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Bucket

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THE BUCKET LIST

TOBY WISE

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Can a bucket list make two people realize they belong together?

Griffin has been in love with his neighbor since the day he moved in and Nolan showed up at his doorstep with baked goods. Since then, his feelings have only grown stronger, but he's never voiced them, too afraid of losing his best friend.

While drinking the night before Valentine's Day, the two devise a plan. Nolan writes a bucket list of things he's always wanted to do with a partner and Griffin volunteers to make that bucket list happen. Having one day as Nolan's fake mate is better than never experiencing it at all, right? At least that's what Griffin tells himself.

Could this bucket list ruin their friendship? Or will it finally open their eyes to the feelings they've both been hiding from each other?

The Bucket List is a low angst alpha/omega story without mpreg. Inside you'll find so much pining, a raccoon shifter, an alpha wolf, best friends to lovers, Valentine's Day fluff, and of course a happily ever after.

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CONTENTS

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Epilogue

More From Toby Wise

About the Author

PROLOGUE

Valentine's Day Eve

I STRETCH MY LEGS OUT, placing my feet on the table. My head is light and my belly is warm. My head tips to the side, looking over at my best friend who's trying to balance his beer bottle on his knee but keeps having to grab it just before it tips over. Nolan giggles, his cheeks a pretty pink color from drinking.

"You're drunk," I murmur, smiling so wide my cheeks hurt.

"Am not.

"You totally are," I say, shaking my head. Fondness warms my chest further. Nolan takes another sip of his beer, just barely not spilling it on himself as he starts having another giggle fit.

I've been Nolan's neighbor for about a decade now. The very first time he walked over and offered me some cookies I knew I was a goner. He was nervous and adorable, his scent coming through my door and I only just barely kept myself on my feet instead of falling to my knees right then and there. The smell of pineapples took on a whole new meaning after that day.

Have I ever gotten the guts to tell Nolan how I feel? No. Do I plan on doing it someday? Maybe? If the chance presents itself? Okay, maybe I'm a chicken alpha who doesn't want to rock the boat and possibly lose my best friend. Ironic since my animal skin is actually a wolf.

“I’ve barely had anything to drink, Griffin. How could I be drunk?”

I smile before taking a sip of my own drink. Every single time we drink, this is what happens, and yet he acts surprised every time. “You’re a lightweight, TP. I try telling you this every time you pick up a beer but you never believe me.”

“Because it’s simply not true. If I was a lightweight then how did I end up drinking—” he looks down at the table, finding one empty bottle. “Oh, you must have cleaned up all my bottles. Thank you.”

I can’t help but snort, shaking my head. “Right. It makes sense. I just happened to pick up all the bottles rather than you’ve only had one drink so far.”

Nolan holds up the bottle in his hand. “One and a half. Thank you very much.”

I set my beer down and turn sideways, taking Nolan in fully. He tips his head my way, giving me a soft smile. My stomach flutters with fondness. Gods, I’ve got it so bad for this omega. I’ve tried dating since meeting Nolan but it was nothing more than quick hookups and dates that went nowhere. It’s hard to date someone when my brain won’t stop comparing them to Nolan. That’s not fair to the omegas, and it’s not fair to my heart which beats for my best friend and no one else.

His light hair is a mess on top of his head from him running his fingers through it all night. His gray, pretty eyes turn to look at me. There are smile lines around his eyes, showing off the fact that he’s a little older than me, but that only adds to his beauty.

“What’s on your mind?” Nolan asks, reaching over and taking my hand. He gently traces my fingers. This isn’t unusual. Whenever we get a little too drunk we both get a little touchy feely with each other. I just happen to conveniently ignore the fact I only get this way with him and him alone.

“Do you have plans tomorrow?”

Nolan lets out a deep sigh, letting go of my hand. I miss his touch immediately. “Tomorrow is Valentine’s Day.”

“I’m aware.”

“Of course I don’t have plans. Do you see a line of alphas breaking down my door to date me? I think not, good sir!”

I chuckle, trying to disguise the relief I feel at that answer. And then I’m immediately hit with guilt. I shouldn’t be happy that my best friend can’t find a date. I know the way he longs for companionship and an alpha. I just wished he longed like that *for me*.

But that’s a me problem.

“Any alpha would be lucky to have you, Nolan,” I tell him seriously, hoping he’s too drunk to hear just how sincere I feel about that sentence.

Nolan reaches over, pinching my arm and I let out a surprised wounded noise. “You have to say that! You’re my best friend.”

“Just because it’s my job doesn’t mean I don’t mean it.”

“Fine. Whatever,” he says, making a farting noise with his lips at me that makes me laugh. Nolan might be older than me but that doesn’t stop him from giving as good as he gets.

“If you could do anything tomorrow, what would you want to do?”

“What do you mean?” Nolan asks, looking over at me in confusion. “Like a bucket list?”

I shrug. “I meant like, your dream date but I like your idea better. What’s on your bucket list?”

Nolan sighs again, sinking down against the couch. “I don’t know, Griffin. I’m an old man now. Why even have a bucket list when I know it’ll never come true?”

“Jesus. Dramatic much?”

Nolan punches my arm and I catch his hand, holding onto it. Now it’s my turn to gently play with his fingers. “I’m being serious. What’s on your bucket list?”

“There’s so many things I’ve never done, Griffin,” he murmurs, his cheeks turning red with embarrassment.

Nolan has talked to me about some of the past alphas he’s dated. All of them sound like idiots to me, never knowing how to properly treat the gem of an omega that Nolan truly is. If Nolan ever gave me the chance to woo him, I know I would go all out, showering him in affection and care for him the best way I know how to. He deserves so much more than those alphas gave.

Just because those guys didn’t know what they were doing, doesn’t mean Nolan should feel embarrassed or ashamed. I tell him as much.

“Hey. You know I don’t care about that. Everyone does things at their own time. You’re never too old to try new things.” *Like me. You can try me.*

Nolan tips across the couch until his head is leaning against my shoulder. I turn towards him. As subtly as possible, I breathe him in, letting his sweet pineapple scent wash over me.

“Take it from me,” I say with a soft smile. “Old wolves can learn new tricks.”

Nolan finally cracks a smile at that. He murmurs, “I’ve always wanted to skinny dip.”

“Oh my gods, really?” I can’t help but chuckle at that. Out of everything he could have said, that’s the last thing I thought he would come up with.

“Hey,” Nolan gasps out dramatically. “This is my bucket list! No judging me!”

“Okay, okay. I’m just surprised, is all. That’s something I’ve never done as well,” I tell him seriously.

I’m struck with an idea. I sit on it for a moment, letting it take root within my brain. Oh. This could be so much fun. This could be the thing that finally lets me show Nolan just what he means to me.

“There’s obvious things like having a mate, having children, falling in love,” Nolan says, his voice achingly gentle and filled with longing. It makes my chest clench. Gods, I would do so much to have that happen for him, even if it meant it wasn’t with me.

“Well, I can’t really fix those in a day,” I whisper under my breath, probably too soft for him to hear. “What else?”

Nolan hums, really thinking this through. “Adopt a star. I know it’s a scam and it’s really silly but I like the idea of naming a star.”

That one makes me smile. Nolan is such a softie. So many things start connecting inside of my head, my initial idea really taking hold.

“I’ve always wanted to be woken up with a blow job,” he blurts out and when I look down, he’s looking anywhere but at me, his cheeks bright with a blush.

“That’s a good one,” I tell him with a wide smile.

“Thanks,” he murmurs, rolling his eyes. “I’ve always wanted to be taken on a fancy date. One where I had to wear a tie and dress shoes.”

“I like that one a lot. I bet you would look amazing all dressed up.”

“To be kissed under the stars,” Nolan whispers, like this list is somehow a confession. “To have someone pack us a picnic with all of my favorite things. Car sex. Definitely want to have car sex someday though I suppose the logistics of that makes it difficult. I don’t care though, still wanna try it.”

I just barely keep myself from kissing the top of his head. I’m proud of him for thinking of things he wants. And if he’ll let me, I’m more than happy to be the one to give him each and everything on this list.

“I have an idea. It’s going to sound really out there but just hear me out, okay?”

Nolan sits up so he can look at me. “I’m listening.”

“Let’s go through and cross things off your bucket list tomorrow.”

Nolan stares at me for a long moment, his eyes wide. “What?”

“I’m being serious. You’re my best friend, Nolan. For one day only, let me be your boyfriend and we’ll cross some of these things off the list.”

My heart races within my chest, banging on my ribs so hard I’m worried it might literally burst out. I sit and wait for Nolan to answer. With every passing moment I think he’ll refuse and toss me out of his house with a look of disgust. Fuck. Did I fuck everything up?

Nolan bites his bottom lip, looking away. His cheeks are still so rosy and it’s hard to tell if he’s embarrassed or if it’s just the beer. Finally he shakes his head. “I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not,” I say softly, hoping it’s not completely obvious just how badly I want to do this, “I’m offering.”

“So you wanna come over tomorrow morning and wake me up by sucking my dick? Really?”

Fuck. Now it’s my turn to blush. I rub the back of my neck. “What else are friends for?”

“Just bros being bros,” he murmurs and we both try to keep it together but after a moment, we both burst out laughing at how ridiculous this situation is.

“If I was smart, I would say no.”

Nolan looks away. I sit and wait, letting him process this idea and really think it over. This could change everything. This could blow up in both of our faces. This could be the end of our friendship.

Yet, there’s a tiny part of me that knows this could be something worth doing.

I’m not sure how long I wait, the minutes ticking by and leaving me more and more resigned to Nolan’s rejection. Eventually, he clears his throat.

“I should say no. But.”

“But?” I ask, trying my best not to get my hopes up, but failing miserably. There’s a chance I’ll get to take Nolan on a date. There’s a chance I’ll get to see him naked. There’s a chance I could have him, even if it is just for one day. That’s more than I ever dreamed of having.

“I’m thinking of saying yes,” he says softly, like it’s a confession of murder rather than a silly agreement.

“Then do it,” I tell him. “Say yes, Nolan. Let me check off these things for you.”

“You really want to?” He looks at me, really taking me in. I’m pinned in place by his pretty gray eyes and I can’t do anything but nod. Eventually Nolan must see something in my face because he sighs and says, “Then let’s work on this bucket list.”

We continue to drink and laugh and hang out, but there’s something else in the air now. Nerves and excitement and anticipation. I can’t stop grinning as Nolan sits on the floor, writing out his bucket list.

“I can’t just put anything! It needs to be the most important things. We only have a day, Griffin!”

I sit back, watching him work. Fondness threatens to be my undoing. I would do anything for his omega. Even if that means hurting myself, because at the end of this, I’ll have to go back to being his bestie. It’ll be worth it though.

“Okay, I think I’ve got it,” he says, handing me a piece of paper. I swallow thickly, already planning how I’m going to take care of all of these. Determination fills my chest. I’ve got this and I plan on making each and every item on this list special for Nolan.

I take the paper and stand up. “You should head to bed, Nolan. I’m gonna head home and start planning, okay? But don’t worry,” I add, giving him a wink that makes him blush. “I’ll be seeing you in the morning.”

Nolan looks down at the ground shyly and as I leave I hear him whisper, “I look forward to it, Griffin.”

As I cross Nolan's lawn, making my way over to my house, I look over his list one more time.

1. *Be woken up with a blowjob.*
2. *Adopt a star.*
3. *Be taken on a fancy suit and tie date.*
4. *Car sex.*
5. *Go skinny dipping.*
6. *Have a picnic date.*
7. *Kiss under the stars.*
8. *Top an alpha.*
9. *Have dessert before dinner.*
10. *Make a blanket fort.*

CHAPTER ONE

NOLAN

Be Woken Up With a Blowjob

A PLEASED NOISE leaves my throat. Gods, this is the best dream ever. Griffin is here, because of course he is. I won't lie, a lot of my dreams feature my best friend. He's just so handsome and sweet and kind and smells so fucking good. I take a deep breath, smiling to myself as his scent wraps around me. Fresh strawberries. My mouth waters.

"Mm," I hum, spreading my legs. I look down, watching as my best friend runs his hands over my thighs. He smiles up at me, his eyes shining with excitement. He's gorgeous. It doesn't matter if it's dream Griffin or real Griffin, the alpha is stunning with his perfect smile, his toned body, his chiseled jaw that's covered in stubble. I could look at him all day and never grow tired.

This dream feels so real. Like I could reach down and actually touch him. Like I can really feel his hands running over my body as they duck under my shirt and onto my skin. He feels so warm, so real.

A shiver runs through me. I spread my thighs even wider, my hips rising off of the bed in excitement. Griffin bites his bottom lip, his cheeks a pretty pink color. I'm not sure I've ever seen him blush like this before.

Leaning down, his lips touch my belly and a sigh leaves me. I love this. I love that my subconscious lets me have this even if it'll never happen outside of my dreams. His lips move lower while his hands tug down my sleep pants and my

boxers. My cock pops free, slapping against my belly. I'm rock hard already, so fucking eager to feel Griffin's mouth on me.

"Eager," Griffin murmurs, his voice taking on a darker tone. He licks across the head of my cock, dipping his tongue into my slit and I whine. Fuck, that feels so good. He makes a pleased noise and my inner omega preens, loving that Griffin likes the way we taste. Maybe he craves it just as much as I crave him.

An omega can dream. Literally.

