**BEAR SHAPESHIFTER**

**ALPHA MALE**

**BBW ROMANCE**

**SYNOPSIS**

*Hazel is totally exhausted spending too much time looking for the perfect guy. Desiring to get her mind off her failed attempts at finding love, she expresses her insecurities to Noah, a popular and wealthy online friend.*

*Making plans to meet him for the first time on a vacation, Hazel travels to a small wildlife zoo that Noah runs. The two hit it off and Noah shows her an intimacy that she's never experienced with anyone before.*

*Hazel loved all the attention she was getting from Noah since arriving at the zoo but things seem to have gotten more complicated. Of course, Noah is hiding something…a deep secret and Hazel is about to find out what it is.*

*"Are these woods really dangerous? I mean aside from bears?"*

*The situation soon takes a turn for the worst when Priscilla shows up at Noah's zoo. Who is this woman?*

*"Noah is a very physical man and even if he's been intimate with you already, it's just because he's trying to be nice."*

*Noah's dark past soon raises its ugly head in the form of another alpha male fixated on driving Noah out of his home land. Not only that, but Hazel discovers that she may have romantic feelings for Noah's quirky and charismatic employee Deacon.*

*Deacon had his own type of charm that spoke to her on a higher level than just a friend's would.*

*Tensions are suddenly high and Hazel is conflicted with who to trust. Noah is great with her, but is he really genuine? And who is this new woman who seems so intent on keeping Hazel away from her new romantic interest?*

*Is this to be a luxurious vacation that Hazel always wanted or a rollercoaster of excitement and emotions?*

***A BBW paranormal alpha bear shapeshifter romance omnibus novella.***

***Around 30,500 words.***

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*bear shapeshifter romance, shifter novella, bbw shifter romance, alpha male, werebear romance, menage shifter romance, new adult college romance.*

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# PART ONE

# Chapter 1

Hazel stepped into her city loft with a deep sigh, dropping her purse on the floor and kicking off her flats. She shut the door and half-heartedly pulled the wavy locks of her brunette hair over her shoulder to weave it in a messy braid.

Why did she even try? Every date she went on ended in complete disaster--this one had especially. The man she'd met at the cafe this evening had been courteous enough... until he'd decided to speak without thinking. At least she thought it was an involuntary comment at the time. Now that she thought back to what he'd said, she realized he'd had no excuses.

Hazel scowled as she dropped her car keys on the kitchen table and dropped down onto the living room couch in a huff, thinking back to the last conversation she'd had with her date.

"It's hard finding nice guys who will look past my weight," Hazel had said to him before taking a sip of her mocha. "But that's their problem--not mine."

"Well you're not fat," said the man. "I mean if you lost a few pounds, you would look even prettier, of course, but it's not about what's on the outside, right?"

Hazel sighed to herself as she thought. "The outside *does* matter," she said aloud as she opened up her laptop resting on the coffee table. "To every man under the sun, apparently."

She checked her e-mail first, and then moved on to look at social networks. Several minutes in, just as she was about to close everything down and head for bed, a chime sounded from the corner of one of her browser pages, and she clicked on it to see who'd messaged her.

*Hi, Hazel. It's Noah. Just saw that you were online, and I thought I'd say hello. How are you?*

Hazel sighed some, picking up her laptop and resting it in her lap. She relaxed a little from the words. Although she'd never met Noah in person, he was always kind to her. Setting her fingers to the keys, she responded to him.

*Hello, Noah. I'm alright. How have you been?*

There was a bit of a pause, and she watched the notification bubble hesitate at the bottom of the screen before his words showed up.

*Life is going well here at the zoo. Nothing to complain about.*

That was right. Noah owned a wildlife zoo, though Hazel didn't know too much about it. Noah sometimes talked about taking care of the animals or hiring on new workers. But this was just Noah's pastime. He'd retired just a few years earlier after making a rather large sum of money from his previous work as some variation of an entrepreneur. He never went too heavily into his personal life. Hazel often wondered how easy Noah's life must have been now that he didn't have to worry about money anymore. She wished her life was just as easy.

*That's good,* she answered him. *Wish I could say the same. I'm starting to think that there's not a single decent guy on the planet.*

*Oh really?* Came Noah's words. Hazel sighed. *Aside from you, of course.*

*What happened to make you decide that?* He asked.

Noah was very good at picking up on Hazel's social trends. It was hard for her to keep a secret from anyone, and she had to admit she'd kind of hoped that Noah would find out about the dating disaster anyway. She'd ranted to him in the past about her failed attempts, and he'd always been there to console her.

*I just had another date with a guy, and he stuck his foot in his mouth. Just like all the others. I can't seem to find a decent guy anywhere in the city,* she replied.

*Perhaps you're looking at the wrong ones?*

*It's not about that,* she answered. Noah didn't know that Hazel was overweight, and she really wanted to keep it that way. He'd asked if she wanted to chat over camera a couple of times in the past, but she'd made the excuse that she didn't own a webcam. There was no way she was going to show the only man in her life who acted like he cared that she was plus size and not exactly the Venus of women.

*Well then what is it about?* He wondered. Hazel thought quick to try and come up with something else to talk about.

*We just didn't see on the same level,* she attempted.

*Maybe you should take a break from the dating scene, Hazel,* Noah responded after about a minute. *It might be good for you to get away for a little while.*

*What do you mean?*

*Why not take a vacation?* He asked.

She smiled wistfully as she typed back to him. *I'd love to, but I really don't think I'd like going to the beach and watching all the couples cuddling.* "And all the pretty, skinny girls in bikinis flaunting their stuff," she added to herself before sending the response.

*Who said you had to go to the beach? Go someplace remote and quiet.*

She sighed again. *It's not the same vacationing without a friend.*

*I suppose that is true.*

She and Noah were quiet for a few minutes after that. Eventually, Noah's notification bubble appeared again.

*Come to northern Colorado instead.*

Hazel frowned when she saw this. *And what's in northern Colorado?*

*Me,* was the simple answer. *Come visit for a week or two. Get your mind off shallow men for a while and come someplace peaceful.*

Hazel had never considered this. Online friends were just online friends. She'd heard so many horror stories about people meeting others they'd talked to online, and how it always ended up in a disaster. Although she spoke to Noah often, meeting face-to-face seemed bizarre.

She set her hands back to the keys, already shaking her head no before typing, but then hit the backspace bar as she realized she was actually considering it. Noah was very nice. She'd never seen him, and he'd never seen her, but it would beat any other vacation spot Hazel could think of.

Besides, she'd already fantasized about what he acted like from seeing pictures of him on various websites. According to his profile, he was 34, which was ten years older than she was, but in her world age didn't matter when it came to friendship.

*Hazel?* Noah wondered as a minute or two passed.

*I don't really know much about where you live or even what you live in,* Hazel countered. She didn't want to tell him she was nervous about that idea, but she was.

*There's nothing to worry about, Hazel. There's lodging here. I have a nice home on the property, and my employees all have homes in Aspen.*

*That's a lot I should think about,* she answered him. *I have to consider how long I'll be gone, what I'll pack, whether I'm driving or flying...*

*I'll pay for your plane ticket. You work from home, still, right? So just take your computer with you and come spend a couple weeks away.*

Hazel did work from home. She was an online translator for websites, and took careful time looking at websites to convert them into French.

*You don't have to pay for my ticket, Noah.*

*I insist,* he responded almost immediately. *This is on me, Hazel. I mean it.*

She frowned a little, but gave him the okay after just another moment's hesitation. She still wasn't sure about it, but she did feel like vacationing was a better idea than deleting conversations off a dating website all day.

Noah sent back a smiley face. *I'll send you the flight schedule then, and I'll meet you at the airport when you arrive. Are you going to bed?*

*Yes, soon. It's been a long night.*

*Why don't you send me your phone number so I can text the info to you instead?*

She bit her lip as she typed in the number and sent it with a grimace. She hated the thought of people badgering her over text, but maybe Noah really was different.

*Thank you, Hazel. I'll talk to you soon, okay?*

*Okay. Goodnight then, Noah.*

His final message appeared only after a second.

*Goodnight, Hazel.*

The next morning, Hazel woke up early to check her phone. As she figured, Noah had sent her the time of her flight and airport location. She sighed a little and packed her necessities before walking to the bathroom to spruce up her appearance. She ran her fingers through her hair and looked sadly at the extra weight she carried all throughout her body.

She dreaded thinking about what Noah's reaction would be when he saw her. Hazel wasn't homely, at least she didn't think so. She was just a little heavier set than most other women she knew, and the constant comments about her "looking prettier if she lost a few pounds" didn't help at all with her dilemma.

Taking a deep breath and straightening out the folds in her clothing, Hazel took her bags and left for the airport.

# Chapter 2

Hazel stepped out of the terminal in a bit of a daze. The flight hadn't been long, but she wasn't always comfortable with flying to an unknown destination on her own. As she walked out of the corridor, she noticed quite a group of people waiting to meet their partners, friends, and family. She'd seen pictures of Noah on various webpages, though, so she wasn't concerned about being unable to find him.

He was a good-looking man, built through the arms and chest, and according to the last image she'd witnessed, he had tawny hair. Her eyes scanned the area briefly, eventually settling on a man with his hands in his pockets, gazing back.

He was tall, and the face was definitely recognizable. Noah had a defined jawline paired with a Roman nose and striking green eyes. As those eyes met Hazel's, she bit her lip and smiled a little, coming closer.

"Um... are you Noah Blackburn?" she asked as she tugged her luggage behind her.

He smiled, flashing brilliant teeth in a charming manner. "That would be me. Hello, Hazel."

His voice was deep, but not grating. It carried a clever type of ring to it when he said her name, and Hazel felt slightly embarrassed for some reason, as if he were amused by her hesitant behavior.

"Hello," she replied only after a moment, still taking in his appearance. Noah wore a light tee and washed-out jeans--not the type of appearance of a rich man like Hazel had imagined. She'd pictured him to be in a nice suit, or maybe even a button-up.

"Well, no use standing around here. Let's go get your things and head out to the car, shall we?"

"Actually," said Hazel, "I only had one carry-on and nothing else. I packed light."

Noah nodded his head in understanding, drawing his hands out of his pockets to walk toward the escalators. "Fair enough. You sure you have enough clothing to cover you for two weeks?"

"I assumed you had a washer and dryer at your home," said Hazel sheepishly.

Her friend made an amused "Hmph," and then nodded. "Since you're staying over, there's no reason I'd limit the uses of household items to you."

Hazel looked at the floor until they'd reached about five yards from the exit doors.

"How was your flight?" Noah asked then.

She glanced at him only slightly. "It was alright."

*I must sound like a total idiot,* she thought to herself. *All this time exchanging secrets over chatrooms online, and here I am in person with him and I have no idea what to say.*

"You're as gorgeous as I imagined," Noah mentioned suddenly as they walked out of the sliding glass doors.

"What?" Hazel started, giving him a startled look. She knew it wasn't really the best reaction to a compliment, but she couldn't believe it. Was he pulling her leg?

Noah looked at her briefly before guiding her across a crosswalk toward the airport parking lot. "Sorry, was that too forward of me?"

"No," she answered with a firm shake of her head, keeping her eyes on the ground again. "I'm just not used to people saying something like that to me. I'm not sure how to take it."

"Well, usually people who are complimented like to say 'thank you,'" he replied with the hint of a chuckle in his words.

"Right. Sorry. Thank you," she uttered, watching him stop by a sporty-looking, convertible Corvette. He walked around to open her side and waited for her to climb in. She did so with another small thanks and let him close the door. The car was ritzy and painted white. She brushed her fingers over the leather interior with fascination. Just how much money did Noah really have? He'd never directly said, but he obviously had enough to live comfortably probably for the rest of his life. As a single French translator who had just enough to cover groceries and house payments each month, Hazel felt a little envious.

"I really appreciate you paying for my plane ticket," she mentioned as Noah dropped down into his side and tugged out a set of keys from his pocket.

He started up the vehicle. "It was nothing, Hazel. My treat. You going to keep your hair down?"

A little thrown by his question, Hazel gave him a strange look. "Huh?"

Noah pulled out of the parking space and headed out of the lot. The wind rushed against Hazel's face and gusted her hair off her shoulders. "Oh, I probably shouldn't," she stated and searched in her purse for a hair tie, maintaining her brown locks in the back so it wouldn't be a rat's nest when they reached their destination.

Noah glided down the roads as smoothly as the wind rushing over the vehicle. The gusts were rather deafening, but Hazel liked the openness of Noah's car. Within minutes, they were out of the city and driving through a more forested area. The smell of the trees and clean air was something she'd never been able to have in her home city. This was nice, and it cleared her head of the previous worries she'd had. Perhaps this trip wasn't such a bad idea after all.

*Of course, I shouldn't come to conclusions before I've even seen his place,* she thought with a grim twist of her lips.

"Ever get fresh breezes like this where you live?" Noah asked over the roar of the wind.

"No, nothing but smog and dirty rain," she replied candidly. "This is very nice."

Noah smiled. "We'll reach the zoo in about thirty minutes."

"Okay." Hazel didn't mind the ride. It gave her a lot of time to think, though she wasn't really sure what to think about. After a couple minutes, Noah turned on the radio and turned it up loud enough to hear over the wind, and so she left her eyes to linger on the passing trees and lost herself in mindless pondering while the music filled the empty space left by the absence of conversation.

After some time, Noah slowed and turned onto a dirt road, which he followed a ways before passing a big property caged off from the outside world. *Blackburn Zoo* was labeled over the top of a pair of gates that Noah pulled through. The inside driveway was long and winding, leading up toward a house on a hill that overlooked the entire property. The house itself was massive, with three separate garage entrances and a large archway leading toward the dark-stained, wooden front door.

Noah opened one of the garage doors with a remote and pulled in, parking his ride next to two other fancy sports cars. Hazel stepped out and walked with him toward the entrance to the house. As Hazel stepped inside, she held her breath in wonder. She stepped into a hall with a high, arching ceiling leading into an expansive living room. The walls were made with a wooden finish, and the floor in the living room held a very large rug.

Hazel absently removed her shoes near the entrance out of courtesy and stepped through the living room, reeling a little at all the high-class furniture. A staircase was just barely noticeable down another hallway, which led into a long kitchen with a cut-out through the wall so that sight into the living room was possible. A long bar with a marble surface made up the lower half of the kitchen window, almost making it seem like a serving station. Noah had a couple of hard wood stools along the bar.

"I hope it will work out for you," said Noah from behind her. Hazel nearly jumped. "What will work out?"

He gestured to his house. "This. I do have cable. There're enough spare rooms upstairs for you to choose from. Mine is the master at the far end of the hallway when you take a right. There're two bathrooms up there, too. Also a Jacuzzi if you're feeling adventurous."

The way Noah spoke about his house made it sound less than impressive, but Hazel couldn't have imagined anything better. She smiled reassuringly to him, clutching her purse tightly in reserved excitement.

"This is amazing, Noah. Why do you sound so worried?"

He opened his mouth to answer her, but then simply shrugged and smiled. "Perhaps once you settle in, I can show you the animals."

She returned the happy look. "I'd like that, I think."

Noah picked up Hazel's suitcase with ease. "I'll take this upstairs for you. You just let me know which room you would like."

She nodded and headed for the staircase, making her way up slowly as she admired the view of the house. A skylight above the stairs made the hardwood steps shine bright from natural light. She reached the top and stepped into the hall. To the left were three doors. Two of them were closed, but one was cracked open slightly.

The tile floor made Hazel guess it was probably a bathroom. She turned and walked down the right side of the hallway, pushing open the first door on the left. The room was washed in clear sunlight from a large window just across from the entrance. To the right was a full-size bed with crisp sheets. The forest green curtains and matching rug was calming and homey to Hazel.

"This room is nice," she said as she stepped into it, and then walked over to take a seat on the bed. It was very soft.

Noah raised his eyebrows, suitcase still hanging by one hand. "You don't want to look at the others and make a final judgment?"

She shrugged. "I like this one."

"Well, alright." He set down the luggage beside the bed, coming close enough to Hazel that she could smell his cologne. It was dark but sharp and woodsy like sandalwood. "I suppose you can always switch rooms later if you change your mind. I don't mind."

She nodded as she watched him straighten and head for the door. "I'll let you settle in, okay? I'll be downstairs."

"Hey, Noah?"

He paused by the door to look back at her. Hazel smiled to him. "Thanks for letting me come stay with you. Thanks for the idea, I suppose."

Noah grinned and nodded before walking out of the room, and she heard him stepping back down the staircase. With a small sigh, Hazel lifted her suitcase and set it on the bed, unzipping it open. She then drew in a gasp of shock.

"You're kidding me!" she exclaimed as she lifted up her laptop and searched the case for her clothes. She scattered her makeup case, toiletries, and two extra pairs of underwear onto the bed before dropping her face into her hands. She must have been in such a hurry to leave for the airport that morning that she forgot to pack the five shirts and three pairs of pants sitting on her bed at home.

Well, this was embarrassing. All she had was her work and the clothes on her back. She could wear these every day; they would wear out fast. It felt awfully awkward to go downstairs and tell Noah that she'd forgotten all of her clothes. What was she to do?

Hazel packed her things back into her suitcase and set it down next to the bed, sighing yet again. Noah was nice, the car ride had been pleasant, this house was gorgeous... but Hazel couldn't get over the setback this had caused.

"I'll just have to see what he says," she told herself before standing from the bed. She exited the room and walked downstairs, her stomach knotting some from the embarrassing inconvenience.

A pleasant smell wafted up the staircase from the kitchen. Frowning slightly with curiosity, Hazel touched her feet to the landing and stopped by the entryway leading into where Noah stood cooking. He had his side turned to her as he chopped vegetables on a stone cutting board. He noticed her, looking up.

"All settled in already?" he asked.

"Actually," Hazel started, "it looks like I forgot all my clothes."

