**ALPHA LION SHAPESHIFTER**

**ALPHA TIGER SHAPESHIFTER**

**BRIDE ROMANCE**

**SYNOPSIS**

*His hands were all over her. She moaned and tried to cling to some sense of reality. She couldn’t do this, she didn’t do things like this.*

*Sammy has had horrible luck in her love life. At twenty-six, she’s had more train wreck boyfriends than she can count. She was always a sucker for the bad boy, but having been burned too many times to count she knows it’s time to look for something different.*

*She never thought that she would find exactly the different she needed when she hacked into a secure match-making site for the incredibly rich… and not entirely human.*

*Surprised and curious to discover the existence of shapeshifters, Sammy decides to forge a few financial documents so that she is able to apply to be matched with one of them. Maybe this will lead her to the love she’s been missing.*

*Things become complicated when two shifters bid on a date with her and tie. Now she’s faced with the decision: does she choose the bad boy lion shifter she’s always been attracted to, or try something a little more cautious with the mature tiger shifter.*

*As her feelings for Mike and Tom grow the choice gets harder and harder to make, but does it matter who she chooses? Will either one of them be able to forgive her when they learn her secret?*

***A standalone BBW paranormal alpha lion, alpha Tiger mail order bride shapeshifter romance.***

***Around 20,200 words. No cliffhangers!***

***KEYWORDS:***

*new adult, bad boy romance, alpha male romance, alpha male, contemporary romance, lion shapeshifter romance, tiger shifter romance, mail order bride romance, short stories, shifter romance, mail order mate.*

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# Chapter 1

Sammy stirred her freshly brewed cup of tea and resumed her seat in front of her computer. Her eyes flicked over to the clock and she suppressed a groan at the late hour. It was past 1:00am, but she knew that even if she went to lie down in her bed, sleep would still elude her. She took a hesitant sip of her sleep enhancing tea and pulled back at the burn. This was her fourth cup and its declared effects still weren’t working. Such was the curse of the insomniac, she supposed.

Sammy started to click through the open tabs on her computer, distracting her from her insatiable exhaustion. She got her degree in computer science because she had loved hacking into closed sites and forbidden areas of the internet back in high school. Now, at twenty-seven years-old, it was actually her job to do so. She worked freelance for a programming company during the day who hired her to try and hack into the secure websites they create for their customers.

If she wasn’t able to do it, then they knew they had the best security possible. At night, though, during the late hours while everyone else was asleep, she liked to keep her hacking skills up to speed with some fun hacking of her own. It was the fastest way to pass the time until she eventually dozed for a few hours before needing to get up for work.

Sammy pulled her auburn hair back, lifting the long tendrils off her neck so that the tender skin could breathe. So far, she hadn’t found anything of much interest, and that was disappointing. Sammy sighed and continued to poke around the internet for a little longer, trying to find anything of interest to occupy her time and keep her interested. About to give up and go lie in bed to give counting sheep a try, she stumbled across a very secure firewall.

Sammy sipped her now tepid tea and smiled. Now *this* was going to be fun. Any site with a firewall like that had something worth learning about. She attempted her usual hack that typically brought down the average firewall and let her through, but the site didn’t budge. Piquing her curiosity, Sammy tried again. She was unable to access the site in its entirety but she was able to view some of the files. Sammy pursed her lips as she perused the files, reading through the application standards of the site.

It was a match-making site, but not like any of the typical ones she had seen commercials for trying to entice lonely people to sign up. This site, was exclusively for the extremely wealthy. She browsed the required documentation: proof of fortune, financial history with supporting documents, three personal references, and a detailed description of current employment.

“Geez, this is more intense than what I went through to get hired as a professional hacker.” Sammy remarked to herself. “What on earth are you hiding?” She wondered, hacking deeper. After several minutes of trying different algorithms, she was finally able to gain access to the full website. Sammy gasped in surprise and shock. It wasn’t just a match-making site for the incredibly wealthy, it was a match-making site for wealthy humans and *shifters*. Sammy shook her head in disbelief and scrolled down the site, voraciously reading all the available information. Shifters? That was just science fiction, wasn’t it? She clicked on the tab advertising success stories and was amazed at what she saw. Not only were shifters real, but there was an astounding number of them.

There were shifters of almost every animal, and all of the billionaire shifters looking for a mate were registered with this site. Sammy shook her head again and glanced wearily at her tea. Maybe she was hallucinating. Maybe she had reached the point of exhaustion that she was actually dreaming while awake. Maybe none of this was real. She glanced back at the screen and bookmarked the IP address so that she could find it again. Clearly, it was time she went to bed. Sammy logged off her computer and stood up, starting at it confusedly for a moment longer.

“I’ll check back tomorrow when I get off work, and if it’s still there and exactly the same… then I’m not crazy at least.” Sammy told herself. Feeling semi-confident with her plan, she headed for bed.

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“What do you mean ‘shifters’?” Amanda, Sammy’s best friend and co-worker asked, sitting on Sammy’s desk. Sammy glanced nervously around and signaled for Amanda to lower her voice.

“Shh, I don’t want anyone else to hear about this. They’ll either think I’m insane or I’ll get arrested for hacking into a secret society or something.” Sammy said, leaning forward so that she could whisper to Amanda more directly. Amanda leaned in to her so that their heads were side by side and their voices wouldn’t carry.

“Sorry! I’m just so confused right now, it’s not every day your friend comes into work and tells you she hacked into a billionaire-shapeshifter site for arranged marriages with equally wealthy humans. Do you know how weird that sounds?” Amanda whispered harshly. Sammy nodded and clicked on her computer a few times to pretend that she was working when their boss walked by. After he had passed by her office, Sammy turned back to Amanda.

“Yes I know how weird it sounds! Believe me, I don’t know what I’m hoping for more— that it was all a dream, or that it’s real!” Sammy said, her round face breaking into a smile. Amanda shook her head.

“Why do you say that?” She asked curiously. Sammy shrugged and looked down at her computer.

“I don’t know, it just seems so fantastic. I was kind of thinking that if it’s real, I might sign myself up or something.” Sammy said with a shrug. Amanda’s eyes widened in surprise and she jumped off the desk, taking a stack of papers with her.

“What?! Sign up? To marry a billionaire shapeshifter?” Amanda asked incredulously. Sammy shrugged again, still looking down at her keyboard.

“Maybe. I mean, what could it hurt? Clearly they have a very advanced screening program—”

“Which you hacked.” Amanda interjected. Sammy scowled at her and ignored her.

“*So* you know they aren’t criminals—”

“At least not convicted.” Amanda scoffed, crossing her arms.

“*And* that they are looking for the real deal. Not just to get into some desperate girl’s pants.” Sammy finally finished. Amanda scowled again and shrugged.

“I guess, but how can you be sure it’s safe? I mean, they change into animals, don’t they?” Amanda tried to reason. Sammy nodded and let out a heavy sigh.

“Yeah, but the way I see it, they can’t be any worse than all the men I’ve already dated. Remember Tyler?” Sammy said, giving Amanda a pointed looked. Amanda gazed off, conjuring the man of mention from her memory.

“Oh yeah, the alcoholic with gambling problem. He was a winner.” She said sarcastically. Sammy rolled her eyes and nodded.

“Yeah, and Kevin before him…” She prompted. Amanda winced.

“The adulterous athlete. I remember.” Amanda said. Sammy opened her arms and gave her a knowing look. “Alright fine, you’ve had a history of choosing not-so-great guys,”

“Try awful. I don’t know what it is about the bad boy persona, but it gets me every time.” Sammy said disappointedly. Amanda patted her shoulder reassuringly.

“Maybe you’re right. If this turns out not to be a figment of your sleep-deprived imagination, it might not be the worst idea to give it a shot. There’s no obligation to actually marry the person you’re matched with, right?” Amanda asked. Sammy shook her head.

“No, there’s no obligation. But, it is a little different than other dating sites.” Sammy started. Amanda scoffed and gave a dry laugh.

“You mean *besides* the shapeshifers?” Amanda said doubtfully. Sammy bit her lip nervously.

“Yeah, besides that.” She said. Amanda perked up and let her arms fall to her sides.

“What else?” Amanda asked hesitantly. Sammy chewed on her thumb nail—a nervous habit she was never able to break.

“Well, I’m not exactly *matched* with someone. It’s more like I’m awarded to someone.” She ventured. Amanda frowned.

“What!” She exclaimed after a moment of silence while she digested what Sammy said. “So just anyone can buy you regardless whether or not they’re compatible with you?” Amanda asked incredulously. Sammy shook her head.

