I got up and opened it. Devon stood on the other side with Oliver on his hip.

Devon's hair was a bit disheveled, and the oversized hoodie he wore had a questionable stain on the right shoulder, like maybe Oliver's breakfast had made it someplace other than his stomach. He cocked his head to the side in question. "What do you need to know about daycares for?"

I groaned. Might as well let the cat out of the bag now. It would feel better to tell someone anyway. "Come in," I said. "You're going to find out eventually."

He gasped. "Pascal!" He pushed his way inside and tugged me toward the living room. We both sat down on the couch.

Oliver fiddled with a toy he had clipped to his clothes. “Are you pregnant? Is that what you’re saying?”

I had to smile because, despite the stress of the situation, I was excited about it, and I knew Devon would be excited, too. There was so much I could learn from him. He was my built-in parent guru.

“I am,” I said.

Devon squealed. “No way! How far along?”

“Three months.”

“What? You are three months along, and you didn’t tell me? I’m three months along!”

“You didn’t tell me either!” I suspected but was waiting for him to share the news.

“Hammer and I were keeping it to ourselves,” he said.

“Yeah, well, Anvil and I just found out.”

Devon’s jaw dropped. Oliver’s little hands made their way inside as if his father opening his mouth was an invitation. Devon gently tugged his toddler’s hand away. “Anvil, like my Anvil.”

My lips twitched into a smile. “I think he’s more my Anvil than your Anvil.”

“Like, we’re talking about Blue Flames Anvil, right? I knew there was something between you two. I could tell the night of the bake sale auction.” He gave me the side eye as if sizing me up.

My cheeks heated under his scrutiny. “Yeah, there’s been something for a while.”

“How come you didn’t tell us?” Devon laid a hand on my thigh. His voice was calm, not accusing.

“It’s casual. We’re not serious.” It was all fun and games until feelings got involved. And a baby.

“You have to be serious now.”

I laughed. “We’re gonna co-parent as best as we can. At least, I think we are. This is so new. I’m trying to make sense of it all.” I gestured to the paperwork I had.

“Oh, sweetie, I did the same thing. But trust me when I say that stressing over all that nonsense will only drive you crazy.”

“So I’ve gathered.”

“Listen. You have time. It doesn’t feel like you have time. And when the time is over, you’re gonna feel like it went by so fast, but just take a deep breath. What does Anvil say?”

“Oh, same old stuff. He’ll be involved and be around. He asked me to marry him.”

Devon gasped. Oliver giggled between us.

I couldn’t help but giggle along, as the baby did not seem to appreciate the severity of this conversation.

“What did you say?”

“He just felt it was his responsibility, I guess. I set him straight. We can co-parent without being in a relationship.”

“Is that what you want?”

I sighed. There was no use lying to my best friend, and I wouldn't want to. "I love him," I said. "I have for a long time."

Tears pooled in Devon's eyes. That had to be a pregnancy symptom I had yet to experience. He swiped at the corner of one eye. "It'll all work out," he said.

I had to laugh at the ridiculousness of it all. "I'm sure it will. But in the meantime, can we keep it to ourselves? I'm not even sure who Anvil has told at this point. We haven't talked logistically about things."

"Except for the part where he asked to marry you."

My stomach clenched, and I sighed. Tears were going to fill my eyes if I kept thinking about that. "Yeah, except that. I think you're right, though. It's all going to be fine. But it doesn't change the fact it's incredibly terrifying."

"Yeah, I remember those days. Hammer and I agreed to date and try to make our relationship work. Obviously, it worked out but adding that stress on top of pregnancy stress... Do you remember how I was?"

I nodded. "I remember." Perhaps I remembered differently than him. Devon had seemed so happy then, just as he was now because he was with his alpha, the man he loved and wanted to be with always. Their whole relationship had begun full of hope and promise. My relationship with Anvil was not that way.

“Here, let’s talk about a few things on your list. Maybe I can help straighten out this expenses question because I know you and you’ll want to overplan, but I don’t want you to dwell on this too much. Let’s just go over a few things and alleviate some of that anxiety. You can cuddle this little bug. How does that sound?”

I smiled. Tears trickled out my eyes now. “That sounds great. I would love that.” I held out my arms, and Oliver practically leaped into them. He was a hefty boy now. He wore a pair of pajamas.