My hands have a mind of their own, finding their way into his thick hair. I feel his strands against my fingers, tugging on them. A moment later, Griffin moans around the head of my cock, leaving me whining in response.

I open my eyes, staring up at the ceiling for a long moment. I'm groggy and half awake. Gods, that was such a good dream. I'm dreadfully disappointed to be waking up before I could even get to the main event. Fuck, that dream felt so real!

I clench my hands and another moan hits my ears. My hips rise up off the bed, chasing the warm, wet cavern my cock seems to be nuzzled in. That's when I freeze.

Wait.

Wait a minute.

Oh. My. God.

My entire body startles as I realize this is not a dream. This is actually happening. This is real.

My hips fly off the bed as I look down, finding Griffin between my open thighs. I jolt so hard that my cock hits the back of his throat, making him gag. He pulls off, his hand sliding up and down my cock as he stares up at me.

"You doing okay?" Griffin asks me, raising his brow in question.

How the *fuck* can he be so composed right now? I am losing every ounce of wit right now as I stare at my best friend

who's currently *stroking my dick*. Oh. My. Gods.

I nod my head. "Never better," I tell him, my voice raspy from just waking up. Griffin smiles and my stomach floods with butterflies. I cannot believe this is actually happening. I was so sure this was all a very lucid dream.

"Just lay back and let me take care of you, okay?"

Words completely escape me and all I can do is lean back after giving him a nod. Griffin wraps his lips around the head of my cock, sucking gently and I whine again, completely overwhelmed. Not only does his mouth feel fucking amazing, but it's *Griffin!* My stomach is flooded with equal parts warmth and awkward, nervous energy. This is terrifying, but it also feels so fucking good.

My fingers dig into my sheets, having let go of Griffin's hair now that I'm fully awake. Gods, his mouth is incredible and a moan leaves my lips as he moves lower, taking more of my cock into his mouth. I've never been the biggest fan of blowjobs, mostly because I love the feel of being eaten out, but Griffin is changing my mind about them.

Past alphas have nothing on him.

"Oh, Griffin. Fuck," I blurt out, watching with wide eyes as he takes me further into his mouth. There's something mind-blowing about his deep-throating skills. I've never had my dick sucked like this before and my toes curl in pleasure. I can feel my cock bump the back of his throat and I expect him to pull back, to stroke the base part with his hand. He doesn't do that.

Griffin's eyes glance up, meeting mine as his mouth slowly pushes lower. My cock nudges the back of his throat but he relaxes, taking me in. His throat is so snug around my cockhead and my knuckles grow white with how hard I'm holding onto the sheets below me. Oh. My. Gods.

"Griffin," I murmur as sweat begins to slide down my temple. "Holy shit. How? Fuck, that's so good."

Griffin rumbles with a growl and the sound vibrates through me. My hips shove up off the bed and Griffin gags, his

throat constricting around my dick in a way I've never felt before. I shout, overwhelmed by pleasure. He pulls back, his cheeks pink and his eyes watery.

Without thinking, I reach down, sliding my thumb across his cheek and wiping away a tear. "I'm sorry."

"That's okay," Griffin says, his voice rough, like he's just gargled glass, which somehow only makes me even more turned on. "I don't mind it," he assures me before diving back in, deep-throating my cock. This isn't going to last long, not when everything feels so fucking good. Even the way his eyes water and his cheeks pinken seem to turn me on.

As my cock is stuck in his throat, Griffin shoves my pants lower so he can get his hands on my ass. One of his fingers swirls around my hole and I realize with a start just how fucking *wet* I am from this. I feel like a teenager experiencing hormones for the very first time. I feel wanton and abandoned in my lust. I lay back, letting myself have this. It's part of my bucket list after all, why *shouldn't* I just take it all in and enjoy it?

"Fuck," I grit out through clenched teeth as Griffin's finger pushes into my ass, my slick making the way easy. Oh fuck. He pushes in, stretching me just slightly with one finger. It's perfect and yet a part of me knows it's not enough. Now that I've had a taste of my best friend I won't ever be able to get enough. If I thought I craved him before, that's all about to be blown out of the water now that I've seen what he looks like between my legs and his lips stretched around my cock.

Fuck. I am so screwed.

Griffin gags again, pulling back enough to catch his breath before diving down again, over and over. I'm lost in the feeling of his hot, tight mouth around me and his finger pumping in and out of my ass.

"I'm gonna come," I warn him breathlessly, tipping my head back against my pillow. He doesn't slow down. "Fuck, Griffin. You're gonna make me come!"

Griffin doubles his efforts. I reach down, holding onto his head as my hips thrust up into his mouth. I fuck up into his mouth over and over. I feel completely out of control, humping his face and chasing my pleasure. I've never done anything like this before. I feel powerful, like I'm the one in charge. I've never felt like this with an alpha before and Griffin just *lets me*. Fuck. I'm going to come, I'm going to come!

“Griffin!”

My body tenses all over and a moment later I'm coming in Griffin's mouth. His finger doesn't slow down playing with my ass, prolonging my pleasure and making it that much more intense. My mind whites out and I lay back in my bed panting.

That just happened.

My best friend just sucked my brain out through my cock.

My stomach is up in my throat and I wonder if this was the worst mistake the two of us have ever made. This feels like it could ruin us. It could ruin our friendship. At the end of today, how the hell am I supposed to look at Griffin and be okay going back to being just friends? Fuck.

Griffin swallows every drop of my cum before finally pulling off my dick. He slowly removes his fingers and carefully tucks me back into my pajamas. He sits up, looking down at me with a cocky grin that makes me love him even more.

Despite the war going on within my own brain, I appreciate how good Griffin looks right now. I can compartmentalize this. I can be chill. I can appreciate how good this all was and hold onto my panic and save it for later.

I can enjoy this even if it's just for today.

“Cocky fucker,” I whisper, making him completely lose it in a fit of giggles. The hand that was buried in his hair slides lower, my eyes on his erection. He shoves my hand away before I even have a chance to reach out for him. “Don't,” he whispers, “I wanna save that for some of the other things on this list.”

My cheeks heat up as I think about the other things on my bucket list. Oh gods. There's no way I'm gonna be able to do all that and not have my perception of him completely skewed for the rest of my life.

I sit up slowly. Feeling brave just for a moment, I lean over, kissing his stubbled cheek. "Thank you," I tell him seriously before standing up and making my way towards my bathroom. "I'm gonna take a quick shower and then we can head out for whatever you have planned today, okay? Just go ahead and make yourself at home!"

From over my shoulder I hear him say, "I always do." And yeah, he does. He's in my space as much as I'm in his. Will all of that change at the end of today? Gods, I hope not.

I take a steadying breath before jumping in the shower, hoping to wash away my insecurities and worries so I can wholeheartedly enjoy today just in case this is the end of it all.

CHAPTER TWO

Skinny Dipping

MY HEART IS PRACTICALLY JUMPING out of my chest with how hard it's pumping. Holy shit. I just sucked Nolan's dick. I had his dick *in my mouth*.

I step out of his room as the shower turns on, my legs so jello-ey I'm worried I might actually trip on my way out. My hands shake as I wipe them on my jeans. That was so much more than I ever imagined. I tuck my hard dick in the front of my jeans so it's out of the way. I'm so fucking turned on I could come just from rubbing myself through my pants but I keep my hands away. I wasn't lying when I said I had plans for that later.

I don't want to come until Nolan is actually inside of me. Just thinking about it makes a shiver run down my spine. Before I came over, I laid in bed, stretching myself out. I wanted to be ready for whenever we got to that part of his list.

Fuck. I have to focus on something else or I'm going to literally combust.

I make my way to Nolan's kitchen, digging through his pantry. I take out pancake mix before looking through another cupboard, finding a bowl to mix them in. At the last minute I decide to toss in some chocolate chips. By the time Nolan steps into the kitchen, his hair a wet mess on top of his head, I have a plate of pancakes waiting for him.

Nolan gives me a soft smile, leaning his hip against the breakfast bar. "I love it when I find you cooking in my

kitchen,” he says and my stomach flutters. My cheeks heat without my permission and I take a moment to compose myself before turning around fully and face him.

I hand him a plate filled with pancakes, pretending his words aren't making me completely melt all the way down to my core. I never admit how much I love cooking in Nolan's space. I know his place just as well as I know my own. That little primal part of my brain whispers how it would be so much easier if we just lived in one place together, how his space is my space and how mine is his. I ignore that inner voice as best as I can.

Just because my inner wolf has decided that Nolan is ours doesn't mean Nolan agrees.

“I made your favorite,” I tell him with a soft smile. “You'll need your strength for the rest of the day.”

Nolan snorts, digging into his pancakes right there at the counter instead of going to sit down. “You make it sound like I'm about to run a marathon instead of spend the day with you.”

“I don't have a marathon planned but the day *is* full of activities. Some of them more *rigorous* than others.”

The blush on Nolan's cheeks makes a thrill go through my belly. He's so gorgeous. His gray eyes alight with excitement at my words despite the way he's trying to play it cool. I don't blame him, I'm excited too. I'm excited and nervous and *confused*, because now I know what Nolan looks like when he comes. I know what his cock feels like inside of my mouth. How the fuck am I supposed to go back to being just his friend after all of this? Fuck.

Today was supposed to be completely for Nolan. I was going to show Nolan a good time, let him live with no regrets. Somehow, today's become so much more than that. Today's not just about Nolan's bucket list anymore, it's also about me getting to see everything I've ever dreamed about with Nolan. It's my chance to have *one day* as his boyfriend, as his alpha. One day will be enough, right?

I quickly finish my own plate of pancakes, stuffing my mouth so full I can barely keep my lips together. Nolan watches me, giggling to himself. I smile and a piece of pancake almost falls out of my mouth which only makes us both laugh a little bit more. If I'm not careful I'll choke on all this pancake. That would ruin the mood of the day.

Once we're both done eating, I set our plates into the sink. Putting my hand on Nolan's lower back, I guide him towards the front door.

"On to our next bucket list item?"

I nod my head, giving him a wide smile. "Get your coat and boots on. We're going for a little walk."

Nolan quickly slips on his boots. "I'm so excited. Not knowing what's coming next is making this even more fun."

"I'm glad," I murmur, following suit before pushing outside. Thankfully, despite it being February, the weather isn't too chilly. The snow has mostly melted, leaving everything a tad too brown but thankfully dry which will really come in handy later when we go stargazing.

"Thank you for breakfast," Nolan says softly, pulling his hood over his head and wrapping his arms around his middle as we walk.

"You're welcome," I say, reaching over and taking his hand. When he gives me a look I roll my eyes. "Today you're my omega. Can I hold your hand, please?"

"Oh," he stutters out before nodding and taking my hand. I lace our fingers together, squeezing gently. The pink that rises up on his cheeks could be from the cold, but I know it's not. Gods, how is he so fucking adorable? How the fuck am I so gone on him? Nolan clears his throat. "Then thank you for making me breakfast, alpha mine."

This omega is going to be the death of me. How the fuck am I supposed to just go back to being his friend now that I've heard what 'alpha mine' sounds like coming from his lips? I'm so thoroughly fucked.

Instead of saying any of *that*, I just smile down at him. “We’re almost to our destination.”

Nolan looks around. “Are we breaking into the neighbor’s house?”

“Not exactly,” I tell him with a smirk. Last night I called Kennedy, one of our neighbors who just so happens to have a hot tub in her backyard, begging her to let me use it for the day. She’s apparently up north visiting her parents so her entire backyard is ours to use. On top of that, the whole backyard is blocked off with a wooden fence so no one can see what we get up to.

“That’s not a no.”

“It’s not,” I say, chuckling. “Be patient, Nolan.”

“That’s not really my strong suit,” he admits with a shrug. “But you know that already. Remember last year for my birthday? How I couldn’t stop bugging you about what you got me?”

“I remember. I also remember how you offered me a hundred dollars just to know.”

Nolan shakes his head. “And you still didn’t crack.”

“Of course I didn’t. Winding you up was far too much fun. Plus, you’re so fucking cute when you think your pouting is going to work on me.”

Nolan blushes, looking up at me with wide gray eyes. “Are you saying my pout isn’t cute?”

“Of course it is,” I tell him with a soft smile. “But if I give in then you’ll stop.”

He thinks about that for a moment before letting out a long sigh. “Touché.”

I step over to Kennedy’s house, leading Nolan to the side gate that leads to her backyard. “Right this way, my good sir.”

“Umm? Griffin? What are we doing at Kennedy’s house?”

“We’re checking off a very important item from your bucket list. We’re gonna go skinny dipping.”

“And what happens when Kennedy steps outside and sees us naked? My ass is too pale for random people to see. What then, Griffin?”

I can't help but chuckle, thoroughly amused by the outrage on Nolan's face. We step into Kennedy's backyard and I pull the gate closed behind us. He stands there with his hands on his hips, waiting for me to respond.

“Kennedy gave me permission to be here. Look, there's even extra towels on the deck over there.”

Nolan looks over before turning back towards me. “Fine,” he says, rolling his eyes dramatically. “It looks like you have everything planned. Maybe I should try trusting you a little more.”

“You act like I would lead you astray.”

“Remember that time we attempted to break into the local high school just so you could see that picture of me in the trophy cabinet but there was a cop driving by that saw us? What about then?”

I shrug my jacket off, laying it on the patio seat near the hot tub. “That was a one time thing. *Besides* that, my track record is solid.”