“No, not quite. The system will go through and select matches that coincide with my profile and then those matches will be allowed to bid on a date with me. To the highest bidder goes the spoils.” Sammy explained. Amanda stared at her with a deadpanned expression.

“So you. You are the spoils.” Amanda clarified. Sammy nodded slowly.

“Yeah, pretty much. But I’m not a possession or anything, they bid on a date with me. I can decline if I want to.” Sammy said, trying to win Amanda’s approval. Amanda’s frown deepened.

“I’m not sure how I feel about this, but if you want to give it a try I won’t stop you. How will you make the profile? You’re not exactly one of the rich and famous.” Amanda pointed out practically. Sammy smiled mischievously.

“No I’m not, but I am a hacker and I can work my way around that.” Sammy said cryptically. Amanda shook her head and walked toward the office door, preparing to return to her own desk.

“Whatever you say, but I want all the details if you win a date with Mr. Billionaire.” She said as she slipped out. Sammy smiled after her and turned back to her computer. Just a few more hours and she’d know for sure if she was really going to go through with this. That is, if it was real at all.

# Chapter 2

Sammy eyed her computer from her kitchen, uncertainly munching on a handful of almonds. She got home from work about two hours ago. She had fought the urge to go directly to her computer as soon as she walked through the door. She was curious, yes. Excited? Definitely. Desperate? No. She bit into another almond and sighed, well maybe a little desperate. Regardless, she told herself she wouldn’t get all nervous and crazy about this.

She would carry on with her life as if she didn’t stumble upon a secret society and match-making website for rich and famous humans and shifters. So despite the very, very strong urge to validate the website’s existence and create her profile, she took a long shower, made herself dinner and was trying to work herself up to watching her favorite show. She reached for another almond but was startled out of her staring match with her computer when her fingers only found the palm of her hand.

Well if she had resorted to mindlessly eating she might as well not fight it anymore. Giving up her internal fight, Sammy strode defiantly over to her computer and took her seat. She logged in and quickly pulled up her favorites tab, locating the bookmarked site easily. She clicked on the link and her breath hitched in her throat as the site pulled up. Sure enough it was all there; it had the same mint green side bars, the same pictures of happy couples, and the same qualifications: rich, single, and open-minded.

“Well, I’m two of those things, so that’s got to count for something.” She muttered to herself. She read through the required documentation and leaned back in her chair, contemplating her next move. She was a hacker, she could forge the documentation easily but that was fraud.

Sammy ran her fingers through her thick hair and groaned. Was it worth the risk to see if one of these pre-screened, satisfaction-guaranteed men was right for her? She glanced over at her new TV and the memory of her ex-boyfriend, Tyler, throwing a beer bottle at the old one causing it to shatter came to mind. Yes, it was worth the risk to ensure that she didn’t waste any more of her time on guys like that. Sammy began searching the site, trying to locate previous submissions.

Eventually, after some diligent hacking, she was able to pull up a file of a recent submission. She copied the forms and began editing the names, some of the numbers, and a few other details to make sure that it neither stood out, nor looked identical. It took several hours, but by midnight she had successfully compiled everything she needed for her submission. The site would need twenty-four hours to verify her forms and approve her request, so she uploaded the documents and waited.

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The following day when Sammy got home from work she didn’t even bother with the pretense of convincing herself that she was nonchalant, she immediately went over to her computer and logged in.

“Please be there, please be there.” She chanted to herself as she pulled up the email account she had set up for this. Her face broke out into a grin as she saw the single email waiting in her inbox. She opened the message and scanned through its content, her smile widening as she read. “Yes! I got accepted!” Sammy cheered, leaping from her chair and dancing jovially in front of her computer. “I got accepted, I got accepted.” She chanted. Getting the built-up energy out of her system after waiting all day to find out, Sammy collapsed in her chair and breathed out a sigh of relief.

“This is better than my college acceptance letter.” She laughed. With the go-ahead to complete her profile, Sammy began sorting through the questionnaire and possible profile pictures. The questionnaire was easy, she just had to complete a multi-choice quiz of sorts about what she liked and what she wanted. Based on her results, she would be matched with the ideal candidates who would complement her.

Finding a profile picture was the hard part. She wanted a picture that would flatter her and all her curves. She sneered as she pulled up another picture that just made her feel fat. She wasn’t usually so self-conscious, but she was well aware that this picture is what her potential future-husband would see and she had to make it look good. Heaving a gust of defeat, she picked up her phone and called the only person she knew who could achieve what she needed.

“Hello?” The sweet voice picked-up.

“I need help.” Sammy said. There was a brief pause on the other line before Amanda spoke again.

“Is this ‘I have to bury a body’ help, ‘I’ve fallen and I can’t get up’ help, or ‘miscellaneous non-emergent’ help?” Amanda asked stoically.

“The last one, ‘miscellaneous non-emergent I need you to make me beautiful to attract a rich man’ help.” Sammy clarified. Amanda chuckled on the other line while Sammy nervously chewed her nail.

“Oh I am the best at that kind of help. I’ll be right over.” Amanda said briskly ending the conversation and hanging up. Sammy smiled and set her phone down, she could always count on Amanda to be there for her when she needed her. While she waited for Amanda to arrive, Sammy busied herself by attempting to hack into a few other profiles from the women on the site to get an idea of how theirs were set up. Sammy was looking at a third profile when Amanda burst through the door.

“Now what is this crisis and how can I help?” She asked, tossing a large tote bag on the couch and striding over to Sammy’s desk. She bent down and peered over Sammy’s shoulder, analyzing the profile of the leggy blond that Sammy was looking at. “Wow, who’s the babe?” Amanda asked, giving a low whistle. Sammy rolled her eyes and spun her chair around.

“My competition… of sorts. I need to make my profile look something like this. All the girls I’ve looked at are like freaking supermodels and their pictures are all professional photo shoots or something. How the hell am I going to pull that off?” Sammy ranted, her volume rising in her anxiety. Amanda pursed her lips and looked Sammy critically up and down, taking in her worn sweatpants, over-sized t-shirt, and her hair which had become incredibly frizzy from running her fingers through it so many times.

“Um, yeah, we have our work cut out for us. I mean you’re beautiful and I love you, but *this*,” Amanda gestured to Sammy’s outfit and disheveled hair with a sad look of disgust, “this is not doing you any favors, darling.” Amanda said. Sammy gave her a tired look and put her hands on her hips.

“Yes, I am aware of that, thank you. But even if I got all fancy, how can we make it look like I’m rich and have a photographer on speed dial?” Sammy asked, wearily glancing around her apartment that—while nice and cozy—was nothing like the designer lofts features in the other girls’ pictures. Amanda tapped her chin and gazed around. Her face broke into a grin when an idea struck her.

“Well I take excellent pictures, so I will be your speed-dial photographer. As for the background, I’ve totally got it! We have to hurry though, otherwise there won’t be much sunlight left to pull it off.” Amanda grabbed Sammy’s hand and dragged her toward her bedroom.

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Sammy let out a relieved sigh and uploaded the final picture to her profile. Amanda was reclined on her couch, one leg strewn over the back and was fanning herself with her hand. Amanda had been brilliant. She dressed Sammy in her beautiful green and blue cocktail dress that she saved for special occasions and let her auburn hair cascade down her back with one side pulled back so that the contours of her high cheeks were visible.

It was fast and simple assembly, which is what they needed in order to be able to catch the sunset. Amanda had reasoned that since all the other profile pictures they had looked at were in studios, it would make Sammy stand out if she was outside. They went to the white gazeebo built on the edge of the property and made it just in time to get a few pictures with the setting sun and colorful sky. The pictures looked amazing and Sammy had never felt so beautiful. The dress flattered her plus-sized curves and the warm light of the sunset gave her a romantic glow. It was perfect.

“Alright, it’s about to go live in three… two… and one.” Sammy counted down before clicking the submit button. Her profile was officially active and ready to be matched. Hopefully, once she was matched with someone he would bid on her profile for a date. She crossed her fingers and leaned back in her chair, staring insecurely at the screen; she just needed one bid. For a few minutes, nothing happened. Sammy stood up from her computer and walked over to the couch where Amanda was laying. She picked up Amanda’s leg and plopped down, lowering her friend’s leg back onto her lap.

“Don’t worry, they can only bid if they’re online, right? It’s only 8:00pm, they probably haven’t had the chance to check yet. Plus, it’s only been five minutes anyway. I doubt the match-making algorithm works *that* fast.” Amanda reasoned, swinging her leg that was still hanging over the back of the couch. Sammy nodded and rested her head back.

