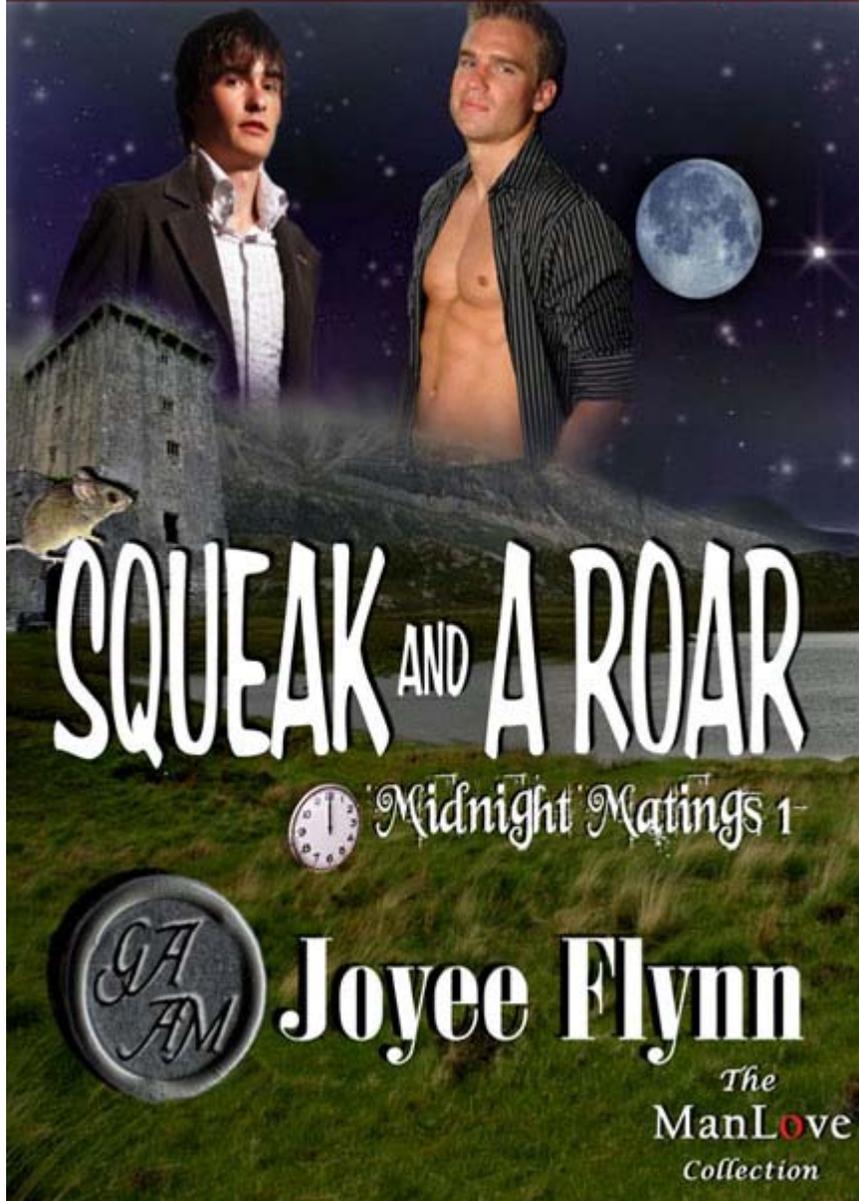


SIREN PUBLISHING *Classic*



# SQUEAK AND A ROAR



Midnight Matings 1



Joyee Flynn

The  
ManLove  
Collection

## Midnight Matings 1

# Squeak and a Roar

The paranormal world is in chaos. The elders are tired of their younger people playing the field, causing trouble, and fighting with each other. Everyone who attends the UPAC Conference now has twenty-four hours to claim a mate of a different species. If they don't, they will never have a mate. The spell is cast. There is no escaping the Midnight Matings.

Software developer Gavin Ashby is perfectly happy with his life. He finds other people annoying after being around them for only a short period of time, and having a mate sounds like pure torture to him.

Video game tester Ant Marino is satisfied with his quiet, solitary life. After being accosted and almost forcibly mated, he meets the aloof but handsome Gavin.

Neither Ant nor Gavin are prepared for the feelings that arise. Will the two men continue to dance around each other or will they pounce on love and never let it go?

**Genre:** Alternative (M/M or F/F), Paranormal, Shape-shifter

**Length:** 35,379 words

# **SQUEAK AND A ROAR**

*Midnight Matings 1*

**Joyce Flynn**

**EROTIC ROMANCE  
MANLOVE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.  
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## **DEDICATION**

To Stormy & Gabrielle: Thanks for seeing my crazy-ass idea as I did and making it way better than I could ever have dreamed. Three heads are better than two and I'm proud that you're my sisters in crime on this project!! Just wait until the bar crawl, Mwaa-haaaa

# SQUEAK AND A ROAR

## *Midnight Matings 1*

**JOYEE FLYNN**

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## **Chapter 1**

“Welcome. I am Elder Burke.” The elder paused as if waiting for something from us. “I want to thank you all for being here tonight. This is a momentous occasion for us. It’s been twenty-five years since the Great War between all paranormals ended, taking a large portion of our population from us.”

I thought it was odd that the room was so quiet with so many people. There wasn't a single cough or sneeze even as everyone stared at the elder, hanging on his words. Then there was me, who was ready to fucking bolt and trying not to roll my eyes.

“I would like you all to drink a toast with me in memory of those we lost.” The elder held up his champagne glass and waited for the rest of us. Grinding my teeth, I did it. I caught my father's smug gaze then. What was he up too? “May we never forget them.”

The elder swallowed everything in his glass then looked out over the crowd, I threw mine back as he watched everyone else. A few moments later he set his down on a nearby table and turned back to us, clasping his hands behind his back.

“As I have said, this is a momentous occasion for us all. In the twenty-five years since the Great War ended, the United Paranormal

Alliance of Cooperation has watched and waited. We will wait no more.”

“The fighting between species must stop,” another elder in a long white robe said as he stepped forward. “We are known to the humans, and they have learned to accept us in their midst. However, their tolerance will only last so long. The constant fighting among the paranormal communities has come under scrutiny. We no longer have the luxury of watching you solve your own disagreements.”

“Elder Lucas is correct,” Elder Burke said as he gestured to the other elder. My father's smile grew even wider as his gaze never left me. Fuck! That was never good. “We no longer have the indulgence of waiting for you to end your petty squabbles. As such, we have taken measures to ensure that you take your place amongst our society.”

Now that got some whispers. I glanced around to see lots of confused faces and questioning looks directed at the elders. Elder Burke gestured to the glass he had set down on the table. “You’ve all taken a toast with me. As such, you are now bound by the covenants we put before you.”

“Each of you has twenty-four hours to find and claim your mate,” Elder Lucas said. “If you fail to claim a mate in twenty-four hours, and bring him or her before this council to be recognized, you will not have a mate. You will go feral inside of a week.”

The gasps and grumbling almost overshadowed the elders’ words as they continued to speak. My father gave me a smirk and a mock salute. Son of a bitch! Both elders stepped back from the edge of the dais that they stood on. They knew the crowd was angry. Someone would have to be dense to not feel the tension in the air.

“Because of your continued squabbling between races, you may not claim a mate of the same race,” Elder Burke said. “You must claim a mate outside of your own species.”

“If you fail to bring a mate before this council by the stroke of midnight tomorrow night, you will be hunted down and executed as a rogue paranormal.”

“To ensure that you will find a mate, something special has been added to the potion that each of you drank. It will insure that the need to mate outweighs your need to fight. It is a particular additive that induces the mating heat in each of you. You will not be able to deny the need to mate.”

“And just in case you think to try and break this spell,” Elder Burke said, “we have added a special clause. Anyone that attempts to negate the covenants of this spell will instantly be cursed as befitting their race. Vampires will no longer be able to drink blood. Shifters will no longer be able to shift. Magic user will have no magic, and so on. I’m sure you get my point.”

No, no, no! They couldn't do this to us!

The two elders went to stand back with their fellow elders and turned back to face the crowd. “Now, children, good luck. We expect to see each of you in twenty-four hours. May your hunt be successful.”

“Un-fucking-believable,” I swore as my heart raced a mile a minute. I didn’t want to be mated! Seeing my father walking out with the rest of the elders to the side room off the ballroom, I raced over to him and grabbed his arm. “What the fuck is this shit? Why include me? I don’t fight with *anyone!*”

“You also don’t ever talk to anyone either,” he growled at me, staring at my hand on him until I removed it. “Are you challenging me?”

“No, because we both know I’d win,” I shot back fiercely. I’d long-since exceeded my dad in physical capabilities, but I had no desire to lead. “I make money for the pride. I don’t start problems. I just want to be left alone.”

“Good, then find a mate who wants the same! Because I’m tired of having some pathetic recluse as a child.” Just then we broke apart

as someone came flying toward the door that most of the other elders were walking through. When I turned back to my father, the shit had escaped away from me.

“Cock sucker,” I mumbled under my breath. We’d never had a great relationship, mostly keeping our distance from each other. But this was unreal!

I blindly walked through the ballroom, ignoring the chaos that followed the elder’s announcement. I already hated coming to these things every leap year because I was forced to socialize. Now I had to take a mate in twenty-four hours or go feral? Un-fucking real!

Lost in my own thoughts, I stumbled through the halls, ignoring everyone else who bumped into me. It wasn’t until I felt the cold rain on my face that I realized I’d walked out into the courtyard. I stepped back inside and sat down in the quiet library to sulk.

It was a wondrous room. I glanced around and took in the peace of the room and tried to let it seep into my weary mind. This was a room I wanted one day in a house of my own. It was two floors high without the ceiling, and had floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. The library even had the track ladders that were in the classic movies.

“Are you okay?” a soft voice asked, pulling me out of my swirling thoughts. I glanced up at the cutest piece of tail I’d ever seen.

“Are any of us?”

“No, but you were muttering to yourself, and I heard you from the hallway,” he answered and sat down next to me. “I was running away from a few guys that wanted to claim me. One vampire tried to bite me, and I don’t even know his name.”

“I’ll keep them away from you,” I said and wanted to smack myself in the head for offering. Like I didn’t have enough to worry about right then.

“Thank you,” he whispered, and we sat there for several minutes in silence. “Can I ask what you were muttering about, or is that rude?”

“I don’t want to be mated, and my father took a couple of shots at me.” I sighed and flopped back against the couch. “I like being alone.

People annoy me most of the time because they're petty or just stupid. I hate having to explain things to people, and they never understand my job or what I do for the pride. I just want to be left alone, you know what I mean?"

"I do," he said with a nod and tucked his shoulder-length dark hair behind his ear. "I'm Anthony Marino, but everyone calls me Ant."

"Why do they do that?" I almost laughed as he gestured to his small body. He couldn't have been more than five-four and a hundred and twenty-five pounds dripping wet. "Are you okay with that nickname?"

"Doesn't really matter to me." He shrugged. "I don't interact with people very well. I'm not popular in my pack and prefer to just read instead of going out."

"Yeah, I know the feeling." And I did. People deferred to me because I was the lion Elder's son and that made me basically next in command. Not because they wanted to talk with me. Sure, I ran a successful business, but most of the pride's squabbles were interpersonal. And I tried to stay away from those with a fifty-foot pole.

"Maybe we should mate," he said so softly I barely heard him. "I mean, you're gorgeous and I'd leave you alone since I'm not the best with people."

"You're kidding, right?" I snickered and then stopped when I saw he was serious and looked like I smacked him across the face. "I'm sorry," I sighed again. "This whole thing is just a joke, and I'm not dealing with it well."

"Neither am I, but we're at least in agreement on a few things here. Maybe we could make it as mates, unless you don't find me attractive, of course."

I glanced him over slowly, drinking him in. Not being attracted to him wasn't going to be a problem. He was a gorgeous little twink with bright blue eyes and a firm little ass I wanted to sink my dick in

all night. “No, I’m attracted to you. I just don’t want to be mated, Ant.”

“I don’t either—I don’t know your name.”

“Gavin Ashby,” I replied, turning to face him. “You’re really serious about us mating? You’d just accept a stranger like that?”

“We all have to unless we want to be put down like lab rats.” He shrugged and tucked his hair behind his ear again. I realized it was a nervous gesture, and I found it quite endearing. “Plus, you’ve not tried to just bite me without talking to me first. I’m not a fan of that crap. I’d like someone to at least ask me first. I know I’m small, but I’m not just a plaything.”

“I like to be the boss,” I said after a few minutes of staring at him. “I’m not an affectionate person, and I’m always in charge. It’s part of being a lion. Can you deal with someone who’s dominant?”

“Are you going to make me call you master and treat me like some loser sub?”

“No, not anything like that.” I chuckled, liking his sense of humor.

“You’re not violent, are you?” he asked, scrunching up his nose. “Because I had a boyfriend once that said he was dominant and to him that meant smacking me around. I won’t mate for eternity to someone like that.”

“I’d never hit you,” I whispered as I reached out to cup his cheek, before realizing what I was doing. I dropped it back to my lap, my heart breaking that such a sweet little guy was ever abused. “I’m a pretty laid-back guy, especially for a lion, as long as I’m not annoyed. But I’d never just hit someone unless they punched me or something.”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t have to worry about that from me.” He giggled, and I instantly got hard. Seems I had a thing for small twinks who giggled. Who knew? “Maybe we should find out if we’re even physically compatible?”

I was just about to ask what he meant when I saw the lust in his eyes. Oh! He meant sexually. Well, fuck, I was more than willing to get some action at least.

“Here, get yourself ready,” I purred as I pulled a small tube of lube out of my pocket.

“You just walk around with that shit?” Ant squeaked, glancing from it back to my face. Shit! Why was the squeak as hot to me as the giggle? And I’d never known a shifter who squeaked like that.

“If I’m forced to come here, I might at least get laid.” I shrugged. Then I stood up and started stripping.

“Aren’t you even going to kiss me?” he asked, squirming in his seat as he stared at my naked chest. “I mean, shouldn’t we kind of work up to sex? I know everything’s going really fast and all, but I’m not very experienced with just jumping into bed.”

“We don’t even have a bed.” I snickered as I started to unzip my pants. It took me a minute again to realize he was serious when I saw his face fall at my words. “Okay, we can kiss.”

Ant glanced up at me with such hopeful eyes that I felt my heart skip a beat... Which was ridiculous, since I wasn’t a romantic. Lions weren’t known for being very loving. Even lions in the wild were known for giving a quick fuck and moving on. While lion shifters mated for life, I wasn’t about to start snuggling and being all kissy face with someone. But I could give him a few kisses now, at least.

I leaned over, bracing my hands on the back of the couch as I crowded Ant’s personal space. His eyes went wide as I slanted my lips over his and brushed them softly. While the lion side of me couldn’t give a shit about kissing, the human in me found Ant delicious. Giving him a longer kiss this time, I tasted something sweet on him. I know the drink we all had was sweet, but it wasn’t that. This was all Ant.

“Wow,” he panted as I pulled away after a few minutes of gentle making out. “Yeah, I think this will be just fine. Are you okay with the idea of mating me?”

“You’re cute and promised to leave me alone for the most part.” I shrugged as I toed off my shoes. Then I took off the rest of my clothes and looked back at him. It was then I realized he’d not gotten

undressed and was staring at his hands as he picked at his thumb with his nail. “Ant? Don’t you want to do this?”

“J-Just nervous, I guess,” he whispered, not looking at me. “Plus, I’m not sure I can mate someone who shrugs about mating me as if he was picking what color shirt to wear.”

“This was *your* idea, Ant,” I replied, rubbing my hands over my face in frustration. I took a deep breath and tried to control my annoyance before I made things worse. And people wondered why I rarely left my house! But he’s been abused before, I reminded myself. “We’re going to have to cut each other some slack after the curveball we’ve been throw today, okay?”

“Right, right, good point. Fair enough.” He nodded as he pulled his shirt off. Ant had light skin that almost looked like perfect porcelain in the moonlight shining into the library. He quickly shucked the rest of his clothes, staring up at me with questioning eyes as he stood there naked. “Yes?”

“Yes, I like,” I whispered as I pulled him into my arms. I gave him a quick kiss before pushing him back onto the couch, picked up the lube he’d discarded, and handed it to him. “We don’t have much time, Ant. If we aren’t compatible, we’ll have to find someone else. So stretch yourself out well.”

“Yeah, because you’re fucking hung,” Ant replied, swallowing nervously as he eyed over my erection. “Lots and lots of lube needed to take you.”

“Well get to it.” I chuckled as I knelt between his legs. I didn’t normally worry about this part of sex. If they wanted to be with me, they’d be ready to go, I figured. But under the circumstances, I could at least watch. It wasn’t like there was anything else to do right then. Ant slicked up his fingers with a liberal amount before pulling his legs up and pushing two fingers into his ass. “Niiaiiiiice.”

“Glad you like,” he gasped as he wiggled them about. “Does that mean at least you desire me sexually?”

“Yes, yes it does,” I groaned, shivering at the idea of sinking my cock in his tight ass. I found myself fixated on where his fingers were moving inside of himself. The way his hole sucked them in each time as the skin of his rosette stretched around them. It was hot!

“What do you do for a living, Gavin?” Ant asked, and I liked the way he said my name.

“Really? You want to talk right now?” I chuckled as my eyes never moved from his fingers. I was completely captivated by his body and the idea that it would be mine soon.

“Like you said, we don’t have much time here to make the most important decision of our lives. Figured we should start learning about each other.”

“I’m a software designer,” I answered since his request was logical. At least we could get some of the basics out of the way. “What about you?”

“I test video games for flaws.” Ant pushed in a third finger as my cock started leaking at the sight. I gave it a few good tugs to remind my body that the fun was coming soon, pun intended.

“Good fit then, don’t you think?”

“Yeah,” he gasped. “What do you like to do when you’re not working?”

“Read and watch movies mostly.” Ant’s body started to shake as his other hand held his leg so firmly his knuckles turned white.

“Me, too. I have a shitload of books on my Kindle and in paperback.”

“Me, too,” I replied with a smile. Already we had a bunch of common interests. I figured that had to be a good thing. “Where do you live?”

“I own a house outside Indianapolis,” he answered.

“I rent an apartment in Indianapolis,” I gasped. I was completely floored that we lived right by each other but had to come to Scotland to meet. He was almost ready for me, and I realized I was now staring

at the pool of pre-cum on his stomach. I so wanted to lap it up like the cat I was.

“Since I own, would you be cool with moving in with me?”

“Do you have room for me?” I chuckled.

“Yeah, I make a good living. I have tons of companies wanting me to test their games.”

“Okay, I’m done talking,” I groaned as he slipped in a fourth finger easily. I pulled his hand away and put it on my cock to use the extra lube to slick me up. Ant gasped and stared up at me. I gave him a wink and moved into position. “I hope you like it hard and fast.”

“I used to,” he said softly, his cheeks heating up. “But then my ex-boyfriend started hitting me during sex. I think he got off on causing pain. I’ve not been with anyone since him, and we broke up almost thirty years ago.”

“Damn,” I groaned as I slid inside of him. That was a long fucking time to go without sex, and I chose to focus on that part of what he said since I had no clue what to say about the rest of it. “You must whack off constantly.”

“I like toys,” he hissed and arched his hips as I sunk home. “If this works, I’ll show you my collection.”

“I’d like that,” I growled as I stared down at where our bodies were joined. And then I almost smacked myself for being such a sentimental pussy. Why was I getting all mushy and watching what was going on instead of just fucking him into the couch? That wasn’t like me. I reached over and grabbed his hips before taking him slowly. “You okay?”

“Gods yes,” Ant squeaked. I wasn’t sure what was up with the squeaking, but I liked it. As his hole opened up for me, I started to pick up speed and ferocity.

