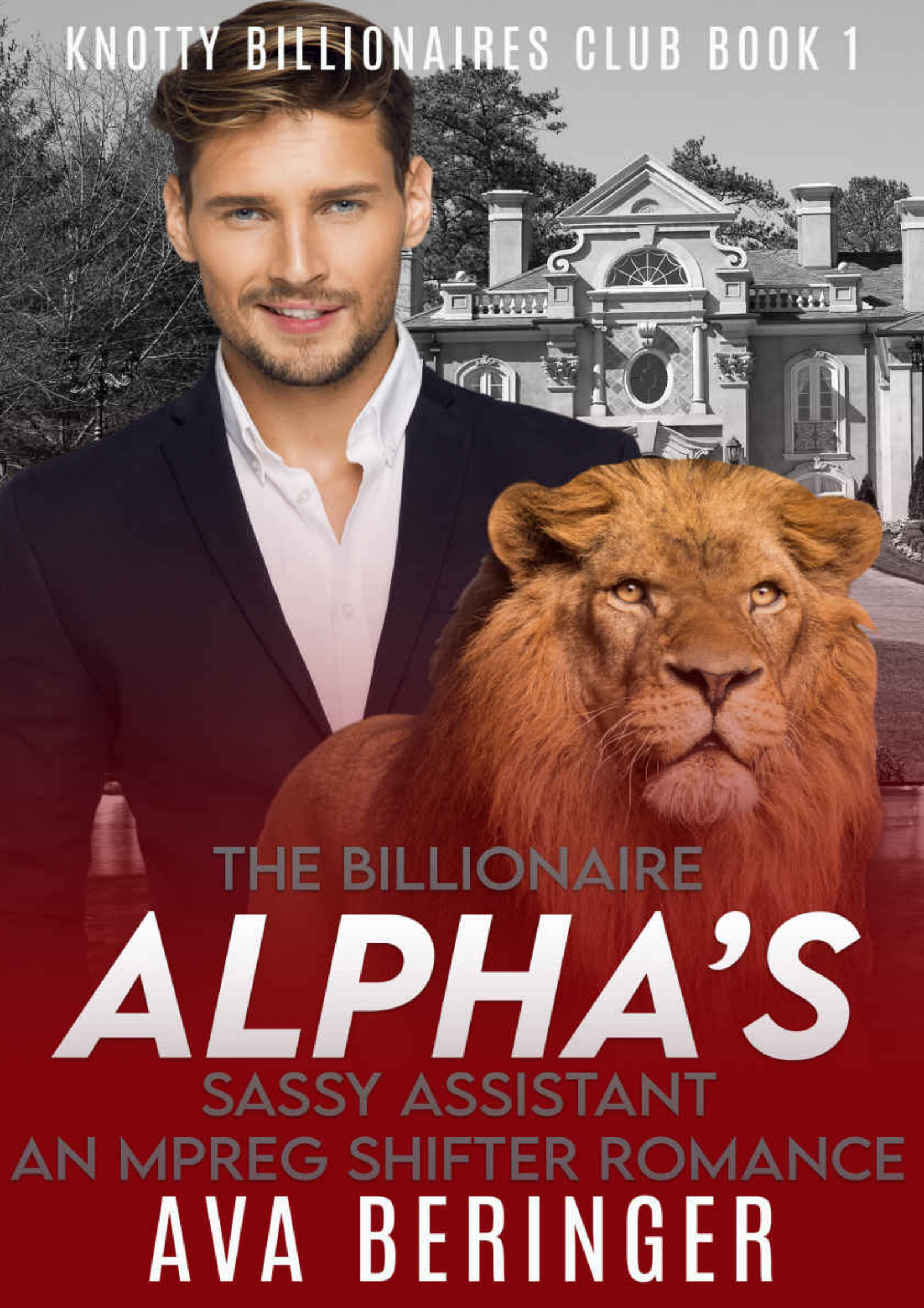


KNOTTY BILLIONAIRES CLUB BOOK 1



THE BILLIONAIRE

ALPHA'S

SASSY ASSISTANT

AN MPREG SHIFTER ROMANCE

AVA BERINGER

THE BILLIONAIRE ALPHA'S SASSY ASSISTANT

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KNOTTY BILLIONAIRES CLUB BOOK 1

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VICTOR

“WHERE THE HELL AM I GONNA FIND A NEW ASSISTANT THIS time?” I threw my huge paws up in frustration. The rest of the alphas around the massive oval oak table just stared at me.

“You mean you ran off another one?” asked Trevor, sitting to my right, smoothing his hands over his Hermés tie as he smiled in amusement. I slammed my paw down on the table, almost breaking it. I shifted my paw back into a human hand.

“It’s not funny, Trev, this is my third assistant this year.”

“Maybe try not being such a damn lion all the time. All that roaring is making them all run for the hills, Mr. King of the Jungle.” I was a lion shifter and I was never afraid to show it. As the CEO of a multi-billion dollar athletic shoe and apparel corporation, I needed to make sure my voice was heard at all times, even if people didn’t like the volume. If anyone decided they wanted to oppose me, then they’d see my actual lion come out.

“Forget about it,” said Richie, “The scotch is fantastic.” He poured a finger of the rich imported scotch into a crystal lowball glass and slid it across the table to me. I caught it with one hand and lifted it in one fluid motion, taking a sip. It was smooth, strong, and smoky.

Our billionaires' club had gotten together just to bullshit, as we did a couple times a month when our schedules allowed for it. It was an escape for all of us, to mastermind and sometimes just shoot the shit with a group of like-minded alphas with something in common; our money and power.

“What happened with that last omega, Trev?” asked Palmer, sipping his scotch and leaning back in his chair with a smug look.

“Omega number three-thousand five-hundred and six?” I asked, laughing.

“Something like that,” Trev replied, grinning devilishly. “She was alright. One of the ambitious ones. I could just see how badly she was itching to try and be my girlfriend, and then my wife.”

“Stick to the sugar babies, Trev. They're more your speed.”

“Yeah, at least they understand the game.”

I gave him a little shove. “Asshole.”

“What about you, Vic? Anything interesting on your radar?”

I shrugged, looking out of the floor-to-ceiling windows at all the other skyscrapers in the city of Mondello, California. “I have my share of interested omegas, and I have my fun, but I don't have the time nor interest in being an omeganizer. I have no desire for any of them to stick around long term at all. I have a company to run.”

“Someday, you'll realize that life's too short not to get your dick wet as much as humanly possible. We are filthy rich and powerful, after all. We deserve to live it up.”

“First of all,” said Brecken, the member of our club who was closest to being known as a “sensitive” person with “feelings,” “you’re disgusting. Second of all, we’re not all base animals like you.”

Trevor held his arms out wide. “Come on, man, yes you are. We all shift into something savage. We need to soothe our savage beasts.”

Richie laughed. “There’s no infusing any class into this idiot.”

“Someday,” said Brecken, “all of you are gonna meet that one omega that brings you to your knees. I’m gonna have a field day giving you shit.”

“Same’s gonna happen to you, Breck, and who’ll be laughing then?”

“Still me. I’m ready, unlike the rest of you filthy animals.”

Trevor raised his glass. “To our fated mates, the omegas who tame us, if indeed they do exist.”

“I’ll drink to that. Cheers.” We brought our drinks together in the middle of the table. The sentiment sounded okay, but I doubted I’d ever find an omega that held my interest for more than five minutes, let alone my fated mate to make me fall head over heels. That shit was for the movies.

We all ate our gourmet catered meal in Trevor’s sixtieth-floor conference room in his company’s skyscraper in downtown Mondello. We blustered and bullshitted for the next couple of hours, letting the scotch loosen us up. We were always busy, always on the go, so we played as hard as we worked.

When it was time to leave, we all clinked our glasses with one last sip of scotch and left the cleaning for someone else to

do. We had more important matters to attend to.

I got in the back of my Rolls-Royce, which was idling, waiting for me on the street in front of the building.

“Back to the office,” I snarled at my driver. I was still sour about my assistant situation.

His eyes were wide in the rearview mirror. “Right away, sir.”

Back in the office, employees had already heard about my foul mood and were scurrying this way and that, trying make sure their work was done, and trying to stay out of my way.

I called Sue, my office manager, into my office.

“Sir?” She asked meekly as she peeked in through the door.

I slammed my fist on my stately, polished-cedar desk. “I need a new assistant now. Right now.”

“Sir, we’re having a hard time getting new applicants from the temp agency. I think word is getting around-”

“What, that I’m a bear to work for?” Sue caught the joke and laughed a little. “Don’t they know how great I am when everybody’s doing what they’re supposed to?” That was true. I was gruff and short-tempered, but I took care of my people. The temp agency wasn’t just any company; they were the highest-end agency in the state, gathering up the world’s highest-quality talent in areas such as administration, supply chain, and manufacturing. At least, they were supposed to be. Lately, they’d been letting me down.

“I know that, sir. I know how fair and kind you are. It’s just...”

“Just what?”

“You never give anyone a chance. They make one mistake and you jump down their throats. Next thing you know they’re crying and running for the door, then you turn into an ogre and take it out on the rest of us.” She ducked a bit behind the door, waiting for me to shift into a savage beast and start roaring. Sue had been with me for a long time, though. I needed to listen to her opinion for once. I sat back in my luxe leather chair and stroked my clean-shaven skin, fresh with aftershave.

“Know what? You’re right, Sue. What we need is a someone with thick skin. Elephant hide.”

Sue winced. “That wasn’t exactly what I meant.”

“Latriiiiice!” I yelled. The head of my HR department, Latrice, bounded through my office door immediately, hands on her knees as she leaned forward and panted from running at top speed.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“We need to try a different tactic to find me the right assistant. I need somebody who’s talented, but also has gonads of steel. Somebody who can handle me.” Latrice and Sue exchanged a look, and I wondered if they were thinking this wasn’t the best way to go about finding someone new. Tough shit. They were wrong and I was right.

Latrice nodded. “I’ll get one right away, Sir.” The two of them backed out of my door, closing it quietly. The perfect applicant should walk in within the hour.

Forty-five minutes later, Sue and Latrice were back.

“We found an executive assistant willing to try the job, Sir. They assured us that he’s the best. They also assured us that, uh,” Latrice gulped, “That he’s the toughest they have.”

“What are you waiting for? Send them in.” Sue held the door open and waved her hand to get the person to come forward.

Into my office walked the tiniest little omega, with the biggest possible attitude. His chin was in the air and he looked me right in the eye. His defiant stare went straight to my groin.

I leaned forward, resting my elbows on my desk, interlacing my fingers. I looked him up and down, meaning to intimidate him, but I couldn't stop myself from taking in the silhouette of his body.

“Who are you?”

“I'm Bobby. Who are *you*?” He was short, he was femme, and he wasn't having any of my bullshit. Sue and Latrice noticed the look on my face.

“We'll just leave you both to it,” Latrice said, and the both of them scampered out of there.

I leaned forward a little more. “I'm your new boss, so you're gonna want to get that through your head right now.”

He made a point of looking me up and down slowly, too. “Noted.”

“You're to get to work right away. I have a log of what I'm doing every fifteen minutes of my workday. Your first task is to prepare a report with spreadsheets and charts showing how I spend my time, and making suggestions for more efficiency. Got it?”

“Got it.” He was still standing there when I was done explaining, an expectant look on his face.

I rolled my eyes. “Well? What are you waiting for, pig shifters to fly? I thought they told me you were the best, yet

here you are, looking clueless. Am I gonna have to tell you every little thing? Hold your hand? You won't last long here if I do, you know that, right? Get to work." I waved a hand, but he was still standing there, staring a hole into me, completely unimpressed. His intense gaze was unnerving, and I was never unnerved. It also made me horny.