“You’re right. I shouldn’t be so nervous about this, it’s just an experiment anyway. Gosh, it might actually be more complicated if I do get bid on.” Sammy said, opening her eyes and staring off as she thought about it. Amanda shrugged.

“Maybe, but it’s all for fun right now. Who knows, maybe you’ll meet Mr. Right and he won’t care that you falsified your identity and aren’t exactly one of the rich and famous.” Amanda joked. Sammy rolled her eyes and gave her friend a shove.

“Gee, thanks.” Sammy said sarcastically. They were quiet for a bit, enjoying the stillness after their rush to get the perfect picture. Now that her profile was complete and uploaded, they could both breathe for a bit after all their rushing around. After several minutes of silence, Sammy heard a tell-tale *ping* on her computer. She straightened instantly and listened more acutely.

Sure enough, there was another one signaling that she had a bid. She exchanged surprised glances with Amanda and they sprung off the couch in a tangle of limbs to check. Climbing over each other, they finally made it to the desk where Sammy sat down and looked at her profile.

“Oh my god.” Amanda said, stunned. Not only was there a bid, but there were dozens of them. The price for a date with her had already climbed to over a thousand dollars. Sammy was mute with shock.

“It looks like there’s a bidding war for you!” Amanda said excitedly, grabbing Sammy’s shoulders and giving her a shake. Sammy watched as the price of the bids continued to climb. Once it reached five thousand, the other bidders dropped off and it was just between two men at this point. “Who are they, can you tell?” Amanda asked eagerly. Sammy shook her head.

“Not until one of them wins. I can’t believe this is happening! One of them should have won by now, they’re reaching the limit.” Sammy mumbled. The bidding was going so fast that Sammy could barely keep up. It was only minutes later that the maximum price limit was met at ten thousand dollars. Sammy stared disbelievingly at the monitor. Someone wanted a date with her so badly that they would spend ten thousand dollars? No, not just some*one*, but two!

“So what happens now? Who won?” Amanda asked, her eyes scanning the screen for answers. Sammy shook her head and lifted one shoulder in a half-shrug.

“I, I don’t know.” She answered. For a minute nothing happened, and then she got another *ping* signaling a message. Wordlessly, Sammy opened the message and read the contents. ‘“Due to the rapid bidding and the maximum limit having been reached, it was determined that the bid resulted in a tie. Both matches are available for you to review and choose from.’” Sammy read aloud. She clicked on the first profile of winner #1.

“Um, wow! Is he a model or something?” Amanda exclaimed. Sammy laughed and scrolled down. He was incredibly handsome. His profile picture showed a tall man with short, business-styled, light brown hair, serious brown eyes, and a lean frame. He wore a suit and had a small, professional smile in his picture.

“No, he runs his own business; he’s the CEO of Acumen Data Processing. I’ve totally done a few jobs for his company. What are the odds?” Sammy remarked as she continued to read his profile. He was thirty-six years-old, liked computers as well as the outdoors, was a fan of her favorite movie, and loved to listen to live music.

“God he sounds perfect! And he’s a shifter?” Amanda asked as she read his profile over Sammy’s shoulder. Sammy nodded and continued to scroll.

“Yeah, says here he’s a tiger shifter. So I guess that means he shifts into a tiger, right?” She asked, looking back at Amanda. Amanda shrugged and nodded.

“I guess so, that’s what it sounds like to me. Is that dangerous? I mean, if he shifts into a tiger couldn’t he bite your face off or something?” Amanda asked concernedly. Sammy laughed at her friend and patted her arm.

“No, I don’t think that’s how it works. I’ll admit, I don’t really know, but I highly doubt the wealthy would be signing up to be mauled by their husband.” Sammy joked. Amanda smiled and stood up, going to the kitchen to get a glass of water.

“Well you never know, the rich do weird things. So who’s the other guy?” She asked, sipping her water. Sammy turned back to her screen and clicked on winner #2’s profile. He was younger—thirty years-old and had inherited his money. He liked extreme sports, and occasionally worked as a stuntman.

“Wow, he’s one of the Welton’s!” Sammy exclaimed. He was the son of one of the oldest families in the country and was vastly wealthy. Amanda came over and resumed her post behind Sammy.

“Oh that guy! I remember seeing him in the papers a few years back. He used to be quite the partier.” She said. Sammy thought back and remembered reading something similar to that as well.

“Well he seems to have cleaned up his act a bit and is looking for a mate. Plus, isn’t he just dreamy?” Sammy said, scrolling back up to show Amanda his profile picture. Amanda hummed her approval as she stared at him. His black hair was longer— falling just below his ears, and his eyes were a piercing blue. He was obviously very toned and muscular, his broad chest and toned abs were visible through the tight, black T-shirt he was wearing in the picture. Sammy felt herself start to drool just staring at him. “And he’s a lion shifter. That’s cool.” She said.

“So which one are you going to choose?” Amanda asked. Sammy switched back to the other profile, feeling drawn to his clean image. Tom Jamestown: mature, successful, possibly a bit dull but so completely opposite all the men she’s dated. She switched back and looked at the second profile again. Mike Welton: recovering playboy, stuntman, with a huge inheritance so he’d never have to work a real job if he didn’t want to. Exciting, dangerous, and she could feel her old allure for the bad boy stir in her belly.

“Maybe I’ll go on a date with each of them. I’m compatible with both, and I’m really intrigued to learn about different kinds of shifters. What could it hurt?” Sammy said, accepting both Mike and Tom’s invitations. Amanda raised an eyebrow critically but said nothing.

# Chapter 3

Tom couldn’t believe his luck. He reviewed the woman’s profile again and felt his heart skip a beat. He’d been on the match-making site for months now, but had yet to find a match that spiked an interest in him. He was actually debating removing himself from the site when he was alerted to her profile.

She had the same interests, she was a self-made success, they both worked with computers so they had a common understanding with their professions, and she was freaking gorgeous. He had specified when he filled out his preferences that he preferred plus-sized women; the curvier the better was his opinion. He never liked to hold a woman close against him and feel her hip bones digging into his.

Besides, he didn’t like to worry about whether or not he would accidently crush the woman he was with whenever he was being affectionate. But, despite his specifications, all the women he had been matched with so far were thin and straight-figured. He had bid on a couple of them— he was trying to find his mate after all— and he didn’t want to limit himself from the possibility that one of them could be his mate just because she didn’t match all of his ideal qualities.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t just their physical appearance that didn’t fit with his expectations. The two women that he went on a date with were very disappointing. They were selfish, entitled, and he just didn’t respect them. Tom let out a sigh and smoothed his hand over his face. He leaned back in his desk chair and stared at her profile contemplatively. Hopefully she wouldn’t be like that. If it didn’t work out with her, Sammy, he was going to have to go back to the drawing board.

Maybe looking exclusively for women in his tax bracket wasn’t the way to go, but he wanted to weed out all the gold diggers. Once his company took off and he became one of the top earning CEOs, the only women he seemed to be able to attract were just after his pocketbook.

He read through her profile again and found himself smiling. She seemed so… natural. He was immediately drawn to her picture because she was the first one he had seen that wasn’t taken in a studio and he really liked that. She seemed real, not someone trying to sell herself as a perfect fantasy. He tapped his thumbs on his desk impatiently.

The bidding for a date with Sammy had concluded over half an hour ago. Tom shook his head and dropped it between his palms. He wanted to message her, but since he wasn’t the only winner she had to choose. He was nervous—he didn’t know who the other bidder was and he hated not having control over the situation. It was the predator inside him that made him want to be the first to pounce; he wasn’t very good at being the prey.

Tom got up and paced to his kitchen, trying to get his mind off of it. He pulled a snack out of the pantry and began munching when he heard the tell-tale *ping*. He dropped the bag of mixed nuts on the counter and skidded across the floor to slide into his chair. She had sent him a message! He tried to calm his speeding heart and lower his adrenaline level. It felt like he was fifteen again, for god’s sake! His eyes skimmed her message and his nerves calmed. He let out a deep breath and reread it, taking his time to actually digest it.

*Dear Tom,*

*I am incredibly flattered by your proposal and persistence. After reviewing your profile, I agree that we have a lot in common to possibly make a good match. I would love to take the opportunity to get to know you better. When would you like to go on our date? I am available on Saturday if that works for you.*

*Hope to hear from you,*

*Sammy*

Tom grinned and felt his tiger growl in pleasure. Even the way she wrote seemed perfect. She was professional and to the point without any unnecessary filler talk, he liked that. Tom rubbed his chin and pondered where to take her on their date. He had to make it good, but he suspected that she wouldn’t appreciate something overly showy and over the top—just his type of woman.