“Touch yourself, Ant.” I grunted as I pounded into him. What the hell was up with me? I never cared if my partner got off. That was for them to worry about! I shook off the thought... chalking it up to the situation we were in to force a mating to happen.

He did ask I asked, stroking himself in time with my thrusts. I adored the cute little noises he made during sex and realized while I didn't normally care if I got a repeat performance or not, I would with Ant.

"Gavin, Gavin, coming," Ant whimpered second before he shot ropes of seed all over his stomach. I roared as his orgasm threw me into mine when his ass massaged my cock perfectly. I thrust into his tight grasp a few more times before snarling as I shot my load deep into him. And then I threw back my head and roared. Not so much from my orgasm, but from the possessiveness I was feeling toward Ant as my seed coated the inside of him.

"Yeah, I'll keep you." I gasped for air as my climax started to ebb.

"I'm so flattered." He snickered as my cock slipped free. "You're not a sweet-talker, are you?"

"No, you won't get flowers and romance from me, Ant. Just not how lions are built."

"Fine, but we're sleeping in the same bed, and you'll have to deal with me laying over all you."

"I can handle that." I chuckled, impressed he spoke up like that. "As long as you don't snore."

"Nope," he replied with a wide smile as we stared at each other. "Are you asking me to mate with you, Mr. Ashby?"

"I guess I am," I answered, leaning in to give him a quick kiss.

"I accept," he whispered against my lips. And I was pretty happy about that. I never wanted to mate, and the idea of being forced to mate sat heavy with me. But if I was going to, Ant seemed like the best suited mate for me given the time constraints. I could deal with that, I guess.

## Chapter 2

“How do you claim a lion?” Ant asked as he slid down off the couch and onto my lap. I stared at him for a moment, never having had a lover be so forward and just demand cuddle time after sex. “Gavin? Are you still with me?”

“Umm, yeah, it’s a dominance thing,” I answered, shaking my head to clear my thoughts. Ant was just so different than anyone I’d ever had sex with. And why would he want to sit in my lap? “You ever read or see lions in the wild? The male does some sniffing, and then the one he wants lays down and just offers themselves up. There is an ear nip which we’ll get an earring for later and that’s it.”

“Okay,” he whispered, looking nervous at being near a lion. I gave him a quick kiss before moving him off my lap and letting the change flow over me. Ant’s eyes went wide, and I realized if he’d never seen it before, how big of a shock this would be for him. I was big as a man, six-five and almost three hundred pounds of solid muscle. Hey, I might work at a computer all day long, but that’s no reason not to keep in shape at my home gym!

My blond hair grew out past my ears to become my mane as fur flowed freely. And my eyes, which were light brown, almost amber, changed into cat eyes.

“Holy shit, you’re beautiful,” Ant gasped, running his fingers over me. I let out a long purr, loving his attention before I snapped out of it. Giving him a soft growl, he seemed to remember what we were doing here. “Sorry, right, you’re dominating me. But next time I want to see and explore.”

He stood still as I moved around him and sniffed. My lion liked him. He wasn't Alpha enough to try and challenge us for authority or power. I gave a loud roar that he pleased me as a potential mate. Damn! I'd forgotten to warn Ant about that, and he went so pale I thought he was going to faint. I quickly moved to nudge his hand, letting him know everything was okay.

"Yeah, a heads-up would have been nice before shattering my eardrums," he mumbled as he dropped to his knees. If I could have laughed in lion form, I would have at his antics, but this was a serious ritual of my people. I moved one paw to gently push him onto his hands and knees, positioning myself over him when he had. I licked his neck when I felt him shivering. I wasn't sure why he was so scared.

I mean, I know I was a huge six-hundred-pound lion, but he was a shifter. He should know that I knew what was going on and was completely sentient. And then a thought hit me. He smelled like prey. Just what type of shifter was the man I was going to mate? I leaned forward and gave him a quick nip on the ear. He let out a cute little squeak as our hearts and souls moved to synchronize.

"You have to lick my whiskers," Ant said nervously a moment later as I nuzzled his neck. That was a strange mating ritual. No bite or fucking? No marking? Just licking whiskers? I started to shift back, and he let out a squeak and quickly shifted.

"Ant? Ant, where are you?" I asked in a panic after shifting back to human form. I couldn't see my mate anywhere. Then I heard a loud squeak. "You've got to be fucking kidding me! You're a mouse?"

*Squeak, squeak* was all I got for a response. I opened my large hands on the floor, and Ant moved forward cautiously, sniffing me. When he finally crawled into my hands, I raised him up to my face and licked his right whiskers.

"Haven't you heard the old story about the lion and the mouse, Ant?" I asked softly as I licked the other side. "The mouse gets eaten in the end, you know."

He started shivering as the change vibrated through him. Suddenly, I had a man sitting in my hands. I braced his weight before I dropped him, settling him on my lap. “You can eat me anytime you want, big boy.”

“No wonder you squeak, you little flirt.” I chuckled but then got serious as I took his face in my hands. “Why didn’t you tell me you were a mouse?”

“Because you would have immediately rejected the idea of mating me if you knew what I was,” he whispered. “But then I was going to tell you after we had sex, and I got scared. And then you just shifted, so well, umm, yeah, things kinda went fast after that and my brain was reeling.”

“No more hiding things, Ant. I won’t have a sneaky mate who I can’t trust,” I said firmly. I was willing to let him off the hook this time since the way the night played out. But not again.

“I promise, Gavin.” He nodded and then kissed me. “We’re really mated now. I can feel it, can you?”

“Yeah, I can,” I answered as I pulled us to our feet. I handed him his clothes before quickly yanking on mine. “Let’s get registered with the council and get the hell out of here. I can hear the chaos around this place, and it’s driving me nuts.”

“Can someone still try and bite me and claim me before we get the mating seals?” Ant froze at the idea as I started walking to the door. “I don’t want someone else to just bite me, Gavin.”

Shit! He was completely right. With the ensuing clusterfuck going on in the castle how did I get him to the council without getting taken from me? Great! Just one more obstacle that the fucking elders threw at us. They were so off my Christmas card list for this shit!

“Do you trust me, Ant?” I asked as I took his hand in mine.

“Of course, you’re my mate.”

“I want you to jump up on my front and wrap as tightly as you can around me,” I replied as he did as I asked. It took me a second to get my body under control with his ass in perfect position for me to fuck

again. Lions were some of the horniest animals in the animal kingdom. On top of that, paranormals were known for having high libidos as well. “Hang on and make yourself as small of a target as you can. We’re going to make a run for it.”

“What if someone bites you when you’re worried about me?” He squeaked out.

“As sad as it is to say, most big guys don’t get fucked with like you guys do,” I answered with a sigh. I hated that kind of shit in the world. “I’ll be fine and keep you safe, just hang on.”

Ant tucked his head in my neck as I wrapped my left arm around him. I walked through the door of the library into a quiet hallway. Maybe we were being silly and this would be no big deal?

Yeah, not so much! I got to the real action when we moved into the next hall leading to the ballroom. A few people stopped what they were doing and eyed my mate over like he was lunch. Oh, fuck that shit! Ant was mine!

I took off at top speed, glad I ran three miles a day. One dark-haired guy about my size came at us, and I punched him in the face before shoving him with my shoulder to get him out of the way. Then someone else pushed us from behind, and it took everything I had to stay on my feet. It was even worse when we got to the ballroom. I can’t even remember the faces of all the people I pushed, shoved, and hit to get through there.

It was like an insane football game where there were no rules, and the touchdown was getting my mate to the elders safely. Once I leapt up on the stage where the elders were all seated with a large book in front of them, I finally won.

“Gavin Ashby and Anthony Marino have mated,” I shouted amongst the noise. The elder nodded and wrote our names down in the Book of Mating. I pried Ant off of me right before we both cried out as the mating seals were magically tattooed on us.

“You mated a man?” My father roared. I instinctively pushed Ant behind me.

“Is that a problem, father?” I smirked, never having told him I was gay. “Did your little plan not go how you wanted? Oh and I’m leaving the pride to go live with my mate. So good luck getting the income I brought to the pride now.”

“You’re next to lead the pride,” he yelled, his teeth and claws extending.

“I don’t *want it!*” I snarled back as Ant shook behind me, his hands holding my hips. “I never did, but you don’t care about what I want. You wanted me to mate. You forced me to mate. Now deal with the fucking consequences because I don’t give a rat’s ass what you want!”

I didn’t give him time to answer, swooping Ant up into my arms and leaping off the stage.

“Wait, Gavin!” One of the elders shouted as he leapt off the stage after me. He handed me an envelope with the UPAC seal on it. “There are rules to this mating. You need to read that after you have sex with your mate.”

“Like I wouldn’t test out if we were compatible sexually before tying us together for eternity.” I looked at the guy like he was nuts. “I’ll read it on the plane. My mate and I are leaving this hellhole.”

I stormed off with a shaking Ant in my arms. What was he upset about? I was the one who just started World War III with my father and my pride. He didn’t say anything until we were in the cat’s wing of the castle. It was split up by communities when we came for this convention every leap year.

When we got back to my room, I lowered Ant to his feet and started to pack. Suddenly, I felt the air vibrate when a shifter went through the change. Sure enough, I looked and Ant’s clothes were in a pile on the floor.

“Ant, where are you? We don’t have time for this shit,” I said with a sigh. I decided to ignore him. Whatever his issue was, he’d tell me eventually. And then I felt tiny claws crawling up inside my pant leg. “Fuck! That hurts, Ant!”

I heard a series of squeaks and froze. I understood them as if he'd been speaking human English. Oh this was a new fun development.

"Why can I understand mice squeaks, Ant?"

"Because you're mated to one, you big dumb lion," he replied in mouse form and bit my knee.

"Fucking cut that out! I'll pack you in my suitcase if you don't behave, Ant. Why are you pissed at me?"

"Did you mate me just to piss off your father? Don't you think I deserved to know that he'd be pissed and might want to hurt me for being mated to you?"

"No, that's not why I mated you," I sighed and sat down on the bed. Part of me was annoyed at his childish antics. But then again, if I was a mouse fighting with a lion, I'd want to be a small target, too. The other part of me realized he was right. I should have told him.

"Look, I didn't mate you to piss him off. Yes, I figured it would because he didn't know I was even gay. But we talked about cutting each other some slack given the circumstances. I didn't bite you when you didn't tell me you were a mouse shifter, did I?"

"No," he squeaked quietly and crawled back out of my pants. I watched as he then moved over my shoe and back up to my lap on the outside of my jeans this time. He shifted back, naked in my lap, and tucked his hair behind his ear before looking up at me. "I'm sorry, Gavin."

"It's okay, we've all got our little quirks," I replied, wondering where this sudden patience was coming from. I must really like Ant to not be pissed with him. "I can hear you when you squeak, and you bite me when you're upset. Just promise no matter how pissed you are, you won't bite my junk."

"No way." Ant giggled and slid off my lap. "Can't risk doing damage to that which brought me such pleasure."

"All right, then let's get the hell out of Dodge," I said with a nod. I went back to my packing, which took minutes since I'd not brought much. Ant got dressed again, and while I was disappointed that he

was covering up his hot body, we couldn't walk through the castle with him naked. I slung my bag over my shoulder, along with my laptop case, and followed Ant to his room.

While Ant packed, I called and changed our flights to the first available. There were guards and employees of UPAC that could drive us to the airport, since that's how we got to the castle. When he was ready, we made our way to the kitchen. We figured we could find someone to drive us there, and the chaos in the castle wouldn't stretch down to there.

"And you've mated?" the guard asked, probably have been given instructions not to let anyone out who hadn't been claimed. I rolled my eyes and yanked up my sleeve, showing my mating seal on my right bicep. As he checked it out, I wondered where it was on my little mate. I know it was different for each race, but I didn't know about mice.

Since I figured it was a discussion for private, I didn't ask as the guy led us out the back to one of the UPAC vehicles. And I must have dozed off during the drive because soft lips woke me with a kiss.

"We're here, Gavin," Ant whispered and kissed me again. Maybe I did like kissing. Could it be I'd missed out all these years on kissing because I thought it wasn't something lions did? Or maybe it was just who I'd had in my bed before?

I didn't know, but I kept thinking about it is I walked over to the ticket counter. As I was waiting in line, I noticed I'd lost Ant. Glancing around, I saw him back by the front doors struggling with his suitcase and carry-on. Whoops! Great mate I was... didn't even notice when my mate wasn't at my side. I got out of line and jogged over to him.

"Sorry, was lost in my thoughts," I said sheepishly as I took his suitcase on wheels and carry-on. I gave him my laptop case instead. "Better?"

"Yeah, um, thanks," he replied as his cheeks turned pink. Ant went to take my hand, but I pulled it away.

“Do you need to be led around like a child?” I asked as I stared at him with confusion. I swear I didn’t mean it as harsh as it came out. I just didn’t understand why he needed to hold my hand.

“Forget it,” Ant whispered, lowering his head and walked over to the ticket counter line I’d been in. I shook my head as I trailed after him, wondering if this had been a mistake. He was quiet the entire wait. And after we’d gotten our tickets and handed over his suitcase. And still when we went to grab breakfast at a small shop before our flight. And still he didn’t say anything when we boarded the plane and got settled into first class.

“I’m sorry,” I blurted out, no longer to take the silent treatment. “I didn’t mean to call you a child or be such an ass. I just don’t understand why you’d want to hold my hand. Can you explain it to me, or at least just stop being angry with me?”

“You’ve never just walked with your boyfriend or lover and held his hand?” he asked after a few moments, searching my face.

“No. But then again, I’ve never really had a boyfriend or a lover, just people I’ve had sex with. Been on a few dates, but those kind of annoyed me, too.”

“Okay then,” he said and reached into his carry-on to pull out his Kindle.

“Wait, so you’re still not going to talk to me or explain it?”

“It’s a sign of affection, Gavin,” Ant sighed and turned toward me. “I forgot you said you weren’t affectionate and was embarrassed that I was having problems with my luggage and reached for your hand. I wanted comfort and to show you I appreciated the help.”

“Oh, I thought you were afraid of getting lost in the airport,” I replied, not sure how something as simple as holding someone’s hand could lead to telling me everything Ant said it would convey. “Wouldn’t just a thank you and sex have worked better?”

“Shit, you’re serious, aren’t you?” he asked after a moment, his eyes going wide.

“Um, yeah.” I shrugged.

“Okay, so I guess I better get out of the habit of holding hands with my partner,” Ant muttered under his breath. We were interrupted by the seat belt sign for takeoff. But once we were in the air, I wanted to talk to him more. I guessed he wasn’t thrilled with my answer since, as soon as he could, he turned on his Kindle and started reading.

Not knowing what else to do, I grabbed my laptop and started working. I wasn’t going to sit there and wait for him to forgive me. I’d said I was sorry he was upset, not that I felt I did anything wrong, other than being harsh. I wasn’t going to apologize for not wanting to hold his hand. I worked for an hour or so as I mulled it over.

But then I thought of something as I worked on the coding for my latest program. What if I did like holding his hand but didn’t know it because I’d never done it?

Logically, I wasn’t sure how I got to that progression. But as I saved my work and closed my laptop, I realized I wanted to try it. Reaching with my left hand since Ant was in the window seat, I slid my hand under his on the armrest. He intertwined his smaller fingers with mine as I stared at our hands. I did notice his glancing over at me on the edges of my vision.

“I do like this,” I admitted out loud, even if it was more to myself.

“I’m glad,” he said as he leaned in closer. “Would I really be pushing my luck if I kissed you, too?”

“No, I already figured out I really like kissing you. And that’s new for me, too,” I answered as I slanted my mouth toward his. It was a soft kiss first then got more heated as I now had the time to explore his sweet mouth. I pulled back suddenly when I heard a giggle. Glancing over, I saw a young girl smiling as she watched us.

“We’ve been busted.” Ant snickered and put his Kindle away. Well, I guess getting that had him wanting to open back up to talking with me. “So I guess we’ve got to get you packed up to move when we get back?”

“Well, with the time difference and the flight times, considering we have a connecting flight in New York,” I started to say as I did the math in my head. Scotland was six hours ahead of Indiana, one flight was thirteen hours... “We’ll be getting in midnight Saturday our time. And by then my personal assistant Marv should have my essentials packed up. What’s left or not needed he’ll get done and moved to your house. I already emailed him.”

“I’ve been debating if I should get a PA,” he replied, scrunching his eyebrows together. “But I set up some interviews, and I had a few guys come in that gave me one look and knew they’d be running the show.”

“Can I ask why you’d need a PA?”

“Well, I’ve got more requests for my services than I have time in the day,” Ant answered as he rubbed his thumb over my hand. “And I can’t outsource that work. But I figured I could get someone to clean the house, pay bills, run errands, send out contracts, type up my notes I record. That kind of stuff. And I love to cook and bake. I absolutely adore doing it when I’m stuck on a game. But every time I go to do either, everything in my fridge is expired or it’s bare.”

He had a valid point and after a few moments, I had a plan. “Okay, do you have a mortgage?”

“No, I bought it outright,” he answered with a wink. “I might look in my twenties, but I’m over three hundred years old, Gavin.”

“Wow, you’re an old geezer.” I chuckled. “I’m only a hundred and fifty.”

“Nicccce, I’m totally robbing the cradle.” He chuckled. “Okay, so what’s your plan? I could just about see the wheels turning in your head.”

“Well, I figure since we’re going to be living together and you bought the house, I should take care of the bills to catch up,” I explained as I opened my laptop back up. “Marv is my personal assistant, so he handles all that for me now, so we can take it off your

list. Plus, I employ a maid service, and we can just add on the extra rooms and laundry of yours.

“And as for typing up your recorded notes, I can ask my business assistant about it or see if she’d like to make some money on the side. Maybe a little extra for Marv, since I’ve never had him grocery shop, because mostly I eat out. Which gets tiresome. So if you cook, I’ll get the groceries and the maid services for the cleaning up. Fair enough?”

“More than fair.” Ant nodded, looking impressed. “You really don’t screw around, do you?”

“No, I don’t have time for it when it comes to organization,” I snickered. I fired off a few emails about the changes and questions. “And we should get a lawn service.”

“I have that already,” Ant said with a yawn as he laid his head on my shoulder and watched what I was doing.

He was touching me, but this time my instincts didn’t scream to push him away. It was kind of nice, actually. *Maybe I could get used to this*, I thought with a smile, before I shut down my laptop and we settled down for a nap.

## Chapter 3

We ended up sleeping most of the flight from Scotland before getting up to switch planes and eat something. Ant slept the flight from New York to Indianapolis while I stayed awake. I ended up staring at him most of the flight, wondering how different my life would be now. As much as I thought we fit well, both workaholics and all of that, I knew there would be changes.

I woke him when we landed, and we finagled our way through the airport. Ant had parked his car as well so I had to find him with my car in the other lot and follow him. It took about half an hour to get to his house in Greenfield. He had a nice two-story colonial with perfectly manicured lawns. I parked in the driveway while he pulled into the garage. We could figure out that part later.

“I finally understand the term *dead on your feet*,” Ant said with a yawn as he let us in the house. It was a connecting door off the garage, opening into the kitchen. The kitchen itself was a nice size, with an island and stainless steel appliances. The granite countertops matched the tiled floor, and I found myself impressed with his decorating skills. The house was stylish without being cold. It felt like a home, not just a place to crash like, my apartment.

I carried his bags along with mine up the stairs into the master suite. Again, it was very comfortable. There was a large queen-size bed in the center of the back wall. The color scheme was a little loud for me, mostly bright greens and purples. I was more of a dark-colored guy, but it wasn't so bad that it was an eyesore. He had deep oak dressers that matched the bed frame, and I thought they went well with the bedding.

Ant collapsed on the bed, but I had other plans for my mate. I'd read the envelope from UPAC on the connecting flight. One of the rules was he had to have intercourse once every twenty-four hour period from the time we mated until the next leap year conference. If we didn't for whatever reason, we'd lose our ability to shift permanently. And that made a shifter go feral.

