

Happy New Year!

Gabe and Kira

“Oooh, yes, that feels nice – touch my butt again.”

Gabe North froze as his lips hovered over his mate, Kira’s neck. “Flower, I’m not touching your butt.”

“Oh.” She fumbled behind her back and brought out a mop. She let out a loud guffaw, and Gabe joined in. “The perils of making out in a closet.”

He took the mop from her. “Don’t touch my girl again,” he told it sternly before tossing it away.

His hands cupped her buttocks, and she let out a moan. They had initially stepped away from the party to get a breath of fresh air but on seeing the broom closet available and just waiting to be defiled by two horny wolf shifters, they couldn’t resist.

Vaguely she heard the sounds of pack mates hooting and hollering; Kira pulled away. “Bambi, weren’t you supposed to be in charge of the fireworks?”

Gabe shrugged as his hands snaked under her shirt. “Don’t worry, I outsourced it.”

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Britt and Craig

“Three... two... one! Happy New Year!”

Pack mates shouted, hollered and started howling as they ushered in the New Year.

Britt tried not to roll her eyes as she watched her two brothers attempting to smooch the faces off their mates. Not to mention her sister and mother who were cooing sweet nothings to their boyfriends. She folded her arms and tried not to look too sullen.

She wasn’t in a bad mood. Nope, not one little bit. Just because a certain wolf shifter had told her he loved her and was now mooning after another she-wolf – it didn’t bother her at all. Or at least, she suspected he was – she hadn’t actually seen him mooning. She just knew that the other she-wolf was simpering all over him. Her wolf growled but Britt shook her head - it was a good thing. After all, Graig was far too young for her. *She’d said that over and over.* And the horrible little she-wolf, Chelsea was much more appropriate for him, in age at least. *She was fourteen like Craig, while Britt was seventeen.* Although regarding pure malevolence and ‘mean girl’ spirit, Chelsea had to be, at least, four hundred, and she had decided that Craig Tanner was going to be her boyfriend. That suited Britt just fine. Her wolf wasn’t sulking at all about the fact that Craig no longer hung around her, asking her out, offering to carry her books at School, trying to give her a lift on his bike... Nope, they were all things she could live without.

Where the hell was Craig anyway? Oh god, where was Chelsea? Her wolf yowled. *What if they were together?!*

Not that she cared or whatever. But maybe she should just make sure that they were okay.

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“What are you doing out here?” snapped Britt.

Craig grinned at her. *He was impossible to sneak up on.* “I’m in charge of the fireworks, babe.”

She snorted, ignoring the *babe* for the moment. “Someone put you in charge of things that go bang? Are they insane?”

“It was Gabe, and I reckon he was just horny.” Craig waggled his eyebrows suggestively, and she gave him a double eye roll – *one eye roll didn’t seem to cover it.*

“I thought the fireworks were supposed to go off when it hit twelve.”

“Yeah, and they will.” Craig flashed his watch at her.

“Dummy, it’s already past twelve.”

“What?!” He tapped his watch, and it started moving again. “Crap!”

Craig hurriedly grabbed all the fireworks and dumped them into a pile.

“No, not all at once!” Her wolf yelped in alarm.

He threw a match at the pile and Britt leaped at him knocking him to the ground as the fireworks ignited and rose into the sky, creating a glittering display. Awkwardly, she realized she was now lying on him, and they were in no danger whatsoever from the fireworks. Despite all the odds, he seemed to know what he was doing.

His chest vibrated with pleased laughter. “Aww, babe, if you wanted a hug, all you had to do was ask.”

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Britt wrapped her arms around herself. “Don’t you want to go back into the party?”

Craig dropped to the ground. “Nah. It’s either watching my brothers make out with their girlfriends, or,” he shuddered, “watching my parents making out.”

“Tell me about it.” Britt sat on the ground next to Craig and shuffled close to him. For warmth – it was just for warmth. She was cold and he emitted more heat than a bonfire. She ignored the groan he let out as she brushed against him. “Wow, those fireworks lasted ages,” she mused.

“Yeah, the Alpha went all out.”

“No Chelsea tonight?” she asked trying to appear nonchalant.

Craig shrugged. “I haven’t seen her.” He actually *did* sound nonchalant.

“Usually, she’s hanging off your every word,” muttered Britt.

He turned to her, frowning. But soon that was replaced by a huge smile. “You’re jealous.”

Britt blushed. “No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Shut-up, I...”

Craig leaned in and pressed his lips to hers for a brief kiss. Her wolf whimpered at the soft touch and the sweet taste. He pulled back and gave her a maddening smirk.

“Happy New Year, Britt.”

She was going to give him a piece of her mind. She was going to yell at him and tell him it was not okay to kiss her without her permission, not matter how much she enjoyed it.

Her wolf whimpered and she softened. Instead, she said, “Happy New Year, Craig.”