Noah stopped what he was doing and set the knife down. "Really…all of them?"

She bit the inside of her cheek. "Yes..."

"Well, don't panic." He picked up his knife again. "It's too late to go into town tonight, but we can hit the stores tomorrow and pick up a couple outfits for you."

"I really hate the thought of being such a burden to you," said Hazel.

Noah scoffed with a smile and shook his head. "Taking you here was my treat, Hazel. And anything you want to do here on vacation is also my treat. Buying you clothes is really not a big deal."

"You're sure?"

"Of course." He sent her another grin as reassurance. "I'll have dinner ready in about a half hour."

She stepped out from the entrance to the kitchen and walked back into the living room, eyeing Noah's large TV. "What exactly did you do before you retired?" she asked.

She heard him dropping the sliced vegetables into a frying pan. They hissed and sizzled. "I invested in various sites around the web. Some big ones and plenty of little ones."

"That's all?"

"It's what made me money," he answered, his voice a bit muffled as he had his back turned toward the wall. "People came to me for help, I offered to help get them the funds they needed to start businesses, and in exchange, received my fair share of abundance."

"Sounds easy when you say it that way," she said with a thin grin.

"Nothing is ever easy," Noah answered as he stepped out from the kitchen. "I was just dedicated. Dedication is really the key."

He picked up a remote from the coffee table in the living room and switched on the TV. "Why not sit down?" he offered, patting the back of the couch he stood behind.

Hazel took a seat as she watched him search for a channel while rounding the furniture. He dropped down beside her, finally settling on a show, and then lifted his arm, placing it along the back of the couch and behind Hazel. She looked at him in surprise.

"Don't be shy," he urged with a smile, nodding to his side. "I don't bite."

Taking a deep breath, she scooted herself closer, and he rested his arm down around her shoulders. Noah's presence was warm and inviting, and although she'd been insecure about the situation before, her worries began to drift away. Noah was casual about meeting in person, so why did she need to keep feeling so self-conscious?

After several minutes, Noah stood to check on the food. He came back in to touch her shoulder. "Dinner's ready. Shall we move to the dining room?"

Hazel stood with slight anticipation. She hadn't seen the dining room yet. Noah led her back down the hall and past the staircase, turning and entering a bigger and more open room with a long wooden table in the center. The chairs were as ritzy as everything else. Noah had already set down plates and silverware, the serving dishes, and two glasses of wine beside two other glasses of water.

"Wow... Noah, you didn't have to get this fancy," Hazel admitted as she stepped into the room.

He tugged a chair back from one of the place settings for her. "What do you mean? You deserve it."

She sat down where he'd indicated. "Deserve what? I'm nothing special."

Noah took a seat at the end of the table, diagonal from her. "Nothing special? You're not only my guest but a friend, too, Hazel. I think you deserve a nice dinner with a guy whom you can see on the same level with." She blushed a little from his mention of their last online conversation.

Noah dished her plate as she took a small sip of the wine. She wasn't much of a drinker, but this kind wasn't too bitter like others she'd tried. She enjoyed it. The meal was also very good. Noah had created a stir fry with fresh ingredients. Hazel was used to frozen dinners, so this was a change that she approved of. She looked up and over at him after a moment or so to catch him staring at her, and she set her fork down.

"Sorry," he uttered as he looked back at his own meal. "I was admiring you at the wrong time."

"Admiring me?" Hazel wondered after swallowing her bite.

Noah frowned. "Am I not allowed to?"

"It's not that," she answered with a shake of her head. "I just find it really hard to believe that you find me in any way appealing."

"Oh Hazel." The softness of his voice stilled her heart some as he reached over to take her hand in his, leaning in to look her in the eyes. "I've found you appealing since the day we first spoke to each other online, and now that we've met in person, I find you even more so."

Shocked by Noah's sincerity, Hazel looked away before her eyes could well up.

"Did I say the wrong thing?" he asked.

"No, you didn't." She wiped at her eyes before looking back at him and forcing a strained smile. "That's very sweet of you."

Noah still saw the remnants of tears, and he didn't return the smile. Instead, he pushed back his chair and stood. "Stand up for a minute, Hazel." Still holding his hand, Hazel rose from her seat, and Noah tugged her close to him. He pulled her into a gentle embrace. His arms were strong and radiated such a heat, but she liked the warmth that he gave off. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head, keeping her against his chest as if to shield her from the world.

"Life has been rough on you, hasn't it?" he breathed.

She sighed and rested against him, letting loose her fears. "I guess you could say that."

Noah pulled back just a little to touch her chin with two of his fingers, tipping her head up until her eyes met his. And then in one swift motion, Noah touched his lips to hers in a tender kiss. Hazel melted against him from the sensation. She kissed back readily, and found her hands touching his face in urgency. She'd never felt this way toward anyone, and hadn't expected it to take place here, in the very brief amount of time that she'd spent with Noah, but she loved it and craved it. Noah prolonged the kiss, cradling her head in one hand with his other at the small of her back. She wrapped her arms around his waist, sinking in bliss as her head cleared completely.

Finally, Noah let go, but he continued to embrace her. "Is that better?"

Her face was hot with the desire for more delicate touches. Noah smiled at the vacancy in her eyes, and she became aware of how serene he'd made her feel with just a simple kiss. "Yes," she finally answered him.

"Are you still hungry?"

"Starved," she answered honestly, and he chuckled and let her sit back down.

As she continued to eat, they exchanged flirtatious looks from across the table. Hazel didn't think her red face would ever go back to normal. After dinner, Noah cleaned up for them and then met her in the hallway as she was about to go back upstairs. He caught her by the hand and pulled her into another embrace. Hazel allowed it, smiling apprehensively as he kissed her cheek.

"Retiring to bed already?" he wondered. "I was thinking perhaps we could cuddle on the couch again."

"That sounds better than sleep," she admitted.

He guided her away from the stairs and over to the sofa, where he sat down with her beside him, partially in his lap. She kept herself close to his body in a feeling of satisfaction, not really caring what was on the television.

"So I'm thinking we'll make a run to the clothing store in the morning. For now if you need something to sleep in, you can borrow one of my robes," Noah explained.

"That sounds fine," she answered absently, staring at the TV but not registering what was on it.

"Unless, of course, you'd rather sleep in my bed."

Hazel sat up straight in astonishment, looking him in the face.

"Is that a no?" he wondered.

"Well, yes. I mean it's a no…you're right," she answered him. "Are you....are you asking...?"

"I'm not asking for sex," said Noah blatantly. "I just thought maybe you would feel more secure with someone you know tonight rather than sleeping in a cold and unfamiliar bedroom by yourself."

Hazel had a feeling Noah just wanted her near him, and she really didn't mind. Although he was partially right about her not enjoying sleeping in an unfamiliar place, she felt like he had other reasons why he wanted her in his bed instead, and she wasn't entirely convinced that he wasn't asking for sex.

"It's a no, Noah," she replied slowly, "and for that comment, I'll keep tabs on you to make sure you behave."

Noah laughed at this. It was a deep and carefree sound. "Alright then. I didn't mean to offend you."

Once the show was over, Noah turned off the lights to the downstairs, locked the doors, and led Hazel back up to the second floor hallway. They walked down the right side until they reached his room, which he opened to let her in. His bed was a king size with a fur comforter draped over the foot of the mattress. It looked fit for royalty. Noah had his own bathroom off to the left, and there was a dresser to the right next to a walk-in closet.

He turned on a lamp beside the bed before walking to the closet to look through it. After a moment, he returned holding a satin teal night robe. She took it from him as he nodded his head to the hallway. "I suppose this is goodnight then."

She nodded back. "I suppose so."

He smiled to her and drew an arm around her waist, tugging her a bit closer to his side. She didn't mind. Although she didn't have any desire to sleep with him, Noah had been very kind.

Hazel left for her room. She closed the bedroom door, stripped to her undergarments, and then donned the robe, tying it off to the side. The fabric felt good against her skin. With one despondent look at the door, Hazel climbed into bed and closed her eyes.

# Chapter 3

His hands were warm, as were his kisses. Softly, he stroked her inner thigh, moving upward to her hips, and then her breasts. She sighed contentedly as he brushed his lips over her supple skin. His body was so hard, yet hers was so soft. They meshed together perfectly.

Hazel gazed into the eyes of Noah, listening to their breath in the silence around them. His fingers curled back around her neck as he drew her in for another kiss, then spread her legs apart to press his hips against hers, urging her to feel his masculinity. There was only a thin sheet keeping the two of them apart, and Hazel drew in a fast breath from the feeling of his hardness.

"Noah... I was wrong to deny you," she sighed as his fingers met the tender areas of her skin again.

"Hush," he said, his voice silken. He trailed kisses down her throat, stopping to trace a finger over her exposed nipples. She watched him as he made his way down her body, tugging off the sheet from in between them so that his lips could finally meet her delicate, feminine heat.

She fluttered her eyes in ecstasy from the feeling of his mouth. Her legs closed about his shoulders as she twisted a little, and he lifted himself up from her to stroke her womanhood with a middle finger. She felt herself growing moist from his attention, and she gazed at him as he knelt over her body, reaching to guide his member into her sheath.

Hazel's eyes snapped open, and she gasped. She felt her face, realizing her cheeks were flushed enough to radiate heat. That... had been all a dream? She shifted in the sheets uncomfortably, her center pulsing with need. She did find Noah very attractive, but she hadn't imagined she'd dream about him so swiftly like that, and so vividly. What was she going to do when she saw him? Obviously she couldn't tell him about something that embarrassing.

Hazel stood from the bed with a shaky exhale, brushing out the wrinkles from her borrowed robe. She stepped out of the room, smelling more cooking from downstairs. As her feet touched the landing, Noah looked up from cleaning a couple fancy dishes in the sink. He smiled, and Hazel bit her lip to try and avoid thinking about the dream she'd just woken up from.

"Did you sleep okay?" he asked. Hazel saw that a plate of eggs, bacon, and toast rested along the bar.

"Yes, I did." She pointed to the plate. "Is that for me?"

He nodded. "I hope you don't mind. I was up early to take care of some of the animals, so I already had my breakfast. But after the day you had yesterday, I figured you'd need something hearty this morning."

She sat down on one of the stools and drew the plate a little closer to her. "Thank you, Noah. That's very sweet."

He simply smiled again and continued washing his dishes. After a few minutes, he looked at her again. "We'll go into town today to get you some clothing once you're done having breakfast."

"Alright. When do I get to see your zoo?" Hazel questioned.

"We can do that a little later today when we get back from town."

Hazel finished her meal; glad to have her head cleared some from the awkward dream from that morning. After dressing back into her travel clothing from yesterday, Hazel and Noah left the lavish house to step back into his expansive garage. After picking out another flashy car, Noah opened the door for her and let her climb in before getting in himself. The ride to town seemed shorter than Hazel remembered from the day before, but it could have been that the exhilarating rush she'd experienced from the ride was not present this time.

Noah parked beside a small clothing store along the side of the street once in town and turned the car off. He stepped out, and so did Hazel, following him into the building. She balked upon entering as Noah stepped past some racks of clothing. He glanced back at her.

"What's the matter?"

Hazel stared at the clothes, realizing it was a plus size store. "Noah," she started. "This is one of my favorite stores."

His frowning face lit up some as he turned to fully face her. "You should remember, Hazel, that I know you. We talk all the time online, and you tell me a lot." He tapped his temple with one finger, a half grin turning his mouth upward. "I remember these things."

She giggled a little. "That was an awful long time ago when I told you about my favorite places to shop."

He walked closer to her and took her hand, giving her a reassuring smile. "This is where beautiful women such as yourself shop, so why wouldn't I take you here? Come on, let's go look at some things."

She walked with him gratefully, picking out some modest clothing that didn't seem so high up in the price range. When Noah noticed a trend in her picks, he took the clothes and placed them back on the racks.

"What are you doing?" she wondered.

"Finding you things that you'll actually like," he said with a smirk and replaced her cheap outfits for the more expensive brands.

"Noah, I don't want to be a bother…"

"You're not a bother, Hazel. How many times do I need to tell you?" he laughed.

Pressing a hand to her back, Noah urged her to walk toward the dressing rooms. "Maybe you'll reconsider when you have them on."

"Noah..."

Noah's naturally calm expression didn't change. "Clothes are coming home with us, Hazel, and since I'm paying for them, why should you worry?"

Still a little startled, she took the clothes from him and stepped into one of the changing stalls, only to find herself then surprised that all of the outfits Noah had picked for her fit well and looked extremely flattering on her. She tightened her mouth to hold back a grin as she looked her figure up and down.

"Okay," she started after a minute or so before trying to pull off a blouse she'd tried on. "You win, Noah. Everything looks good and fits great."

She heard him chuckle on the other side of the door. "And you were doubting me."

"Although...this is kind of humiliating, but I can't get this blouse off."

"Well, come out here."

Hazel opened the door after straightening her clothes and showed him the outfit. "There's a tie in the back I can't reach."

Noah turned her around and took hold of it, tugging it from the knot.

"Thanks, Noah…" Hazel gasped as Noah pushed her forward back into the dressing room, along with himself, and shut the door. "What are you doing?" she demanded before he pressed a finger to his lips and then winked.

"Why not show me those other outfits you tried on?"

At first Hazel felt stunned by his lascivious nature, but then slightly flattered. The idea of showing off in front of this stunningly attractive man filled her with a type of confidence she'd never had before.

"We really shouldn't do this," she uttered as he came closer, running his hands up her arms.

He kept a dark yet serene expression as he pressed a kiss to her throat, and then to her own lips. The action left her breathless and recalling the dream from last night, and she couldn't help but press herself against him more in an effort to obtain the same feeling she'd had from the reverie. Noah's hand brushed across her hemline and stroked her skin before tugging the top up and over her head. His fingers traced along the back of her bra straps before he unhooked them and let the undergarment drop to the floor, exposing Hazel for Noah's hungry eyes to feast. He cupped one of her breasts to feel her, and Hazel couldn't believe that allowed him to do this.

But there was something about Noah that just caused Hazel's center to pang with want. She craved his touch, and she let him feel her, his expression serious as he gazed at into her eyes.

"Noah..." Hazel started, but she wasn't quite sure what to say to him. She opened her mouth, but he silenced her with another kiss before pushing her over to a small bench in the changing room where she'd left her street clothes. His lips brushed along her throat again, then moved to her nipple, and she held in a gasp as the rising warmth of desire coursed through her body. She gripped onto him as he enjoyed her, sucking gently.

Noah's hands moved upward to tug a scarf out from some loops in one of the blouses that Hazel had tried on. He took hold of her wrists, wrapping the cloth around them, and then tied the end of the scarf to one of the hooks above their heads. Hazel wanted to speak, but she wasn't sure what to say. He kissed her again, and then worked his pants down past his hips. Her eyes widened in surprise as he slipped his hand beneath his underclothes to touch himself in front of her. Hazel jerked at her restraints in utter amazement.

"I've fantasized about what I've wanted to do to you for some time now," he whispered.

"Noah," was all that Hazel could say.

Noah drew out his manhood from his clothing, and Hazel watched him as he knelt over her, resting it close to her breasts. She gasped from the sight, and he lifted himself up higher to press his tip to her lips. She'd never taken a man into her mouth before, and she didn't know if she would like it, but she parted her lips, and Noah pressed himself inside.

She closed her mouth around his size and sucked on him almost in the same manner as he had her nipple, paying close attention to his shaft head. Noah's hand tangled in her hair as he pushed her closer to his hips, and his length slipped down her throat. At first she choked, but he held her in place and eased himself back out, then in again. She fell into a rhythm.

His faint groans and swift-working hips filled Hazel with the relaxing sense that she was skilled enough to pleasure him. She tightened her lips over his skin and tugged where it was necessary, then swallowed when he pushed in deep.

Noah removed his shaft from her mouth after a time and transferred his hand to it before sitting down beside her and brushing his free hand underneath her own clothes. His fingers cupped her heat, and her breath grew hot and rushed with anticipation.

"I'll bet I can make you come before we leave here," Noah uttered with a dark and challenging glance of his eyes.

Hazel bit her lip to keep from moaning as his fingers slipped into her opening with ease. She had been wet for him since he'd pulled her into the dressing room. His thumb rubbed against her sweetest spots, and she writhed against the bench, still tied up from the scarf. Her head fuzzed with pleasure as she watched him work his other hand across his member.

The very sight swelled Hazel's body with more bliss, and she squirmed harder, arching her hips into his grip. His fingers clutched at her with a little more force, and soon the ecstasy of the moment seemed too much. She arched more severely against his palm, climaxing with a gasp. Noah removed his fingers slowly, then untied her wrists and pulled her into his lap. She closed her arms around his ribs and kissed his neck.

"Noah, I have no words," she breathed.

He rubbed her back softly as he fixed his pants. "That's okay, Hazel. I think we are both thinking the same thing."

She looked up at him. "That we both really like each other?"

"Of course." He kissed her gently before easing her off his lap to clean up the clothes. "We should probably step out of here before the employees think we're up to some mischief."

Once Hazel was back in Noah's car, her legs crowded with shopping bags, she leaned against Noah's side with a happy sigh. Noah kept a hand on her thigh, so she held it nearly the entire ride back to the house.

# Chapter 4

Hazel stepped out into the sun two hours later, smiling faintly. Noah hooked an arm around her waist as he walked her through the front entrance leading into the zoo.

"What kinds of animals do you have here?" she asked as she peered around at the visitor's center and distant structures.

"Just some of the many various animals here in the woods. It's a wildlife habitat as much as it is a zoo," said Noah. "Bighorn sheep, pronghorns, mountain lions, gray wolves..."

"Huh. Any bears?"

Noah smirked at this, which confused Hazel a bit. He kept his eyes ahead of him as he led her toward the exhibits. "No, no bears."

"Oh. How come?"