"Time to shower and have sex," I whispered in his ear as took off his shoes. "I read the rules the elder gave me, and we have to have sex at least once a day, Ant. We're coming close to our twenty-four hour mark."

"Lube me up and take me then," he mumbled, not moving as I pulled off his socks.

"You're not going to participate?" I chuckled as I worked on his jeans and then shirt.

"I'll grunt some," Ant said with a yawn as he rolled over naked. "Let me see you hard and wanting me, and I'm sure I'll perk right back up."

I started stripping for him slowly, making sure he'd get a nice view of all my muscles flexing. If nothing else, his cock took notice. By the time I was naked, my mate slid off the bed and onto his knees.

"I want to taste you," he whispered and reached for me.

"Another time, Ant," I replied as I pulled him up and into my arms. "We have to consummate our mating every twenty-four hours. That means intercourse."

"Fine." Ant chuckled, rolling his eyes. "I guess I can put out for you."

"Oh, so sweet of you." I lowered him to his feet and went to turn on the shower. As it warmed up I heard him moan. Glancing over my shoulder I saw he already had his fingers in his ass and where he got the lube from I had no clue. "Shit, that's hot."

"Slick up, big boy," he said with a wink and handed me the lube. "I'm feeling randy all of a sudden."

I growled my approval as I quickly slicked up and noticed it was waterproof. Thank the gods for small favors. I watched intently as he got ready for me. Then we got in the shower, my eyes focused on his firm ass.

“Wear me out so I can go back to sleep,” Ant taunted as he placed his hands against the tile and stuck out his ass.

“Gladly,” I purred as I moved into place. I pushed against his hole, groaning when it sucked me right in. Ant cried out as I filled him up and leaned his forehead on the cool tiles. I started out slow, but quickly switched to a faster pace.

“Oh gods you’re huge,” Ant moaned, reaching down to stroke his dick. I pounded into his warm heat, relishing the feeling of him wrapped around my cock. It had never been like this before with a sex partner. “Gavin, coming.”

“Do it, Ant. Scream my name,” I grunted as I picked up speed. I made sure to nail his prostate and moments later, he cried out my name to the heavens. Following him right over, I bit his shoulder to keep from roaring out in his ear. I shot my seed deep inside of him as a thrill ran through me. This man was mine forever, and no one else would ever know the pleasure that could be had from him. Only me.

“Feel like carrying me back to bed?” He panted a few minutes later as he slumped against the tiles. I chuckled and pulled out of him, getting a moan from both of us. “You’re such a stud. I can’t even feel my legs.”

“Thanks, Ant,” I whispered in his ear. I cleaned us up quickly, figuring we could wash our hair in the morning. When we were done and crawling into bed, I stiffened up in shock as he lay against my side. Ant threw an arm and a leg over me, sprawling over me as he had warned.

I didn’t know what to do. Part of me panicked at the incredibly intimate gesture. But then I heard his deep breathing and knew he felt safe enough around me to fall asleep. Shouldn’t I be able to do the

same? I tried to relax and while it took a while, I finally was able to fall asleep. Maybe there was hope for me yet?

\* \* \* \*

The next morning I woke alone in bed. I threw back on my jeans since I didn't have anything besides the bag I'd brought to the conference, and had pretty much gone through the clothes already. After I used the bathroom and washed up, I headed down the stairs and followed my nose to the kitchen.

"Coffee," I purred and went to get some.

"You owe me something first for making the coffee," Ant said as he looked away from his laptop. I turned toward him and saw he had his lips pursed. Chuckling, I went to him and gave him a good morning kiss. "Did you sleep okay? If not, we can use your bed."

"I slept great, but my bed is a king size where yours is a queen," I replied with a shrug and went for coffee. "How long have you been up?"

"A couple of hours," he answered and started typing again. "I got more sleep on the planes than you did."

"Fair enough." I sat down at the kitchen table, tilting my head so I could see what he was doing. "Grocery list?"

"Yup, we're completely bare." He giggled. The doorbell rang and he glanced up, his eyebrows drawn together in confusion. "Who the hell is here at eight in the morning?"

"That would be Marv." I chuckled and headed to the door. Sure enough, there was my PA, fresh-pressed and ready to go. "Morning, Marv."

"Hey, Gavin," he replied with a bright smile as I let him in. "So you bought a house? How did I not know about this? You didn't give specifics in your email, and I figured you'd be tired from the flight and I could just ask this morning."

"I didn't buy a house. I moved in with my boyfriend."

“Your *what?*” Marv gasped, freezing in his spot. “You don’t date, though! You told me you don’t date. How could you have had a boyfriend that I didn’t know about that was serious enough to move in with?”

“I gave him an ultimatum,” Ant answered smoothly, picking up on the lie as we got back to the kitchen. “I’m Anthony Marino. Gavin’s told me a lot of nice things about you.”

“He’s told me nothing about you,” Marv said as he went to shake Ant’s outstretched hand. I swear I saw Marv curl his upper lip, but that couldn’t be. Marv was a sweetheart. I must not have had enough caffeine yet to face the day. “So what’s this about adding extra errands to my normal ones?”

“Since I’m moving in here and Anthony owns the house, I’m going to be paying the bills,” I explained, careful not to use Ant’s nick name since he introduced himself to Marv by his full name. “And Anthony is a great cook, so I won’t constantly be eating delivery and take out. But he works as much as I do, so neither of us has time for errands and we’ve got an empty fridge since we were in Scotland.”

“He went with you?” Marv gasped, his eyes going wide. “But I booked the flight. There was no companion.”

“I flew out at a different time and was going fly home earlier because of work,” Ant answered, raising an eyebrow. “But I was able to change my ticket and come back with Gavin. And while we were there, he accepted my offer to move in with me. Are we all caught up on the gossip now?”

“Yes, of course,” Marv replied, looking properly chastised. “Forgive me for asking questions and all, but I’ve worked for Gavin for three years. He doesn’t do anything last minute or spontaneously. So imagine my shock when I get an email to go and start packing up his apartment, hire movers, and additions to my responsibilities.”

“I can imagine you re-read the email a few times.” Ant chuckled as he moved over by me and wrapped an arm around my waist. “Would you like some coffee? Or do you have some of Gavin’s

things we can unload? He's out of clothes, and the ones he had on the trip I threw in the wash."

"You didn't have to do that," I said, smiling down at him for thinking about that for me. "I emailed the maid service and changed the location address. I also asked they come by today or tomorrow to estimate the cost difference of your house. Plus, I think we should add in laundry."

"He's not even going to take care of you?" Marv asked, glancing back and forth between us. What was up with him? Okay, I got that this was a shock, especially since he didn't know I was a shifter and about matings. But get over it already.

"No, Anthony is a very successful businessman with his own workload." I chuckled. "You want a cup of coffee while I unload your SUV, Marv?"

"I already had some, thanks. I'll help you unload," he said, and headed back to the front door. I set down my coffee cup and followed him as Ant gave a sigh. I was really missing something in all of this, and I didn't like it.

Once outside, Marv opened the back hatch to his SUV while biting his lip. "If you've got something to say, Marv, get it out now and let's be done with it."

"Does this guy have something on you? Is he forcing you to live here?" He asked quietly as my jaw just about hit the ground. He reached over and touched my arm. "I'm sorry, Gavin. I know your personal life is none of my business, but this is so out of left field that I can't help but be worried!"

"Marv, everything is fine, okay?" I replied firmly and patted his hand. "Anthony and I have been seeing each other for a little while, and I was trying to deny how strongly I felt for him. When he basically said to get serious or get out, I got serious. My lease is almost up, and I've been getting pressure from my family to settle down. It was just the right time with the right guy, and I've fallen head over heels. Nothing more than that."

“As long as you are fine,” he replied with a nod, not looking quite convinced. We picked up boxes and didn’t say anything else as we unloaded his SUV. When we got all the boxes out, we started bringing them upstairs.

“I made room for you in the walk-in closet,” Ant said with a smile as he pointed the way. “Give me a few minutes and I’ll clear out a few drawers for you in the dresser as well. And we can turn the spare bedroom down the hall I use for storage into an office for you. Also, the basement is finished, and we can turn that into your home gym.”

“You’ve just thought of everything, haven’t you?”

“I don’t have time to screw around.” He snickered, using my same words from the day before. “I do really need to get some work done though. So I’ll be in the play room with my headset on. If you need me, just yell.”

“Okay,” I said as I started unpacking.

“Oh, can Marv do the grocery shopping today? I thought I’d make a nice dinner to celebrate you moving in with me.”

“Yeah, just email him the list,” I said as Marv handed over his business card like the awesome PA he was. “When are the movers coming with the rest of my stuff?”

“Tuesday at three,” he answered. “That was the first time they had, even with the short move.”

“That’s fine.” I shrugged as Ant gave me a quick kiss and left. “I got this, Marv. You go ahead with your other stuff and just head on back when you’re done with the groceries. I’ve got the latest program to finish.”

“Um, okay, later,” Marv said and left. I shook my head, thinking he was acting kind of strange. But then again, I was Mr. Reliable and Constant, so this change must have really thrown him. *He should have been in Scotland*, I thought to myself with a chuckle.

When I had unpacked everything Marv had brought, I grabbed my laptop and coffee and found the game room. Sure enough, Ant was playing some game on a large LCD TV while talking into a headset. I

sat down and booted up, only interrupting when I needed his password for the Wi-Fi. Then I got to work.

We worked like that for a few hours before Ant paused his game and looked at me over his shoulder. “Lunch? I could order something for delivery.”

“Chinese?” I asked, smiling at him. It didn’t feel like we’d just met and moved in together. It felt comfortable, like we’d been living together for years.

“Egg rolls or crab rangoon?”

“There’s no *or* in my vocabulary.” I snickered. “Sweet and sour pork and beef lo mien for me.”

“Me too.” He chuckled and pulled out his cell phone. Damn! Ant was as bad as I was. He had the local place on speed dial, and they recognized his name. We went back to work for the next forty-five minutes or so before the doorbell rang.

“I got it. Meet you in the kitchen,” I said as I jumped up to get it. I paid the guy and brought the food, setting it all up on the table as Ant got drinks. We chatted about work as we stuffed our faces before cleaning up and getting back to work.

Ant left the game room about an hour after we’d finished lunch. I wasn’t really paying attention since I was having trouble with the coding on my project.

“You might want to restructure your interface,” he said, and I jumped since I’d not heard him come back into the room. I looked over what I was doing, and he was right.

“Thanks,” I replied as I glanced up to smile at him. It was then I saw he was naked. “Fuck, Ant!”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I want to do,” Ant purred as he moved my laptop and slid onto my lap. “I figured we’ve been working hard and are back early from Scotland. We should get an afternoon treat.”

“Oh you do, do you?” I chuckled and ran my hands up his thighs and around to cup the cheeks of his ass. “Do I get to see this toy collection of yours?”

“I’ve got one of them in my ass stretching me out for your massive cock,” he whispered in my ear as he moved his hands over my chest. “Did you think I’d keep my hands off these gorgeous muscles for very long? I’ve wanted to touch you like this for years, Gavin.”

“I’ll walk around shirtless—” I started to say but then froze. I pulled his hands off of me and leaned back so I could see his face. “What do you mean *years*, Ant?”

“I, um, well, last conference,” he stuttered as his pulse raced and his chest started heaving.

“You knew who I was when you *found* me in the library, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” he whispered, and that one word said it all. I stood up, letting him fall off my lap onto the couch. Ant grabbed the blanket that was folded on the back of the couch and wrapped it around him as I paced.

“You knew who I was but pretended you didn’t. Why?” I asked, narrowing my eyes at him, finally facing him after a couple of minutes. “What did you get out of this, Ant?”

“You,” he answered quietly as he glanced down at his lap. “I-I saw you at the last conference and thought you were the most gorgeous man I’d ever seen, Gavin. I didn’t know how to talk to you. I’m not good with people, and no one pays me any attention. But when everything happened with the drinks being spiked, I wanted to find you and hoped you saw me as a potential mate before you found someone else.”

“You kept something major from me again!” I snarled, getting in his face. “First you didn’t tell me you were a mouse, and now I find out you’ve been holding a torch for me for four years. How can I ever trust you, Ant?”

“I didn’t think it was such a big deal,” he answered, scooting back away from me. I could smell his fear pouring off of him. He thought I was going to hit him, which just added to my anger. “But I didn’t

know how to say anything without sounding like some stalker. I mean, I was just part of a conversation you had at the last conference. We never officially met, and I don't think you ever even looked at me."

"I've mated a sneak and a liar," I sneered, not buying his explanation. "You promised no more hiding things, and then you still did. Anything else I should know? Oh wait, if you tell me no, I can't believe you. Can I, Ant?"

"I'm sorry," he whispered as he turned his head as if I had slapped him.

"Not good enough," I snarled, pissed he was reacting this way. It wasn't fair for him to get upset. I was the one that had been lied to! I grabbed my laptop and stormed out of the play room. I ended up in the kitchen and got back to work as conflicting emotions raged in me.

Maybe I was overreacting? But if it wasn't a big deal, why did he act like he didn't know me. And if he hid that, could I believe his reasoning? I just didn't know what to do, what to think, or if I could trust my own fucking mate!

I worked for a few hours before the doorbell rang. I opened up for Marv and helped him unload the groceries and everything else.

"Okay, I'll put away the food," he said once he was in the kitchen, looking over his list. "I added a few things to the list, like Anthony asked for coffee, but it wasn't the kind you drink, so I got both. I got your dry cleaning and some more boxes from your apartment. I'm going to need a copy of all the bills that you want me to start paying now so I know due dates, et cetera."

"Thanks, man," I replied, rubbing my hand over his hair to mess it up. "I can always trust you'll take care of me."

"Of course." Marv snickered and smacked my hand away. "It's what you pay me for. I do have a question. What about the stuff you have duplicates of now? I mean, you don't need two full sets of dishes, and couches, and entertainment units."

“Fuuuuuck,” I groaned, not even having thought about that. I really liked my stuff. “I’ll have to talk to Anthony about it. I guess when the movers come, we’ll have to put it all in the garage until we sort through whose stuff goes.”

“Okay, well, let me know when you start having stuff to get rid of,” he said, jotting down notes. “I’ll take it to donate or schedule pick-ups, and that will be a nice tax write-off for you.”

“Good idea.” I’d not thought of that. But then again, I’d not gotten the chance to think about much with how fast this was all going. Well, except my mate was a liar.

“Do you need anything besides more packing done tomorrow? The movers aren’t coming until the day after.”

“I know there are contracts at the office I need to sign,” I answered as I thought of the never-ending list of things to do. “Also, I know there are proofs from marketing for the giveaways for that tech convention in a few months. You don’t have worry about bringing any more of my things since the movers are coming soon. Can you just pick up that stuff from the office in the morning, bring it over, and spend the rest of the day packing?”

“Yes, of course,” he said with a smile as I led him back to the door. “Want your Monday morning treat?”

“Silly question.” I chuckled as I patted him on the back and closed the door. He knew me so well that we were like a well-oiled machine. Marv made my life easier, less complicated, unlike the man who tricked me into mating him. And I couldn’t get out of that one.

## Chapter 4

The house was filled with tension, to say the least. When Ant came into the kitchen later, I grabbed my laptop and left. I went to search out the spare room upstairs he said I could use as an office. It was a good size, completely empty besides some boxes in the one closet. This would work nicely. There were a few larger windows with good sunlight coming in during the day, and view that I could gaze at when I needed a break.

I need to clear my mind before getting back to work, so I decided to go for a run. Back in the bedroom, I unpacked a box that Marv had even labeled “workout clothes.” Sure enough, my running shoes and most of my workout stuff were in there. I quickly changed, grabbed my iPod, jogged to the door to the garage since I didn’t have a key to the house yet, and left.

I felt Ant’s eyes on me, but I figured it was obvious I was going for a run and not leaving for good since I didn’t even have car keys. Unlike I normally do, I didn’t start out slow this time. I needed the burn of my muscles to help me think past my emotions. I did four miles instead of three at top speed, and was back in under twenty minutes. Being a shifter had perks after all.

As I walked back in the kitchen, dripping sweat, I saw Ant pulling food off the grill on the deck. Yeah, like I wanted to eat with him. Or hell, like I trusted him to cook my food and not put something in it. Instead, I headed for a shower.

I took my sweet time, scrubbing hard to let out my frustration that the jog didn’t take care of. When I was done, I dried off, threw on some shorts, and headed back downstairs.

“I made dinner,” Ant said softly as I entered the kitchen.

“How nice for you,” I sneered as I opened the fridge and grabbed the leftover Chinese.

“You’re not even going to eat what I made?” I spun around to face him and saw his mouth hanging open in shock.

“Can I trust you that there’s not rat poison in it?” I growled between my teeth as he turned his cheek as if I’d smacked him.

“Not knowing how to tell you something is *not* the same thing as lying, Gavin,” he finally said, his eyes cold. “And going from that to assuming I’d poison you is one huge fucking leap. I’m done being sorry and trying to apologize if you’re going to be so unreasonable.”

I didn’t answer as I stuck the carton of Chinese food in the microwave and hit start, mostly because he was right. I was overreacting. But he broke my trust, and to me, when it came to that, it was all or nothing. Either I trusted you or I didn’t, and that meant I didn’t trust him with anything.

“We still need to have sex tonight,” Ant whispered when my food was ready and I tried to escape.

“Fine, be ready and stretched at nine and I’ll meet you in your room.” I ground out before storming back up to my office. Yeah, like I really felt like having sex with him!

I worked until nine, sighing when I saw the time. My cock wasn’t even cooperating with the idea of sex since everything in me was screaming not to touch Ant. I went to his room and sure enough my mate was laid out naked on the bed like a sacrifice. Glancing away from his body and up to his eyes, I could see he wanted this probably less than I did.

Not able to deal with his issues, I quickly stripped and approached him. I slicked up my now-hard cock with the lube he had by his hip before pulling on his leg. So sue me, he was naked. He let out a squeak of shock as I dragged him to the side of the bed and flipped him over so his feet were on the floor.

“You wanted me all this time, Ant?” I growled in his ear as I smacked his ass hard. “Let me show you what you got, my *mate*. Welcome to being mated to a lion.”

I didn't give him time to answer as I slammed my cock into him in one shot. Ant cried out, arching his back, giving me better access to spank him.

“No more lying or hiding,” I grunted as I pounded into his ass. I switched off hands between holding his hip and slapping his ass, so each cheek took equal shots. “Bad mate! I won't tolerate it from you again. And if we didn't have to fuck, I'd just spank you and not let you get off. You might not be poisoning my food, but you've got penance to pay for your deceit!”

Ant gasped and cried out as I fucked him at a punishing pace, putting all my strength into the thrusts. He'd learn who was the boss here, and how being mated should mean trust. If this didn't teach him I wouldn't tolerate deception, I didn't know what would.

I felt my canines extend at the submissive pose Ant was in as I dominated him. Leaning over, I sank them into his shoulder to hold him in place as I found my release. I groaned around his flesh as my cock erupted inside of him. Guess my aggressions and adrenaline could work for sex after all. I guess that's how the term *angry sex* came about.

When I pumped the last of my seed in him, I pulled my teeth out and licked his wound closed. Ant whimpered as I pulled out my semi-hard cock, but I didn't move off of him.

“That's how a lion fucks, Ant,” I hissed in his ear. “And that's how we punish our mates for transgressions against us. I was willing to try something different with you because that's what you wanted. You wanted to hold hands and snuggle. And I trusted you enough to try it and be what you wanted. But you broke that trust, and now you'll see what I meant when I said I like to be in charge. This is what you get from now on, as is my obligation.”