Bobby threw out a hip and tilted his head. "How can I file the report if you haven't given me the data?"

He had me there. I tried to bluff, though. "What is this, nineteen ninety-nine? Are you waiting for a hard copy, because we don't do those in the new millennium."

A little half-smile quirked on his face. "Noooo, I'm waiting for computer access. I'm not even set up in the system yet."

Shit. He kept beating me to the punch. I took a deep breath, trying to settle myself now that this sassy little omega had come to flip my world on its head. I did ask for somebody with thick skin.

"I'll send it to you, and Latrice will get you set up. Any more questions?"

"Nope." He still wasn't moving.

I cocked an eyebrow at him. "What is it now?"

"You know, it wouldn't kill you to apologize. It's what grownups do."

"Apologize for what?" I blustered. "I'm the boss here."

He used a measured, but cheeky voice. "And I'm the employee, but I still deserve respect." That shut me up. How did he have my number already? How did he have so much

control here? I finally looked away, toward the ceiling. It was the closest I could come to relenting.

“Respect for you. Yeah, sure, why not.”

He rolled his eyes, chuckling. “Close enough, I suppose.” I narrowed my eyes at him. He wasn’t intimidated. He wagged his head back at me. *I should fire him right now, coming in here with this kind of insubordination.* I didn’t, though. I couldn’t. This little omega had me by the tail and I knew it. He was just what I needed, the right one to handle me. My lion paced and growled within me. I wanted him to *handle* me in so many other ways. I was sure that he could.

Keep it together, Mr. Ruler of the Pride. No dipping in the company ink. You need Bobby to be your assistant for a long time.

“Since you’re supposed to be the best, prove it.” I rattled off a long list of things I wanted him to do, much more than one assistant should be able to handle. He watched me and the concentration was plain in his eyes as he took it all in. There was no fear or apprehension there, though. “Aren’t you gonna write all that down?”

“Don’t have to. It’s up here.” He tapped his temple.

I sat back in my chair, interlacing my fingers and folding them over my abs. “We’ll see.”

“What else?”

“Isn’t that enough?”

“I can handle more. Much more.” The little joker had to be kidding me, challenging me with those sharp, sensual brown eyes. I’d give him all he could handle and much more. He had no idea, but he was about to find out. I was gonna show him. *Do you mean here in the office or in your bedroom, Vic? My*

lion rumbled deep in its throat. *Either one. Both. In any position he wants.*

“Oh, yeah? In that case...” Since he wanted to be a showboat, I piled on more work than I figured he could handle in a week.

“I’ll have it on your desk by the end of the day. I’ll get started now, and you just let me know if you need anything.” Almost as an afterthought he added, “Boss.” He threw a saucy look over his shoulder as he crossed through my office, and through the door that connected to his.

“Shut the door behind you,” I said, just to feel like I still had some control of the situation. He winked and shut it with a little *click*.

I would never admit it, but I snatched my desk phone off the receiver and hit the speed dial button for Latrice.

She sounded breathless when she answered the phone, as if maybe she’d run to pick it up. “Sir?”

“Hire him on permanently. Give him whatever he wants.” This little firecracker wasn’t afraid of anything, and I liked that. He was strong enough to stand by my side. God, he just so happened to be a stunner. Yeah, I wanted him around for a long time.

Little did I know those feelings for Bobby were about to grow into something I never could have imagined.

BOBBY

THE SALARY THEY OFFERED ME BLEW MY MIND. IT WAS WAY more than an executive assistant earned, even for my level of experience and expertise. I technically didn't deserve it. I wasn't about to tell them that, though. The temp agency had had a hard time placing me, because despite my impeccable credentials and shining personality, I didn't play well with others when they tried to treat me like I was less. The goat in me would come out immediately.

Victor had tried to do the same thing, but it was different. First of all, Victor was a stupid-hot lion shifter. Under different circumstances, such as private ones behind closed doors, he could order me around all night if he wanted to.

Second of all, he obviously liked that I didn't back down. Otherwise, he would have booted my ass out the door instead of offering me everything I ever wanted from a job.

Right after our little first meeting-slash-altercation, I walked through the door to my own office kicking myself.

“You just got yourself fired from job number four this year already,” I hissed into the open air. The office attached to his was huge, as big as some people's apartments, with a breathtaking view of downtown. “I better enjoy it for the five minutes I'm here.”

But then, in through the door rushed Sue and Latrice.

Sue grabbed my shoulder and hustled me in behind my desk, turning on my desktop. “We need to get you set up in the system right away, Bobby.”

Latrice let a manila folder drop on my desk with a *slap*. “Here’s your offer letter. We need you to have a look at it and sign it. It’s generous, not only with pay but with benefits as well, so you won’t be needing to make a counter.” They were both all business when not in front of the boss, and almost as scary as he was. That explained why he kept them around.

The stubborn goat in me shined through as I picked up the manila folder. “Just a second, please. I actually do need to review-” My voice got stuck in my throat when I saw the number on the page. It was so big it made my eyes cross. “Nope,” I said in a choked, reedy voice, “no arguments here. Where do I sign?”

Thirty minutes later, Sue gave a final tap on my keyboard. “And that’s a crash course on the system. Call the office assistant with your lunch order. Whatever you want, it’s their job to get it for you. If you need research done or an errand run, call up an intern and they’ll do whatever you want asap. Your duty is to be available to the boss at all times. You are essentially at his beck and call, got it?” I unintentionally screwed my face up. My goat stubbornness didn’t like the sound of that, unless it was for some sort of French maid scenario. Ooh, now I’m getting ideas.

Sue noticed the look on my face and an amused and somewhat gentle smirk crossed hers. “You don’t like the idea of him being disrespectful or rude to you, I get it. That’s why he likes you.” Likes me? A flush ran through my whole body and settled low in my belly. “He’s gonna snap and snarl a

little, that's just part of the job. He's a good guy underneath all that roaring, though. You'll see." She straightened up and gave me a playfully stern look. "And you will see, because I'm not finding him another assistant. You better stick around, understand?"

"Yes, Ma'am." I gave her a mock salute and she chuckled. Maybe, just maybe, I'd start to like it around here.

"Maybe I spoke too soon," I muttered to myself, as my second week at the office began. We were in the middle of a merger, as our company absorbed a smaller, but still massive, athletic apparel company.

Deadlines had Victor on edge. Everybody in the office scurried around even more than usual, terrified that they'd get caught under his big paws. Despite it all, I was finding Victor to be a fair boss who looked after his employees. His roar could be as bad as his bite, but when you did what he wanted you to do, you were rewarded. It made it easy to respect him, even if we did bump heads all the time.

"Bobbyyyyyy!" He yelled through the office door.

I hopped up from my desk and jogged over, standing in the doorway. I made a show of clicking my heels together and straightening up my back.

"Yes, sir, ready for my marching orders, sir." Victor narrowed his eyes at me, not sure if he wanted to bite my head off for being so obviously sarcastic, or laugh from the playfulness of it all. There was another aspect to his stare that was always there. An up-and-down sweeping of my body, in barely-veiled appreciation. I let him look. It wasn't in my nature to shy away, especially when I was being admired the way I should be. The look in Victor's eyes was full of possessiveness, a blinking neon sign with one word; *mine*.

To my surprise, that overwhelmed me. I dropped my gaze then, unsure of what the feeling was racing through me. It seemed like so much more than intense lust. It felt like, maybe possibly, there could be love.

Victor looked away from me, typing on his computer. “We need to figure out how many of the employees from the other company we’re going to give the axe.”

“Report time?”

“Report time.”

“Tell me what stats you want highlighted and it’s done.” He rattled off a list to me, and I made a checklist in my head with my eidetic memory.

“That’s all.” He waved a huge hand at me, never looking up from his computer. “Go.” I wasn’t quite ready to go yet. Maybe I was overstepping with the thought in my head, but I couldn’t quite let it go.

“About the people you’re thinking about firing.”

His head jerked up, and he was scowling, his irritation plain. “What about them?”

“They have families, Victor.”

His irritation escalated to anger, and his voice raised accordingly. “What do you expect me to do, go broke for these people?” I lowered my chin and gave him a look, lightly and playfully scolding him. After a few seconds of trying to keep his face hard, Victor threw up his hands. “Fine. We’ll try to retain as many as realistically possible, and those we can’t they’ll get a severance package that’s more than fair. Is that okay with you, Bobby?”

I smiled from ear-to-ear. “Thank you for doing the right thing, Boss Lion.”

He snarled something under his breath. It sounded like, “Damn, love it when you call me that.”

“Excuse me?” I asked politely, wondering if I’d heard correctly. The slight chub in my pants told me I had. I took a mental note to call him that more often.

“Don’t worry about it.” He waved a hand dismissively. “About this whole layoff thing. If I don’t do what you ask, I feel like you’re gonna try to kick my ass.”

I took another step into his office, flirting, teasing. “Try?”

That *almost* made a grin cross his sour face. “Yeah, *try*. No way you can win.”

I raised a saucy eyebrow. “You don’t know me very well, Vic, but you will.”

“Vic?” He raised an eyebrow himself. Maybe I had overstepped, but he didn’t seem to mind. Instead, a hint of alpha pheromones floated on the air.

Flustered, I tried to recover. “Um, sorry, I didn’t mean-”

He cut me off. “You’re plucky. I like that. Just watch yourself, or you’ll get in big trouble with me. Got it?” The alpha lion was intimidating, and as plucky as I was, it was hard not to shake a little bit from his power. Still, there was something in his tone, some hidden intention that made my knees slam together, trying to hide how much he turned me on. Should I push it a little further, see what getting in trouble with him really looked like? *You need your job, Bobby. Behave, for once.*

“Got it,” I squeaked. I scurried back to my office, scared and horny, a combination I never knew I’d be so into.

There were some things I had little experience with or didn’t know, and I had bluffed a bit to get the job, but I was still damn good at what I did, and I was gonna show Mufasa what “executive assistant” really meant. I set to work putting together a series of reports. There were over a thousand employees in the smaller company, from factory workers to top executives, including their own CEO. What were the most important factors in showing the efficiency and value of an employee, relative to what they were being paid? I came up with a dozen factors and began to plug in the numbers. If I did my best to make the employees from the other company look as valuable as possible, well, that was my little secret.

As the day wore on, Victor got more testy and less flirty. We were behind, and it looked like we weren’t going to meet our deadlines to finalize the merger if we didn’t figure something else out, and *now*. Every five minutes, he was roaring my name, and not in a fun way, and I was jumping up to run into his office and see what he needed.

“Bobby, I need their CEO’s proposal for the merger in a hard copy, now.”

“Bobby, call Supply chain and see how they’re proposing to handle the seventy-five percent increase in output.”

“Bobby, get international on the line so we can get the ball rolling on distribution in Canada.” The original reports he’d given me fell lower and lower down the priority list.

I had people running around like crazy to help me, too. There was a little button on the desk for me to summon the interns. If they worked their asses off, they might get permanent positions at the company. They might be able to

work their way up and become high-level executives, given enough time. However, I belonged to the boss. None of them were more important than me.

I belong to the boss? I need to stop thinking that way. Of course I wanted to be underneath him, getting owned hard and fast, but it was a drive I needed to ignore. So was that voice that kept saying mine, over and over again. I didn't stop for lunch. Instead, I ate a bag of chips. Then I ate the bag.

I worked frantically, but relatively peacefully, until the roar broke the silence.

“Bobbyyyyyyy!” I was in big trouble.