He shrugged. "I'm just not interested in owning them."

Hazel frowned, trying to work out Noah's sudden aversion to the subject, but figured it was nothing major.

They stopped outside an avian cage holding two white-faced barn owls perched on branches high above the two onlookers. The birds turned their heads Hazel's and Noah's way as they approached.

"Oh, they're gorgeous," Hazel crooned.

"Aren't they?" came a new voice.

The two of them turned to the left to see a thin woman with long blond hair pulled back with a tie step toward them. She wore casual clothing, but she had a nametag on that read *Priscilla*.

"I take care of all of the bird exhibits for Noah. You must be Hazel." She offered to shake Hazel's hand, and so she did.

"Yes," said Hazel. "How did you know?"

Priscilla glanced at Noah for a moment and then smiled almost too sweetly. "Noah talks often about his mysteriously adorable online friend."

"'Mysteriously adorable?'" Hazel repeated in surprise, looking at the man beside her.

He smiled hesitantly. "I may have said that once or twice."

She nudged him playfully, and Priscilla's smile dropped from her eyes.

"Noah, may I show Hazel around the zoo? I think Deacon wanted to talk to you about the lion exhibit anyway," said Priscilla.

Noah paused, and then nodded lightly. "I don't see why not. Might be good for you two to get to know each other anyway, right? Do you mind, Hazel?"

She shook her head. "Go do what you have to, Noah. I'll be fine."

As she watched the man head in a different direction, Priscilla walked Hazel down past the bird cages.

"Look, Hazel, you seem like you're a great person, but I know what you're trying to do, and I'm going to tell you right now that it's not going to work out," said Priscilla as they made it onto a bridge arching over a green pond. A couple ducks floated lazily around down below.

"What do you mean?" Hazel wondered as she searched Priscilla's pretty face, trying to decipher the woman's motives.

"Well it's pretty obvious that you want to get with Noah," she answered casually.

"What?"

"And I'm just letting you know now that it's not going to happen," Priscilla continued. "Noah isn't into..." She searched Hazel's figure up and down, "...bigger girls."

Hazel then scowled, taking a small step back and away from Priscilla's biting stare. "I don't believe that for one moment. And how am I supposed to know you're not just saying this because you like him as well?"

"Oh, honey, this has nothing to do with me," Priscilla nearly laughed, a disdainful grin curling the edges of her lips. "Noah is a very physical man, and even if he's been intimate with you already, it's just because he's trying to be nice."

"You're lying."

Priscilla placed a hand to her heart as if she were hurt by the statement. "Lying? Absolutely not! I'm just telling you this ahead of time so you don't get hurt. But don't believe me if you don't want to. I just thought I would tell you upfront."

Hazel narrowed her eyes. "Yeah... Whatever."

That didn't sound like the Noah she knew, but then again, she *had* only known him as an online friend until yesterday. How was she to know what he did in his daily life when he wasn't sitting at the computer? He talked about friends and even female friends in the past with her. Did this mean that she really was just to be used like a pair of socks and then thrown into some corner of a room, discarded for who knew how long?

No way. Priscilla was clearly eager to turn any female threat away from Noah. Hazel could easily read it in the woman's eyes.

Priscilla sighed. "Okay, it's clear I'm not getting through to you. The only other thing I can suggest is to really win his heart so he doesn't just use you in the end."

"What are you talking about?" Hazel wondered.

"This zoo is Noah's pride and joy. And it's actually rather expansive. The exhibits aren't limited to these grounds. Noah actually has a butterfly house just about a mile down the road from here. If you really want to impress him, I'd suggest going to go check it out without him knowing. Make it a surprise."

"A surprise that I visited his butterflies?"

She nodded, already tugging Hazel toward the exit of the zoo. "I'll show you to it. I'm sure he'd be happy to know that you find an interest in his passion."

Puzzled but deciding to go along with it, Hazel let Priscilla pull her out of the gates leading into Noah's property

With a flurry of rising emotions and eyelids brimmed with moisture, Hazel whirled from Priscilla and left for the exit of the zoo. They walked down the dirt road past the perimeter of the house on the hill.

"How far of a walk is it?" Hazel asked.

"It's a long way. About a mile, and there's some hiking through the forest, but it's fairly easy to find. And I'll help you there," said Priscilla.

The two of them headed down the dirt road, continuing onward without pause. It wasn't until Hazel's feet touched grass, reaching a dead end of the road, that Priscilla pulled out a phone from her pocket to check the time.

"Oh, shoot," she started, glancing up at Hazel with a look of worry. "I forgot I have to check on the eagles around this time."

"What about the butterfly house?" Hazel wondered.

Priscilla waved a hand toward her to indicate for Hazel to keep walking. "Just continue on through the trees. You'll see it in no time. I really have to run back, though, okay? See you later."

Without waiting for an answer from Hazel, Priscilla turned and jogged back toward Noah's property.

Hazel waited until Priscilla disappeared behind a few more trees before turning back and trudging past the valley clearing. She walked in a straight line through the collecting trees. The forest grew thicker as she navigated, but she continued to keep her eyes to the woodlands, looking for any sign of an exhibit.

Why would Noah treat her so well if he just wanted to play around? It didn't make sense to her. Was it because he was just a spoiled, rich man with too much time on his hands? Hazel paused her thought process to let it linger on one idea. What if...Priscilla was actually Noah's girlfriend?

She let her feet continue walking after realizing that she'd stopped to reel at the thought. No, that didn't sound right. If Noah had a girlfriend, he would have told Hazel before advancing on her...wouldn't he have?

Before Hazel knew it, she'd lost track of how far she'd gone into the woods. She looked back where she'd walked, but there was no path, and the forest was dark. She sighed and turned around, heading back the way she had come. There was no butterfly house. Priscilla had probably just wanted to waste Hazel's time and get her away from the property.

Within ten minutes, however, Hazel could have sworn that she would have reached the clearing again. This wasn't the case. She was lost, and she had no idea how to get back to Noah's house.

Distraught and bewildered, she turned back around to see if she could find the place where she'd stopped to go back in the first place. A couple more minutes of walking only confused her more, and it wasn't until she heard a snarl that she stopped her frantic thoughts to focus on the noise instead.

Just barely visible through the trees ahead was a brown and shaggy shape. Hazel took a couple steps back, but the beast had already seen her. As it nudged its way through the bramble and shrubbery, Hazel saw that it was a large grizzly. Terrified, she backed up more, unsure if she should run or play dead. She'd never studied up on how to confront a bear before. What was she to do?

The bear advanced toward her, shaking its massive head and parting its jaws in an intimidating stance. Hazel panicked and turned, racing in the opposite direction. She heard the beast bounding through the brush after her, and Hazel's foot caught on a fallen branch.

She dropped. Knowing she didn't have time to scramble up and continue running, she stayed where she was, only to see another grizzly dashing for her in the opposite direction, bigger and more menacing looking than the first. It carried a duffle bag, the strap around its neck. She wailed into the grass in terror, but the giant bear only raced past her to slam into the first. Hazel twisted to watch, eyes wide in shock, as the new bear rose up on its hind legs, roaring at the first. The other turned tail and rushed back into the trees.

Hazel dragged herself up into a wobbly stand and turned to run away.

"Hazel, wait."

Alarmed by Noah's voice, she turned back toward the grizzly, only to see that there was no longer a bear there. Instead it was Noah himself, standing in the nude. He had the duffle bag hanging from his neck, which he pulled over his head and dropped to the ground, unzipping it and pulling out clothing.

"What is going on?" Hazel nearly cried. "Noah? What happened?"

Noah's expression didn't change as he tugged on a pair of pants. "You saw what happened, Hazel, and your eyes weren't deceiving you. I'm a bear." His voice was breathless and resigned.

"A bear…how?"

He ignored her, stepping closer and pulling her into his arms. She was quick to push away.

"No, Noah. I don't understand."

His look turned hard. "Priscilla took you into the woods to get you lost or even hurt. She's been trying to get with me for a year now, and she's jealous that I've found someone special. I can't believe the dirty trick she's pulled this time."

"How can I trust you?" Hazel demanded, her voice still shrill with frenzy. "You're a bear!"

Noah said no more, and instead pulled her back in for a firm kiss.

"I live in the forest because I'm a werebear, yes, but this doesn't change anything. It was difficult for me to live the life of a human in the city, so I retired and moved. I've searched and searched for a girl to fall in love with, and I've found one, Hazel. And that girl is you."

As terrified as Hazel still was, Noah's voice was soft and gentle, like a caress across her skin. She stayed in his arms, despite not knowing what to do or say.

"Have some faith in me," Noah urged. "I love you, and I want there to be something special between us. What about you?"

Hazel tightened her face with emotion, and she held onto him. "I don't know what to think right now. I do want something special between us, but I'm just so..." She shook her head.

"That's your problem," Noah whispered. "You're still thinking." He kissed her once more, and then pushed her back against a nearby tree, working his hands across her body.

She ached for his touch, and she didn't even know why, but her body wanted more and more of it. She readied herself for Noah's attention as his fingers brushed against visible skin, and his hips pressed firmly against her own. Hazel felt the urgency between them. She worked her pants down to her ankles, and Noah kicked them out of the way.

"What if the bear comes back?" she started, but Noah hushed her.

"Shh, she won't come back. I scared her away for good. Now quiet and let me take you, Hazel."

Startled by the passion in his voice, Hazel pressed herself closer to the tree as Noah undid his own jeans and yanked them down low enough for his proud erection to spring forth. He swept his hand over her moistening center, slickening his tip with the nectar, and then lifted one of Hazel's legs.

Noah locked his lips with hers once more, keeping his hand to the back of her neck, and the head of his manhood slipped upward, entering her sheath. She pulled away from his lips to let out a moan toward the tree tops. She'd craved this for such a long time, and now Noah gave it to her. In a few quick thrusts, his tool slid deeper up inside her, and she gripped onto him in desperation.

"Noah!" she cried as he lifted her leg higher to hook around his waist.

He growled against her throat as he worked his hips, thrusting in short, powerful motions. The desire for Noah's attention only burned within her as he removed his shaft to turn her to face the tree instead. His hands found her hips, and he bent her downward until he could reach her opening with his rod again, covering her like a true animal of the forest, wild abandon in every deep and rhythmic thrust.

Hazel felt a climax building inside her from his thick member's constant attention. Her body tightened around him as she cried out through the trees, releasing the tension in a deep, hard orgasm. Noah reached his peak nearly at the same moment, and his seed filled her inner flower with a warmth she'd never thought she would experience before.

As Noah removed himself, he rested down in the grass and pulled her into his arms, holding her tenderly. Emotion brimmed on the edges of Hazel's eyes as she clutched at him.

"Noah, I'm scared," she admitted after she was able to control the sobs threatening to hitch her breath. "I'm lost, a bear almost attacked me, and now my only comfort is another bear."

Noah kissed her head. "Do you think I'm going to attack you after what I just did, Hazel?" She paused before shaking her head.

He stroked her cheek and brought her head up so she could look him in the eyes. "I love you. I told you this, and you can trust me. Yes, you are lost, but I will help you out of here. I know these woods. So stay by me, Hazel, and I will be your protector. I'll show you safety."

Hazel dropped her head and hugged him close. "For now, Noah, let's just remain here for a little bit. I feel so safe in your arms."

Noah stroked her softly, and she heard the reassuring smile in his words. "You are safe, Hazel. As long as I hold you, you will stay safe."

After the longtime of feeling unsure whether or not to fully trust Noah…from online friend to physical lover... Hazel finally believed that what Noah said was genuine. He was her safety, and she loved him in return.

# PART TWO

# Chapter 5

Hazel woke up in the arms of a bear. Well, he wasn't really a bear... Not all the time at least. Noah Blackburn sat with his back against a tree, holding Hazel in his lap. He was awake.

"What time is it?" Hazel wondered; sleep still lingering in her eyes as she blinked them awake.

"It's getting late. Probably around eight or nine o'clock," Noah replied quietly. "You've only been asleep a short while."

She frowned. "When did I fall asleep?"

"Shortly after we..." He paused and smiled, then changed his sentence. "Shortly after that she-bear tried attacking you."

Hazel blushed when she recalled what had happened. That was right. Noah's zoo employee Priscilla had led her into the forest probably hoping that she would get lost, and then Hazel had been attacked by a big grizzly. Noah charged in to save her, as a bear himself in a miraculous turn of events, and he'd calmed her down by giving her an experience unlike any other.

Noah leaned down to kiss her gently, and she sighed against his lips. "Don't worry," he breathed. "I'll get you out of these woods and back to the house safely. I know how to navigate these parts."

Hazel sat up slowly and took a look around. To her, every direction looked the same. She knew she would have to rely on Noah, and she felt uncomfortable with herself when she thought about getting lost in the first place.

"Are these woods really dangerous? I mean aside from bears?" she asked him.

Noah's gaze glanced through the trees for a second. "They can be if you don't know where you're going. I'm worried, though," he said. "I'm certain that she-bear came from a part of the woods that I don't affiliate with, and if that's the case, we need to leave here as soon as we can. Are you okay to walk?"

Hazel blushed even more. She still felt physically sensitive in some areas from the passionate pursuit they'd had earlier. "I think I'm okay, yeah."

Noah smiled as she stood, and he rose to his feet as well. He took one look to the left, then to the right.

"I thought you said you knew how to get home," Hazel pointed out.

"I do," he confirmed, and then he pointed with one finger to his right. "We need to head this way. There's no trail, though, so we're going to have to be careful not to get off track."

Hazel followed by Noah closely. He kept a hand on her shoulders as he walked her through the bramble. The sounds of the forest surrounded them. Hazel heard birds of all kinds, and every once in a while, an animal skittered through the brush and out of sight.

"Why are you a bear?" Hazel asked Noah after a few minutes of walking.

Noah chuckled at this. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean normally there are bears and there are people. There aren't bear people," Hazel argued.

Noah fully laughed, pulling her a little closer to his side. "There's a lot you don't know about, Hazel. Many of the bears in this forest are werebears. It's hard for us to integrate ourselves into human life, which is why I moved into the mountains to have a quiet life."

"I don't understand how it works," said Hazel. "I mean... how you... change."

Noah stopped Hazel there for a moment and turned her to face him. His eyes were smoky. "Sometimes things just are, Hazel. Much like how we came across each other. It just happened one day online and now look where we are?"

Hazel smiled faintly and rested her body against his torso, letting him wrap his arms around her. He kissed her, and she brushed her fingers along his bare abs, enjoying the feeling of his defined muscles and perfect shape.

Noah brushed kisses down along her neck and shoulder, pushing her up against a wide tree. Hazel felt tingling rise in her stomach from the memories Noah's heated affection.

"Thinking about something, Hazel?" Noah breathed in her ear, his voice silken.

She smiled a little. "Perhaps."

He slipped his fingers under the hem of her pants and popped open the button before tugging down the zipper. His hand cupped her warmth easily, and she closed her eyes to the feeling.

"Stroke me, Noah. Please," she begged, and Noah held her against his body and ran his fingers in between the soft folds of Hazel's center. She felt moist for him already, and Noah seemed just as eager to pleasure her.

He pulled Hazel's bottoms down to the middle of her thighs and then knelt in the grass and forest debris, pressing his lips to her heat. Hazel gasped as she combed her fingers into his hair, holding his head against her hips. Noah's strokes of his tongue and his kisses were skilled as he suckled her gently.

Hazel opened herself wider by spreading her legs as much as her pants would allow, and Noah found her sweet spot. The sensation of his passionate desire for her body relaxed her, and made her recall just everything she liked about Noah.

It was reeling to think that in just two days, Hazel had traveled to the mountains near Aspen, Colorado to meet an online friend for the first time. And the next day, had experienced so much more than she could ever have imagined. Noah’s drive to please Hazel was what held her up, and she didn’t want that to end.

He straightened while kissing up her abdomen and to her breasts, and then placed his fingers between her legs to touch her evenly. Hazel clung to him.

"I enjoy pleasing you," he whispered with an impish smirk as he quickened the motions of his fingers. She gasped in delight. Noah undid his pants with one fluid motion. He inched down her pants to her ankles and then lifted her thigh, resting her slowly over the erect point that he’d let out into the open.

She was still so very sore, but she only winced once, and afterwards enjoyed every moment of it. Noah’s shaft stroked back and forth with an ease and fluidity that only helped sooth Hazel. She wrapped her arms around his waist and moaned softly.

“Oh Noah,” she gasped as he rocked his hips. She wasn’t sure what else to say, and so she only moaned more, eyes fluttering with bliss from his sex. Noah quickened his pace some, keeping his firm hold on her body. As Hazel’s mind quieted to enjoy the pleasure, Noah gritted his teeth with a stern expression and groaned once, filling her with his seed.

Hazel dropped against him as he fixed her pants. She sighed contentedly and pressed herself closer. Despite all of the crazy things happening around her, Noah knew how to help her relax, and she loved his affection and attention.

“How do you feel now?” Noah asked her as he helped her step over shrubs and continue onward.

Hazel’s face lit up, and she smiled sheepishly. “Better for sure.”

“We’ll have to make a bit of a detour,” said Noah as he urged her to walk to the right with him. “I’m not entirely sure how you managed to get yourself clear past were bear territory, but the safest way home will be to go down by the river and follow it back to the house.”

“Whatever you think is best, Noah,” said Hazel. She really didn’t care. As long as she was able to spend plenty of time by his side, Hazel didn’t mind where they were or how long they were out. She’d begun to get hungry, however, and she wondered just exactly how much time it would take to get home.

The sun had set some time ago, so she hoped that the darkness of the woods wouldn’t hinder their traveling any. Noah seemed confident, but Hazel had never been in the woods when it was this dark. It was eerie, and she thought she heard the snapping of branches and scuffling steps of paws every minute or so.

“Just keep by me, and you should be fine,” he reassured.