He preferred things to be more low-key and pragmatic, which is probably why the other few dates he was matched with didn’t go so well. One women even went so far to call him boring for his restaurant selection. Tom let out a low *hmm* in thought. Well, he certainly didn’t want this woman to think him boring, but he also didn’t want to go against his natural instinct and do something over the top, either. Tom pulled out his phone and dialed his assistant. He had the perfect idea.

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Mike took a sip from his water-bottle, sweat dripping down the side of his face. His breathing was heavy, but that was to be expected after a five mile run. He wandered into the house, squirting the water over his sweaty hair.

“Did you have a good run today?” His mother asked, kissing him on the cheek. Mike smiled and gave her a kiss back.

“Yeah, I beat my old record.” He said proudly. His mother smiled at him and patted his shoulder.

“Good for you, honey! By the way, I didn’t mean to be nosy but I couldn’t help overhearing your computer alerting you to some new messages. Maybe it’s from that match-making site!” His mom said eagerly. Mike rolled his eyes and went into the kitchen to grab a post-run snack. Sometimes he hated the tradition that he should remain with his parents until he found a mate and started a pride of his own. Lion shifters were very family oriented, though, so going against the tradition would not be well received in his community. That was fine, most of the time he loved being with his family—like any lion would—but it was certainly inconvenient when it came to his love life.

“I don’t understand why you signed me up for that?” He groaned, opening the fridge and looking for something to satiate him. His mother took a seat on one of the stools at the island counter and shrugged innocently.

“Well, you mentioned you felt things were a little stagnant and I thought this would help you move your life in the right direction.” She said. Mike shot her a glare over his shoulder and pulled out the fixings for a sandwich.

“I meant I should try a new hobby, like base jumping, not get a wife.” Mike said haughtily. His mother clicked her tongue at him and waved her hand in dismissal at his reply.

“No matter, you *do* need to find a mate. You’re thirty-two years old, it’s time you moved on with your life to something more substantial.” His mother advised. Mike shook his head and left her sitting in the kitchen. He went directly to his study, knowing that if he didn’t she would shadow him around pestering him until he did. He logged onto his computer and checked his email. Sure enough, there was a message from the match-making site. It appears that during his evening workout he had bid on a date with a woman named Sammy and had tied with another suitor.

“Mom, what did you do?” Mike asked monotonously. His mother poked her head in his office from where she had been eavesdropping outside.

“Oh, well while you were gone you were matched with someone. I read her profile and she seems lovely. I really think you should go for it.” She said enthusiastically. Mike gave her a blank look.

“It appears I already did.” He said. His mother gave him a guilty smile and shuffled her feet.

“Well, I didn’t want you to miss an opportunity.” She said in explanation. Mike shook his head at her and reviewed the woman’s profile. She was very pretty and *very* curvy which he liked.

She had an interesting job which meant that she was intelligent and while he was no stranger to a ditzy girlfriend, he supposed he should be able to have a full conversation with his mate. She didn’t seem to share many interests with him, but that wasn’t unusual. He actually enjoyed dating someone who didn’t do the wild and crazy things he did—it meant that he could teach her how and that was always so amusing. She had sent him a message which he read through very quickly.

“She wants to have a date on Friday.” He said stoically. He glanced over at his mom who was waiting in anticipation for his response.

“And?” She asked hopefully.

“And…” He started. He scratched his cheek, noticing that he needed a shave as he did so. “I think I know a perfect first date for her.” He finally said. His mother’s face lit up in a huge smile.

“How wonderful! I knew you’d like her.” She said, turning and flouncing out of his office. Mike raised an eyebrow at her disappearance and shook his head. He loved his mother, but sometimes she was just too much. He looked back to his computer contemplatively. What would a woman who spends her days in an office want to do for fun? A wide grin spread across his face as it came to him: why, get out of her comfort zone of course. Mike pulled out his phone and sent a text to one of his buddies. He’d make sure Friday would be a night she wouldn’t forget anytime soon.

# Chapter 4

Sammy’s hands shook as she slipped on her jacket. It had been so long since her last date that she was a nervous wreck. She’d never panicked so much over what to wear before. She didn’t know where he was taking her or what he had planned, Mike just told her to wear something sensible.

Sammy checked the mirror by her front door and reevaluated her appearance. Jeans, a green blouse to match her eyes, and sneakers were sensible. Right? She debated pulling her hair back but decided against it. This was still a first date and she didn’t want to look too casual. She took a deep breath in to calm herself and ran a finger under one eye to remove any smudged make-up.

Why on earth did she choose to do two dates back-to-back? Not only was she nervous as hell for this one, but all she could think about was that she had to go through this all again tomorrow! She was not looking forward to that. She took another calming deep breath in and forced herself to relax. She’d never be able to drive if she didn’t stop shaking and even though Mike offered to pick her up that was not a viable option.

He’d take one look at her apartment and know she was a fraud. That was definitely not how she wanted to start a first date. With one last deep breath she pushed herself out of her apartment and to her car. Once she pulled up the address on her GPS, she used the hands-free option to call Amanda.

“Did you finally make it out of your apartment?” Amanda asked when she answered the phone. Sammy laughed and made a turn toward her destination.

“Yes, I did. I’m still freaking out though! It’s been way too long and I’m worried he’ll see right through me. It doesn’t help that I have no idea where I’m going or what he plans to do that requires ‘sensible’ dress.” Sammy said. Amanda made a dismissive sound.

“Nah, it’ll be great! Besides, if he ends up being all that particular about the whole money status then he isn’t the right guy for you and you got an awesome story out of it regardless. After tonight, no matter what happens, you will be able to say you went on a legitimate date with Mike Welton!” Amanda gave an excited squeal which made Sammy laugh and relax a little more.

“That’s true. I could also go to prison, but you’re right, I’ll still get to say that at least.” Sammy joked back.

“I doubt he’ll press charges, if anything you can play it off like an advertisement for work and maybe the company will pay *you*. As for the where you’re going, I’m sure it’ll be fine. Admittedly, I’ve never been told to wear something ‘sensible’ so I can’t say for certain…” Amanda said hesitantly. Sammy laughed and took another turn, her nerves starting to flare up again as the GPS told her she was getting closer.

“Well just stay on the line until I get there, depending on what it is I might need you to be my voice of reason.” Sammy said, looking around for any clue as to where she was meeting him. The directions had taken her to the edge of town and she could see wide fields and only a smattering of buildings.

“Darn, I’d much rather be the voice of recklessness. I’m better at it, too. Girl go get you some! See, it’s just more natural. Since he’s a lion shifter, do you think the sex with him will be like, really primal?” Amanda rambled. Sammy shook her head and focused on the final steps of the directions. She pulled into the parking lot of a large, dome building and her mouth fell open in surprise.

“Oh my god.” She gasped, cutting Amanda’s speculations off.

“What is it? Where are you? Should I alert the police?” Amanda asked frantically. Sammy chuckled.

“No! It’s an indoor skydiving place. Oh my god, he wants me to go skydiving?” Sammy shrieked. Her nerves were now back in full force and she felt her legs shake as she stared at the building.

“Oh how awesome is that! Points to Mr. Welton for best first date ever.” Amanda praised. Sammy shook her head and wanted to drive home.

“No, no I don’t think I can do this.” She said.

“Of course you can! It’s indoors, so it’s not like you’re jumping out of a plane or anything. Turn off the car and get your ass in there.” Amanda ordered sternly. Sammy heaved a sigh and did as she was told.

“Okay, but if I die I want you to confess in your eulogy that it was all your fault for making me do this.” Sammy said, getting her purse together.

“I promise. If you die I will take responsibility for making your last few moments be filled with awesomeness. You’re welcome.” Amanda said matter-of-factly. Sammy chuckled and bid her good-bye, disconnecting her phone from the car. She took a final moment to gather her courage and got out of her car. Her legs were shaking slightly, but she managed to get to the front doors where Mike was waiting for her.

Her breath hitched when she saw him leaning against the side of the building. The wind had blown some of his dark hair into his eyes but he didn’t seem to notice as he stared down at his phone. He was dressed simply in a black t-shirt and a pair of worn, tattered jeans that had seen better days but looked amazingly sexy on him. Suddenly, Sammy’s legs were shaking for a completely different reason.

Mike shook the hair out of his eyes and looked up at her as she approached and Sammy felt herself wobble at the intense blue of his eyes. He was literally breath taking. She had to gasp to inhale at all. *Oh, I am in trouble,* she thought. He gave her a smirk and pushed himself off the wall to meet her halfway.

“You must be Sammy. What a pleasant surprise, you are much more gorgeous than your picture and I didn’t think that could be possible.” He said, his voice thick and sweet like caramel. Sammy took his hand and giggled nervously as he kissed the back of it.