I didn't give him a chance to reply. Pushing off the bed, I stormed out of his room and went into spare room that was now my office. I was glad it had its own smaller bathroom with shower stall. I'd grabbed some clothes and my shower case earlier in the day when I realized there would be no way I'd be sharing my mate's bed tonight.

After the shower was turned on and warmed up, I stepped in and ducked my head under the hot water. What had I just done? That was my *mate* in there, and I just treated him like a piece of meat. Hell! I didn't even treat one-night stands that badly. I meant not to show affection and spank him for keeping things from me. Not be cruel.

I sank to my knees when suddenly I couldn't seem to breathe. Did I hurt him? I mean, I knew his ass would be sore from the fucking and spanking. But what if I really hurt him? I never meant to really hurt him, just not show any tenderness. No wonder he'd been afraid to tell me he was a mouse and knew who I was - I was a monster.

When I could breathe again, I quickly cleaned up and shut off the shower. As I pulled on clean pajama pants, everything in me wanted to go check on my mate and take care of him. But that would show him that he could walk all over me. Wouldn't it? I just didn't know. And like the socially inept man I was, I did nothing.

I finally went into the living room and flopped on one of the couches to sleep. As I pulled a blanket over myself, I felt alone for the first time in my life. I'd liked sleeping with Ant in my arms last night. Had I just ruined that forever? I mean, what Ant had done was something that could be forgiven eventually. But what I had done, I wasn't sure that was.

\* \* \* \*

I woke the next morning after tossing and turning most of the night, desperately needing coffee. Glancing at my phone, I saw that Marv would be here soon with my Monday morning treat. Nothing

like an iced venti peppermint white mocha and some vanilla bean scones to start the week off right.

Heading to the bathroom off my office, I washed up before going to the kitchen. Ant wasn't there. Was he still in bed? No, the door was open as I passed his room. I crept over toward the game room, sighing in relief when I heard noise from it. He couldn't have been in pain or hurt if he was working, right?

I didn't have time to ask or come to any conclusions when Marv showed up. I took my breakfast and the paperwork from him. We exchanged a few words, and he left to go finish packing up my apartment.

It took me a while to look over the new contracts, analyze the proofs, and decide how many of everything to order. When I was done, I rolled my eyes, realizing I had to get them all back to the office. I went upstairs to change into real clothes when I heard Ant sniffing from his room. The door wasn't closed all the way, and just as I went to check on him, I heard him.

"He hit me," he whimpered. "I mean, I know spanking isn't like punching me in the face, but this wasn't for fun spanking. And he was really mean, Alpha. I couldn't even lie on my back or sit this morning. It still hurts now, and we're shifters. You know how fast we heal."

I sank against the wall outside his door. Fuck! How did I fix this? And did I even forgive him for what *he* did? But then again, I knew what I did was way worse.

"And this is how it started with Matt," Ant sniffled. "He'd get mad and fuck me really rough, not even letting me get off. Then it turned into spankings and always hitting my back during sex. And toward the end, there wasn't any sex. It was just using me like a punching bag."

Oh fuck me sideways! I'd never thought about Ant's past with his ex-boyfriend. I completely forgot that my mate had been abused in his last relationship. Gods, I was a douche.

“There has to be a way to break this mating, Alpha! I get what UPAC was trying to do, but I’m not staying in another abusive relationship. I’d rather die. Please just talk to them and explain what’s going on.”

No, no, no! I didn’t want to end our mating. I just wanted to be able to trust my mate. How could I fix this? I had no clue what I was doing. I simply acted on instinct as I pushed open the door and entered the room.

“Yes, Alpha, but if he hits me again I’m leaving. The consequences be damned. I understand,” Ant said as he wiped his eyes and finished up the conversation. He flipped the phone closed and gasped when he saw me there. “Leave me alone.”

“Can we talk?” I asked, not moving from where I was standing. I didn’t want to spook him or freak him out any worse.

“No,” he replied and shifted. I left, realizing he needed time, and there was no way I wouldn’t scare him worse by chasing him around. He said no, and I’d respect that... for now.

I went and got dressed with a heavy heart. I’d fucked this up way worse than Ant ever had. I found the pile of current bills on my laptop case that Ant must have left, and picked them up. I left them on the kitchen table on my way out and sent Marv a text that he could come pick them up in a couple of hours when I’d be back home.

It took me about an hour to run to the office and get everything I needed to do. On the way back to Ant’s house, I passed a florist and stopped in. I figured that’s what you did when you fucked up. You got flowers. Okay, Ant was a man, but no matter the sex of the partner, the point would be the same. I picked out a large bouquet of roses. I figured mixed colors would be best since I had no clue what they all meant.

I sent up a silent prayer to the heavens that Ant would at least talk to me and give me a chance to explain before running from me. It wasn’t until then that it even crossed my mind that if he did run, it

would affect me as well. The rules from UPAC were that if we didn't consummate our mating every day, we'd lose our animals.

As I parked in the driveway and got out, I noticed the front door was open. What the fuck? I raced to the door, barreling through it as I shouted out for Ant.

"In here," he called from the living room in a pained voice.

I froze as I walked into the room, dropping the flowers in shock. It looked like a bomb had gone off. Ant and Marv were both panting and bleeding as they sat on opposite sides of the room. Why hadn't I noticed Marv's car parked on the street? Had I been that distracted?

"He attacked me," Marv said, pointing to Ant but crying out when he moved his arm. It seemed that was broken.

"The fuck I did," Ant growled as he held his T-shirt up to his bleeding nose. "Marv jumped me when I opened the door, saying I stole you from him. I raced into here when I couldn't shove him out the door. He followed me into my house and attacked me."

I glanced back and forth between them. What the fuck? Who did I even believe on this one? Marv had never shown me a single violent tendency in the years I employed him. And Ant had lied to me before, but nothing like this. His story made more sense though. Why wouldn't Marv leave if Ant attacked him?

"Un-fucking-real," I swore as I kicked the roses across the room to Ant. "Here I wanted to apologize. Now I'm not so sure."

"You believe *him*," Ant snarled as he shot Marv a dirty look.

"I've known Marv for years, and you've kept things from me," I shot back as I went over to Marv. I lifted him up into my arms, straining a little since he wasn't that much shorter than me. "Let's get you guys to the hospital."

I didn't wait for Ant to answer me as I spun on my heel and left. Once I got Marv in the car, I went back for my mate. But he was already hobbling out to his vehicle.

“I’ll drive myself since you don’t believe me and that man is insane,” Ant shouted as I approached him. Fine! I stormed back to my car and took off for the hospital. This was such a fucking mess!

“I’m sorry, Gavin,” Marv said softly and then winced when he put pressure on a gash on his leg.

“What are you sorry for?” I asked, glancing at him before returning my eyes back to the road.

“That you got put in the middle of all of this,” he answered as he closed his eyes. “That you found out your boyfriend is a jealous freak and violent. I would never have thought that someone so tiny would pick a fight like that. I followed him inside to get the bills and asked him if he wanted a Monday treat from now on like you, and he jumped me. I was so shocked he got a few shots in before I could even defend myself.”

I nodded as we pulled into the ER drop-off. I helped him get out, and he went to register as I parked the car. As I jogged back to the reception area, my thoughts were racing, and I couldn’t focus on just one. Something here wasn’t adding up. And not just that one of them was lying. There was a thought on the edge of my brain that I couldn’t seem to grab onto.

Ant came limping in a few minutes later, and I raced over to him. I tried to help him, but he skirted around me.

“Look, I don’t know who to believe,” I hissed in his ear so people didn’t start staring. “Would you give me a minute to think before you get pissed at me?”

“You forget I was already pissed and trying to leave you, Gavin,” he answered, his eyes filling with tears.

That was it. That was the thought I kept having. Ant was trying to leave me! That was why I brought him flowers to apologize. Why would he get jealous and attack Marv if he wanted to leave me? Ant hadn’t known I heard his conversation with his Alpha while it was happening.

And unless he was an Oscar-worthy actor, no one could fake all this. I let him go and wandered back over to Marv, who was getting an exam in a curtained-off area.

“Did you break up with him?” he asked as someone stitched up his leg.

“Soon,” I lied as I watched his reaction intently. He was relieved. But then again, a friend worried about another one would be, so that didn’t tell me much.

“Good, he can’t take care of you like I could,” Marv replied with a wide smile.

“Pain meds?” I asked, not wanting to show my hand or how he just slipped up.

“Oh yeah, they loaded me up with the good stuff.” He giggled and slapped his hand over his mouth. “Man I just giggled! Who know that little shit could do so much damage?”

“Well, you get some rest, and I’ll call your mom to get you back home,” I said quickly. He was liable to ramble out exactly what he did, and I didn’t want that. Because if he knew that I knew, then he’d freak. And I had a lot of damage control to handle, starting with canceling the debit card he had to my accounts, changing passwords, etc.

“Okay, love you, Gavin,” he mumbled as he turned his head in his pillow. Well, fuck. Guess that explained a lot.

It took me a bit, but I found where Ant was after I’d called Marv’s mom. When I walked in, the doc looked up at me. “Who are you?”

“His husband,” I answered as I went to my mate’s side. He wouldn’t touch me, and I didn’t blame him. But before I could say anything else, the police showed up to ask Ant questions.

“Can you tell us what happened, Mr. Marino?” the first officer asked.

“I was working at home when the doorbell rang,” Ant replied, glancing over at me now. “My husband’s PA, Marv was at the door and asked if Gavin was home. When I said no, he said good and hit

me in the face. I stumbled back in shock, and when he came after me, spouting all kinds of crazy shit about he should be Gavin's husband. That I stole Gavin from him and I needed to be out of the picture. I ran, and since Marv was blocking all the exits I ended up cornered in the living room like an idiot. We fought until it became clear it was a draw and Gavin showed up."

"Did you assistant ever show any signs of aggression to your husband before?" the second officer asked me.

"No but they just met the other day," I answered, clearing my throat. "We were just married in Europe. But Marv did just admit to me that he loved me a few minutes ago after the doctor doped him up with pain meds."

Ant's eyes went wide, but he didn't say anything.

"Is there anything else you want to add, Mr. Marino?"

"Yes, I knew Marv was in love with Gavin the moment I met him. He had a slight meltdown when he met me."

"Yeah, he did," I sighed and ran my fingers through my hair. "I thought it was because we eloped. He asked me if Anthony had anything on me that would make me marry him. I thought it was just concerned after working for me for so many years."

We answered several more questions before the police were satisfied and left. While Ant was being discharged, I called my business assistant and explained what was going on. She immediately jumped in and said she'd take care of the debit card, and would let everyone Marv dealt with on my behalf know he was no longer allowed to speak for me or was employed by me.

Ant got out of bed and started to walk. But I wasn't having any of it after the doctor said he'd popped his knee out in the fight and shouldn't put any weight on it. I scooped him up in my arms and carried him out to the car.

"Don't touch me," he snarled. "You've done enough."

"I know, and I'm sorry. You were right, and I'll make it up to you, Ant," I whispered and kissed his temple. "What I did last night was

way worse than anything you kept from me. I wasn't thinking about your past abuse."

"What about how rough you were with me?" he asked after I loaded him into my car and we headed home. "I won't be mated to someone who treats me like that, Gavin."

"I know," I replied as my eyes burned. "I swear I didn't realize how cruel I had been until afterwards. And then I didn't know what to do. I figured I'd give you some space and then come talk to you. But then I heard you on the phone with your Alpha and realized just how badly I hurt you."

"The rough sex was fine," he admitted as we pulled into the driveway. "It was the spanking. And maybe that's normal for some couples, but I just can't do it. That and you didn't even seem to care if I got off."

"I was hurt and upset," I sighed as I got out of the car and went to help him. When I had him in my arms, I continued. "It's not an excuse. I know that. I just felt so betrayed and tricked into this that I wanted to hurt you the way you hurt me. I just didn't mean for it to go like that. I'm really sorry, Ant."

"So am I," he said softly and snuggled against my chest. I walked us into the house and to his room. "For the record, I didn't even know your last name or that you were a lion. You walked up and joined a conversation I was a part of, and I almost swallowed my tongue. Yes, I had dreams about you and wondered what it would be like to be with you. But that was it."

"I have to be able to trust you," I replied after a moment. I was careful when I laid him in the bed before stripping off our shoes and joining him. "Everything in me screamed that you wouldn't hurt Marv. But then I just kept thinking you'd broken my trust, and I've known him for three years. It took me a while to catch up."

"I understand that part, but what do we do now?" he asked hesitantly. The truth was, I didn't have a fucking clue.

## Chapter 5

“I called my business assistant, Cheryl, and told her what was going on,” I said after a little while of just holding him. “She’s going to cut all the ties I have with him and close him out of my accounts. It won’t matter that he has the key to my apartment since the movers are coming tomorrow. But do you want to press charges?”

“No, I just want us to have a real mating, and all the bullshit to stop,” he answered with a snuffle. “This is not the mating I dreamed of for three centuries, Gavin.”

“I know,” I whispered, trying to swallow the lump that was suddenly in my throat. “Do you still want to leave me? If there’s a way to break the mating and that’s what you want, I won’t fight you.”

“Can we just start over or something?” Ant asked after a few moments, turning on his side so he could throw his bum leg over mine and place his arm on my chest. “Maybe we just need a mulligan?”

“I don’t want to start over. I think if we can forgive each other, we should just move on and learn from it. And I promise never to come to our bed or touch you when I’m that angry again.”

“I can forgive you just fine,” he whispered and kissed my chest. “What you did wasn’t that big of a deal if I’d never been abused. But it instigated all these memories and emotions in me, and I panicked. I don’t ever want to be afraid of you, Gavin.”

“I don’t want that either,” I replied honestly as I ran my fingers through his silky hair. “And I want to not doubt you when you tell me something. I think we can forgive each other, but it will take time to build up what we broke.”

“Where do we begin?”

“Well, we’ll let you rest for a while, but then I suggest we actually have nice sex.”

“You mean make love?” He giggled, and I pinched the little shit’s ass.

“Yeah, that, too.” I chuckled. “And from there, Cheryl’s going to start trying to find us a new PA, and we’ve got my move tomorrow. I think we just need to take it one day at a time, Ant.”

“I can do that.” Ant yawned, and I realized I was tired, too. One of the perks of working from home was being able to nap when you needed it. Then again, one of the negatives was I could never leave work at the office, and tended to work all the time. But everything has its ups and downs.

I didn’t realize I’d fallen asleep when I woke to wet heat wrapped around my cock. Gasping, I sat up in bed and witnessed the most beautiful sight in my life. Ant with his lips wrapped around my dick.

“Fuck that feels good,” I groaned as I fisted the sheets. I didn’t want to thrust up and risk hurting him. “Now I get why people like oral sex.”

“Wait, are you saying you’ve never had a blow job before?” Ant asked hesitantly after pulling off my cock.

“No, why? Is that a big deal?”

“Um, no, but why haven’t you? I mean, you’ve had sex.”

“Why go to third base when you can go all the way home?” I shrugged and motioned for him to continue. “Obviously, I was wrong.”

“Is this a lion thing? I mean, I don’t want to seem rude, but you guys seem cold,” he asked, not meeting my eyes.

“I’ll tell you if you go back to what you were doing.” I wiggled my eyebrows at him. Ant rolled his eyes and started licking my cock like a popsicle. Guess that was as good as I was getting until I talked. Not that I was complaining really. It felt like heaven.

“Enough stalling, Gavin.”

“Yes, lions aren’t known for being warm and fuzzy,” I said with a sigh as I propped myself up on a pillow so I could watch the show. “It’s also growing up with my dad. I mean, you met him, and that was on one of his good days. My mom ran off when I was five and left me with him. It was just me and him, and all he cares about is the pride. Well, that and the Ashby legacy of me taking over.”

“On the plus side, you’re open to trying new things, and you’re already kissing and touching me.” Ant’s smile was so sweet I knew I would keep trying for him. No matter how pissed I’d been that he knew me from the last conference and never told me, he did see me and hold a candle for me. That made me feel special, which I never felt before. And we were mates. The proof of that was on my bicep.

Then it hit me. Where was Ant’s mating seal? I quickly pulled him up to me, and he let out a cute squeak. I rolled us over and started to explore his body much to his delight.

“There it is,” I gasped. It was on his right inner thigh right by his groin. I felt like a heel, a selfish lover for not having seen it before. But then I remembered we’d only had sex with me behind him since we’d mated. Though I was still feeling a heavy dose of guilt, I traced the image with my fingers. “How did I miss this?”

And then it hit me like a mother fucking freight train. Because I was a selfish prick... just like him. Just like my dad. I bolted off the bed, stumbling in the sheets and landing on my ass at the floor at the foot of the bed. Scrambling away from the bed as if it was full of deadly snakes, I didn’t stop until I hit one of the dressers. It shook, and I heard something fall, but it wasn’t registering with me.

“Gavin?” Ant asked, his eyes wide as he crawled to the edge of the bed.

I shook my head as my right hand clutched my chest. My heart was racing so fast I worried I might be having a heart attack. But I couldn’t have one of those, right? Humans had them, and I wasn’t human. I was immortal. I gasped for breath, not able to breathe as spots formed in front of my vision.

“Gavin! What’s wrong? You’re scaring me,” Ant screeched as he leapt off the bed. I could only see him in frames, like part of the movie reel was missing. Then suddenly, he was kneeling in between my legs that I had pulled up to my chest and cupping my face with his hands. “Baby, talk to me. Please! What just happened, Gavin?”

“I’ve become my father,” I whispered so quietly I could barely hear myself over my racing heart. “I think I’m having a panic attack.”

“Focus on me, baby. I’m right here, okay?” Ant took my right hand and removed it from my chest before placing it on his own. “Feel my heartbeat, Gavin. See how my chest rises slowly with deep breaths?”

I nodded rapidly as I focused on him. Ant took several deep, slow breaths as I tried to mimic what he was doing. It felt like hours, even though I knew it had been only minutes, before my heart slowed down and my breathing returned to normal. Finally, the spots in my vision cleared, and I could see his intense blue eyes focused on me.

“You are not like him,” Ant said firmly. He covered my lips with his free hand when I went to tell him otherwise. “The man I met in Scotland was full of hate. His eyes were dull from years of unhappiness, and he didn’t give a flying fuck about what his only son wanted, or your happiness. You are *not* that man, Gavin.”

“How do you know?” I asked desperately, feeling as if I could crack any second if he didn’t bring me back from the abyss I was about to fall into. “I didn’t even know where your mating seal was.”

“Because you held my hand on the plane,” Ant answered as he ran his knuckles over my cheek. “Because you brought me flowers, and have been trying since you know that I needed more affection than you’re used to. Because you admitted you were wrong about what happened with Marv and said you were sorry, Gavin.”

“I don’t want to be him,” I gasped as the panic seeped back.

“I won’t ever let you.”

“Promise?”

“I promise, baby,” he said firmly with a nod. Ant brushed his lips over mine before leaning back to stare into my eyes. “You just need someone to show you what love is. Let me show you, Gavin. Say I can make love to you in our bed and give yourself to me completely. Please? I want to show you how great it can be.”

“Okay,” I breathed out as I started to shake. “I’ve never been a bottom before though.”

“Don’t worry, I have.” Ant winked as he stood up and held out his hand to me.

I knew this was one of those moments I would never forget. The choice was there for me to make. Either I could trust Ant and let him help me, or I could go at it alone and risk ending up like my dad. It wasn’t a hard decision when I realized that’s what was going on. I slid my hand into his and stood up, taking the biggest leap of faith in my life.

“I’ve topped before, too, so you don’t have to worry about me hurting you,” Ant said gently as he led me back to bed. I nodded as he pulled me to sit down and then tapped my hip so I’d scoot to the center of the bed. My entire body shook with nerves from allowing someone to take me in the aftereffects of my panic attack. Could I really do this?