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BOBBY

THE END OF THE DAY WAS FAST APPROACHING, BUT THE END OF the work was not. Through the doorway, a fearsome rumble began, starting with a shaking in my toes and upward through the rest of my body. Another moment to be horny and scared at the same time.

“Bobbyyyyyyyyy!” That lion growl shook my chest like I was at a metal concert. I was a forward-thinking modern omega, so I had no problem saying I wanted to hear it rumbling in my ear, preferably from behind while he mounted me. *Stay cool, Bobby. Tamp all those feelings down. Time to be a professional.*

“Yes, Dear. What pressing issue might there be now?” He gave me a quick sideways glance that told me he didn’t appreciate my sass right now. I huffed and crossed my arms over my chest. “Okay, fine, what’s going on?”

Victor slowly stood up behind his desk. His face was both regal like the lion he was, and grave like our situation. He rounded the desk and came to stand in front of me. So close, I had to crane my neck to look at him and hold my breath to keep from getting aroused by the scent of him. I only came up to Vic’s chest and he was broad, probably as wide as two of me.

“The reports,” his deep voice boomed.

I fired back immediately. “Not done.”

His voice dropped an octave, his anger simmering just beneath the surface. “Excuse me?”

I held firm. “Listen, I’m Superomega, but even I couldn’t get to the reports with all the work you needed me to do.”

He banged his fist into his palm with a *smack*. “I need those reports done tonight.”

I shrugged. “No problem. I’m ready for an overnighter. I’ll come work right next to you until we’re done, Boss Lion.”

He nodded, a glint of something feral and sexy in his eyes. “Fine then.”

“You know,” I said, raising my chin and leaning in close, “all you had to do was ask. I was planning to stay anyway.”

That disarmed him. “Oh. Well,” he huffed, “it’s your job. That’s why I pay you that exorbitant salary.”

“Yes, but I’ll tell you a little trade secret. C’mere, c’mere.” I waved him down to my level. Confused and curious, he bent over at the waist so I could whisper in his ear. *Take me right now on top of your desk*, my brain said. *I’m yours and you’re mine*. What I said instead was, “I’m only staying because I love my job and my coworkers, and want what’s best for the company. And because I care about *you*. Not because of some silly job duties you typed on a piece of paper. Got it?” There, I just said it out loud. I cared about Victor.

“Oh,” he said again, surprise and softness in his voice. It took him a second to gather himself, smoothing down his tie and clearing his throat. “Thanks, Bobby.”

“Think nothing of it.” I gathered myself together, too, straightening the lapels on my pink blazer, accidentally mirroring my alpha. I mean, my *boss*. “Maybe other people around here are intimidated by you, but if you don’t straighten up and fly right, I’ll show you how stubborn a goat can be. Might even give you a bonk with my horns.” I playfully head-butted his huge bicep. For the first time in maybe a week, Victor cracked a smile.

“What do you want for dinner?”

“Are you springing for it, Mister Lion Man?”

“Least I can do. It’s nice to have you here.” He cleared his throat again. “It’s helpful, I mean. Whatever you want. Have you tried Cava’s?” The most expensive place in town? Hell, no, I hadn’t tried Cava’s. I wasn’t gonna tell him that, though.

“I’d love to have some tonight. What’s your favorite thing on the menu?”

“You can never go wrong with their surf and turf.” For somebody who used to eat a lot of ramen, that was music to my ears.

“Two of those, then.”

He squinted. “I didn’t say I wanted surf and turf.”

“I know. They’re both for me.” Victor burst out laughing, and what a sight it was, the laugh coming deep from his strapping chest as he tossed back his golden, medium-length mane. What an alpha.

We worked diligently, even as the moon rose in the sky and other exhausted employees stumbled out of the office like the undead. The surf and turf was to die for, and tasted even better with the rent-payment-expensive bottle of wine Vic opened for us, and it tasted even *better* because I hadn’t spent

a dime. We laughed and joked and flirted shamelessly as we worked, caring less and less about propriety. If I didn't know any better, I would have thought we were on a date.

With the food all gone, I picked up the box and took a big bite. Mmm. Cardboard, sliced thin, just how I liked it.

Victor looked at me in alarm. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Having dessert after dessert, thank you very much." He burst out laughing, and after such an intense and serious night, it filled my heart with happiness to see him so free, and to know that I made him laugh like that.

"That's disgusting."

"That's the goat life, baby."

Victor shook his head as he chuckled. "Next time I'll just grab you one of the boxes out of the recycling bin. It'll save me a whole lot of time."

"Oh, no you don't. I want more surf and turf for my all-nighters. The boxes are just a bonus."

"Okay, you win. We'll stick with the fancy dinners for all-nighters. Whatever the hell your little heart desires, you keep working like this you'll get it. If your goat heart desires styrofoam, too, you'll get that. I just won't watch the carnage."

I licked my lips at the thought. "Yum, I haven't had styrofoam in a while."

Vic smiled fondly. "That's it, you have to go home."

"No problem. I have a tarp at home."

Vic's eyes bugged out of his head. "To eat?"

“Sure, after I’m done covering stuff with it. It’s gotta go somewhere. Better than some damn landfill. I can recycle it naturally.” Vic’s laughter came out like a tropical storm, fast and wild and lush. It made me want to make him mine. MINE.

Am I crazy, or is this my fated mate? Yep, you’re definitely crazy, Bobby. Even if he was, do you think that would mean anything to him? Do you think he’d stoop so low as to bond with his lowly assistant? Normally, I was a person bursting with confidence. However, with this subject, being fated mates with Victor and actually *being* with him, seen as his romantic partner and equal? It seemed like a pipe dream, no matter how badly I was coming to ache for it. Besides, even if he ever decided he wanted me in his bed, could he ever truly see me as someone on the same level as him? He was a billionaire. I doubted it.

“As much fun as all *this* has been,” I gestured to all the papers, electronic devices, and empty food packaging I hadn’t eaten, “I really do have to go home.” Victor dropped his eyes and nodded. He looked disappointed, which I wasn’t expecting.

“Well...thank you. For all your help and hard work tonight.”

It was sweet and sincere and caught me off guard. It made my heart a little soft. “You’re welcome. I was happy to do it,” I replied, just as genuine.

“It’s late. Dark outside.”

“I’m a big goat, I can take care of myself.”

He looked me up and down, his eyes twinkling with amusement. “I think you might wanna rephrase that.”

“Fine,” I huffed playfully, putting my hands on my hips. “I’m tiny, but I’m an adult goat. With horns. Okay?”

He ignored my independent-goat act. “Where’s your car? I’ll walk you to it.”

“I don’t have a car. This is California, and I’m saving up because I’d like to own my own home before I turn eighty.” That got a half-smile out of him. It was genuine, and it was sexy, and dammit, it was caring.

“I’ll get you home, then.”

I wasn’t about to argue. “If you insist.”

He held up a finger. “Let me call my driver.”

Duh. How could I forget how rich he was? We never left at the same time so I never saw how he got home. Sometimes I wondered if he lived at the office, since his ass was always glued to his desk chair. But of course, once he was done, he rested in the lap of luxury. I was getting a taste by proximity.

We went downstairs and stood in front of the building, under the yellow glow of the streetlight, me next to the mountain of an alpha trying to keep up my usual air of sassy untouchable-ness while he just stood there with his hands in his suit pockets looking regal and unbothered.

His car glided to an easy stop in front of us and his driver hustled over to open the door for us. The inside of the purple Rolls-Royce was plush, with buttery leather in an even deeper purple and every trick and amenity known to man. Victor chuckled as I raided the mini-fridge, taking some bottled water that probably cost twenty bucks a pop, plus some soda and some, ahem, adult beverages.

I sipped from a bottle of mini Macallan that probably cost a thousand bucks all by itself, enjoying the spiciness and slight

burn in my throat, my limbs turning into jelly as I became one with the custom leather. Victor lifted an amused eyebrow.

“I need it after the night we had tonight,” I said. He just smiled.

My ears burned with embarrassment as his Rolls pulled up in front of my apartment building. I was doing well for myself, but it was still peanuts compared to the ridiculous number of zeroes in his bank account. Victor didn't blink an eye. It didn't seem to matter to him, which I appreciated.

He rested a heavy hand on my shoulder. I was disappointed when he took it away. “Get your track shoes on for tomorrow. We'll be right back at it, just as hard.” A few hours of sleep, then it was right back to work. I found I was looking forward to it, if it meant I got to work that closely with Victor again. Oh, and more Cava and rides in Rolls-Royces wouldn't hurt, either.

The driver opened my door and I stuck one foot out. “No problem, Boss Lion.” I decided to call him that every chance I got. “If you want somebody to annoy the whole time you're working late, all you have to do is ask. I don't mind.”

“You sure have a lot of gall, you know that?” His eyes twinkled with amusement.

I stepped completely out of the Rolls, then leaned down to wink at him. “I'm a goat, that's all we are is gall.”

“Just remember that I'm the king of the jungle.”

“Oh, we're going to rid you of that notion, and soon.” When I strutted out of his car, putting a switch in my walk as I headed up my walkway to my door, I could have sworn I saw him smile.

VICTOR

“BOBBY, I NEED THAT REPORT ON MY DESK BY THREE.” THERE was no response. “Bobby.” Nothing. “Bobby?” I growled. I looked up and he was in my doorway, huffing on his nails and buffing them on his cardigan. “Why aren’t you answering me? Why aren’t you doing what I asked you to do?”

He shot me a sly little grin that I felt all the way down to my cock. “Waiting for the magic word.”

I flattened my voice and my eyebrows. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Serious as a snowstorm.” I shifted my teeth in frustration, and part of my mane grew in long, blond strands around my neck, flowing down to my chest. Bobby kept examining his nails. “Oh, you don’t scare me, Mister Pride Male. The only thing standing between you and everything you want is one simple ‘please.’”

A part of me thought, *how dare he? I’m the boss and he’s the subordinate, he does what I say without questioning it.* A second part of me thought, *he’s not questioning me at all. He wants a little common courtesy. I’m not generous with that, but maybe this time I should be.* A third part of me thought, *I want to kiss that sassy mouth and rip those clothes right off, show*

him who's boss. I'm so turned on I want to have my way with him, right here on top of my desk. Screw the reports, literally.

I fixed him with a mock glare and flattened my eyebrows. "Please." My tone was flat and bored, but he still gloated, grinning to himself.

"Now, how hard was that?"

I put a little heat into the look this time, a little suggestiveness. "Seems like you want me to beg."

"I live to make you beg, Boss Lion." We flirted all the time now. I was a rich, powerful alpha, so I knew when an omega was flirting with me, and I knew how to do something about it.

This time though, with Bobby, things were different. From his scent it was obvious he was special, and it was obvious that he'd been made with me in mind. He was my fated mate, and while it had taken me a while to figure it out because I had my head up my ass only thinking about work and trying to make him do what I said, I was fully aware now. I was going to do something about it.

For the first time in forever, nervousness and insecurity crept over my skin. I had a mental argument with myself over how to go about telling Bobby how I felt. *What if he says no? He won't say no, Victor, you're you. Yeah, but he's also him. Good point. Still, are you gonna be a cowardly lion and not tell him how you feel? Hell, no. I'm no coward and never will be.* We worked in perfect tandem now, and I was falling in love and not afraid to admit it. So it was time to make my move.

"I need your help with something while you're here."

"Name it." I downed the rest of the Coke I was drinking and set the can on my desk, preparing to sweep it into

recycling. “You done with that?” Bobby asked with hungry eyes.

“Yeah, why, do you want it?” He simply plucked it off my desk, opened his mouth, and bit down on the top half.

I flinched. “Are you crazy? That’s a soda can.”

