



FINDING

*Smart*

ALEXA RILEY

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# FINDING SNOW

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Also by Alexa Riley

Stalk the Author

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FINDING SNOW  
*Fairytale Shifters Book 4*  
by Alexa Riley



Koda's found his sister, Winnie, and now he's made a life for himself in Gray Ridge, Colorado. As a bear shifter, he's naturally a loner, and with so few females around, he's resigned to never finding his mate. But when he stumbles upon a woman in the woods, his whole world changes.

Snow's been on the run and has made a makeshift family with a band of seven wanderers. While resting in the woods and waiting for them to come back, something big finds her.

When Koda and Snow collide, they realize their stories are woven together more tightly than they could have imagined. Will the truth break their mates bond? Or will it bind them closer together?

Warning: This fairy-tale shifter story is full of alpha sweetness with a side of growly bear. What's not to love?! If you love a classic story with a dirty twist, then get your click on!

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*To the hubs; my life, my love, my mate.*

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CHAPTER 1

SNOW



*Smack!*

Finn drops the bacon and pulls his hand back, a grunt coming out of his mouth like my little slap actually hurt him. I raise my eyebrow at him, knowing better. The man is six foot and probably has a hundred pounds on me. Not to mention he's a shifter.

"Forest hasn't gotten his yet," I scowl. Finn just grunts again and goes back to eating his steak and eggs and everything else he has left on his own plate. I lift the coffee pot and top off his coffee. Living with three male shifters can be a fight when it comes to food. You'd think they've never eaten before, like I was starving them and not making sure they got three full meals a day, but since I've been cooking for them for the past seven years, I know that's a load of bull. I keep them well fed.

Three is a whole lot easier to handle than the seven it used to be, but over the years, one by one, the brothers have started to find their mates. Our little family gets smaller and smaller each year. That's all the band of brothers seems to be about—looking for their one true mate.

Each time one found his mate, it was bittersweet—knowing he found what he were looking for but would be leaving us. We were always on to the next town. Never staying in one place too long. I liked being on the move at first. It felt like my past couldn't catch up to me. If I kept moving, I'd never be found.

For the last year it has just been Finn, Forest, Flint, and me. Down to three brothers and not one has gotten lucky with finding his mate yet. Tired of being on the road and hopping from town to town, we all decided it was



time to settle in somewhere. We've been in Gray Ridge, Colorado for over a month now, and I've been stuck inside this cabin.

We'd chosen Gray Ridge because we'd heard they were a more laidback pack. Not so sticky with the rules. Some packs only accept certain shifters and have a list a mile long of dos and don'ts. But it isn't like that here. Or so my brothers have told me. Everyone just has to be a part of the community. They all work together here. I like the sound of that. It sounds friendly and even homey.

"Do you think I can just go out for a little? I'll be real careful." I bite my lip and give Finn my best sad face, opening my blue eyes real big. It's something I've been doing for years when I'm trying to get something. When I was little it was just candy or ice cream. As I got older, it tended to lean on the side of family movie night or them taking me fishing.

"Ahh, Snow, don't do that." Finn puts his fork down, and I can see he feels guilty, and that makes *me* feel guilty. I know they're just trying to keep me safe. It's all they have ever done since the day they became my family. All I want is to take care of them and make them happy. It's all I know.

But it's like I'm going to be a secret my whole life. No one is allowed to even know I exist. Ironically, it was something I'd begged them for when they'd found me out in the snow all alone seven years ago. Begged them not to take me back. Begged them to hide me from my father.

They did. Now I'm like their little sister. At first they were reluctant about taking me in and hiding me like I asked. Not that I blamed them. I was eleven, and they found me running through the woods in the middle of the night all alone. But soon their protectiveness ascended to a whole new level. I was one of them. I belonged with them. They were my world. All I had. A better family than I'd ever had. It was a miracle that brought them into my life. They saved me, and I would forever be indebted to them for that.

"I'm sorry. I'm just going a little stir crazy, is all." I make Forest a plate as he stumbles into the room and sits down at the breakfast bar next to Finn. His blond hair is sticking in five different directions. It took me a good six months to be able to tell them apart—they're identical twins—but now I can just tell with a glance. "I was hoping since we were staying here that maybe I could come out of hiding. I, ahh..." I pause, feeling a little guilty at my next confession. "I turned eighteen last week."

“What?!” Flint growls from the kitchen entryway, making me jump. Even after all these years I still haven’t gotten used to how these big men can move around so quietly.

“It’s not a big deal.” I try to reassure them, seeing the annoyed, angry looks on their faces. “I didn’t want to make a fuss. You guys have been working like crazy, and I didn’t want to be a bother, is all. It’s fine, really.”

“It’s not fine, Snow. We should have celebrated. You just came of age,” Forest says, looking at me with sad eyes. He’s always the softy.

“I’m not a shifter, so I don’t think it really counts.”

“It matters.” Flint walks the rest of the way into the kitchen and wraps me in a hug, kissing the top of the head.

“I mean, just think about it. My father can’t, like, come and take me or anything. I’m eighteen and all.”

“I’d snap his fucking neck,” Flint growls, making me smile at his protectiveness.

“But you said your dad took all kinds of people,” Flint adds, squeezing me tighter like someone might bust in and take me now. He’s right. My father liked to take shifters. Cage them and then do God knows what. It still eats at me that I’d run and left them all behind. By the time the Denali brothers found out where I’d been, the building I’d run from was empty. They’d said the place was completely bare. Maybe if I hadn’t been so scared. Maybe if I’d told them sooner, they could have saved some of them. I push the painful thought away.

“I know, but it’s been seven years, and I can’t hide forever. If I do that, I might as well have stayed in the cage he put me in.”

Flint releases a deep breath then lets me go. He walks over to the counter and picks up a piece of bacon, popping it into his mouth. “Thing is, I still got to tell the alpha about you. It’s kind of against the rules to let humans who aren’t mated to shifters know about us.”

“It’s not like you spilled the beans,” I remind him. I’ve known about shifters most of my life.

Flint runs his hands through his hair, something he always does when he’s thinking.

“Just think on it is all I’m asking. Nothing has to be done today. Besides, you’re going to be late. Can’t be doing that your first month here.”

I turn to the fridge and pull out the three lunches I packed, then I grab the thermoses I filled with coffee, handing them over to each of them.

“Make a cake. I’ll grab some candles. We’re celebrating,” Forest says, pulling me into a hug.

“Okay.”

“Chocolate,” Forest adds. I smile.

“It’s my cake. Shouldn’t I get to pick?”

“Fine.” He winks.

I’ll still be making chocolate. I know it’s their favorite, and I can’t seem to help myself. It’s hard not to dote on them. Even more so considering they’re pretty much my whole world. They each say their goodbyes before filing out the door. Flint pauses in the doorway.

“Stay inside, Snow.” He gives me a hard look. He’s the eldest, so he uses the same one on all his brothers.

I just smile and nod.

I step over to the kitchen window to watch them pile into the truck as snow starts to fall. If the storm gets too bad, maybe they’ll be home early. I’m not used to this new schedule or being alone so much. Since we got to Gray Ridge, they’ve been working, building houses with some guy named X. That’s about all I know.

Sometimes they work twelve-hour days. I get lonely. I’ve become so used to taking care of people. It makes me long for what some of my other brothers have found. Mates. But I guess for me it would be a husband. A family of my very own to take care of.

I turn away from the window and clean up the kitchen. It only takes five minutes. Then I stand there, looking around the cabin that’s now our home. When we first got it, I was thrilled. We’d always moved around so much that I was excited to have a place that would be ours. I didn’t realize that meant I’d be left alone so much.

There really isn’t anything for me to do. I can only clean a house so many times, even with it being a four-bedroom and three-bathroom. I turn to the window again and look out. The snow is falling harder. I’d once heard Flint say the snow can often hide your scent, make it harder to track or catch someone.

I know most of the town of Gray Ridge is shifter, but I also know we have a cabin with a good amount of land. I’m not sure where ours ends and

begins. Maybe I could just go out a little. No one would know.

I need to do it now. The snow will cover my tracks back up, so no one will know I went out. Just twenty minutes, I tell myself.

Excitement has me dashing to my room. I find my dark blue hooded cape and slip it on over my clothes. I pull the hood over my long black hair, then slip on my boots. Grabbing some gloves from the front-door closet I slip out onto the porch, breathing in the winter air. Normally we stay a little farther south, away from the cold.

I haven't seen snow since...I ran. The urge hits me again. This time, I'm not running from something, but I just want to run. I jump off the porch and sprint towards the woods, running as fast as I can, as I've seen by brothers do many nights. Only I don't shift. Dodging the rocks and ducking below low tree branches, I run until my legs start to burn and the cold air fills my lungs. I finally break free of the trees and come to a sliding stop at a little iced-over pond.

Dropping to my knees, I look up at the sky, trying to catch my breath as the snowflakes fall around me. I close my eyes and relax into the snow, breathing in the winter air and thinking about how different running was this time. So different from before.

CHAPTER 2

KODA



*I*t's still dark when I wake up with a jolt, the cold sweat covering my naked body. It takes me a moment, like it always does, to remember where I am and that I'm safe. The seconds tick by, and my breathing evens out. Rubbing my hands against my eyes, I remind myself that I'm not in a cage.

I give up on sleep and get up from the bed. I make my way to the bathroom, turn on the shower, and get in before the water has a chance to warm up. I'm used to cold showers after being denied the luxury of hot water for so long and then having to bathe in rivers when I escaped.

I soap up and try not to think about my past, but it always comes flooding back after a nightmare. I can't seem to stop it, so I just have to ride it out until all the feelings pass. This dream was like so many before, most of it exactly the same, but sometimes my mind likes to add in details that weren't there, just to fuck with me.

This time when I was dreaming, I was in the cage again. The one they kept me locked in unless they were running tests. They had a theory that if shifters were kept in small places, they would be less likely, or unable, to shift.

In this dream, I was in the cage, and I could hear Winnie crying. I know this didn't happen because Winnie was never captured with me. She got away. I always have to remind myself of that. We were young when we were caught, but she fought and was able to get free. I was too drugged up to know what happened, and all I could remember was waking up in a cell without her.

I'd learned over the years that we were taken by a company that was doing research on shifters. They kept us as if we were animals in a lab. It was a horrible time in my life, and ever since I broke free, my only goal was finding my sister. When I found her, it was only to see that she had amnesia and was being cared for here in Gray Ridge. Winnie had gotten lucky, and Alpha Stone had taken her into the pack and kept her safe. When I found her, and when her memories came back, I felt like my journey had finally come to an end.

Only it didn't.

I'm a bear shifter, and there aren't as many of us as there are of other species. Even fewer bear shifter females exist. When Winnie mated with Alpha Stone, I could have left, but I didn't want to. Bears aren't normally pack animals, but they are close to their families. I couldn't move away from Winnie after finally finding her, even though she was mated.

Thankfully, Alpha Stone welcomed me into the pack and gave me some land. Xavier, one of the wolf shifters, and I built my cabin out here to give me some space away from the pack and also to have a way to stay close to Winnie.

I'd been in captivity for so long that I was worried I wouldn't be able to adjust to pack life. But Xavier had gone through some trauma before he met his mate, and he was able to give me some advice to help me cope.

When we built the house, he helped me put in extra security measures so that I could feel safe again. My nightmares used to be a lot worse, and I think he knew it. So to help, we installed bolted locks both inside and outside the entry points of the house. The locks are in place in a way that no one is going in or out of my home without my permission. The extra security helps me sleep. As long as the nightmares don't creep in.

When I've finished showering, I make myself breakfast and have coffee. My life is very quiet, and I don't have many friends—just the Gray Ridge pack people who Winnie makes me hang out with. I look over at the counter and see an invitation to a kid's birthday party at Xavier and Gwen's home. I know I should want to go and be around everyone, but I feel myself getting tired and wanting to hibernate.

I let out a long sigh and try to shake off the dark mood. Internally, I know that I'm safe and everything is okay. I'm just getting used to the world again. Also being around a lot of happy mated couples can start to

wear on any single shifter after a while. There's a longing that comes with wanting to find your mate, and knowing I probably never will sends another wave of sadness over me.

Closing my eyes, I see dark hair and blue eyes. I try to grab on to the image, but it's gone like smoke through my fingers. I think of the image every time I think about finding my mate. I don't even know where the image is from or how I remember it, but something about it is familiar.

I push away from the table and clean up the kitchen. When I finish, I look outside. The sun has come up and it's starting to snow a bit. I love this time of year. The cool air and the clean smells of the forest calm my bear. I feel him stir inside me, and I decide he could use a walk in the woods.

Bears aren't much for running or spending energy when they don't have to. Our shifters are usually really big and solidly built. I lost a lot of weight when I was being held captive, but in the time since, I've put on a lot of weight. It feels good to have the extra layers of thick muscle and even a little extra around my mid-section. We're pretty hairy, too, and I definitely meet that type. My long beard and chest hair help keep me warm when it's cold out. So even though it's snowing, I don't need much coverage.

I've got on a long-sleeved, cream-colored thermal shirt and jeans. I go over to the door, pull on my boots, and then go about unlocking the door. I walk outside and turn, locking the cabin back up.

The woods are quiet, and my bear is enjoying the peace. He likes being outside, but a lot of times my fear overrides his need and we stay indoors. This is good for both of us, at least for a little while.