“No regular clothes?” I asked.

“Hmph. You’ll get it soon, don’t you worry. That was the only clean thing he hasn’t spit up on. We tried sweet potato muffins for breakfast this week, and he is not a fan. I’m a touch behind on laundry.”

“PJs are comfy.”

“They are. Now you’ve got a pretty traditional nine-to-five job, but I know you work some off hours here and there. That’s where it pays to have family around. You and Anvil both have your parents local. That’ll be nice.”

We spent quite a long time talking about baby things, budgeting, and other pregnancy-related things. Devon gave me ideas on questions to ask my primary care doctor on our first appointment, which was next week. It worked out well that Devon and I both went to the same doctor. We were literally days apart as far as due dates went, which I took a lot of



comfort in. It would be fun to have our kids so close together. They'd have built-in playmates.

Just as he was about to leave, there was another knock at my door. Never before had my place been so popular. I opened it to find Anvil. He flicked his gaze to Devon, then back to me.

"Can we talk?" he asked.

Devon hoisted Oliver on his hip. "You sure can. I was just getting ready to head out."

Anvil smiled. "Hammer's on his way home, so if you leave now, you might beat him there."

"Smart." To me, he said, "Call me for anything. Okay?" He pulled me into a hug. Oliver was squished between us, and he let out a little squeal. We pulled apart, and I kissed his chubby cheeks.

"I'll call you," I said.

Once he was gone, it was just Anvil and me standing there. "Have you eaten?" Anvil asked.

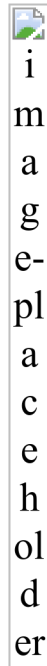
I nodded. "I've learned my lesson. I've been keeping my water filled, and I've had several snacks today. In my grocery delivery, I included fruits and vegetables."

"Good," he said. "How about I order us some dinner, and we can talk. I have something I want to show you."

"Sure," I said. "Come on in."

# Chapter 18

## Anvil



I had never been so nervous before. It was a new experience for me. Generally, I had plenty of confidence when talking with just about anyone. I had long since given up apologizing for who I was, but standing with Pascal right then getting ready to pour my heart out to him... It left me feeling way too vulnerable, and I did not like it.

Like the first time I'd ever had my art displayed in a gallery, it was like my own naked body was displayed and vulnerable for all to see and stomp on.

We talked over what we wanted for dinner and submitted a pick-up order.

“They’ll deliver,” he said. “We don’t have to go pick it up.”

“Part of what I have to show you is at the shop. So if you’re feeling up to it, can I take you there?”

“Yeah,” Pascal said. “Sure.” He licked his lips, his gaze not quite meeting mine.

I grasped his hand, and we walked outside. “I’m not sure I feel comfortable having you on my bike anymore. We should discuss that with your doctor. Can you drive? Or can I drive your car?”

“Why don’t you go ahead and drive my car? I feel up to this trip, but I’m tired. I don’t mind having you drive.”

“Sure thing,” I said.

I opened the passenger door for him, and he got in. I rushed to the other side and piled into the driver’s seat. With just minimal adjusting, I was able to sit comfortably.

Once we were in the car, I started talking. “I know now that proposing the idea of marriage the way that I did was not the best idea. I want to tell you a bit more about me. I haven’t hidden anything, not really. We’ve never had a reason to discuss it. Have I ever told you about my college boyfriend?”

Pascal scoffed. “No, can’t say we’ve exchanged information about past relationships.”

He was right. We knew a lot about one another, our favorite foods, movies, etc., and even some family history. But relationships hadn't been a discussion.

"He was a nice enough guy. Little bit controlling. He wanted everything structured to an exact schedule."

Pascal's eyebrows rose. "That's a 'little' controlling?"

"I'm not the best at that kind of thing. The planning, I mean. So, we did not do well. But he was my first serious boyfriend, and I thought we were a good match. Then my art started taking off. I was learning so many new techniques. If you can, try to imagine me, no tattoos, in college, driving a rusty as fuck bike that barely turned over."

"I bet you were charming," Pascal said. The smile he gave me lit up my world. I wished for a moment that I'd known him then. Would we have clicked just as well when we were both in our early twenties, ready to take on the world?

"I was learning all about metalwork, ceramics, pottery, all of it."