Within just a few minutes, Hazel thought she heard the rushing of water. Another minute later, and she saw that she’d been right. Noah paused by a riverside and waited for her to stop beside him. The rushing current glinted from the moonlight high above them, not normally very visible under the trees. The water looked black from the night sky, but the frequent glimmer of reflection across the liquid mimicked the stars.

“So explain the werebears to me,” Hazel insisted as Noah continued down the riverbank. She rushed to catch up to him.

“Explain what, exactly?” he wondered.

“The whole thing. I mean…where did you originate from? How did you come to be? You personally? Do you have family? What was your childhood like? If we’re going to date, I should know these things.”

Noah laughed at this, and he hooked an arm around her waist as he walked. “How about we focus on one at a time? Werebears have always been around. I don’t know a whole lot about our history, but we live in clans. Well, most of us. I don’t anymore. I was outcast some time ago due to my affiliation with too much human life. I’d wanted to blend in with human society, and they didn’t like that idea. Werebears are cautious and dangerous creatures.”

“What made you love human society so much?” she wondered.

Noah shrugged with one shoulder. “I suppose structured life just fascinated me. I’d always wanted to do something more than just hunt fish every day, though I have been rather hungry to start a family. It always seemed so neat that humans could do so much without the worry of turning into massive beasts every once in a while.”

Hazel sighed and smiled. “I suppose changing into a bear wouldn’t be the most convenient talent.”

He smiled a bit and shook his head. “No, at least not in the city. Up here in the woods is fine.”

“Were you born that way?” Hazel asked as she took his hand in hers.

He nodded this time. “Most of us are.”

“Did you used to live in one of these clans in the mountains?”

“Actually,” Noah began with a grim look, “the one we’re trying to avoid right now is my home clan.”

Hazel frowned. “Why would you build your home so close to a place that ostracized you?”

Noah sighed. It was the first time she’d ever heard resignation in his tone. “They may have ostracized me, but I still care about them. I live close to let them know I still want to be nearby, even if they don’t recognize me as a family member anymore.”

“That’s sad,” she uttered, and then she gasped as her foot tripped over a rock. Noah tried catching her, but Hazel tipped forward too far and dropped, landing in the icy water of the river.

The river itself was not deep, but it was certainly chilling, and the river rocks hurt. She scrambled to get out of the cold liquid as Noah helped her up.

“You’re soaking,” he mentioned as she shivered.

“That was dumb of me,” said Hazel. “I should have looked where I was stepping.”

“You didn’t know.” Noah gripped the hem of her shirt and tugged it over her head. “Let’s get these wet clothes off you to let them dry. I have some extra clothes in my duffle bag I brought.”

Hazel allowed him, and she stripped off her pants and shoes as well. She shivered as Noah unzipped his bag and searched through what he brought. After a moment, he pulled out a t-shirt and fitted it over her head. She pulled her arms through the sleeves.

“No pants?” she asked in a hopeful manner, shivering a little from the cold dampness.

Noah bit the side of his cheek and shook his head. “Sorry. I’m wearing the only pair I brought. But we need to let these clothes dry, which means we might be spending the night here.”

“What?” Hazel wondered in shock. “But it’ll take twice as long to get home then.”

He shrugged a second time while taking Hazel’s wet clothes and draping them over some larger rocks beside the river. “Can’t be helped. I brought a blanket. We can wrap up tightly tonight and wait out the night together.”

# Chapter 6

Though she felt slightly irritated at the delay, Hazel realized Noah’s insistence that they wait only meant he wanted to spend more time with her alone. Her cheeks flushed with heat as she reflected on his intense affections earlier. Though she never pictured herself being with anyone capable of such intense passion, here she was alone in the woods with a man who wanted nothing more than to love her.

“Hazel…?” Noah’s voice brought her back to the present. Glancing at him, she noticed he’d spread out the blanket and was kneeling on it. She shook her head.

“Sorry, just feeling a little spacey.”

His smile was indulgent. “You look beautiful when you’re deep in thought.”

Again her cheeks flared crimson, and she was glad for the darkness to hide the rush of blood. Noah patted the place next to him on the blanket, and she sat down beside him, tucking his shirt in as much as she could around herself. His tender hands stopped her.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

She felt a little surprised by his question. “I’m cold, Noah. I just took an unintentionally freezing bath.”

His voice was low, and the slight growl in it sent shivers down her spine. “Then let me warm you.”

Her teeth closed over her lower lip as Noah tugged at the bottom of his shirt, bringing it just above her breasts. “I want you to do something for me, Hazel.”

Her nipples began to harden in the cool night air. “And what’s that, Noah?”

“Trust me.”

With that statement he yanked his shirt up over her head, but stopped just short of pulling it off her arms, leaving her wrists trapped. Nudging her onto her back, he kept firm hold of the shirt, snaring her arms up above her head and leaving her helpless underneath his hungry, predatory gaze. She gasped a little.

“Noah, what are you--”

He placed a finger to his lips. “Trust me,” he repeated. “You see the stars above us?”

She nodded, unsure of where he was going with this.

“I’m going to send you to them.” With his free hand, Noah delved between her legs, his fingertips seeking out and teasing her clit. With a soft moan Hazel gave herself to his skilled fingers, her thighs opening up willingly to his exploration.

He pressed a soft kiss to her throat. “You are so beautiful like this, Hazel. There is no sight I love more than seeing you helpless beneath me.”

Her teeth sank into her lip once more as she bit back an aroused moan at his words. She couldn’t help but squirm a little, despite not being able to move her hands out of his grip. Noah’s fingers delved deeper, to where her center was leaking nectar. He swiped one of his fingers across her opening, bringing it to his lips and making sure she was watching as his tongue swiped the glistening juice from his finger. Hazel’s eyes widened as she watched him, her hips squirming involuntarily with desire.

He smirked a little before moving his fingers back down. “I love how wet you get for me, Hazel.” His skilled digits delved into her opening, teasing her, touching her lightly before pulling away. Of their own accord her hips began responding to his teasing, bucking slightly.

“N-Noah…” She moaned his name.

“Yes Hazel?”

She could barely force the words out past the haze of desire clouding her mind. “I…I want you inside me, Noah, please.”

His smile was wicked. “All in good time, Hazel.” He shocked a groan out of her as he slipped four fingers inside her. Though she’d expected pain from his constant, insatiable lovemaking, there was only relaxing pleasure. She sank back and allowed Noah to continue teasing her opening, her hands struggling a little still against the frustrating confines of the t-shirt he’d wrapped so cleverly around her wrists.

At last she heard the hiss of his zipper being pulled down, and Hazel watched as the moonlight shone down just behind Noah’s head, wreathing him in an ethereal glow. In this setting it was so simple to imagine him as an otherworldly being, someone whose world she might never completely understand, but also someone that she wanted to be with badly.

His shaft curled proudly, arcing back toward his stomach. Her fingertips ached to caress it, and she strained a little against her bonds, but his grip on the shirt tightened and he shook his head. “No struggling, sweet Hazel.”

A whine nearly escaped her at his torture continued. He knelt between her legs, stroking the tip of his shaft along her slit. His head tossed back, and a low snarl emitted from deep in his throat. “You’re so ready for me, you beautiful woman.”

“Then do it, Noah!” Her voice was thick with pent up desire and frustration.

A corner of his lips quirked up in a smile. “So demanding, Hazel… could you really want me that badly?”

“Yes!” The word was a strangled whine.

He leaned over her, pressing a firm kiss to her lips. “You have no idea what you’re doing to me, wanting me that badly, Hazel.” And with a firm thrust of his hips, he was inside her. As Noah’s thick member filled her aching cavity, Hazel felt her entire body relax against the soft blanket. Though the ground was hard and stony, she felt as if she were resting on luxurious silk cushions.

Noah kept her hands trapped all during his lovemaking, and though she was frustrated at not being able to touch him, the gesture somehow drove her to new heights of pleasure. Something about the feeling of being trapped beneath this commanding man spoke to her deepest desires, and she loved the feeling of being subjected to his whims.

She gasped and moaned in turns, as his lips latched onto one of her nipples, tugging at it ever so slightly with his teeth. The small shocks went straight to her groin, and she felt herself convulse around him. Noah growled, pulling himself out briefly. She felt the loss of him inside her like a knife.

“Noah--”

“Not yet, Hazel. I don’t want to come inside you yet. I said I’m going to send you to the stars, and I intend to do that. Turn around for me.”

Nervously she did as she was told, lying on her front on the blanket, cushioning her cheek on the upper arm that Noah still held captive in the shirt. Her entire stomach was tight with anticipation, and her hands were clenched. Noah’s warm hand caressed her backside, occasionally pinching skin just enough to cause a twinge. His lips smoothed over the pinches, soothing and sweet, as he guided his shaft back inside her.

The feeling was exotic and new to Hazel, and her whole body shuddered. “Oh Noah…” her voice was a breathy moan. His shaft filled her in a new way, stroking her sweet spot with consistent, torturous regularity. Her moans drowned out the sound of running water from the river not too far from them. This new sensation drove her straight to the brink as Noah picked up the pace, and she couldn’t help the shout of pleasure as the first orgasm tore through her. Her entire body clenched for a brief moment, then relaxed.

Noah’s voice cut through her haze. “We’re not done yet.”

Her eyes almost rolled back. Not done? The man was insatiable! Yet as his shaft continued to stroke her sweet place, inexplicably she felt pleasure building again. His short, harsh breaths mingled with her soft, sweet moans to create a symphony of lovemaking that filled the entire clearing. He leaned protectively over her, his lips tracing along her spine. Finally he released her arms, both of his hands moving instead to her hips.

“You have the most gorgeous hips, Hazel.”

She was in too much heat to respond to his compliment. He gripped her firmly, his own hips picking up the pace. Hazel felt Noah’s name escape her lips over and over, almost sounding like a prayer for mercy, though he seemed inclined to give her none. Soon his shaft thrusted in and out of her at an inhuman speed, and her back arched.

She let out a wordless cry to the starts, an orgasm unlike any other seizing her entire frame and shaking her deeply to her innermost core. Noah thrust in as her walls tightened around his shaft, letting out a guttural snarl as he shot his seed deep inside her, collapsing next to her on the blanket.

For a while all Hazel could do was lie helplessly on the blanket, the shudders of Noah’s lovemaking still tracing through her body from her center. Each nerve seemed to be alive with crackling, sizzling energy. She could only stare into the nearby forest with blank eyes, recovering slowly from the intense climax.

Then Noah’s strong, sure hands tugged the shirt back down over her form, and he wrapped an arm around her, pulling her securely against him. There were no words exchanged, but Noah lifted up Hazel’s hair to kiss the back of her neck lightly.

She shivered, and she felt him smile against her skin. One of his arms slipped beneath her head, the other resting protectively over her. She felt her curves fit perfectly against all his hard, angular lines as she drifted off to sleep in his arms.

# Chapter 7

"Hazel."

Hazel stirred. The rush of running water reminded her of where she was and she opened her eyes slowly. She rested in Noah's arms as he looked down at her and smiled.

"You slept heavily," he stated as she lifted herself up in a sit. "Yesterday was a long day, I suppose."

"Very long," she responded with a slight whimsical smile.

Noah pulled her back for a light kiss before helping her up. "Your clothes are probably dry. How about you change, and we'll finally get back to the house?"

With a nod, Hazel donned her original clothing again. They felt a little stiff and smelled like a forest bed now.

"How far is it back to the zoo?" she asked.

Noah paused as he checked the time on his watch, and then looked down the river. "It wouldn't be as long if we cut through the forest, and would only take maybe thirty minutes, but because we're following the river to keep from the bears, it'll take longer. An hour and a half or so."

She sighed but nodded in understanding.

As they traveled, Hazel kept close to Noah, holding his hand or allowing him to keep an arm around her. She leaned against him as they walked, only moving from her position when the two of them needed to maneuver around objects to keep walking.

Sunlight shone down through the trees, dappling the forest path. Birds were chirping, though fell silent as Noah and Hazel would approach their position. They resumed once the couple passed them. For a while Hazel basked in the glow of having someone as wonderful as Noah by her side, but abruptly he stopped, looking around warily.

"What's wrong, Noah?"

He pointed to the trees. "Hear that?"

Hazel paused, her ears straining. "I don't…"

"The birds are silent," Noah interrupted.

"What does that have to do with…"

This time a loud, challenging roar stopped her words cold in her throat. There was a thundering crash, and a massive grizzly smashed through the low bracken directly in front of them.

"Go!" Noah shouted, and he pushed Hazel to the left to get her out of the way of the charging bear. Hazel staggered to the side before tripping and dropping on her back watching in alarm as Noah dropped to his hands and knees and changed.

His body darkened as tawny fur spread over his skin. His legs altered their shape as his hands and feet grew wide and clawed. A stout muzzle emerged from his new animal face, and he threw his new weight into the thundering, intruding beast. Hazel crawled backward as the two bears swatted and bit at each other's throats, snarling and roaring in fury. The newcomer pushed Noah backward into the river, slightly bigger in stature and sure to be somewhat more powerful.

As Noah struggled to reclaim a fighting position, the new grizzly turned Hazel's way to see her. Hazel froze in fear. The bear left Noah in the water and splashed toward her, the rushing current doing nothing to hinder its deft movement. Hazel shrieked, scrambling to her feet and turning, racing into the trees. She skirted behind several thicker gatherings of trunks, hoping the tight fit would keep the animal away.

There was a silence for just a moment, and then the giant bear slammed into the trees with a snarl. Hazel screamed. The beast dropped its weight against the thin trunks, splintering them. Knowing she needed to get out of the hiding space before the trees fell on her, Hazel rushed out from her spot and sprinted deeper into the woods. She dodged low-hanging branches and potential tripping hazards, gasping for breath and letting adrenaline and fear carry her. She wasn't fast enough, though.

The bear caught up behind her, and the snapping, snarling sounds of its gaping jaws, sent her in a swirl of panic. She tripped as she lost track of where to place her feet, and she fell on her front. The bear loomed over her, dropping its head down to take in the scent of her clothes as it growled in her ear. Her head and heart pounded with terror. She squeezed her eyes shut, waiting for the big beast to tear her apart.

And then there was a gruff voice and a pair of hands on the collar of her shirt, forcing her to stand.

"Get up," said a man.

Hazel rose, shaking head to toe, and turned her head to see who'd spoken. In place of the giant grizzly was a towering man. He had deep eyes that were hardened with a stern personality. His hair was dark, mimicking the fur of the bear form he'd been in just a moment ago. It was longer than Noah's, braided in a couple of areas that gave him a type of ethnic atmosphere.

"Start walking," he ordered.

Hazel stood firmly where she was. Despite all the panic and fear she'd felt as she'd run from him, now she realized that he didn't have any intention of hurting her. At least... she hoped.

"I won't," she refused, remaining in her standing spot. Her body shook faintly, but she kept a firm glare at him.

The man scowled. "You're my key to getting that traitor Noah out of the forest, so you come with me before I force you," he commanded.

Hazel took two trembling steps back from him. "We're on our way out already. You're the one stalling our progress."

He seized Hazel's upper arm, and she gasped as his fingers dug into her skin. He yanked on her, dragging her from the spot.

"Stop!"

Hazel's chest lifted at the sound of Noah. She ripped her arm from the stranger's grip as Noah rushed into the area, panting. He must have just changed back. Hazel couldn't imagine Noah being able to run clear to them in that short of an amount of time on just two legs.

"Gavin, let her go," Noah ordered after he'd caught his breath.

The werebear named Gavin reached forward, taking almost a lunging step, and gripped onto Hazel's arm again, tugging her back to his side.

"Come any closer, Noah, and you'll never see her again," he threatened.

Noah's expression turned dark. "She entered this forest by accident. We were on our way back when you spotted us."

"It doesn't matter. You are not permitted to enter this part of the forest no matter what, Noah. You're an outcast, and you'll remain that way. No matter what kind of stunt you try pulling to get back into the family, it won't happen."

"He's not pulling any stunts!" Hazel shouted. She jerked at his hold, trying to pry her arm out of his tightly-clasped fingers, but he cinched them harder when she did. "I got lost, and Noah came in to get me. That's it."

"She's right, Gavin," said Noah, hesitantly taking step toward the other werebear. "I'm not here to cause trouble. In fact, we were walking along the river's edge *because* we wanted to avoid you and the rest of the clan. So please... Let go of Hazel."

"Humans," Gavin snarled. With a firm thrust of his arm, he shoved Hazel toward Noah. She staggered across the ground, and Noah caught her in his arms before she could fall.

"Leave this forest, now, before I go and tell the others. You don't want us coming for your throat," Gavin warned.

Noah stayed quiet as Hazel watched Gavin drop to his hands, transforming into an angry bear. He gave a thunderous roar at them both before turning and lumbering further into the trees. Noah didn't speak until Gavin's silhouette had disappeared in the darker parts of the woods.

"He didn't hurt you, did he, Hazel?"

Hazel checked her upper arm, lifting up her sleeve to look at her skin. There were red marks where Gavin had dug his nails, but the skin wasn't broken and there was no bruising. "No," she answered as she smoothed her sleeve back down. "He gripped me a little hard, but that was it. I'm fine."

Noah nodded in confirmation. "Good." He twisted his head to look around them both at the thick clusters of trees. "Well, we're not lost. Just a bit of a setback is all."

"I don't feel lost thanks to you, Noah," Hazel said, smiling a little bit. Her heart still thudded uncomfortably against her chest, but she felt much safer around him. She noticed as she gazed up at his face that he sported a sizeable cut along his jaw. It was red and puffy, but seemed to have already stopped bleeding

Noah caught her looking. "I'm alright, too," he reassured. "He just grazed me with his claw. Nothing serious."

Hazel sighed. "We wouldn't be in this mess if I hadn't listened to Priscilla," she uttered. Thinking back to the lies that Priscilla had filled Hazel's head with only made her hurt and angry. And to think that the woman had walked as far as the forest with her... just to tell her a lie!