“Mhmm,” Nolan hums, stepping over towards me. He slowly takes off his jacket, looking unsure.

“We don't have to do this,” I remind him gently, seeing his nerves and wanting to do whatever I can to wash them away. “It's just a little dip in the hot tub. If you're not comfortable, we can skip to the next thing I have planned.”

Nolan bites his bottom lip for a moment before shaking his head. “No. I want to do this. I'm just nervous about you seeing me naked.”

“I just had your dick in my mouth less than an hour ago,” I blurt out, making him sputter and look away.

“You're such an ass.”

“*Your* ass for the day,” I tell him with a smile so wide my cheeks hurt. Now that I know that Nolan wants this but is

nervous, I start pulling my clothes off. I wanna rip the Band-Aid off in the hopes it'll make him more comfortable.

Once I'm down to my boxers, Nolan finally jumps into action, pulling his clothes off and laying them on his own patio chair. I take a deep breath in, steeling myself before yanking off my boxers. I meet Nolan's eyes for a moment and my inner alpha fucking *purrs* in pleasure at the look in Nolan's eyes. He looks me up and down, taking in my naked body and I can tell, he likes what he sees.

His scent turns warmer, sweeter around the edges as his lust becomes known. His eyes dilate. My inner wolf pants with horny joy. That's not a phrase I ever thought I would use to describe him but here we are.

I quickly step down into the hot tub, shivering as I get out of the cold and into the hot water.

"Your turn," I say, greedily watching Nolan pull his clothes off. Finally, he's tugging down his boxers. He stands there a moment in all his glory, letting me look him over. The look in his gray eyes tells me he's determined to not feel embarrassed despite the pink blushing rising up the center of chest.

My cock was soft just a moment before but now is quickly springing to life. I take in Nolan from the top of his head down to his toes. He's so fucking sexy and I just barely keep in a growl. He's shorter than me and softer around his middle and thighs and hips. There's a treasure trail of hair that starts at his belly button and runs down to his groin. Gods, he's perfect. Even his cock is perfect as it lays there soft and pink. I know exactly how good it looks hard, and somehow, it looks just as good soft.

I lick my lips, remembering how good he tasted and how good it felt to have the head of his cock buried in my throat. I just barely keep a growl at bay, not wanting to overwhelm Nolan while he's feeling vulnerable like this.

I finally look away, hoping Nolan doesn't mind all the attention I've just given him. I don't want him to be embarrassed or feel uncomfortable just because I find him attractive as fuck.

As soon as Nolan is seated across from me, I finally look over at him. “So,” I say softly, giving him a smile. “How’s skinny dipping for the first time?”

“A little underwhelming,” he says with a chuckle. My hackles rise up at that because that wasn’t his normal chuckle. He’s uncomfortable.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he says, looking away. “I’m just—” Nolan pauses, running his hand across the back of his neck. “I know I’m not much to look at. I’m not as built as you, Griffin. I’ve grown soft in my old age.”

He’s not wrong. I’m built completely different from him. I’m all hard lines and toned muscles and he’s so soft. But I don’t want someone that looks like *me*. I’m attracted to *him*.

“Nolan,” I murmur, slowly sliding closer. “Just because you’re not built like me doesn’t mean I don’t like what I’m looking at. Trust me.”

“Oh yeah?”

I nod my head. “Would you like me to prove it to you?”

Nolan sucks in a sharp breath, his eyes darting between mine. Finally, he nods.

As gently as possible, I take his hand in mine. With my eyes glued to his, I guide his hand to my erection, wrapping his fingers around me. My dick jumps in his grip and he makes the tiniest gasp. “This is all from you,” I whisper gently.

“Fuck. *Griffin*.”

CHAPTER THREE

Topping an Alpha

I CAN'T BELIEVE I have my best friend's cock in my hand right now. Oh my gods. Holy shit. He's so hard and long. My own dick fills with blood as my stomach flutters wildly.

"Really?" I can't help but whisper. I'm filled with disbelief. Griffin is like a Greek god and I'm— well, I'm just me. "This is from looking at me?"

"Yes," Griffin says back, "you're gorgeous, Nolan. I want you so badly."

"Really?"

"Yes. Really, really. Can I kiss you, Nolan? Please?"

My head is spinning. One moment we're getting into a hot tub naked and the next my best friend is asking me if he can kiss me. This is everything I've ever wanted. I've dreamed about this more times than I care to admit. I'm so fucking desperate for him. A tiny whimper leaves my lips and heat rises up on my cheeks.

He somehow makes me feel brave. Just like this morning, I feel *powerful* and in control. It's enough to leave me breathless.

Instead of responding, I lean forward, pecking his lips before pulling back. It was a split second kiss but my lips tingle nonetheless. I stare at Griffin with wide eyes.

Oh my gods. I just kissed him. I kissed Griffin!

His hand gently touches my cheek. I've never felt like this before. In the past, the alphas I slept with were always rushed and hurried, caring about getting their knots to pop rather than worry about my pleasure. Griffin makes me feel so *seen*, so cherished. It's terrifying. I wonder if I'll handle the reality of tomorrow.

Instead of thinking about that, I do my best to focus on the now and how he's making me feel in the present. I don't want to miss a second of this with thoughts of tomorrow.

"That was perfect," he whispers, his breath fanning across my face with how close he is. "May I do it again?"

I swallow around the lump in my throat and nod. This time, while cupping my cheek, Griffin leads the kiss. His lips gently press against mine and I close my eyes, savoring the feeling. I'm completely swept away that it's a surprise when his lips leave mine.

A whine leaves my throat and I chase his lips, pressing mine against his again. And then again. And then again. Over and over until Griffin pulls away because he can't stop smiling. I open my eyes, realizing I'm grinning from ear to ear as well.

We stare at each other for a moment before I'm moving, pushing forward and kissing him again. I feel addicted, like I just can't get enough. This time is different though. Before, it was soft presses of lips against lips, now our lips move against each other. I open for him and Griffin tentatively pushes his tongue forward. I receive his tongue gladly, pressing my own tongue against his. As they touch, a flutter of pleasure runs through me, making me shiver despite how toasty warm the hot tub is.

Griffin's hand, the one holding my hand against his cock, tightens. My fingers follow his movement without a second thought, squeezing his cock in my grip. Fuck. He's so hard and I can feel the tiniest throb. He wants me. I'm doing this to him. My kisses are turning him on. My *body* is turning him on.

I feel like I'm on cloud nine and I'm not sure I'll ever be able to make my way back down. I don't think I want to come

down, not if it means stopping these kisses or being away from Griffin. If I could crawl into Griffin's skin just to be closer to him I would.

A surprised noise leaves my throat as Griffin moves, sliding one of his thighs over me and turning so he's straddling my lap.

"Is this okay?"

I nod my head, too breathless to even speak. Instead I let my mouth wander across Griffin's jaw, his beard rubbing against my lips and making them tingle even more. All of my dreams didn't even come close to the reality of kissing Griffin. He's so soft, so gentle. He's everything I hoped he would be and yet somehow so much more. He's perfect.

"Oh, Nolan," Griffin murmurs breathlessly, like somehow he's just as affected as I am. But that can't be right, can it? He's an experienced alpha and I'm— Well, I'm just a little raccoon staring up into the eyes of a wolf. "That feels so good."

I nip at his throat, overcome with the impulse to mark him. The noise he makes in response only pushes me forward, licking and sucking and biting until there's a visible red mark in his skin. My stomach flutters violently as I look at the mark I've left. My inner omega growls, whispering to me that Griffin is *my alpha*, and now there's a mark for everyone to see that claim.

I lean my head back against the side of the hot tub, taking in shuddering breaths as I try to regain control of myself. I feel overwhelmed, like at any moment I'm going to tip over the edge and completely lose myself.

Too bad Griffin apparently doesn't want me to calm down. He peppers kisses just under my chin and I squirm beneath him. My squirming causes my cock to find a perfect place between his cheeks. My stomach flares with excitement and nerves. Holy shit. I've never touched an alpha's ass before. The alphas I've slept with in the past had very clear expectations of who would be topping and who would be receiving. Fuck, having Griffin in my lap like this is beyond

anything I've ever expected, and that's without thinking about the fact that it's *Griffin*, the alpha who's had my heart for years without even knowing it.

"Fuck," I breathlessly gasp out as he nips at the sensitive skin of my throat. "Fuck, Griffin."

"I want you," he tells me, his lips brushing against my ear and making me shiver. "I want you so fucking badly, Nolan."

"You have me," I say barely above a whisper. I wish he knew just the depth of that confession. Not only does he have me here in this hot tub, willing to do whatever it is he wants, but he owns my very heart. I would give him anything he asked right now without a second thought. That should be scary but it's not, because it's Griffin and I know he would never ask for something I couldn't give. I trust him explicitly.

"Do you wanna fuck me? Because I want that so fucking badly."

"Gods yes."

Griffin is moving before I even realize what's happening. I whine as the weight of his body leaves me, but the noise is cut off short as I watch him lean against the side of the hot tub, his chest leaning against the cold ground, his ass hovering above the water. I swallow thickly, my eyes glued to his ass. Griffin's body is toned and strong, all hard lines and muscle. Sometimes I wonder if the gods literally carved him from marble before breathing life into his body because it's so fucking perfect and his ass is no different.

"Are you just gonna stare at it all day or are you gonna fuck me?"

My eyes meet Griffin's and he smirks at me. I roll my eyes, finally standing on shaky legs and stepping up behind him. "I'm gonna fuck you," I tell him, hoping my voice doesn't come across as nervous as I'm feeling. "Don't we need lube?"

Griffin smirks. "Don't you make your own? Use that."

I bite my bottom lip so hard I'm worried it might actually bleed. Fuck. The idea of using my own slick to fuck Griffin

has me on the brink of coming. That would be embarrassing as fuck, so I take a steadying breath, finding an ounce of self-control buried somewhere in the midst of all this desperation. My hands run up his spine and he shivers, his skin pebbling with goosebumps.

Reaching behind myself, I gather slick onto two of my fingers before bringing them to Griffin's ass. I gingerly touch his hole, just barely skimming over it and he moans, the noise giving me confidence. I've always wanted to try topping, but the alphas I dated weren't interested. My hands shake as I finally get to try something I've always desired. I push one finger into his ass. He takes me easily so I push in a second.

My eyes are glued to his ass, watching as my fingers push into his ass. He stretches around me so perfectly, his hole pink and tight around my fingers. Fuck. My cock aches with how badly I want to be inside him.

"Yes," Griffin moans out, his hips pushing back against my fingers. "Just like that, Nolan. That feels so good."

I can't seem to look away from his ass, watching as my fingers pump in and out of him. I can't believe this is happening. I'm almost positive I'm about to wake up any minute alone in my bed, realizing this was the most intense dream of my life. But then Griffin is reaching back and slapping my hip hard enough to let me know this is *real*. I really am finger fucking my best friend and getting ready to actually top him.

Oh. My. Gods.

"Come on," Griffin whines, looking over his shoulder at me. "Please, stop teasing me. Get inside me already, Nolan."

"Okay, okay," I whisper, pulling my fingers free. After swiping a little more slick onto my fingers and using it to wet my cock, I bring myself to his hole. I run the tip of my cock over his hole just to give myself a moment to compose myself.

"Please," Griffin murmurs and his pleas spur me forward. I've never had an alpha say please before. Fuck. The feeling washing over me is heady. Griffin makes me feel powerful. He

makes me feel *sexy*. I push forward until the head of my cock pops through his tight ring, sinking into his ass with ease after that.

I keep moving forward until I'm completely seated within Griffin's body. I lean my front against his back, wrapping my arms around his chest and holding on tight. Fuck. Holy fuck. This is so overwhelming. His ass is so *hot* and tight around my cock. Sex has never felt like this before. I'm not sure I'll be able to last very long.

"Holy shit," I whisper with my lips against the back of Griffin's shoulder. "Holy fucking shit, Griffin."

Griffin lets out a hearty chuckle. "Is topping an alpha everything you hoped it would be."

"So much more than I imagined. Fuck. You feel so fucking good, Griffin," I tell him, my arms tightening around him. I slide my hips back before pushing forward again, rocking in and out of Griffin. The hand that's cupping his chest finds his nipple and I tweak it gently.

"Fuck," he hisses out, his hips rocking back and meeting my soft thrusts. "You're good at this, Nolan. Fuck."

Griffin's praise washes over me and somewhere along the way I seem to find my confidence. My movements become more sure, more steady. I fuck into him gently, keeping a steady pace. Sweat drips down Griffin's spine and I chase it with my tongue, moaning as the salty taste explodes on my tongue. His scent is thick within my nose and my mouth salivates, practically convinced a ripe strawberry sits against my tongue.

"Please, Nolan," Griffin murmurs, reaching back and gripping my hip. "Please. I'm so close, baby."

Sparks light up my entire body at the pet name. My cock throbs with pleasure and warmth pools in the pit of my belly. I pinch his nipple harder as my hips pick up speed, slapping into him over and over. The water laps around us as our movements become more frantic. I can feel slick sliding down the back of my thighs. I'm close. I'm so fucking close. Fuck.