When Ant turned to look at me and had such love in his eyes after grabbing the lube, I knew my answer. Yes. Yes, I wanted this with him. Yes, I wanted to love him. And yes, I wanted us to share everything and be true mates.

Ant smiled softly as he moved so he was sitting on his feet by my hip. I watched with equal parts desire and apprehension as he poured a liberal amount of slick on his fingers before closing the bottle and dropping it by my ass. He leaned down and gently grazed my lips with his.

“It’s very erotic to stretch your lover,” he said as he kissed along my jaw and up to my ear. I felt the fingers of his right hand rub the cool lube over my hole as his left hand rested on the bed by my ribs.

“Knowing that your pleasure is entirely up to me is more thrilling, and gives me a better high, than any drug.”

“Before you, I never cared if my sex partners got off. I always figured if they wanted to have sex with me that they’d be ready,” I admitted sheepishly.

“Well, that is in the past.” Ant nibbled on my ear, and I heard a sound come out of my mouth I’d never made before. I whimpered. I wanted this. “Push out while I push in.”

“Okay,” I gasped as I felt the pad of his finger start to breach me. He had small fingers given his height, so there wasn’t the burning I’d read about. But it was weird. Part of me wanted to scream, *get it out, that’s not supposed to go there*. And then I realized the other part of me wanted him to hurry up and show me everything.

Ant placed soft kisses on my shoulder as he whispered words of encouragement. He circled his finger inside of me, trying to stretch me out while keeping me distracted with his sweet lips.

“Give me more and kiss me,” I begged as I reached up to thread my fingers through his hair.

“That, my mate, is something you’ll never have to ask twice for,” he whispered and lowered his head down to mine. The kiss was so tender that I felt the last of my nerves slip away. His tongue ran over the seam of my lips as he slid a second finger in me. It was then that I started to like this. Sure, there was nothing like a tight hole surrounding my cock, but this was a nice change and something I’d like to explore more in the future.

Ant nibbled on my lower lip before sweeping his tongue inside of my mouth. He was being so gentle with me that I felt a stab in my heart for the way I’d treated him in bed. Swearing I’d do better, be worthy of him, I pushed those feelings away and focused on the now.

When he pushed a third finger in, I was more than ready for more and wanted his cock inside of me. I gave another whimper, not caring about my ego at the moment, and he took pity on me.

“I don’t want to hurt you, baby,” he said as he cupped my cheek.

“You won’t ever hurt me, Ant,” I replied, shocking myself as much as him. But it was the truth, and I knew it in my very soul. Ant quickly snapped his mouth shut and gave me a nod. I moaned as he pulled his fingers out, feeling empty. He moved in between my legs and pushed them up toward my stomach.

“I’m going to make you feel so good,” he cooed as he lined up his cock with my hole. I gasped at the pressure against me, a sudden panic surging through me when I realized this was really going to happen. “Breathe, Gavin.”

I let out a deep shuddering breath as he pushed in. There was a slight burn, but nothing major as he passed the first ring. He froze as he allowed my body to adjust to the intrusion. When I realized he was waiting for me to give him a sign to continue, I nodded rapidly.

Ant smiled and ran his hand over my thigh as he thrust in slowly. We stared at each other as he worked his cock in me. It took a few minutes, but then he bottomed out inside of me, his balls resting against my ass.

“How you do feel, Gavin?” he asked as he moved my legs to circle his hips. “Do you feel cherished?”

“Yes,” I whispered as my eyes blurred with tears before I blinked them away. “I feel as if I’m giving you my soul instead of just my ass.”

“Can you tell how I feel about you right now?” Ant leaned over me, moving his forearms under my shoulders as his lips brushed mine.

“I-I mean a lot to you,” I blurted out when I realized what it was I saw in his eyes. “You’re mine.”

“I am,” he agreed as he started to move his hips. The burn turned into delicious pleasure like I’d never experienced before. “Just as you are mine. You are mine, right, Gavin?”

“Yes, yes, I’m only yours, Ant,” I gasped as his cock rubbed over my sweet spot. I tilted my head up to kiss him as we wrapped tighter

around each other. “I’ve never felt that I mattered as much to someone as I do right now.”

“You do matter to me,” he replied, still moving his hips in a slow, gentle pace. “I’m starting to fall for you, Gavin. I lusted after you for years, but even after everything that’s happened, I find you’re becoming part of my heart.”

“I want to be better for you. I want to be the man you deserve, Ant,” I admitted as my face heated up with embarrassment. “Is that the same thing?”

“Yeah, it is.” Ant smiled before mashing his mouth down to mine. I immediately opened for him and I rocked my hips up to meet his thrusts. We started to move a little faster and a little harder, but nothing like the quick fucking I was used to. There was nothing left to be said after that, as we made love to each other’s mouths just as we did our bodies.

I never wanted this connection, this close feeling to end. But like all good things... I felt the slow buildup of my orgasm. It wasn’t the quick slam I was used to when I came, though just as intense. When I finally let go and stopped fighting it, I threw back my head and cried out his name.

Ant thrust forward a few more times before slamming deep into me and moaning loudly. His cock exploded inside of me, coating the inner walls of me with his seed. And I knew he had given me more than his orgasm. Ant gave me all of him in that moment, and I would cherish and protect that with the very fiber of my being.

I was still panting from my climax as his ebbed, and he collapsed on my chest. We lay there for several minutes, trading soft kisses on the skin we could reach while caressing each other.

“So that was making love?” I asked, unable to think of anything else to say. I wanted to roll my eyes and smack myself in the head. But then of course, I let more stupidity pour out of my mouth. “We can still have hot, sweaty monkey sex though, right?”

“Yes and yes.” Ant giggled as he nuzzled his face in my neck. “I vote for lots of both, personally.”

“Yeah, I could get on board with that.” I chuckled and kissed his neck. “Will you let me take care of you now?”

“What do you mean?” He leaned up and started down me as he scrunched up his nose in that cute way he had. How did I not realize he was a mouse shifter before he told me?

“I know you’ve got that massive tub in the bathroom,” I answered hesitantly. I was on treading on new ground, and after over a century of living, old habits were hard to break. “I thought maybe you’d let me draw a bath for us, and I could wash you. Or is that stupid?”

“No, it sounds perfect,” he groaned as a smile broke out on his face. “Very tender and considerate of you, especially after my hospital visit today.”

“Oh fuck,” I gasped and sat up while making to hold onto him so he didn’t get tossed off of me. “Are you okay? Should we have just done that? I mean—”

“Gavin, it’s fine,” Ant chuckled as he cut me off. “I’m a little tender, but you know how fast we heal.”

“Okay, good,” I sighed with relief. I moved him so he was in my arms as I scooted to the side of the bed and stood. It took me a few minutes, but then I had the bath drawn while Ant waited on the counter, ready to go. I went back for him, carried him there, and sat us down.

“Oh yeah, this is what I needed,” he moaned and settled back against my chest as he sat between my legs. I loved the big garden tub he had, complete with pulsating jets. I’d never admitted it before, but I was a bath man when I needed to relax.

“Will you tell me about your family and pack?” I asked after a few minutes of comfortable silence. Now that I knew Ant was it for me, and accepted it, I wanted to know everything about him.

“Sure, but we’re really not a pack. A group of mice are a mischief. Most of us say pack to other shifters because it’s easier and a much

more widely known name. I've told a few shifters that about my mischief, and they just look at me like I've got six heads, so I say pack."

"Boy, aren't you just teaching me a ton of new things today," I chuckled and kissed his neck.

"I try," he snickered and wrapped his arms around mine. "I'm an only child, too."

"What about your parents?"

"Some people just shouldn't be parents," he sighed.

"They didn't hurt you ever, did they?" I asked hesitantly. If Ant had been abused by a past lover *and* his parents, I was going to beat them all bloody. Well, I still might for the ex-boyfriend, anyway.

"Physically? No," he answered softly. "They just ignored me. My parents were so wrapped up in each other that I was just in the way mostly. My earliest memories were of my nanny, Rita. I very rarely even saw my parents. They both come from a long line of rich shifters and lived off their trust funds and the money from their savings. And they *hated* when I called them mom or dad. I always called them by their first names the few times I saw them."

"That sucks," I replied, not sure what else to say. How horrible to be so invisible to the people who were supposed to love you the most. I almost laughed at how much I'd grown up on the other end of the spectrum. My father focused too much on me as he groomed me from a small cub to take over the pride.

"I don't think they ever remembered my birthday or were home for it. I grew up with Rita and a slew of tutors. Then when I was eighteen, they *mailed* me a note saying it was time to move out and make my own way in the world. At least they gave me my inheritance from my grandparents. But I'd been secluded in that house. I knew nothing of the outside world."

"What did you do?"

"I had a house built and worked in a bakery in town to occupy my time. You have to remember this was the 1700s. As time went on, I

learned how to start over in another town after a decade or more so that no one realized that I'd stopped aging after twenty-five. I kept up with my schooling here and there when I found a new area of study that interested me, but mostly kept to myself.

"I eventually came back this way when humans found out about us since it was my home mischief. I see my parents sometimes at functions, but they don't really even acknowledge me. They were there in Scotland and didn't even bother saying hi when I went over to them."

"How did you get into gaming?" I reached over to grab the soap and a washcloth. Getting it good and sudsed up, I started washing him.

"I saw an Atari in a store when it first came out and was fascinated by it," he shrugged. "After that, it became a passion of mine. When the industry blew up with Nintendo and then Sega, I started entering tournaments. And you know how the gaming world progressed from there. When the right people found out how good I was about a little over a decade ago, I had companies start to approach me about testing games for them. The rest is history. What about you?"

"I told you my mom left when I was five," I hedged, not sure how much I wanted to tell him without sounding like I was whining. I took a deep breath and just went for it. "But she said it was because of me, or at least that's what my dad told me. After she took off, he became the horrid man he is now. All he cared about was growing the pride to be the strongest, and grooming me to take over."

"Yeah, that sounds like a great childhood."

"Right?" I snickered and relaxed. Why had I worried that Ant would judge me when I knew he wasn't like that? "I was a late shifter. I didn't have my first one until I was almost seventeen, and even then it was bad. It took me hours to shift. And with lions you do it in front of the whole pride. If you do fine, they welcome you into the pride as

an adult and everyone's happy. But we both know that not everyone survives their first shift."

"I was pretty lucky with my first shift," Ant said as he turned over so I could wash the other side of him.

"With lions, if you have a really bad shift or seem lame and weak, the pride kills you."

"Holy shit!" Ant exclaimed as he moved up onto his knees. "That's horrible."

"Yeah, but was our way of life," I sighed, hating that I had to admit how cold lions could be to my sweet mate. "It's different now with UPAC and humans knowing about us. But back then, it was how things were done."

"What happened?" he asked and took the rag from me. I settled back against the tub, smiling as my mate turned to take care of me, probably without even having realized it.

"I guess I bordered on being considered lame." I shrugged as he washed my shoulders and chest. Even though the topic was a depressing one, my cock took notice at the attention he was giving me. "My father and grandma got everyone to agree to wait until my next shift to see if I did better before forcing a decision.

"The pride agreed and left, but we stayed behind and my father beat the shit out of me. I was in so much pain and knew fighting back would just make it worse. After he walked away and left me there bleeding, my grandma got me back to her house somehow. The next morning she gave me a sack of money and told me to run. So I did."

"But you're back with them now?"

"Once I knew I was strong enough to stand up to my dad in human or lion form, I came home. It was the only pride I'd ever known, and I was tired of living alone, looking over my shoulder all of the time. I still don't do much with the pride since a lot of them who were alive for my first shift treat me like crap. But it's still better than not having any support from other shifters or friends."

"I can understand that," he said with a nod.

I was officially done with our sad topic choices. When I thought we were clean enough and the water started to get cold, I stood up as I cupped Ant's ass in my hands. He gave the cutest squeak and wrapped himself around me.

"I guess we're done?" Ant's eyes sparkled with lust as I nodded and stepped out of the tub. "How about some hot monkey sex then?"

"Music to my ears," I moaned and sprinted for the bed. I didn't even bother pulling the drain for the tub in my haste. We could get to that later. Right now, I planned on enjoying the mate I was falling in love with.

## Chapter 6

The next morning Ant was still asleep when I snuck out of bed. I left him a quick note saying I had to pick up something from the office, but I would be home in time for the interviews. Cheryl had emailed me last night saying she lined up several candidates for the PA position. The great thing about Cheryl was that she was part of the pride, so I never had to hide from her.

I'd also told her about Ant and what he was, so like the great assistant she was, she called the mice and asked if there was anyone looking for a job as well. So we had a mix of lions and mice coming over starting at eleven. And while I did need to run to the office to drop off the keys to my apartment so she could handle the movers, it wasn't the main goal of slipping out of bed early.

When Ant had fallen asleep in my arms the night before, I'd realized something... I'd not gotten his earring for our mating. If anyone, especially any lions, saw him and he was minus that, it would be a sign that we'd not fully solidified our mating. And I wasn't going to risk anyone thinking that, especially when Ant had no idea what any of it meant.

So I got in my car with a huge smile on my face and a plan in mind to woo my mate. After I dropped off my keys to Cheryl, I swung by a jewelry store that was owned by someone in the pride. Technically the store didn't open until ten, but I knew Jacob would be there early like he always was, putting in orders and whatnot.

I knocked on the door when I got there and waited. I saw him come out from the back room, and when he saw me, a scowl formed on his face. What was that about? The older man and I had always

gotten along. He came over to the door and unlocked it enough to talk to me but not to let me in.

“You’re not welcome here, Gavin,” he said firmly and went to shut the door in my face. Instinctively, I stopped it with my hand.

“Why not? And since when?” My eyes went wide with shock at his treatment. What the fuck was going on?

“I don’t serve your kind in my store,” Jacob sneered and his meaning hit me like a ton of bricks.

“You have *got* to be kidding me,” I snarled loudly. “You’re severing our relationship because I’m *gay*?” I was a good customer over the years. I always got something nice from his store for Cheryl for her birthday and Christmas. Plus, he had higher end watches there, and I bought two dozen for the executives of my company for Christmas a few months ago.

“Yeah, fags aren’t allowed here.”

“Listen here, you pissant,” I hissed as I pushed the door open wider and grabbed him by the shirt. “Are you just looking for me to challenge you at the next pride meeting?”

“Y-You can’t do that,” he gasped, his eyes going wide. “This has nothing to do with pride business.”

“The fuck it doesn’t, Jacob! You’re insulting a stronger lion because of who I sleep with. That seems very personal, and you know how lions handle personal disputes. I won’t be back after today, so you’re stupid if you’re going to let me being gay end our business relationship after all the money I’ve spent here over the years.

“But I need my mate’s earring now, and you know you’re the only one who carries them since it’s a lion thing. So you *will* allow me in here for my purchase and never disrespect my mate or me like this again. Or I will challenge you and end you. Are we crystal fucking clear?”

“Yes, Gavin,” Jacob said with a defeated tone as he lowered his head submissively.

“I really expected more from you, Jacob. We’ve always gotten along, and I never pegged you for a narrow-minded bigot.”

“He’ll hurt me,” he whispered after I let him go and entered the store.

“Who?” I asked, knowing full well he was talking about my dad.

“Elder Ashby.” Yeah, I hated being right sometimes.

“Let me guess, he told the pride to not associate with me. You especially since you sell the mating earrings to lions in most of North America.”

“Yes, I’m sorry,” he replied as his shoulders slumped in shame.

“Why didn’t you just tell me? You knew I’d protect you from him,” I asked gently. I scrubbed my hands over my face in frustration and tried to get my adrenaline under control. Jacob wasn’t the enemy. He was just a pawn in this war with my father.

“He said you left the pride.” I followed him over to the back display case where he pulled out the mating earrings from a drawer. They weren’t on public display since they were just for lions and they had our pride markings on them. Other prides could order mating earrings from him with their markings, but Jacob always carried some for our pride.

“I told him I was moving in with my mate, and after he tricked me into mating, I said I was done contributing money to the pride. But that doesn’t mean I’m just walking away from everyone, Jacob. We’ve known each other for decades. Have you ever known me to simply abandon people?”

“No,” he whispered as his cheeks heated up. “I’m surprised you’re gay, Gavin. But I don’t care who you have in your bed or what kind of plumbing your mate has. You deserve to be happy after getting stuck with your asshole father.”

“Thank you,” I said gently as I patted his shoulder. “I will handle my dad. He gives you any trouble and you let me know, okay?”

“I owe you,” Jacob replied as he gestured to the earrings. “Pick out whatever one you’d like for your mate and it’s on the house.”

“Not necessary.” I shook my head and sighed internally at the clusterfuck situation. “This is my dad’s fault, not yours. I’ll pay and will still be here for my holiday presents like every year.”

“Oh thank god,” he sighed with relief. “When your father said we couldn’t do business with you I think he ignored the fact that a lot of us depend on your business to survive. He could ruin the pride by trying to punish you or whatever he thinks he’s doing.”

“He’s trying to get me to challenge him for leadership,” I blurted out as the notion hit me. That mother fucker! He wanted me to take over, and if I wouldn’t do it on his terms, he’d try to trick me again. “He has no qualms with forcing my hand.”

“I hate that he’s our leader,” Jacob muttered, and I couldn’t agree more. But I didn’t want to lead. I just wanted to live my life and be happy!

We dropped it as he helped me pick out an earring and then rang me up. I promised I’d have my cell on me and would speak to my father first thing tomorrow. Normally I would have handled it right away, but Ant and I had the interviews and the move and I needed to explain to him what was going on. It wasn’t just me anymore. This affected him, too.

After that was done, I went back to the florist shop from yesterday. The roses I’d gotten for Ant were now a reminder of what happened with Marv, and I didn’t want that. Actually, I was pretty sure they were still all over the living room from when I had kicked them. So this time I got him some tulips and headed to my next stop.

I parked and went into the import store that had all kinds of goodies from all over the world. This was more a gag gift I’d planned to try and show Ant I accepted who he was and had no problem being mated to shifter who was technically prey. I found what I was looking for, paid, and climbed back in my car as I bit my lip to keep from laughing.

It didn't take me long to get home. Wow! I'd lived there a few days and already I was thinking of Ant's house as home. That made me smile even wider.

I got out of the car after parking it in the driveway and entered through the side door in the garage. We really needed to add getting me keys to the list of things to accomplish.

"Hey you," Ant said brightly as he looked up from his laptop, sitting at the kitchen table.

"Hey back." I chuckled as I carefully kept my purchases behind my back. "I have a few things for you. Would you prefer serious or funny presents first?"

"Umm, funny," he answered with a wink after a moment. I brought my right hand from behind my back and laid the five pound wheel of cheese onto the table. My smile faded when I saw Ant's did. He glanced from me to the cheese with a pained expression. "Why is this funny? I don't find this funny, Gavin!"

"I-I was t-trying to show y-you I was c-cool with you b-being a mouse," I stuttered as my heart fell. How did I fuck up again already? "I wasn't being mean, Ant. You s-said most shifters a-are mean to you when they f-find out you are a mouse. I-I just wanted to, I dunno, show you, that umm, it didn't matter to me."

"Oh," he whispered and looked back down at the cheese wheel. "Fuck, I'm sorry, Gavin."

"Don't be sorry." I shrugged, still upset that my plans were going to shit. "I'm going to go for a run." I got about two steps backwards as I tried to still hide the flowers before he jumped out of his chair and grabbed me.

"Please, don't go," Ant whimpered. "Don't run because I was a butthead and ruined your gift. I jumped to conclusions. This is my fault. Now that I understand, I love the cheese. Thank you."

"I figured it would show you that you matter to me, not what type of animal you are." I still wouldn't meet his look in case there was

still hurt in his eyes. I was trying, goddamnit! Why couldn't I get this right?