"Speaking of her," said Noah, "she wouldn't tell me everything. What exactly did she say to you?"

"She said you had a butterfly house out here in the forest, and that it would really impress you if I went to check it out. She took me about a mile from the house and then walked away while saying she had to get back to take care of the birds," Hazel explained.

"Well, she was half right," said Noah. "I do have a butterfly house. It's not in this part of the woods, though. It's only about a quarter of a mile from the zoo, and it's westward, not toward the north."

"Maybe we can visit it once we get back and get something to eat," said Hazel. "I'm feeling starved."

Noah smiled softly and kissed her cheek. "I'll cook you something nice when we get back."

Gazing at Noah's tired eyes and naked, sweating figure, Hazel doubted it. "How about we just have something easy tonight? Don't you have people cook for you sometimes?" she asked.

Noah began walking through the woods with her again. He'd left the duffle bag somewhere, probably by the river still, and he didn't even have any shoes on. Hazel worried about his feet on all the hard debris. "Sometimes," he replied. "I might ask Deacon if he isn't too busy today."

"Deacon?" asked Hazel.

"He's in charge of some of the other animals in the zoo. He’s nice. Nicer than Priscilla," Noah responded sourly. "I'm irate with her, by the way."

"We'll worry about it when we get back to the house," she breathed.

"Right." Noah stopped walking to look back at her. "I'm not sure why I didn't decide to do this to begin with, but it would be much faster to carry you."

Hazel narrowed her eyes, wondering if he was crazy. "I'm probably too heavy for you, Noah."

He scoffed and grinned. "Not in my human form."

"Oh..."

"Is that okay? It might be easier on me, and it would give your feet a break."

Hazel felt nervous about seeing a bear again. "I don't know..."

He wrapped his arms around her to hug her closely to his body. Before she could question, he dipped his head and kissed her sweetly to calm her down. "It'll be okay," he whispered. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes, Noah."

Noah let go to step a couple feet away, then dropped to his hands and changed. Hazel felt like she would never get used to the sight. When Noah had finished transforming, he lowered down to offer his back to her for her to ride on, looking her way and waiting patiently. Hazel took a couple of ginger steps his way, touching his nose softly, and then brushed her fingers over his fur.

Finally, she held her breath and climbed over him. He was wide, and her legs spread out on either side of him. Noah straightened into a stand, and she held onto thick patches of his fur to support herself. Seeming more at home in the forest in his bear form, Noah began to walk past the trees at a slow pace until Hazel was comfortable. Once she'd relaxed, he sped up his walk into a run, and soon he bounded through the woodlands.

His travel was a bit rough, but Hazel lowered herself down flat to his back and held on tightly. Because of her position, she wasn't afraid of getting hit with low-hanging branches, and Noah seemed aware of which routes to take to avoid too much of the thicket anyway.

Hazel didn't move until sunlight brightened around her, and she straightened back up into a proper sit. Noah raced out of the forest and across the short clearing before reaching the dirt road, but he didn't stop there. He continued across the dust and gravel, his breath harsh and loud in heavy pants. Hazel hoped he didn't exhaust himself too much.

Eventually Noah slowed as he passed about the mile mark, and Hazel saw the gates leading into Blackburn Zoo in the distance.

"We made it finally!" she cheered.

Noah entered the gates and began up the hill leading to the house. Hazel watched as they passed the zoo, vaguely wondering if the employees knew that Noah was a bear. She figured they'd had to at least have an idea. Hazel had barely spent three days with the man, and she'd already been witness to his transformation three times.

He stopped beside the entrance and lowered himself down so Hazel could slide off his back more easily. Once she was safely on the first step leading up to the front door, Noah morphed back, losing the tawny fur, snout, and claws to become a standing man in the nude once more. He sighed, looking utterly beat, and climbed up to the front door, opening it and walking inside. Hazel followed him.

"You look like you need to lay down, Noah," she mentioned as he stumbled across the entryway and headed for the staircase past the living room

He sighed loudly at this to emphasize his exhaustion. "Let me go find some clothes and then call Deacon to come up. He'll take care of dinner if I bribe him enough."

Hazel followed him up the stairs and to her room to change out of her river-water clothes. She heard Noah trudge down the hall and into his room, and once she was done changing, she went to check on him. Noah had tugged on a pair of pajama pants and another casual tee, and he sat on his bed looking at his phone.

Hazel stopped by the door to eye him. He looked up and then patted the spot beside him, indicating for her to sit down. She took his offer and perched beside him. He opened his arm, and so she leaned against him as he draped it over her shoulders.

"Did you call Deacon?" she asked.

"Yeah," was his quiet reply. He sounded a little less tired than he had a few minutes before. "He'll be up here in ten minutes, which gives me a little time to shower."

"After you've already dressed?" she wondered curiously.

He half shrugged and stood up, setting the phone down on the bedside table. "Want to head downstairs and wait for him?"

"Well, I'm a bit filthy myself."

Noah had headed for the bathroom, but he stopped with his hand on the doorframe and turned around to look at her. His face was blank for a moment, and then his lips curled into a grin. "I suppose we could have a quick shower together, if you wished."

Smiling back, Hazel followed him into the bathroom, and he shut the door behind her.

# Chapter 8

Noah helped her out of her clothes after he turned on the faucet. She set her shirt and pants on the counter, and then Noah's hands were at her hips, tugging her backward. She let out a gasp of surprise as his bare hips met hers. A curving erection pressed against her.

"Noah," she started. "Now?"

He chuckled lowly in her ear and snaked his hands around her front, pressing his middle fingers to her womanhood. "Why don't we have a little fun before Deacon shows up?"

Without waiting for a response from her, Noah dragged her into the steaming shower. He yanked the shower curtain back to trap the hot steam inside before pressing Hazel's body against the wall. The water sprayed across their bodies, hot and shocking. She blinked moisture from her eyes as Noah pinned her. His hungry growls of lust overpowered the emphatic splash of water. She whimpered in anticipation when he spread her legs apart with his knee, one of his hands making its course over her nipple.

"Do you like it when I play with you, Hazel?" Noah crooned as she mewled with enjoyment.

"I love it, Noah." Her voice was weak and filled with expectancy.

Noah dipped his head, pressing his tongue to her other breast. The warmth of his breath mixed in with the heat of the shower as he scooped her nipple into his mouth and pinched ever so slightly with his front teeth. Hazel moaned.

"Every time you touch me, I feel so hot for you," she admitted as her hands rubbed against the tiles of the shower wall.

He lifted off her breast for just a moment to flick his gaze up to her face. His eyes looked smoky under thick lashes. "Good. That's just what I've wanted." He replaced his mouth to her nipple, suckling a little harder. Hazel's center pulsed with desire as she combed her fingers through his wet hair.

"You're making it so hard to think. I'm throbbing for you already," she breathed.

Noah let go of her breast and lifted his head, a cool and calculating smile tweaking the edges of his lips. The look only made Hazel that much more hopeful.

"Does it hurt, Hazel?" he asked, his voice silky. "Does your desire for me hurt?"

"Enough that I want you to fill me again," she replied breathlessly, her chest already rising and falling with hot want.

Noah pulled her away from the wall and over to the other side of the shower, drenching them both in the torrid wash of water. His hand slipped under her thigh, as did his hips, and he allowed his dripping shaft to enter her pulsing opening. She tipped her head backward in contentment, opening her mouth for a silent moan, and Noah leaned back to support himself against the wall.

"Ride me, Hazel," he ordered.

Hazel did so without pause, rocking her hips to push them firmly against his groin. His member glided back and forth in a sinuous, uninterrupted pace.

"Yes, Noah!" she cried. "Yes! Yes!"

Noah's panting of physical exertion shifted to a rougher growl as he sped up the motions of his hips, plunging deeper and swifter. He kept an even pace for a minute or so before easing himself out of her. Her nectar coursed down her inner thighs as he removed his rod, and he bent, keeping her legs spread so that he could stroke his tongue against her skin to taste her.

She watched his lips move upward toward her center, and then he pressed them to her soft folds, kissing. She closed her eyes and let herself fall victim to the constant felicity. Noah was skillful and tender with her. He finished cleaning her of her sweetness, rising up from his crouch.

"I feel like we've only just scratched the surface, Hazel," he murmured, his hands running over her skin and moving to her backside to grasp her tightly. He twisted her around and pushed her body up against the wall, keeping her end toward him.

"Are you going to fill me again, Noah?" Hazel wondered.

"I will do much more than that," he rumbled, and his hand fisted into her hair, tugging her head back as his pulsing member entered her moist opening once again. She whimpered his name several times over as his hips rocked back and forth, the tip of his shaft delving deep enough to send an ache through her body.

Hazel's cries of bliss echoed in the bathroom, and Noah finally grunted, squeezing his eyes shut for just a moment, and dispensed his essence thick inside her.

Hazel held onto him as he withdrew himself. She sagged in his arms, but happily. He kept one arm around her as he washed his body with a free hand, and then pressed some soap into her hands to do the same.

"Best not to smell like sweat and sex still after getting out of a shower," he said with a crooked smile.

Hazel blushed and started to clean herself, but Noah's hands got in the way. He tugged the soap back out of her hands with a mischievous grin. "Maybe I ought to help you."

She frowned some, turning to face him. "I can wash myself, Noah."

He leaned over her, "Oh, I don't doubt it. But sometimes..." He stroked the soap along the sensitive inner skin of her thigh. "It's better to have a little help."

Just as her lips opened to protest again, Noah stopped her by pressing the slippery bar firmly against her clit. "No arguing." Her body jerked in response, and her fingers tensed, gripping onto the shower rod as Noah began stroking her slowly and sensually with the soap bar, turning something completely innocent into the most sinful thing she'd ever experienced. Noah knelt in front of her, his eyes intent on her womanhood as he caressed her every fold. His fingers toyed with her inner lips, tugging lightly and teasing her.

Hazel had never felt such bliss as she did now, with Noah's skilled fingers fondling ever small centimeter of skin between her thighs. Her body had slumped against the shower wall, the hot water pounding down on her legs as she glanced down, watching Noah as he continued his ministrations. After a few moments he finished washing her down, though the time had seemed to stretch to an eternity. He washed her gently off with a washcloth, and then pulled her close for a long, slow kiss.

"You're insatiable, Noah." Her voice was a moan.

He smirked, sending shivers down her spine. "I would say you're just as insatiable as I am, sweet Hazel. Every time I demand, you rise to the occasion. That's rare in a woman."

The blush that crept over her cheeks had nothing to do with the hot water in the shower. "Well...I just..."

A tender light filled his eyes. "You've been deprived, Hazel, because those idiots you were dating couldn't manage to see past their own noses."

Her lower lip trembled for just a moment at his words. "Well..."

He leaned down to nuzzle her throat, his wet hair chilled slightly from being out of the water for so long. "They have missed out on something precious, Hazel."

This time the tears did start leaking down her face, and she looked away from Noah. He straightened, saying nothing else and bringing her head to rest against his own chest as the water started to cool. "I suppose we ought to get out now."

Hazel was reluctant to leave the steamy haven, but she was forced to agree as the water got even colder, nearly frigid.

A few minutes later they exited the shower after turning off the water. Hazel reached for a towel, but Noah's hand stopped her. "Allow me, please." He draped a towel over the toilet and nodded to it, indicating that she should sit down. Hazel plopped down, not knowing what to expect.

He took up another warm, fluffy towel and began drying off her legs, the swipes of the towel followed by sensual kisses. Her entire skin prickled where his lips touched, and all too soon she was nearly panting for him again. Noah only smiled to her, shaking his head. "Deacon will be here soon, Hazel."

She gave him a dirty look. "Then stop teasing me like that and give me the towel so I can dry myself off."

Chuckling, Noah surrendered the towel, though he stared at her the entire time she was drying off and slipping her clothes back on. She glanced around the bathroom. "I don't suppose you have a brush in here, do you?"

He looked thoughtful for a moment, and then opened a drawer, pulling out a small brush. "I used to have long hair, believe it or not."

"Bit of a hippie?" Hazel's tone was teasing. Noah only grinned.

"Maybe a bit." Without her even asking he stepped up to her, and starting at the ends of her hair, began combing out the tangles. His fingers felt good, and he was gentle, so Hazel allowed it. She closed her eyes to enjoy the feeling.

He separated her hair and then twisted it into an elegant braid, clipping the end with a hair tie he'd had sitting on the counter. Pressing one last kiss to her head, Noah helped her up so she could study his handiwork in the steamy mirror. She nodded in approval, and he turned to his own pile of clothes.

Noah escorted her out once he was clothed as well and walked her to the staircase down the hallway. Hazel stopped at the landing to see a new face near the entry hall.

The man was red-haired with a youthful face. He was lanky and had kind eyes. He unfolded his arms when he saw Hazel and Noah.

"How long have you been in here?" Noah wondered as he stopped beside Hazel.

The newcomer grinned and straightened from his spot against the hallway doorframe. "Oh, five minutes or so. I didn't feel like I should interrupt the two of you."

Hazel went bright red from the thought of having this new guy listen in on her shrieks of pleasure. Noah rolled his eyes.

"Hazel, this is Deacon. He takes care of the reptile cages in the zoo as well as some of the mammals."

Deacon moved away from the frame and extended out a hand for Hazel to shake. As she took it, he spoke. "A pleasure to meet you."

"Likewise," she expressed.

"Noah told me about what had happened," said Deacon as he left them to enter the kitchen. "I've never really liked Priscilla, but that was really dirty of her. I sympathize with you."

Noah ignored Deacon's words as he followed his employee. "How about something simple this afternoon, Deacon? Fish filets and a garden salad."

"So is Deacon your cook?" Hazel wondered.

Deacon chuckled and answered for Noah. "Oh, no. Noah just found out that I like to cook things, so every once in a while he asks me to come up and make him a dish or two alongside what I do for him in the zoo. He pays me extra for it, though of course today is on me."

"That's very nice of you," said Hazel as she studied what Deacon was doing. He opened the refrigerator to pull out some freshly wrapped fish and a head of lettuce, kicking the door closed.

"Noah and I have known each other for a while now," said Deacon with a shrug. "It's not that big of a deal to me."

Hazel looked at Noah. "Does everyone who works in the zoo have a close affiliation with you?" she asked.

Noah eyed her. "Well I suppose they have to, don't you think?"

Deacon set down the food items to raise his arms up in an animal-type position as he let out a fake snarl.

"They all know I'm a werebear," Noah clarified as Hazel watched the new zookeeper in befuddlement.

Deacon unwrapped the fish to prepare it for searing. "I hate to be the bad guy, Noah, but about Priscilla..."

"I know," the other answered. "I'm going to fire her."

Hazel looked at Noah in astonishment. "Fire her? Just for lying to me?"

"She did more than just lie to you, Hazel," Noah protested. "She led you into an unsafe forest and left you there. You could have been killed. Her self-centered negligence nearly cost you your life, and that isn't okay with me."

Deacon seemed already lost in his own world, singing and whistling to himself as he chopped up the fish, washed his hands, and began working on the salad.

"I suppose you're right," Hazel uttered, though she didn't feel comfortable with the subject. It seemed like Noah's life was unexpectedly centered around a lot of drama. First with Priscilla, and then with the werebear named Gavin.

Noah placed a hand to her back and rubbed it a little. "Don't worry," he said. "I’ll get all of this figured out. You don't need to stress about it. This is your vacation, remember? It's time that you had some relaxing moments to yourself. This whole idea of getting you away from stress hasn't really worked very well."

"Well, it's worked some," Hazel admitted, thinking about all of the pleasurable times they'd spent together.

Noah leaned down and kissed her gently before straightening and leading her away from the kitchen. They walked to the couch, and he sat her down beside him to hold her under one arm. She pressed her cheek against his chest.

Noah tickled his fingers down her back, and Deacon spoke up from the kitchen, but Hazel didn't really hear what he'd said. She didn't realize how tired she'd been from the trek through the woods. Noah looked equally as worn out. Closing her eyes, Hazel drifted off to sleep under the arm of her protector.

# Chapter 9

Noah gently shook her awake several minutes later as Deacon placed a plate down on the coffee table in front of her. The heavily-seasoned scent of fish wafted to her as she sat up slowly, blinking sleep from her eyes.

"Thank you, Deacon," she uttered as she picked the plate up to eat.

"If you don't mind, lovebirds, I've gotta go back to work," said Deacon.

Noah looked up from the couch. "Thank you for coming all the way up here to take care of us," he said.

Deacon walked toward the door. "Anything you guys need, just let me know."

Hazel heard the door close as Deacon left. The food was excellent, though Hazel could have been a little biased concerning the fact she hadn't eaten for quite some time. Noah leaned in and kissed her cheek.

"Is it good?"

"Very," she answered him. "What are we doing after this, Noah?"

"Well, once you're done, I'd planned to take you to the butterfly house."

She brightened.

Once they'd finished the meal, Noah walked Hazel to the door and led her out. They traversed the grounds until Noah came to a greenhouse just a short ways from the zoo.

"How come this isn't next to the other animal exhibits?" Hazel wondered as he unlocked the door and opened it for her.

"I felt like it needed a place of its own," he answered, shutting the door tightly before moving on to open the next. There was a short entryway cut off from the rest of the building. Hazel figured that was probably to make sure that insects didn't escape very easily. Noah walked her inside quickly.

The butterfly house was practically aglow with vegetation of all kinds. Tall, wiry plants made overhangs along the concrete walkway, and already a bevy of butterflies stirred from their entrance, fluttering up toward the glass ceiling.

"It's beautiful," Hazel admitted.

A rustle around the brush reached them from up ahead, and a blond woman stepped out onto the walkway. She noticed the two of them near the entrance and stopped in surprise.

Noah's brow furrowed in sudden fury, and he left Hazel to advance toward the woman.