With the hand not torturing Griffin's nipple, I reach down and touch his cock. My fist closes around the base, massaging where his knot will be. It's already hard and filling with blood. Knowing he's getting off on me fucking him only adds to my pleasure. We're feeding off of each other, wracking each other's pleasure higher and higher. Gods, I love this feeling, I could chase it like I'm chasing my next high if I'm not careful.

"Right there. Yes. Fuck, Nolan. I'm gonna come."

His deep voice washes over me and my hips stutter. I push into him hard, burying my cock to the hilt as it begins to throb within him. I come inside of him, crying out in pleasure. My orgasm takes me completely by surprise, unable to prepare for how good it'll feel to be inside of him while he praises me.

"Fuck!" I can feel his entire body tense, his ass squeezing every single drop of my cum from me. His knot pops, becoming impossibly hard within my grip. I whine, thinking about that knot inside of my ass instead of my hand. I want to feel him inside of me, marking my insides the same way I'm marking his.

I squeeze around his knot, wanting him to feel just as good as his ass had made me feel. I lay my forehead against the center of his back, breathing him in, letting myself come down from the high of fucking.

"Holy shit," I whisper just barely loud enough for the two of us to hear. "Wow."

I lay a soft kiss against Griffin's shoulder before beginning to pull out. His hand reaches back, stopping me. Without looking back at me he murmurs, "wait. Just a little longer."

"Okay," I whisper back, leaning my full weight against his back. I understand how he's feeling. It's why I love being knotted so much, that feeling of closeness that comes afterwards, still having them inside me. I feel so close to Griffin right now. I never want this to stop. I never want to go back to being just his friend.

Tears threaten to fall from my eyes but I just barely keep them at bay. Instead of thinking about tomorrow, I think about

how good this is right here and right now. I have Griffin for the day and I don't want to waste it being sad about tomorrow.

I kiss him again. And then again. And then one more time just for good measure.

Eventually, my cock softens and slips out of his body all on its own. Griffin shivers and I sink back into the water, letting it warm my rapidly cooling skin. He turns around, sitting back down into the water beside me.

Feeling brave, I take his hand in my own and the smile he gives me in response makes a thrill go through my belly. I lift his hand, kissing his knuckles. "That was—" I shake my head, unable to find the right words. "It was everything," I tell him seriously.

"I'm glad," he whispers right back, his eyes shining. "It was truly no hardship on my account. I enjoyed myself immensely."

I snort. "It sure seemed that way. The neighbors probably heard you, Griffin."

"Oh my gods, TP. You're such a dick."

I outright giggle which in turn, makes Griffin start to giggle as well until we're stuck in this hot tub laughing back and forth. When one of us calms down the other says something else that sets us both off again. It's easy to see why I fell in love with Griffin. He makes me feel at ease in a way no other alpha has ever done before. I can't help but wonder if there's any logical reason why we wouldn't be able to keep this going after today? We seem to click so well.

A tiny sliver of hope blooms within my chest. I try my best to ignore it but now that it's ignited, I know it's only a matter of time before it's a burning inferno within me. I just hope Griffin will be able to take the heat.

CHAPTER FOUR

Have a Picnic Date

NOLAN'S STOMACH rumbles and that's my signal to start up the next portion of our day. "As much as I've loved being in this hot tub, I think it's time we start drying off and head back to my place."

"But your place doesn't have this perfect view of your ass," Nolan says with a giggle. Oh, it would seem someone is finding their confidence today. As much as I adore seeing Nolan with that adorable blush, seeing him flirt and hold his own is its own sort of magic that I'm enjoying seeing.

"Not with that attitude it doesn't."

We both chuckle as we get out of the hot tub, quickly toweling ourselves dry and getting into our clothes before we freeze our asses off. Despite the fact that it's warmer than usual doesn't mean we should be out here with our asses out for longer than we need to. It *is* February after all.

"So what's next?" Nolan asks, bumping against my side as we step out of Kennedy's backyard and towards my house. I smile down at him, wrapping my arm around his back. My body warms as we make contact and my mind races a thousand miles a minute.

When I was planning the day, I never thought it would feel like this. Having Nolan as my mate for the day is a dream come true, but this dream has an expiration date. How am I supposed to survive tomorrow? I know what Nolan looks like naked. I know what it feels like to have him inside of me. I

know what it's like when he takes control and finds his confidence. I know what pineapple and strawberry smells like all mixed together until the scents combine into something new.

If nothing else, at least I'll have spank bank fodder for the rest of my life.

"You okay?"

I snap out of my thoughts, looking down at Nolan and trying my best to put on a casual smile. "Yeah, I'm good. Just lost in thoughts for a moment."

"Are you sure?"

I nod my head. "Just thinking about what we just did and how I'll be dreaming about it for years to come."

Nolan blushes, looking away and biting his bottom lip. There's my shy omega again. "Whatever. It wasn't even that good."

I stop in my tracks, pulling Nolan against my chest. "You blew my fucking mind," I tell him seriously. "That was the best sex I've ever had." *Especially because it was you*, goes without saying. "You blew out this alpha's back," I say, breaking the tension and making us both chuckle.

"Alright," he says softly, leaning up on my toes and giving me a shy peck against my lips. "It was really fucking good for me too."

We walk the rest of the way to my house in comfortable silence, content to lean our hips against each other as we go.

"What's next on the list?" Nolan asks as we step into my home. I pull off my coat and hang it up as Nolan toes off his shoes.

"You're so impatient," I say with a wide smile, shaking my head. "Trust me, Nolan. Just go with the flow."

"I hate you," he murmurs and I snort.

"You don't."

His eyes meet mine and a look passes between us. Something close to *longing*? No, that can't be right. I'm seeing what I want to see. After a moment Nolan smiles. "Fine. I don't. But I'm going to pout until you tell me what's next."

"Good thing your pouting is so cute."

Nolan walks away with a playful huff. My stomach flutters at our playful banter. Gods, I'm just so in love with that omega. He fits into my life so perfectly and I can't imagine my life without him by my side. As much as I'm glad I could give him this day to experience the things he's deemed he's been missing out on, part of me wants to get on my knees and promise to give him these things every single day if he allows me to.

I could give him all of this and so much more if he only gave me the chance.

"Oh my gods!"

Shit, looks like someone went snooping and found our next activity. I stop in my kitchen, picking up the picnic basket I packed before leaving the house this morning. With my other hand, I snag two glasses before making my way towards my back door.

My house came with an enclosed back porch. It was pretty shitty before I moved in and renovated the whole thing to be more to my liking. I flip on the space heater, letting it warm up the little space in here. This space is perfect for the next thing on Nolan's list. I already have pillows and a giant blanket on the ground. It might not be a usual picnic out in a park but since it's still cold outside, this will have to do.

Nolan is already sitting on the blankets, making himself comfortable. He adjusts a pillow here and a blanket there. My inner primal instincts whisper that he's perfecting our nest. That little voice can get bent. I can't be thinking about things like that right now.

"I have food and drinks," I tell him, closing the door behind me and setting down the basket. I flip a switch and a bunch of little blue lights that I hung up around the area turn

on. It's so cozy in here that I can't help but smile, proud of myself.

"The lights were a nice touch," Nolan says, looking around the space. Yes, I may have ran to an overnight store to pick up lights I could hang up in this space. No, I don't think that was overkill. It was worth it for the little smile Nolan is giving me.

"I'm glad you like it," is all I say in response. I sit down across from him, tucking a pillow behind my back for support before digging into the basket. I pull out little plates for us both and then all of the food comes out one by one. I packed sausage, cheese, and crackers because I know that's Nolan's favorite snack. Then I have some crab Rangoon spread to have with the crackers. I have some sweet white wine to share to go with everything. For our main entree, I have some shrimp on ice with a little cocktail sauce to dip them in.

As each thing comes out of the basket, Nolan makes increasingly exciting noises. "Oh my gods, Griffin. This is all of my favorite things! Thank you so much!"

I lean over, kissing the side of his head. "Of course. Today is all about you, Nolan. Sit back and enjoy it."

Nolan leans back against the nest he's made, letting out a deep sigh. "I don't know if I can handle that. It's just a hardship, Griffin. But I promise I'll do my best."

"You cheeseball," I say, my voice dripping with affection. I pour both of us a glass of wine and dig into the food. It's delicious and by the noises Nolan keeps making, he agrees wholeheartedly.

"Oh my gods, Griffin. Try this," Nolan says, holding up a cracker that he's spread with the crab Rangoon dip and topped with a piece of sausage. I lean towards him and open my mouth. He carefully feeds me the cracker and I close my lips against the very tips of his fingers. Fire burns within my belly and I watch as his eyes dilate with lust as they're glued to my lips.

I carefully sit back, tasting the food he's given me and pointedly ignore the way my cock is filling with blood.

“Delicious,” I murmur, my voice deeper than I mean it to be.

Nolan clears his throat, looking away. “This has been the best day ever,” he whispers, looking at me from below his lashes.

This is my moment. I could spill every single bean I’ve been holding back. I could tell him just how beautiful I find him, how I can’t stop thinking about him. I could tell him I’ve been head over heels in love with him since the day I moved in and met him for the first time. I could tell him how I purposely buy pineapple scented candles just so my house smells like him and how that soothes my inner wolf. I could do so much.

Nolan looks away and I stare at the side of his face, wondering why the words are stuck in my throat. What the fuck is wrong with me? Why can’t I just *say* it?

“Don’t worry,” I finally say, my throat constricted, “we’re only getting started.”

Nolan finishes the last of his wine, his cheeks a pretty rosy color from the drink. He gives me a soft smile before he’s scooting over towards me, laying his head against my chest. I close my eyes, overwhelmed with emotion. I run my hand up and down his spine.

“I just wanna stay like this forever,” he whispers, just barely above a whisper, but I still hear every word. My heart races against my ribs and I know he can hear it.

“Okay,” I whisper back, “just a little longer.”

“Let’s get more comfy,” Nolan murmurs. We readjust and a moment later, I have a lap full of raccoon. Nolan’s raccoon skin is so adorable. He’s almost completely white but for a spot around his eye, his nose wiggling as he looks at me expectantly. I take a moment to run my fingers through his soft fur. After he nips my finger, I smile and finally shifting into my own animal skin. We curl up together in our blankets, my nose resting against him.

I lay back against the blankets, just holding Nolan as best as I can in this form. I’m bigger than him and he fits perfectly against my side, all curled up. He’s so warm and soft against

me. I kiss the top of his head and he makes a startled noise as my tongue laps across his head. I breathe in his pineapple scent, contentment warming me all over. I still have so many things on his list to do, but for just a moment, we stay like this, pressed against each other and content.

Tomorrow is going to break me if I don't do something soon. Before the end of the day, I need to take my shot. I need to tell Nolan my true feelings and pray to every single god willing to hear that he somehow feels the same.

Not only is today about Nolan getting everything, but it's also about truly and utterly wooing him. I want him to see all the things he can have *with me*. I want him to see how well we fit together. I want his inner omega to crave my wolf the same way he craves our little raccoon.

With my new resolve in place, I breathe out some of the anxiety I was holding onto. Hope begins to bloom and I hold onto that with everything I have. Instead of worrying about the weight of tomorrow, I'm going to focus on winning over my omega. He'll see how good life with me can be and by the end, I'll tell him I want him to be mine forever instead of for a day.

Mentally, I add one more item to his list: *fall in love with Griffin*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Have Dessert before Dinner

GRIFFIN HAS SENT ME HOME. I've been told to head home and doll myself up. I snort to myself as I think about him saying that phrase. It sounded so silly coming from him.

Now that I think about it, I'm not sure I've ever seen Griffin in a suit before. His job doesn't require him to dress up, being a contractor who mostly works with his hands. It's why his indoor porch is so lovely, because he built it himself.

I have a moment to myself as I step into my bedroom, slowly pulling my clothes off. I just *think*. I think about the day so far and everything that's happened. I've been woken up with a blowjob that quite literally blew my mind, and then I was fed my favorite breakfast. After that I finally skinny dipped which I still think was a little overrated, if I'm completely honest. The only thing that made it truly memorable was seeing Griffin naked.

I smile to myself as I pull my suit from my closet, laying it on my bed. I can't believe Griffin let me top him. My stomach swoops just thinking about how amazing that moment was and how good it felt to be inside him.

Griffin is making each and every one of my dreams come true. I never knew being with someone could be this good. I didn't think Griffin and I would fit so well.

I should tell him how I really feel. What's the worst that can happen? At this point, ripping off the Band-Aid and telling him the truth only to have him pull away feels like it'll hurt

less than if I just keep pretending everything is ‘friendly’ between us. Taking that chance feels more and more worth it.

I put on my suit as I think about the possibility of having Griffin *for real*. He could be here in my space, helping me into my suit before our date. He could be here at the end of the night to help me back out of it. Now that I’ve seen what it’s like to have him as my alpha, I know I can’t go back.

My suit is navy blue and fits me just right. I’m wearing a white button up underneath it with the collar pulled open. It’s dressy yet more on the casual side without a tie. I think I look perfect, and I hope Griffin agrees.

I look in my mirror, sliding my hands over the front of my suit. As much as I love dressing up, part of me wishes I could go back to Griffin’s house and crawl back into his lap. I might have dozed off for a little bit while I was in my raccoon form. I can’t be blamed when Griffin was so warm and comfortable, his sweet strawberry scent wrapped around me like a warm blanket. It was perfect and the best nap I’ve ever taken in my entire life.