“Thank you, you’re very sweet. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mike.” Sammy said, hoping her voice didn’t quiver as much as her knees were. His grin widened and he opened the door for her, ushering her inside.

“Have you ever been skydiving before?” He asked, leading her toward the instructor waiting by the jump suits. Sammy was suddenly very thankful she opted for sneakers instead of the flats she had been considering. Now, she understood what he meant by ‘sensible’ and made a mental note for any future dates.

“No, I haven’t. This is all very new to me, the most extreme thing I’ve done is ride a motorcycle.” Sammy said with a laugh. Mike chuckled and helped her into her jumpsuit.

“Well, I am very glad I picked this for our first date. There is nothing like the rush you get from free falling and being suspended by nothing but air.” Mike told her. Sammy’s heart sped up and she stared at the platform she was going to be jumping off of with trepidation. Well, trying new things was always good, right? The instructor told them what to expect and the correct technique for a good dive.

Sammy listened intently, not wanting to mess up and break her leg. What a horribly embarrassing ending to the date that would be. She let out a deep breath and climbed up the scaffolding to the jump point.

“So do you own a motorcycle, then?” Mike asked, his voice was calm and relaxed which was completely the opposite of how Sammy felt at that moment.

“No, but I dated a guy who did. I really liked riding on it, but I don’t think I could drive one so it wouldn’t be a very practical purchase for me.” She joked, watching the instructor ready the equipment. Mike laughed, putting his hand on her shoulder as he came to stand behind her.

“Well, when you have a multi-million dollar fortune you can afford for practicality to be thrown out the window from time to time. I bought my first bike back when I was eighteen. I hadn’t ridden one before it, but I wanted one and bought it anyway and I’m so glad that I did.” Mike said, nudging her forward once the instructor gave the all-clear. Sammy gave a nervous smile, her heart lurching at the looming jump and her slip-up. *Remember, you have oodles of money and can buy anything*, she reminded herself.

“I opted for a convertible instead. I only get to drive it on good weather days and bad hair days, but I love it.” She lied, trying to cover-up her mistake. Mike laughed but didn’t reply as the instructor took her hand and led her to the edge. Sammy looked down and felt her stomach knot.

“On three!” The instructor said, a huge smile on his excited face. Sammy nodded and waited for him to count her down. She took a deep breath on each number and when he shouted “three” she leapt off the platform. Mike was right, the sensation was indescribable and the most amazing thing she’d ever felt. She hovered for a few minutes before landing gently.

“Well done!” She heard him shout at her from above. Sammy turned and gave him an awkward thumbs up, her smile radiating her exhilaration. “I’ll meet you down there in a minute!” Mike shouted to her again, preparing for his own jump. Sammy watched him leap into the air and felt her heart lurch with him. She didn’t know what Tom had planned for tomorrow, but she doubted he could top this.

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“So you get paid to hack into secure websites?” Mike asked, walking beside her on the trail just outside the indoor skydiving building. They were sipping water, which Sammy was thankful for because she wasn’t sure her stomach was ready to handle anything else quite yet. Her organs still felt like she was suspended in the air—her heart especially.

“Yup, and I’m pretty good at it, too.” Sammy said with a joking wink. Mike laughed and shook his head.

“I can’t believe you get paid to do that. I never would have thought hacking could be so lucrative and legal. Perhaps I should take some more computer classes.” He said. Sammy chuckled and nodded.

“Yeah, I really lucked out. I’ve always loved computers and I used to do a lot of hacking when I was younger, so it just made sense to try and make it my career.” She told him. It was all mostly true, anyway. She did love it, and she made a very decent living at it… it just wasn’t as much as he was thinking. *I really hope money isn’t a huge issue for him, otherwise I’m in even bigger trouble than I thought*, she told herself.

“That’s really cool. I did the same thing with my career. My dad wanted me to go into the family business but that’s what my brother’s there for, I wanted to do what I love and banking isn’t it.” He said with a shrug. Sammy nodded and sipped her water.

“I get that. It’s really important, I think, to follow your passion. I mean, you’re going to be doing it for the rest of your life, you should love it.” She said with a small smile. Her nerves had calmed and she was glad that the conversation seemed to flow relatively easy. There were a few awkward pauses but that was to be expected when getting to know someone.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking,” Sammy started, her eyes nervously darting from his curious blue ones to the ground. “It’s just, I’ve never had a date with…”

“A shifter?” Mike filled in for her. Sammy looked at him and when she noticed he was smiling at her she relaxed and returned his smile with a nod.

“Yeah, I’m just kind of curious about it.” She said with a shrug. Mike laughed and nodded, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“That’s normal, what do you want to know?” He asked calmly, making her feel more comfortable with her line of questioning. Sammy chewed her lip in thought.

“How does it work? I mean, do you become the animal completely or is it like your brain but in different body?” Sammy asked, Amanda’s concerns popping into her mind. Mike laughed and shook his head.

“It’s more like the latter, I guess. I can shift form but everything about me and who I am stays the same. Even now, I have the lion in me and those traits affect my behaviors.” Mike turned to her and took a step closer. Sammy’s heart jumped and she gulped at his proximity. He was so close to her she could feel his breath on her cheeks and their noses were almost touching.

“Right now, my lion wants to devour you… and I just might let him.” He whispered, leaning his head down to capture her lips. Sammy’s throat was so dry that she couldn’t speak, and once his lips connected with hers she didn’t want to. His kiss was hot and searing, burning her from the inside out. His tongue darted between her parted lips and aggressively twisted with hers, deepening the kiss and intensifying the passion.

Sammy’s knees went weak and his arm snaked around her back to pull her tight against him. She moaned and entangled her hands in his hair, not caring if anyone saw them. When he pulled back, he scrapped his teeth along her lower lip. Sammy opened her eyes and stared at him, her heart thudding in her chest.

“Wow,” she managed to get out. If that’s what it was like to kiss a shifter, she could only imagine what *other* things would be like with him. “You’re lion is very… good at that.” She said. Mike chuckled and gently cradled her cheek.

“Yes he is. He’s also quite fearless, and goes for what he wants.” He said, brushing his lips against hers again. Sammy felt a shiver go up her spine and closed her eyes.

“Can I see him?” She asked breathily. Mike pressed his lips against hers again, making her brain cloud with the passion. He pulled back and Sammy almost whimpered at the loss, but she opened her eyes and took in his rueful grin.

“Sorry, hun. Not on the first date.” He said with a playful wink. Sammy blushed and nodded.

“I’m sorry I shouldn’t have asked.” She said, taking a step back. Mike waved her comment off and resumed walking with her beside him.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s just not something I want to do out here in public. It’s important to maintain discretion. The shifter community is very secretive and quiet for our protection.” He explained. Sammy nodded and accepted his explanation.

“That makes sense.” She said. Mike turned on the path and began taking them back to their cars.

“Well, perhaps you could come over tomorrow for dinner and I’ll show him to you.” Mike said smoothly. Sammy felt a bit of panic churn her stomach and she cleared her throat.

“I’d love to, but I have plans tomorrow night. Perhaps the day after?” She suggested. Mike nodded and gave her another smile.

“Sure, that would be great. So what are you up to tomorrow? Anything fun?” He asked innocently. Sammy’s stomach lurched and she swallowed hard. It had been so long since she’d been on a date, but she’d never dated two guys at the same time and she didn’t know how to deal with it. She hesitated and Mike raised his eyebrows at her prolonged struggle.

“Oh don’t tell me, you’ve got a date with the other bidder don’t you?” He asked, the smile on his face widening at the deep blush that covered her cheeks.

“Y-yeah. I do. You both seemed so wonderful I couldn’t decide.” Sammy hastily explained. Mike chuckled and wrapped his arm around her shoulders.

“Well then, I’d best show you a great time tonight to make it easier for you.” He led her over to his very expensive car and opened the door for her. Sammy frowned in confusion and looked back at him, her hand on the car.

“There’s more?” She asked incredulously. Mike said nothing but helped her into the car. He climbed in beside her on the driver’s side and gave her a wink.

“So much more.” He answered, pulling out of the parking lot.