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Hans and Melanie & Acksel and Simone

“Hans!” snapped Melanie as her mate’s hands fondled her ass. “People can see us.”

“Don’t care,” he growled into her shoulder.

“You want people to look at my ass?”

His hands stopped, and he pulled back aghast. “Fuck no.”

“Happy New Year,” she chuckled before giving him a chaste kiss.

“Happy New Year, sugar. Now, let’s go home,” he muttered, hovering on the edge of a bad mood. She didn’t care. He was usually in a bad mood, and she liked it. The worse the mood, the more passionate he became.

“The party’s not over yet.”

“It’s midnight, it’s the New Year, let’s go.”

Melanie shook her head and wandered over to her brother-in-law, Acksel and his new mate, the tiger shifter, Simone. She hugged Simone and gave Acksel a hearty handshake.

Simone laughed. “You can hug him, you know. I promise not to go all crouching tiger, hidden bitch on you.”

"It's for my safety, sweetheart," said Acksel with a smile. "Hans ain't exactly the sharing type when it comes to his mate."

"Got that right," snarled Hans, placing a possessive arm around Melanie's waist.

"Don't be silly," said Simone, dismissively. She gave Hans a hug and planted a whopper of a kiss on his cheek. "See? No big deal."

Hans might have blushed slightly, as Melanie eyed him and Acksel scowled.

"Don't do that again," said Melanie and Acksel in unison.

Simone's howls of amusement could be heard throughout the entire pack rec center.

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Adam and Rosalee

"Sweetheart, you should really be getting home," said Adam with a stern look at his heavily pregnant mate.

Rosalee pouted. "Five more minutes?"

He growled and muttered under his breath, but she ignored him. Getting permission to come to this party had been a hell of a chore, she wasn't about to give in now. She was due to give birth to their first child in a little over four weeks. Which meant Adam had tried to put her on bed rest *five months ago*. He was a tiny bit overprotective, even for an Alpha. And there was no way they could both miss a pack party. Adam had suggested that he come to the party on his own, and she stay home, but that idea was shot down the moment it escaped his lips. No freaking way was she staying at home while he celebrated with a load of lissome, single she-wolves.

As her pregnancy progressed, Rosalee had found herself becoming more and more aggressive. From mercilessly hogging all the covers at night, to trying to growl at her mate whenever he attempted to order her around – her mannerisms were downright wolfish. *God help anyone who got between her and the last pancake*. But most of all, her anger was directed at any female who so much as looked at her mate. *In particular, Scarlett*.

The smug she-wolf had recently returned from college was very vocal about her condemnation of the Alpha's mate being a human. Adam had no time for her, and he put her in her place whenever she acted out. But the damn bitch kept on popping back up like a freaking jack in the box. It was... *annoying*. Rosalee was confident that even if she weren't on the scene that Adam wouldn't give the sneering she-wolf a second glance, but it still raised her already sky-high ire. No way would Rosalee allow Adam to attend pack meetings and parties without her. *Wouldn't want to give Scarlett hope*.

Rosalee pouted at Adam. "It's New Year, aren't you going to give your mate a kiss?"

Adam grinned, dropping his worry over the pup for a moment. He pulled her to her feet and gave her a lingering kiss. "Happy New Year, sweetheart."

He rubbed her chin over her bonding mark and Rosalee gave Scarlett a sweet, completely fake smile. *Suck it bitch!*

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“Oh, Scarlett what a surprise!”

Scarlett’s smile faltered slightly, as she found Rosalee in the bathroom.

“Oh, Rosie...”

“Rosalee,” snapped the irate, pregnant human.

Scarlett shrugged smugly. “Sure.”

Rosalee smiled viciously. “Look, bitch, you need to shut the hell up about Adam and me. Even if I weren’t on the scene, you wouldn’t have a chance. So do us all a favor and behave like a good little pup, okay?”

The she-wolf flushed. “The Alpha mating a human is just plain wrong.”

“Blah, blah, blah – not interested in hearing it. We’re mated, I’m pregnant – get over it.”

“You...”

Rosalee felt a surge of anger and her baby gave a huge kick – yeah, she could guess where these unusual feelings were coming from. “You want to fight me for the position of Alpha’s mate?”

“I’d wipe the floor with you,” sneered Scarlett.

“You sure about that?” snarled Rosalee.

The she-wolf’s face flickered with doubt before she backed away. Rosalee caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and she didn’t wonder – the expression on her own face was terrifying!

Scarlett mumbled a sorry and fled the room.

Rosalee patted her stomach. “I guess I have you to thank for these scary new mood swings.” She wasn’t a shifter, she wasn’t a witch – but that didn’t mean she was weak. She had managed to scare a she-wolf with her attitude alone.

Yep, start the year as you mean to go on.

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Terri and Mal

Terri Tanner opened one eye as fireworks exploded through the sky. “You hear something?” she murmured.