"It's not hard to picture. I'll bet you had fun working with all those different mediums."

"I did. I learned a lot, but it meant I spent a lot of hours in my studio or in the studio at the college. I would get lost in my own head. The designs I had in my mind didn't always come out the way I wanted them to. Whatever medium I was working with wasn't perfect. I didn't have the technique down. I wasted a lot of stuff."

Pascal grinned. "I'm sure all of your pieces were gorgeous. Whether they had flaws or not."

"I'll show you some pictures sometime," I said. I wanted to share that with him, my journey through my career. Just like I wanted to hear more about how he came into his career. The passion we both shared for our work was one of the biggest things we had in common. "Some of them you wouldn't even be able to recognize."

I appreciated his confidence in me, though. He completely understood that I needed time to practice to hone my skills.

"Eventually, my boyfriend got tired of waiting around for me, and it wasn't pretty. He went on a bit of a rampage about how I clearly couldn't commit to anyone and that my getting lost in my art was just a wasted effort. He did this in the middle of the student union. In front of a lot of people. It was mortifying." I shuddered just remembering it. Thankfully, I hardly kept in contact with people from college except my club brothers. Every once in a while, though, someone would talk about the famous story of the guy who got his heart broken in front of two hundred other students. "After that, I decided I wouldn't let an omega have that hold over me. I would be honest and upfront that relationships were not for me. I was going to get lost in my art and be focused on it for days; that's just the way I was. The way I am."

"You were in college. You were young."

"I know. I know that now."

“I guess I’ve never noticed you getting holed up in your studio for that long.” Pascal’s brow furrowed as he thought it over.

“I really don’t anymore. I have the techniques that I know work. Images come out of my head and come to shape easier than they have in the past. Some days it works perfectly. I don’t quite have the stamina I used to as a twenty-year-old.”

Pascal smiled. “I don’t have any complaints about your stamina.”

I winked at him. “Likewise.”

We had time, so we pulled into the shop first before picking up our food. My palms were slick with sweat as I pressed the access code into the keypad. Thankfully it only took one try to get in.

I held onto Pascal’s hand as I led him back to my studio, which was behind the office area of the shop, out of view from any customers.

“I’m not sure I’ve ever been in here,” Pascal said.

“Since it’s not a showroom, I try to keep people out of it. I don’t need all my secrets on display. Some artists will live stream their process, but that’s never been me.”

I guided him toward the center of the room, where I had the piece covered with a drop cloth.

“I had this image in my head ever since the first time I saw you in that bar last year. That night... it wasn’t just amazing because we had great sex.”

Pascal snorted.

“I felt like a part of me had been restored, only it didn’t really dawn on me until the past few days. When my ex said all those things, he shattered me. My heart burst into a billion tiny pieces, which is cliché but accurate. You... You put me back together, Pascal. Piece by piece.” I lifted the dropcloth.

Beneath it was a three-D heart, with shards of itself floating all around it. The pieces were held by tiny wires.

Pascal gasped. “That’s... Anvil, that’s amazing. It’s... I don’t know how you did it, but it looks like it’s coming back together. Like I’m looking at this heart in motion.”

My real heart quickened, and I sucked in a breath. “That’s what it’s called. ‘Back Together’ That’s what I want for my heart, and I know you’re the only person I want. I love you, Pascal. I was too fucking scared to say it, but I do. I love you.”

Pascal turned. Tears welled in his eyes. “I love you too. And I believe you. I can see it in this work. You... it’s just so amazing. Someone is going to shell out a lot of cash for that.”

I cupped his face in my hands and guided him toward me. My lips pressed to his, leaving the softest of kisses there. “It’s yours. Ours. I want you to have it. I’m not selling that, not for anything. If the Louvre called, I would not take the offer.”

Pascal chuckled. “Okay then.”

“I want to be with you, Pascal. Not for the baby, not because of the baby, but because you are amazing, and I love you.”

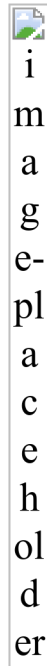
“I want that too,” Pascal whispered. “We have so much to figure out.”

I kissed him again. “We’ve got time and each other.”