He pointed at himself, gnawing on the aluminum. “I’m a goat.” He pointed to the mangled, shredded can, “and this is delicious. Gonna eat the whole thing. ” After a moment of me staring at him in horror, he broke out into a sly grin. “Just kidding. We can’t eat cans, it’s an old wives’ tale. We do chew on them sometimes when we’re being idiots, though.”

I tried to wrap my brain around it all. “So you can’t eat tin cans, but you will chew on them.”

He furrowed his brow thoughtfully. “Mm-hmm. Cool texture. Great taste.”

“This is insane.” I laughed out loud. That was something I didn’t get to do much of, but it seemed like I was always laughing at something Bobby said or did lately.

I was nervous, which was something that almost never happened. *You’re the king of the jungle, Victor. You’re about to claim your mate and make him your queen, or other king, or however he chose to identify. It doesn’t matter, as long as he’s by your side.*

I held out a hand to indicate the seats across from my desk. “Bobby, we need to talk.”

Bobby hesitated. “Am I fired? I swear, I didn’t even steal that much printer ink!”

“You stole printer ink?”

His eyes went wide and he let out a nervous laugh, waving a hand like I was talking crazy. “Pfft! No, I didn’t steal any printer ink. Who said anything about stealing printer ink?” Again, he made me laugh. Once I pulled myself together again, I got back on task.

“Never mind that.” I flicked the thought away with a hand. “We’ve got more important matters to discuss.”

“Well, if I’m not fired, then I’ll come and sit. I’m ready to take notes. What do you need, Boss Lion Man?”

“I need you to set up a hotel stay in Big Sur.”

Bobby gushed over it. “Oh my god, Big Sur? I haven’t had a chance to get there, but I hear it’s gorgeous.”

“It is,” I assured him.

“Got a place in mind?” He came around my desk and helped himself to the arm of my chair, sitting and leaning close to my computer screen. Having him so close we were practically touching made my pants tight. If everything went according to plan, I’d be able to touch him whenever I wanted, however I wanted, very soon.

“Escapade Ranch. Whatever the best suite is.” Bobby’s thumb tapped on the screen as he scrolled through the available options.

“The best suites are entire mansions, built into the mountain overlooking the sea.”

“That’s what I want. What do you think?”

He blinked at me, confused. “Is this for work?”

“Nope.”

“Oh.” His voice went quieter. “It looks like a place for a romantic getaway.”

“That’s what it is.” I tucked my thumbs in my belt loops, grinning like an idiot.

He swallowed hard, his Adam’s Apple taking a big dip. “So, um, how many should I book for?”

“Two, of course. It *is* a romantic getaway, after all.” Bobby looked more and more pained as he prepared to set up the reservation. He still didn’t get it.

“So.” He sat up straight and put his balled up fists on his hips. “Who’s the next floozy you’re about to wine, dine, and leave behind?”

This was too easy. “You calling yourself a floozy?”

“Am I...? You better watch out there, Mister. You mess with the goat, you get the horns. I’m no floo- wait a second.”

I pressed my lips together to hide my smile, but it didn’t work. “You might need more than a second.”

Bobby pointed to himself. “Are you saying that I’m the floozy? The one who gets wined, dined, and left behind?”

I rested a big paw on his slim shoulder. “Not if you don’t wanna be.”

“What does that mean, then? That I get to be the date who gets wined, dined, and... held on to?” His sweet brown eyes looked up at me with vulnerability and hope.

“That’s right. Forever, if you want to. You’re my fated mate.”

He nodded, biting his lip. “I am your fated mate.”

“Ah, you feel it, too.”

“Obviously. I just didn’t have a way to say anything.” I moved closer to him, wrapping my arms around his petite little waist and pinching a little, making him squeak like he was a mouse instead of a goat.

“You have a way to say everything else. Literally.”

He giggled. “Oh, please, Boss Lion.”

“Love it when you call me that.” I pulled him close. He came with a smile. I leaned forward slowly, making him wait for it, even though the agony was killing me, too. Finally, our lips met. I stood up out of my chair so we could be chest-to-chest. Bobby wrapped his arms around my neck, standing on his tiptoes to kiss me deeper, and his nipples were so hard I felt them through both his shirt and mine. I deepened the kiss, sipping like a fine wine. He tasted sweet, savory, and, well, a little like aluminum. I chuckled.

“What are you laughing at?” He asked, barely taking his mouth away from mine. I couldn’t resist. I kissed him some more before answering.

“I just love that you’re a plucky, feisty goat.”

“Good, then this is the perfect time to lay out my demands. I want Moët and strawberries on ice when we get there. There better be a huge soaking tub overlooking the ocean.” He leaned over to scroll through the pictures. “There is. You might lose me in there and have to go on without me.”

“What if I was to join you?”

Bobby’s eyes darted back and forth as he looked into mine. “When are we going?”

“Today. Pack yourself a bag. You won’t need much, though, and if you do I’ll buy it.”

Bobby playfully shivered. “The magic words, ‘I’ll buy it.’” He set his iPad down on my desk and stood up, gazing at me with so much love in his eyes I couldn’t stand it. I was used to sass, or annoyance, but never naked, raw affection and romance. He gave me a big, loud smack on the lips and then pulled back, ready to get moving. “Let’s go. I want you to show me why you’re king of the jungle.”

“Oh, I will. I will.”

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BOBBY

MY EYES BUGGED OUT AS WE PULLED UP TO OUR DESTINATION, the engine of our vehicle perfectly silent.

“I can’t believe they call *this* a hotel.” Our driver grabbed our door and we stepped out of the cushy convertible, which Victor had waiting for us when his private jet brought us to the local airport in Big Sur.

“Yup, that’s what it is.” Victor nodded, taking my hand as he led me up to the door. He carried my handbag, while the driver and concierge gathered everything else together.

“So nice not to have to lift a finger.”

“You never have to lift a finger when you’re with me, Bobby,” Victor said in his sexy, growly voice, his thumb stroking the back of my hand. “I promise.” I swooned as I walked beside him. Was this really happening to little old me?

“I’m gonna hold you to that, Mister.”

He smiled down at me. “Please do.” The concierge opened the door for us, a giant smile on his face like he was the one vacationing here.

“I’d like to welcome both you and your mate, Sir. We’ll get you checked in and acquainted with the space and all of the luxury amenities and services available to make sure this is

the absolute best trip of your life. Please come in.” He held a hand out. “We strive to provide you with the utmost-” I didn’t hear whatever else he said. I walked in and my jaw dropped. There was Italian marble everywhere. The ceilings soared. The entire western wall was glass, the ocean waving at us in all its glory. There was more glass when I looked to the right and left, and the view of the cliff face running north and south, seagulls circling overhead, made for the perfect panoramic view. Was this what it was like to be a billionaire’s mate?

I walked to the kitchen and ran a finger over the cool, glossy marble countertops as the concierge looked on in satisfaction.

“I could get used to this,” I murmured, admiring the veins of gold running through the marble.

Vic chuckled. “That’s the plan, Bobby.”

The concierge swept us through the dazzling place, telling me about features I’d never ever heard of in my life.

“The bathroom floors are heated, there are fifteen jets in the whirlpool soaking tub overlooking the ocean, and the shower has a dozen nozzles for a rainfall shower, with a dozen different massage settings.”

I squealed, clinging to Victor’s arm. “I can’t wait to get into that tub! What else is there in this joint?”

“Your penthouse has six bedrooms-”

“Six?” I asked in disbelief. “I’m gonna go lay in every single bed just because I can.”

I expected Victor to be embarrassed, but instead he just laughed. “That’s what it’s all about, doing things just because you can.”

The concierge waved us forward. “There’s still the master bedroom to show you.”

I gasped when we walked in. “It’s bigger than my apartment.” There was a four-poster, California king bed, draped with dreamy white curtains. They fluttered in the breeze that came through the door to the huge balcony overlooking the water, and of course, that wall was all glass as well. Pink and red rose petals dotted the floor and the sheets, and in a shiny silver container were two bottles of Moët on ice, along with chocolate covered strawberries.

The concierge actually bent at the waist in a little bow. “We carry only the best of any sort of spirit you may desire. Fifty-year-old, barrel-aged whiskies, imported scotch...” I lost him again, because I was imagining all the things I wanted to do to my alpha on this very bed after we drank this very champagne. I gazed at Victor, my eyes hooded with love, yes, love, because I was in love with my alpha mate and I wasn’t going to bother denying it. There was also desire, open and obvious and intense. Victor returned my gaze, his smug feline eyes promising to satisfy my every need.

The concierge was excellent at his job, and he knew when to make himself scarce. “I’ll leave you lovebirds to it, but the second you need anything, give me a call or shoot me a message and it’ll be done in an instant.”

“Thank you so much.” My eyes were on the champagne. “Let’s pop that open right now.” Vic opened the bottle with the satisfying pop from the movies. I jumped a mile and giggled as white foam sprayed out of the top, flowing over Vic’s fingers and splattering on the marble floor. It was so nice to know I could have fun like that, but didn’t have to worry about cleaning it up.

Vic poured the golden, fizzing drink into two glasses for us and handed one to me. “A toast. To being with my fated mate.”

I raised my glass. “Yes, a toast to me.” Vic laughed again. We drank deep, and when Vic was done he put his glass back down on the end table. He pulled me into his arms and held me softly as he kissed me.

“We’re here and we finally have some privacy. What do you want to do?” He leaned back in for another kiss, making my toes curl. As tempted as I was to start the bedtime fun right away, I wanted to experience more of this vacation with my mate before we consummated our bond. *Look at me, being all sentimental for once.*

I pulled away and tapped Vic’s lips with a fingertip. “I have to experience this vacation a little bit first, and this mountainside right now.”

“What do you mean? We’re already experiencing it.”

“I mean I want to climb it. Actually, I *have* to climb it.”

“Climb it? With what equipment?”

I rolled my eyes, chuckling. “With my hooves, silly. As a goat.” He just sort of stood there, staring. I slapped lightly at his chest. “I wouldn’t expect you to get it, Mister Bumble Paws.”

“Bumble paws? I’ll show you bumble paws.” His hands gripped the back of my thighs, sliding up to cup my cheeks right at the bottom. He leaned down and kissed my neck.

My eyelids fluttered as the pleasure built, right at that point where his mouth touched me. “Okay, okay, okay, you’re gonna make me forget what I wanted to do.”

“Good. Forget about it all and focus on me.”

“I will, Honey, just gimme like, fifteen minutes to shut up my inner goat and a night on the town, then I’ll show you things you’ve never seen before.”

Reluctantly, he relented. “You better. Now, how exactly do you plan to explore the cliffside?”

“Like this.” I peeled off my clothes in preparation of shifting. I could have been more careful not to let Vic see parts of my naked human body before I changed over, but the body belonged to him now, whether it was in human form or not. I wanted him to see everything, and soon I would show him, deliberately, slowly, every secret edge and curve.

For now, I needed to hike this cliffside. I shifted into a goat and jumped onto the bedroom railing, balancing neatly on all four hooves. With a short hop, I landed on a little ledge on the cliff face. There was the slightest path worn into it. It was narrow. Only about three of me could walk side by side, and the drop was steep, but it was just fine for a goat like me. I took a few steps forward, then I heard a soft *whumph* behind me. I turned my head to see Vic, shifted into his lion form, stick the landing on the ledge gracefully, but wobble a little because of how narrow it was. He righted himself, then gave me the grumpiest of grumpy lion looks. I tilted my head and bleated in question. He let out a snarl that said, *you think I’d let you go alone?* It was so cute I thought I would explode. My mate was taking an interest in my interests.