Her mate, Mal wrapped his arm around her more tightly. “Nah, go back to sleep, baby.”

She kept an ear out for Seth, but her baby just continued snoring almost as loudly as his daddy. “Mmm, good.”

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Alec and Liv & Delilah and Andy

“Get back here you little... treasure!” snarled Alec as his mate, Liv raised an eyebrow.

Yes, this had all seemed liked such a good idea when Liv and Delilah suggested it. Now, not so much.

Alec and Liv had a young baby and had decided to forgo the pack New Year party, as did Delilah and her mate, Andy because of their baby. So, the four of them had agreed to babysit any other pack mates’ children so that they could go to the party if they wanted.

It didn’t sound like it could be difficult. Alec was a huge wolf, and Andy was a black bear shifter – how could they not handle eight young pups? *They were idiots.*

“Andy, to your left.”

“Oh... fudge!” roared the bear as he tried to pull two-year-old Alexander out of the dryer.

Delilah tried not to shake with laughter. “You guys hang tight, I need to feed this one.” She gave her baby, Louisa a bounce and wandered off.

“I’ll come with you and check on Daisy,” said Liv. “This is too painful to watch.”

Alec scowled at his mate, and she stuck out her tongue. Everything had been going fine. It was hard work, but all the kids had been fed, bathed and put to bed at an early hour. Then the damn fireworks went off, and with the exception of their baby, Daisy, every single one of the little mites was awake and causing havoc.

“Stop drawing on the wall!” howled Andy as four-year-old Davey created a masterpiece out of crayons.

Yep, brought down by a bunch of kids – it was just plain embarrassing. And now Liv had returned with the camera – terrific! Thankfully she was laughing too hard to get a clear shot of him. *Thank heavens for small mercies!*

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“I can’t believe they’re finally all asleep,” whispered Alec as he surveyed the pups all snuggled into their sleeping bags.

Andy and Delilah were snoozing on the couch. The bear was flat on his back with his mate draped over his chest.

Liv wrapped an arm around her mate’s waist. “Still want a big family?” she teased.

Alec kissed her temple. "Definitely."

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Casey and Deanna

Casey pulled his mate behind him. Deanna giggled as they weaved through the crowd at O'Neill's. The bar was packed, but Casey only had eyes for his bobcat mate.

He pulled her into the handicapped bathroom and locked the door behind them. He pressed her against the door and took her mouth in a searing kiss. They panted as they came up for air. It was hardly the most romantic of locations – *far from it* – but it held fond memories for him.

"Just think," he murmured. "A year ago today we met. And we had our very first time together right here in this bathroom."

Deanna let out a cringing laugh. "Oh god, don't remind me."

"Don't remind you?" he whispered against her cheek. "It was the best night of my life. Thought I'd died and gone to heaven when you jumped my bones. I thought you were a freaking angel."

"Angels don't have sex in handicapped bathrooms," she said wryly.

Casey stopped his feverish kisses and pulled back to look at her. "You sound like you regret it," he grumbled as his wolf growled.

Deanna gave him a half smile. "I'm not exactly proud of having sex in a bathroom with a guy I just met."

He frowned in confusion. "But it wasn't any guy – it was me."

"Yeah, I got lucky. But come on, I was really drunk that night. If I weren't, we wouldn't have done that."

Casey took a step back from her, and his wolf whined. "So we never would have got together if you weren't drunk?"

"Wolfy, that's not..."

"I guess you don't want to recreate that night, then."

Deanna raised her eyebrows. "Is that why you dragged me in here? You thought we were going to have sex?"

"Maybe I should have got you drunk first. Why else would you want to be with me?"

"Casey!"

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Deanna followed her mate outside the bar. “Casey, don’t be so melodramatic.”

“Kitten, I know you’re too good for me. But it bothers me to know I would never have got you if you weren’t drunk.”

She giggled, and he scowled. “Wolfy, that’s not true at all. You know what, I *was* drunk that night. I was trying to have fun and work up the courage to approach the handsomest guy I ever saw. I figured if I was a little drunk, then at least if you *did* reject me I could laugh it off.” Her bobcat yipped. It was true; details of that night were a little hazy – *the booze and all* - but she could definitely remember her instant lust for him. The rest of the world seemed to melt away the moment she saw her lovely wolf shifter.

“What? You saw me before we...”

She took a step toward him and her smile burned with lust. “I saw you, and I thought you were the sexiest guy I ever saw. I didn’t think I stood a chance with you. So yeah, I did have to be drunk. Because if I weren’t, I might never have even been able to talk to you, never mind the rest of the stuff we did. Which, for the record, I could never regret. But in like fifty years time when our grandkids ask, we’ll say we met through friends.”

Casey slipped an arm around her and pulled her tight against his body. “Kitten, to be clear, there was a zero percent chance of me rejecting you. Thank god you agreed to settle for me.”