"Gavin, look at me," he whispered as he turned my face toward him. I sighed and stared into his eyes. "I'm sorry. I thought—I don't know what I thought, but I was being oversensitive. I think I might just be emotionally fried with everything lately. This is an awesome gift though. It means so much to me that you thought of a way to try and show me how you felt. Thank you."

"You're welcome," I sighed and brushed my lips to his. While his initial reaction wasn't what I'd have liked, I had to admit I understood what he was saying. "I might tease here and there, but I'll never be mean, Ant."

"I'm glad," Ant whispered and kissed me again. We were both panting when we broke apart as his gaze never left mine. "Do I still deserve whatever else you have behind your back?"

"Umm, kiss me again and I'll say yes," I drawled as I pretended to think about it. He gave me a wicked smile before doing just that. When he moved back, I brought the tulips between us.

"How did you know these were my favorites?" He squeaked loudly as he took them from me. I was awestruck by how he buried his nose in them and inhaled deeply.

"I didn't," I admitted. I'd love to have taken credit for figuring it out, but that would have been a lie. "I didn't want to get roses again after yesterday, and I thought these looked pretty without being too girly, since I've never bought flowers for anyone before." I snapped my mouth shut as I tried to cut off my own nervous rambling.

"Tulips really are my favorite, thank you." He stood on his toes again and gave me a soft kiss before turning and almost hopping with excitement as he went to one of the cabinets. Ant opened it and glanced up before his eyes darted around the kitchen. When he stopped on the step stool tucked away by the fridge, I realized what was going on.

“Can I help?” I asked, not trying to draw attention to his short height, but there was no reason to get the step stool when I was right there.

“Yes please,” he said with a bright smile as he pointed to the third shelf. “There’s a bigger crystal one behind those little ones that I think would be perfect for these.”

“Okay, hold this,” I replied as I handed him the jewelry store box. I reached up and moved around the vases before finding the one he wanted. I froze when I turned to hand it to him as he stared at the box with an open mouth. Well, that was a smooth move. Nice way to give him something as important as the mating earring.

“Is this for me?” Ant glanced up at me then with so much hope in his eyes I was eternally thankful I could answer yes.

“It’s for your ear,” I replied as I put the vase on the counter. Then I took the box back from him and opened it as I got down on one knee. “I went to get it this morning. This is the last step of accepting our mating to a lion, Ant. I want everyone to know that you’re my mate. Will you wear it?”

“Of course,” he squeaked and reached out toward it. He ran one finger over the thick, dime sized earring that would hang from his ear with the pride’s markings on it. “Can I put it in now? I want to see what it looks like. I never thought I’d be bad-ass enough to get my ear pierced, but this is wicked cool.”

“Yes, put it in.” I chuckled as I gestured for him to take the box.

“Thank you!” Ant exclaimed and took the box before racing from the room. Then he ran right back, handed me the tulips, and turned back around. Guess he didn’t want to bring flowers with him to the bathroom. I had to bite my lip to keep from laughing at his antics. Life would never be boring with Ant, and I think I was going to prefer it that way.

Before Ant could reappear, there was a knock at the door. Glancing down at my watch, I saw we still had an hour before the first

interview. Who was here? I walked over to the door and opened it, shocked to my very core who was standing there.

“Gigi?” I asked as I glanced from her to my dad.

“Hey, Gavin,” my longtime friend said as she hugged me. I returned the embrace because I was glad to see her - just not with my dad.

“Gigi has agreed to be your lioness to lead the pride,” my dad stated as he eyed me over with rage in his eyes. “She knows about your toy and is fine with it as long as she will lead at your side and he stays out of pride business. This way you can produce heirs.”

“That’s not what I said—” she started to say as she gaped at my dad.

“While I can continue to be the elder of the lions,” he kept going, ignoring that Gigi had even spoke, “you know that the limit for leading a pride is three centuries. And since you’re the only heir I have, fag or not, you take over.”

“What?” I snarled as all the pieces were falling into place.

“Wait, you said Gavin knew,” Gigi gasped as she glanced from my dad to me. “You told me Gavin wanted this so he could have children.”

“He does,” my father said firmly, staring at me as if he dared me to contradict him.

“The fuck I do,” I growled as I pushed Gigi behind me. This was about to get really ugly, really fast, and I didn’t want her in the line of fire. Before I could say anything else or pound my father into the ground, I heard several loud squeaks.

“*How dare this fucker come to my house and call me a toy,*” Ant said in his mouse form, which of course only I could understand.

“Ant, no,” I groaned as I searched the floor for him. This would not help the situation, and I couldn’t give my dad the beating he deserved if Ant was around to get hurt in the process.

“What the fuck?” My dad roared as he lifted his leg. “Something just bit me.”

“That would be my mate,” I yelled as my dad went to smack his shin. I grabbed his wrist in time before he crushed poor Ant.

“Control your pet, Gavin,” my dad growled as he shook his leg. “He’s fucking biting my knee like a coward! Pathetic prey.”

“You will *not* speak like that about him, or I’ll kick your ass and still not lead the pride.”

“And you lied to me,” Gigi snarled from behind me. Her hands already had shifted into claws as she reached around me to try and strike at my dad. I pushed her back as I tried to block her path. My focus left my dad for a split second, which of course that bastard exploited.

“Gigi, one attack on him at a time,” I said, exasperated. I wanted just to slam the door in my father’s face and talk with Gigi and Ant, but since my mate was currently up my dad’s pants leg, that wasn’t really possible. She gave me a curt nod and backed off. I turned back to my dad just in time to see him pull Ant out of his pants and fling him across the lawn. “No!”

“You couldn’t just be a fag. You *had* to pick a fucking prey animal,” my dad sneered.

I lost it then. I pulled back my fist and punched him with everything I had. He stumbled back with a look of shock and landed on his ass. I didn’t even bother with him as I took off in the direction he flung Ant. I only got about ten feet before I froze and scanned the yard. Nothing would make this worse except if I stepped on my own mate.

“Ant? Ant, where are you?” I cried out as my gaze darted all over the grass.

“*Fucker threw me into the tree,*” Ant gasped, his voice pained. I looked to the tree on the street grass and sure enough there was my mate lying at the base of the trunk. Racing over to him, I dove on my knees but stopped short of touching him.

“Jesus, Ant! Are you okay, sweetheart? What should I do?”

“*Can I have your shirt so I can shift back and heal?*”

“Of course,” I answered as I whipped it over my head. I dropped it down over him, unsure of what to do. The air vibrated and in a flash there was Ant in human form leaning against the tree with my shirt on. My clothes were big enough that at least it reached him mid-thigh. “Are you okay?”

“I’ll heal,” he gasped as he held his arm to his body and winced.

I threw back my head and let out an ear-splitting roar. My dad fucking hurt my mate! Without a single thought in my head besides spilling the man’s blood, I shifted.

“Gavin, no! I shouldn’t have started it,” Ant begged, but I wasn’t really thinking straight. I spun to face my dad who had a wicked smile on his face as he stood up. The bastard wanted this. I should have been the bigger man and walked away, but I couldn’t. Not when he’d hurt Ant. He shifted in a flash, shredding his clothes as I just had.

I raced toward him, leaping when he was within range. He met me in the air as we tangled limbs and claws. We landed with him on top, and I quickly rectified that with a swipe of my paw to his face. I kicked out with my hind legs, hitting him squarely in the stomach. He flew through the air and landed hard against his SUV.

“Gavin, stop,” Gigi screamed as she darted in front of me. I snarled at her, but like the true friend she was, she didn’t back down. “This is what he wants! You defeat him and you rule the pride. I’m so sorry for my part of this. I thought you wanted this.”

Ant took another approach. “Gavin, help me,” he hissed in pain as he went to stand. My head immediately snapped in his direction as he struggled in pain. I shifted right back and ran to him.

“I got you, sweetheart,” I whispered and gently lifted him into my arms. Ignoring my nudity or the fact that some of Ant’s neighbors had come out of their homes at the disturbance, I walked toward the door with him, but not before I stopped in front of my dad. He shifted back and was gasping for breath. But then he went to open his mouth and I knew what he was going to say. “Don’t even bother, Dad. You could say you yield, and I still won’t take over. Plus, you have to have

witnesses for it to count, and I don't think anyone here will vouch for you!"

Gigi gasped and darted toward the house yelling, "La la la la" at the top of her lungs until she was out of earshot and couldn't hear, in case he said it. I smirked at my father, knowing I'd won.

"But if you *ever* hurt my mate again, I won't just kick your ass. I will kill you. And I won't formally challenge you, which will void my leadership of the pride. Do you feel me?"

"Accidents happen every day, Gavin," he sneered as he stared directly at Ant, the threat clear. I set my mate down on his feet and leaned him in the doorway before storming over to my father. I decked him hard in the face.

"I will kill you before you even have a chance to think up a way to come up with an accident for Ant to have," I whispered in his ear so my mate couldn't hear. "This is over, dad. I'm going to UPAC. You've gone against their wishes for the conference and matings. You will lose your elder seat for this and probably spend the rest of your life in prison."

"Nothing says you can't have one of your own to give you heirs and rule your own kind." He smirked. Rat bastard!

"You still attacked my mate to try and trick me into leadership," I sneered right back. "I wonder if they'll feel that's how an elder should act, Dad. I doubt they want a sneaky, conniving asshole as the ruling body of an entire species of shifter."

His face paled as he reached for me. But I wasn't having any of it. I spun on my heel and went back to my mate.

"This isn't over, Gavin!" He screamed as I helped Ant into the house. I slammed the door on his lunatic ranting. I was so done with him.

"I'm so sorry, Gavin," Gigi sniffled as tears ran down her cheeks. She moved in front of us into the kitchen and went right to the freezer for ice. "I'm so stupid for ever trusting him!"

“No you’re not, Gigi,” I said, shaking my head at the mess we were in as I helped Ant sit down. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I just didn’t want you to kill your dad.” He shrugged and then hissed in pain. I guessed his shoulder was dislocated, to start with. “I realized what he was doing after a minute or two and didn’t want him to trick you. I’m sorry I shifted and crawled up his leg. It just happened before I realized it. He insults me, our mating, and brings this gorgeous woman to rule the pride with you to our home, and I just lost it.”

“I know, sweetheart,” I said and kissed him gently. “Gigi’s a nurse, so she can set your shoulder.”

“Well, at least no hospital trip today.” He chuckled and then groaned as Gigi put an ice pack against his cheek.

“Hold it there, sexy,” she said as Ant took it from her. Then she moved her hands over his shoulder and upper arm. I could tell from the look on her face that I’d been right. “It’s not broken, but it is dislocated. If we set it now, he should be fine in a few hours, maybe stiff until tomorrow.”

“Just do it,” Ant gasped as she moved it around. I’d seen her do this before with other members in the pride, so I knew what to do. I held Ant’s other shoulder and waist to stabilize him as he nodded in time with an internal count. Then she quickly yanked it out and up as there was a loud snap. “Fuck, that hurt!”

“I know, sexy man,” she cooed and slowly lowered his arm to Ant’s lap. “I love the earring by the way.”

“Never thought I’d be cool enough to get one.” He chuckled. Fuck! On top of everything else, my dad ruined our moment where I gave him the mating earring. Gigi was right though. It fit him perfectly.

“You’re way too cool to care if you are cool,” I purred and rubbed my finger over his ear. “It’s perfect, Ant. Do you like it?”

“I do,” he whispered as he stared into my eyes. “It means everything to me because it shows me how you feel and that this is real to you.”

I leaned in to give him a quick kiss, which ended up turning into something more passionate until Gigi cleared her throat. I spared her a quick dirty look before going back to my mate’s lips. We kissed for a while longer until air became necessary. Just as we broke apart, panting with smiles on our faces... the doorbell rang. Son-of-a-bitch! Couldn’t get just a minute in between fires? Groaning, I went to see who it was now.

## Chapter 7

It ended up being one of the interviewers for the PA position. I escorted them to the play room, asking they give a few minutes before going back to the kitchen. When I got there, I smiled at my closest friend leaning her head in to Ant's as they whispered in a conspiring tone.

"Should I leave?" I asked with a raised eyebrow as I leaned against the fridge.

"Ant was just filling me in about Marv. I never liked that guy. He totally had the hots for you," Gigi answered, shaking her head.

"Thanks for telling me, brat." I snickered, messing up her hair as I walked by to get us all some coffee. "So tell me what happened with my dad? How did you end up on Ant's doorstep with him?"

"He called me yesterday and asked for a meeting," she sighed, playing with the mug I handed her. "I went there, and he said in light of the forced matings from UPAC, you were devastated that you wouldn't have an heir since you decided to be gay."

"You knew I was gay, Gigi!"

"I know that." She snickered and rolled her eyes. "I figured you wanted kids and he was just telling it his way. Anyways, he said I could keep my mate that I got from Scotland, but we'd be like president and vice president of the pride. Basically, I'd be a surrogate for you so you could have kids and heirs, and I'd be your lioness for the pride. I had no clue he hadn't talked to you about it. He said you came to him."

“Of course he did,” I groaned, closing my eyes as I reached out for Ant’s hand. “I never wanted to lead the pride, Gigi. I thought you knew that.”

“Things change, Gavin.” She shrugged. “I figured now that you found such a sexy mate you’d want to settle down and embrace your heritage. Being leader of the pride is your legacy, Gavin. How can you just walk away from that?”

“I don’t even like most people,” I muttered, guilt starting to weigh on me at the way she put it. “There are others that can lead.”

“Pleeease,” Gigi drawled and rolled her eyes. “Without an heir, there will be total chaos when your father’s rule is up, since now it will be open as to who is next to lead. We’ve got some power-hungry, ruthless lions, Gavin, and you know it. The right person won’t end up with the job, and we’ll be in big trouble since they’ll lead for three centuries.”

I opened my mouth to say something back several times but then snapped it right back shut. Was she right? Had I been so wrapped up in my own bullshit and stubbornness that I’d completely overlooked what was best for the pride?

“She’s right, isn’t she?” Ant asked softly as he rubbed the thumb from his good hand over mine.

“Yes,” I admitted after a moment, my shoulder slumping in defeat. I glanced from Ant to Gigi as if looking for answers. “I’m really going to have to lead, aren’t I?”

“Hey, it won’t be that bad,” she said gently and took my other hand. “I can still be your lioness in the pride without the babies, backstabbing, your dad’s set-up, or sex. Wolves have Betas for their packs. I could be like that for you. I wouldn’t just abandon you.”

“I know you wouldn’t.” I nodded numbly as it all sank in. Everything I’d fought against since the day I understood was becoming a reality. This sucked! I glanced at Ant, scared to see his reaction. “How do you feel about being mated to leader of a pride?”

He nibbled on his lower lip for a few moments as his nose scrunched up in thought. "I'm totally cool with it and with Gigi being your lioness as long as there's no sex, you remain my mate and faithful to me, and we figure out a way to get your father out of our hair."

"We can do that," Gigi said brightly, and gave Ant a loud smacking kiss on his uninjured cheek. "He's good for you, Gavin. Nice choice for a mate, man!"

"He found me, actually," I replied as I reached out to cup Ant's cheek. How did I get so fucking lucky? Most people would have turned and run already before this new development, but Ant was still here at my side. "I would never, ever cheat on you, Ant."

"Glad we cleared that up," he squeaked and kissed my palm.

"I'll talk to my mate about approaching the council through his elder," Gigi said as she stood up. She smiled wickedly and pulled down her shirt to show her collarbone. "He's a vampire. Who knew biting could be so much fun?"

"TMI, woman," I chuckled and leaned over to smack her ass. "You go do that, and then we need to figure out who we want as a second."

"James. We both like him, he's the only one bigger than you, and he's sharp as a mother fucking tack."

"Works for me." I smiled at her. I should have realized she would have someone in mind. That's just who Gigi was... smart, beautiful, fun, bright. Even if she had a stripper name that we all teased her endlessly about. But she was the best choice for the pride's lioness, everyone loved her.

Lionesses were known as the enforcers of a pride. Even in the wild they were the ones who hunted, tended to the cubs, and kept the pride in line. Wolves had their Betas and they could keep them. I wouldn't trade Gigi for anything in the world as the role of my lioness. She was *not* someone you wanted on your bad side and she always kept her word.

“Now on to the interviews,” Ant grumbled and looked down at his lap. “But pants first.”

“Right, pants would be good.” She giggled and kissed his cheek. Then she did the same to me and left with a wave.

I ended up going jogging up stairs to grab Ant a shirt that actually fit him, as well as a pair of lounge pants. After I brought them back down to him, we switched clothes, and he got dressed. Then I remembered an old shoulder splint I had in my workout box and went back for that. It took us another ten minutes to finally get our act together and talk with our PA candidate.

Of course, it ended up being unnecessary. The douche gave Ant a look that screamed of the contempt he had for my mate. I looked back at Ant, who wouldn't meet the guy's eyes, and I knew all I needed to. I let him out without even having bothered to ask his name. When he asked what my problem was, I told him I wouldn't hire anyone who looked at my mate like that and shoved him out the door.

I didn't ask Ant what that was all about, figuring he'd tell me when he was ready, or that I could ask after the interviews. Next we interviewed a lion who was giving my mate looks for a *whole* other reason. Yeah, he was gone right away, too.

“Naw, you're not the jealous type.” Ant chuckled after I'd kicked the guy out.

“I am,” I growled playfully and knelt between his legs. He raised an eyebrow at me as I stuck my nose in his groin and started scenting him. “Mine!”

“Yes, but unless you want the next person to show up while I'm riding you, I suggest you cool it until after the interviews.”

“Fuuuuuuck,” I groaned as I backed away slowly. “I love the idea of you riding me. I'll be good on one condition.”

“Okay, what?”

“I want to see the toys after the movers leave,” I answered with a wink. The doorbell rang as Ant burst out laughing, and I went to answer it.

Now the next applicant rocked. Brad was a mouse from Ant's mischief, and they seemed to get along well. His resume and credentials were spotless... Which left me with one question.

"Why apply for a PA position that you are clearly overqualified for?"

"Well," he hedged and then took a deep breath. "I'm really hoping this will lead me to something bigger and get my foot in the door for the career I aspire to."

"Oh," Ant replied, doing a double take. "You want to develop software at Gavin's company?"

"No," Brad said, shaking his head. "I want to do what you do, Ant. I was hoping that given some time and learning the ins and outs of it, maybe you'd expand and take me on like a junior associate."

"That's not a bad idea," I replied slowly as I glanced at Ant. He had that *I'm thinking* face with the scrunched up nose, and was nibbling his lip.

"How about this," he said after a few moments. "If we hire you, we'll contract you for six months while I show you some things on the side on your off-time. After the six months is up, we can work on you being my intern while you train a replacement if I feel you'd do a good job as an associate of mine. Once your replacement is up to speed and on his own, we can renegotiate your contract. Fair enough?"

"Yes, yes!" Brad gasped as he nodded furiously.

"Gavin?" Ant asked me, and I gave him a wink. It was a great idea and a fabulous way for him to expand. He already said he had more clients than time. If he trained and molded someone to his style, they could increase his income and give Brad his dream job.

"We'll be in touch tomorrow," I said to Brad and stood. He shook our hands and squeaked as he left. I stared after him in shock.

"What is it? I thought you liked him," Ant whispered as he touched my arm.

“He squeaked, and it didn’t turn me on,” I blurted out as I stared into his eyes. “It’s not the squeaking I find sexy. It’s when *you* squeak.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

“Totally,” I purred as I gently lifted him into my arms. “We have some time before the movers and no more interviews for today. I think we should cancel the ones for tomorrow and hire Brad. He’s going to work out.”

“I agree,” he panted as his eyes filled with lust. I walked us out of the play room and up the stairs. “What did you have in mind to pass the time before the movers?”

“I was thinking it was time I gave my first blow job and then see how much I can make you squeak.”

“Okay,” Ant squeaked and then smiled widely at me. I laughed as I entered his room and laid him on the bed. Then I quickly got both of us undressed, swatting his hand away when he went to help.