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When Sammy got home it was past 1:00am. She flopped down on her bed and lay there, staring at the ceiling. Her body was exhausted, but her find was still reeling from the date. It was the best date she’d ever been on and she was so incredibly attracted to him. She pulled out her phone and read the dozens of text messages Amanda had sent her throughout the night:

8:00pm: *Did you survive the indoor skydiving?*

9:00pm: *Are you still out with him? Skank!*

10:00pm: *Seriously, now I’m getting worried you actually did die or something*

10:30pm: *Are you in the ER?! I’m going to have to tell your parents it’s all my fault, aren’t I? I’ll start writing your eulogy.*

11:00pm: *You know you could have written more than just ‘alive, still on date.’ That’s not even a complete sentence!*

12:00am: *I don’t care how late it is when you get home you better call me.*

12:45am: *CALLLL MEEEE*

Sammy rolled her eyes and dialed her friend.

“Are you just getting home?! You slut! I’m so proud, tell me everything!” Amanda answered with a flourish of questions after only one ring. Sammy laughed and rolled onto her side, her purse dropping to the floor beside her bed.

“You crack me up, but you didn’t need to worry so much! He was the perfect gentleman.” Sammy said, her face unable to fall from the smile.

“Really? How unexpected. What happened?” Amanda asked eagerly. Sammy twirled her wind-tangled hair around her finger and sighed. She felt like she was in high school again and it was so good to feel that giddiness again.

“Well, after the skydiving we went for a walk and he kissed me. It was the most incredible kiss I’ve ever had! He has this whole passionate daredevil thing that I’m so attracted to.” Sammy said.

“Oh, that’s awesome! But didn’t you want to get away from bad boys?” Amanda asked. Sammy thought about that for a minute and struggled to respond.

“Well, yeah, but he’s not like my exes. He took me to this Hibachi restaurant where the table is the big stove and the chefs come out and do all these knife tossing tricks while they prepare your food. It was located on the top floor of this club where we went dancing afterward and played this crazy table game I’ve never seen before and I won a thousand dollars!” Sammy rattled off excitedly, her adrenaline from the night still coursing through her veins.

“Wow, you gambled? And won? Sounds like a crazy night! Did you guys go back to his place?” Amanda asked, her tone turning suggestive. Sammy laughed and buried her face in her hands.

“No, he was very polite and took me back to my car where he kissed me senseless. I won’t lie, I really wanted to go back to his place. How crazy is that! He’s just so exciting.” Sammy confessed. Amanda chuckled on the other line.

“Well I’m proud of you for going for it! Maybe on the next date you’ll actually get to go to his place. Speaking of, are you still going to go on that date with the other guy?” She asked. Sammy blinked and remained silent for a moment. She had completely forgotten about her date with Tom.

“Yeah, I think I should. I’d feel awful to cancel on him so last minute. Besides, it’s just one date.” She reasoned. *And he’s going to have a hard time topping the last one.*

# Chapter 5

Tom checked his watch again and wiggled his shoulders in an attempt to dispel some of his nervous energy. He was still early and she had plenty of time, he didn’t need to worry so much. He glanced behind him and ran a hand through his short hair. Maybe it was too much for a first date? It was, it was too much. He blew it.

She would pull up and think him an over-compensating ass. He began to pace in front of the dock and shook his head. He was over-thinking this. He saw head lights in the evening light and his heart sped up. She was here and, he checked his watch, she was on time. He smiled and felt some of the tension in his shoulders ease. He liked a woman that was punctual. He squared his shoulders confidently and waited for her to park.

Sammy turned off her car and felt her heart lurch at the sight of him. Unlike her first impression of Mike—which was complete sexual attraction to his lazy ease, seeing Tom standing in front of her car with his hands clasped in front of him, his shoulders pulled back and dressed professionally in slacks and a button-up shirt, Sammy felt a longing she couldn’t explain. He smiled at her and came to her door to open it for her and help her out.

She felt a flutter in her stomach at his grin which revealed an unexpected dimple. She thanked him and took his hand. She looked behind him and her jaw dropped in shock. *Alright, he might have just topped indoor skydiving,* she thought with surprise. Tom took in her expression and the tips of his ears reddened a little with embarrassment.

“I thought a quiet dinner where we could talk and get to know each other would be nice. Do you like it?” He asked, trepidation in his deep voice. Sammy glanced away from the yacht decorated with hundreds of tiny twinkle lights and smiled at him.

“Yes, I love it.” She told him, following him onto the boat. Tom let out a relieved breath and took her to the small table he had set up on the deck of the boat. He pulled out her chair and waited for Sammy to sit before scooting her in. Sammy tried to calm herself but she was shaking with excitement. She’d never been treated so well by any of the men she’s dated before.

She looked around the small yacht and smiled. It wasn’t over-the-top huge: it had a single cabin below, the main deck, and a cockpit for the captain. It was perfect, and she didn’t feel out of place on it like she had when she went to her boss’s yacht for a celebration he held after they completed a contract for a very prestigious company.

Tom brought over two plates covered with silver lids to keep the food warm and fresh and set them down in front of each chair. Sammy was a little taken aback that he was the one serving them, she half expected a waiter or butler or someone to be in the employ of a billionaire. Tom seemed to read her expression exactly and commented.

“I used to wait tables in college. I guess the skill was never lost.” He said with a laugh. Sammy nodded and waited for him to sit down before lifting the lid off her plate. While she had expected a waiter to appear, she was rather glad it was just the two of them.

“I know what you mean. I worked retail in college and I still fold all my shirts the same way.” Sammy joked. Tom chuckled along with her and Sammy felt incredibly at ease. If she thought that Mike and her had talked easily, she had been sorely mistaken compared to how naturally it flowed with Tom. The more they talked while they ate, the more she felt like she’d known him forever. Since he was a self-made billionaire, they had a lot in common that she could relate to.

“Okay, so we’ve covered work, college and our favorite things. I think it’s time we swap stories.” Tom said, leaning back in his chair and sipping his beer. His tiger purred in contentment and he felt relaxed and whole. He had known the moment she swung her thick, gorgeous legs out of the car that she was his mate.

His eyes scanned over her curvaceous body and the tiger growled in anticipation. The little black dress she wore was very flattering to her figure and he loved it. Throughout the dinner she was smart and witty and gave such honest responses that he almost proposed to her. Sammy smiled and sipped the wine he had poured for her.

“Alright, what kind of stories are you interested in?” She asked, tilting her head to the side. Tom pursed his lips in thought and steepled his fingers below his square jaw.

“What made you sign up for the match-making site?” He asked. Sammy felt a warm blush crawl up her cheeks and took another sip of her wine.

“Well,” She started, debating whether or not to tell him the truth or make something up. She looked into his brown eyes and knew that it was futile to lie. She let out a sigh and proceeded. “Honestly, I suffer from insomnia and while I’m up late I like to explore the web. The site caught my attention with all the firewalls and high security so I looked into it. I was blown away and, out of curiosity, I applied. I figured, my love life hasn’t exactly been going in the direction I want it to, so why not.” She confessed. She held her breath while she waited for Tom’s reaction. He didn’t say anything for a minute, just digested what she said.

“That sounds very similar to my approach. I was tired of dating women who only wanted my fortune, so I decided to find someone with their own so that we could match over more important things.” Tom said, his lips curling into a soft smile. Sammy’s throat tightened and she looked down at her fingers tapping her glass.

“So, is money an important attribute to you?” She asked, hoping her voice sounded innocent and light-hearted. Tom snorted and drank his beer.

“Yes and no. I think it’s important, especially to find someone like you who also made your fortune from the ground up. It shows persistence, strength, and perseverance. It wouldn’t matter so much to me if women without it showed more interest in anything other than my fortune.” Tom said with a sneer. Sammy forced a smile and nodded. She felt guilt seep into her heart and it scared her how much she feared his reaction when he found out she lied. Tom reached over and took her hand.

“Luckily, I found you so I don’t have to worry about it anymore.” He said with the sweetest smile that nearly broke her heart. Sammy shook off the guilt and returned his smile. *This is just for fun, remember?* She chastised herself.

“So, I’m curious to know more about being a tiger shifter. Would you mind explaining it to me?” She asked, changing the topic. Tom leaned back in his chair and shrugged.

“Sure. What would you like to know?” He offered. Sammy paused to think about it. She had already asked Mike her really pressing questions, but Mike was a lion shifter not a tiger.

“How does the tiger influence you and your behavior?” She asked frankly. Tom let out a deep breath while he considered. His tiger pawed at him and he felt an answer forming.

“Well, I am who I am, but the tiger does make me more introverted. I don’t like large crowds or being surrounded by people, it tends to make me very anxious and my tiger can get very defensive in those situations.” Tom explained. Sammy nodded, taking it all in and comparing it to what Mike had told her.

“Does it affect your temper or your control?” She asked, Mike’s steamy kiss flashing in her mind. She crossed her legs as she felt the attraction for Mike surge through her and tried to refocus on the conversation at hand. Tom gave a shrug.