She slapped his chest, and he caught her hand, placing a kiss on the palm.

“Now, if you’ve finished throwing a hissy fit,” she teased as he snorted, “why don’t we finish celebrating our anniversary.”

“I thought you didn’t want to...”

Deanna and her bobcat growled. “I don’t want to have sex in the bathroom of a bar, but,” she softened, “we do have a very comfortable bed at home.”

He grinned wolfishly. “Happy anniversary, kitten.”

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Don and Kayleigh

“Happy New Year, darlin’,” murmured Don Cross into his mate’s neck the moment the clock turned twelve. One hand carefully cupped one of her breasts while the other gently rubbed her sex.

“Mmmm, Happy New Year, cowboy,” moaned Kayleigh.

She pressed her hand against the headboard and buried her head into her pillow to muffle her whimpers.

New Year's Eve had been quiet for them. Ordinarily, Kayleigh would be the first to arrive at a party and the last to leave, but with newborn twins, they had opted to stay home. They had watched *Horrible Bosses* on DVD. Don lied and told her she sounded sexy when she snorted with laughter. They reheated some leftover casserole that Carly gave them and were snuggled in bed by nine.

Their one concession to celebrating was that they had stayed up past midnight to consummate the New Year. They just had to be quiet. *Little ears picked up a heck of a lot.*

The twins, Benjamin and Amelia – Benji and Amy – were just over six weeks old. Don was adamant that they actually smiled for the first time two days ago, although there was some debate as to whether it was just gas. Either way, Don couldn't be prouder.

"Love you, darlin'," he panted as the tip of his throbbing manhood pressed through her folds.

"Yes, yes!" she whined.

They froze as an enormous barrage of fireworks exploded through the sky.

"That was really loud," she whispered.

"Maybe they didn'..."

He was cut short by the sound of a wail, and seconds later the second wail followed. If one was awake and crying, then they were both awake.

"Shit," mumbled Don disentangling his arms from around her body.

Kayleigh slipped out of bed and pulled a t-shirt over her head. "A few minutes and they'll be asleep, and we can pick up where we left off."

More fireworks burst through the sky. A steady stream of bangs doubled the cries of their babies.

"Or not," growled Don pulling on a pair of boxers.

Kayleigh sighed and followed him into the nursery.

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Twenty minutes later

With both babies fast asleep, Kayleigh made her way back into the bedroom. She found her mate stretched out on the bed, snoring lightly.

She pulled her t-shirt off and crawled up the bed. Poised over his body, she dipped one hand into the waistband of his boxers. She gently massaged his hardening manhood.

"Havin' fun?" he murmured.

She looked up to see him giving her a lazy smile.

“Sure am,” she taunted, giving him a squeeze.

“Twins asleep?”

“Sure are,” she cooed. “Changed your mind about marching down the rec centre to find whoever set the fireworks going and beating them to a pulp?”

“Yeah. Got as far as puttin’ my pants on and realized it could wait until daylight. You, on the other hand,” he grabbed her and flipped her on her back, she didn’t let go of his member, “will not wait.”

“Damn right I won’t,” she breathed and pulled him down for a kiss. He growled into her mouth as she rubbed her thumb over the head of his sex.

Impatiently, he flicked out a claw and sliced through his own boxers. She pulled him to her honey-drenched channel, the tip kissing her flesh, and excruciatingly slowly, he pushed inside her. She shuddered at his gradual entrance. The teasing slowness sent shockwaves through her body, promises of what was to come.

Fully seated he paused and nibbled on her neck, swiping his tongue over her bonding mark. He took his time relishing the joy of being so intimately joined with his mate, but neither he nor she could wait any longer.

Kayleigh hitched her legs around his mate, digging the heels of her feet into his ass cheeks, urging him on. “Hurry, mate,” she whispered. “Need you.”

Don growled and began driving himself in and out of her, pinning her to the bed with his fierce, possessive movements. A moment before, he had thought of nothing but savoring her body and the feel of being buried inside her sheath, but now, he was nothing but raw need. She rocked her hips against him, trying to match his rhythm, but she found herself swept away. His animal was too close to the surface and she was left helplessly moaning and clutching at him, unable to match his furious tempo.

He scraped his teeth over her neck. She bucked beneath him and bit her lip to stifle the cry that desperately wanted to be free. Don moved a hand to her ass, lifting her slightly, allowing him to plunge even deeper, allowing him to graze her clit with every thrust.

Sweat beaded his forehead with the effort of the brutal pace. The bed groaned and wheezed around them from the merciless treatment it was being given. Kayleigh wasn’t sure which would last longer – her or the ominously creaking bed.

“Don,” she breathed, “please.”

He muffled a howl in her neck and thrust into her, violently exploding in orgasm. Kayleigh bit his shoulder to squelch her scream as her own release didn’t so much wash through her as hit her like a tidal wave.