I walk for a few miles and come through the clearing next to the lake. I don't usually venture to this side of the protected lands, but I just need a change today. New scenery. Something inside me is telling me this will be best for me and my bear. That we need a new direction and something different to see today.

Looking off in the distance, I see a dark figure on the ground. My bear is instantly alert, and I widen my stance, preparing for danger. I raise my nose, trying to catch a scent, but the wind is at my back. Slowly and silently, I walk around the edge of the lake, looking for danger from every direction.

My bear is pacing, trying to get out, but I want to be able to hold my skin. I'm always terrified that someone will try to take me again after

getting captured the last time, so I'm being extra cautious.

I don't know what possesses me to even want to investigate the dark figure. Normally, I would just turn and run. But something's pulling me in that direction, and I need to see what it is.

As I step closer, I see the dark figure take shape. The scent still hasn't come my way, but I can make out that it's a person lying in the snow. My steps are tentative and slow, and I move closer and closer.

When I realize it's a woman, my heart starts to beat faster and my steps quicken. What if she's a shifter in trouble? I don't know everyone in the pack yet, so this could be a member in distress.

Moving close, I see that her eyes are closed and she's lying on her back with her arms outstretched. She must not have been here long because not much snow has fallen on her. It's starting to come down heavier now, and she's getting a small dusting on her face and body.

She's got thick black hair and skin the color of cream. Her lips are blood red, and something inside of me is pulling me towards her. I can't explain the force that makes me go to her, but something inside me knows that I must help her.

Something inside me needs to kiss her. Taste her... Brand her.

I kneel down beside her, and the sound wakes her. Her big eyes pop open, and the blue there strikes me right in the chest. Her eyes are the most beautiful things I've ever seen. I want to get lost in them and let them carry me away. There's something about them that's familiar and safe, but also terrifying and confusing.

A heartbeat passes between us, and for a second I'm pulled back in time to a place I thought I'd left. Fear grips me, but then the woman smiles up at me, and all of that melts away.

"Hi," she whispers, and I light up at the word. I start to say something back, but at that moment her scent hits me, and I my throat nearly closes up. She's human.

Rage pulses through me, and I start to stand. I want to get away from this human as fast as I can, but suddenly I'm dizzy with need. I inhale again, and I feel my bear trying to take over. He's clawing inside me to get out to roar, but I hold him tight, trying to catch my brain up to my body.

*Mate*, my bear growls over and over, and I realize that this human is my mate. A human. The one thing in this world that I not only fear but never



want to be near again is my mate.

I growl long and low, but the human doesn't look surprised. She sits up and pushes back from me, but I reach out, snatching her ankle before she can get away.

"Mine," I say through gritted teeth. I didn't want this, not like this. But my body has no choice.

"Let me go." I look into her eyes to see panic there. "Don't, please. My brothers will worry. I know what you are, please don't do this."

The plea for her family pulls at my heart. How many times had I begged to be let free to find my family? How many times had I begged for news of my sister? I feel sadness for her, but then it's followed by anger. Her kind are the ones that kept me from Winnie. This human is my mate. I have every right to take her from her human people.

"You're mine now," I say, pulling her off the ground and throwing her over my shoulder.

"Please let me go. I swear I won't come back. I'll never tell anyone."

As the snow comes down heavier and heavier, I carry her back to my cabin. Our tracks are covered and no one will be able to find us. I'm taking my mate home, and she will get used to it.

"You can't do this. You can't take me." There is so much panic in her voice that I nearly stop and go back, not wanting to upset her.

"I will treat you kindly and no harm will ever come to you as long as I live." I take a breath and keep walking. "It's more than your kind ever gave me."

CHAPTER 3

SNOW



*M*y hood falls over my face, blocking everything out. I try to move it out of the way, but it only falls back again, showing me nothing but the snow-covered ground rushing by while the man who has me over his shoulder runs through the woods.

Each step bounces me. One even makes me grunt. The sound makes him slow his strides in an effort not to jostle me again. I try to find words to plead with him, but nothing comes now that I'm over his shoulder and he is taking me farther and farther away from my brothers' cabin.

I try to shift to see if maybe I can catch him off guard and break free, but his hold only tightens on me.

"Still or you'll hurt yourself."

I do as his deep voice commands. It would be a fruitless effort. I'd probably break something if I fell from this height. The man is ginormous, even compared to my brothers.

"You're hurting me," I lie, finally finding my voice again.

"Am I holding you too tight? If you stop struggling, I can loosen my grip. I don't want to drop you."

I huff, not answering his ostensibly generous question. He kidnaps me but wants to make sure I'm unharmed.

When I opened my eyes and stared into the deepest brown eyes I'd ever seen, I was shocked. That shock only grew when a honey color started to blend into them. They were beautiful. I also knew instantly he was a shifter. Human eyes could never do that. I wasn't scared until he jumped away from me and started to growl.

When he lunged for me, I felt a moment of panic, unsure of what he was doing.

“*Mine,*” he’d growled. At the time I was in fight or flight mode, but now thinking back on it, I know what’s happened. I’ve seen it before. Mates. I’d seen my brothers, one after another, find their mates. I’d witnessed the instant attraction they had. The need they had for them so strong and unstoppable.

It’s what’s gripping the man carrying me over his shoulder. I’m his mate, and he doesn’t seem all too happy about the idea. In fact, he seemed enraged for a moment. I try to think back to what he’d said

*“I will treat you kindly, and no harm will ever come to you as long as I live. It’s more than your kind ever gave me.”*

That sealed it. He was mad that I was human. I could do absolutely nothing about it. Something even I wished I wasn’t. The humans I’d been brought up around were evil, vile people. Not like the shifters in my life who’d taken care of me and shown me more love than my father ever did.

My body jerks a little when he takes three stairs at a time, then I hear the sound of locks clicking before a door opens and slams shut. I hear the sound of locks clicking into place once again. Then I’m on my feet, staring up at one angry-looking man.

“What are you?” The honey color is back in his eyes, pushing all that dark brown away.

“A shifter.”

“I know that.” I put my hand on my hips. I’m used to having to look up at my brothers, but this is just crazy. I’m going to get a crick in my neck.

His eyes narrow on me.

“Yes, I know all about shifters,” I inform him. There’s no beating around the bush or pretending I don’t know. Besides, it’s more than obvious he is with all this grunting and growling he’s doing.

“A bear. How do you know about my kind?”

I just shrug, not feeling scared of him anymore. Shifters don’t hurt their mates. Most even die if the other does. But those are true love cases. It’s clear my big bear isn’t happy with his choice of mate. “I grew up with shifters, you could say. In fact, they’ll be looking for me.”

“They can look all they want. They won’t come on my land,” he says with utter certainty. It makes me wonder what they will do. The Alpha

doesn't even know about me.

"They will when they track my scent," I retort.

"Snow will cover it. It's coming down hard now." I know he's right. They won't even be home for hours. My shoulders drop, and I'm not real sure what to do. Glancing around the wooded cabin, I see it has an open floor plan and is somewhat decorated. Like someone came in and spent the time to put the cabin together—new-looking leather couches, a dining room table that looks like it could fit a whole bear family.

Everything looks new, but the place is a mess. Dishes litter the counter. Clothes are strewn all around, random crap piled on the table. It looks a little sad. Like a home was built but wasn't loved. And all the windows are locked up. Shutters closed over them, blocking any light from outside.

"So you're just going to keep me here? Against my will?"

"Your kind did the same to me. At least I will take care of you, not lock you in a cage." His words don't sound angry, just matter-of-fact. Each one hits me hard, making my stomach cramp. Please no. Could he have been one of the shifters I'd left behind?

"Okay." I pull my hood off and toss my cape on the couch next to me. He growls, making me look back up at him. His eyes roam over my body, making my blood heat. It's the same feeling that coursed through me when I opened my eyes to see him looming over me. I'd wanted him to kiss me so bad. I've never been kissed. Never even been close to being kissed.

He's handsome. Maybe a little overgrown and rough around the edges, but that doesn't take away from his handsomeness at all. In fact, I kind of like that he looks a bit scary. He could protect me.

"Just 'okay'? You're not going to fight me?" I can hear the uncertainty in his voice.

No, I'm not going to fight him. He's right. If what I'm thinking is true, then my people did do worse than what he'd do to me here. I'd seen glimpses of how my father treated the shifters he'd kept caged away. The ones I'd left behind because I was too scared to stay. Selfish.

This, I could do. I could be his mate. I glance around the room, taking in the mess and chaos. If I know how to do anything, it's make a home. It's what I love to do. I owe him this. Maybe I can make him see not all humans are terrible.

I can see the sadness in his eyes. I see it when I look in the mirror.

“No, I won’t fight you, but I need to tell my brothers.”

“No!” he growls. “They can’t have you.” He snaps the last part, making me jump. A frown forms on his brow. It shows me he doesn’t like scaring me. I like that. It’s an oddly cute look on his hard face. Not that I would inform him of that.

I widen my eyes and pouting. “I just need to let them know I’m okay.” I do the same face that seems to work on my brothers. His eyes go wide as if in panic.

“Don’t cry,” he growls, like that will make me stop.

“They’ll worry. Then I’ll worry that they are worrying, then I’ll worry myself sick with all the worry,” I push on.

“That’s a whole lot of worry. You should only worry about your mate. Me.” He points at himself like I forgot who my mate was.

“Well, I can just worry about you if I can undo all this other worrying...” I let my words trail off.

“Fine.” He stomps past me towards the kitchen and starts digging through drawers. I grab my cape, sliding it back over my head.

He comes back and hands me a notepad and pen. I take it from him, not sure what he wants me to do with it.

“Address,” he says, nodding down at the paper. I scribble it down and hand the pad back to him.

“I can just show you the way.” I glance at the closed window. I can’t see out of it as it’s been boarded up. “Or maybe not. I don’t remember the way here.”

“Good.” He looks down at the note. “Then you can’t try to leave because you won’t know where to go.”

My mouth drops open. “What are you going to do? Blindfold me to my brothers’ and back?” I snap.

“No, that’s ridiculous.” He folds the paper and tucks it into his jeans pocket “I know where the Denali brothers live. I also know they are wolf shifters, making them not your actual brothers.” He growls the last part, and it spikes my temper.

“Maybe not by birth, but they raised me like one of their own.” I narrow my eyes on him, not liking him saying they aren’t my brothers. Maybe not by blood, but they are family.

“Write them a note. I’ll deliver it to their cabin so they’ll know you’re okay.” He takes a step towards me, crowding me.

“No, I’m going to tell them in person.” I go to move around him towards the front door. I don’t even try to open it. I heard the million locks click into place when we entered. Besides, one looks higher than I can reach. “Let’s go.” I try to use the same tone I use on my brothers, but it doesn’t seem to work. He just stares at me, jaw clenched.

“No. You’re not dressed to be in the cold. No one can take you if I have you here.” He comes closer to the door, crowding me all over again. His woody smell carries a touch of cinnamon, and it fills my lungs. He smells delicious. I feel my body react to the dominance pouring off him, waking up parts of me that I didn’t even know existed. It makes me wonder if humans feel these mating feelings, too. I don’t know anything about shifters mating with humans. I’ve heard it could happen, but I’ve never seen it.

I try the pout that seemed to work before, but this time he catches me off guard when his mouth lands on mine. It’s like a light being switched on. Pure pleasure hits my body just as his lips meet mine. He pushes his tongue into my mouth, and I let him. I open for him. I wrap my hands around his neck, wanting him closer.

He deepens the kiss, a growl pouring from his mouth into mine, and I can’t help but moan back, rubbing my body against his. He lifts me, his hands going to my ass as he pins me against the door. I can’t stop myself from wriggling against him. His mouth pulls from mine, going to my neck as he trails open-mouthed kisses from my ear down to my collarbone.

Who knew something so simple could feel so wonderful? My whole body feels like it’s on fire. I dig my fingers into his hair, wanting to pull him closer, then I feel his teeth skim my neck and sink in. My body explodes, an orgasm rocking through me, making me drop my head back and ride out the pleasure.

I’ve never had one before. I’ve always been too scared to try one at my own hand. Living with shifters, they hear and smell everything, and the embarrassment would have killed me, but I can enjoy this one. Soak all the pleasure from it.

“Mine,” he growls.

“Yes,” I agree. I’d already told him I’d stay. I meant it. He needs me. Maybe with time he won’t hate being mated to me. It will be more than just

the animal pull he feels towards me.

I feel his tongue lick the spot he just bit, making my body jerk. No one told me you could come from a mate bite. My brothers didn't talk about sex with me. Not to mention shifters don't have sex until they're mated.

He slowly sets me on the ground.

"Write the note. It's the only option. Take it or leave it." I can tell by the look in his eyes it's final. I'm more shocked he isn't taking me to bed. I know with wolves, the mating hits hard and fast, and most of the time the mated female is flat on her back within the first thirty minutes, but he just seems calm. Completely in control, and that stings. Maybe he is just using my body against me, knowing I am feeling some mating pull. Or worse, he regrets kissing the human.

I have no clue how bear shifters even mate. I just know they're rare. I pick up the notepad and pen.

"Just say you're fine. You found your mate and you'll be in contact soon," he says in the still-cool, calm voice while my hand is still shaking a little from the orgasm I just had. I'm shocked I can stand at all.