It was too narrow for us to walk side by side, so Vic followed behind me, grumbling the whole time because lions had no stamina and he was tired. At one point, we reached an area on the cliff face that had lots of footholds for me and enough space for Vic to comfortably lie down. I frolicked

around, showing off my agility and strength, scaling up and down the steep wall, too dangerous for any other species, but perfect for me. The deep blue ocean and light blue sky, along with the crash of the waves and the smell of salt in the air, turned the moment into a dream. Add in my mate looking on, one paw folded over the other and his head resting on them, looking perturbed about the walk but proud of the way I moved, and it was heaven. *Maybe that's really where I am. Heaven*, I thought as I reared up and danced on my hind legs amongst the yellow and purple wildflowers clinging to the cliff.

Later that night, Victor took me to dinner in Carmel-by-the-Sea. This was where the real jetsetters came to blow their millions. There were Lamborghinis and Bentleys and more Rolls-Royces everywhere. After an extravagant dinner with every kind of fresh seafood imaginable, we hit the town to explore. Read: so I could go shopping!

I picked up every trinket, every little handbag, every article of clothing I saw, claiming everything I liked for myself. Whatever I wanted, I just handed over to the waiting store owner to ring up and it was mine. I didn't need half that shit, I bought it because I could. I'd never experienced that kind of freedom with money before, and it almost became a game to look at Vic with pleading eyes, and see whether or not he'd be willing to buy me this crystalline figure or that scarf or that purse for the exorbitant price on the tag. Every time, he just smiled and said, "if it makes you happy." It *did* make me happy. It wasn't just to be able to shop freely in a way I never had before, it was also the love behind it, coming from my fated mate and a damn good alpha.

With the shopping done, there was still just enough daylight to enjoy a California beach sunset. We took our shoes

off and let them hang from our fingertips as we strolled through the damp, sun-warmed sand. Vic wrapped his heavy, muscular arm around my shoulders, and I wrapped mine around his waist. Even though his strides were much bigger, we kept perfect pace.

After a long stretch of strolling, I turned behind us to see a trail of our footprints left in the sand, my prints much smaller, with much less space between them, while Vic's huge prints covered much more ground next to mine. The waves had faded or washed the prints away at certain points, but the trail extended for a long ways.

"Look, Vic." He turned, but never took his arm off my shoulder.

"Beautiful. Perfect, just like you." He looked down at me with a fond smile.

I pouted. "They're not perfect. The waves broke the chain."

"That's why they're perfect, because they're imperfect. They're representative of our journey together, you know?" He turned me to face him, gathering me up against his huge body with his huge arms. "I know our love story hasn't been a fairy tale, but it's been incredible and I wouldn't change a single thing. I never thought I'd find my fated mate. I thought the whole thing was a bowl of crap being spoon-fed to dreamers and fools. I never dreamt you'd be exactly what I never knew I needed. Now I get to cherish you forever. I'm the luckiest alpha in the world."

I ducked my head, letting it fall forward until my forehead rested on his chest. I was overtaken by the power of love surrounding both of us on that beach. It floated in the salty air,

it crashed on the beach in the waves, the birds sang about it in their calls. It was everywhere, especially inside Victor and I.

“I don’t know,” I murmured, “I feel like I’ve seen the ‘billionaire gets new assistant who’s so sassy he falls in love’ in plenty of Hallmark movies.” A deep rumble sounded in Victor’s chest as he chuckled. “I’m just glad that sassy assistant was me. I never thought I’d have this, either. Millions of omegas can only dream of what I have. I keep wondering if I’ll wake up and you’ll be gone.”

Victor lifted my chin with a finger, making me look up at him. “You’re awake, Bobby. I’m not going anywhere. You belong to me now.” He leaned down and kissed me. Our lips touched, just as the last few golden rays of the dying light illuminated us on the beach, casting our shadows a mile long over the sand. His hand dropped lower on my back until it rested right above the curve of my behind. Arousal surrounded me, just as strong as the love I felt surrounding me from the natural world. It was one with the love, an extension of it. Love and lust joining together, all for my man.

“Ready to go home?” Victor asked. I heard the unspoken question in his voice, and after the perfect day, yes, I was ready for my king to have me.

“Let’s go, Boss Lion.” He answered with a growl, easily lifting me off my feet. He ran across the sand, carrying me as I laughed out loud, ready for a wild night with my alpha.

BOBBY

THE SUN WAS DOWN WHEN WE GOT BACK TO THE RESORT. There was only the vast, calm darkness of the ocean, the constant soothing sound of the waves, the champagne, and the dreamy bed.

I kissed Victor again, long and hot, the moment we got inside the door. “Thank you for the perfect day, Victor.”

“There’s much more to come, Beautiful.”

“Like what, more mountain climbing?” I teased as he backed me toward the massive bedroom.

“I have to admit, that was pretty cool.”

“We goats are pretty talented.”

“You have a ton of talents, Bobby. I’m just wondering if they extend to the bedroom.”

“You bet your sweet ass they do.”

“Come show me.” We kissed our way over to the bed, Victor pulling me down on top of him.

I gave him one more kiss before I pulled back. “Wait, I need to freshen up first.”

Victor reached for a drawer in the bedside dresser. “While you’re in there, I got you a little gift. It’s up to you whether or

not you choose to wear it.” That made my eyebrows lift in surprise. An extra twinge of arousal flowed down, down, down, making me even wetter than before. What did my alpha have in store for me?

The rectangular box was pink and done up with a velvety red ribbon. Something sexy to wear? I was all for it. I snatched the box from his hands and took off for the bathroom.

I took a quick but luxurious shower and opened the beautiful box. Inside was a pink silk robe with frills at the sleeves and at the hem. The very short hem. As soon as I put it on, I knew how little it left to the imagination because of the cool air puckering my sphincter in the back, and in the front, the very tip of my cock, which could be seen peeking under the delicate, transparent hem. I shimmied my shoulders in the mirror. *I'm gonna knock Victor dead.*

Victor gasped when I walked out on my tiptoes.

“So? What do you think?” I did a little spin, causing the robe to flare out slightly, giving him an even better peek at what was underneath. I looked over at him and he didn’t say anything, just sat there staring at me with his mouth open. “Yup, that is the correct response.”

“I knew you’d take my breath away. I never imagined you’d look this damn good.”

“Should I leave it on?”

“I don’t know yet-” I untied the front and slowly opened it to reveal *everything*. “Okay, take it off, get it off.”

“Just a minute, don’t rush me.” I did a little dance, swaying my hips and turning circles, loving how I drove my alpha crazy.

Finally, he jumped up and grabbed me, carrying me to the bed. “Can’t wait anymore. Gotta have you.” He tossed me down, and I lay on my back, propped up on my elbows, waiting for him to ravage me. Victor dropped on top of me, weighing me down on the bed with his heavy body as he pulled my hair back to expose my neck, sucking a bruise there, marking me up.

“Yes, I like that. Do what you want with me, Victor.”

“Call me Boss Lion.”

I shivered. “Take your clothes off, Boss Lion.” Victor sat back on his heels and ripped his shirt off. It was my turn to stare. “Good god.”

He grinned, sly as ever. “I know.”

I made grabby hands for him. “Get back here.” He laid back down on me, and I knew I’d love the heavy weight of his perfectly sculpted body on me forever, like a safety blanket.

We kissed a lot more, our tongues twisting fast and dirty. Victor yanked my knees open and settled in between them. He pulled his slacks down in one smooth move, then we were skin-to-skin, hot, sweaty, and panting with want. I buried my nose in his neck to smell the lion in him, powerful and savage and always ready to show his prowess. I wanted him to show it now.

Victor changed his angle just slightly, then our erections were side-by-side, trapped between our bodies, which were fused tightly together like we were one being. Victor rolled his hips, and it sent me to the moon. I held on for dear life, moving closer and closer to the edge.

My first orgasm with my alpha was against both of our bellies, digging my heels into his back and thrusting upwards

as I creamed all over both of us.

“Hell yeah. Look at you,” he rasped.

“Claim me, Alpha. Now.”

Victor laughed, the rumble low in his throat. “Bossy little thing, aren’t you?”

“You’d settle for nothing less. Now bite me.”

“Are you sure? You don’t want to take things slower for our first time?” I didn’t want to slow down.

“Honey, we’re not that type of couple. I want it fast and hard.” He didn’t argue. He grabbed my hip and flipped me over like it was nothing. “Yes, like this. I want it like this.” Victor pulled at my hips until my ass was in the air, and I arched up that much more, presenting for him, showing off my tight hole, sopping wet for him. I took a deep breath when I felt him knocking. I arched up a little more and made my whole body relax as Victor pushed inside, farther and farther and farther. Every time I thought he had to be done, he pushed in farther and stretched me even wider. His cock was nothing I had ever experienced before; by far the largest I’d ever taken.

“Yes, give me all of it. Oh, my god.” When Victor had finally pushed all the way in, I felt him in my lungs. When he pumped into me, it knocked the air out of my chest. I had just enough breath to yell, “Yes, fuck me with that big thick dick, Boss Lion!” Fuck me he did, fast and furious. I yelled so loud, even though we were vacationing in a mansion and the next home in the resort was nowhere in sight, they must have heard me.

I was in heaven, just giving myself over to my alpha, taking what he gave me. Then something weird happened.

“What- oh. Ooohhh.” There was a new sensation, something I’d never felt before. So many tiny points of touch and pressure inside me. Vic’s cock was barbed. The barbs didn’t hurt, but were more like an added internal massage that drove me crazy and made it impossible to get away until my mate was done with me.

I couldn’t wait any longer. “Claim me now. I’m yours.” His lion fangs were long, and they were sharp, but they pierced the flesh of my shoulder like butter. The pain felt almost pure, uniting with the pleasure of our solidifying bond. I moaned as Vic held me still, letting out a groan and biting down just a bit harder, warning me not to move as he pumped into me. When his copious seed began to fill me, my body exploded in a shaking, quivering orgasm. I yelled gibberish as my alpha marked me, inside and out.

After what seemed like hours of coming, I was finally spent. I collapsed, Victor still inside me, the massaging barbs holding him firmly in place.

We relaxed in the luxurious bed, leaving cleanup for another time and for somebody else to do. Victor and I cuddled as we absently watched some trash talk show on TV. I stroked my hand over his glorious obliques. Without thinking, I reached for the string on Victor’s sleep pants. I stuck it in my mouth and chewed. Victor looked at me like I was nuts.

“What?” I asked innocently.

He laughed. “This has been the perfect day. I couldn’t have asked for anything more.”

“Ditto to that.”

“It’s obvious you enjoyed yourself. I thought you were never gonna slow down.”

“Not my fault you can’t keep up, Mr. King of the Jungle.”

“I love you.”

“It’s me and you against the world. Or should I say, against the merger?”

“The two of us together can’t lose. We can take on anything. With you by my side, we’ll take over the world.”

“Let’s do it, Big Lion Man.” He laughed and fell down on top of me. I let his huge body press me down onto the bed, comforting me like a weighted blanket. “I love you too, Victor. I love you, too.”

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VICTOR

MONDAY, WE LEFT OUR LOVE NEST AND WERE BACK TO WORK. It was crunch time, so tensions were high. The first week after we bonded, it didn't affect us. We were still on Cloud Nine, canoodling and making love several times a night. The next week, however, things got tougher at work and I got caught up in it, reverting back to my old ways.

Soon, the pressure put me in a short-tempered mood toward everybody. Unfortunately, that included my mate-slash-assistant. We were officially mated, and maybe that was why I felt like I could get away with making him collateral damage with my work problems. I canceled our dates, and pulled all-nighters at the office, repeatedly coming home with the sunrise and leaving him in bed by himself. He tried a couple of times, in his sassy, teasing way, to let me know that he needed more of my attention. I didn't listen. I should have known better.