They trembled from the force of their releases, their bodies clinging to one another.

“I’m sorry, darlin’,” he murmured into her shoulder.

Kayleigh stroked his head. "What for?"

"I was a little... rough." His voice was laced with regret. "I'm sorry."

They'd had sex since the babies were born – *of course, they had!* But Don had been gentle and careful with her, perhaps fearing he might break her. Yes, she was a little more sensitive in certain areas, but that was no reason for them to cut back on their ardent lovemaking. She'd been trying to tell him that for the last two weeks. Kayleigh smiled. *Looks like his wolf couldn't hold back anymore.*

"I'm not," she cooed. "Start the year as you mean to go on, and that was incredible. I'm sorry I bit you."

"I'm not," he chuckled, echoing her. "Felt good, darlin'."

"Yeah? Kinky beast."

"Damn right."

Kayleigh giggled as she felt him stirring inside her. "Oh, cowboy."

She pulled his mouth up for a kiss and then paused as a shrill, little cry, followed by a matching shrill, little cry echoed through the house.

"No rest for the kinky," she teased.

They kissed and went to check on the babies.

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Jake and Val

The clock hit twelve. "Happy New Year, baby," cooed Val.

"You know it's impossible for me to get any work done when you're doing that."

Val fluttered her eyelashes. "Just work around me."

Jake rubbed his forehead as his wolf panted lustily. His leopard mate, Val was currently kneeling on his desk wearing nothing but a set of wispy green underwear. Work around her? *Fat chance.* The fact that he couldn't take his eyes off her, and the fact that his dick was rock solid, meant that work was the last thing on his mind.

He was the town sheriff. Given that the town needed someone on duty for the night, he had volunteered so his deputies, both shifter and human, could celebrate. His mate had stoically offered to stay with him throughout the night. Of course, she was proving to be more of a hindrance than any help.

Val shifted to a sitting position and draped her legs over his shoulder.

In spite of his wolf and every urge he had, he said, "We are not having sex in my office."

“What? Who said I wanted to?” Her face was the picture of pure innocence.

He wasn't opposed to office sex with his mate – *far from it*. Their first time had been on her old office desk. He couldn't see a desk without feeling a thrill. But the last time they indulged, they broke his desk. Not that he minded that, but the fact that one of his deputies ran in and saw his mate practically naked afterwards was unacceptable.

“But if we did...” she murmured. He groaned; he knew he couldn't hold out if she really wanted to get him out of his pants. “We're the only ones here.”

Jake ran a hand along her calf, and she shuddered lightly. “This is a sheriff's station – anyone could just walk in.”

“We could lock the door.”

“What if someone...”

“They could knock.”

“I'm not sure we have it in the budget to replace another desk,” he said lamely. *His resistance was ice thin.*

Val hopped off the desk and moved to the door, her hips weaving mesmerizingly. His wolf whimpered in disappointment as he realized she was leaving. But no, she turned back and winked. “I wasn't thinking of using the desk.”

She shimmied out of the room, and lord help him he followed her right on into the cells.

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Cain and Carly

“Let's all raise our glasses to the New Year! Huzzah!”

“Yeah, raise our fucking glasses,” muttered Cain as his inner bear rumbled. “Fucking champagne's like fizzy piss. Hu-fucking-zah.”

Carly gave him a sympathetic look and sent him a wave of love. He softened immediately and gave her a gentle smile. Yeah, he was a total pussy for his sweet, little she-wolf mate.

“A kiss for New Year?” offered Carly, puckering her lips.

His bear roared. *Just try and hold him back*. He pulled her into his arms, in what was not so much a sweep as a whirlwind, and lavished kisses all over her pretty face. All without so much as spilling his fizzy piss-like drink.

There were a few gentle coughs around them, and he could sense Carly's mild embarrassment. “Cain, your hand's on my ass.”

Sure was. He was giving the juicy rear a heck of a squeeze, too. In his defense, she couldn't own a derriere like that and not expect it to be groped on a regular basis. By him, anyway, if any other fuckers tried to touch what belonged to him, they were dead men walking.

With an unhappy grunt from his beast, he let her go, and she slipped down his body. If they were at home, enjoying New Year with the pack, he could have his hands all over his mate at that moment, and no one would give a shit. Half the pack would probably be dry humping or sneaking off to find somewhere to celebrate in private. But no, they were celebrating with Cain's mom.

Carly smiled and flounced off to get some more food. That was another thing he adored about her. She had an enormous appetite – both in and out of the bedroom. Thank god she was here keeping him sane.

Yep, a couple of months ago, his mom had contacted him out of the blue. The she-bear had abandoned him and his dad when he was just a cub. She'd sent birthday cards for a couple of years and then they just stopped coming. But now she was feeling guilty or nostalgic *or something* because she was interested in getting to know the bear she left behind twenty-five years ago.