"Priscilla!" he exclaimed. Even though Noah remained in his human form, Hazel noticed the similar animal-like rage that ensued from his voice and aura. Priscilla flinched from his sharp tone.

"N-Noah, I'm so glad the two of you are safe!" she attempted, holding her hands up to her chest in a look of insecurity from Noah's harsh anger.

"Don't even try it," Noah warned. "Your ugly ploy nearly cost Hazel her life. I can't believe your selfishness!" More butterflies around them took frenzied flight from the loud noise

Priscilla looked utterly shattered by Noah's rage. She nearly cowered under his glare. "But Noah...! How was I to know that she wasn't smart enough to take the hint and come back?"

Hazel opened her mouth in gaping shock at Priscilla's words. Noah didn't find the comment funny at all.

"I know what you're trying to do, and I don't like it," said Noah. "And if the clan hadn't kicked you out as well, I'd send you right back to where you came from."

Hazel widened her eyes. What did this mean? Was Priscilla a werebear as well?

"I understand your anger, Noah," Priscilla said quietly.

"No you don't," he continued. "I would have fired you long before now if I knew there was another place for you somewhere in this world. But there isn't. No one will take you in because of your attitude."

Priscilla's icy gaze drifted over to Hazel in indignation, but Noah stepped in front of her to block the view. "I won't let you try to hurt her again. In fact I'm seriously considering sending you back to the clan anyway, just to let them deal with you."

"You wouldn't," Priscilla breathed, her glower now resting on Noah's face.

Noah reached with a lightning speed and seized a hold of Priscilla's outfit, pulling her closer. He dipped his head and whispered something furiously into her ear. They were too far away for Hazel to hear, but Priscilla's eyes grew hard and wild with upset at his hushed words. She backed away from him, looked over at Hazel and then charged for her in utter fury.

"Priscilla, stop it!" Noah exclaimed. Hazel turned and rushed into the brush full of butterflies, sending up a cloud of them. Noah was quick on Priscilla's heels.

As Hazel rushed out from the plants on another portion of the walkway, Noah grabbed Priscilla by her shirt and pulled her backward into a tight hold against his body, keeping her arms pinned.

"I could transform right now and break out of your grasp!" Priscilla threatened as she struggled against Noah's strong arms.

"But you won't, because you don't want to hurt me," Noah said calmly. He looked at Hazel. "You'll have to pardon me, Hazel. I need to send Priscilla back to the clan. Seek out Deacon, okay?"

Hazel started forward. "Noah... will you be okay?"

Noah's eyes were hard, but not toward Hazel. "I'll be fine."

Hazel watched as Noah carried Priscilla easily out of the butterfly house. She followed them until Priscilla finally managed to change. She jerked herself out of Noah's grip to form into a moderately sized grizzly that snarled at him and raced out toward the gates of the zoo. Noah transformed as well and followed her.

Hazel felt sad as she watched the two of them head out toward the forest and disappear around the corner of the gates. She knew there was not much she could do concerning the two of them. Despite feeling so close to Noah now, she was not a werebear, and didn't feel like she should tread on any of the werebear business.

Dejectedly, Hazel began toward the inner plaza of the zoo, hoping that Noah would keep safe. That werebear named Gavin seemed powerful and frightening, and she didn't want Noah to be injured again.

"Hazel, hey."

She realized she'd had her eyes to the ground when she looked up to catch site of Deacon beside a reptile cage.

"Please tell me right now, Deacon," Hazel started, "that you're not a werebear, too."

Deacon raised his red eyebrows in surprise. "What, me? No way. I'm very much human."

Hazel sighed as she stopped in front of him. "Thank goodness. I was starting to think that I was the only one around."

"Where's Noah?" Deacon wondered.

Hazel looked off toward the zoo gates again. "He and Priscilla sort of had a fight, and I think he's sending her off somewhere."

Deacon tilted his head a little and gave her a soft look. "It's hard spending time around a bear, huh? Don't worry…I'm sure all of this will blow over soon enough, Hazel."

She nodded with another sigh.

Fifteen minutes later, a very disheveled and gasping Noah approached them from the plaza. Priscilla was not with him.

"Noah!" Hazel cried and rushed over to his side, hugging him.

He returned the embrace. "It's all taken care of for now," said Noah.

Deacon turned to look at them. "What do you mean?" Hazel wondered.

"Priscilla raced into the woods. I followed her for some time, but couldn't go back near the clan territory, so I just let her go."

"Why don't you just fire her, Noah?" Deacon wondered.

"Well, essentially she has been, now," he replied. "She's not allowed back onto my property, and if either of you or any other employees see her, let me know."

Deacon made a fake salute to him. "Yes, sir."

"So does this mean I'll finally get to spend the rest of my vacation in peace?" Hazel asked, glad to see that Noah was alright.

Noah looked at her, and his steely expression slackened around the eyes and mouth. "Yes, Hazel. I believe I can give you a more peaceful vacation now."

Hazel smiled and kissed him, and he hooked his arm around her side, taking her back to the house.

# PART THREE

# Chapter 10

The sunlight glared through the massive open windows beside the living room. Hazel sat in the cozy sofa of Noah Blackburn's house. The wide flat screen mounted on the wall across from her was off, and its black surface reflected the stark glow of morning being displayed throughout the kitchen behind her.

Deacon, an employee of Blackburn Zoo, clattered dishes together in the sink as he washed them. Hazel glanced up from her coffee at the reflection of his red hair and determined expression.

"Careful, Deacon," she chuckled. "You might intimidate those plates."

Deacon glanced over at her with a crooked smile. "They have to behave somehow."

A series of footsteps were heard on the staircase not far from the kitchen, and Noah left the landing. He circled the sofa and dropped down heavily beside Hazel. The contents of her mug sloshed onto her lap with a wet burn.

"Noah!" she exclaimed as she wiped at the coffee stains with her palm.

Noah picked up the decorative corner of his sofa throw and pressed it to Hazel's thigh. "Sorry…I didn't see the coffee in your hands."

"Oh, Noah, don't use that." She pushed his hands away and stood while setting the mug down on the coffee table. "You'll ruin your fancy throw."

Hazel left the living room and stepped into the kitchen to pull the damp dish towel Deacon had used a moment before. She pressed it to her pants while Deacon inspected her to see what she was doing.

"Any sign of Priscilla this morning at the zoo, Deacon?" Noah asked as he picked up Hazel's mug to steal a drink.

"Nope. All's quiet around the bird cages. The work's doubled though," he answered as he waited patiently for Hazel to hand him the dish towel back.

"I'm sorry," said Noah, setting down the mug. "I put up an ad for a new worker just this morning, so it might have to be like this for a few days."

"It's okay. I'll probably enlist one of the other employees to help me with half the work," Deacon replied casually, shrugging his shoulders. "You know, if that's okay with you, boss."

Hazel finished trying to seep the coffee out of her pants and pressed the towel back into Deacon's open and awaiting fingers.

"Of course it's okay," Noah answered back. "You know you don't have to come here and cook for us all the time, Deacon. Especially if you have extra work now."

He shrugged again as he finished up the last dish in the sink and rested it on a drying mat. "I don't mind, Noah, really. I enjoy it."

Noah stopped by the entrance into the kitchen. "How do I know you're not just trying to earn brownie points from me so I'll give you a raise?"

Deacon laughed but didn't comment.

Hazel walked over to Noah and wrapped her arms around his waist, kissing his cheek. "So what are we doing today?" Hazel asked him, smiling faintly.

Noah returned the grin, and his eyes narrowed in a sneaky type of suggestiveness. "I don't know, Hazel. The day is completely open. We could do absolutely anything."

Hazel understood the hint, and she blushed slightly. She felt that she would never grow numb to his flirting. It made her feel special, and she felt that no one would ever give her the same type of sensation that Noah did.

"Well, I'm done here," Deacon announced as he hung the dish drying towel back on its appropriate hook beside the sink. "I'll leave you two to get on with... whatever it is you have in mind." He smiled, proving he'd also known what Noah was talking about. He walked past them and headed for the door leading out of the house. "Call me if you need anything else, Noah."

"Will do," said Noah, though his eyes remained on Hazel, smoky and desirous. Hazel barely heard the entry door close as Noah pulled her in for a sweet kiss.

She sighed and leaned against him, closing her eyes to enjoy the sensation to its fullest. She'd never felt so in love with someone. In Noah's protective arms, Hazel felt safe and comfortable. She felt like they fit together…that they were made for each other. Perhaps that was what new love always felt like, but for Hazel, there wasn't a place in the world she would rather be than wrapped in Noah's arms.

Taking her hand, Noah led her over to the couch and then pushed against her, causing he to trip over the living room rug and fall backward onto the furniture. "Noah!"

He crawled over her body, smiling and growling with want. Hazel giggled and pushed against him, but he swiftly took her by the wrists and pulled them over her head, dropping his own head down to taste along her throat. Hazel's giggles turned to sighs of enjoyment.

She relaxed further against the couch cushions while Noah made his descent down her body. He removed one hand from her wrists to brush it along her bosom. His touch was a drug to her. She craved every feather-light caress.

"What should I do to you this morning?" Noah questioned in a playful manner as he stopped his hand at the skirt she wore. "Should I tease you until you beg for me to fill you? Or should I take you like my inner animal craves, and claim you as my female?"

His silken words gave Hazel shivers. She stroked one leg up along his hip, and the bottom of her skirt rolled upward along her thigh. He wrapped an arm around her leg and lifted it higher until he had full view of her panties. Noah paused for a brief moment, biting the inside of his cheek in thought.

Hazel lifted her head to look at him fully. "What's the matter, Noah?"

His eyes moved to hers for a moment, and then he stood from the couch. "Wait here while I go grab something. Don't move. If you move, I'll have to punish you."

Hazel smiled as he winked and fled the room quickly, racing upstairs. He was back in less than a minute, and Hazel lifted herself up on the sofa to see what Noah had grabbed. He scrunched his face into a chastising look and clucked his tongue. "Naughty girl. I told you not to move."

Hazel widened her eyes when Noah rounded the sofa and dropped his items to the coffee table. Several strips of leather unraveled.

"Now I'm going to have to punish your pussy for your disobedience."

"Oh, Noah," Hazel gasped, but she didn't have time to say anything else. Noah picked up a short leather strap with a knob in the middle and pressed it into her mouth. She gazed at him in surprise as he buckled the device behind her head, and then took her by the arm and sides to turn her onto her front.

Hazel's jaw was stretched to accommodate the size of the ball gag. She was about to tug at it, but Noah clutched at her wrists next and tied them behind her back with some silky black rope. Hazel moaned from the sensation, her voice slightly stifled from the knot of leather between her teeth. She squirmed a little as Noah removed her skirt and panties, flinging them over by the TV.

"I'm not done prepping you," Noah stated. "So don't get too impatient yet."

Just as Hazel wondered what Noah could possibly do next, he latched a hook to the back of Hazel's gag and unraveled a leash, which he used to tug her head up, pulling her into a slouched kneeling position. She heard him undo his pants.

"Are you ready for me, Hazel?"

She whimpered a little. His treatment hadn't hurt, but her body already ached for his attention. She felt a set of fingers at the folds of her flesh, and one of them rubbed lightly over her clit. The sensation shook her body with desire. She was about to tell Noah not to tease her and just to penetrate her, but she remembered the gag in her mouth. Noah's thumb slipped into her opening, and he chuckled.

"You're already so wet for me, you dirty thing."

Something else nudged against Hazel's entrance, and she recognized the feeling. Noah brushed the tip of his shaft against her softness, causing another moan to escape her throat. He jerked on the leash, keeping her head up, and then slipped himself into her. The filling sensation caused her body to clench, her cavity pressing against his thick member.

Noah groaned from the feeling and began a slow back and forth motion, one hand still clutching onto the end of the leash. Hazel continued moaning, trying to say Noah's name but failing. Instead she arched her back and pressed out her hips to lean back into his thrusts, and he sped up the process, forcing his tool deeper inside of her.

"I'll have you screaming for me," Noah gasped as he rocked his body faster. Hazel already felt like screaming, but she held it in and squeezed her eyes shut from the ecstasy enveloping her body. Her moans grew louder.

She throbbed from the constant grind of their sex, and Noah slapped his hand to her backside, sending a sharp yet fleeting sting to spread over her skin. She loved the sensation. She wanted to cry for him to do it again, but she didn't have to. Noah slapped the other side after switching hands with the taut leash.

Several more rocks of Noah's hips at a faster pace, and Hazel's head swelled with a climax. She let out a shriek of pleasure as the feeling flooded her from head to toe, and she shuddered with a powerful orgasm only moments before Noah's essence poured inside her. Hazel dropped against the sofa as Noah slackened his grip on the leash before removing it as well as the gag. He untied her hands, and so she brought them forward for relief and turned her head to watch him fix up his pants.

"Oh, Noah..." was all Hazel could manage, still too lost in the stars to say much else.

Noah sat down beside her and pulled her head into his lap. His fingers stroked her hair gently, and he smiled down at her with tenderness. Hazel brushed her fingers over his chest and then cuddled to his body.

"That was amazing," she commented, and Noah smirked.

"I've wanted to get those out. That's not all of them, either."

"It's not?"

"No, but we can play with the rest later." Noah leaned down and kissed Hazel's forehead. "I have to do some work in the zoo. Will you be okay for an hour or so?"

Hazel nodded and closed her eyes, basking in his warmth.

# Chapter 11

Hazel wandered down through the zoo plaza twenty minutes later. She spotted Deacon who crouched checking a bevy of frayed wires in the fencing around one of the zoo habitats. She watched him for a moment, stopping beside him, and he noticed her feet in his peripheral vision and glanced up.

"Oh hey, Hazel."

"What are you doing?" Hazel wondered.

Deacon looked back at the wires and plucked one of them with a finger. "Questioning how to get the wolves to stop chewing at the fence."

"They chew on the fence?" Hazel wondered with a raised brow. "Like dogs?"

Deacon shrugged. "They really aren't much different. I asked Noah if I could keep one as a pet a couple years back. You should have seen his face." He grinned widely. "But yeah, like dogs. Not only are they making a hole here to try and get out, but it's tearing up their teeth and gums."

"Poor things," Hazel sighed.

Deacon chuckled lightly. "I just think it's obnoxious." He looked back at her as he stood. "Did you have any pets growing up, Hazel?"

"Just some fish," she answered with a small tilt of her head. "That was all my parents would ever allow. Then I grew up and got too busy to care for any other animals."

"I had a dog," said Deacon. "Back when I lived in Colorado Springs. His name was Brutus."

Hazel giggled. "Did you name him?"

He grinned. "Nah, he was my grandpa's dog. When my grandpa passed away, my family voted to take care of his dog for him."

"I see. Must have been nice to have a companion."

"You didn't have any siblings growing up?"

She shook her head. "I was an only child, and after I moved out, I was pretty much cut off from my parents. Not because of anything terrible happening, but just because they weren't really the most attentive to me, and once I'd moved out there wasn't much of a reason to drive halfway across the state to visit them very often."

"That makes sense," he replied. His eyes roved over the zoo, scanning the lake. "This might sound odd, Hazel, but what do you think of Noah?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you've known him for a while now. I mean as an online friend. But what do you make of him in person?"

Hazel relaxed a little bit. "He's sweet, he saved me from another werebear in the woods and he’s very affectionate. He's much more of a man in person than he is in text," she answered. "Why do you ask?"

Deacon half-shrugged, his hands now in his pockets. "Just curious. I've never seen an online relationship hit it off so well." There was a twinge of remorse in his words.

Hazel frowned and stepped closer to him. "Deacon, I know it's not my business, but did you have a bad experience?"

Deacon looked startled by the question. He turned from the lake to look at her, his blue eyes wide. "Oh no, nothing like that. It's nice to see things going so well for you, Hazel."

Hazel watched him in dark curiosity, wondering just what it was that Deacon hid.

"Have you ever been in a relationship?" She knew it was forward of her to ask, but the dejected look on Deacon's face made her heart hurt.

Deacon's mouth flattened out to a thin line. "Once. In middle school." He chuckled a little, but Hazel didn't find it very funny.

Deacon was a wonderful person, at least from what she'd witnessed. He was kind and cared for the animals and his friends. Not only that, but he was rather good-looking. A small glance from him didn't send Hazel into shivers like Noah's gaze did, but Deacon had his own type of charm that spoke to her on a higher level than just a friend's would.

Before Hazel realized it, she'd taken Deacon's hand and had pulled him closer. Leaning upward, she pressed her lips to Deacon's in a soft kiss. Although she'd taken both he and herself by surprise, Deacon returned the kiss by molding his with hers. He unwound because of the action, but Hazel pulled away before the gesture deepened.

"I…I'm sorry," she breathed.

Deacon dropped his weight to one leg, remaining calm and collected. "For what?"

"For *that*," said Hazel. "I shouldn't have kissed you. I just..."

Deacon took a step forward. "It's okay, Hazel. If it makes you feel better, I really didn't mind. After all, I really kind of like you."

She bit her lip and gave the ground a worried look. Hazel was with Noah. It wasn't right to flirt or crush on another man. She shook her head. "It's not right. I like you too, Deacon, but..."

"Noah. I know." Deacon smiled. "Don't worry about it, Hazel. We'll just forget it happened. Okay?"

She nodded. "Yeah..."

Hazel walked away from Deacon only a moment later, feeling awkward. What had really possessed her to kiss him? Was it the sympathy she felt for his situation? Maybe that was it, but it didn't help Hazel's apprehension that she'd done something wrong.

As she approached another animal cage to study the big mountain lion behind the glass, she questioned her situation. In the course of just a couple of days, Hazel had met with her online friend Noah and became charmed by his demeanor and romance almost immediately.