“You’re still going to ride me after the movers leave, right?”

“Oh yeah, baby,” he moaned as I cupped his balls and reached over for the lube.

“I like when you call me that, Ant. I really do.”

“Good,” he gasped as I tugged on his sac slightly. “I’m glad that you’re not one of those big macho guys who can’t take a term of endearment without bitching that it emasculates them.”

“Nope!” I uncapped the lube and slicked up my hand before closing it and tossing it by the pillows. I rubbed some in on my painfully hard cock before reaching down and pushing a finger into his hole. “Who do you belong to, Ant?”

“You, Gavin. Only you,” Ant whispered as he arched his back at my intrusion. “I wear your mating earring and only you can ever take me ever again.”

“Good answer,” I praised as I slid in a second finger and leaned over and swallowed his cock halfway down.

“Holy fucking shit, Gavin.” I chuckled around his cock, moaning when his musky flesh and scent hit my senses. This was fun! As much as I was sorry I’d missed out on this before, I was glad that my first time was with Ant. He squirmed as I sucked him harder, bobbing my head slowly.

After a few minutes, he started squeaking loudly, which I figured meant he was getting close. I pushed in a third finger and stretched him faster, and I used my tongue along his cock as I worked him along. I was so fucking turned on as I gazed up his body and saw the pure bliss on his face. I needed him right then more than I needed air.

“Coming! Gavin, I’m coming,” he screamed seconds before his cock exploded in his mouth. I almost gagged since his dick was almost completely down my throat, but then I pulled back a little and was able to swallow his seed just fine. And the taste! I’d tasted cum before, and it was salty and bitter, not like Ant’s. It was salty-sweet, sweet like when I kissed him. It was like mixing your popcorn with chocolate, and I was completely addicted.

As the last pulse of his seed shot in my mouth I started to lick him clean, while he went limp on the bed as he gasped for air. Ant gave a full-body shiver when I kept running my tongue all over him, well after he’d been cum-free.

“Take me, Gavin,” he whimpered as he lifted his head. “I need to feel you.”

“Yeah, you’ll have to talk me into that one.” I snickered and moved into position. I lifted his legs up and his ankles onto my shoulders as his eyes went wide. “You didn’t say I couldn’t fuck you into the bed, just to take you.”

“Okay,” he panted as he smiled. “Fuck me into the bed, baby. Ride me with everything you got.”

“Gladly,” I growled, before slamming into him in one fast thrust. We both cried out as his tight ass spasmed around my cock and he started shooting ropes of cum. Guess my mate could have back-to-back orgasms. Nice!

I was too wound up and ready to blow to take things slowly. He was still coming as I pounded my cock into his ass and folded him in half.

“That’s-it-Ant. Enjoy-the-pleasure-I-give-you,” I grunted out as took him faster. Every time I snapped my hips forward, he gave out a sexy squeak or cry of bliss. It spurred me on as nothing else could have. I came so hard I thought the top of my head might explode. Roaring out his name, I slammed home and let my cock coat his most private places with my seed.

“A-fucking-plus,” he moaned as I lowered his legs before collapsing next to his uninjured shoulder. “Pun intended.”

“Want to go again in about five minutes?” I gasped, a wicked smile spreading over my face at his praise.

“I’d love to, but you know the movers will be here soon.”

“I recover quickly,” I pouted. “It’s a lion thing.”

“I’ll have to keep that in mind.” He giggled and took my hand in his. We were quiet a few minutes in comfortable silence before he broke it. “So did you like it?”

“I really, really did,” I answered, knowing he meant giving my first blow job. “You taste so much better than I expected, and I got so hard knowing I was giving you that much pleasure. But I don’t think I would have liked it with anyone else as much as I did with you.”

“You definitely deserve to see the toy box now,” Ant purred and leaned into me. The doorbell rang again, and we burst out laughing. When we calmed down enough to breathe, I grabbed my jeans and yanked them back on. I picked my shirt off the floor and tugged it on as I headed to the door.

Sure enough, it was the movers. I was glad we planned ahead and had already moved Ant’s car onto the street so the garage was open. He came out and helped me direct traffic when I said something could go straight into my office. Then we had them move Ant’s bed out and mine into our bedroom, since mine was bigger.

It honestly went fairly quickly since it was a local move and they had a crew of three. Plus, most everything was going into the garage for now. When Cheryl pulled up, I was ready for another friendly face after the stress of the day. She and Ant hit it off as well as him and Gigi had. But then again, my mate was really a sweet guy and very likable.

They went inside and discussed Brad and us hiring him while I finished up with the movers, signed more paperwork than I had for my old apartment, and gave them a nice tip. I went to join them and walked in on the ending of their conversation about the next steps, the contract she already had set up, and an offer letter.

“I would like to make a suggestion that deviates from crazy man’s original idea,” she said when they were done. “I think you should have a party with the pride and Ant’s mischief when you figure out what stuff you aren’t keeping. It would be a way for the groups to interact, since you’re mated to him but going to lead the pride. Also, we could set it up as charity event, selling your items for ten dollars or whatever, so you still get the tax write-off.”

“Oh, I like her.” Ant chuckled and wrapped an arm around my waist.

“You get what you pay for,” I replied, giving Cheryl a wink.

“What’s that mean?”

“He pays me some outrageous salary that no executive assistant makes and treats me like one of his vice presidents,” she answered with a laugh.

“Hey, you’re more than worth it,” I quipped and reached into the fridge to get a bottle of water.

We had a quick laugh before finishing up, and then Cheryl left, promising she’d get some tables rented and set up the party for Saturday. I thought it was fast, but then again, we didn’t want all those valuable items just sitting in the garage for someone to try and steal.

Ant and I ate some lunch and then went back into the garage. We worked well together, I realized after about an hour. Neither of us was very demanding about our stuff... it was just stuff, after all. Though there were a few things I was honest about not wanting to lose. For instance, the china cabinet was a family heirloom, and I had my grandparents' wedding china.

He said it was too gorgeous to part with, and he wasn't a fan of the sideboard he had in the dining room anyway. We also decided to keep my leather sectional for the living room since his was pretty much in tatters after the scuffle with Marv. And while we traded out his bed, his dressers and nightstands were a better fit than mine. I kept my office furniture, of course, since the third bedroom was empty, and he was fine with the workout equipment they'd moved into his basement.

We sat there in the garage on my sectional and discussed some other details, coming up with a game plan on unpacking my things and setting up my new office. I stared into his eyes and it hit me - I loved him. Ant was everything I could ever have dreamed of in a partner and mate, and then some. He was the perfect man for me, and I loved him.

Now how the hell did I tell him? And was it too soon?

\* \* \* \*

It was the next morning the next time the doorbell rang. We were setting up my office during a break from working, and I jogged downstairs to go get it. I rolled my eyes when I sniffed who it was and yanked the door open.

"You're fired, Marv, deal with it," I said and went to close the door again. He stuck his hand out to stop it, and as much as I wanted to force it and break his hand, I refrained.

“Why?” he shouted and took a step closer. He wasn’t a small man, but not as tall and nowhere near as filled out as I was. So if he thought I’d back up, he was sorely mistaken.

“Try attacking my husband,” I drawled as I ticked off my fingers with attitude. “Lying to me; crazy, obsessive tendencies for me; when you babbled that you loved me and took better care of me when you were in the hospital. We’re not a couple, Marv. We never were. You *were* my employee, but I terminated your employment, and just be grateful we’re not pressing charges.”

“I said what?” he gasped, his eyes going wide.

“Oh, you don’t remember what you admitted to when you were on the pain meds in the hospital?” I sneered and narrowed my eyes at him. “You told me you loved me, that you took better care of me than he ever could, and that I needed to get rid of him. I figured I could have gotten much more out of you, but I wanted to sever ties before you realized what you’d copped to.”

“I-I—” Marc stuttered, but I cut him off.

“You’re fired. Leave now and don’t come back, or we will press charges. And if I ever see you near Anthony or you contact him, I will gut you like a fish. Have a nice life.”

I closed the door in his stunned face before he could reply and went back to my mate.

“Gut him like a fish, huh?” Ant snickered as I sat down on the floor by him. I shrugged my shoulders and opened the next box.

“It just came to me. What can I say? I’m a creative guy.” I chuckled as I pulled out some of my personal files and hung them in the filing cabinet.

“So am I,” he purred and kissed my cheek. “You should see how creative I have to be just to sit here and not come. It’s hard with the large plug I have in my ass.”

“Let me see,” I growled and reached for him. He squeaked and leapt to his feet outside arm’s length distance. “I think we need to christen this office.”

“You have kinky desk fantasies?” Ant started slowly lifting his shirt up so I could see his lean stomach.

“Naw, the desk is so overdone,” I drawled. “But I do have a one for the filing cabinet, if your game.”

“Bring it on, baby,” he challenged, and yanked his shirt off. We shucked out clothes in record time, and then I showed him exactly what I could bring. And my fantasy of him on the two-drawer cabinet with his legs spread wide as I held his ankles and pounded into his sweet ass was finally fulfilled. It was so much more fun working from home now that I was mated than it ever was when I was single.

## Chapter 8

Two days later on Thursday morning I was moving stuff in the garage that we were going to have out for people to “buy” at the party Saturday to the back wall. I figured if I got it out of the way, it would help make everything look less overwhelming with what was left to do.

Brad had started the day before, and the man was a godsend! He was twice the PA Marv ever was already, and he was brand-spanking new. In one day he’d restocked the fridge, set up all the bills for auto-pay, set up the maid service, and showed them the house. Not only that, but he met with Cheryl on his own to get an employee handbook for my company and taken over typing up Ant’s notes.

He had dropped off over a week’s worth of them first thing that morning. Ant had stood there with his mouth hanging open in shock before hugging Brad. At the moment, they were in the play room where my mate was showing Brad how to format the notes so they could go directly into his findings reports.

I smiled as I thought about how great things had been with Ant and me now. Our sex life was off-the-charts great, and we’d transitioned into a loving couple. While I’d still not told him that I loved him, I was planning a special dinner that night to do it. I figured he deserved some romance with my declaration after the rocky start our mating had.

The sound of a car pulling up quickly and slamming on the brakes pulled me out of my thoughts. Spinning around to see who it was, I stood there stunned when Gigi and our friend James leapt from the still-running car.

“What’s wrong?” I called out as I quickly moved to meet them in the driveway.

“Your dad’s been arrested by UPAC,” she blurted out, and jumped into my arms. I hugged her back as I stared at James with wide eyes. He smiled and nodded at me to confirm the news.

“How? When? How? Why?” I rambled as my brain tried desperately to process this new development.

“My mate talked to his elder while we collected a bunch of sworn affidavits regarding your dad’s treatment of you and the pride. I wrote one about how he lied and what happened to Ant and his plans to trick you into taking over. They *flipped* out, and next thing I know, I get a call this morning saying they sent guards they had from Chicago to take him into custody until his trial.”

“Holy shit,” I gasped as she pulled back. Part of me wanted to smile like my friends were, but the other part of me that realized I was now the leader of our pride took over. “Ant, get Ant.”

“Gavin, what’s wrong?” Gigi screeched as I dropped to my knees as I gasped for air. I couldn’t seem to get enough into my lungs as my heart beat so loudly and fast I thought it would jump out of my chest. She didn’t wait for an answer. “James, go inside and get his mate.”

“On it,” he replied and ran to the door connecting to the garage.

“You gotta calm down, Gavin. Ant’s coming, okay? Just breathe.”

I nodded as I tried my damndest to do as she said, but I couldn’t. Spots appeared in my vision, and I realized I was going to pass out. I heard quick footsteps before Ant’s scent filled my nose. He knelt down in front of me and put my hand over his heart as he’d done before.

“Focus on my steady heartbeat, baby,” he whispered as he cupped my cheek with his other hand. “You are fine, Gavin. We are just fine, okay? I need you to breathe deeply for me and relax or no sex for you tonight. If you behave, I’ll give you a nice blow job after everyone leaves.”

That cut through my panic enough where I could finally get enough air as I tried not to laugh at his crazy style of calming me down. After a few good ones and my heart calming down to a rapid but not scary pace, I smiled at him.

“You are nuts, my mate.” I snickered and took another deep breath.

“Totally. But it worked, didn’t it?” He gave me a quick wink and kissed my cheek before sitting his butt down on the driveway. Ant pulled my arm, so I did the same and gestured for everyone else to join us. “Now that I’m not scared my mate is going to pass out—what the hell did you say to freak him out?”

Gigi explained quickly explained as Ant held on to my hands. When she was done, he moved my arms out and turned to plop down in my lap. While that would have freaked me out worse than I was now when we first met, I was used to his affectionate ways. Hell, I was grateful for the comfort and support.

“Are you okay?” he whispered as he nuzzled his face in my neck.

“I will be. It’s just such a shock,” I answered as I hugged him tightly to me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” Ant chuckled. “I wanted you before I knew you were next in line for the pride, Gavin. I’m with you no matter what you want or how you handle this.”

“Thank you,” I whispered, and kissed him. It was soft and sweet since we had company, but I poured everything I was feeling for him into it. “So what now?”

“Now your party Saturday turns into the change of leadership ceremony,” James answered with a wide smile. “You’re the boss now, man.”

“Fuuuuck,” I groaned and molded my body around Ant’s as much as I could. Right then I would have crawled under his skin with him to try and absorb his strength. We all sat there a few moments as they patiently gave me time to get my head on straight. “Is it official with UPAC that I’m now in charge of the pride?”

“Yes, they’re sending a representative to witness the ceremony.” Gigi looked hesitant as she relayed the information, as if she was ready for me to freak out again.

“Gigi, I need you to get Ant and Brad a copy of the ceremony rites. While you’re my lioness, he’s my mate and will have role in it. Brad because he just needs to be there as my PA so everyone can learn who he is and work with the members of the pride on what questions or issues get directed to whom. We need to figure that out as well.

“James, set up a meeting with my dad’s second. I want us to sit down with him and see if he’ll be friend or foe with this transition. And I’d like you to work with Cheryl on the arrangements since this is no longer a meet and greet party. It’s a mandatory event, and I want everyone in the pride to know the specifics so there are no excuses for anyone’s absence.”

“Guess you’ll need to hire the movers right back,” Gigi snickered as she pulled out her phone and started taking down notes. I gaped at her a moment before the meaning of what she said sank in. I moved Ant off my lap and slowly stood up. Without a word, I walked into the garage, threw back my head, and let out a roar.

Before anyone could even react, I turned and kicked an innocent bookshelf, watching as it crumbled. But I wasn’t done just yet. I picked up a metal folding chair and beat what was left of the bookshelf with it. When I was done, there was nothing left of it but splinters. I stood there staring at the destruction as my chest heaved.

“Talk to me, Gavin,” Ant said softly, and it registered that he was standing a few feet away with everyone else. I’d been so caught up in my rage I’d not even seen them move.

“I fucking *hate* that house,” I ground out between clenched teeth. “I have so many horrible memories of that place I swore to myself that I’d never live there again. Hell, I skip the pride gatherings that are there instead of the running grounds. We agreed to live here when we

mated, not that evil place. You didn't sign up for this, Ant. *I* didn't sign up for this, and it's just another reason I don't want it!"

"We can do this," he said calmly as he moved forward and took the bent chair from me. Man, I'd done some damage to it, too. Probably to the concrete of Ant's poor garage as well. "I know a woman in our mischief who's into new age stuff. She cleanses auras that she can see and does the same for houses. I think she's half-witch or something. I can call her and arrange it with Gigi to have the house purified."

"That won't fix all of this," I sighed as my eyes started to burn. "That was the house where my mom abandoned me, Ant. Where my father beat me and almost killed me the night of my first shift. I have nothing but nightmares associated with that place."

"Then we'll change them. We can gut the fucking house and make it our own."

"How can you be so calm about this when I agreed to live here with you when we mated?" I was floored by how accepting he was being of all of this when I was freaking out.

"Because I love you, Gavin," he answered firmly, and took my face in his hands after he dropped the chair. "I love you so much that I would do anything for you, to be with you. So what? We have to move. That's no biggie, baby. But if this isn't what you want, just say the word. If you don't want to lead your pride, then we'll figure out another way. You can name James or Gigi the leader and we'll stay here. Whatever you want, I'm with you all the way."

I glanced up from his face to my friends. I saw the worry and concern in their expressions. But I knew in my heart if I said no, that I wouldn't rule the pride, they'd step in and do their best they could.

I just couldn't do that to them. Gigi had been right a few days ago. Without the next in line, the heir to the pride taking over, anarchy would ensue. It would tear apart my pride and then myself for allowing it to happen. I looked back at Ant and saw the love and trust

in his eyes. He believed in me that I could do this. And him most of all I wouldn't let down.

"I'll figure out a way to deal," I said as I leaned down to brush my lips over his. "With you at my side, we can do anything, because I love you, too, Anthony Marino."

"Awww," Gigi cooed. We turned to her, and I saw the tears in her eyes before she wiped them away. "You guys are so perfect together. I'm so thrilled you found him, Gavin. You deserve to be happy."

"Yeah, man," James agreed, clearing his throat. "You've been thrown too much shit in your life. You should have a mate who supports you like Ant's doing."

"I'm so fucking lost it's not even funny," Brad said and threw his hands up in the air. "I have no idea how lion prides work or how to help, but just tell me what to do and I will."

"Then we won't make you a snack, little mouse." James snickered and clapped Brad on the back. Unfortunately, James was about a foot taller than Brad, and his strength almost sent the man sprawled on the garage floor. He quickly grabbed his shoulder and righted the smaller man as we all pretended nothing was going on.

"Gigi, call Cheryl and tell her she's been promoted to president of the company," I said after a few moments thought.

"You're promoting your assistant to president?" James asked as he raised an eyebrow at me.

"Yeah, the woman has a MBA from Yale for fuck's sake," I snickered. "She never wanted to deal with the sales side of things, and she's not a programmer. Plus, she likes having her hands in all the different departments. She's so qualified for it she does my job most of the time, while I'm playing the role of developer. That's why I pay her two hundred and fifty thousand a year. She makes more than my vice-presidents do."

"Oh," James replied as his eyes went wide. "Good to know."

“Also, tell her we need those movers again for Monday, and pay whatever they want. I liked them,” I continued, as I rubbed my cheek over Ant’s soft hair.

“Is there someone who can box up all your father’s shit and get it out of there?”

“Yes, Marla, the housekeeper. James, you talk with her and set up with Ant’s lady to cleanse the house and grounds before Saturday.” I made a list of more things for each of them to do, we broke up, and Ant and I went back into the house. I immediately shot off an email to everyone in my company announcing Cheryl’s promotion and instructing anyone to direct questions to Brad.

Ant was humming as he made breakfast for me, and my heart filled with warmth. He knew how much I enjoyed his cooking, and while I figured it was the last thing he wanted to be doing right then, he was still there doing it for me.

“I love you, Ant,” I said. “I could never do this without you.”

“Yes you could.” He chuckled and gave me a wink over this shoulder. “You’re much stronger than you give yourself credit for. You might not have wanted to do this without me, but you could have. And I love you, too, Gavin.”

While I wasn’t sure if that first part was true or not, I knew that he did love me. And that made me feel thirty feet tall, that someone as wonderful as Ant saw something in me to love. The cold lion who knew nothing about affection or love had fallen head over heels for a mouse. I needed to send all the elders of UPAC a gift basket for their trick to get us all to mate. Because I’d never have found my soul mate without them. And I knew I’d never have been this happy with anyone other than Ant.

\* \* \* \*

Saturday came way too fast for me. It seemed wrong that I had only two days to prepare and embrace something this important. I felt

horrible for Ant. I'd been a growling mess for the entire time, especially since I'd not been able to sleep more than a couple of hours. Granted, he knew the best ways to calm me down and put a smile on my face. But he still didn't deserve this chaos in his life.