After a week passed in that way, we were in the office working our respective tails off. Bobby appeared in the doorway between our offices, leaning against the frame. He spoke in his usual teasing tone, but it was softer today, more careful.

“Vic, Baby, you’re so stressed. Your mane’s gonna fall out, and then how are you gonna be the vain, mirror-obsessed jungle king I know and love? Why don’t you take a break?”

I shook my head, snorting like he was crazy. “A break, he says.” I went back to my iPad, scrolling, scrolling, scrolling, through endless lists of numbers. The merger was not coming together the way I needed it to. We’d successfully merged all the employees, and everyone we planned to keep was now onboard. I suspected that Bobby had found a way to be much less ruthless with the cuts than I would have been, but I saw the benefits in not taking the company down to a skeleton crew, even if I didn’t want to admit it.

Still, the issues remained. Production was stuttering overseas because of technology issues. It set my teeth on edge. It wasn’t a supply chain problem, or employee errors or anything like that, no, it was glitches in a stupid computer system that made it so my product wasn’t on the shelves. Customers looking for athletic wear were walking away empty-handed, or worse, with products from a different competitor.

I didn’t look up. “Coffee,” I barked.

“Is that your way of requesting it?” Bobby asked.

“*Please.*” It wasn’t a very pretty please. It had some attitude to it. Bobby turned out of the doorway, going to fetch it for me.

“You’re really pushing the envelope here, aren’t you, *Boss?*” I didn’t answer.

Twenty minutes later, he was back, Starbucks in hand.

I looked at him with one bloodshot eyeball. “That took longer than usual. What happened?”

Bobby somehow kept up his playful nature, wagging his head at me as he set the teal and white cup down on my desk with a solid *clack*.

“There was a line, if you must know. I wanted to get you your favorite, instead of using the coffee press here. I figure it might cheer you up. Not sure if that’s possible right now, since you’re being such a bear.” He lifted an eyebrow at me, smirking at his little joke. I was grateful he’d had the idea to get me my favorite indulgent coffee. In that moment, I really needed the boost. I should have thanked him right then, but I dipped my head to look over the latest email from our CTO, Chief Technology Officer, and got distracted. *As soon as I get everybody pulling in the right direction, things can go back to normal. I’ll make it up to Bobby then. We’re almost there.*

The reality was, I should have been paying attention to what was going on in the moment. I should have kept in mind that pushing my time with Bobby into the future was not the right thing to do. Planning for the future was of the essence, but treasuring the present with the one you loved was most important.

Bobby cocked a hip and sat halfway on my desk. His usual flirtatiousness was in his voice.

“That ‘please’ was lukewarm, so now I’m expecting the sweetest, most tender ‘thank you’.” It should have soothed me, should have turned me on, but instead, in the moment, it just frustrated me.

“Stop playing around, Bobby, and get back to work. We’ve got too many things going wrong with this merger for you to be goofing off like a child.”

That did it.

Bobby pulled his head back, the smile dropping off his face. Shit. I readied myself for the storm.

“So, let me get this straight. You treat me like an afterthought all week. Then you start ordering me around, and now you’re being outright rude and condescending. I’ve been patient with you, Victor, more patient than is in my stubborn goat nature, but now I’ve had enough.”

I got defensive. “Bobby, it’s a tough time around here. Everybody’s on edge and I just need to get all this done, then everything will calm down again.”

“And in the meantime, is this how you’re going to act?”

“Listen-”

“No, you listen. I’ve been understanding all week, but you’re taking it too far now. You’re forgetting who I am.”

Something about that statement made me respond as CEO Victor, and not Fated Mate Victor.

I stood up, unconsciously sprouting my golden mane, wanting to show that I was the king. “You don’t talk to me like that.” I stabbed the surface of my desk with my pointer finger. “You forget your station here. I’m the boss, and you work for me. You’re a peon.”

As soon as I said it, I knew I went too far. Bobby’s mouth dropped open and the fire went out of his eyes. All that was left was hurt, all the way down to his soul.

“Wait, I didn’t mean that.”

“But you said it.” His voice was a whisper, his beautiful brown eyes clouding with tears. I just wanted the fire to come back. I wanted him to be mad at me. Anything but this. It was so silent in the room, you could have heard a mouse pissing on

cotton. I had no idea what to say. An apology should have been the first thing bursting out of my mouth, but because I was a dunce, my tongue stayed tied.

“I...I...” I tried, but the right words wouldn’t come out.

Bobby pressed his lips together, then sighed. He was probably waiting for the apology, too, then I let him down even further.

“You know, Victor, I was about to suggest that you ask the new employees to pull five more hours a week each until we get the ship righted. Since you spared so many of their jobs when they thought they’d get the axe, I bet they’d be grateful and willing to do that for you. I don’t know, though, I’m just a peon.” Bobby did the last thing I expected.

He started to cry.

It split me in two. Bobby never cried. He disappeared into his office, and I jumped up to follow him. He slung his handbag over one shoulder, his jacket over his arm, and put his thermos in his hand. A tear ran down his cheek.

Alarm bells went off in my head. “Honey, what are you doing?”

He pushed past me and out of his office, past the small cluster of cubicles in the center of the room. The rest of the floor was executive offices, and everyone stepped out of their doorways to see what was going on. They were horrified to see Bobby tearfully rushing out of the office, me right behind him, panicking.

I didn’t care that they saw me plead with my mate. He was the most important thing in my world, even if I forgot sometimes because my head was up my ass.

“Bobby, wait. Let’s talk about this, okay? Don’t rush off like this.”

Bobby didn’t stop. “I need to leave, Vic. I need some air.” At the elevator bank, he tapped the down button. It lit up, but he kept pressing it, urging the elevator to come faster.

I touched his arm. “Don’t leave so fast, okay? Let me explain.” He didn’t shake my arm off, which was a good sign, but he did shake his head, denying my request.

“Just not right now, Vic. I think I’d better take some time off. Think about whether or not I’m doing the right thing here.”

“Will I see you at home?” I asked the question because I was desperate to hear him say yes.

“I’m going...somewhere else. I need to think about this, too.” He pointed between the two of us. The elevator bell dinged, and he stepped into it.

This was my worst nightmare. “Bobby, please. Let’s talk about it.” He lifted his arms and let them fall to his side with a *flap*. The dark circles under his eyes showcased his exhaustion. How hadn’t I noticed before now?

“Why, so you can humiliate me in front of the whole upper management team again? I don’t think so. Have fun with your right hand tonight. Don’t call your peon.” The elevator doors slid shut and he was gone.

I let my chin drop to my chest. *What have I done?*

I slunk back to my office. Everybody watched with bated breath. I grumbled and growled at them all, baring my lion fangs and hoping they’d do what they usually did and leave me alone. I had no such luck.

The moment I was back in my office, there was the fast click of high heels on the floor as Sue and Latrice barged through the door.

Sue stood in front of me, a hand on her ample hip. “Victor, what happened?”

“I...I don’t know,” I replied honestly. My billionaire ego had just gotten me in trouble with my mate.

Usually, my employees held back for fear of my temper. They weren’t doing any of that now.

Latrice pointed a damning finger at me. “Did I hear you tell him he was a peon? Are you crazy?”

I sputtered like a chastised child. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“Obviously!” Sue said. “You made Bobby *cry*?” I dropped my elbow onto my desk with a thump and pressed my thumb and forefinger into my temple.

“I didn’t know he would cry! I didn’t mean to. I’ve just been so caught up in this merger shit. I’ve been neglecting him, and he’s been so damn patient with me. Then here I go taking my frustrations out on him, treating him like he’s beneath me. The same way I used to with all my other employees. I was so wrong. He deserves better than that.”

Latrice narrowed her eyes at me. “You’d better tell him the exact things you’re telling us.”

“I know. I will, whenever he talks to me again.”

Sue added, “*If* he ever talks to you again.”

If. The word hung over my head like a funnel cloud, threatening to drop down into a tornado and sweep me up in it.

“I’m sure it’s not an ‘if,’ Sue,” Latrice said softly, but her eyes burned when she looked at me. “You damn sure better beg, though.”

“Oh, I will. Believe me, I will.”

I’d just made a huge mistake with the love of my life. Now, how did I fix it?

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VICTOR

AFTER TWENTY-FOUR HOURS OF NO BOBBY, I WAS CLAWING the furniture. He hadn't returned my calls, and when I drove past his house, or rather, had my driver go past his apartment building so I could stare like a creeper, he wasn't home.

"So this is love," I mumbled as I eyed the front of Bobby's building through my tinted windows, looking for any sign of him. "Turning me into a fool. If I'm being honest about it, I wouldn't have it any other way. Bobby wouldn't be the one for me if he didn't tell me exactly where to get off." My driver met my eyes through the rearview mirror. He knew how big of a deal it was for someone, anyone, to stand up to me for being a feral beast, and not in a fun, sexy kind of way.

I continued. "He sure showed me. Our love is so new, so fresh. I can't let this happen to us already." My driver, who nodded to me through the rearview mirror, trying to keep the judgy expression off his face. Even he knew I messed up. "In a way, I'm glad this happened early in our relationship. I learned my lesson. I'll never neglect or talk down to him again."

There was caution in my driver's voice, but he asked me anyway. "Are you going to tell him all of this, Sir?"

I chuckled. "Damn right, I am. I just need him to give me a chance to explain myself and make it up to him. I can't have

this being a stain on the most beautiful thing that ever happened to me.”

The next morning, Bobby wasn't at work. Again.

“Called out sick,” Latrice told me, lifting an accusatory eyebrow at me.

“How am I supposed to make it through the day without him?” Not only was I heartsick, but so much of our day-to-day operations depended on my mate being there with me, working with me as a partner, not just an assistant. As my equal, as an invaluable member of my team. Just more proof of how special my mate was, and how much he'd fit right into every part of my life. He was the perfect fit, and I had to make things right with him. Luckily, I had a plan.

“Get him to come to the office,” I told Latrice. “I don't care what you have to do, just get him back.”

At the end of the day, I knew Latrice had figured something out because a buzz started across the whole floor as my employees started tittering and gossiping. Soon, a familiar scent wafted in, a scent I'd recognize anywhere. I stood up from my chair.

Bobby.

His voice resonated through the office. He was mad now, and he didn't care who heard about it.

“I read that entire file back to front, Sue. I didn't see anything about a bonus. I'll tell you one thing, I deserve it for putting up with that ogre of a lion. There better be a lot of zeroes on this check.” He rounded the corner and there I was.

Bobby skidded to a stop, giving me a death glare. “You.” The good news was, although the glare had a little extra fire I

didn't recognize, I still saw the love and vulnerability there. This could be fixed with the right amount of groveling.

I smiled gently and nodded along. "Me."

He crossed his arms in that sassy way of his I loved. Even though I was suffering, I loved that even now he wasn't putting up with my shit.

"Were you going to personally hand me my bonus check? Because that's literally the only reason I want to see you right now."

"Bobby, if you want a check, you can have that, too." He poked out a hip and held out his hand. I chuckled. He was being the omega I loved, one hundred percent. "Just, please, give me five minutes."

He looked at his fingernails, buffing them on his shirt. "I don't see why I should. You were a total dick to me the last time I saw you."

"I know, I know, I was the dick to end all dicks..." I realized what I said. "I mean, I meant I was a giant dick...aw, shit." The glint in his eye let me know that he was both trying to stop himself from making a dirty joke, and thinking about my dick. *Okay, Vic, he's open, now get this thing solved.*

"I'm not used to being at a loss for words like this, but then again, I've never met anyone like you before. I never met my match until I met you. In every sense of the word." Interns were craning their necks to listen in, and some of my execs were sticking their heads out of their offices. Good. Let them all see. "Since I publicly chastised you, and it was unfair and humiliating, it's only fair that I apologize publicly, so that everybody sees me taking responsibility for my mistake.