"Do you just want to write it?" I hold the notepad out for him to take. He just shakes his head, and I do what he says, scribbling on the paper. I can tell there is no fighting this. I hand it over to him. He looks down at it, then tucks it into his pocket with the other note.

"I will drop off the note and then I must do a few things. You'll stay in the cabin."

"I have a feeling there isn't a way even if I wanted to get out."

He doesn't answer me, but he does reach out and lift a strand of my hair. Bending down, he rubs it against his nose, breathing it in. The simple act makes my heart flutter. Then he drops it and starts popping the locks on the doors.

"Make yourself at home. I will be back to care for you soon." He takes one more look at me like he's debating leaving. I can see the fight in his eyes.

"Take the note please. I'll worry," I remind him. "I'll stay right here." I have the need to reassure him, to wipe that lost look off his face.

"What's your name?"

I feel myself blush a little after having done what we did without even knowing each other's name.

“I’m Snow. Yours?”

“Koda.”

I smile at him, and he nods. Then he steps back, leans down, and presses his lips against mine. This time he just holds them there before pulling away, then stomping out of the house and slamming the door. I hear all the locks click into place, leaving me all alone.

Touching my lips where he kissed me, I think about his name. *Koda*. I like the way that sounds.

I turn around to see the chaos that is now my home. I pull off my shoes and cape once again. I hang my cape by the front door and place my shoes in a closet next to the door. I guess I should get to work. I told him I’d be his mate.

If what he said about being caged away is true, I’m going to turn this new cage into a home like he’s never had before.



## CHAPTER 4

### KODA



*W*alking away from the cabin, I feel an ache in my chest. I try to control it, but I can't, so instead I will ignore it and try to carry out what I need to as fast as possible. I don't know what came over me when I kissed her. The things I felt. The need to bite her to show she belongs to me. Then she came, shocking me. I didn't know what to do. I panicked.

The longer I'm away from her, the more uneasy I feel, and it's only been moments. I need to get back to her as soon as possible.

Taking off through the woods, I go towards the Denali home. I remember Alpha Stone talking about them one of the last times I went to have dinner with Winnie. He mentioned there were three wolf shifters living together hoping to find their mates. He never mentioned a human, so he must not have known about Snow.

Snow. Such a beautiful, perfect name for her. She's named after something I love. It makes me think about hibernating and having her in my bed with me. Now that she's my mate, she'll be the thing I love most. I'll take care of her.

The weather is taking a turn for the worst, so I speed up my running to get to the house faster. It would be easier to drive, but the roads are all unpaved out here. It's all protected land, so it's either run or shift. And since I didn't bring a change of clothes, I choose to run. Our shifters aren't too worried about nudity, but going to see my sister naked isn't something I'd like to do anytime soon.

When I get to the Denali cabin, I stand outside for a moment and listen for signs of someone being home. After just a second, I can tell that it's

empty, and I walk in the front door. Since this is protected land, no shifter would dare break in and steal anything. If they needed shelter, it would be provided, so most of the time cabins like this aren't locked. Except mine.

Walking through the house, I can smell the scent of the three wolves and human that live here. The wolf scent is strong, so it covers most of Snow's, but I scent my way to her room easily enough.

As a bear shifter, our sense of smell isn't as sharp as other shifters, but I'm a male and I would know my mate's scent anywhere. When I go into her room, I see that it's tidy and simple. A small bed with just a few things around the room. Nothing is out of place, and it's all very clean. It makes me feel a bit sad that my home was so messy when she came in. When I get back I'll clean because it looks like she would appreciate that.

I take a bag out of her closet and pack what few belongings she has. Everything in her room fits into a small suitcase, and it makes another pang of sadness hit me. I didn't have much when I first came to Gray Ridge. I just had a small pack with things that kind shifters had given me along the way. I'd told them all I couldn't stay and I was looking for my sister, and they all tried to help as best they could.

Seeing Snow's suitcase and thinking that this is all she owns makes me wonder what her story is and how she came to live with a pack of wolves she calls brothers when she's fully human.

When I go to exit the cabin, I leave the note on the table. Before I turn to go, I find a pen and write something at the bottom. Hopefully, it helps them understand what is happening.

*I'm okay. Don't worry, guys. I found my mate and he is going to keep me safe. I'll check in soon. Love, Snow.*

*PS She is mated to Koda, brother of Winnie, who's mated to Alpha Stone. I will protect Snow with my life.*

Once I'm finished, I take her bag and leave, heading into the woods towards the Alpha's home.



It doesn't take me long to get to Winnie and Stone's place. When I get there, I don't scent the Alpha, and I breathe a sigh of relief. I just need to talk to Winnie alone for a few minutes, and then I can get back to my mate.

I knock on the door and she answers a moment later, beaming brightly at me. Thankfully, she's a female bear and she probably won't be able to scent my mate on me when she reaches in for a hug. Our kind love to snuggle and are very affectionate, so I hug her back, thinking that she would know something was wrong if I didn't.

When I pull back and walk inside, she looks at me funny for a half second, then I see her dismiss whatever thought she had. I hid Snow's suitcase outside so she wouldn't get suspicious. I just have a few questions and then I can leave.

"Koda, I'm so happy you came by. Micah is sleeping right now, but I can wake him up if you want to hold your nephew."

I smile at her, shaking my head. "I'd love to see the baby bear cub, but let him have his rest. I know how it is in this weather. I just want to curl up and go to sleep."

Winnie agrees and rubs her big baby belly. She's pregnant with another baby, and I'm sure the cold has her wanting to nap a lot as well.

"I'm surprised you came out in this." She nods towards the window. "It's really coming down now. Stone went to go check on the pack to make sure everyone is stocked up and good to bed down for a few days."

"I had to pick something up in town." I look around, trying to find the words. "And I need to ask you a few things. Privately."

She sits forward in her chair, looking at me with concern. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes. I just have some questions about..." I hesitate, then just decide to rip the Band-Aid off. "About your mating."

Looking up, I see her cheeks turn red, and I hate that I've embarrassed her.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. I just don't trust anyone else to talk to about this. It's hard not growing up with a pack or an Alpha to explain this to you, and it would be even more awkward if I asked Stone now."

Winnie nods her head in understanding. "I can imagine. I was lucky that I had women to talk to about it. Okay. What would you like to know?"

I clear my throat and just go for it. Needing it over as soon as possible.

"Did you feel attraction right away? Did you know you were true mates?"

I don't think this was the question she expected by the look on her face, but she nods and starts to explain.

"I felt attraction, yes, but from what I've heard, it's different for us than for other shifters. I didn't have the pull that some shifters experience, and that may be because I'm a bear. It was something that grew over time with me, and now I think I feel the same as others. I get separation anxiety when we are apart for too long, and I have an uncontrollable need to have his scent on me. I didn't have that before."

I nod, listening to her answers and thinking of what else I need to ask her.

"Dom and Ruby are mated. But she's human."

I help the Gray Ridge sheriff a few days a week so that he can spend more time at home since his mate had triplets. I help the shifters with what they need, being muscle when they need it and do odds and ends around the office. Dom and I have never had a serious conversation about his human mate, and I didn't have a reason to before.

"Yes. Apparently, it's not unheard of. It's just rare. From what little I know, she felt the pull after their first coupling during the mating moon." Her cheeks splash pink again, and I am just as uncomfortable talking about this as she is. "The mating moon is designed to bring shifters together to propagate the species. And from what I could gather from Ruby, that's when Dominic was able to claim her for the first time. She felt the pull at its greatest then, and that's when they, um, bonded."

I nod my head, glad that at least one of us knows how this is supposed to work.

"So Dominic didn't claim her until the first mating moon?"

She nods. "From what they said, he could have before then, but the transition would be easier if he waited. So he did."

She lets out a little laugh and rubs her belly. "The mating moon gets all shifters though, not just the ones mated to humans. I guess this storm has good timing."

"What do you mean?" I ask in confusion.

"I guess you wouldn't know. Unless you're mated, you don't really pay attention to it as closely. But when the mating moon approaches, you want to make sure your house is stocked and you don't have plans for a few days."

I'm already pregnant, so the pull won't be as strong. But all the other couples will notice a change."

"But what does this have to do with the storm?"

She waves her hand like I should understand her meaning. "The mating moon is tonight, Koda. Shifters are going to be holed up in their cabins in a snowstorm, with Mother Nature telling them to breed." She lets out a laugh. "Just be glad you're not a newly mated shifter. I hear it's pretty rough."

A sinking feeling hits my stomach, and I feel like the earth shifts under me.

"Koda, are you okay? You look a little pale."

I shake my head, trying to push away the thoughts running through my mind. "I'm fine."

"Why all the sudden questions about mating?"

I shrug my shoulders and look away. "I've just been feeling lonely lately. It's hard to be around couples and cubs and not want one of my own."

Winnie reaches out, rubbing my knee. I put my hand on top of hers and look into her honey-brown eyes, the same color as mine.

"You'll find her one day, Koda. And when you do, you'll turn your world upside down for her."

I nod, unable to tell her the whole story. I don't know why, but I want to make sure that everything is perfect between Snow and me before I tell anyone. I feel as if our mating is something special, and I don't want to tell anyone for fear it will all disappear. Like waking up from a dream that's too good to be true.

"Kiss Micah for me when he wakes up. And take care of this little cub, too." I reach down and rub her belly before giving her a hug goodbye.

"Be sure to stock up on food if you're going to be stuck in your cabin for a while."

I pause at the door, my hand on the knob. For a second I wonder if Winnie knows about my mate, but there's no way.

Looking over my shoulder, I smile at her and head out. I grab Snow's suitcase from behind the tree and make my way into town for a few supplies. The storm is getting almost impossible to navigate, so I don't have much time.

CHAPTER 5

KODA



I unlock the bolts and enter my cabin, shutting the door behind me and locking it again. I place the packages of food on the kitchen counter, thinking I may have gotten too much, but I want to make sure my mate is well provided for.

Once I've got the bags out of my arms, I notice the pot on the stove, a mouthwatering smell coming from it. Walking over, I see that it's a pot of stew, and my stomach growls loudly. The smell is wonderful and makes me think of a good home-cooked meal, something I usually have to go to someone else's house to get. It doesn't happen that often.

Looking around the cabin, I see everything is tidy, like it's been cleaned top to bottom. I feel a pang of guilt knowing that my mate did this. I should be caring for her, not the other way around. I should have cleaned up before I brought her here, but I had no idea I was going to meet her while I was out for a walk.

I inhale, smelling her scent, and I love it. Knowing she is here and in our home makes the bear inside me lie down happily. After I quickly put away the groceries, I pick up Snow's bag and go in search of her.

The cabin is built for a family, but it doesn't take me long to follow her scent into our bedroom. *Our bedroom.* The thought makes my bear even happier.

When I walk in, I put down her bag and see her laid across our bed. I feel a growl forming low in my chest. She looks like she belongs there. So small in the center of the giant king-sized bed.

She's stretched out on top of the covers, wearing one of my old T-shirts. The bottom of the hem has slid up, and I can see the curve of her ass.

I clench my jaw with the need to bite her there, to mark her as mine. The sun is setting, and soon the moon will be full and I'll need to be inside of her.

Walking over to the bed, I slowly strip off my clothes. My bear is pushing forward, and the need is growing. I'm being pulled to her like nothing I've ever felt, and I need to be close to her. Skin against skin.

Looking down, I see my cock is long and hard in front of me. It's never been this way before. For shifters, it only gets hard when you find your mate. I wrap my hand around it, rubbing up and down, but from the little I know about shifter matings, I won't cum unless I'm inside of her. It's Mother Nature's way of making sure the seed isn't wasted and that it's used to breed your mate.

When I crawl onto the bed, she moves just a little. I run my hands up her warm legs, seeing that she's naked under the T-shirt. I can smell her pussy, and the scent has my cock aching. The feeling is bittersweet. It aches, but it's an ache I want. I lick my lips, needing a taste, so I push her legs open more and push the shirt up over her ass. She's on her stomach, but I can get to all of her no matter how she sleeps.

My bed is oversized because I'm larger than a lot of shifters, so it helps now that I have a mate. I lay my chest down on the bed and put my face between her legs, inhaling her scent again. I hear a little moan, and I open my mouth, pressing against where she's wettest.

Her hips rise, and I hear my name on her lips, the sound driving me wild.

"Koda."

The word is breathy, and it makes me feel dominant. My bear growls and pushes forward, wanting to taste her honey, too.

When her hips rise again, giving me more of her, I grab hold of them with both hands and keep her in place as I eat at her. I've never done this before, but from the sounds she's making, I must be doing it right. I lick all of her, tasting how sweet she is. I suck on her warm, pink parts, thinking that I could spend hours doing this.

I roll over onto my back, my bear wanting to show her we can be a good mate. When she sits down on my face, her pussy on my mouth, my bear stretches out and shows her his belly. I keep sucking on her sweet honey, and she keeps saying my name.

I push her shirt up so that I can see her look down at me, her bright blue eyes wide open. She reaches down, grabbing my shaggy hair and gripping it in her hands as she moves back and forth on my mouth.

My bear growls when she tenses and tries to pull away from my mouth. I grab her thighs and bring her back down, not letting her off. I see out of the corner of my eye that my nails have come out a little and there is darker hair on the back of my hand. My bear is pushing forward, and I don't know how much longer I can hold my skin.