While most paranormals held their events at night, normally during the full moon, lions didn't. We were grassland animals who loved nothing more than basking in the sun. There were very few lion shifters who didn't sport a tan all year round. So with that in mind, our ceremonies and gatherings were held at noon, when the sun was at its highest. However, it was early March, so it was still ball-numbingly cold out.

"You can get nakie in front of all of them, but if anyone touches you when you're without clothes, I'll shift and bite them where it matters." I turned from the bay windows of my dad's study to see my gorgeous mate leaning against the door frame. I smiled at him as I went over to hug him. He immediately got the idea and threw his arms around my neck.

"I'll send out a memo," I whispered against his lips before kissing him softly. He moaned beautifully and opened for me. We spent a few minutes exploring each other's mouths before breaking it off. It was getting too heated to not lead to more, and as much as I still had a list of rooms I wanted to have sex with my mate in, we didn't have the time. "Did you decide which room would be the best for your new play room?"

"Yes, and I decided three hundred and twenty-four is officially old enough to be an adult and stop having a *play* room," he answered with a snicker. "I think the lounge closest to the kitchen will be our new media room."

We decided to stay in the guest wing for the time being, until the renovations were complete to the master suite. My family's estate was seated on thirty acres and could comfortably house most of the pride. It was complete with several sitting rooms, lounges, a library, a ballroom, and others we'd probably never use. This was definitely not

the home we'd left at Ant's house. But we were both determined to change that, Ant more so than I.

"It's showtime," he said gently as he pulled away, but kept his hand in mine. I reluctantly let him lead me to the ballroom, where the entire pride and most of his mischief was gathered. I immediately sought out friendly faces, taking comfort in the supportive nods and smiles I got. When we stepped up onto the stage, Ant took a step back as James and Gigi joined us.

"By now you've all heard what happened to my father," I announced loudly and cleared my throat before continuing. "Also, you were there at the UPAC conference and saw that we all had to mate. Luckily, Anthony Marino from the Indianapolis mischief agreed to be my mate. I know in the long history of this pride there has never been an openly gay leader. I'm not going to change who I am or hide it from our pride.

"That would be a disservice to myself and everyone here, not to mention lying. I think each person here, no matter their beliefs about their leader being gay, would prefer I be honest with you at all times than lie. We hope that this will not be an issue and everyone will accept our mating." I paused as I reached out for Ant's hand who immediately took it as he smiled at me. "If it is a problem, or something that you cannot accept, then I suggest you find another pride."

I paused when I heard several startled gasps.

"I will not give up my mate or disrespect him or our bond by pretending he is not the most important thing to me, or hide him like a dirty secret. I love Anthony, and if you don't like it, too fucking bad, because he stays. I've never hidden that I didn't want to lead the pride, and hated the idea of becoming my father. But Ant very wisely convinced me I could lead without turning into him.

"And my lioness, Gigi, made me see that without the heir to be next in the succession, the pride would be thrown into chaos. So here I stand ready to take my place, but as who I truly am. We are a pride,

a family, and keeping something as important as who I love from you is wrong. If you leave, I will be disappointed, but won't fight it. It's your choice to make, and while I'm the leader of this pride, I'm not a dictator. Nor do I ever want to be."

I gave Gigi a nod that it was her turn.

"As Gavin said, he has named me as the lioness of the pride. We're doing things differently, people. Get on board with the twenty-first century, or get out. UPAC laid down the rules of inter-mating, and we're adapting. I have my own mate, and he's a vampire. It was through his coven and elder that we are now free from the iron fist Gavin's dad ruled with. Embrace it.

"While I'm not Gavin's wife or mate, I will be performing all the roles of lioness, including the training of cubs to get ready for their first shift. Other roles as the mate to the leader of this pride will be left to Anthony, whom I adore. He's a good man, and I will gut anyone from our pride who shows him the slightest disrespect, before Gavin even can."

"We've named James as our second and I—son-of-a-bitch," she groaned. I was startled with the change in her planned speech. I followed her gaze to see she was staring at the back left corner of the ballroom. Everyone from Ant's mischief was huddled there, and when I sniffed the air I could smell fear pouring off of them in wave.

"This is what we're talking about," I said loudly as I pointed to the intimidated group. "We need to stop this segregation of the different species! We are all people here. It doesn't matter if we're lions, mice, vampires, or aliens. I'm just as much to blame, I'll admit that. Until I met Anthony, I didn't even know there was a mischief of mice that shared the territory with us. Divided and fighting, we have failed as a community.

"The petty squabbles between us has led to deaths and destruction. It changes here and now. Those may be mice shifters, and we may be lions, but we share a commonality in our human side. My new PA is a mouse, and I can tell you that he is one of the hardest-working people

I've ever employed. My *mate* is a mouse, and I love him. This shit stops now!"

"But they smell like prey," Ben, a younger lion, called out from the middle of the group. "It goes against nature to treat them as equals!"

"Bullshit!" Gigi snarled. "You smell like prey to me, Ben, but I'm able to contain myself just fine. Gavin is right. We're only half animal, but more importantly, we're half human. Get over it! I can tell you that even after only knowing Anthony a week, he's stronger than half the lions in our pride.

"He's never once bitched about the curveball thrown at him with Gavin taking over, and helped all of us by giving testimony to what happened with Elder Ashby. Would you all rather he come back and lead in his selfish, corrupted ways?"

There were several shouts of "no," with even more mummers in the negative. I smiled at my pride, glad at least we were on the same page.

"We're not saying that when you leave here today you will all be the best of friends," I said gently but loudly, so everyone could hear. "But it's time we look past just our pride to the rest of the world. These people are our allies. I'm already employing one of them. There's no reason we can't have our communities thrive in a partnership that could even grow into friendships."

"If I may, Gavin," Ant's Alpha, Leo, called out. Yeah, we'd already had a chuckle over a mouse named Leo who was now mixing with lions.

"Of course, Alpha. You're here as our guest and as friends of mine to witness Ant's and mine mating."

"We actually have a private Yahoo! group where we share mischief information and goings-on. Currently, we have several members who own businesses that are looking to hire. Also, we have some in other fields looking for jobs. While the humans know about us, we all know that they're not always accepting of our kind.

Another breed of shifter is always a welcome addition, since no one ever has to hide.”

“I couldn’t agree more, Alpha,” I said with a nod. “And that’s a fantastic idea. I’ll talk with Gigi and James about starting our own group that you will be invited to. That way, if there are any announcements that you feel would be useful to your mischief, you can pass them along.”

“Wonderful,” he replied, with a big smile. I could almost see the mice exhaling as a group their figurative breaths they were holding. “We also have that arrangement with the wolves, coven, and flock in the area. We would be happy to host a local mixer so that everyone might start to interact with each other.”

“That is incredibly gracious of you. My pride will be there,” I said, giving a look at my lions, as if daring them to counter me. I was shocked to see how many were smiling and nodding at the idea. It seems we weren’t the only ones tired of all the bickering and drama. “Are there any other questions before we start the ceremony?”

“While I have no problems branching out and making new friends,” one woman hedged, and her name slipped my mind for the moment. “I really don’t. Is it always going to be joint events? I mean, I just worry that we’ll lose our identity as a pride if we never have our private gatherings.”

“That is an excellent question, and the answer is no,” I answered, giving her a warm smile since she was almost shaking as she asked. “We will still have our monthly runs at the pride grounds. We might have a visitor here and there, and of course any pride member's mates. But we’re not just going to mix everyone up and combine the groups. We just want to expand our horizons so the animosity fades away.”

“Okay, good, because as much as the big parties sound to get to know each other, sometimes our smaller pride gatherings are nice. I just didn’t want us to lose that as a group.”

“It’s a valid point, and we have no intentions of our pride losing its extended family feel. Any other questions?”

“What about an heir?” another man asked as he cleared his throat. “Being gay as our leader is fine and all that, but what happens when your rule is up and we are faced with the same situation as we would have been if you’d declined the role?”

“Again, a valid point to raise,” I answered with a nod. “While we’ve just mated and jumped into our roles of leading the pride, we’ve not ruled out the potential for a family down the road.” I raised Ant’s hand to my lips and brushed a gentle kiss against it as I glanced down into his eyes. “Gigi has already offered as my lioness to be a surrogate for us, but we have more than enough time to discuss it. So we understand the responsibility to provide an heir for the next rule, but for now the discussion is tabled.”

“That’s very fair, Gavin,” the man, Al, said as he smiled. “And I for one am thrilled to see this new, happy side of you. If a mouse put that smile on your face, then the more the merrier in our community.”

“And on that note, let’s begin,” the elder from UPAC said as he and his entourage approached the stage.

Once they joined us, I knelt before them as Gigi placed her and on my right shoulder, and James did the same on my left. While it was normally the leader’s mate on the right, things were different this time. We’d decided ahead of time that Ant would stand behind me while holding their other hands, to show our solidarity. It was a little awkward with the four of us sharing such a small space, but we made it work.

I took my oath and pledged to do my best by the pride and adhere to the laws set forth by UPAC. When that was done, they brought over the brand. All four of us would have the pride’s crest magically branded on our right wrists to show we were the current leadership. As soon as ours were put in place the previous leaders’ would disappear with the spell.

“Rise, Gavin Ashby,” the elder said with a big smile, when it was all done. “And take your place amongst your people. May your rule bring prosperity to your kind, and to all paranormals.”

We leapt off the stage and walked into the middle of the circle the pride had formed. I threw back my head and let out a roar as James and Gigi joined in, signaling the start of our three-century rule. The others joined in after a moment, and I was pleasantly shocked to see the mischief had joined us, intermingling in our ranks.

And then we partied. Trust me when I say that paranormals, especially lions, know how to party. Everyone ate and drank their fill while celebrating. I knew part of it was simply because my dad was gone and the pride could start to heal from the damage he'd caused. But everyone seemed generally glad we'd taken over, and went out of their way to accept Ant.

Overall, it made me proud of my people. They might have kept to themselves and been misguided under my father's rule, but there was so much potential there. It was time we tapped into that and stopped simply surviving, and started thriving. We'd taken the first steps in that direction, and with time and guidance, I knew everyone's lives would be different for the better.

Mine already was because of a mouse nicknamed Ant who had given me his heart.

## Chapter 9

After most everyone left, besides the people who were crashing in some of the guest rooms, I finally got to spend some alone time with my mate. We'd hired a cleaning crew to come in the morning, so we left most everything, including the caterer's supplies that they'd be picking up. It was tradition to leave the new leaders alone for a couple of days while they got acclimated, so I knew Ant and I would at least have that time without drama.

"I think I'm a bit tipsy," my mate giggled as we climbed the stairs to the guest room we were using.

"Uh-oh," I chuckled, and wrapped an arm under his shoulders. "And what kind of drunk is my mate?"

"A horny one," he whimpered beautifully. I could live another thousand years and never tire of that sound coming from him, or any of the other ones he made.

"Are you in the mood to play with toys?"

"As long as we're not talking Matchbox cars, then hell yeah!" That was all I needed to hear. After watching my sexy mate laugh and have a good time all day, it had taken all my control to not drag him off into a corner and have my way with him. I swept him up into my arms and ran to our room as he gave a surprised squeak.

I tossed him on the bed and pretty much shredded my clothes, getting them off in my haste to feel his skin against mine. He laughed as he bounced on the bed before getting the idea and yanking off his shirt. While he got naked, I pulled out his toy box he'd showed me a few days ago. I knew exactly what I wanted.

“What do you—Gavin!” He yelped as I flipped him over with one hand so he was lying on his stomach as I placed the box on the bed next to him. Reaching in, I pulled out the supplies I needed and pushed it out of our way.

“Did you know lions in the wild can have sex as often as every half hour when their mates are in heat? I personally have had sex or gotten off five times in one evening alone.”

“That’s an impressive recovery time,” Ant said with wide eyes, as he glanced at me over his shoulder.

“Are you feeling hot, my mouse? Maybe we should try for five rounds tonight?”

“I’m always hot for you,” he moaned as I spread his legs and knelt between them. “But fuck five times, I want to break your record and then some. What about seven?”

“You think you can handle seven times?” I asked, knowing I was issuing the challenge as I ran my fingers between the cheeks of his ass. Ant whimpered and nodded as I kept up my soft touches. Then I shocked us both by leaning over and licking his hole.

“Sweet hell, baby that felt good,” Ant gasped. I liked it, too. I’d always thought the idea of rimming someone was gross, but when it came to my mate, I wanted to experience everything. And when I saw his little pink puckered hole twitch from my touch, I knew I just had to taste him. Sure enough, one lick wasn’t enough.

I growled as I pulled his cheeks apart with both hands and lapped at him like a kitty with a bowl of cream. And I did expect to get my cream from Ant by the end of the night... lots of it. As soon as he opened up for me, I speared my tongue into his ass, much to the delight of my mate. He squirmed and cried out at my attention to him.

“Fuck! Is there any part of you that doesn’t taste like pure heaven?” I didn’t wait for him to answer as I pushed my tongue back into him. What I had planned for my small mate didn’t need to have him stretched out very much, since he’d be fucking me first. But I did

need to stretch him enough for the remote-controlled vibrating egg I wanted him to have in his ass while he took me.

“Gavin, baby, I need to come,” he begged as he pushed his ass back toward my mouth. I kept at it while I reached over to the lube and egg. I popped open the cap and slicked it up before sliding it into him. “W-What a-are we d-doing to me?”

“I’m going to take the edge off of you before you pound your gorgeous cock in me,” I explained, and rolled him over. Guess the plan changed, but I could adapt. “Only if you promise to be loud and make those noises I love so much.”

“Anything, I’ll do anything. Please just let me come,” Ant whimpered as he spread his legs wide in the air. We’d learned I liked his flexibility in bed instead of just pulling his knees to his chest. If he did that, I’d miss out on seeing his flat stomach and toned chest.

“Pinch your nipples for me,” I growled, as I eyed him over like Christmas morning. He nodded and did as I asked as he stared into my eyes. His mouth was partly open as he panted. Deciding I’d teased him enough, I turned the egg on and didn’t start him off slow. I knew I had it right against his sweet spot, and I set it for the middle level.

“Fuck!” he cried out as his entire lower body twitched from the vibrations.

“Pinch them harder. I want to see them standing up and turning that pretty pink from you torturing them.” Ant moaned as he did it. I rewarded him by turning up the toy even higher.

“Gavin,” Ant screamed as his cock exploded. I stared at his groin in shock. I’d never seen someone come so hard that they shot their spunk straight up in the air. Ant road wave after wave of his climax, his hips thrusting up as each one hit. My mate was never as sexy as when he was having an orgasm.

It was a few minutes until he was finally spent and dropped his legs. I gently pulled the toy out of him, smiling when his entire body shuddered. Before his hole could recover, I slicked up a small butt

plug and slid it in. He gasped at the sensations, but then went back to trying to suck air back into his lungs.

My fingers were already lubed up, and I reached back to stretch myself out for him. I was going to ride my mate for the first time ever, and I couldn't wait any longer. I leaned back over him and leisurely licked the cum off of his body as he squirmed in delight. By the time I had him cleaned up I had three fingers in my own ass, and Ant's cock was perking right back up.

"I'm not the only one with a good recovery time," I cooed as ran my free hand over his hip bone. "I want to ride you, Ant. I want you to be full with that plug while my ass massages your cock."

"Awesome plan," he panted and gave me a thumbs-up.

"Do you need more time to catch your breath?" I chuckled, as he still hadn't opened his eyes.

"No, I'm good." He pushed up onto his elbows as I pulled my fingers out of my ass. I used the remaining slick on my fingers on his cock and gave it a few strokes to make sure he was good and ready for me.

When he was, I moved to straddle his stomach, and Ant reached down to hold his dick for me. I lined it up with my hole and slowly started to slide down as I stared at my mate. His nostrils flared with desire as his gaze ran over my body like a caress. I shivered at his look as he bottomed out inside of me.

We moaned as my ass sat on his hips, and I didn't move, simply savoring the feeling. Finally, when he started whimpering in need and stroking my cock, I knew I had to move. Leaning over, I placed my hands on either side of his head as I brushed my lips against his. I rocked slowly, starting as gently as I had with the kissing.

"Tell me you're glad you sought me out in that library," I whispered as I kept my eyes on his. "Do you regret our mating?"

"Not for a single second, Gavin. Going to look for you that night was the best decision of my life." I searched his eyes and saw the truth burning in them. "I love you with my whole heart."

“I love you, too.” I wrapped my arms around his shoulders and pulled us up until he was sitting up with me in his lap.

“Fuck,” he moaned as his eyes fluttered. “The plug is pushing in further now, and it’s right against my prostate.”

“I take it you like my idea then?” I teased him, and he smiled widely.

“Oh yeah, you’re getting inventive.”

“I had a good teacher,” I grunted as he stroked me faster and began snapping my hips harder.

“Just good?” Ant smirked at me as he rocked his hips in time with mine, and the angle nailed my sweet spot.

“Excellent, fantastic, wonderful, sexy, brilliant teacher,” I panted as we picked up the pace. I ended up pushing down with my knees as well as my hips, so the bed moved with us and pushed Ant up to me every time I came down.

“Gonna come, Gavin,” he gasped as he worked my cock faster. It was one of his endearing traits that he always warned me to make sure I was right there with him. Now that I knew he would follow me right over, I let go and my orgasm slammed into me.

“Ant!” I cried out as I covered him in my seed. As the muscles in my ass clamped down on his dick, he shuddered and came deep in me. We wrapped tighter around each other as our bodies found their releases at our connection. In that moment everything was perfect, just as it should be. And while I knew there were so many more to come, I cherished this one as much as I would the next one.

We flopped back onto the bed, and I was able to catch my weight on my elbows so I didn’t crush him. As we gasped for breath, we gazed at each other with big smiles. I knew my mate well enough that he was mentally checking that position and this guest room off the list of places we needed to christen in our new home.

“I love you so much, Ant. You can’t ever leave me,” I whispered against his lips.

“I’m not going anywhere, baby,” he replied with a soft smile as he reached up and cupped my cheek. “You are stuck with me, and that means there’s lots more to come for us.”

“Let’s start with more coming.” I chuckled, making a bad pun. It worked, because my mate laughed as I rolled us over so he was on top. There were going to be a lot of firsts with Ant, but everything would also be our lasts since there would never be anyone else for either of us.

**THE END**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joyee Flynn grew up in Chicago living in the same house all her life until she left for college. She loves to get lost in fantasy that only books could bring. Her wide interest in reading was reflected in her writings. Currently Joyee lives with her dog, Marius, named after a vampire from Ann Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* series. She dreams of one day living with enough land to have a few horses, and find a couple of cowboys of her own.

A lover of men, Joyee's all about them in any form in her books. Vampire, werewolf, military, doesn't matter at all as long as they are hot, hard, and sex fiends!

### ***Also by Joyee Flynn***

Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 1: *Dragon Mine*

Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 2: *Dragon Ours*

Ménage Amour ManLove: North American Dragon 3: *Their Dragon*

Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 1: *Micah*

Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 2: *Remus*

Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 3: *Stefan*

Siren Classic ManLove: Marius Brothers 4: *Victor*

Ménage Amour ManLove: The O'Hagan Way 1: *A Dillon Sandwich*

Ménage Amour ManLove: The O'Hagan Way 2: *A Caleb Footlong*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Purrfect Mates 1: *Here Kitty, Kitty*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Purrfect Mates 2: *My Little Kitty*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Purrfect Mates 3: *Our Sexy Tiger*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Purrfect Mates 4: *My Angel Cheetah*

Siren Classic ManLove: Hiding Hounds 1: *Sheriff Found*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Resistant Omegas 1: *Tristan*

Ménage Amour ManLove: Resistant Omegas 2: *Carson*

Siren Classic ManLove: Sons of Thanatus 1:

*My Maven, My Everything*

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