Furthermore, I want to go on record and say that I was wrong, and you were right.”

Bobby purred, pleased like a cat. “Go on.”

“How about a little public humiliation for me, which I deserve?” Slowly, I knelt down so I was on my knees, my Armani suit grinding on the carpet. The entire office gasped. They’d never seen me on my knees, not even in their dreams.

Bobby was delighted. He let his full smile shine through, playful and mischievous as always. There was the omega I knew and loved.

“I’m taller than you now.”

“Not by much.”

“Hey,” he said, but he was hiding his giggle behind his hand.

“Bobby,” I reached for his hand. He let me take it. In that instant, touching him again, feeling his life force under my fingertips, I knew I’d never make the same mistake again. “Please accept my heartfelt, sincere apology. I’m so, so sorry.”

“Well.” He twisted from side-to-side, pretending to think about it. He was smiling, so everything was fine, but it was still gut-wrenching waiting for him to let me off the hook. “You’re forgiven. Apology accepted.”

“Thank god.” I wrapped my arms around his waist and pulled him to me. He wrapped his arms around my neck, his fingers in my hair, and the whole office clapped and cheered.

“I was such an asshole for making you cry. I knew I fucked up really bad,” I murmured into his stomach. I scented him greedily, grateful for his essence in my lungs again. It smelled

so much sweeter now. Had I been away from him for that long?

He let out a laugh. “I was so mad at myself for crying. It wasn’t like me. I was so embarrassed, because normally I’d be ready to fight.” He balled up a fist and punched me in the shoulder. It was playful, but he still tried to put some force behind it. I chuckled because I barely even felt it. He was so cute. “You better remember this for next time. Wait, let me correct that. There won’t be a next time.”

“No, Sir,” I said, lifting my right hand. “I learned my lesson.”

“If it happens again, you won’t get off so easy. I’m gonna bonk you.” He let his goat horns extend. They were long and curved out of his brown hair to curl around his ears. They were thick and sharp, and even as a lion, I wanted no part of them. “Mess with the goat, you get the horns!”

“I don’t want ‘em,” I said with a laugh. “Just want you. Speaking of just wanting you...” I reached in my pocket for the ring I put there earlier. I lifted one foot and planted it, so now I was on only one knee. I held out the ring, which glittered with more carats than a bunny farm. “Will you?”

Bobby’s eyes popped out of his head. Then, they glittered with tears. “Apology definitely accepted, and yes, I will.” If anybody around us made any more noise, I didn’t notice. It was only me and my mate, now my fiancé.

I got to my feet and I stood in front of him, looking down toward his tiny little frame that drove me so wild. I took both of Bobby’s hands in mine and squeezed them.

“I’ll never, ever treat you like you’re not my equal ever again. I think we all know who’d win in a fight.”

“Damn right, we do.” I slid the ring on his finger, and he stood on his tiptoes. I leaned down and gave him a soft but passionate kiss.

Bobby patted my chest. “Well, you have perfect timing. I think I’m pregnant.”

It was my turn for my eyes to pop out of my head. “You think you’re *what?*”

Bobby playfully slapped my chest again. “Oh, don’t act all surprised after the way our romantic getaway went.”

“Hell of a point.” That explained the teariness, and the change in his scent. I cursed to myself, laughing at the same time. “I’m gonna be a dad.”

“You sure are.”

“I can’t believe it. We’ve got so much to celebrate.”

He lowered his eyelids and gave me a coquettish glance. “I know one way we can celebrate immediately.”

I turned and addressed the folks in the office. “Alright folks, Bobby and I need some privacy to talk about our big news.” Bobby snickered, and I realized that they probably knew what I meant when I said “privacy.” I didn’t care, hell, they might get to hear all about it, too, if I got my way in the next few minutes.

I grabbed Bobby’s hand and we ran, giggling, into my office. With the door slammed shut behind us, we kissed, cuddled, and whispered promises of forever. Then Bobby pulled my erection out of my slacks and put his mouth around me. One blissful orgasm later, I did the same for him. Everybody probably *did* hear us.

After, we both put our ruffled clothes back on. I hugged Bobby and kissed his forehead. “Got you something else, too.”

He hugged me back. “The surprises just keep coming today, huh? I should get mad at you more often.” I chuckled and led him through the door to his workspace.

I unveiled the tree, pulling the light canvas cloth from over top of it. “A little gift for your office.”

Bobby made a *meep* sound, and seeing him have one more thing to be overjoyed over made this one of the best days of my life. The best might well have been the day I met him. He shifted immediately and leapt to the top. He looked down at me and let out a bleat of joy that made me fall over laughing. I recorded some video of him climbing on the low, squat, solid tree to tease him over later.

When he finally came down, he shifted back to his human form and we sat on our butts on the carpet, looking at the tree, Bobby’s head on my shoulder.

“So, how’re we gonna do this, Mister Lion Man? Not only us being a couple, but us being a *family*.” He looped his arm through mine and squeezed my bicep in a sweet little hug.

I chuckled. “I’ve been a one-man-army in my business for so many years, I forgot how to let other people into my life. I’m not gonna be one of those businessmen who finds the perfect mate, then loses them because he so stubbornly refuses to give his work a break. Especially now, with a baby on the way, I need to be there to spoil you.”

“That’s exactly right, good on you for recognizing it without me having to bonk your noggin.”

I laid a soft hand on his belly. “I never in my wildest dreams thought I’d have something like this. I never thought

I'd ever have someone like you. I didn't get this far being a stupid asshole. An asshole sometimes, but not stupid. I know what I have in front of me. I'm not dropping the ball."

"I know you won't, Big Lion." He stroked my arm, and in that moment I was the tallest alpha in the world.

"Should I look at hiring somebody to replace us, stop working altogether?"

"Hmm." He tapped his finger to his lips. "Nah. I'd go stir crazy without the excitement of the job. We need to make a deal with ourselves and each other to limit our working hours to fifty a week, being generous. We need to have fun and keep our fingers in the pot with the business, but we make time for the kid. Or kids."

"Well, I *am* filthy rich. We can have a nanny who sits right here in the office with us taking care of the kids while we work. We have that option."

"I sure am glad to have money now. So many other parents never get the opportunity to spend that much time with their kids because of work. They never get that choice."

"Things will be different for us. Anything we want, we can get. Anything the kids need, it'll be there in an instant."

Bobby wagged a stern finger. "We won't be spoiling them, though."

"No, no spoiling our kids. Just showering them with love."

"We have an endless supply of love to give them. If it's like this between us, I can't wait to see how much love there is when our little person comes into the world."

"Can't wait to find out."

My perfect future was right around the corner, and my perfect present was right in front of me.

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VICTOR

“BOBBY,” I ASKED SLOWLY, LEANING ON MY DESK WITH ONE foot kicked up over the other, “What are you doing?” He was rifling through all my drawers at a breakneck pace, tossing things all over, which wasn’t like him because he always ran a tight, neat ship. He ignored me for a while, continuing his frantic rummaging until-

“Ah, ha!” He stood up straight, triumphantly holding up one of those microfiber cloths for cleaning glasses in his hand like it was some kind of trophy. “Finally.” Standing up, in profile like this, it was plain just how far his belly stuck out in front of him. He was petite, so he would have looked like he was smuggling a beachball anyways, but it seemed like his belly was almost as big as he was, so we knew we must have twins on the way.

“Finally, what?” I asked, confused.

“I just so happen to have a craving, Mister Lion Man, but for what, I don’t exactly know.”

“But why are you...oh.” That’s why he was looking for the cloth. “Wait, don’t you-” Bobby popped it in his mouth and started chewing, his jaw working in big circles. “-Want a candy bar or something.” I finished the sentence with a laugh and a shake of my head. “I sure hope that’s hitting the spot.”

He shrugged, then swallowed in a big gulp, the lump of cloth traveling down his throat. “I mean, it’s good, but it’s not quite scratching the itch.” Bobby looked around like he thought he’d find what he was looking for in some other corner of the room.

“What exactly is it that you want?”

“I don’t know,” he whined. “You’re my mate, you’re supposed to help me.”

“I want to, Bobby, and I will. As soon as you know what you want, you’ll have it in your hands in an instant. You know how I operate.”

“I know, I know, it’s just that you’re supposed to read my mind.” He came over to me and rested his forehead on my chest. He wrapped his arms around me as best as he could. His belly kept him at a certain distance, for the time being.

I chuckled. “You’re so cute.”

“So cute you can read my mind and figure out what I’m craving?” I shook my head sadly, disappointed that I didn’t know. “It’s okay. You’re still a caring alpha. And super hot. And great in the sack. And super rich.”

That really made me laugh. “So you forgive me, then?”

He lifted a teasing eyebrow at me. “I suppose.” I leaned down for a kiss and he gave me one. “It’s back to work for me, until I solve the mystery.”

“We’ll get it figured out.” I hoped so. I wracked my brain trying to think of what he might want. There had to be something.

Thirty minutes later, I needed Bobby’s opinion on something, so I called into his office like I always did.

“Bobby. Bobby?” No answer. I dialed his desk phone, since sometimes he worked with music on. Nothing. “Strange.” I got up to poke my head into his office.

He wasn't there.

“What the...?” Where was my pregnant mate? I pulled out my phone and called him and sent him a message, which he didn't answer. “No need to panic, Vic, he's only been out of your sight for a few minutes.” *And anything could have happened in those few minutes*, my brain said helpfully. *I need to start the manhunt immediately.*

I marched out of his office, looking for help from my office manager and head of HR as I usually did.

“Sue, have you seen Bobby? Latrice?” Both of them shook their heads, their expressions saying that they wondered why I was asking.

“Is everything okay, Boss? Do we need to look for him?” Latrice asked.

“Yes.” I was being irrational, but I didn't care. The two of them fell in line with me, and we gathered up a posse of top execs who all dropped what they were doing to look for my fiancé and unborn children. We searched high and low, until someone got the bright idea to check the printing room.

Bobby was there, hunched in between a couple of Xerox machines, his back to all of us. When he turned around, his mouth dropped open like he'd been caught red-handed... eating printer paper. There was a wad of white in his mouth, half-chewed, and in his hands were crumpled up sheets of paper ready to be stuffed into his mouth. A ream of paper was torn open. There were shreds of white all over the place, paper

carnage everywhere, like he'd turned into a carnivore like me and hunted down his prey on the Serengeti.

He looked at all of us with wide eyes. "I just, uh, it was really good!" I rushed over to him, relieved to see him in one piece. I took his hands, even though they were still clutching the paper.

"Honey, I don't care that you're eating paper, although it is pretty strange and we should make sure you're okay to eat it, I care that you disappeared! I was worried sick."

"So were we," Sue added.

Bobby blushed, and it was so sweet. "Sorry, everybody. Next time I'll just scarf everything down where you can see me instead of turning into Smeagol with 'my precious'." He shook the paper in his hand and laughed. I laughed, too, I couldn't help it. Soon, all of us were in an uproar. When the laughter finally died down again, I waved everybody away.

"Thanks folks, for coming on this missing person search with me. I hope that brought some excitement to your day. Lunch and dinner is on me, whatever you want." The crowd of employees dispersed, and I hugged Bobby close to me, kissing his nose. "You're so much trouble. You're lucky you're cute."

He pretended to throw his hair over his shoulder. "I know."

"That satisfy your craving?"