Plus, seeing him in his wolf form is always a treat. He’s a big wolf with gorgeous gray fur, his eyes the prettiest brown even in that form. He’s beautiful in *every* form.

“Knock, knock, knock!”

I quickly adjust my shirt one last time before stepping out of my room. The moment I see Griffin, I freeze. My eyes wander over him from the top of his head down to his dress shoes and then back up again.

“Do I look okay?” Griffin asks, rubbing the back of his neck and that seems to push me out of my frozen state. There’s no way I can let him doubt just how hot he is, even for a second.

“You look incredible,” I tell him seriously. His suit hugs him just right, a light gray color that reminds me of the same shade as my own eyes. He’s wearing a bright pink bow tie that really pops and he’s somehow found pink dress shoes that match. “Where did you find those?”

“I’ve had them in the back of my closet, just waiting for the right time.”

I shake my head, taking him in again, just because I can. Gods, he looks amazing. As much as I’m looking forward to this date, part of me wants to carefully take that suit back off of him.

I gotta keep my head from floating away with dirty thoughts. I have a feeling that if Griffin could smell just how his suit is affecting me, we’d be missing dinner all together. Which wouldn’t be the worst, would it? No, we’re going through my list. Focus, Nolan!

“Shall we?” Griffin asks, holding out his arm for me. I wrap my hand in his elbow, giving his bicep a nice squeeze as we step out of my house. I feel warm from the tip of my head down to my toes, overwhelmed with just how happy Griffin makes me.

Stepping outside, I see Griffin’s truck parked in my driveway. When we step towards it, he opens the door for me. He holds my hand as I step in and scoot into my seat.

“What a courteous alpha,” I tell him with a soft smile. He gives me a wink in response that leaves me blushing. I don’t think I’ll ever get used to having this much of his attention on me.

Griffin gets behind the wheel of his truck, throwing it into reverse and pulling out of my driveway. Am I in love or is the way he’s putting his hand behind the headrest and pulling out of my driveway hot? Maybe it’s a little of both?

I’ve got it bad.

“Where are we off to?”

Griffin looks over at me, rolling his eyes. “You can’t wait five minutes?”

I tap my bottom lip a few times. “Got it. So it’s someplace close. That narrows down the options.”

“You’re such a bratty omega, you know that right?”

“That might be true, but you seem to like it.”

Griffin looks over at me before his eyes dart back to the road. “Yeah,” he murmurs softly, his voice taking on a different tone entirely from our banter just a moment ago. “I really do.”

My stomach flutters at the soft confession. Feeling brave, I reach over and take his hand in my own, lacing our fingers together. He gives me a squeeze.

“Today has been everything I hoped it would be,” I tell him, bringing his hand up to my mouth and kissing his knuckles. “Thank you, alpha.”

Griffin sucks in a sharp breath. He squeezes my fingers tight before relaxing again. “It was truly my pleasure.”

My stomach ties itself into knots, nerves race through me at an alarming rate. My heart practically tattoos a bruise against the inside of my ribs with how hard it’s beating. I could tell him. I could tell him I’m in love with him and want him to be my alpha. It would be so easy to tell him, just a few words and he would know.

I know today is all about me. I know he’s only pretending to be my alpha. But there’s a part of me that’s completely convinced that I stand a chance with Griffin. At the very least he holds fondness for me that goes beyond being my friend, right?

I open my mouth to say something, anything, but just then, Griffin is pulling into a parking lot and finding a parking spot. I let out a long breath, doing my best not to show the way emotions are tearing me up inside. After clearing my throat, I put on my best smile as I look out the windshield and see where he’s taken us.

“Oh! I love this place!”

“I know,” Griffin says with a smile, kissing my hand before letting go and getting out. Before I have time to open my own door, he’s there, tugging it open for me. “Welcome to dessert before dinner.”

I slide my arm around Griffin’s waist as we walk, wanting to be close to him. It’s Valentine’s Day so it’s not a shock that

it's quite busy when we step inside. It's mostly teen couples out on dates. I can't help but smile as I see one awkward couple pressed up against each other, chatting together as they wait for their turn in line. The sheer variety of couples fills me with joy. There's a couple shifters, someone with angelic blood based on the wings on their back, and a demon with their horns and tail on full display. I love how diverse our little town happens to be.

One of the couples, clearly a teenage couple on a first date, finds a seat in the busy ice cream shop, blushing and whispering to each other.

Young love. There's something about it that's so incredibly innocent and beautiful. Longing hits me square in the chest. Not to be a teenager again, but I'm realizing I missed out on a lot. The alphas I've dated in the past just weren't the best for me. We didn't fit and I didn't get these soft little moments of shared glances and cute dates. I look over at Griffin, thankful he's giving me a slice of those things I never had.

"Do you know what you want?"

I give Griffin a big smile. "Of course! I'm gonna get the same thing I always get. Cake batter ice cream with a brownie."

"That sounds so yummy," Griffin murmurs, looking up at the menu, debating the selection of ice cream he can get. He always gets a different kind every single time we come. It's something I find incredibly endearing about him. "Probably nothing with chocolate."

I snort, shaking my head. "Right. Inner wolf doesn't need a tummy ache tonight."

"Absolutely not," he murmurs, eyes still glued to the menu. "I have big plans for after dinner. Can't be stuck in the bathroom or stuck on the couch in pain."

"Big bad wolf taken down by chocolate."

Griffin finally looks away from the board, giving me the most adorable pout. My stomach flutters at the look. "Listen here, lil omega."

I put my hands on my hips, a surprised noise leaving my lips. “Excuse me?”

Griffin leans down, putting his mouth so close to my ear I can feel his breath. A shiver runs through me. “My lil omega is teasing the big bad wolf,” he whispers, a thrill going through me at his dark words. “Keep this up and you’ll meet the big bad wolf when we’re alone.”

Griffin pulls away, looking back up at the menu like nothing just happened despite the way I’m left breathless and horny beyond belief. I take his hand, digging my nails into his wrist. “You’re such a fucker.”

In response I get a blinding smile and wink. “I sure hope so.”

I just barely keep a frustrated noise at bay. Before I can comment further, we’re stepping to the front of the line. The cashier is a teenage girl who smells like a small shifter like me. I give her a friendly smile and make sure to throw a five into the tip jar after Griffin pays for us. He’s decided on a strawberry shortcake sundae. A sundae to match his scent.

As we wait for our ice cream, I lean against Griffin’s side. I watch another couple holding hands, both of their cheeks bright red. They share a soft kiss before leaving the ice cream shop.

“They were so cute,” I whisper, nodding at the younger couple leaving.

“Hmm,” Griffin hums. “They are,” he says with a soft smile before adding, “but we’re cuter.”

I smile so wide my cheeks hurt, tucking my face against his shoulder. I feel Griffin kiss the top of my head. Just then, our order is called and we quickly get it and take it outside, getting out of the way.

As soon as we get outside, I take a giant bite, moaning with how yummy the ice cream is. This is my favorite combination of all time and it just hits the spot. Birthday cake flavored ice cream with bits of brownie pieces mixed in and sprinkles on top. I look over at Griffin, freezing at the look

he's giving me. Why does he look like he wants to take a bite out of *me* instead of his ice cream?

"Sorry," he murmurs, looking away. "That noise got me going. I'll contain myself. For now."

"It's really good," I say in my defense, both of us chuckling. Once we're back inside Griffin's truck, I take a big scoop, making sure there's no brownie pieces in it. "Here you go."

Griffin opens his mouth and I carefully feed him a spoonful of cake batter ice cream. My eyes are glued to his lips, watching as he carefully licks my spoon clean.

"Delicious," Griffin says, "just like always."

"That's why I always get it."

"Here. Try mine." I'm expecting him to give me a spoonful the same way I've fed him, but I watch with wide eyes as he scoops a little ice cream onto his finger. He carefully brings it up to my mouth, holding it there and waiting.

With my eyes locked to his, I open my mouth and take his finger into my mouth. The sweet strawberry and cream taste explodes on my tongue. I suck his finger clean, watching as his pupils dilate. His eyes dart down to my lips and I suck a little harder, swirling my tongue around the digit before pulling away. I kiss the tip of his finger for good measures.

Griffin clears his throat, adjusting his hard cock to sit better in his dress slacks. He has a way of making me feel so sexy, so *powerful*. I love him for that.

"And with *that* little party trick, you about ready to head to dinner?"

"Very much so," I tell him, buckling up and going back to finishing my ice cream. My stomach flutters pleasantly, warm from the affection that Griffin has been showing me all night and from the ice cream. I'm sad our day is about halfway over but I'm excited to see what happens next.

CHAPTER SIX

Be taken on a suit and tie date.

PLACING a gentle hand on the small of Nolan's back, I lead him towards the sushi bar. I called last night, making sure they'd have room to squish us at the hibachi bar. There was no way I'd get here and have to wait two hours for a table.

"Oh my gods," Nolan murmurs, looking up at me with wide, gray eyes. Gods, he's so soft today. Every little thing I do somehow makes him a little more soft, like he doesn't know he deserves all of this and so much more. "I've always wanted to try this place!"

"It's almost like I knew that about you and wanted to make that happen," I say with a warm chuckle.

"You spoil me, Griffin."

"As I should. I am your alpha after all."

Nolan blushes, looking away from me quickly. He tucks his head against my shoulder for a moment, hiding away from me so he can compose himself. How can he be this fucking adorable?

Stepping inside, I tell the host my name and he takes us to a table straight away. The hibachi bar is already full, only two seats left empty for us. There's two teenage couples, an older couple and then a trio. We sit down, getting comfortable as we wait for our waitress to come take our order.

"I'm so excited," Nolan whispers to me, practically squirming in his seat.

“You’re fucking adorable,” I whisper back, just to see him blush. He shoves my arm, shaking his head at me. Yep, truly adorable.

We place our orders with the waitress, both of us getting a cocktail to drink. Nolan is getting the steak hibachi and I’ll be getting the chicken. After getting our drinks, the chef steps over to our table, rolling his cart with him.

“Hello and welcome, I’ll be your chef tonight,” he says with a wide smile. He starts cleaning the grill in front of us, carefully showing off his skills by starting a giant flame using alcohol before quickly extinguishing it. From behind his back, a set of tentacles pop up over his shoulders and I grin, excited to see the little show he’s about to put on for us, knowing it’ll be even more exciting with a few extra appendages to help.

“Have you ever been here before?”

Nolan looks over at the older lady beside him, shaking his head. “This is my first time.”

“You’re in for a treat,” she tells him with a soft smile. “This is the place Darla asked me to be her girlfriend twenty years ago. We come here all the time.”

“You two are incredibly cute,” Nolan says back and he’s got the softest look in his pretty eyes. Nolan has always been drawn to love. He finds it warm and palpable and something to cling to whenever possible. He has the biggest heart I’ve ever seen and he tends to feel so deeply about the people around him.

I sit back in my seat, just watching him interact with this older couple.

“Why thank you,” she says, “took her long enough but we got there in the end.”

The woman who I assume is Darla leans forward so she can look at Nolan. “She always says it’s my fault it took so long for us to get together but she never said anything sooner! How was I supposed to know Katherine had feelings?”

Katherine chuckles warmly, reaching over and taking her partner’s hand and kissing her knuckles. “It’s alright. All that

matters is we figured it out.”

Darla smiles softly, leaning over and kissing Katherine’s head. Then she turns back towards Nolan. “What about you? Are you here with your partner?”

Nolan looks over at me for a moment, his eyes darting between mine before turning back to the women. “I am,” he says proudly and my stomach turns to warm goo. Hearing him say that has my inner wolf howling with joy.

I just barely keep myself in check. He’s just saying that to these strangers, it doesn’t actually *mean* anything.

And yet, my heart tells me it means *everything*.

“How long have you been together?”

“We’ve been neighbors for around ten years, but recently we decided to finally take the plunge into being more than that.”

“That sounds lovely,” Katherine says with a wide smile. “You two look like you just fit. Very cute.”

Nolan blushes and I feel his hand lay gently across my thigh, giving me a squeeze. “Thank you,” he says back, turning back as the chef begins making our food.

Hibachi is an entire performance and our chef is really something. He connects with everyone at the table, telling jokes and having a ton of flair. His tentacles juggle eggs before he’s cracking them onto the grill. He tosses pieces of broccoli at everyone at our table and Nolan is the only one to actually catch it. The teenagers all giggle and cheer while Katherine and Darla are a tad more reserved. Well, until the sake comes out that is.

The chef points the bottle at Darla and the entire table counts as he squirts it into her mouth and she just keeps swallowing it down like it’s not a big deal.

“This is why I married her,” Katherine says with a giggle, finally making Darla stop so she can give a startled chuckle. They’ve been together for two decades and yet, I can clearly see the love they share. If I’m lucky, just maybe I’ll have that

someday. My inner wolf whispers that we have a good foundation with Nolan, convinced we'll go the distance.

Eventually the performance comes to an end and we all have our plates of food. I dig into my chicken and fried rice, the flavors salty and delicious. The fried rice was made just right, the chicken flavorful and juicy, and the veggies the perfect touch to all of this. Fuck, this food is amazing.

"Here," I murmur, sliding my shrimp off my plate and onto Nolan's. "I know you like these."

"Thank you," he says back, leaning over and kissing my cheek before going back to eating. "Do you wanna try my steak? It's *perfectly* cooked."