Snow grips my arms and cries out, but her sounds are from pleasure instead of pain.

Her honey drips into my mouth as she climaxes on top of me. I lick and suck it up as pleasure rockets through her and the mating heat takes me over. I didn't know what to expect, but it's far more intense than anything I could have imagined. My bear growls, and I flip Snow off of me, putting her on all fours in the middle of the bed.

Pushing her shirt up, I expose her ass to me. I grab her hips and knee her legs apart, wanting to take her but trying to slow down. I growl again, not knowing how to stop myself.

Snow leans up, looking over her shoulder and pushing her ass towards me. "Please, Koda."

There's a flicker of light in her eyes, and I can see that the mating heat is taking her over, too.

My cock is so big and her body is so small, I don't know if it will fit. But surely Mother Nature wouldn't put us together and work us into this state only for us to be unable to mate.

I push the head of my cock through her wet folds and feel her heat stretch to envelop me. I slowly sink into her until she has taken all of my cock. Her tight channel grips me, and I reach up, pulling Snow back against me. I'm kneeling on the bed with her sitting in my lap, my cock planted inside her small body.

I tear her shirt away, needing her skin against mine, her creamy neck exposed for my bite.

"I missed you, mate," I whisper against her skin, licking the shell of her ear.

"Koda. What's happening? I feel like I'm on fire. But in a good way."



“It’s the mating moon. I found you when it’s full. The mating heat will be stronger. The need to mark you is so powerful I don’t think I can hold back.”

“Bite me, Koda,” she gasps as she moves up and down on my cock. “It aches inside me. I think you biting me will make it better.”

I feel her pussy pulse, and I thrust up, moving with her. Without hesitation, I put my mouth on the soft skin of her neck and bite down. The small taste of her pure blood hits my tongue, and I cum inside her.

My cock pulses and throbs as jets of cum pour into her. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I realize she’s cumming, too, as the bonding takes place and the two of us join as one. Opening my mouth, I lick the small wound, knowing there will be a scar there for the rest of her life, showing all shifters that she’s mine.

The thought makes me growl, and I pull out, putting Snow on her back and spreading her legs wide. Her arms go up, reaching for me as I come down on top of her and put my cock inside her again.

“Don’t take it out, Koda. It aches when you take it out.”

She moves under me, raising her hips and begging for me to thrust.

She bites her lip as I thrust again. This time I claim her lips, needing to taste them while I’m inside her. She tastes like home, and my bear rolls around, loving the attention. It feels so good to have someone so close to us. Snuggling against Snow, I rub my body all over hers, letting my bear feel our mate.

Before I know what’s happening, I’m cumming inside her again. I hold myself still as she lies under me and I fill her womb up again. I don’t stop thrusting though, my still-hard cock not the least bit spend even after two powerful orgasms.

I look down at Snow, and she smiles up at me, petting my face. I lean into the touch, realizing that some of my bear has pushed to the surface. I know my eyes are probably glowing and I’m hairier than usual. My canines are a bit longer, and I feel more aggressive about protecting what’s mine.

“I was a virgin, Koda. I thought it would be painful, but I just feel an ache like I need more.”

Leaning down, I kiss Snow again, still thrusting in a steady rhythm. She grabs my wrist and moves my hand so it’s in between the two of us. She

puts my fingers on her clit and I rub it, seeing that she wants me to do this to give her pleasure.

I will give her anything she wants. Forever.

As I rub her pussy, she pulses around me, tensing and then cumming on my cock. The wet honey coats me, and I cum inside her again. I have lost control of my body when it comes to orgasms. I just know that I can't stop and I can't pull out of her.

When we've both come down from our peaks, I roll us over so Snow's on top. She sits up and begins to move.

"Koda," she moans and rocks on top of me.

I grip her wide hips and watch her large breasts sway with her rhythm. Leaning up, I take a nipple in my mouth and suckle her as she rides me.

"My God, does this ever stop?" she asks after another orgasm runs through her body.

I laugh and lie back, thrusting up into her. "I hope not."

We don't uncouple for a long time, trying out different positions and having orgasm after orgasm. The mating moon bears down on us, and the heat takes us from one peak of pleasure to the next. It's a night of magic beyond anything I've ever experienced, and I hope that even though Snow is human, she feels at least some of this.

When the morning light peeks through the curtains in the bedroom, Snow finally lies across my chest and breathes a happy sigh. I hold her to me, running my fingertips up and down her back.

"I didn't know it could be this way," I say, kissing the top of her head.

"Did nobody tell you what happens during mating moon?" she asks.

"I'd heard bits and pieces. But I never imagined it could be so wonderful. I promise I will be a good mate to you, Snow. I will protect you and keep you safe. I'll make sure nothing and no one ever harms you. I'll make sure that our cubs are provided for and that you have all that you desire."

She leans up, looking into my eyes, and I see something that looks like love and devotion in hers.

"I know you will, Koda. I've been around shifters a long time. But I know that you will make a wonderful mate. I'm lucky that you found me."

Leaning down, I take her lips, and this time when we make love, it has nothing to do with the moon.



CHAPTER 6

SNOW



I giggle as Koda nips at my neck while I sit in his lap at the giant dining room table. I may have gone a little overboard with all the food I cooked for breakfast, but I'm used to cooking for three shifters, and Koda's kitchen has more than a cook could dream of.

I could cook for an army in here. A lot of the stuff had never even been used and I'd had to take the plastic off most of it. That just highlighted how much Koda needs me here. He keeps telling me he's going to be taking care of me, but I'm going to care for him just as much.

"I made you all this food and you're just going to eat me," I protest half-heartedly as I lean my head to the side, letting him nibble at my neck.

His big hands run up my legs and under the shirt I have on, going to my ass and squeezing. "I want to eat you first." This time, he licks me, and the sensation makes me wriggle on his very hard cock. I don't know how we are still going at each other like this, but we can't seem to get enough.

"You can't live off of just eating me," I tease back, shifting on his lap to rub against him.

"I could," he grunts, then goes back to his neck assault, making me giggle again.

"Well I can't." He pulls back quickly, looking down at me with his big brown eyes.

"You're hungry?" Concern shows on his face. He always seems so worried about me. Anytime I make the tiniest remark, he's in action. I don't even have to try the pout thing. I ask and he does. It's sweet. It makes me feel important. Like he's never going to let me go.

He pulls me from his lap and sets me in the chair next to his before getting up and working his way around the table, making a giant plate of food. He piles it with eggs, bacon, pancakes, and some little hash potatoes I made. Then he places it in front of me.

“I can’t eat all that.” I thought he was making the plate for himself. It’s piled so high with food that I’m surprised it hasn’t collapsed.

“You’re small. I’ll make you nice and big.” He nods like that’s that.

I snort, knowing if I eat all that I’ll be sick. “I’m just built small. Trust me, I eat,” I reassure him. I grew up with shifters and spent most of my time cooking. In fact, I ate a lot, but it never seemed to go anywhere. “But there is no way I can eat all this food.”

He sits back down in his chair, pulling the plate over in front of him, before picking me up once again and depositing me in his lap. It’s a habit he’s picked up over the last two days. When he wants me somewhere, he doesn’t really ask. He just picks me up and puts me there.

“I’ll feed you until it’s all gone.” He picks up some potatoes and brings them to my mouth. I open for him. A feeling warms me deep down. I know I can’t eat all the food, but I’ll give it a go.

I’ve always been the one to take care of my brothers. While they were good to me, this is different. I feel cherished as I sit in his lap while he slowly feeds me, bite by bite. I still like doing things around here, cooking and cleaning, but the way he shows me he cares makes my heart flutter. It makes me believe that maybe being mated to a human isn’t bothering him anymore.

I’ve been mulling over what would happen if our children were human. I don’t know how all that works and what happens when a human mates with a shifter. I know with me, he has the mating pull, so he has no choice but to want me. But would it be different with our kids? He wouldn’t have that special bond with them, and if they were human, he might not love them like they’d deserve.

I push the thought away, not wanting to think about it right now. I want to soak this up, enjoy every moment of being the center of someone’s world. It’s intoxicating, and I want more. For so long I felt like I was waiting for the inevitable, when I wouldn’t be useful to my brothers anymore. My future was so unsettled. All I’ve ever wanted is a real family of my own. One that wouldn’t leave me one day.

What would happen when the final one found their mate? Where would that leave me? I have no real skills besides keeping a home and taking care of people. That had never bothered me, and I liked doing it. But I always worried whether it would be enough to get me by once I was alone.

Koda brings another bite to my mouth, reminding me that I'll never have to worry about that again. I have a mate to care for now. Maybe I could even make him fall in love with me. Guilt hits me at the thought. He'd probably hate me if he knew it was my father who'd kept him caged.

He'd told me his story late last night. How he came to Gray Ridge to live. That he'd tracked down his sister after being caged for years. He didn't give me all the details, and I could tell from the look on his face that the memory hurt deep. He hasn't been free that long. A few years. If I had been stronger, he could have been free years before that. He wouldn't be carrying that sadness and hate I see in his eyes when he talks about being caged.

Looking around the room, I wonder if he even realizes he went from one cage to another. This one might be nice, but he's still locking himself away. Even the windows are locked up tight, and I realize I haven't seen the outside in almost two days. I wonder how my brothers are doing.

"Do you ever open the shutters?" I ask, nodding towards one of the windows.

"No," he says simply, bringing another bite to my mouth.

"I miss the sun. Has the storm passed?"

"Yes. It's gone. Stopped sometime last night, but you cannot go outside until I get you something better to wear."

"But I can go outside? Maybe open the shutters?" A frown forms on his face at my question.

"I don't think I'll like people looking at you."

That shouldn't make me smile but it does. That makes him smile in turn. I shake my head, and the smile drops as his frown comes back. I laugh at his changeable mood.

"As much as I love being locked away with you, Koda, I have to go out sometimes. I want to. I've been kept away from town already for over a month. I'm going a little stir crazy."

He studies me for a second like he's thinking it over. "Okay," he says reluctantly. I beam at him. "But you stay at my side at all times."

I nod. I'm more than okay with that. I still get a little scared that someday my father might find me. I'll feel safe with him next to me when we do decide to go out.

"But you still need to eat." He brings some food to my mouth, and this time I bite his finger when he feeds me. He growls in response. "I like that."

I slide my tongue against his fingertip before I release his finger from between my teeth.

"Your teeth feel good on me." I turn a little so I'm straddling him. Leaning forward, I lick his neck like he always does to me, before taking a little nibble of him. His whole body jerks. A moan pours from him, and the sound goes straight to my core.

Pulling back, I look into his now-gold eyes. He reaches for my shirt, ripping it right down the center and leaving me completely naked on his lap. My underwear was long gone before I even got out of bed this morning.

"Fuck, you're perfect. I didn't even know something could be so perfect." His hand starts to roam my body, and I can't stop from moving my hips. Feeling bold, I lean up and reach between us, pulling his hard cock from his flannel pajama pants.

"Take me inside you, Snow. I want to watch you ride me."

I bite my lip, and he grips my hips, steadying me as I guide his cock to my entrance. When he's in position, I slowly slide down. Moans fill the room as I start to move on top of him. His hand goes back to greedily worshiping my body, touching me anywhere and everywhere before he slides it between my legs to play with my clit.

"Bite me, Snow, please," he begs, something I'm sure he never has to do. I do as he asks, leaning forward and biting into his shoulder. A loud roar booms from him as I feel him erupt inside of me, sending me over with him and making me bite harder. I feel more of him flood into me, making me moan as I finally release him. I lean back to watch his face. He always looks so peaceful and happy after we make love, and I love that I put that look on his face.

"You're perfect," he says again, bringing his hand up from between my legs to his mouth, licking his fingers clean and making me blush a little.

"You taste perfect, too."

Both his hands come to my hips and slide over to my stomach. "We might have made a cub," he says smiling.

“What if it’s not a cub?” I ask, unable to help myself. I know mates tend to conceive fast, so the likelihood of me being pregnant is high.

He shrugs like it’s no big deal either way.

“What if it’s human like me?” I push, needing more from him. “I know you don’t like humans.”

“I like you.”

The word *like* stings a little, because I more than *like* him.

“Will you like our babies if they’re human?”

“I will love them either way. You aren’t the only human I like. Sheriff Dominic’s wife is human too, and she doesn’t bother me. If our babies are human, they will be perfect like you. Anything from you would be perfect.”

His words hurt way more than he could ever know, because they can’t be true. My father was his jailer. I’m almost a hundred percent sure of it now that he’s told me about his time in captivity. He only told me bits and pieces, but I recognized his descriptions and I knew he was talking about the same place I had run from.

Not only that, he had a clear hatred for humans. I know how much that hatred can eat someone up. I’d seen it with my father. He hated shifters. Thought they were science projects. Hell, I think he hated humans, too, if how he treated me was any indication. It was why I ran to begin with. He wanted to start running tests on me, too. I’d seen an opening to escape one night and took it. I ran for what felt like forever until I collapsed in the snow, where my brothers found me. I’d only been eleven.

I’d refused to tell them my name, so Snow was born that day. Pulling myself from Koda’s lap, I grab the discarded shirt from the floor and use it to cover myself a little as I exit the room. I hear his chair push back and his heavy footsteps following me down the hallway and into the bedroom where I start to look for clothes to wear.