“I suppose it does at times. When I’m uncomfortable I can be more aggressive than I mean to be, but I never lose control because of my tiger. We are the same, so if I lose control it’s just because *I* lost control. But that rarely happens.” Tom said. Her line of questioning was not what he was expecting. Usually, when humans first meet a shifter they want to know more about how it happens and if he really becomes the animal in every sense.

She seemed to already have some basic understanding and was asking much more applicable questions. Tom’s heart skipped a beat as he watched her chew her lip in contemplation and wanted to pounce on her. *Not yet, relax*, he told himself and tried to soothe his tiger but he would have none of it. Giving in, at least a little, Tom stood up and held his hand out to her. She looked at him curiously but accepted his invitation.

He led her over to the portion of the deck that wasn’t blocked by the table or their chairs. He signaled for her to wait right there while he climbed down to the cabin below and turned on some music. When he returned, Sammy was already swaying to the soft tunes trailing up from the cabin. Tom smiled and took her hand again, leading her in a slow dance. Sammy felt euphoric, she couldn’t remember the last time she slow danced with someone. None of her exes would indulge her—they were too cool for that.

“May I kiss you?” Tom asked, his deep voice a whisper. Sammy’s heart jumped and she was rendered speechless with anticipation. She gave a slight nod and Tom leaned down to claim her lips. His lips moved slowly over hers, gently opening them for his tongue. He licked her lips lightly, before dipping his tongue in her mouth.

A shiver ran up and down her spine making every nerve come alive at his touch. He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her closer to him, but refrained from crushing her against his very solid and toned chest. Sammy entwined her arms around his shoulders and pulled him down a little further to deepen the kiss. It was slow, and sensual, and nothing like the rough, raw passion that Mike kissed her with.

But unlike Mike’s kiss, this sent a fire raging through her and made her just want to be closer to him. She couldn’t explain what she was feeling and her brain was too engrossed in the kiss to care. She felt connected to him, not just lust for him but something deeper that scared her.

Tom pulled back, not wanting to but his lungs were screaming for air. His tiger growled and he knew, without a doubt, that she was his mate. He stared down into her dazed green eyes and his heart clenched. *Mine*, his tiger claimed. He leaned down and kissed her again, tenderly and sweetly.

“May I see you again tomorrow?” Tom asked. Sammy, still dazed form the kiss could only nod. His face lit up in a wide grin and it was then that her memory came flooding back, breaking through the walls of pleasure and contentment.

“Wait, I’m sorry, I have plans tomorrow. I totally forgot.” She said, remembering that Mike had invited her over for dinner and to show her his lion. Guilt wrenched in her stomach again. She hadn’t expected to like both of them so much, she thought for sure she would click with one and not the other and her dilemma would be solved. Tom nodded, unable to hide his disappointment.

“Maybe the day after?” He suggested. Sammy smiled and nodded.

“That would be great, I get off work around six, so any time after that.” She said. Tom nodded and they went back to dancing. He had felt her tense up at the mention of her plans and curiosity was eating at him. What was she doing that made her uncomfortable to tell him? They danced one entire song in comfortable silence while he tried to convince himself to respect her privacy and not ask. As the next song started playing his curiosity got the better of him.

“So what are you up to tomorrow?” He asked, hoping to sound nonchalant. Sammy stiffened in his arms. *What’s with these guys being so curious about my plans? No one ever used to care what I was doing*, she thought to herself. Well, like earlier, there was no use lying to him.

“I’m having dinner with the other bidder.” She confessed, averting her eyes guiltily. Tom felt a surge of jealousy course through him and he fought to control his tiger’s possessive rage. He wasn’t mated to her just yet, he didn’t have any claim other than what his tiger already did. He logically couldn’t be upset with her for it. He pressed his lips together in a forced smile.

“Well that’s only fair, I suppose. I respect your decision to give us each an opportunity.” He said very diplomatically. Sammy flinched at the coldness in his tone and could tell he wasn’t happy about it, but why would he be? If he cared for her at all, he would be upset by it—she knew she would be if the tables were turned.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything.” She said, the guilt eating at her. Tom’s eyes met hers sternly and he shook his head.

“No, I appreciate your honesty and openness. Communication is very important to me, so I’m glad that you’re comfortable enough to tell me.” He said, his lips softening into a real smile. Sammy’s heart pounded in her chest.

“Well, I respect you too much to lie to you, and I don’t think it would be a good foot to start out on if I did.” Sammy concurred. Tom’s smile widened and he spun her. Oh yes, she was definitely his mate, now all he had to do was convince her of it.

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By the time Sammy got back to her car, she was feeling even more confused than she was before. Tom was amazing, almost too good to be true. And Mike, Sammy let out a groan as she thought about him. Mike was everything that she was always drawn to but so much better. If there was such a thing as a good bad boy, he was it. Sammy got to her apartment and tossed her purse on her bed.

What on earth was she going to do? She debated calling Amanda for advice but checked the time and decided to just call her in the morning. She did pull out her phone and shoot her a quick text letting her know she was home and would tell her everything later. With a sigh, she plugged her phone in and began to undress. She needed a shower, the warm water always helped clear her thoughts.

As she stood under the showerhead with the hot water pouring over her skin she tried to sort out her feelings. She was getting a little ahead of herself, she had only had one date with each but already she could tell that it would be dangerous to let this go on much longer. She was playing with fire—hot, rich, dreamy fire—and if she wasn’t careful she would get burned.

Sammy massaged the shampoo into her hair and contemplated her next move. She could go on one more date with each, in a more private setting, and get to know them more intimately. Sammy smiled at the idea but quickly dismissed it. No, that would *not* be a good way to avoid getting burned.

She heaved a heavy sigh and let the water cascade over her. She had to come clean and let them decide if either of them still wanted to see her. After all, the entire site was geared for finding your future spouse and it wasn’t fair to either of them to start anything with this huge lie between them.

Amanda was not going to be happy with her decision, but she knew it was the right thing to do. Sammy turned off the shower and toweled off. Tomorrow morning she would call Mike and Tom and invite them over to tell them the truth. She slipped on her nightgown and lay down, her heart thudding in her chest. Hopefully, they would be able to forgive her—especially Tom.

Her heart stopped at the thought of how upset he will be. She briefly contemplated changing her plan so that Tom wouldn’t find out and she could keep seeing him, but she knew that wasn’t an option. Sammy rolled over and turned off her bedside lamp, encasing her room in darkness. She wasn’t about to get any sleep, but she sure as hell was avoiding her computer at all costs. Late night hacking only resulted in trouble.

# Chapter 6

“Why are you doing this again?” Amanda asked as she helped Sammy make her bed. Sammy grunted as she pulled her heavy comforter up on her bed and together they smoothed it out.

“Because it’s wrong to lie to them both, especially since I have feelings for them. I just don’t want to get in so deep that I’ll never be able to get out.” Sammy answered. Amanda nodded and followed her to the living room where they both began picking up the strewn magazines and books cluttering the surfaces.

“So why tell both? I thought you were into Mike, shouldn’t you just go on your date with him at his place and tell him then?” Amanda asked, still confused by Sammy’s plan. Sammy paused and bit her thumb nail guiltily. She kept her eyes downcast and idly shuffled some papers around her desk, not actually cleaning them up. Amanda’s eyes went wide and she dropped the magazines she had been organizing.

“Oh my god, you’re falling for both of them!” She shouted accusingly. Sammy winced and nodded.

“Only a little. It’s hard to explain, I’ve never felt this way with anyone before and I feel so differently with both of them. I can’t begin to compare them because they are such opposites and I can see two very different futures with each of them. I have no idea what I’m doing!” Sammy rambled frantically, wringing her hands nervously. Amanda gave her a sympathetic look and walked over to her distraught friend.

“Oh sweetie, it’ll be okay. Whichever man is the right man for you will want you no matter what your socioeconomic percentage is.” She gave Sammy a tight hug and felt Sammy relax in her arms. “So I have to ask, which one are you hoping for?” Amanda asked with Sammy’s head still cradled on her shoulder. Sammy stiffened and pulled back.

“I’m not sure I want to know the answer to that question. I think my heart’s already chosen, but I don’t want to even consider it until I know for sure that it’s an option. I don’t think I could handle getting my hopes up on one only to have him reject me. It’s safer just betting on both of them for now.” Sammy said with a sigh. She ran her hands exhaustedly through her hair and closed her eyes.

“What kind of date did Tom take you on to make you this crazy?” Amanda asked, a knowing smile on her lips that Sammy didn’t see. Sammy leaned her head back and dropped her hands, opening her eyes she stared at her ceiling.