I open my mouth, letting him feed me a piece of his food straight from his fork. This feels so incredibly *domestic* and I'm overcome with longing. I want this. I want this every single weekend. I wanna take Nolan out on dates, and spoil him at home, and make sure he never questions how special he truly is.

At the end of our meal, Katherine and Darla stand up. "It was really nice to meet you," Katherine says with a nod, tucking herself against Darla's side. Now that they're closer I can smell that they're a mated couple. Dragons maybe?

"It was so nice meeting you too," Nolan says, "maybe we'll make it a tradition to come here too. Then we'll be seeing you again."

"That would be lovely." As they're leaving, Darla looks at her mate and says, "those two remind me of us when we were that age. Idiots in love."

I can't help but snort. I've never heard that one before but I have to admit that the shoe fits. For me at least. I'm in love and I'm an idiot for not telling Nolan sooner. I promise to change that by the end of the night.

"What's so funny?"

I shake my head, holding out my hand for Nolan. "I'm just thinking about that time you ran outside in your boxers because you saw a spider."

“Oh my gods,” Nolan groans out. “Please, just let that memory die! It was one time! It came out of nowhere. I wasn’t prepared, Griffin!”

“Whatever you say, dear.”

“I refuse to believe we’re already to the ‘whatever you say, dear’ phase of this relationship,” Nolan teases, bumping his hip against mine. “We’ve barely even started and already you’re tired of being my alpha. I get it.”

We step outside. My heart races against my ribs. Once we get to the truck, instead of opening Nolan’s door for him, I pin him to the door instead. He sucks in a sharp breath, staring up at me with wide eyes.

I lean down, running my nose over his throat, his breathing shaky in my ears. I kiss just below his ear before whispering into his ear, making sure my lips are right up against his lobe. “I could never get tired of you, TP,” I say, using the nickname I came up with years ago for him. A nickname I tend to say with affection and fondness, this one little thing I’ve never managed to hold back.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” I confirm, kissing his ear before moving so my nose runs across his throat, moving my mouth to his other ear. “I fucking crave you,” I confess softly. I pull back so I can look into his eyes which are still wide, like a deer caught in headlights instead of the adorable raccoon he is.

I gently kiss his lips before completely pulling away. He swallows thickly, his eyes darting down to the ground between us.

I open his door for him before moving over to the driver’s side, wanting to give him a moment to process all of that. I might have come on a little too strongly but the idea of him not knowing how much he means to me tore me up inside. It’s not often I let my inner alpha have free reign of my instincts but in that moment, I couldn’t hold him back.

“Ready?”

Nolan gets into his seat, nodding his head. “Ready.”

“Awesome,” I say, putting on my best smile. “Time to head back home and change into something a little more comfortable. Then we’re off to the next thing on our list.”

I’m worried maybe I’ve ruined everything by being too forward but after a moment, Nolan rests his hand on my thigh. He gives me a soft smile. “Sounds perfect.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOLAN

Adopt a star

MY HEART FEELS like it's in my throat, choking every breath I try to take. Oh my gods. That moment outside Griffin's truck plays over and over in my head on a loop.

I fucking crave you.

That sentence sinks into my very soul, wiggling its way in until there's no way I'll ever be able to unhear it. This is the soundtrack of my heart. He craves me.

Is this really Griffin talking or is this him trying to say what my alpha would say if we were really mated? Gods, I feel so confused. I don't know what's real anymore.

That's not true. I know one thing is for certain. I'm in love with Griffin. I don't think I'll ever love someone the same way I love him. I want him to be mine and at the end of this, when I tell him that, I'm hoping against all hope that he truly feels the way he's just said.

My mind is made up. I'm going to tell him how I really feel. Before the night is over, a confession will be made. My stomach feels like it's on a rollercoaster and I'm filled with nerves, but I do my best to fight them off and stay positive. There must be a chance he feels the same about me, right?

I pull on a pair of jeans and a hoodie, following Griffin's instruction to wear something comfortable. Then I slide on my favorite flannel over my hoodie, making sure I'm nice and warm for whatever we have planned next.

The only thing left to do is wait for Griffin. I lay on my couch, getting comfy. My belly is full and my entire body is warm. My inner omega is happy to be home for a moment, comfortable in our own den. I close my eyes, just for a moment. I'm not taking a nap. Nope. I'm just resting my eyes.

I'm not sure how long I lay there but eventually I hear the door open and footsteps coming inside. I don't even open my eyes, knowing it's Griffin based on his steps and scent. I open my arms and a moment later, Griffin is carefully crawling onto the couch with me.

Griffin lays against my chest, resting his head below my chin. He's heavy but the weight of him against me feels good, comforting. Without opening my eyes, I hold him. His scent mixes with my own and it's delicious. I breathe him in greedily and my inner raccoon is content and happy. A purr rumbles through my chest, mirroring the contentment I feel welling up inside of me.

"We should get going, TP," Griffin whispers but I just squeeze him tighter. I can feel the way he's smiling against my chest.

"Five more minutes."

Griffin rubs his cheek against mine. A surprised giggle leaves my throat, feeling his stubble against my soft skin. It tickles, but I don't push him away, not when he's rubbing his scent against me like this. My inner omega is grinning from ear to ear with happiness at being scented by our alpha. I indulge him, not dampening his excitement by reminding him this is all *for a day*.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"What the hell does TP actually stand for? It always makes me think of toilet paper."

Griffin chuckles softly. "It stands for trash panda, my cute little raccoon." I wrinkle my nose as Griffin licks my cheek.

"Are you serious?" I blurt out, unable to hold back my giggles. Trash panda! If I wasn't head over heels in love with

this man I might be offended. But as it stands, all I feel is overwhelming affection. “Also! Was that really necessary?”

“Inner big bad wolf wanted to do it. It wasn’t me. Pinky promise.”

“Oh my gods. You two are the same, you can’t blame him.”

“I can. Just did. All him. Trust me.”

I quickly get my fingers under Griffin’s shirt, tickling his sides and making him squirm. He jumps off of me, rolling onto the floor with a loud thump. I giggle as he stares up at me with wide eyes, looking betrayed. “I’m sorry! It was my inner raccoon! I swear! He can’t keep his lil hands to himself!”

“You’re the worst,” Griffin murmurs, standing up and dusting himself off. He crosses his arms over his chest. “Are you gonna take a nap or would you like to join me for our next adventure?”

“Definitely the second. I’m not wasting even a moment with a nap when I could be spending it with you instead.”

Griffin gives me a soft look, pulling me close and kissing the side of my head. Then he pulls a piece of paper out of his back pocket and handing it over to me. “What’s this?”

He rolls his eyes. “Open it up and you’ll find out.”

“Aren’t we suddenly sassy,” I murmur, unfolding the paper carefully. I read over the page, a smile curling across my lips. “Oh my gods.”

“Yep,” he says, looking proud of himself. “It’s most likely the biggest scam out there but hey, it was worth it just to see the smile on your face.”

This alpha has me wrapped around his finger and he doesn’t even realize it. He went online and *bought me a star*. He wasted his real money on something so fucking silly that’s no doubt a scam, but he did it anyway. For me.

I lean up on my toes, stealing a kiss. His arms wrap around my waist, tugging me against his chest. He kisses me back with just as much ferocity as I’m giving. His tongue pushes

between my lips, touching my own and my head swims. The paper in my hand falls to the ground as I grip the back of his shirt with all my might, so much that my fingers start to cramp but I don't care. I don't have the capacity to care, not when his lips are moving against mine and his tongue is in my mouth.

Griffin is the one to break the kiss, taking a step back. His scent is darker than usual, laced with lust. I want him. I want him right here and right now. But before I can drop to my knees and nose at his groin, he's taking yet another step away from me, putting more space between us.

"I can see the look you're giving me," he says, sucking in a sharp breath to try to calm himself. He adjusts his jeans and I can see the outline of his erection. My stomach flutters, knowing he wants me just as much as I want him. "We have more things on your list to do today. If you keep looking at me like that I'm going to end up fucking you right here on the floor."

"You say that like it's a bad thing."

"Nolan," he says, his voice stern. I pout, knowing he's going to stick with his plan. "I want to. I want to so badly. But I also know I have more planned for the night."

"Fine," I finally say, pretending to pout even though I'm pleased he's got more planned and know I still have time to be his omega before the night is over. "What's next, alpha mine?"

"Next we're heading back to my truck for a little trip out of town."

"Lead the way," I say, putting my hand in the crook of his elbow and letting him lead me to his truck. If that kiss was anything to go on, I have a feeling I know what we're going to be getting up to in his truck and I cannot wait.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Kiss under the stars

“WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME? Why are we leaving town?”

“You have the patience of a raccoon who’s seen a marshmallow for the first time,” I say, amusement clear in my voice. “Have I led you astray any time today?”

“No. But there’s still time. Maybe you’ve put me in a false sense of security so you can take me out of town once and for all.”

“The big bad wolf is finally showing his true colors, TP.”

“Oh my gods, don’t start with that again. Also now that I know TP means Trash Panda it loses a little bit of its shine.”

I smile as I pull onto a dirt side road. “Can’t handle the wolf?”

“Oh,” he murmurs, “trust me. I could handle him alright.”

“We’ll see.”

“Is that a promise?”

“Very much so,” I say, looking over and giving him a wink. I take a right into a dirt driveway, following the wind and bends of the road. “Do you want me to stop using that nickname now that you know what it means?”

There’s a long pause before Nolan pokes my side. “No,” he confesses softly and I smile to myself. I knew he loved the

nickname, something special for just the two of us to understand. “Are we trespassing?”

“No way! You think I would take you to some random person’s house? Come on, I’m better than that.”

“We literally fucked in Kennedy’s hot tub earlier today!”

“That’s different!” I can’t stop laughing as I park my truck.

“How is it different?”

“I got permission. Well, I got permission to be here too. You know what? Shut it, raccoon boy!”

“Oh my gods,” Nolan blurts out, tumbling out of the truck as he belly laughs so hard tears spring to his eyes. He rubs his eyes. “At least we have permission I guess.”

“Don’t get hung up on this. Details, details.”

“Whatever you say, big bad.”

I toss my hat over to Nolan and he puts it on. He looks cute in my clothes. Gods, the things I would give to see him in one of my shirts, covered in my scents, maybe even covered in my marks. Fuck. Maybe someday. If I’m lucky.

“We have a tiny bit of a hike. Feeling up to it?”

“Absolutely,” Nolan says, quickly catching up to me and grabbing my hand. I look down at him in question, thinking he wanted to tell me something but instead, he laces our fingers together. He’s holding my hand just to hold my hand. My stomach swoops at the realization.

We walk through the trees towards an open field. The noises of the forest are all around us and I feel at home here in the woods. My inner wolf is craving to come out and play, to run and chase, maybe even to claim. I soothe him with promises of running through the woods near my house soon. Nolan is relaxed beside me, letting me know silently that he feels the same way. It’s already dark, and thankfully, the night sky is clear. It’s a perfect night for stargazing.

We break through the tree line, finding the perfect little opening for what I have planned. A few deer look up at us

from where they're gazing. They stare at us for a long moment, waiting to see what we're doing here. When we keep walking, they run off into the woods.

"This is beautiful," Nolan says under his breath, just barely loud enough for me to hear. He looks around before looking up at the sky, a small smile playing at his lips. "Oh wow."

I follow his gaze, taking in the dark sky littered with stars. It's a gorgeous night despite the way we can see our breath. It's a little chilly but nothing our coats and hats can't handle.

"Right this way, good sir," I say, pulling Nolan over towards the middle of the field. I pull a blanket out of my backpack, laying it on the ground. "I want to try to find your star."

"This is so sweet," he tells me, laying on the ground. Nolan reaches up, snagging my hand so he can drag me down to the blanket with him. With an amused snort, I carefully lay down, my feet pointing the opposite way from Nolan, our heads side by side.

We stare up at the sky, looking at the magnitude of stars before us. Sitting here like this makes me feel so small. There's so much out there, so much universe outside of me. It's humbling. It's beautiful. It makes me feel brave because life isn't guaranteed. Tomorrow isn't promised. Why not take a chance tonight?

"I think it's that one right there," Nolan says, pointing up into the sky. "Based on the paper you gave me, it's a couple away from the spout of the little dipper. That's my star."

I stare up at the sky, finding the star he's pointing out. There it is. The silly star I paid actual money to buy for him. My heart clenches as I stare up at it, warming all over knowing that this gift made Nolan happy. "Do you have a name for your star?"

"The Great Potential."

I turn my head to look at Nolan. Like this we're looking at each other upside down, but I can still see into his eyes just

fine. I love his eyes no matter what angle I'm looking into them from. "The Great Potential?"

Nolan smiles, nodding his head. "That way I can always make a wish on my star."

I kiss his cheek before turning onto my back and looking back up at the stars. Movement catches my eyes and I point up. "Oh!"

Nolan looks where I'm looking, making a noise of delight as a shooting star darts across the sky. "Looks like I can save my wish and use that shooting star instead!"

My lips spread into a wide smile at his excitement. Once the shooting star has disappeared, I make my own little wish. *I wish that Nolan was mine.*

"This has been the most wonderful day," Nolan says softly, his breath fanning out from his lips in a gray cloud. His nose is rosy from the cold and I shiver, feeling it as well. He's said this after almost every item was checked off his list. He's loved today and he's made sure I knew that.