He stands in the doorway, watching me get dressed, with a confused look on his face.

“We aren’t going anywhere. I like you naked,” he protests as I slide a shirt over my head and pull on socks. I ignore him as I find pants and slide them on next.

“What’s the matter? I can tell you’re sad. Tell me and I’ll fix it. We can go to town now if you really want. Maybe I have something that can keep you warm. It might be a little big but—”



“Koda,” I say, cutting him off. “You can’t think every part of me is perfect.”

“I can,” he growls, taking a step into the bedroom. I match him with a retreating step, making him growl again.

“The Denalis are my brothers because they found me in the woods one night. Covered in snow. It’s how I got the name, actually. I was eleven when they became my family.”

“I’m your family now,” he corrects, possessiveness coating his words. A half smile pulls at my lips. I love that he’s like that with me. But it’s not real. He keeps calling me perfect and it’s not true. Each time he says the word, it cuts a little deeper.

“Before I was Snow Denali, I was Angie Madden.” His eyebrows rise like he’s thinking. “That night I was running from a facility my father ran. That was the night the Denali brothers found me. His name was Dr. Jack Madden.”

I see the color leave his face before a roar of rage sounds through the house, making me jump. “See? Not everything that comes from me can be perfect, because I come from him.”

We stand in utter silence for what feels like an eternity before Koda turns, storming from the room. After a few moments I hear the front door bang open. Following the sounds, I enter the living room to see the door that’s always locked up so tightly is wide open.

I grab my shoes next to the door and my cape and slip them on, stepping outside onto the porch to see if I can see where he went, but I only see his tracks in the fresh snow. A sob hiccups from my chest, and I feel the tears start to slide down my face.

Stepping off the porch, I start walking. It’s clear that he wants me gone. He’s been so protective of me, but he just left the door wide open. It’s not long until I start to hear howls, and I start running towards the sounds, knowing who it is.

When I break through the clearing, I see them coming towards me at a dead run. When I reach them, I drop to the ground, petting each of them. I can tell they are inspecting me but won’t shift until we get back to their cabin.

“Lead me,” I tell them as I follow them through the woods for a good mile before I finally see their cabin. I push inside and sit on the sofa. I wait

for them to shift and change, and then all three join me back in the living room. They pull me up from my seat and wrap me in hugs.

“We’ve been so fucking worried, Snow. The phones have been down, and we had to wait for the storm to stop to make it over to the Alpha’s house to find out where you were,” Flint says, a half growl in his voice.

“I’ve been with Koda,” I tell them.

“We know,” Forest says sternly, and I give him another hug.

“He wouldn’t fucking tell us where Koda lived. Said he’d go check it out, but then his mate started freaking out. He kicked us out of his house. Said he’d get back to us, but we’ve been searching anyway,” Flint finishes. I can see the tension in his body.

“I’m fine,” I try to reassure them.

“You’re not fine. You’ve been crying,” Finn says worriedly. My fair skin hides nothing.

“I...” I pause, taking a deep breath. “My mate wants nothing to do with me.” The last part comes out as a sob as Finn pulls me into an embrace, holding me tightly and trying to get me to stop crying. Suddenly, a roar sounds from outside.

CHAPTER 7

KODA



*W*hen I bolt from the house, I don't think about anything other than the name that Snow said. Jack Madden.

He was such a horrible human being who did terrible things to our kind. When I was there, he was the one was leading the facility. I'm pretty sure he owned the place. Everyone answered to him and he seemed to be making all the decisions. When I was there, I got the feeling that if he went down, the place would have fallen apart. I could sense dissent in the people that worked there and knew that all it would take would be one good gust of wind and the whole place would tumble to the ground. The only person who seemed to want to be there was Madden.

I knew I'd have to wait for the perfect moment. I waited until he was the last one in the lab that night. Sometimes he would stay late and do experiments the other technicians weren't comfortable with. They knew he was going too far, but no one was willing to stop him.

On my last night there, he came into the lab furious. He was blaming me for things I had no clue about. He said our kind was a disease on mankind and he was going to cure it. I had thought for a long time that he wanted to make us some kind of super-race with his experiments, but soon I realized he just enjoyed torturing us. He was crazy. I knew one day he would kill me, and I knew that day had finally come.

I saw the needle on the table and knew I only had one chance to make my move. Before the last tech had left for the night, he'd placed a pair of scissors on the table close to me and gave me a look. I couldn't figure out why he did that until Madden came in. Then I knew. He was giving me a chance.

While his back was turned, I grabbed the scissors and cut the straps binding me. Before I could form any sort of plan, Madden turned around and I swung out, slicing the scissors across his throat. In one move, my captor was on the floor, bleeding to death.

I waited, scissors in hand, and watched until the light left his eyes. I wanted to make sure that he never did this to anyone ever again and that no other shifters would suffer through what I had to. I took what I could in the short amount of time I had. I found the other shifters and set them free. They all took off as fast as they could without a second glance. I went outside and found some gasoline in a storage building nearby.

Watching the fire take hold, I made sure that there wasn't going to be anything left but ash. Once that was clear, I got out of there and started running. I ran into some shifters a few days later and they helped me out. All I could think about was finding Winnie at that point. I didn't think about what I had done, but even now I don't regret it.

When I get to a clearing in the woods, I stop and try to catch my breath. How could my mate want me if I killed her father? Would she even be able to look at me if she knew the truth of what I'd done?

There's a burning in my chest, and I know it's because I'm separated from her. I don't know what to do. I don't know what I'll do if she pushes me away. The last few days have been the sweetest I've ever known. I never thought I'd have something like that again. She pushed back all the darkness that's always been present in me. When I was with her, it was gone. I saw nothing but her. My perfect little mate.

I want to go back to our cabin and tell her what I did, but what happens if she pushes me away? My bear whines at the thought, knowing it would rip us apart. Being rejected by a mate doesn't happen with shifters, but she's human. This could send me into shock.

I drop to my knees in the snow, putting my head in my hands. I have no idea what I'm going to do. I feel lost.

"Koda?"

The voice of the Alpha has me looking up. Stone is close by, but I didn't even hear him approach. I'm so lost in my own thoughts and pain that I've pushed out everything else.

"Are you all right, brother?"

He comes over and kneels down beside me, looking over my body, I assume, for injury.

“My mate,” I say, and I feel the pain slice through my heart.

“Is she hurt?” he asks, like he already knows about her. Maybe her brothers had come to him after I’d left the note.

“No. It’s nothing like that.”

Stone puts his hand on my shoulder, and I feel the weight of the Alpha speaking to me. It’s not in my nature to bow down to anyone, but belonging to this pack means doing what my pack leader tells me to, and for that, my bear will listen.

“Koda. Tell me what’s wrong.”

I let out a deep sigh and explain what happened with Snow and me. How I found her and how she is my mate, and then I tell him about her confession, who her father was, and what that meant to me.

“I don’t want to do anything that will cause my mate pain. But I fear that if I tell her the truth, she may push me away.” The weight of my words is nearly crushing me, and the pain in my body is worsening. I can’t be away from her for this long without consequences.

“I’ll go with you, brother. We’ll talk to her together.”

I nod. There’s no disagreeing with the Alpha. And maybe he will make her understand what pushing me away means. He’s better with people than I am. I often feel at a loss for words. After being held captive for so long, some of my social skills aren't what they used to be.

I get up from the ground, and he follows me back to my cabin. When I get within sight, I’m shocked that the door is wide open. Shocked that I would have done that. I was so upset when I went outside that I forgot to lock the door. I left her unprotected. Panic hits me hard and fast like nothing I’ve ever felt before, going all the way down to my bones.

“Snow!”

I run towards the house in a panic, and I know within a half a second she’s not inside. Looking down, I see her tracks, and I start running after them, trailing her prints into the woods. I feel Stone beside me, tracking her as well, and we run hard for a long time before we find a large cluster of wolf tracks next to her boot prints.

“Her brothers. The Denalis,” I say, gasping for breath.

Stone nods and motions in the direction of the tracks. We take off running and follow them to a cabin on the outskirts of the protected land.

When I get to the cabin, I can scent the wolves and my mate. My bear pushes all the way forward, and I barely hold my skin as he roars his anger.

I will rip this cabin apart board by board until they give me my mate.

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CHAPTER 8

SNOW



*A*nother roar sounds, this one a heck of a lot closer. Then the front door explodes, and chunks of wood clatter all around us. Everyone ducks, but before I even know what’s happening, I’m in the air with strong arms around me as the cold of the outside hits me.

A strange feeling a *déjà vu* strikes me as Koda runs through the woods at a pace that clearly isn’t human with me wrapped in his arms. I don’t say anything. The look on his face is entirely savage. Part of his face has shifted, and his eyes are completely black.

It isn’t long before I start to hear the howls behind us, making my heart rate sky rocket. I don’t want anyone to get hurt. Deep down I know Koda would never hurt me. He might not want me as a mate, but he wouldn’t hurt me. I wonder if that’s what’s driving him now. He knows he has to have me as a mate even if he hates me.

Maybe that’s why he’s so savage. He’s lost control. More howls sound behind us, and Koda picks up speed somehow as he runs through the wood, dodging trees and never missing a step.

“Please,” I whisper as I push my face into his neck. I don’t know what I’m begging for—for him to stop or for him to refrain from attacking my brothers, who I know are hot on our trail.

“Mine,” he growls. His arms tighten around me. Soon the house comes into sight, the door still standing wide open. Koda leaps over all the stairs and lands inside the house, kicking the door closed behind him he puts me down and starts flipping the locks.

I feel relief as I hear the locks click into place. I know now that a fight won’t break out between my brothers and Koda. I know Koda could take

them one on one, no problem. That's clear from his size alone. But I don't know what he'd do with all three of them at once, and I couldn't bear for any of them to get hurt.

Koda turns to look at me, and it's then I see the dart sticking out of his shoulder. I gasp and rush over to him as he pulls it out.

"Tranq," he growls, tossing the dart across the room. He shakes his head. "They don't work on me anymore. I'm immune."

Relief and sadness hit me. Relief because I know he'll be okay, but sadness because I know he's immune because he was probably shot up with hundreds of tranqs when he was held captive over the years.

He takes two steps towards me, dropping to his knees in front of me and catching me off guard. He leans his forehead against me, like he's breathing me in. I run my fingers through his hair, wanting to calm him.

"Go away," Koda growls a second before a bang hits the door.

"Snow, are you okay?" Flint yells through the door.

"Open the door, Koda." A deep voice I don't recognize says. "Is he out, Snow? I hit him with a dart."

Koda doesn't move. I just keep running my fingers through his dark hair, his breathing starting to calm and some of the tension leaving his body. I love that my touch can do that to him and that I have such power over this giant man.

"I'm fine, everyone. We just need a minute," I try to reassure them.

"I said leave! She's mine!" Koda growls against me, his possessive tone sending a sweet chill up my body.

No one responds, and I have no idea if they've left or not, but Koda doesn't move from his position in front of me.

"Don't leave me. I can't stand it. When I came back," his voice cracks, "and saw the door wide open and found you gone, it was the worst moment of my life. I never even felt that kind of panic when they took me. Never had a fear like that."

He looks up at me, and I can see the plea in his eyes.

"I thought you wanted me gone, Koda, after I told you were I came from."

He shakes his head. "That's not why I left." I can tell he needs to say something but doesn't want to say it.



I run my hand from his hair down to the side of his face. He leans into my touch, turning to kiss the center of my palm.

“Say you won’t leave me.”

“I didn’t want to leave to begin with,” I admit. Each step I took from the cabin hurt more and more. It was like I was leaving the place that was meant to be my home.

“Say it,” he demands, making a smile pull at my lips.

“I won’t leave you.” I can still see the uncertainty in his face. “Ever,” I add. “As long as you want me here, I’ll stay.”

“I’ll always want you here,” he says instantly. I smile.

“I killed your father.” His hands tighten on my hips like I might try to pull away from him.

“Good.” I feel relief. Like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I’ll no longer have to look over my shoulder in fear of my father popping up at any moment. Koda just gave me a gift and he doesn’t even know it.

He looks at me with shock on his face.

“Did you expect me to be sad about that? I ran from him. Have been running from him. I’ve felt guilt for years about the people I’d left behind. Worse, when I got to safety, it took twelve hours for me to admit where I’d come from, and when they went back to try and save some of the shifters, the place was empty. Maybe if I had said something sooner, you could have been free sooner!”

A sob rips from my throat as I think about how I’d left him there.

“Snow.” He pulls me into his lap so I’m straddling him. “You were eleven.” I know. He isn’t telling me something my brothers haven’t been trying to say for years. I shouldn’t have any guilt, but it’s still there.

“Besides, I’d take every year in there if it meant it led me on the path to finding you.”

“Oh, my God.” I wrap myself around him, burying my face in his neck as the tears start to flow. I can’t believe he just said that. It’s bittersweet. He would have willingly stayed in that place just to be with me.

“I love you,” I sob into his neck. In one quick movement, I’m pinned to the floor.

“Say it again,” he demands.

“I love you.” His mouth comes down on mine. His kiss is soft and sweet but lined with possessiveness. Everything he does when it comes to me is

possessive.

When he finally pulls back, I have to ask. “I know being mates makes you drawn to me no matter what, but do you think that maybe you could love me one day, even knowing who my father was?”