He shook his head, disappointed. "It was hella tasty, but unfortunately, no."

"We gotta get this figured out before you destroy the whole building and I end up in the nuthouse."

I was right about almost ending up in the nuthouse. Bobby's quest to fulfill his craving didn't stop with the secret

paper smorgasbord.

About an hour later, I had an epiphany.

“Ah ha!” I yelled, pointing straight up with my finger. “I got it. I’ve solved the cravings mystery. Bobby’s gonna love it.” I stood up from my desk, slamming my fist on it in triumph. I couldn’t call Bobby to order what I needed, so I called one of the interns, whose name I barely remembered. They took off at full speed to get me what I wanted, and they were back in under ten minutes. I prepared my gift to my mate and again went looking for him. Not in his office.

I rubbed my temples. “Not another search and rescue, Bobby, please. I’m gonna have a heart attack.”

He wasn’t far. I walked out of my office to see him standing at one of the intern’s cubicles, about to stick something very thin and very long in his mouth. Once I realized what it was, I freaked out. An extension cord.

“Bobby, don’t!” He took a bite, chewing it up like a piece a spaghetti, and my chest exploded from panic, waiting to watch him freeze up as he and my children got electrocuted.

Instead, he heard me yelling and looked over at me, squinting in confusion. Bathed in relief, I ran over to him, touching him all over.

“You’re okay? Babies are okay?”

He chuckled as he submitted to the pat-down. “We’re fine, Weirdo. What’s the matter? It’s just an extension cord.”

“*Just* an extension cord.”

“Wait, you thought...” He looked at that cord, then looked at the wall outlet, then back at the cord. “I gotta be careful with these things.”

“You think?”

He gave me a sheepish smile. “Sorry, Honey.”

“It’s okay, as long as all of you are okay.” I hugged him close, enjoying his scent, the feel of his small body against mine, and the movement of our children in his middle.

After a moment, I stepped away from him, still squeezing his shoulders. “Guess what? I figured it out.”

Bobby screeched. “You did?”

“I did. Wait just a second.” I went back to where I had dropped the bag with Bobby’s prize in it when I was panicking over the extension cord.

Bobby wriggled in excitement, his giant belly shaking a little like jello. It was so cute I wanted to eat him up.

“What is it? What is it, what is it?”

“Ready?” I presented him with...an empty San Pellegrino can. Bobby slapped his hands to his cheeks, Home Alone-style, and let out a huge gasp.

“No. You’re kidding.”

“This is it, right? This is what you’ve been craving.”

“Hand it over, Boss Lion.” Bobby grabbed it out of my hand and took a bite off the top. I winced, but I was laughing, too.

“How do you do that?”

He shrugged, totally focused on the can. “Just goat things.”

I made a “c’mon” motion with my hands. “So, tell me your alpha got it right. Tell me how well I know you.”

“You got it right, big alpha, you got it one-hundred-percent, on-the-nose, pin-the-tail-on-the-goat correct. You know me inside and out.” He winked. I preened, some long strands of my mane even growing out for me to show off what a big, strong, alpha lion I was.

Bobby took another bite of the can. “Ooh, it’s even my favorite flavor. You got any more?”

“I got a dozen, but we’re gonna limit the number of cans you consume in a day.”

“I can live with that. Let me have one more.” He followed me into my office and made grabby hands while I emptied another of the beverages into a glass for me to drink and handed him the can, resting a hip on my desk while I sat in my chair. “Nice and cold, too.” He took a huge bite and started chewing, the aluminum making a loud crinkling crunch between his teeth. After a few moments of chewing and making happy yummy noises, Bobby slowed down. His chin tilted forward and his eyelids drooped.

He was worn out now, and it made me smile. “Need to take a break?”

He shook his head. “Nuh uh.” Then his mouth opened in a wide yawn, revealing all his goat teeth, used to chew all the weird stuff he’d been craving. Now, he nodded. “Mm-hmm.”

I held open my arms and he came and perched on my lap. Even though he was heavily pregnant, he was still able to tuck his small body in against mine, comfortable, safe, and protected from any harm.

We sat there in silence for a moment, just breathing with each other, basking in the special moment.

Bobby nuzzled into my chest. “Thank you.”

“I did good today?”

“You did the best today. Best. Alpha. Ever.” My proud lion heart pumped with even more pride. I was a great mate. I was a great A-Dad.

I kissed the top of Bobby’s head. His brown hair was soft and smelled like the new designer-brand shampoo that had grown to be his favorite since he’d been with me and could afford things like that. I squeezed him a little tighter, admiring the ring I put on his finger, feeling our children move under our fingers, knowing we’d get to meet them soon. I was giving my mate a great life. I was going to give my kids the *best* life.

I nuzzled my nose against Bobby’s forehead, scenting him a bit. “All good now?”

“Never better, Boss Lion,” he said as he curled up in my arms, his eyelids falling closed. “Never better.”

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BOBBY

“OH, NO. OH NO OH NO OH NO,” I SAID QUICKLY AS ANOTHER contraction started up. “You didn’t tell me it was going to hurt like this when I first got pregnant.”

“Bobby,” said the doula, patting my arm gently as she chuckled, “I didn’t know you when you first got pregnant.”

“But you’ve known me for a while and you didn’t say it would be like this.”

She patiently reminded me for what must have been the millionth time. “Honey, yes I did. We discussed multiple times that different omegas experience different levels of pain and that your birth experience could be, well, intense.”

“You used the word ‘intense,’ you didn’t say it would feel like I had shards of glass in my ass.”

Vic winced, his normally unflappable face looking a little green. He was leaned over next to me, the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to his elbows, one hand in the water as he rubbed my exploding belly with the other. At least, it felt like it was exploding.

He dropped a soft kiss onto my shoulder. “You’re being so brave.”

“Don’t wanna be brave. Wanna be *not in labor*,” I whined.

“I know, Bobby, but you’re doing so good. It’ll be over soon and we’ll have our babies.” *We’ll have our babies.* I clutched my alpha’s arm and closed my eyes. *We’ll have our babies.*

Vic and I had opted for a home water birth, all natural and unmedicated. What an idiot I was. I was reclined back against the cushy edge of the inflatable pool, filled with warm water. It didn’t seem to be making things better, per se, but I wanted the water to be there because otherwise it would have been worse. So, score one for water births.

“I just want them to come out.”

“You’re getting really close, Bobby. Just listen to your body, push when it tells you to,” the doula said, sounding like some kind of mystic.

“I can’t listen to my body, it’s screaming bloody murder.”

“Just let the beauty of the process wash over you. We’re witnessing a miracle.” I was in the pool naked, my legs wide open and all of my business out there to see, all while my abdomen got turned inside out. It didn’t feel very miraculous. My stomach crunched down, so hard I could see the huge muscle that was my womb squeezing from the outside. It was surreal. It hurt like hell, especially as the first of the babies moved down, exiting my womb, preparing to crown.

“Vic!” I grabbed his arm and clung on for dear life.

“I’m right here, Bobby, right here.”

“You’re lucky I don’t have claws, I’d gouge a hole in you. You should gouge a hole in yourself in my honor.”

He squinted, panicked and confused. “Would that help?” I hadn’t expected him to say yes. As I considered making him

do it, baby number one started crowning and I forgot about everything else.

“I spoke too soon. Let them stay in there!”

“They can’t stay in there, Bobby,” my doula said in a voice that was so understanding and patient it made me want to pull out my teeth. “You have to be brave and push through the pain, literally. You can do it. You’re almost there.”

I pushed, and it felt like I was getting ripped in half. No way a whole human was gonna be able to come out of me without carnage. The water swirled pink with blood and amniotic fluid.

“A-Dad,” the doula called in her melodious and way-too-happy voice as I gritted my teeth, Baby A probably ripping me to shreds on their way out. Vic put on a determined face and put his hands where the doula told him to. I saw nothing, only felt pain and pressure until Vic held up his hands, and in them was a perfect, screaming newborn.

“Oh,” I said, and my voice cracked. My beautiful baby waved their arms and legs, opening and closing their mouth as if trying to decide whether or not they liked the outside world, and whether or not to scream about it. In the end, Baby A decided they were just fine, and the doula placed them in my arms.

“Female anatomy for Baby A,” they announced gleefully. This time, the glee was acceptable. I took a moment to rest and enjoy the new little person in my arms. In only about two minutes, contractions squeezed my abdomen, my belly now much smaller than it had been a few minutes ago, but there was still more work to be done.

Baby B was no less painful to push out, but luckily they were at least faster, so fast that I didn't have time to get a snarky comment out, and Vic had to scramble back into position to catch them. Catch them he did, though, and Baby B was just as perfect, and just as content to be with us as Baby A was. I cried as our doula rested them on my chest.

"This baby has a penis," she sang joyfully, and it was so unexpected that I burst out laughing. The laughter soon turned to tears as I cradled both my babies, one in each arm. My doula handed Vic a pair of scissors that glinted silver in the low light, and he cut both the babies' cords, and they were officially brand new little people.

"Congratulations, Daddies. You've got two new miracles on your hands." She was right. These little people I'd spent months of my life making were miracles. They both had eyes like Victor's and noses like mine, and when Vic and I counted, they both had ten fingers and ten toes.

Vic stroked the soft, damp wisps of their hair. "I couldn't have dreamed up more perfect babies."

"You couldn't have dreamed up a more perfect mate, either."

"That's for sure." He pressed his nose to my cheek and we simply nuzzled each other, exchanging scents and getting lost in the moment while our two new babies enjoyed their first meal, via the milk truck.

I adjusted them both, new little weights that fit perfectly in my arms. "I wonder which they'll be, goats or lions."

"It would be hilarious to have two more of you climbing on all the furniture."

"Two more of you would scratch it all half to death."

“Touché. Maybe we’ll get one of each. One prince or princess of the jungle, one future king of my bookshelf.”

“Either way it’ll be perfect. Just perfect.”

Victor leaned down and kissed each of our babies, then he kissed me, and all was right with the world.

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EPILOGUE

Bobby

I HAD TO ADMIT, THIS WAS THE LIFE. I NEVER, IN A BILLION years, would have thought that I would even *find* my fated mate, let alone that he'd be a tall, handsome, strong lion with, dare I say it, a fabulous barbed cock. Oh, and did I mention that he was a billionaire? Money wasn't the most important thing, but I couldn't lie, having so much of it that I had literally no limits was the way to go.

It meant that not only could my alpha lion and I do whatever we wanted, whenever we wanted, it meant our two precious babies would never want for anything, unlike millions of babies all over the world. As I watched the two of them toddle around on the plush carpet of our study at their A-dad's feet, I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Both were in their shifted forms. One lion cub and one goat kid. It couldn't have worked out any better.

My son let out a little bleat and gave his sister a mock head-butt. My daughter swiped at him with her tiny paw, letting out a "meow" that would someday be a roar that shook entire houses, just like her A-Dad.

I walked up beside Vic and wrapped an arm around his waist, tilting my head to rest it on his chest.

He wrapped a muscular arm around my shoulder and held me tight. “Cutest babies in the whole wide world.”

“With our genes, they were bound to be beautiful.”

He chuckled. “I know, right?” I had never felt more safe and at ease. To know that this was my life now? I’d stepped into my fantasy world, and I got to live there permanently.

“Lucky me. I got to be the billionaire alpha’s sassy assistant, and now look where we are.”

“Yup. Living the dream with my perfect mate and family.”

“You better believe it, Boss Lion. It’s you and me, forever.” We sealed it with a kiss.



KNOTTY BILLIONAIRE’S Club Book Two is coming soon, but until then, check out the first book in my Seven Corners Shifters series, [His Protective Alpha!](#)

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