# Chapter 19

## Pascal



Somehow we managed to avoid our friends for the past week. Sure, Devon sent me text messages, and we had a few phone calls to discuss random pregnancy things, but for the most part, Anvil and I were left alone. Anvil even took a break from the studio. I took a few days off work, and we lazed around my apartment, just enjoying each other.

Eventually, we would have to announce to everyone in the club that we were together and having a child. Though, Anvil let me know he had told the officers about us. They didn't know we'd decided to make a go of it.

Today might be that day. I'd cleared out my afternoon so I could have my regular appointment with my omega doctor to discuss the pregnancy, and Anvil would be coming along. He arrived early, showing up at my office with lunch and a very large box.

"What's all this?" I asked.

He came in and took a look at my bookshelf that was across from my desk. "This will be perfect," he said.

"Oh, yeah? Perfect for what?"

"The heart. You didn't think we would just leave it on the dining room table, did you?"

I laughed. "I mean, it does look nice there." After we'd left his studio and gotten our dinner, Anvil had set the heart right on my table. I enjoyed looking at it each day as it definitely added character to my space. I could almost look at it without crying now.

"But it makes it hard to see you and anyone else sitting across from me."

Anvil had been staying at my apartment. Thankfully, it wasn't far from the shop. Not that it really mattered to him. Though eventually, we might have to figure out someplace else to live. Wherever we picked would require a studio, and though I had space at my apartment, I wasn't sure if I had that much space.

It was something we still had to discuss, but between the two of us, I knew we could come up with a good solution. Whether

it was buying something or maybe even building, we'd figure it out together.

We may have spent some of our time this week browsing houses and talking over possible scenarios.

I dug into the lunch he had brought. I groaned when I saw what he had brought me. "How did you know I was dying for a burrito?"

"This morning, when you were watching the news, an advertisement came on for this place. I thought you were going to lick the screen."

I shrugged. "It had crossed my mind." Apparently, I had moved out of the nausea stage and was full on into the give-me-all-the-food phase of this pregnancy. It seemed my belly had doubled in size overnight as well. Hopefully, that was normal.

While I ate, Anvil carefully reorganized a few of my shelves and then placed the heart in the very center of the bookcase.

"Oh wow," I said, standing beside him. "It really does look nice there. I'm going to have trouble not staring at it all day."

"It does look good. And I got this." He pulled out a little plaque, peeled back the backing, and stuck it onto the shelf.

"Back Together, Anvil," I read aloud. "Inspired by my omega." Tears pooled in my eyes. "Dammit. These emotions. They're intense."

"I know they are." He pulled me into a hug and kissed my lips. "Thank you again for bringing me back together."

“I didn’t even know I was doing it,” I said.

“Well, you did. And here we are.”

He kissed my temple and held me close to him. We stood like that for a long while, but then my hunger got the better of me.

We sat down and finished our lunch, which I inhaled like I had every other meal sat in front of me the past two days. After we cleaned up, we made our way to the third floor, which was the omega and baby wing of the hospital. There we would have our appointment. It didn’t take long for us to get checked in.

When we were in the room, that is when my anxiety began to spike.

“What if something happened in the first three months, and I didn’t even realize it?” I asked.

“The ultrasound we had at the hospital said everything was fine.” Anvil laid a hand over my knee. Calm settled over me.

“All the blood tests you had done at the hospital came out fine, and your doctor has already reviewed those, so if there were a concern, we’d know by now.”

Anvil was flipping through some of the materials he had gotten from the receptionist.

“Pregnancy is fascinating,” he said. “Did you know that your organs are going to basically rearrange and that eventually, the baby is going to push on your lungs?”

It sort of felt like that was happening now. Only it was my stomach being squished from eating too much. “Yes, I think

Devon mentioned that toward the end. It was difficult for him to breathe deeply. It's why he sat down a lot."

"Holy shit. That's 10 centimeters." He held up the page and turned it around for me. There was a large circle on the pages. Anvil looked at my midsection "Holy shit."

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, a full-size baby is going to come out of there. Now, do you see why I'm freaking out?"

"A little bit, yeah. But it'll be fine. People do this all the time, right?"

"Exactly, right they do. And I help them along the way," the doctor said as she breezed into the room. "I hear congratulations are in order. I also hear you didn't know you were pregnant until about a week ago?"

I nodded.