“I don’t care where you came from. You’re mine,” he growls, taking my mouth in another kiss and making my body come alive. It seems to do that every time he says the word *mine*. I love that I belong to someone, that I’m so important to him. I don’t care how needy that makes me.

I try to pull his shirt off, but he stops me, resting his forehead against mine.

“I love you, Snow. You brought me back to life. I was just moving through the motions each day, but now I feel like I have purpose. A reason to be here.”

“You say the sweetest stuff to me.”

“I’ll be so good to you,” he says, adding more sweetness. I’ll be shocked if I’m not a big pile of happy goo when he’s done talking.

“Like take me into town and let me open the shutters?” I tease, making him growl, but he nods.

“I’ll go with you every time. Someone might try and take you from me.”

“No one is going to snatch me.”

“Yes they would, because I would.” It’s adorable that he thinks everyone wants me. He thinks I’m so rare and special that no one could resist taking me.

“Did,” I correct him as I laugh. I don’t want to go anywhere without him anyway. I don’t know if some of my old fears still reside inside me, but I never like it when I’m alone, and I feel safe in Koda’s home with all the security.

I go to pull his shirt off, wanting to make love to him, but he stops me once again. I pout.

“They’ll hear.” He looks over his shoulder at the front door. “I don’t want them to hear me taking you. No one hears that.”

Suddenly, we hear the locks start to pop one by one. Koda is on his feet instantly, pulling me with him. He turns when the door flies open.

A short girl with brown hair and the same eyes as Koda stands in the doorway, her very pregnant belly in silhouette.

She has her hands on her hips, and I see a man standing behind her, a possessive hold on her shoulder.

A smile spreads across her face. "I knew something was going on!" She bounces into the room, the big tattooed man following her. He picks up the tranq dart off the floor.

The girl sees it, and her eyes narrow. "You shot my brother!" she yells at the man, and I now know she's Winnie, Koda's sister. He's talked about her a little.

"Not that it did any good." He tosses the dart onto the coffee table.

"It would take more than that then to stop me from losing my mate."

My brothers all shuffle in, and I can feel the tension come in with them, making Koda growl. My brothers all growl back. I move in front of him. He locks his hands on my hips so I can't leave his hold, but I'm still blocking him from my brothers.

"Everyone, cool it. My mate is pregnant, and there will not be a fight in the living room. One of the females could get hurt."

"No one is going to fight." I try to stay as calm as possible. "Koda would never hurt my brothers, would you, Koda?" I turn my head, looking up at him and giving him my pout.

"No," he growls, clearly unhappy. "Unless they try to take you from me."

"No one can take me from you," I reassure him.

I turn to look back at my brothers. "Glad to see that doe-eyed look she does doesn't just work on me." Forest says.

"Her eyes are perfect." Koda kisses me on the top of my head. "You don't need to worry about her doe eyes. Only I get them now."

"Ahh. That's so sweet. See, I told you, Stone. He's a marshmallow on the inside. No one believed me," Winnie says, coming over to me and trying to pull me into a hug, but Koda won't let me go.

"Let her go," she huffs, and Koda reluctantly lets me go with a grunt.

She wraps her arms around me. "Thank you," she whispers in my ear. "I already see the old Koda coming back." Releasing me, she steps back.

"How about a family dinner? All the families come together and really meet," she says, clapping her hands together.

"No," Koda says, making me laugh.

“Koda,” she says, sounding annoyed and looking over at who I’m guessing is her mate, making him the Alpha from what Koda had told me. She looks at him as if she expects him to demand we all have dinner together.

“I want to meet the man who’s going to be with my sister,” Flint says.

“No,” Koda says again.

“What Koda is trying to say,” I say, cutting in, “is that we’d love to have dinner.” Koda growls behind me, pulling me back into his grasp. “Maybe next weekend. We need some alone time. He’s still a little on edge. Then we’d love to have you over for dinner. I can even cook for everyone.”

Winnie and my brothers start to voice their complaints.

“Winnie, let them be for a little,” Stone tells her. Her eyebrows furrow a little, and she’s clearly not liking what he’s saying. “Maybe you’ll get yourself a little niece or nephew,” he adds, making me blush.

“Everyone out!” Winnie yells, trying to shuffle everyone out of the room, making Stone laugh.

We all say our goodbyes, and my brothers reluctantly leave after I assure them (four times) that I really want to stay. I promise them we’ll come by tomorrow or the next day. I also get them to move a little faster when I vow to make meals for them that they could just pop in the oven.

When the door finally closes and all the locks click back into place, I don’t even have a moment before Koda has me in his arms, striding towards the bedroom. He lays me on the bed and hovers above me. Reaching behind him, he grabs his collar and pulls off his shirt.

Slowly, he moves down my body, pushing my shirt up as he goes. His mouth lands on my stomach and he starts to place gentle kisses there.

“You want cubs?” he asks, and I can see the longing in his eyes.

“I want everything with you, Koda. The family I’ve always dreamed about. I’ve watched my brothers get mated one by one, and I never thought I’d get that, too. You’re like my prince. Not only did you rid me of my father, but you’re going to give me the life I’ve always wanted. A real-life happy ever after.”

“I’ll give you anything, Snow. Just tell me what you want.”

“Just you. Make love to me, Koda”

CHAPTER 9

KODA



Nuzzling her skin, I push away the rest of our clothes off until we're both naked. I need my mate, and I need all of her.

Sliding further down, I move between her legs and lick her pussy. I don't know how other male bear shifters are, but I can't seem to get enough of the honey between her legs. I lap at her over and over, until her body eventually shakes under me. I hope that she likes what I'm doing, because I want to be a good mate, and having my mouth between her spread legs is something I love to do.

"Koda," she breathes, gripping my hair and pulling me closer.

I suck her clit, and she seems to like that the most, because when I do, she orgasms into my mouth. More of her honey drips from her body, and I lick it up. Just as her peak hits, I turn my mouth, biting the inside of her thigh. The mark sends her into another orgasm, and my own is so close it's painful. But I hold on to it, wanting to cum inside her. I lick the small bite to seal it and then kiss the tender flesh around it. Her thick thighs open even wider, welcoming me in between them.

Her body is open and ready for me, and I can't hold back any longer. Climbing up her body, I'm impatient, but I try to go slow. I want this to be perfect for her every single time.

Leaning down, I kiss her lips and lie over her gently. The taste of her sweetness passes between our tongues, and she moans around the kiss. I push past her wet folds with my hard cock and thrust all the way inside her. I should have taken my time, but if I have to spend one more second outside of her body, I may die.

When her pussy is wrapped around my cock to the root, I finally feel like I can breathe. My mouth moves down her neck and to her breasts, and I lick her nipples, loving the feel of them on my tongue.

“So beautiful,” I whisper against the full mounds.

I push them together, and bury my face in between them. The warm globes pressing against my cheeks as I nuzzle in her valley.

She giggles and says my beard tickles, but she makes no move to push me away. So I thrust into her with my face buried there, loving the soft snuggle I get with each stroke.

“What did you say?” she asks, another giggle coming from her.

I lift my face up, smiling at her because she couldn't understand my mumbles against her breasts. “I said I love you.”

Her hand comes up to cup my cheek, and there is so much love in her eyes. “I love you, Koda. I love you so much.”

Holding her hips, I cum inside her, filling her with my warm seed. But as Mother Nature keeps reminding us, there is lots more where that came from.

I roll us over and help Snow sit up on top of me, riding my rock-hard cock. When she has another orgasm, she nearly collapses on my chest, but I catch her and hold her against me.

Thrusting into her slowly with no rush to the next peak, we lie there and pet each other for hours.

“I think you might be part bear,” I say, running a bit of her hair under my nose.

She laughs, lifting her face up to look at me. “Why do you say that?”

“Because you like to cuddle almost as much as I do.”

Suddenly, she starts kissing down my chest, and I love the way it feels. I love the way every part of her feels, but I especially like her mouth.

When my cock slips free from her pussy, I growl, but she just keeps kissing lower, and for a second I forget to be mad.

Her mouth goes to my hip, and I nearly start to sit up. But she puts her hand on my stomach, and I look down at her.

“Snow, what are you doing?”

Tentatively, she moves lower, taking my cock in her hand. “I just want to make you feel as good as you make me feel.”

“But you do. You make me feel perfect just being my mate.” I grab her wrist, trying to halt her movements, but she pulls back a little.

“Just give me a second, Koda. Relax.”

I start to say something else, but her mouth goes to the tip of my cock, and I lose all conscious thought.

“Snow,” I manage to choke out as her tongue flicks across the head of my dick. She must taste the two of us mixed together, and the thought only makes me hotter. Our passion coating me and her licking it up. Selfishly, I want a taste, too.

“Mmm,” she hums around me, and she takes me deeper.

My claws come out, and I dig them into the mattress to try to keep some control. I grit my teeth, but when she goes a little deeper, I can’t stand it anymore.

Reaching down, I grab her arms and haul her up my body, turning us so she’s pinned on her back and I’m on top of her. I thrust into her in one stroke and put my mouth on hers. Feathers fly around us, and I realize that I must have cut through a pillow or down blanket. I should care, but I’m so turned on, I can’t stop and think about it.

When my mouth goes to Snow’s neck, she’s gasping for air as I keep thrusting.

“I wasn’t done yet,” she manages to say between ruts.

“No. You were finished,” I growl into her neck and feel her pussy squeeze around me. She cums clinging to me, and I follow her into the fog of paradise.

Sometime later, she says she wants to try that again, and I’ve got her on her back before she can finish the thought. She giggles and says maybe in time I will get used to it, but I don’t think that’s possible. I’ll never get used to having this perfect human all to myself. And I’ll never get used to loving every inch of her with every inch of me. For the rest of our lives.

EPILOGUE

SNOW



*Six months later...*

*M*y belly is growing big, but I swear the bigger I get, the more Koda can't keep his hands off me.

Life is still perfectly wonderful as my mate takes care of me and our growing cub. Apparently, bear shifters are pregnant for a long time, but I don't mind. I like feeling our baby move inside of me, and I can't help but wonder if it's a boy or a girl. Or if it will be a shifter at all.

From what Winnie tells me, the bear gene is dominant, and with a mate the size of Koda, we are guaranteed a boy bear shifter. I loved hearing that and spent hours picturing a little boy with honey-colored eyes and golden-brown hair like his father.

I hum a happy sigh and look up to see Koda carrying over a basket of blueberries for us. We are having a picnic by the lake he found me at. I'm stretched out, enjoying the sun on my face as he lies down beside me and kisses my belly.

"Have you thought about what we should name our baby?" he asks, feeding me a blueberry.

"I think you should choose, Koda. You have a strong name, and I think you will give our son one, too."

"What if it's a girl?"

I smile at him and raise an eyebrow.

"Okay. If it's a boy, I like the name Jasper."

I nod my head and smile, liking the sound of that.



“But just in case it’s a girl, I like the name Snow.” He reaches up and touches my cheeks, and I can feel them blush.

“Why would you want to give a girl the same name as me?”

He leans down, kissing my lips softly before whispering. “Because I can’t think of anything I love more than Snow.”

We kiss for a long time before I finally lean back and look into his soft eyes. His bear is happy to be outside today, and I’m happy I can do that for him. I’ve brought Koda into the light again, and he no longer feels afraid of what’s going to happen.

He no longer has the nightmares he said he had before I came along. Instead, he sleeps and sleeps until I get up from the bed. Then he’s by my side until it’s time for bed again. He says that before he found me he wouldn’t leave the house a lot, but now he finds reasons to bring me to new places and show me the world. I think it has to do with him knowing I was locked away for so long, even though it was for my protection. I think he feels the need to make up for lost time.

“Well, we both know it’s a boy, so it’s a moot point.”

He smiles at me and cuddles my neck. I rub up and down his back, hearing him growl in delight at the feeling. He loves when I run my nails all over him, scratching his big body.

“If you want a girl, I will make it so.”

I laugh at his serious tone. Only Koda would try and will Mother Nature to give me the sex I want.

Kissing him again softly, I shake my head. “A healthy baby. That’s all I want.”

He kisses me back, and this time he deepens the kiss, putting my back on the blanket and coming over me. He pushes my light spring dress up and exposes my bare sex to the sunlight. Then he moves down my body and settles between my legs.

I close my eyes and moan a little as his warm tongue licks lazily across my clit. We are in no rush today, just enjoying the beautiful spring day and each another.

His mouth opens and covers my pussy, then he sucks on my clit. I feel his thick fingers penetrate me, and I arch up to greet them. I’ve been in a state of constant need since the first time we made love. I thought at some point it would diminish or fade a little, but it hasn’t.

Our mating bond is something I never thought I would experience. It's all-consuming, and I can't seem to get enough of him. I reach down and grip Koda's hair, pulling him as close to me as I can. Then I'm climaxing against his mouth and he's slowly licking me clean.

When he's wrung me out, he comes over me, careful of my growing belly, and slides his full length inside of me. My mate mark tingles, as does the rest of my body as we make love on the blanket. His heavy thrusts become our heartbeat, and our perfect day is even better now.

As his hot seed enters me, my own orgasm is triggered, and I cling to Koda, shouting his name. He leans down, worshiping me and whispering words of love. I'll never get tired of the way he dotes on me and tells me he loves me.