She'd found herself lost in the woods, only to be rescued by him while witnessing him transform into a noble beast of the forest. Not only had he saved her from an attacking she-bear, but he'd carried her back to safety after a grueling fight with another of his kind. Noah had gone through so much to keep Hazel safe and happy. What would he think if he knew she'd kissed another man?

*It didn't mean anything,* she thought as she pressed a hand to the glass. *I just kissed Deacon because he's kind, and I sympathize for him. That's it.*

"Hazel?"

She turned in surprise to see Noah. He stood with his hands in his pockets, eyeing her curiously. "Everything alright? I've never seen you space off like that."

Hazel nodded quickly. "Everything is fine. I was just lost in thought for a minute."

He smiled gently before walking up beside her to look into the exhibit. "You like her?" he asked, nodding his head to the mountain lion resting several feet from the window.

"She's very beautiful," Hazel commented. "You found all these animals in the woods, right?"

Noah nodded. "I had a little help from some supporters, but most of these animals were rescued. They either had potentially fatal injuries, were runts, or were too weak to take care of themselves.

I've always wanted to start my own wildlife habitat of some kind, but I never really centered my life around the thought until Priscilla came to me with an injured goshawk and asked if I knew how to take care of it. I contacted a buddy of mine in Aspen who practiced animal medicine, and so we banded together and began taking in unfortunate wildlife."

"That's wonderful," said Hazel. "And then it just turned into a zoo?"

Noah smiled and nodded his head once. "In a fashion, yes. At the time, I'd already earned quite a fortune and had been in the process of staking out some land to build a new home on. I thought it would be a perfect opportunity for me to live closer to my family as well as continue my passion of taking care of animals."

"I wish I had more experience with animals," Hazel sighed, gazing at the lion's comfortably sleeping figure.

"Well, now you can get some experience with me," said Noah as he pressed a reassuring hand to her shoulder. "I'd love to show you some more of the residents here in the zoo. We haven't really had much of a chance yet."

Hazel smiled wistfully at the exhibit. "Yeah, that would be nice."

"Are you sure that everything is okay?" he asked after a brief pause.

"Yes, Noah. Everything is fine." She looked up at his eyes to smile again, hoping that no more of her inner conflict would seep through her actions.

Noah seemed to buy her facade. "Well, maybe we can start with feeding the porcupines."

Noah's phone rang a moment later, and he frowned to tug it out of his pants pocket.

"Hello?" he answered after placing it to his ear.

Hazel waited, watching as Noah's face darkened to one of intense horror.

"Noah...?" Hazel wondered.

"I'll fix it. Grab the nets immediately." Noah hung up and stowed his phone away, turning to Hazel quickly. "Hazel, I'm going to need your help after all. Someone just released several of my birds."

"What?"

"Come with me. Fast." Noah gestured for her to follow and then turned, starting off in a sprint toward the avian exhibit. Hazel hurried to catch up to him.

"How could someone manage to release your birds while there are employees everywhere?" Hazel asked. Noah didn't reply.

Deacon and several other employees were already doing their best to try and catch one of the birds that had flown up to the top of one of the cages. A female employee approached Noah and Hazel, looking grave.

"We have a problem, Noah," she said. "Alex was released as well, and we can't find him anywhere."

"Who's Alex?" Hazel wondered.

"My goshawk," Noah replied grimly. "The first animal I took in to take care of, the one I told you about. I know who's behind this." He turned to the employee. "Grab someone else and search every corner of the zoo for him. In the meantime, I'll be headed back into the forest."

"What?" Hazel exclaimed. "Why?"

Noah's voice was dark. "Because Priscilla was here." He turned from her and rushed back down the pathway toward the exit of the zoo. "Stay and help the others collect the birds!" he called before turning a corner and disappearing from sight.

Hazel felt bothered by his sudden escape, but she knew that it was necessary. She hoped he would be safe in the woods.

Turning her attention to the others, Hazel walked closer to see Deacon pass a net to another employee. He turned to look at her.

"Hey. Looks like there's just no rest for the weary, huh?" he said as he fitted a long and thick glove over one arm.

"No kidding," Hazel replied. "Is there anything that I can do to help?"

Deacon looked around for a moment before spotting another bird sitting on top of the visitor's center. It appeared to be some type of hawk. "Yeah, you can help me out, I think. See that red-tail sitting up there?" Hazel nodded.

"We need to lure him back. I've got some of his favorite snacks in a freezer back in the employee room around the other side of the bird cages. Think you could go grab a frozen mouse for me?" Hazel made a face.

He smirked. "I'd go, but the others might need my help."

"Alright, fine. I'll do it," said Hazel, and she turned from Deacon to hurry along the pathway. She turned right at a corner to see the employee hut resting beside the fence that cut Noah's property from the fields and trees beyond. A girl rushed out from the station to hurry back toward the chaos around the corner, and so Hazel entered and looked for the freezer.

There was a table and sink off to the right, and the freezer was located near the back next to a restroom. Hazel walked over to it and placed her hand on the lever to open it, but another hand rested on her arm to stop her.

She looked up at what she thought at first was an unfamiliar face, but then recognized the long braids in the man's hair and the stern, cold eyes. This was Gavin, whom she'd only met recently in the forest. The big alpha werebear was without clothes, proving to Hazel that he'd changed probably upon reaching the zoo. He removed her hand from the freezer and held her wrist tightly.

"Gavin," she stammered. "What are you doing here?"

Gavin didn't answer at first. He backed Hazel up against the counter, tall and intimidating. His muscles looked powerful, built from years of strenuous survival in the forest. Noah was built like him, but Gavin seemed almost twice his size.

"Where is Noah?" Gavin demanded. Hazel only shook her head.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He left the zoo a few minutes ago," she answered truthfully. "He said something about Priscilla and then took off."

Gavin growled. It wasn't like the soft growls of Noah when he wanted to play around. This was a full-on snarl from a wild bear. "I told her not to get carried away," he said. "Now it looks like I'll have to clean up her mess."

"Why are you doing this to him?" Hazel demanded after Gavin had backed off a little.

He glared at her. "Noah is a criminal in the eyes of the clan. I'm doing this because he needs to be punished for trespassing."

Hazel scowled at him. "And your kidnapping me wasn't enough? I don't understand you werebears."

Gavin returned the hard look. "Then why are you now laying with one every night? Perhaps you should have seriously considered what you would be getting into before you decided to stay with Noah. His life is dangerous."

"It's only dangerous because you and that Priscilla won't leave him alone!" Hazel snapped.

Gavin was swift. He gripped her hard by the arm and pushed her back against the counter, holding her there with his hips. His face was inches from hers, and she had full view of his furious, furrowed brow.

"Do you know what it looks like to us when an outcast tries to live close to the forest that kicked him out? It looks like he's slapping us in the face. It's an insult. It's like he's laughing at us and telling us that it doesn't matter what we do to him…he's still going to push his ridiculous ideas onto our people."

Hazel was startled by the force of his body and his firm grip on her arm. "What ridiculous ideas?"

His face relaxed a little as he comprehended her question. "His constant desire to be surrounded by humankind. It is sick and it is revolting. We werebears were designed to live out our lives in the wild, and here he is attempting to push bizarre ways of living onto us. He wants to surround himself with weak creatures who don't even believe that we exist. It makes our kind angry."

Gavin's grip on her arm had begun to hurt. "Then if you hate it so much, why not just leave him alone and pretend he doesn't exist? Why do you have to keep pestering him?"

"Priscilla and I came this time to teach Noah a lesson. He was kind to take Priscilla in when the clan couldn't take care of her, but he's broken rules by sending her back to us as a mockery."

Hazel frowned harder. "Noah isn't mocking you guys. He kicked Priscilla out because she nearly got me killed sending me into the woods on my own. And he didn't send Priscilla back to the clan. He just fired her."

Gavin straightened, letting Hazel squeeze her way out from between him and the counter. "Priscilla came to us in tears saying that Noah had booted her back into the forest as a joke."

"Then she's a liar," said Hazel. "Just like she lied to me a couple days ago about the safety of the forest. She's just trying to get Noah in trouble for firing her." Gavin was quiet as his eyes studied her.

"If you don't believe me, just wait around and ask him yourself when he gets back."

Gavin twisted his face into another frown, but his voice was quieter. "If I find out that you are lying, I will personally take you back to the clan to make you pay."

Hazel returned the angry glower. "I'm not afraid of you."

"You should be."

"Hazel, there you are." The voice belonged to Deacon. Hazel turned around to see him approaching her. He had a big falcon perched on his gloved arm. "Came to let you know I don't need a mouse…" He stopped when he spotted Gavin standing by the freezer in the employee house. There was an electrifying exchange of looks as Deacon and Gavin stared at each other.

"You," Deacon began. "Gavin." He frowned. "What do you want?"

Hazel looked at the two of them. "Deacon, you know him?"

"Vaguely," he answered. "We've met once. Gavin came to tell Noah something about a year ago. I was there at the time. They fought a lot." He directed his next words to Gavin. "What are you doing here?"

Gavin remained cagey and snarling. "I came for Noah, and I will wait until he returns."

Deacon gave him a bitter look. "Fine. But keep your nose out of things." He took Hazel's hand, surprising her a little, and then walked her away from the employee station. He stopped by the door of one of the avian cages. It'd been opened already, so he stepped inside. The hawk on his arm flapped its wings a few times and carried itself up to one of the perches up above their heads. Deacon walked back out and closed the door, locking it with a key hanging from a lanyard around his neck. He sighed.

"There. I think most of them have been recaptured." He looked at Hazel. "Are you alright?"

Hazel wrung her hands together. "I don't know." Her heart still pounded a little from the abrasiveness of Gavin. Though she'd told him that he hadn't scared her, in reality she had been. She hadn't been terrified like she had when he'd kidnapped her in the forest, but she still gained a nervous, fluttering heart when Gavin stared at her like he wanted to kill her. Deacon looked sympathetic, and he pulled her into a warm embrace.

"I guess nowhere is really safe right now," he said. "I don't think Noah ever intended for this vacation to get so hazardous for you."

"I'm sure he didn't," Hazel replied, hugging him back. It felt good to be so close to him. Just like Noah, Deacon made her feel comfortable. Before she could melt into his arms, however, Deacon drew away and straightened.

"Why don't we head back to the house and wait for Noah to show up?" he suggested.

"What about Gavin?"

Deacon glanced ungratefully toward the employee station down the pathway. "We'll ignore him. He won't cause any trouble until Noah gets back. That's what he's after. According to Noah, Gavin's pretty simple-minded."

Taking Deacon's hand as he offered, he and Hazel left the avian exhibit and walked back up toward the house on the hill.

# Chapter 12

Hazel closed the door behind her and sighed as Deacon walked over to check Noah's fridge.

"You seem rather at home here," said Hazel as she watched him pull out a block of cheese.

Deacon smiled as he closed the fridge and roamed the pantries for bread. "Only when Noah isn't around."

Hazel giggled. "Of course."

He heated up a pan on the stove and began to grill himself a cheese sandwich.

"So tell me this, Deacon," Hazel started. "Do you often come in here to steal Noah's food when he's not at home?"

"It's his fault he leaves the door unlocked when he's in a hurry," Deacon excused with a laugh. Hazel only shook her head with a grin.

"Oh, should I be a chivalrous gent and ask if you'd like a stolen sandwich as well?" Deacon questioned in a joking manner, causing a laugh to erupt from Hazel.

A sudden crash sounded from upstairs, and the two of them went silent. Deacon snapped his head up toward the noise before exchanging a look of confusion with Hazel. Together they left the kitchen and stepped across the hall. Deacon placed a finger to his lips and began to scale the stairs. Hazel followed him, trying to stay as quiet as possible. Deacon touched the upper landing with one foot and peeked around the corner to see down the hallway.

He waited for a couple of seconds and then gestured for Hazel to continue following him. Hazel thought she heard a scuffle of feet in Noah's room at the back of the hall. Deacon must have heard it too, as he sped up his walk and then pushed open the door slowly.

Rummaging through Noah's drawers and scattering personal items to the floor was the blonde figure of Priscilla. Hazel watched in alarm as she removed a shirt of Hazel's and began to tear at its seams. Since Hazel had begun a relationship with Noah, she'd moved several of her clothing items into Noah's room.

And now Priscilla was in the process of destroying everything she owned. Several pairs of precious, high-end clothes that Noah had bought for Hazel lay in tatters on the hard wood floor Hazel's hair brush, tooth brush, and most of her hair ties had been broken or snapped in two across the bathroom floor.

"When did you sneak in here?" Deacon demanded.

His voice startled Priscilla so badly that she nearly jumped from her spot, shirt in hand, and turned to look at them. "Deacon!" Her eyes landed on Hazel, and they suddenly grew livid. "Oh, and you brought *her*."

"What are you doing to all of my stuff?" Hazel exclaimed. She stooped and picked up a shirt, which had been ripped well beyond repair.

"I'm tearing it all to bits. What does it look like?" Priscilla replied vehemently.

"You're psychotic," said Deacon as he stepped into the room. "And what's Noah going to think when he comes home to this? He'll know it's you."

"I don't care," Priscilla spat. "If I don't get to have a spot next to Noah, than neither does she." She pointed to Hazel.

"I hate to break it to you, Prissy, but ruining Hazel's things isn't going to break her up with Noah."

Priscilla balled up the shirt in her hands and threw it at Deacon who caught it nonchalantly. She looked at Hazel. "I'll send you back home in tears."

Hazel folded her arms and scowled. "It'll take a lot more than destroying my personal items to send me home crying."

"You're running out of tactics fast, Priscilla, and I can tell you're getting desperate," said Deacon as he pulled a pair of pants from her hands and folded them back up to place them back in Noah's drawer. "Why not just give it up, say you're sorry, and then leave?"

Priscilla looked hurt. "Deacon, I thought we were friends. How could you side with them?"

He raised a red eyebrow at her. "Friends? After all of the hell you've put Noah and Hazel through? Give me a break. I'm glad Noah fired you. Oh, and by the way, did you know that Gavin is down by the bird cages?"

She sent him a black look. "Of course I know. He helped let out the birds."

"Wait a minute," Hazel began. "If you're here, then where is Noah's bird Alex?"

"Alex is in the downstairs bathroom," said Priscilla. "I'd never get rid of that bird. I just placed him elsewhere to stir the air."

Deacon lifted his hands and pretended to write something down on his palm. "I'll just add that to the growing list of unnecessarily evil things that Priscilla has done in one afternoon."

"Don't make me hate you, too, Deacon," Priscilla warned. Deacon shrugged.

"Do whatever you want, Priscilla, since you pretty much already are. I'm not your friend, and I don't even want to be associated with you."

Priscilla looked at both he and Hazel. Seeming distraught and backed up into a corner. She tore away from them, pushing Hazel roughly out of the way of the door. Hazel started for her, but Deacon caught her hand and stopped her.

"But Deacon! She's going to get away!"

Deacon shook his head. "Let her go. There isn't anything else she can do, I'm sure. Noah will be home soon, and once he sees this, he'll be furious. Gavin should probably see this, too."

Hazel heard Priscilla scamper down the stairs, and then a moment later the entry door opened and shut.

"For now, let's go downstairs and retrieve Alex," Deacon suggested.

With a nod, Hazel followed Deacon out, only looking back at her personal belongings with a slightly dejected feeling in her chest. All those perfect clothes that Noah had bought her on her second day here at the zoo... now strewn around, dirty and shredded. With a sigh, she copied Deacon's steps back down the hallway, to the staircase, and down to the base floor.

"Priscilla could have told us which bathroom," Deacon mumbled as he walked down an opposite hall. "Noah has three down here. Why don't you check the one by the entryway? I'll go down this hallway."

Hazel walked toward the entryway and opened the door to the bathroom. She stepped inside and looked around cautiously. She'd never seen a goshawk before, but figured it looked something like a hawk. And if that was the case, this bathroom was too small for it. There wasn't a bird in sight.

"I've checked both the ones over this way," Deacon called from the living room. "Is he in there?"

"No," Hazel replied while closing the door. "Nothing."

Deacon frowned as Hazel entered the living room. "Odd. She lied to us again?"

The smell of burned bread and smoke reached Hazel's nose, and she wrinkled it in distaste. "Deacon...your sandwich."

"Shoot!" Deacon rushed out of the living room and hurried into the kitchen to take the sandwich off the pan, cursing quietly to himself as he did.

The entry door opened, and Noah stepped inside with a sigh. He spotted Hazel standing in the living room and approached.

"I turned up empty handed," he announced. He paused at the entrance into the living room and sniffed the air. "What burned?"

Deacon poked his head out from the kitchen. "My hopes and dreams of making the perfect sandwich, Noah. That's what burned." Noah only frowned in confusion.

"Priscilla was here," said Hazel to Noah. "She was up in your room tearing up my things. Deacon and I chased her out."

He suddenly looked irate, eyes widening in disbelief. "And Gavin was near the bird exhibits," Hazel went on. "But he didn't really do anything. Just talkative."

Noah ran a hand through his hair in exasperation. "So their releasing of the birds was basically just a way to get me out of the zoo so that they could cause more havoc."

"Probably," Deacon chimed in from the kitchen. Noah sighed, looking bothered. "And no sign of Alex, I take it." Hazel shook her head sadly.

"Let's see if we can track him down then. I haven't had any word from my employees that he's around the zoo perimeter, and I checked the forest as much as I could. That leaves only the house and the surrounding buildings in the zoo."

"Priscilla said that she put him in one of the downstairs bathrooms, but we just finished checking," said Hazel.

"Then how about the visitor's center?" Deacon suggested as he stepped out of the kitchen, dusting off his hands. "I'll help, too."

The three of them made their way out back toward the zoo. Deacon checked the money booth while Hazel and Noah entered the visitor's center and gift shop. Noah walked past the counter and listened intently for any foreign noises. Hazel did the same. She came close to him and took his hand, and he closed his fingers around hers, shooting her a smile.