His mom was now married to a successful doctor – an elephant shifter. She had a new family and was hoping they could all just get along. Cain's snort could be heard a mile away when he read that in the letter she sent. He crumpled it up and tried to forget all about it. Course, Carly managed to winkle it out of him within ten minutes. *She had him completely whipped.* And, devious Omega minx that she was, she managed to persuade him to give his mom a chance.

Carly knew what it was to be abandoned. Both her parents dumped her with the pack and left when she was just a kid. They loved each other more than their little pup. *Which was insane!* The thought of it made his possessive beast snarl. Carly was the most lovable creature on the fucking planet! *Although, he might be a little bias in that respect.* But it did mean that she could sympathize with him, and she knew what he was going through – and not just because she was an Omega who was more tuned in than a radio.

So, reluctantly, he agreed to spend New Years with his, *ugh*, new family. Not Christmas though. No, their first Christmas together had to be perfect. And it was, they spent the day with Carly's adopted family – the Lucas family. Cain had always liked Hans and Melanie, not to mention mother Lucas and the young girls that he always got mixed up. And now that Acksel was mated, Cain found him less objectionable. *What?* Carly had a crush on the male wolf growing up – that was a perfectly good reason for Cain to want to hit the asshole right in his perfect teeth.

Christmas had been great. Cain didn't think he'd ever seen his mate quite so giddy as he did on Christmas morning. He really did wish it could be Christmas every day.

But, Christmas was over, and now they were stuck in this McMansion, sipping champagne and eating tiny little bites of food – he had to swallow five at a time to make sure he was

actually eating something. He'd rather be at home, swigging beer with his friends, and openly fondling his mate – *if she'd let him*.

His mom sure had changed. He remembered her as a loud woman, always yelling at him and screaming at his dad. Not that his dad didn't deserve it. Now, she looked like she'd stepped out of an etiquette magazine.

He watched as his stepsister flirted with some stuffed shirts. They had wavy hair, pointy shoes and acted like they were the funniest things put on the earth. Millie let out a fake dutiful laugh. *Oh, brother*.

Cain really didn't belong here. They had three different types of forks – three! They all looked the fucking same to him. And they had linen napkins for heaven's sake. He stuck out like a sore thumb at this damn party. And despite his mom's fussing, he was not welcome. Still, in a few hours, they could leave, and he could honestly tell his mate that he tried. She wouldn't force him to see his family again. Not that she forced him this time. She just had to flash those damn big eyes at him, and he was a goner.

His bear snarled. One of the stuffed shirts had noticed Carly. And no wonder, instead of wearing the huge poncho like he wanted her to, she was decked out in a strapless prom dress. The sight of her lovely shoulders on display – *sporting his bite mark* – practically had him coming in his pants. Clearly, he wasn't the only one who had that reaction.

A male elephant shifter, by no means small, but smaller than even Cain's mighty stature strutted up to his mate.

Cain growled and thrust his glass at the nearest person to him. He strode over to the smirking male and grabbed his mate. "My mate, mine!" he snarled.

The elephant actually gulped. Carly made hushing noises and sent Cain calming vibes while she stroked his back.

"Cain!" hissed his mom. "Please behave yourself."

He growled. *Yeah, not happening*.

Carly giggled. The musical sound soothed his prickly beast. "Oh, this is nothing. My pack can't get through a party without at least five fights."

"Well, this is not how we choose to present ourselves. You really need to learn to control yourself, Cain."

Carly smiled sweetly, and Cain felt his sex harden. Carly may be the Omega, but he could read her like a book. *That was her mean smile*. True, she was about as mean spirited as a particularly gently mouse, but she wasn't a coward.

"Thank you so much for inviting us, Mrs. Callaghan. But I think it's time Cain and I were leaving."

His mom blinked at her in surprise. "There's no need..."

“There’s every need,” interrupted Carly, in that sugary voice that really was playing havoc with his dick. “I certainly don’t want Cain to change, and I don’t want to be around anyone who would want him to, either. I think he’s wonderful, and if you can’t accept him just as he is, then I don’t want to know you.”

Fuck, did he ever mention he was the luckiest bear in the world? A grin split his face. “I’ll get our bags.”

His mom held up her hands. “No, please, I... I’m sorry, I just...”

Carly patted her arm, and his mom immediately got the dazed look that indicated Carly was soothing her. “It’s okay. He can be a bit hard to take at first – believe me.”

Cain frowned and tried to protest, but Carly ignored him.

“But trust me, most of it’s just bluster.” She rubbed against him, and he moaned softly. “He’s just a big teddy bear.”

His bear pouted, but Cain wasn’t about to correct her. Seriously, if the damn elephant had touched his mate, the male would already be missing an arm. *Probably best if he didn’t point this out.*

“I’m sorry, Cain,” said his mom. “I guess I just didn’t think about how hard this would be.”

He shrugged but didn’t say anything. Talking wasn’t his strong suit. He was happy to let his mate speak for him.