Hope blossoms in my chest. If he's loved everything about today, maybe I really do stand a chance. I can do this every day for him if he lets me. But one of us needs to take a chance.

I'm reminded of Katherine and Darla. They both had feelings for each other, but it took one of them actually confessing their feelings for them to be together. I need to find the bravery to tell Nolan I love him.

"It's not over yet," I say under my breath, thinking about how by the end of the night I *will* tell him that I love him. Even if it's the last thing I ever say to him.

"I know," he tells me, turning his head to look at me instead of the sky. "I just wanted you to know how thankful I am for everything. Today's been a day I will never forget."

"Me neither," I whisper. Unable to resist, I lean towards him, kissing his lips gently. It might literally be the most awkward kiss I've ever given because of the fact that we're upside down from each other, but somehow that only makes it

sweeter. I can kiss him in the most awkward position but it's still kissing *Nolan* and therefore, it's great.

Wow, I've got it bad.

Nolan shivers and I tug him towards me. "Come here. Let me keep you warm."

He quickly shifts, flipping around until he's laying across my chest. I wrap my arms around him, moving my hands up and down his back to generate even more heat. His lips press against my jaw and I warm all over. His touches and his kisses are done with a tentativeness that makes me weak all over, like he's never sure if he's allowed, or if I'll be okay with it. He's so gentle with me, but not in a meek, submissive way that some omegas tend to be. No, he's powerful in his own way but chooses to be gentle with me anyway. I love it.

I cup his cheek, bringing his mouth to mine. He kisses me and it starts off with a soft press of lips against lips, but after a moment, Nolan is growing bold, darting his tongue across my lips. I give him exactly what he's silently asking for, opening my lips for him so he can explore my mouth. His pineapple scent comes to life around us, mixing with the natural scents of the forest around us, making my inner wolf excited to come out and play.

My body comes alive as Nolan kisses me. Sparks dart under my skin, pleasure rushing through me. I cup his cheek, keeping him here, desperate to stay in this moment forever.

I wish there was a way to encompass this moment in a glass jar, that way I could open it whenever I want and experience the euphoria of this moment again and again and again.

My other hand slides under Nolan's jacket, desperate to feel just a slice of his skin against my palm. He's burning under his jacket. My hips rise up, like they have a mind of their own. My cock is hard where it's trapped in my jeans, throbbing with need just from our kisses. Nolan makes me feel like a teenager again, discovering his knot for the first time. Everything is heightened and *new* with him.

“Griffin,” Nolan gasps out, moving from beside me to straddle my lap. His ass rests perfectly against my hard cock and a surprised moan leaves my lips without my permission. He ruts against me and my inner alpha growls in pleasure, loving this turn of events. He and I are in agreement; we want Nolan.

Nolan dives back into the kiss with renewed vigor, darting his tongue into my mouth. His hands cup my face, his thumb brushing against my beard-covered cheek. My cock is aching with need, Nolan’s ass rubbing over it in desperate little movements. Desperation claws within my chest, breaking out in the form of a groan. I want him. I want Nolan so badly. I want to mark him and fuck him and make him mine. I want to knot him.

“Fuck,” I gasp out, my hands moving to Nolan’s hips and holding on for dear life. I hold him still as I catch my breath. “You have to hold still.”

“Why? You don’t want me?”

“Fuck, Nolan. The exact opposite. I want you *so* badly that I ache all over.”

“Then why are you stopping?”

My hands clench around his hips. I suck in a sharp breath and get a noseful of *horny omega* which does *nothing* to calm the lust raging within me. “I’m holding you still because if you don’t stop moving your cute little ass on me like that I’m going to come in my pants,” I tell him breathlessly. “And if I’m honest, I’d much rather come inside your ass this time. If you’re okay with that.”

That cute little ass moves again, riding down against me, like he just can’t help himself. “Oh my gods,” he grits out through clenched teeth. “Yes. Please, Griffin. Want you to fuck me so badly.”

I slap his ass, not too hard, mostly just to startle him and keep him from falling too deep into his lust haze. He moans, blinking down at me with wide eyes.

“Run.”

“What?”

I get a wicked grin on my face. “Run, my little omega. The big bad wolf is here to chase you.”

“Oh my gods,” he gets out, letting out an excited giggle as he scrambles onto his feet. I quickly stand, picking up the blanket. That little bit of time gives Nolan a head start. As he darts away, I dig my feet into the ground and let out a deep growl that comes straight from my chest. My inner alpha comes to the forefront of my mind. The moment Nolan darts within the trees, the chase is on.

CHAPTER NINE

Car Sex

THE AIR around me is cold. I can see my breath as I pant, but it also keeps me from overheating as I run full force through the forest. Sweat drips from the side of my temple down my face, but that's easy to ignore when I'm chasing down my little raccoon. I breathe in the air, scenting the sweet smell of my omega in the air. I chase that smell, letting my inner alpha out to play, allowing him to lead this chase.

My body is alive with adrenaline, a livewire of sensations that are both human and animalistic all in one. I let out a howl, overwhelmed with the urge to let the wolf be front and center. It feels so good to be this free. I've never let myself have this before, too worried about scaring omegas in the past. I'm safe to be completely myself with Nolan. Just another reason I love him.

My lungs ache as I suck in sharp, panting breaths, but I just keep running. I need to catch Nolan. I need to catch my omega. I'm fucking *compelled* to catch him.

An excited giggle catches my ears and I hone in on the noise, following it like a moth to a flame. I'm drawn towards Nolan like a planet is compelled to stay within its orbit. It's like breathing, I don't even have to think about it. It just *is*.

I slow my steps as I catch sight of Nolan. A wicked smile curls across my lips and a dark chuckle escapes me. "You haven't gotten far, little omega."

"You're faster than I thought, Big Bad."

“I think I’ll be catching my prey now,” I say, letting my eyes shift, shining with alpha red. My senses are heightened like this, giving me even more of an advantage. “There’s no use in running anymore.”

In response, I see the shine of omega gold in Nolan’s eyes. Our inner animals acknowledge each other. There’s no fear or disapproval, instead, all I feel is joy.

He smiles from ear to ear before taking off like a bullet towards my truck. I curse under my breath before taking off after him. His natural raccoon tendencies lets him leap over branches and rocks with ease. His agility is stunning, further cementing the fondness I feel for him. My inner alpha is beyond impressed with this display. Catching him will be that much more satisfying.

The moment I see the truck come into view, my resolve doubles. My legs take me faster than I thought possible and just before Nolan can get the truck door open, I’m there, pouncing on my prey.

I’m careful as I crowd against Nolan’s back, pinning him against the side of the truck. He gasps, his scent invading my nose, further sending me into a spiral of desperation. He shoves back against my front, his ass rubbing against the crotch of my jeans.

A growl sounds between us and I shove forward until his front is plastered against the truck, my body tucked tightly against his. I lean down, running my nose over the side of his face, breathing him in. My heart is racing and my hands are shaking, but I stay in control.

“Caught you,” I tell him, my voice sounding like I’ve just gargled with broken glass. I swallow thickly. “Can I have you now?”

Nolan whimpers and the sound is music to my ears. “You have me already,” he whispers. “Take me, alpha.”

I turn him around so we’re face to face. His eyes are just as wide and wild as mine are. Gripping the back of his thighs, I hoist him up. Nolan wraps his legs around my waist, his arms

going around my neck. He lets out a surprised noise that quickly turns into a gasp as I bury my face against his throat.

“Griffin!” I lick across his sensitive skin, wanting to mark him with my scent. I want him to be mine. I want every person who comes across him to smell me on him. I feel more possessive than I ever have before.

I pull away from the truck, taking him towards the back. With one hand on Nolan’s ass, keeping him in place, I use my other hand to open the hatch and drop the back down. “Crawl in, baby.”

Nolan gets into the back of the truck, finding blankets and pillows back there ready for us. “Oh,” he breathes, “car sex.” He looks at me with a bright smile, holding out his hands, beckoning me forward. I tuck myself into the back, pulling the top part of the hatch back down to keep some of the cold out.

“I figured this would be far more comfortable than trying to fuck in the front.”

“Gods, you’re the best,” he says, pulling me forward, colliding our lips together. I sink into the kiss, letting it wash me away. Not only am I horny as fuck, ready to knot Nolan, but I’m also filled to the brim with affection for this beautiful, kind man. I’m overwhelmed with emotion. I don’t only want his body right now, I want his entire soul to touch mine.

“Nolan,” I breathe out, not knowing what else to even say. He takes my face in his hands, kissing both of my cheeks.

“I know,” he whispers back and just maybe he does, just maybe he’s feeling this too.

He carefully begins undressing me. It’s a little awkward and a little snug back here but we quickly get out of our clothes. His body against mine burns me in the best possible way. I can already smell his slick in the air and my mouth waters.

Nolan strokes my cock and I moan, loving the feel of his hand on my body. Returning the favor, I take his cock in my hand as well. My ass clenches, remembering what it felt like to have this inside of me. I can’t wait to do the same to him. I

can't wait to have my knot tying the two of us together, to have my seed marking him in the most intimate place.

Nolan's leg goes around my hip, tugging me forward until our cocks are pressed against each other. I take both of our cocks in my hand, stroking us against each other. Everything is too much and yet not enough at the same time. "This feels so good," he murmurs against my lips, his breath fanning across my face. I shiver in a way that has nothing to do with the cold.

We rut together, chasing our pleasure as we trade hurried kisses. If I don't slow things down we're both going to come. As much as I want to come, I really, really want that to happen while I'm inside Nolan. I really want to fuck him and knot him. I want my knot to be the best thing he's ever felt. I want to ruin him for anyone who isn't me.

Fuck, where are these possessive thoughts coming from?

"I wanna feel you," I tell Nolan, biting his bottom lip. "I wanna be inside you. Please, Nolan, can I?"

He nods his head, flipping me onto my back and crawling into my lap. My cock lays against his crack and he rubs himself against me. Tossing his head back, he lets out a long moan of pleasure. Gods, he's beautiful like this. I can feel his slick covering my dick and I groan, throbbing with anticipation. If this already feels amazing, how the fuck am I going to handle actually being inside him?

"Ready?"

My hands go to Nolan's thighs, running up and down them. Nolan is in control. I want him to take exactly what he wants, what he needs. Gods, he looks so sexy like this. His hair is a mess from tossing off my hat, his cheeks a brilliant pink color. His thighs are strong and flexed as he gyrates against me.

"I'm ready, baby. Take what you need. Ride me, Nolan."

"Fuck, you're so sexy like this," he says, reaching behind himself and guiding the tip of my dick to his hole. He pushes back, taking the tip inside himself. "Fuck."

"Me? You should see yourself right now. Holy shit, TP."

Nolan is so fucking wet, his slick making the passage of my cock easy. He pushes back, taking more and more of me inside until I'm fully seated. Oh gods. He's so tight and so fucking warm. My hands flex against his thighs, digging my fingers into his muscle.

Once he's fully seated in my lap, Nolan closes his eyes, getting used to the feeling of being full. He runs his hands over my stomach and chest, pausing to tweak one of my nipples. When he finally looks down at me, there's a glazed look of lust filling his gray eyes, somehow making him even more attractive.

"You have no idea what you do to me," Nolan murmurs and the sentence makes a flutter go through me. If only he knew what *he* did to *me*.

"Then tell me."

"I can't even think right now," he blurts out, his hand finding my hair and tugging on the strands. I let out a pleased whine at the feeling. "Everything is Griffin, Griffin, Griffin in my head. You're all I can think about. You're *everything*, alpha."

My hips seem to have a mind of their own, thrusting up into Nolan, compelled to *mate and fuck* after hearing Nolan's words. I feel the same exact way. He's my everything. He's *mine*.

"Want you," I hiss out, my head tilting back as Nolan rides me. Lightning bolts of pleasure run down my spine, branching out to all of my limbs, making my muscles tense and relax over and over. "Want you so bad, Nolan." Not just right now, not just to fuck. I want him all the time. I want him to be mine day in and day out for the good and the bad. I want everything with this omega. I want to be his alpha through the thick and the thin, forever.

Nolan leans down and kisses my exposed throat. As his teeth come into play, nipping at my skin and leaving a mark, a rumble radiates from my chest, filling the back of my truck with a growl.

“Fuck,” Nolan murmurs against my throat. “You already have me,” he says, biting down against my skin, just barely keeping himself from breaking the skin. Part of me wants it. I want him to bite me. I want him to claim me as his. My rational brain knows now isn’t the time for that though. If I’m lucky, we’ll revisit that bite for real. For now, I’m just happy to have his marks displayed on my skin.

I hold onto Nolan’s hips, holding him still so I can fuck up into him. The sound of our skin slapping fills the truck, paired beautifully with my growl and our heavy breathing. The windows all begin to grow foggy and our skin grows tacky with sweat. We fuck wildly, letting go fully, getting lost in the sensations our bodies are giving each other.

“I’m gonna come,” Nolan says, his breathing picking up speed until he’s panting above me. “Fuck, Griffin. Make me come. Please. Make me come and knot me. Need it. Please.”

I couldn’t say no to that even if I wanted to. I fuck up into Nolan harder than before, bringing my hand between us and wrapping it around his cock. I squeeze tight, running my thumb around the head of his dick.

“Cover me in your cum,” I tell him breathlessly, my mind blanking out but for the idea of *claim, mark, mate*. “Wanna smell like you. Mark me, Nolan.”