"Noah, can I talk to you about something?" Hazel asked.

Kissing Deacon had weighed heavily on her mind since it'd happened, and Hazel wanted to be honest and straightforward with Noah about it. Though she'd been easygoing around Deacon, the thoughts of it still had entered her mind frequently.

"I kissed Deacon earlier," she admitted. Noah widened his eyes.

"I don't even know why," she continued, feeling flustered and remorseful. "I guess I felt sympathetic because he'd said he'd never really had a relationship, and we just connected. I don't know." She shook her head, disgusted with herself. "I'm sorry, Noah. I mean... it was nothing. Will you forgive me?"

Noah's face had been surprised at first, his mouth parted just lightly to signify his confusion, but he closed it and smiled, his eyes softening. "Hazel," he started, "if it were any other man, I would be worried. When it comes to Deacon, I understand."

Hazel felt astounded by Noah's calm behavior. "You do?" she questioned.

Noah took both her hands in his and pulled her closer to him, keeping his reassuring smile. "Yes. Deacon and I have known each other for a number of years now. He is a close friend, and I'm actually glad that you find interest in him. He's charismatic and funny, and I think you need a little of that in your life."

"What are you talking about?"

Noah shrugged. "Maybe it's something we can talk to Deacon about later. For now, Just know that there's no need to worry. I'm not upset at all."

Hazel felt a flood of relief from his words. It was nice to know that Noah wouldn't suddenly despise her for sharing a kiss with his friend.

"Let's focus on Alex first, and then I think I want to talk to Deacon about something," Noah said as he lifted a finger to his chin in thought. Hazel eyed him peculiarly, but he only shook his head. "I'll make it a secret for now."

"Well... alright." Hazel and Noah checked over the visitor's center thoroughly. Noah unlocked the employee doors and walked inside just as Deacon reached the entrance to the building, peering in.

"Any luck?" he asked.

Hazel was about to shake her head, but Noah's call from the employee closet caught their attention.

"In here!"

Hazel and Deacon rushed over to the door, and Noah stepped out clutching a sizeable raptor to his chest. Alex the goshawk had a stripe along its chest and had a gray back. He cocked his head to one side to gaze at Hazel with gleaming orange eyes.

"Oh, he's beautiful," Hazel commented.

"Of all the places..." Deacon started. "Is he okay?"

Noah nodded as he stroked Alex's feathers. "He seems fine, but Priscilla's going to be in deep trouble if she ever comes back here again."

"Speaking of her," said Deacon. "What are we going to do about them?"

"Gavin wanted to speak to Noah," Hazel reminded.

"Right," Noah began. "Let me put Alex away, and then we can address the other situation."

They made their trek down the pathways of the park to get back to the avian exhibits. Noah walked around the back to enter into Alex's cage. Hazel heard footsteps behind her. She twisted around as Gavin, now in a pair of borrowed pants, walked forward. His eyes were still hard as he watched Noah place Alex back in the cage. Deacon returned the hard glare, but Hazel felt that there was something different about Gavin's presence this time.

Noah locked the cage and turned around to spot Gavin. At first his fists balled up, his knuckles turning white.

"Before you unleash your anger on me, Noah, I'd like to talk to you," said Gavin as he raised a hand.

Noah folded his arms. "I've heard about the things that you and Priscilla have done, and I'm not happy about any of it. I could have lost some of these birds, you know. And some of them can't survive out in the wild. They are too weak."

"I told Priscilla to take your goshawk. I did not tell her to release the others. She went too far, and she will be punished for this," said Gavin.

"Oh, that isn't everything," Hazel spoke up. "She destroyed my personal belongings." Gavin's eyes narrowed to slits.

"If she's gone back to the clan, make sure she doesn't come back here," said Noah.

"You have my deepest apologies," Gavin remarked. "We won't be coming back unless it's necessary. I think you've learned your lesson about the forest, and Priscilla will soon learn hers about going too far." Noah looked ready to retort, but he closed his mouth and said nothing.

With a nod to the others, Gavin turned around and left the scene. Hazel watched him disappear down the pathway leading back to the zoo entry gates.

"What a pompous hothead," Deacon uttered. Noah began the walk back toward the exit as well. Hazel and Deacon followed.

Hazel reached and took Noah's hand, looking up at his face. "What's next, Noah?" she asked. "I really hope all of that is over."

"It is," he answered. "My birds are back, Priscilla and Gavin are gone, and everyone seems to be safe."

"Does this mean I can finally start my vacation?" Hazel wondered.

Noah glanced at her, and then to Deacon. He smirked. Hazel caught the expression and frowned. "What is it, Noah?"

Noah stopped on the pathway and turned to her. "Hazel, do you mind if I talk with Deacon for a moment? Just the two of us?"

Hazel sent him a confused look but nodded after a couple of seconds. "I suppose. I'll just go back to the house then."

Hazel left the two men to chat and wandered out of the zoo, heading up toward the house. She sighed, wondering if she would get a single day here that wouldn't be filled full of stress and adventure.

She didn't mind the adventure, but she'd had no idea that Noah had adversaries and so much contention with others. She hoped whatever he was discussing with Deacon was not anything bad. And she *really* hoped it had nothing to do with the kiss she'd shared with him.

Hazel was about to place her hand to the handle of the door leading into the house when a snarl met her ears. She turned around and gasped in shock as a massive grizzly lifted up on its hind legs to let out a bellow to shake Hazel's confidence. She backed up against the door in complete fear as the growling bear lunged at her, jaws open and ready to snap.

# Chapter 13

Hazel screamed and ducked. The bear slammed into the door, just missing her head. Hazel crawled out of the way and pushed herself into a dash back down the driveway toward the zoo. The big bear behind her tromped after her, faster than she was. Hazel shrieked again in fear.

"*Noah*!" she cried. She nearly lost her footing as she slipped on a couple of loose rocks in the gravel, but continued running anyway, her adrenaline too high to slow her down.

Noah came sprinting out from the gates of the zoo. He dropped to the ground, and his back hunched. Fur spread over his body as he grew in size, and as he lifted back into a half raised stand and roared. Deacon caught up to him, eyes wide and panting to catch his breath. Hazel rushed behind Noah as he turned to confront the other bear, snarling and swiping with his paws to make their enemy back up.

The attacking bear attempted to circle around Noah to get to Hazel, but Hazel rushed to Deacon's arms, and he backed them both away from the scene. They watched as Noah snarled and pushed at the enemy, but never did much to hurt it. Hazel didn't recognize this bear, but she had an idea of who it was. There was only one werebear that hated Hazel that much and was that relentless about getting revenge, and her name was Priscilla.

"I know who that is," said Hazel.

Deacon nodded as he watched the fight. "Me too. I feel almost sorry for how crazy she's gone over this whole thing."

"Was she always this selfish about trying to claim Noah for herself?" Hazel wondered as the two bears snarled more and swiped at each other.

Deacon nodded grimly. "Anyone who so much as gave Noah a flirtatious look were placed on Priscilla's black list. She used to come to me complaining that people were trying to take 'her Noah' away from her."

"She really is crazy," Hazel uttered. Noah finally chased Priscilla out of his property, and Hazel watched the bear race back down the dirt road toward the forest. Noah turned to look back at Hazel and Deacon before heading up the hill. Deacon took Hazel's hand and followed.

Noah changed back to his human self, losing his fur and massive size, and he stood up on two legs to open the door and walk inside. "She won't stop," Noah sighed.

"She'll stop," Deacon reassured. "Gavin sounded pretty mad at her. I'm sure he'll take care of her in the forest."

Noah paused by the sofa and then nodded. "Right. I shouldn't worry too much." He looked at Hazel. "Are you alright? She didn't hurt you, did she?"

Hazel shook her head. "You've saved me yet again, Noah." He smiled faintly.

She then looked at Deacon, who still held her hand. "And Deacon, you've been so kind to me. Even with these terrible things happening, I wouldn't want to take any of it back."

Deacon smiled back at her. "Things will get even better from now on, Hazel. Noah and I were talking about it."

"Oh, speaking of that," she said, glancing at Noah. "What was all that about? You keep refusing to tell me."

Noah smirked. "Why don't you come upstairs with us, Hazel, and we'll show you?"

"Show me?" she wondered, but she didn't have a chance to protest, as Deacon was already pulling her along behind Noah.

They scaled the stairs and walked down the hall. Noah opened the door to his room and stopped when he saw the massive mess that Priscilla had left behind. He growled something under his breath and kicked a ruined shirt out of the way.

"I'll clean this up when we have time later. For now, there's something more important that needs to be addressed."

Deacon walked Hazel in and shut the door behind her. Hazel looked at Noah and tilted her head in puzzlement. "Like what?"

Deacon gripped the hem of her shirt and pulled it over her head, yanking it off and throwing it to the floor.

"Deacon!" Hazel began in surprise. She panicked as Deacon unhooked her bra with swift fingers. Noah leaned against the footboard of his bed and smiled, folding his arms and watching. His look was dark and smoky.

"What's going on?" Hazel demanded as Deacon jerked the bra over her shoulders and tossed it behind him with a chuckle.

"Don't worry, Hazel," Noah spoke up. "I told Deacon to do this."

"Noah wanted a little show," said Deacon. "He also told me what you'd told him. You know, about yours and my little kiss earlier."

Hazel felt torn as Deacon walked in front of her and undid her pants. She wanted to pull his hands away, but at the same time she liked the idea. There was something about Deacon doing this to her in front of Noah that fueled a swelling fire of desire inside her.

"I don't know if I'm comfortable with this," Hazel began, but Noah straightened from the bed and walked forward. He took her hands in his and looked her in the eyes.

"It's alright, Hazel. I'm right here." Although she was still unsure about the entire situation, holding Noah's hands helped to reassure her just a little. She nodded hesitantly and leaned against him. Deacon had pulled her jeans down to her ankles, and had lowered her panties. She felt his warm breath against her center, and it caused her to tingle with want.

"I think she needs to be calmed down, Noah," said Deacon. Noah grinned crookedly as he continued to stare into Hazel's eyes. "I have to agree with you."

Hazel was about to ask what they meant, but Deacon's lips touched against her womanhood, and his tongue brushed lightly across her clit. She gasped from the soft and moist sensation. Noah's fingertips traced along her exposed nipples, and she felt them harden under his touch.

"I think that she likes what you're doing down there, Deacon," Noah mused.

Deacon groaned against Hazel's softness. He kissed her sensitive flesh and licked at the moisture developing between her folds. His actions were heavenly, and Hazel slowly felt herself relaxing under the sweet sensation. After a minute or so, Deacon lifted his head from her body.

"Is she ready up there, Noah?" Noah pinched both of Hazel's nipples with this thumbs and forefingers, and Hazel moaned. "More than ready, but what about down there? Is she wet?"

Deacon chuckled darkly. "Definitely."

"Good then. We can get started."

"Get started doing what?" Hazel gasped.

Noah sent her a mischievous smirk as Deacon stood, and the tugged her over toward the bed. Hazel tripped a little over her ruined belongings strewn across the floor. Noah pressed his hand to her back and pushed her forward. Hazel yelped a little as her front hit the mattress.

Deacon's fingers found her wrists, and two leather cuffs were snapped over them, holding them together in a crisscross pattern. Noah climbed onto the bed and knelt in front of her. She widened her eyes as she saw that he'd removed his clothes. His manhood stood erect and curved proudly. He touched the tip to her lips.

"Here is what's going to happen, Hazel," he began. "You will take me in, and Deacon will do whatever he wants to you on the other end. Do you understand? Do you like that idea?"

Hazel opened her mouth in shock but nodded eagerly. She did like the idea. Having these two attractive men take complete advantage of her seemed like a fantasy come to life. Noah's shaft slid past her lips, and she brushed her tongue over his length. She enjoyed the feeling of his thickness and his curve. Hazel began to suck as he pushed his member in deeper, and she felt a hand whip across her backside in a slap. It was Deacon's.

The sharpness and the sting sent an electrifying jolt coursing down her legs, and Noah's shaft pressed down her throat. She choked for just a moment, but then swallowed him and sucked at his flesh. Noah's fingers tangled into her hair, and he pulled her head closer to his hips, pushing his shaft deeply into her. Deacon breezed his hand against her again in another spank, and then she felt a new sensation.

Another member touched the soft folds of her femininity. It teased her opening, pressing just light enough for her to anticipate its entrance. She wanted to beg Deacon to give it to her, but her mouth was still full of Noah's shaft. She sucked harder and arched her back, spreading herself a little for Deacon.

His manhood pressed further, just enough to torture her and she whimpered, her voice muffled. Finally, Deacon ended the suffering and forced his shaft inside. He was big like Noah, and he stretched out her cavity almost painfully at first. The forced entrance made her center throb, but she relished the feeling.

Hazel's hands twisted and tugged at the cuffs binding her wrists together, and her body squirmed here and there as Deacon began to pump his tool in and out of her entrance. Noah pulled out of her mouth and lifted her head so that he could see her face. She kept her mouth open in constant gasping and moaning as Deacon pleasured her.

"Your eyes are so glazed with bliss," Noah commented. "Does Deacon feel good in your pussy?"

"Oh yes, Noah. Yes!" Hazel panted. "I want it more! Please, Deacon! Pound into me!"

"No no, not yet, Deacon. Give her a slow burn. I want to see that look of utter torture on her face," said Noah.

Deacon chuckled, and he slowed his thrusting to complete stop. He left his shaft inside her only partway, and Hazel's body pulsed for the desire to be slammed into. She whined for it and shifted, trying to push herself back against Deacon's hips and force him in deeper. Deacon's hand spanked her again

"Naughty girl," Deacon chided. "You're going to feel the slow burn like Noah ordered."

Noah's shaft pressed against her cheek, and she watched his hand slide across his length as he pleasured himself. "Deacon is right. I don't want you to have his cock until you're screaming for it."

"Oh, Noah," Hazel began. She kissed his tool softly on the tip. "It does burn. I feel it all through my body."

"It's not enough," he uttered.

Deacon's member slipped out a little more.

"No! Please! Give it to me!" Hazel cried.

Noah fitted his own member back into her mouth to muffle her, chuckling wickedly. She cried over his shaft, but was no longer to make any coherent sentences as Deacon slipped completely out of her.

*No! No!* She thought as her femininity leaked nectar from his departure. She *had* to have him inside her! Her body ached and pulsed for it. She needed it.

Deacon's fingers trailed over her the insides of her thighs. He left her skin feeling sensitive and raw. His tongue replaced where his fingers had been, and he licked up and along her thighs and back to her womanhood, taking her back into his mouth.

"Don't worry, Hazel. Deacon will just clean you up and prepare you for the next round," Noah cooed. "Just relax and enjoy yourself."

Deacon's tongue and lips found her clit, and he suckled her until she bucked from oversensitivity, gasping around Noah's tool. Deacon dug deeper with his tongue, flicking it from her most susceptible areas and then up to her opening.

He kissed her a couple of times and then lifted back up into a straight stand, replacing his mouth with his fingers. Hazel tried to lean into his clutch, but Noah's member left her mouth to slap across her cheek. It wasn't rough, but just enough to shock her a little. She'd never felt him do it, but it only enveloped her with more want.

"So naughty. Be a good girl now and let Deacon have his fun," Noah ordered.

The sound of his words had her flooded with pure desire. She pressed kisses to Noah and sucked at his skin around his hips, eager for more attention. He took her by the head again and inserted his length back into her mouth as Deacon's fingertips tickled her opening.

Hazel wailed over Noah's thickness, and so he nodded to Deacon, who forced his own length back inside her body and deeply. Hazel's center accepted his violent thrusts willingly. She melted against Noah as he held her hair with one hand and pumped himself down into her throat once again.

The constant back and forth thrusts of the two men had Hazel's body nearing orgasm. She wanted to hold it off…to save it for later and just bask in this utterly blissful abandon that these two men gave to her. She tried, but her body worked against her. She tensed, her eyelids fluttering in ecstasy, and she allowed herself to be overcome with a deep climax. Her mind let go of all cares and all feeling as she was suspended in the nirvana of pleasure.

Then Noah slipped out of her mouth, and Deacon removed himself from her center. She collapsed to the bed as Deacon freed her wrists from the leather cuffs.

"Oh, Noah... Deacon," Hazel gasped. Noah picked her up halfway and rested her in his lap. Deacon sat down beside them.

"That was amazing," she sighed. "I didn't want to come. I wanted the two of you to stay inside me."

Deacon leaned in a little with an impish smile across his lips. "That's the best thing, Hazel. We can do it again."

She raised her eyebrows at this before Noah spoke. "Deacon is right. He confessed to me how he felt about you, and you had already told me that you may have feelings for him. Deacon is very close to me, and so I want all three of us to share that kind of love and respect."

Hazel clung to Noah gratefully. "You two have given me more than I could ever ask for."

"We're just two men who want to show you the love that you deserve," Noah breathed. "Since I had the opportunity to invite you to my home, Hazel, I've wanted a relationship with you. I love you, and I feel that I would do anything for you."

"Well, you have saved her a number of times, now, from a psychotic woman and her male counterpart," Deacon commented.

"About that," Hazel started. She sighed, but not in a happy sense. "What if she comes back?"

Noah kissed her head. "She won't. There is nothing more that she can do. She's tried everything in her power, and we powered through it all. And with Deacon and me here to protect you, there is no reason why you should fear the werebears."

Hazel touched Noah's cheek. "You have shown me what werebears can really be like. You have taken me in and given me a life that I could only dream of back in the city. I don't think I ever want to leave here now."

Noah chuckled as he stroked her hair. "No one said you had to, though we will have to make another trip into town to get you new clothes, and eventually you might have to make the move official."

She giggled. "Well, yes."

Deacon hugged her, as did Noah, and Hazel embraced them back. She didn't want to give any of this up. As she held the two of them on Noah's bed in that big house, she knew that here was where she was going to stay.

**THE END**