“How about next time you come to us for dinner?” offered Carly. Cain tried to shake his head – he was *not* happy for his mate to speak for him. “You can see where we live, and where Cain works – perhaps that might be easier.”

His mom nodded. “That sounds nice.” Her husband waved at her impatiently. “I better go. Please stay and enjoy the rest of the party.”

“I’m sorry you had to see my dark side,” said Carly as his mom wandered away.

Cain’s roar of laughter virtually shook the entire room. “Beautiful, your dark side is nicer than my good side. But, I’m not sure about this dinner thing.” His bear snarled in agreement.

“Let’s just see what happens. For now, I think we should go to bed. It’s after midnight and in a few hours we have a long drive home.”

He let out a breath. “Yeah, I guess we should get some sleep.”

“Oh, that’s not what I meant at all.”

Carly fluttered her eyelashes and put an extra wiggle in her step as she sashayed out of the room. His beast panted as he virtually ran after her. *Suddenly, this party didn’t seem so bad after all.*

*

Kim and Ed

“Happy New Year, babe,” murmured Kim Buchanan as she stroked her mate’s cheek.

Ed's eyelashes flickered slightly, but he didn't stir. *He looked like a sleeping angel.*

Kim patted her very swollen, very pregnant stomach. “Poor, daddy,” she whispered, “he just needs a little rest.”

She smiled and continued knitting while watching a rerun of Castle. She felt a twinge in her lower back and tried to elbow her cushions into a better shape. She was more than a week overdue. While she had a little trouble getting comfortable, she wasn't worried. Her first child, Jamie, had been two weeks late. Except this time she was making sure she took things easy and rested in bed. Jamie's father had been a total asshole who blew all their money - Kim was forced to work right up until she gave birth. Having her water break while trying to bring garlic bread to a couple celebrating their engagement was not fun. Thankfully, Ed was a million miles away from her first husband. Her inner wolf yipped in agreement.

Kim gave her knitting a thoughtful look. Hmmm, it didn't look anything like the picture. She was the first to admit she wasn't great at crafty things, but as with her first pregnancy, she had an urge to nest and create things for the baby. *The pile of misshapen baby sweaters was a testament to how strong the urge was.* Maybe she could ask Liv for help in fixing them – the young witch was good at that kind of thing.

She turned the sound up on the TV as Castle and Beckett chased after a suspect. It wouldn't bother Jamie; the precocious six-year-old could sleep through anything with the adeptness of a teenager. While Ed was currently sleeping off a particularly strong sedative and Kim was pretty sure an earthquake wouldn't bother him.

Ed had been more than a little stressed over the past couple of weeks. He was trying to juggle his job, while taking care of her and Jamie and anxiously panicking the baby was on the way every time Kim said she felt a slight pain. Added to this his crazy bitch faced grandmother – *Kim's words* – was trying to sue him for the money he had received from his trust fund. Yep, the crazy bitch was so pissed at him for marrying Kim that she was actually trying to bankrupt him. She didn't have a prayer of succeeding, but it was enough to piss him off and stress him out that he wasn't sleeping properly.

Given that he was a red wolf shifter with a strong constitution, generic sleeping pills wouldn't help so Kim had sought out her fellow pack mate and witch, Violet and she had supplied her with a tonic. Of course, getting Ed to take it had been impossible. So at the end of her tether, she had put some of it in his drink. *No, she wasn't proud of herself.* And no, she didn't usually have to drug men to get them to sleep with her, but she was really worried for her mate. She didn't like being underhanded, but the last thing she wanted was for Ed to be completely frazzled when junior arrived.

Kim flinched as fireworks burst through the sky. “Holy crap,” she hissed. Her wolf howled.

She just had a contraction.

*

"I'm sorry, I didn't know who else to call," fretted Kim.

Violet Bennett hushed her. "It's okay, honey."

"Where is he?" asked Greyson, Violet's wolf mate.

"Upstairs, first on the right."

He nodded and bolted up the stairs with Violet following close behind.

Sharon, Kim's mother, came into the room with a sleepy Jamie slumped in her arms.

"Mommy," mumbled Jamie, rubbing her eyes.

"It's okay, baby, you're just going to spend the night with Grandma while I go to the hospital. The baby's on it's way."

That had the little pup awake. "Tell the baby she has to be a girl," she said excitedly.

"I'll be sure to pass on the message," said Kim, drily, kissing Jamie's forehead.

"Are you sure you don't want Jamie to be there at the hospital?" asked Sharon stroking Jamie's hair.

Kim shook her head. "No, it could be hours yet, and I'd rather Jamie get her sleep."

"Call me as soon as you know something." Sharon kissed her and gave her a happy smile before leaving.

Violet came down the stairs, wringing her hands. "I'm sorry, honey, there's nothing I can do. Even though I've told him not to, Greyson keeps trying to slap him awake, but it's not working."