As I close my eyes and drift off to sleep, I feel Koda curl up beside me and kiss my mate mark. It's heaven on earth, and I never want it to end.

## EPILOGUE

### KODA



*Two years later ...*

*I* growl watching the unmated wolf smile at Snow. I stand beside her, looking like a giant shadow scaring off the townspeople, but I don't care.

"Koda, if you are going to intimidate everyone that comes over here, then what's the point of me helping out with the bake sale?"

Snow huffs, and I sit down in the chair behind her, looking at her lush ass. I lick my lips as she moves around the table selling baked goods at the festival.

We agreed to help out Ruby, Gwen, and Winnie with the fall festival and take a turn selling the baked goods. It's going on all weekend, and she's been looking forward to it for months. She started helping out with Ruby's Goodie Basket right after our mating, saying that she wanted to get out into the town and become a part of our pack community. I knew it would be good for the both of us, so slowly I've been integrating into the role of town deputy sheriff. I've also been helping her in the bakery and with watching the cubs of our pack.

Snow is about five months pregnant with our second cub, and seeing her like this only turns me on more. We've got one girl cub so far, but she thinks this one is a boy. Just like the last one. I don't care what we have, as long as they are all healthy and happy, just like my mate. Little Snow is at home with her Aunt Winnie and Uncle Stone today, so the time alone is nice. Although I would have liked to have spent it in bed instead of out here in the town, but this makes Snow happy, so I do as she wishes.

“Hey there, pretty lady. Got anything on this table as sweet as you?”

I hear a man’s voice, and I pull my eyes from Snow’s ass to look around her and see a human standing in front of her. If he was a shifter, he would have smelled my scent on her a mile away and know damn well to stay clear.

Slowly, and with as much restraint as I can, I stand up behind Snow. I rise up and tower over the top of her head to look down at this human.

“What did you say?” I ask through gritted teeth.

I hear Snow stifle a laugh, but I don’t think anything about this is funny.

“I, umm, I was, umm.” He tries to stutter out a few sentences, but nothing intelligible leaves his lips.

“Everything is two dollars, and all the proceeds go to the children's playground on Main Street,” Snow says, trying to smooth over the situation.

I loom over her, looking down at this man, daring him to make a move. I would rip out his throat in the middle of this street to show my dominance to all who would think to approach my mate.

Slowly, he pulls his wallet out and takes out a twenty-dollar bill, laying it on the table and backing away. He doesn’t say a word as he backs up and blends into the crowd, never showing me his back.

Snow turns around on me then, putting her hands on her hips and raising an eyebrow. I just shrug my shoulders and sit back down, not even bothering to apologize.

She just lets out a huff like she’s mad, but I see her smiling when she turns back around to the table. That’s fine with me because I get to look at her ass again.

“At least it was a good donation,” she says, picking up the twenty and putting it into the jar.

“At least the view is nice,” I say, and she looks over her shoulder and gives me a wink.

She knows exactly what she’s doing when she wiggles that thing around in front of me, but I just let her pretend she’s innocent as I think about all the ways I’m going to bite it later.

She’s lucky she’s pregnant or I would for sure be putting a baby in her tonight. Mating moon or not, she’s being a tease and she knows it. Snow knows exactly what happens when she pokes at my bear.

Reaching out, I grab her hips and pull her down on my lap. She lets out a squeak and tries to pull away, but she and I both know she doesn't want to go anywhere. She just likes riling me up.

"You shake that thing in front of me again and I'll carry you out of here over my shoulder." I nip at her neck, and it sends a shiver down her spine.

"You promise?" She gives me a wicked smile, and I growl.

"Careful, mate. You're supposed to be here for another hour." I rub my hand across her growing belly and feel myself getting harder.

She smacks my leg playfully, and I let her get up out of my lap.

"Then I guess you'll just have to have some self-control for the next hour."

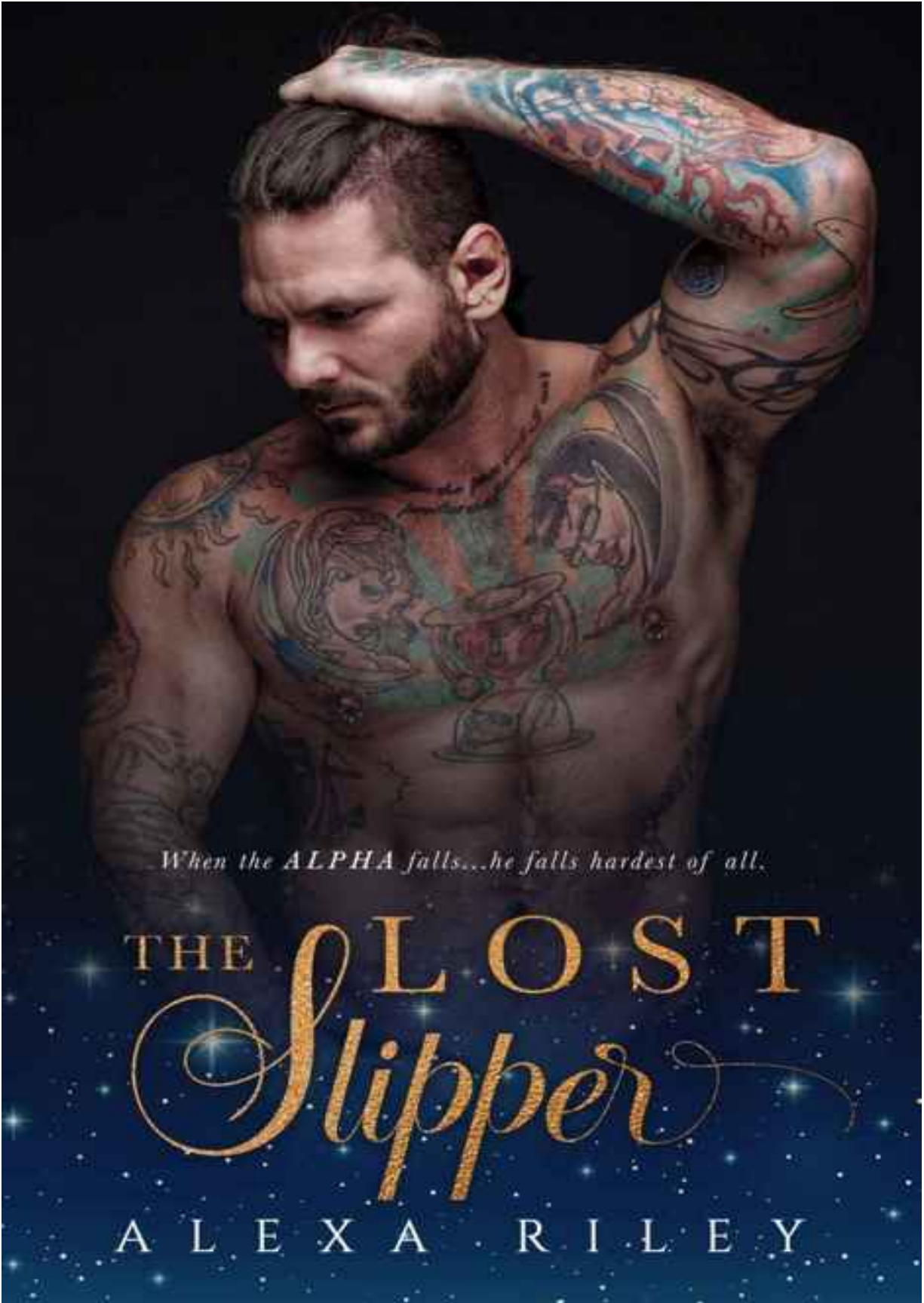
I grip the seat, nearly snapping the arms off, and grit my teeth. "Snow, when it comes to you, I've never had control."

She turns around and walks up to me so we are almost eye to eye. "I know, and I love it. Just like I love you."

The kiss she places on my lips is soft and sweet, but it has me counting down the seconds until I can get her out of here and back in our cabin. When it comes to Snow, I know two things are for sure: I'll never stop loving her, and I'll never get enough.

THE END

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*When the ALPHA falls...he falls hardest of all.*

THE LOST  
*Slipper*

ALEXA RILEY

# THE LOST *Slipper*

The first time Stone saw Winnie, she was alone in the woods with no memory of where she came from.

With one look, he knew something was different. When she finally came of age and her mating heat kicked in, he realized that she had always been the one.

Sent to live with a strange family, Winnie was forced to deal with the hateful treatment of her stepmother and stepsisters.

Mating the alpha changed that.

But when her past comes back to find her, will the heat last after the clock strikes midnight?

Warning: This shifter fairy tale is meant to be enjoyed by only those who love this kind of adorable stuff. Think you've got what it takes? Then come on in! (

*To the hubs; my life, my love, my mate.*



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PROLOGUE

WINNIE



*Past...*

“Please don’t leave me here.” My voice cracks at the plea. I hate this. I hate all of it. I stare up at the alpha of the Gray Ridge pack, not wanting to part with him. One would think I’d want to get away from him as fast as possible. Everything about him screams strength and power. I’ve noticed no one even really makes eye contact with him, but I do. I stare up at him, pleading with my eyes. I feel safe with him. It’s almost funny because he’s easily a foot-and-a-half taller than me. Maybe more.

Stone’s an alpha in every sense of the word. I knew it from the moment he picked me up in his arms. I could feel it almost bleeding off him. He was attractive, but not what I would call handsome by any stretch. His dark-brown hair is shaved at the sides, with the top a little bit longer. He always grips it when he gets a little bit agitated with me. Which seems to be a lot since I started following him around like a lost cub. Which I am.

Even at night, when everyone would go to bed, I’d sneak into his room and crawl into bed with him. Maybe that’s why he’s making me leave. Who wants a lost little cub following them around everywhere they go? He’s all I know, but that’s not saying much since I can only remember the last seven days of my life. He’s my world at this point. He and Gwen are all I know, and I don’t want to let that go.

His big hand cups my chin, and I lean into it, trying to inhale his scent. It’s now become the scent I think of when I think of home, and he’s trying to take it from me. His thumb brushes my cheek, and something flashes in

his dark-blue eyes before he drops his hand away liked I burned him. I want to reach out and put it back, but I don't.

When I was first found in the woods, they brought me to him, and he held me for days. Lay on the floor with me in his home, petting me, trying to get me to shift out of bear form. I couldn't do it. I didn't know how. I didn't know anything except my first name. I still don't know much. I seem to remember everything except my previous life. I know how everything works, and I can read and write, but my life just isn't there.

Even the first few days after being found in the woods is still hazy in my mind. Just like the rest of my life, but no one has come for me. No one has come forward to claim me as theirs. I was abandoned and unwanted, it seems. And now it's happening again. In seven days I've been cast out twice. Okay, maybe Stone isn't casting me out as much as placing me in a new home, but it feels like it. He's found me a permanent place among a family in his pack, but it feels as if I'm being thrown away.

"This is what's best. Trust me," Stone finally says. I want to believe him. Trust him. I turn my head to look at the place that's to be my home now. A man and a woman stand on the porch with two blonde girls who look to be about my age. Well, what I'm guessing is my age. They look like they've been plucked right out of a magazine. Stone said it was a nice family. They have two daughters, and I will like it here.

I hear Gwen, Stone's sister, let out an unhappy huff from behind him. She doesn't want me to leave either. She and Stone have been fighting for the past two days about it. I hate that they were fighting about me. Maybe that was another reason he wanted me gone. She wanted me to stay with them, but Stone said it just wasn't possible. I think it's a lie. He's the alpha; he could make it so. He just doesn't want me to.

Even knowing it's a lie, I try again, not caring how pathetic it is. "Please don't make me go. I promise I'll be better." My voice drops a little before whispering the rest, even knowing everyone will hear it anyways. They're all wolves, they hear everything. "I won't sneak into your room anymore. I'll stay in mine. Please don't make me go." I feel the tears hit my cheeks.

Oddly, this is the first time I've cried. Even when I finally shifted out of bear form, I didn't cry, and it felt like my whole body was on fire. Somehow this hurts more. How I've become so attached to him so fast, I

don't know. But I am. The thought of leaving him steals the breath from my lungs.

A low growl leaves his chest, and I can hear everyone take a step back, but I don't. No. I step closer. I like the sound. It seems to scare everyone else, but it makes me feel safe. Even if the growl is directed at me. I want to lay my head on his chest and hear where the growl emanates from.

Stone takes a step back from me, then another.

He's going to do it. He's leaving me here.

"I'll come back tomorrow to check on you, Winnie." Then he turns, making his way back to his truck. Gwen steps in front of me, pulling me into her arms and whispering in my ear. "You have the phone. You can call me anytime. I'll come tomorrow to see you, too. I'll make sure you're settling in okay." She pulls back, looking down at me with the same blue eyes as Stone. Like everyone around here, she's way taller than me. I guess bears just aren't tall, or maybe it's just me.

"We'll find your family." She tries to reassure me, but it's not reassuring.

I'm a bear shifter, which I've been told is rare. Not only that, but I'm a female and there aren't many female bear shifters left. Stone told me we would find my family fast, being as I'm so rare, but that has yet to be seen. I don't feel rare or special. All I feel is unwanted.

She fully releases me, following Stone and getting into the truck. I watch them pull away, and I can't bring myself to move until I feel a warm hand on my shoulder. I look up at the woman, who looks to be in her thirties. Her blonde hair matches the younger girls', who I'm guessing are her daughters. It's hard to tell with shifters.