"That's totally fine. Babies are designed to handle themselves in the womb. And according to the ultrasound, everything looks good, and baby is growing normally. We will schedule another ultrasound for about four weeks from now, so we can determine the gender. Unless, of course, you don't want to know the gender. But either way, we'll have an ultrasound to measure growth."

I looked to Anvil.

He shrugged. "I would like to know, but you can decide."

"I want to know too," I said. Otherwise, how else was I going to plan and coordinate all the things?

“Great. We have lots of information for you all to review. I see alpha dad already has his pack. Have you been taking your vitamins?” She looked at me.

I nodded. “And drinking my water and regularly eating.”

She nodded. “Good. Keep that up.” She asked me several more questions, took my blood pressure, and all the other fun stuff. There was a bit of poking and prodding at my belly. Eventually, she got out a little tool and was able to find the heartbeat.

“Everything is looking great. Try not to worry. We’ll schedule all your appointments up front for the next several months. It’s gonna feel like a lot, but we just want to keep an eye on everything. It’s totally normal.”

“Thank you,” I said, letting out a sigh of relief.

Before long, we were given a long list of appointments for the next six months, as well as a huge packet of even more information, and we had signed up for a tour of the baby wing of the hospital.

Once we were back in the car, I turned to Anvil. “You know I work there, right? We can tour the hospital anytime.”

He smiled. “I know, but I thought it would be fun. What would you like to do with the rest of your day?” he asked.

“Take a nap,” I said.

“That can be arranged. I was thinking tonight there is an officer’s meeting at the shop. According to Forge’s agenda, we don’t have much to discuss. Devon and Sinclair will be there. I

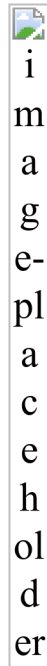
asked specifically. Would you like to come, and we can tell the guys the good news?”

“Someone’s going to want to start planning a baby shower.” I groaned. “Devon might have already mentioned it. And yes, I would like to go tell them the good news. But first, we nap.”

Anvil smiled. “First, we nap.”

# Epilogue

## Anvil



Pascal's pregnancy progressed far faster than I had ever wanted it to. It seemed that it was just yesterday we found out he was pregnant, and now here we were, one week past his due date. And now, each day was a struggle for Pascal.

His belly was round and stuck out far further than I would ever tell him it did. Walking was a struggle, eating was a struggle. Hell, sometimes, just being awake was a struggle. But easily falling asleep was a rarity.

To me, he looked perfect. Pascal seemed to be glowing with pregnancy. Me? I was anxiously awaiting our next step, and I



was a mess.

“How are you feeling today?” I asked as I helped to lift my mate from the bed so he could stand. He grasped my forearm for a while as he steadied himself. His center of gravity was all over the place, and it wasn’t always easy for him to get his balance after lying down for so long. We had invested in an adjustable bed a few months ago after we’d moved into our brand-new home, and it was an absolute godsend for him. Uncomfortable as hell for me since he was sleeping practically upright these days.

Eventually, I hoped we might be able to lay the bed down again so I could sleep flat. I would do anything for Pascal’s comfort, so I wasn’t about to say anything out loud.

“I’m feeling good,” he said.

“Do you think maybe today you might...”

“Anvil, if I thought I was gonna have the baby today, don’t you think I would have told you?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. I was hoping it was going to be yesterday.”

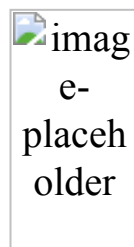
Pascal chuckled and walked toward the bathroom. I followed along with him. It wasn’t often that I wasn’t at his side when we were together. I knew he could take care of himself; he seemed to be taking to pregnancy with ease.

“The baby will be here when the baby wants to be here,” he said. “Our little mister will not be rushed just because you want him here.”

I sighed. “I know that.” But I wanted to meet my little guy. We were so ready.

We’d spent our last six months spending endless amounts of time together picking out all the things, including a new house that was a perfect distance to work for both of us. It had a massive heated garage that I’d converted into a studio and plenty of space for us to grow our family. The nursery we’d decorated with extreme care in classic cars and old motorcycles was ready.

I was ready for the next step, for our baby to be home and in our arms.



I drove us to work. We had decided that Pascal driving himself wasn’t the best idea, and since he was feeling well enough, he continued to work. I figured the hospital was the safest place for him.