Kim bit her lip. Yes, if she didn't feel guilty before about drugging her mate, she certainly did now. "I better get to the hospital."

"We'll drive you," offered Violet.

"I can't ask you..."

"Nonsense. Honey, bring him down," she called.

Greyson almost ran down the stairs with Ed slung over his shoulder.

"I hope I'm not interrupting your New Year celebrations. Weren't you at the party?" said Kim trying to struggle into her coat.

Violet helped her, holding up the voluminous garment that Kim swore was originally intended for a horse. "Oh, no, we were just at home... we weren't doing anything."

"We were doing *something*," muttered Greyson as Violet blushed.

"Nothing we can't do any other time," she hissed.

"I'll put Ed in my truck," he growled as Violet rolled her eyes.

"He's almost fifty, and that's still all he thinks about." Although judging by the shy smile on her face, she wasn't complaining.

"Ed's the same. I'm pretty sure that'll last until the moment they die. Male wolf shifters can be pretty single-minded. Would you mind grabbing my bag? It's by the door and should have everything I need for the birth."

Violet helped her outside, and Greyson lifted her into the truck, next to her snoozing mate. Ed snuggled against her, and her wolf whined.

Please, please be awake for the birth.

*

Five minutes later

"Uh, guys, my water just broke."

"Can you hold it?" asked Greyson. Violet snorted at him.

"Not all the way," groaned Kim. "This baby is coming."

She tried shaking her mate. "C'mon, babe, please wake up!" Tears prickled her eyes. "I don't want to do this on my own again." Her first husband hadn't even bothered to show up at the hospital. He was forcefully dragged home by their Alpha when Jamie was four days old.

Her wolf whined piteously. She was being punished for drugging her mate. Ed had grown up with a bunch of manipulative family members, and now she had betrayed him by doing something just as selfish as them. "I'm so sorry, babe. Please wake up."

Ed's eyes flickered. "Whasshappning?" he mumbled

"Oh, Ed!" she whimpered. "I drugged you to make you go to sleep because I was so worried about you. But I am so, so sorry. And now the baby's on the way, and I don't think we'll make it to the hospital?"

He blinked. "Wha..."

Kim let out a cry of pain.

"Pull over," said Violet to her mate. "I'm calling an ambulance."

*

Half an hour later

The paramedics fussed around them as an exhausted Kim and yawning Ed smiled at their baby.

“Jamie will be thrilled,” whispered Kim. “She wanted a sister.”

“She’s beautiful,” murmured Ed.

“And born in the back of a truck – that’s a great story to embarrass her with when she brings her first boyfriend home.”

“Too soon to think of that,” he grumbled as his heavy eyes shuttered.

“Oh babe, I’m so sorry I drugged you. I’m a horrible person. I was just so worried about you.”

He chuckled. “Gorgeous, when you do crazy things, I trust you really do have my best interest at heart. When I was twenty-one, my brothers drugged me and dumped me in Mexico in just my underwear. They really couldn’t care less about me. They were just acting like...” He paused and looked down at the baby. “Silly Billies.”

“Billie...”

Ed gave her a sleepy grin. “Yeah, you like that name?”

“Actually, I do.”

“Me too. Welcome to the world, Billie Buchanan.” Ed rested his forehead against Kim’s. “Love you,” he mumbled.

*

Greyson and Violet

Greyson wrapped an arm around his mate as they watched the exhausted parents cooing over their baby. The ambulance had arrived, and paramedics were trying to decide who needed more help – Kim and the baby or Ed.

His wolf growled as he realized Violet had tears in her eyes.

“Who upset you, honey?” he demanded. “If it was Ed, I will smack him in the mouth. I don’t care if his pup was just born or not.”

Violet giggled and wiped her tears away. “They’re happy tears, dear.” She snuggled against his chest.

Absently he placed his hand on her stomach. “Do you ever wish that we’d met sooner, and we’d...”

“No,” she replied immediately. “I don’t like thinking about ‘what-ifs’ and ‘maybes’. I’m just grateful to have you now.”

Greyson smiled and pressed a kiss against her lips.

“Besides,” she added, “having grown kids means that we can do whatever we want, whenever we want.”

“Yeah?” His eyes glowed amber. “There’s a big tree over there, how about we...”

“No.”

“Awww come on!”

“We are not having sex in front of pack mates and paramedics,” she scolded playfully.

“Not in front of, we’d be behind the tree.”

“They’ll hear us.”

“That’s true, you are very vocal when you come.” He squeezed her rear. “And you do come a lot.”

Violet tried to hide her blush, but it was no good, he saw it and smirked. She rubbed her hand over his chest. “How about when we get home you can chase me around the house, and if you catch me, you can do whatever you want to me.”

“Oh, honey, I will catch you – you can count on that.” He buried his head in her shoulder and growled, “Mine.”

The end