Nolan lets out a whine, his body locking up around me. Hick cock hardens before the tip is spurting with cum. I aim it at my belly, watching transfixed as he covers my stomach and chest with his seed. Fuck, watching him explode like that brings my own orgasm crashing towards me. My knot fills with blood, stretching his hole impossibly wide with each thrust until finally, it’s locking into place and expanding fully.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Pleasure overwhelms me as my knot locks within the tight walls of Nolan’s ass. I come inside of him, covering his insides with my cum. He tenses around me and I groan, coming over and over and over for what feels like forever.

Eventually, we come down from our highs and Nolan falls completely limp on my chest. He tucks his head under my chin, kissing the underside of my jaw before nuzzling the mark he worked so hard to leave against my skin. He makes a pleased noise that makes me smile.

I run my hands up and down his spine, carefully tugging my coat over his back so we stay nice and warm.

“That was amazing,” Nolan finally says, his voice cracking. He chuckles, clearing his throat before trying again. “Thank you, Griffin.”

“You can’t keep thanking me for sex, Nolan,” I say with a warm laugh. “You say it like I’m humoring you. That? What we just did? That was mind blowing for me. Maybe I should be the one thanking you.”

Nolan sits up so he can properly look down at me. “You can thank me by making me breakfast in the morning.”

My heart is wildly thumping inside my chest to the point that I wouldn’t be surprised if Nolan can hear it. I swallow thickly before answering, “you have yourself a deal, omega mine.”

Nolan gives me a soft smile before tucking himself against me once more, content with my answer. I kiss the top of his head, wondering if he has any idea how honest I was during all of this. I want him, I want all of him. And if he’ll truly let me, I promise I will always make him breakfast in the morning because that’ll mean I’ll *be there with him* in the morning.

With our night coming to an end, I’m already planning ways to convince him to keep me forever instead of just for the night.

CHAPTER TEN

NOLAN

Make a blanket fort

MY STOMACH IS TYING itself into knots, my heart jumping into my throat as Griffin pulls into his driveway. We've come to the end of the night and it's getting harder and harder to not let my disappointment show.

If it was up to me, this night would never end.

As Griffin puts the truck into park and turns it off, he looks over at me. "Why the long face, baby?"

My stomach warms at the pet name and I can't help but smile despite the raging feelings welling up inside of me. "The night is almost over," I say softly.

Griffin reaches over and takes my hand in his own, bringing it to his mouth and kissing my knuckles. "It's not over yet. Come on, let's go inside."

I follow Griffin out of the truck and through his front door. The place smells like him and my body relaxes. I'm naturally drawn in, feeling safe within Griffin's space. My inner voice whispers that it's because his den is our den, but I try not to dwell on that, knowing it'll only make things hurt even more tomorrow.

Griffin takes my coat, pushing me towards the living room. He runs off to his bedroom and a moment later I hear him groan, pulling something big into the room.

"What's that?" I watch as he carefully tugs his mattress into the living room.

“We can’t make a proper blanket fort without the proper foundation. Duh.”

I roll my eyes playfully. “Right, yes. How could I forget such an important detail? It’s almost like I’ve never made one of these before.”

“That’s why I’m the one in charge, my lil omega.” Griffin places the mattress on the ground, scooting it back until it’s pressed against the couch. Then he tosses a pile of blankets and pillows towards me. I’m not quick enough and the sheer volume of them knocks me over.

“Good thing for the mattress,” I murmur, buried under the pile of blankets. I crawl my way out, emerging to find Griffin looking down at me with a soft look in his eyes.

“Go on,” he tells me, “start organizing things. Make yourself a proper nest and I’ll put the finishing touches on it.

I’m giddy with excitement as I begin piling the pillows against the couch. We’ll be able to lay on them or sit against them comfortably. Then I put the softest blanket across the mattress and over the pillows. Then I take one of the bigger blankets, rolling it up so I can use it as an outline for the little nest I’m creating.

I’m not sure how long I work on this but eventually I stand up so I can take in my nest properly. It looks so fucking comfy and perfect. Well, almost perfect. My cheeks heat as I turn to look up at Griffin.

“What is it? Missing something?”

I bite my bottom lip. “Is there any way I could have your comforter? Or maybe one of your hoodies? It doesn’t quite smell right.”

Griffin smiles, quickly moving. As he passes me, he stops and kisses the top of my head. I sink down into the nest, laying back against the giant pile of pillows. Yes, this will be perfect once it smells more like Griffin.

The soft look he gives me as he steps back into the living room fills my stomach with warmth. I make grabby hands at him and hands me his hoodie. I slip into it quickly, tucking my

nose into the collar so I can breathe his scent in. Gods, his scent is so fucking good.

I take the comforter, covering myself with it. I pull it back and tap the spot next to me.

“One second. Just need to do one more thing,” Griffin murmurs as he picks up a sheet he had set to the side. He tucks one end at the bottom of the mattress by my feet, pulling it up over my head. Then he tucks the other end on the top of the couch, making a little fort underneath. The lighting of the living room is dimmed and I feel so perfectly comfy inside here.

Griffin tucks himself inside, sliding under the comforter and laying on his side facing me. I turn to face him as well, giving him a giant smile now that we’re basically nose to nose.

“Hi,” I whisper, reaching towards him and putting my hand on his hip.

“Hi,” he whispers back.

I scoot a little close, gently rubbing my nose against his. My inner raccoon is so happy right now, warm and content, snuggled with his alpha. All I want is to stay like this forever.

The mood in the blanket fort is warm, yet there’s an undercurrent of sadness laced within, knowing this moment is on a timer. Soon it’ll be over.

Under the safety of the blankets, I feel safe. Just maybe I feel brave enough to make my biggest confession. What’s the worst that could happen? I’ve already gotten everything ticked off my list. Why not go for one more thing?

“I’m sad that tonight is almost over.”

Griffin gives me a sad smile. “I know what you mean,” he tells me, reaching over and cupping my cheek. His thumb slides across my skin and his eyes dart down to my lips. Leaning forward, he kisses me gently. Tears threaten to spring to my eyes at the gentleness of this kiss. Like he’s preparing to say goodbye.

“Griffin,” I murmur against his lips. If this is goodbye, just maybe he doesn’t want this to end. Maybe there’s a chance we can have this in the morning. I need to take a chance, I can’t just sit back and let this come to an end!

“When we were sitting outside looking at the stars, I made a wish on that shooting star.”

“You did?”

Griffin nods. “Would you like to hear what it was?”

I turn my head, kissing his palm. “If you tell me then it won’t come true.”

He gives me a soft smile. “If I don’t tell you, there’s a chance it won’t come true anyway. I wanna take a chance, okay?”

“Okay,” I say softly, my stomach fluttering with nerves. “What did you wish for?”

“I wished that you were mine,” Griffin says, swallowing thickly. He continues, “not just for the day but forever. For real.”

I let out a noise of surprise, overwhelmed with the sudden onslaught of emotions. The words don’t really process at first. He wants me? He wants me to be his? For real?

Holy shit.

Overwhelmed is an understatement in this moment. I can’t breathe. I can’t think. All I can do is feel relief. Today doesn’t have to be the end, it can be our beginning. Oh my gods, I think I might actually cry with how fucking happy I am.

I can’t find the words to respond so instead I just kiss him. I kiss Griffin over and over and over, hoping he’ll understand that I feel the same way. I pour as much emotion into the kiss as I possibly can, a broken noise leaving my chest.

When I pull back, I don’t go far, pressing our foreheads together. “Griffin. I have to tell you something.” I clear my throat, trying to compose myself as best as I can. “Griffin, I love you.”

“What?”

“Yeah,” I breathe, nodding my head and smiling so wide my cheeks hurt. “It’s true. I’m in love with you. Today was one of the best days of my life and I don’t even want to entertain the idea of going back to just being your best friend.”

“Oh,” he says, his eyes wide as he stares at me. A moment passes and I’m struck with impatience.

“Griffin. Say something!”

A surprised noise leaves my throat as I’m pushed onto my back. Griffin buries his face against my throat, letting out a hearty laugh like he can’t believe everything I’ve just said. I can relate to the feeling, wondering if this was the most vivid dream I’ve ever dreamed rather than reality. “Holy shit,” he finally says, kissing my throat, then my cheek, then my lips. He looks down at me with wide eyes. “I love you too, Nolan. I have for so fucking long. I love you so much.”

I wrap my arms around him, holding him tight. I can’t believe he loves me. He *loves me*. Oh my gods. I don’t think I’ve ever felt this happy before.

“This feels like a dream, like I’m going to wake up in the morning in my own bed and realize today wasn’t real.”

“It’s real,” he says with a giant smile. “It’s real, baby. I love you and I want you and I refuse to go back to the way things were. I want you around me all the time. I want you in my space. I want *you*.”

“I want you too,” I say with an excited giggle. “I want to make more lists and check things off with you. I want everything.”

Griffin kisses me again until we’re both breathless with euphoric giggles. We take a moment to calm down before going back to kissing again. We stay in our blanket fort for the rest of the night, content to trade unhurried kisses and gentle touches.

Before, everything had an added layer of emotion to it, wondering if this will be the only time I’ll experience each of these things. Dates and kisses and touches. Now, everything

feels different. Everything comes with the knowledge that this isn't the end, but only the beginning. This won't be the last kiss, this won't be the last touch, this won't be the last confession. I have so much to look forward to. Future dates, future Valentine's Days, future kisses. A future where Griffin is present and by my side.

Mentally, I cross off the last thing from my bucket list, the one thing I was too scared to actually include. *Fall in love*. I might have fallen in love with Griffin a long time ago, but now he knows how I feel and somehow, he's confessed that he feels the same. I'm not sure tonight could have ended on a better note.

Eventually, my lids grow too heavy for me to keep my eyes open. I fall asleep against my alpha's chest, feeling at peace. His scent is all around me, leaving me breathing easy. My chest is bright, knowing that I'll wake up with Griffin *here* beside me and if I'm lucky, it'll be like that every night after this.

I made a list to experience all the things I felt like I was missing, but I realize now the only thing I was missing in life was having Griffin as mine.

EPILOGUE

One Year Later

“GRIFFIN! HURRY UP!”

I smile to myself as I gaze into my mirror, making sure my outfit looks alright. My eyes dart to my shoulder, taking in my mating bite. I touch it, my stomach warming pleasantly at the sight. I don't think I'll ever get used to that; being mated to the love of my life.

“Coming, TP!”

I step out of the bedroom, running my hand over the front of my suit. This year I'm wearing a black suit with a black shirt underneath. Nolan mentioned once that I look dashing in black so now it's hard for me to get dress clothes in any other color, wanting to be complimented by my omega.

As I make my way towards the front door, I can't help but look around at my home, finding all the things that weren't there last year. There's the paintings on the wall that once hung in the house next door but have since been moved over here. There's the throw blanket over the back of the couch, one of Nolan's favorites. There's the list of numbers on the fridge, my omega always wanting our favorite takeout places there and ready for whenever neither of us don't want to cook.

My house was cozy before. I was proud of all the work I put into it myself. But now? Now there's something else to it all. Now it feels like a *home*.

“It’s about time,” Nolan says with a whine, pulling me close by the lapels of my suit coat. I smile so wide my cheeks hurt and to make things even better, Nolan kisses the smile away. “We’re going to be late for our reservation.”

“We could be late,” I murmur against his lips. “We could stay here just a little longer if it means getting more kisses. I’d be willing to be late for these kisses, baby.”

“Absolutely not,” he tells me, taking a step back. He looks so cute tonight in his baby blue dress shirt and gray dress pants. “Last year was all about my list. This year I’m attempting to tick a few things off yours.”

This might be our first Valentine’s Day since being mated, but already we’ve decided to make the bucket list a tradition. Last year I worked my ass off to give Nolan the Valentine’s Day of his dreams, this year he’s determined to do the same for me.

If I’m honest, just having him as my omega is making all my dreams come true. Though he wouldn’t take that as an answer. So I sat down and made a list of my own. Going back to the hibachi place was on the list, and that just so happens to be where we’re going now.

“Wait, wait,” I blurt out, grabbing Nolan’s wrist to stop him. “What about the third thing on my list? What about that?”

Nolan’s face pinkens as he looks over his shoulder with a glare. “Get your ass in the truck,” he tells me seriously. “And if you’re a good alpha then I’ll check off number three tonight.”

I fist pump the air, making us both giggle. I’m looking forward to number three. And number one. And number seven. And every single list item the two of us come up with for years to come.

I grab Nolan’s hand, spinning him around so we’re chest to chest. I lean down and kiss his lips. “Just one more before we go,” I whisper with a soft smile. “I love you. Thank you for today.”

“I love you too,” he tells me, leaning up on his toes and stealing one more kiss before tugging me through the front door. We’re off to dinner and I can’t wait to see everything else my omega has planned for the night.

THE END



Looking for another fluffy holiday read?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toby Wise is a stay at home parent who hails from a tiny town in Wisconsin. Contrary to popular Wisconsin stereotypes, he's not a cheese-head who enjoys beer but rather an introvert who spends all his time on the internet, drinking coffee, spending time with his kid, and cooing about his adorable cat, Pikachu.

In April of 2019, A Collection of Strays was born after the world of fanfiction drew him back into his love of writing. Now he's writing all things omegaverse as long as it includes silly moments and found family.

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