I dropped him off at the front entry like I always did. It took him a few minutes, but he was able to get out of the car on his own and waddle his way into the building. I sighed as I drove off so that I could go to the shop.

Hammer, Rock, and Forge shot me a look of pity as I walked in.

“No baby yet?” Hammer asked.

I shook my head. “No sign of him either.” At least not that I could tell. Pascal seemed the same as he was yesterday.

“Jesus, man. Devon’s due date is today. He’s hoping that he’ll have the baby. He’s miserable.”

“Pascal’s feeling okay, but damn, I’m getting nervous. I’m sure our second one will be different. Maybe I won’t be so impatient then.”

“Oh, you guys already think you’re planning baby number two?” Hammer asked with a smirk on his face.

I chuckled. “I’m not opposed to the idea. And Pascal seems on board. We’ll see how we feel after our little guy gets here.”

“Lots of things change,” Hammer said, giving me a supportive clap on the back. “For the better.”

“Yeah, I know.”

I was several hours into my work when my phone rang. I had it close to my side, with the ringer up as loud as possible these days. I answered it on the second ring.

“Hello?”

“I think it’s time,” Pascal’s voice filtered through the other line.

“Yeah, really?”

“Really.”

“How do you know?” That was a dumb question. How wouldn’t he know? We were a week past the due date.

“Well, my water broke, and my contractions are incredibly close together. And the nurse says if you don’t get here in the next fifteen minutes, you might miss this.”

“Fuck,” I said. “Why didn’t you call me right away?”

“I tried to! My water literally just broke.” Pascal’s voice caught.

“Okay, okay. Don’t worry. I’m on my way. I won’t miss this, I swear.” I hung up the phone and left the studio.

Hammer and I both went for the door. He had the same focused look on his face that I figured I had. We were on a mission.

“You going to the hospital?” he asked.

I nodded.

“Me too.”

We drove together, as fast as we could, to the hospital, but still safely because there was no way I wanted to meet my child while I was in the ER.

We raced up to the third floor. We didn’t bother with the elevators.

“Pascal,” I said to the nurse at the reception desk while Hammer shouted out, “Devon.”

She smiled. “Let me take you to them. Pascal’s in room 307. And Devon’s in 308. You better hurry, you made it on time, but it is a race to see which of these babies is going to make their debut first.”

“Perfect.” I sprinted toward Pascal’s room and walked in to find my love on the bed, panting for dear life.

“Oh, thank the goddess, you’re here! I’m so ready for this. I have to push.”

I was surprised to find a nurse and the doctor there already. Pascal’s feet were in the stirrups.

“Oh shit. This is happening right now.”

“This is alpha dad, I presume?” the doctor said. “Sir, if you’re squeamish at all, make sure you’re above his shoulder.”

It all happened so fast. I barely had time to wash my hands and throw on a clean shirt. Pascal had kept a hospital bag in his office, just in case he went into labor at work, so we were prepared.

It didn’t take more than ten minutes, and there was a brand new baby in the world.

Our son, Derek.

The doctor thrust a pair of scissors into my hand, and I cut the cord where the nurse indicated. Then they handed Derek to

me, and I stared down into the most beautiful blue eyes I'd ever seen.

"He's perfect," I said to Pascal, showing him our son.

My love's brow was dotted with sweat, and he was breathing heavily. "He is perfect."

I handed Derek to Pascal carefully, and he looked down at our little guy as I settled onto the bed next to him.

"He just might be the most amazing artwork we've ever created," I said.

Pascal leaned into me and let out a long sigh. I kissed his temple.

"Since when did we create art together?"

"My art comes from my heart, love. And that's where you are. All of my art is our art."

Pascal looked up at me. "When did you get so perfect?"

I smiled down at him and pressed a kiss to his lips. "I learned it from you."

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# About Jena Wade

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I live in Michigan with my husband, two dogs, and three children. By day I work as a software developer and at night I write. I was born and raised on a farm and I spend most of my free time outdoors, playing in the garden or tending to my landscaping.

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I like my books sweet, sexy and full of romance. I love to hear from my readers and would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have about my work! Feel free to email me at [thejenawade@gmail.com](mailto:thejenawade@gmail.com).

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