"Come inside, dear. I'll show you to your room."

"She smells like a bear," one of the girls says. Her face scrunches up like she's smelling something terrible.

"I'm not sharing a room with it," the other girl says, making an equally grossed-out face.

"You'll do what you're told. The alpha said we're to take care of her and that's what we'll do," the father finally says. The woman's hold on me tightens at his words, her nails digging in a little. She's clearly not happy with the alpha's orders.

“Come inside.” This time her tone is annoyed as she starts to pull me towards the house. I want to yank from her hold, but I don’t. What choice do I really have? When we pass the two girls on the porch, they both give me a look that could kill. Gone are the nice girls who were making sweet doe eyes at the alpha when he was standing there.

When I get inside, I’m pulled up two flights of stairs until we reach the attic. Then the woman finally releases me, unlocking the door and showing me the space. The room is a mess, a bed in the center of the chaos.

“You’ll need to get this cleared up and habitable. I’m sure the alpha will want to see it when he comes back here tomorrow. Make sure it’s done right.” She turns and makes her way down the stairs. “Dinner’s at seven. Most of this better be done by then, or you won’t be eating,” she calls as she descends. “...Not that you need it,” she adds in a murmur.

I sit down on the bed and look around the attic. I feel more alone now than when I was running through the woods without any memory of anything. At least then I didn’t have anyone to miss.

PROLOGUE

STONE



*Past...*

“*Y*ou’re making a mistake.” Gwen’s words sting. We both know they’re true, but I don’t say anything in response.

Putting the truck in gear, I pull away from the Stocktons’ house and feel my chest ache. Gripping the wheel tighter, I force myself not to look back as I drive away. Just a few more minutes and then I can run. I just need to get back home.

Gwen and I ride in silence all the way back home. Thankfully, she doesn’t keep telling me what I know to be true and just lets me suffer in silence.

*It’s the right thing to do. It’s what had to be done.* I feel like if I keep telling myself that over and over again, it will be true. It’s like if I keep repeating it, then I’ll somehow believe the lie.

I pull up to the house, jump out of the truck, and head for the woods. Hearing the gravel crunch under my boots, I don’t look back when Gwen calls my name.

“Stone! Where are you going?”

Once I get out back behind our house, I pull off my shirt and throw it on the ground. I keep stomping as I make my way to the tree line, kicking off my boots and taking off my jeans as I go. As I leap into the air, I shift before my paws hit the ground, taking off in a full run towards the protected lands.

Feeling my muscles burn and ache is what I need right now. I need to make my body feel the pain that is eating away at my heart. What is wrong with me? Why can't I stop this feeling, this need?

Pushing harder, I run as fast as my wolf can take me. He's angry and needs to be in control. I run for miles until I'm beyond the borders of our small mountain town in Gray Ridge, Colorado.

Our shifter community is secret, but strong. And finding another shifter wandering in the woods is unusual. We have other packs around us, and we're all friendly. So when our town sheriff, Dominic Wolf, found a stray bear cub, I reached out to all the neighboring packs but came up empty-handed.

The first time I saw her, Dominic was carrying her out of the woods. She was fully shifted into a little brown cub, and she was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. Her head turned in my direction when I approached them, and her big brown eyes met mine.

In that moment, I felt something inside me change.

I'd known my whole life what it meant for me to be the alpha. My father was the alpha of our Gray Ridge wolf pack until he died suddenly when I was eighteen. He was out for a run one day, and had a heart attack. The doctors did all they could do, but he didn't make it. I was young and angry, not wanting the responsibility of the pack to fall on my shoulders. But I was born of pure alpha blood, and I had no choice but to lead.

I knew what taking on this role would mean, and I knew one day I would be destined for a mate. I had always assumed it would be another wolf and someone of similar bloodlines. What I didn't expect was to have some kind of connection to a stray cub that was far too young.

What I feel isn't what people have described to me as the mating pull, but it's something. I feel very protective of her and would do anything to keep her safe, but I feel that if I don't distance myself from Winnie, I might regret it. What if I end up mating someone else? Then these feelings would betray my true mate, and that's not fair.

I finally stop near a small creek to drink some water and catch my breath. My lungs burn from the run, and my legs are shaky as I bend down to take a drink from the cool spring.

The second I saw Winnie for the first time, something in me changed. I'd been angry about the responsibility of the pack weighing down on my

shoulders for so long that the first time I saw her, I felt light. I felt as if looking into her scared eyes broke something inside me wide open, and I can't seem to close it again.

That day in the woods, I took her from Dominic's arms and carried her back to my house. The little cub was shivering with cold and fear, but as soon as she was cradled in my arms, she stopped. It was like our connection was made, and from that moment on, I didn't leave her side.

After three days I finally was able to talk her through shifting back to human form. It took her a long time, and I know it must have been painful, but she was so strong. I was so proud of her, and after it was complete I wrapped her up in a blanket and just held her in front of the fire. She looked so young, maybe around fourteen, and I didn't want to scare her with questions or make her start talking if she wasn't ready. I just wanted to keep her safe.

*Winnie.* That was the first word she ever spoke to me, and it was all she could remember.

I had let her sleep in my bed with me when she was a cub, but after she shifted, I let her sleep in the guest room. I'd lie there in the middle of the night, feeling so lonely without her. There wasn't ever any sexual attraction, to her. Male shifters can't even get hard until their mating heat hits. No, what I felt for Winnie was different. It was a strong pull, and I didn't know how to explain it. I couldn't tell anyone, and I damn sure couldn't talk to Winnie about it.

When she crawled into bed with me that first night, I pretended to be asleep. But as soon as she dozed off, I pulled her to me and held her close while she slept. I never did anything other than hold her and make sure she was safe. I never admitted how happy I was that she felt the need to be near me.

Every night she would sneak in my room, and I would hold her while she slept. After almost a week, I knew it needed to stop.

I started to get anxious if I was separated from her for too long, and when her scent started to fade from me, I tried to find ways to accidentally brush up against her and get it back on me. I was becoming obsessed and I knew it.

Peter Stockton was one of our pack's best hunters, and I knew he had two young girls about Winnie's age. When I asked him to watch over

Winnie and protect her as he would his own family, he agreed. Gwen didn't like my decision, but she's young and doesn't understand the way the pack works. He's a part of us, and he will do his duty just as I will do mine.

I have a responsibility to protect everyone, and I can't let myself be pulled in another direction by a lost little cub. I can't spend my days pining for something that isn't mine and won't be mine. I can't put the safety of the pack in jeopardy because I feel protective. That's not what my life's about. My life is about duty and honor, and in order to fulfill those, I have to let her go.

I'll always watch her, but I can't allow myself to dream of things I can't have. It doesn't matter what I want. The pack is my ultimate responsibility.

Pushing away from the stream, I turn and make my way back home. One day Winnie will mate with someone and I'll be able to move on. My wolf growls at the thought, but I ignore him.

Maybe one day I'll be able to fill the void she made in my heart.



CHAPTER 1

WINNIE



*Present...*

“You okay?” Gwen looks at me with concern in her big blue eyes. I hate how much they remind me of Stone. I can hardly look at her without thinking of him. It’s not a reminder I like because each time it nicks away at my heart. No matter how many times I try to push past my feelings for Stone, I know I’m just lying to myself. Just when I think they’re gone, one small thing sends them all flooding back. I figure if I keep lying to myself enough, maybe I’ll start to believe it.

Gwen always seems to have that look on her face with me. I know she cares, but lately it’s making me feel a little pathetic. If anyone should be asking how someone is doing, it’s me to her. She just found her mate and is already expecting two little girl pups.

Gwen invited Ruby and me over to hang out and catch up. Dominic, Ruby’s mate, tagged along, and X is here as well. With both Gwen and Ruby expecting babies, their mates never seem to be far from them. The male shifters tend to hover over their mates during pregnancy. I wonder if my mate will do that. What am I saying? I don’t even know if bears mate.

“Yeah, just kind of sad. I still can’t remember anything. And I’ve been all over the place today,” I admit to her. I feel like my hormones are going crazy. Maybe it’s because my only two friends are both pregnant and it’s giving me an itch myself. Seeing them so in love and happy makes me ache for the same.

Being a bear in a town full of wolves, I have no idea if mating is different for us. But lately I’ve been trying to find out. For the longest time I tried to remember the life I had before I came to be a part of the Gray Ridge

pack. But after a while I just let it go, thinking that one day it might come back to me. It hasn't yet, and it's been almost four years.

Now I'm back to pushing myself to remember and I still keep coming up with nothing. Even being close to Gwen, I still don't feel like I belong, and I've been tossing around the idea of leaving the pack. To go where, I have no idea. College? Maybe. Something has to give because I feel like I could crack. I'm starting to think I might feel more accepted in the human world. It's not like I even shift anymore. I haven't since Stone found me.

"You'll know when it happens. You'll feel it," Gwen tells me, reaching out to hold my hand. I know she's talking about coming of age. Since I don't know anything about before I came to Gray Ridge, my age has always just been estimated.

Gwen seems to think I'll be like a wolf and won't find my mate until I'm eighteen. Whether that's true or not, no one really seems to know. What's even weirder is when I talk to Stone about finding out about bears mating, he gets all awkward.

Awkward is not a word I would have ever thought I'd use for Stone, but it's what he does. Hell, I'm awkward about it, too, but my need to know pushes me past that, so I keep asking him. He keeps giving me the brush off, and it's hard to ask a man you have a giant crush on when you can finally get the sex on.

"From what Dominic says, you feel it when it happens," Ruby chimes in softly, smiling at me. I really like Ruby. She seems to fit with me more than anyone else. She has wild red hair and a curvy body like I do. All the shifters around here are tall and lean. I kind of stick out, but since Ruby is human she doesn't carry their traits, so we kind of have that in common, too. Well, except for what her mate Dominic gave her during mating.

Like me, Ruby is an outsider who was invited into the pack. I feel like she gets me a little better than most, but if you ask me she still seems to fit better than I do.

"Yeah. You're right. I'm just super emotional today. I keep crying. Sorry," I tell them both, trying to give the best smile I can. I don't want this to turn into a pity party. I came here to have a good time, to get my mind off things, and mostly to get away from my stepsisters. "If I didn't know better, I'd think I was pregnant," I joke about my tears, making everyone laugh.

“Tell me about it. The last time I was this crazy with hormones I was—”  
Gwen pauses for a moment as if a thought hits her. “Winnie, you don’t think —”

She’s cut off by the front door bursting open, making me jump to my feet, to reveal Stone standing in the doorway.

Xavier and Dominic are in front of us in under a second, both half-shifted as if ready to fight.

Stone stands there, breathing hard and looking like he just ran a hundred miles. He’s nearly rabid as he looks past X and Dom, glaring at me. His snarl echoes through the room, making my heart thunder in my chest. I don’t feel fear, though. No, it’s something else. Then one word leaves his lips.

*“Mine.”*

He’s on me before anyone can move, lifting me to his body. My legs go around his waist, and my hands go to his shoulders as I try to keep myself balanced. My back hits a wall, and I don’t even register moving. Before I can say anything, Stone buries his face in my neck, and I feel his teeth. The sharp fangs are on me before I make a sound and he bites. Hard.

I expect to feel pain as my body tenses with anticipation, but instead white-hot passion like nothing I’ve ever felt rips through me. My eyes fall closed as a moan pours from my mouth. My body jerks, grinding against him as the pleasure shoots through my body all the way down to my toes.

When I sink back to reality, I feel Stone’s tongue swipe the spot he just marked, and my eyes pop open.

“Mine,” he says against my skin.

I see everyone in the room just staring right at us. It’s then I realize I just came in a room full of people as Stone claimed me as his.

Gwen’s eyes look like they’re about to bulge out of her head, and both X and Dom look like they’re not sure what they should be doing. I think they’re waiting for me to say something, but I’m not sure what to say.

I thought when mates found each other, they were all over one another. Well, Stone’s all over me, but all I want to do is push him off me. I feel my heart start to beat faster, and I’m sure everyone in the room can hear it.

Stone seems unconcerned with everything as he continues to lick and nuzzle at my neck as everyone stares at us.

How long have I wanted Stone's attention? How long have I begged him to see me, to let me stay? Now it seems I have it, and now I don't want it. As part of me wants to welcome it, the other part reminds me he's only picking me because he has to. Nature made him do it.

The thought makes a sob rip from my throat.

Stone freezes at the sound, and a growl from deep in his chest fills the room. He quickly places me on the floor and turns like he's going to protect me, not knowing he's the cause of the sounds.

"You need to calm down, Alpha," I hear Dom say. I can't see anything around Stone's big body. I try to slide out from behind him, but he backs up, pinning me in so I can't retreat.

"Mine," he says again, like he doesn't know another word. I've never seen him like this. So out of control.

"No one is saying she's not yours. I can just smell her blood," Dominic tries again.

My hand reaches for my neck to touch the spot where he bit me.

Stone turns to look down at me, running his hungry eyes up and down my body, making me feel naked. My traitorous nipples harden his stare.

"Did I hurt you?" His words come out deep, and I can tell his wolf is trying to break free. I just stand there, staring up at him, not sure what to say. Before I can stop myself I lash out.

"When haven't you hurt me?"

# Alexa Riley

erotica author

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