“It was amazing, Mandy. He took me to his yacht—which wasn’t overly flashy or hugely obscene. He had it all decorated with twinkle lights and had made a romantic dinner for two. We spent the whole night talking and dancing. When he kissed me… it was slow and sweet and made me want to cry.” Sammy lowered her head and stared at Amanda with large eyes. “It was nothing like the incredible date I had with Mike, and his kisses didn’t compare with the raw heat and passion but it was something wonderful in its own right. I’m so confused.” Sammy said, turning back to her desk and actually picking up the papers this time to clean it off. Amanda smirked at her friend’s back.

“Sure doesn’t sound like you’re all that confused.” Amanda muttered to herself, shaking her head and going to clean the kitchen.

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Mike frowned down at the message he had received from Sammy. She seemed a little distant and concerned. Mike felt a pinch of panic twinge in his chest as he reread the message again. Did the other guy beat him? He shook his head and relaxed back on his sofa. No, that wasn’t possible. He wooed the hell out of her, there was no way anyone could top him. *I have something important I need to tell you and I’d like to do it in person at my place.* She had written.

He pursed his lips and tapped his fingers on his knee. He didn’t like feeling as if he was missing a piece of the puzzle. His lion was restless and he needed to move. Checking his watch, he realized he had a few hours before he needed to go to Sammy’s place. That was perfect, it gave him just enough time to go for a run and hop in the shower. He’d feel better once he was able to expel some of this excess energy.

He tried not to think about what it was she needed to tell him, it just made him uncomfortable. He changed into his running clothes and grabbed a bottle of water. They had had a great time, he made sure of that. He was so attracted to her. She was fearless and willing to try new things. He loved it. He started down his regular path and focused on his breathing.

Whatever it was she wanted to tell him, he would make sure it wasn’t going to be ‘no.’ Resolute in his decision to fight for her, Mike relaxed and pushed himself to go faster. His lion flared with confidence and he couldn’t wait to see her and show her just how much he wanted her.

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Tom got out of the shower and began toweling off. He took a deep breath and centered himself. He had a nagging feeling that whatever this conversation Sammy needed to have, it wasn’t going to be a good one. His tiger roared with jealousy and his heart sped up at the thought that she was going to reject him.

No, she was his mate, she wasn’t going to reject him. Besides, she had told him she was supposed to see the other bidder tonight, so asking him to come over must be a good sign, right? His hands were stable as he buttoned up his shirt and slipped on his jacket. He wouldn’t—couldn’t—let her go. He will do whatever it takes to keep her. Now that he’s found his mate, he’s not about to let her go without a fight.

Tom checked the mirror and smiled, his tiger swelling with confidence. Good luck to the one that comes between a tiger and his mate. With that, Tom grabbed his keys and headed out to Sammy’s place.

When he pulled up he didn’t expect to see such an average apartment complex. It was very nice with a gated community, balconies, and a classic façade but it was nothing compared to the exquisite loft buildings he’d been to. His instincts reared a little, alerting him that something was a bit off. He looked around and didn’t see anything out of the ordinary, but perhaps that’s what was off: everything was so incredibly ordinary. It wasn’t flashy, or expensive, or upper class—it was completely normal, average, middle-grade. Tom frowned in confusion and located the apartment number she had given him. He knocked twice and waited for her to open the door.

Sammy jumped a little at the slight rapping on her door and took a deep breath in. This was it. She glanced at the clock and knew immediately that it was Tom on the other side of the door. He was right on time, she smiled to herself. She opened the door with shaky hands and welcomed him inside. She could tell that he was tense and suspected something, but she didn’t want to say anything until Mike was here. She was pretty sure she only had the courage to say it once, so she was going to make sure that once was all it took.

“Thank you so much for coming, Tom. Please have a seat and make yourself comfortable. Would you like anything to drink?” Sammy asked, trying to be a good hostess. Tom looked around her apartment with a critical eye and she could tell that he knew. His brown eyes were steely when they flashed to her, and she could see betrayal swimming in their pools but he said nothing.

“Water would be great.” He said, his tone flat and void of emotion. Sammy felt the guilt begin to eat her from the inside out and tears formed in the corners of her eyes. Squaring her shoulders, she took a deep breath in and pushed all of those swirling emotions down and gave him a polite smile. She’d never get through this if she allowed herself to break down now.

She turned to get him a glass of water and Tom was relieved for the break in eye contact. He looked around the modest furnishings and suddenly it all clicked into place. She had said she was a hacker and found the site because of its firewalls. It explained why she was so worried that money was important to him. He felt anger flare within him and his tiger growled at the betrayal he was feeling. He took a deep breath and sat down on her couch. It would do no good to overreact just yet, he deserved to hear the whole story from her first.

Sammy brought him his glass of water which he accepted with a politely forced smile. She remained standing, knowing that as soon as she sat down she would end up spilling everything. She wrung her hands, hoping the Mike wouldn’t be much longer. Tom watched her judiciously, taking a gulp of the water she had handed him.

“I assume we are waiting for the other bidder to arrive before we get started?” Tom said, breaking the heavy silence that had fallen over them. Sammy started and looked away from the door to meet his sorrowful eyes. Her throat closed and all she was able to do was give the barest of nods. Tom returned her nod and leaned forward, resting his forearms on his knees and bowing his head. They remained silent like that for however long it took for Mike to knock on her door. It felt like eternity, but was probably only a few minutes longer. Sammy eagerly opened the door and ushered Mike inside. Mike looked around, confusion clearly written on his handsome features. He raised his eyebrow at her amusedly and gave her a smirk.

“This is not what I was expecting, but it’s very cozy.” He said, diffusing the tension between them with his charming smile. Sammy relaxed a little, glad that he wasn’t as upset as Tom was. Maybe it would be possible to get out of this without both of them totally hating her.

“Thank you, can I get you something to drink?” She offered. Mike shook his head and meandered around the small apartment. He noticed Tom sitting on the couch tensely and gave Sammy a questioning look. Sammy smiled nervously and gestured for him to take a seat as well.

“Mike, this is Tom. Tom, this is Mike.” She introduced, her voice quivering with anxiety. Tom looked up at Mike and gave him an acknowledging nod. Mike returned the nod and took a seat on one of the chairs beside the couch. They both stared at her expectantly, making Sammy’s palms sweat.

Sammy licked her lips and darted to the kitchen to get herself a glass of water. She gulped the glass down, relishing in the feel of moisture in her mouth again. She took a deep breath and went back to the living room where the guys were waiting patiently. Tom was still bent over his knees, an unreadable expression on his face while Mike looked completely at ease slouched in her chair.

“Thank you both again for coming. I-I wanted to confess something to you both before things went any further. I really like both of you, and it isn’t fair for me to lie to either of you.” Sammy started, her knees shaking.

Sammy took a step forward to ease the trembling but it didn’t help much. She took another deep breath and pressed on. “I-I lied about my identity on the site. I found the match-making site one night when I was up late and just poking around the web. I was curious about the intense security so I hacked it. When I saw that it was an arranged marriage site for shifters and humans I was hooked. The only problem is that I don’t have any fortune. I had to falsify the documents so that I could create a profile.” She said, her heart in her throat and her voice stammering.

She waited for that to sink in and gauged their reactions. Tom just stared at his hands, his ears perked and listening intently to her every word. Mike stiffened a little and shifted straighter in the chair but his face remained relaxed. Sammy held her breath, waiting for one of them to say something or storm out.

“Why’d you do it?” Tom asked, his voice raspy and soft. He pinned her with his intense gaze and she knew that she couldn’t even partly lie to him. She rubbed her sweating palms on her pant legs and took a shaky breath.

“Because, I’ve had awful luck with my love life. I’ve gone form one train wreck to another and I thought, maybe if I sign up I’ll be matched with a different kind of guy. A kind of guy who has his stuff together and doesn’t need me to take care of him.” Sammy confessed. Tom nodded silently and leaned back against the couch, biting his thumb nail as he thought about it.

Mike watched the two of them and felt his lion growl possessively. It didn’t bother him that she lied, he wasn’t the one who picked that match-making site in the first place, but it did bother him to see how much she cared what Tom thought of her.

“Well, we’ve all done things that were morally questionable to get what we wanted. I’m just glad that you’re up front about it so that we can move on.” Mike said, opting to get the jump on Tom. Tom shot him a glare and turned back to Sammy.

“I won’t lie to you either: I’m disappointed. It’s not that I’m disappointed you don’t have the fortune you claimed to have, but that you went to such lengths to forge it about yourself. I’m struggling with it a bit, but I appreciate you being upfront about it before things went further.” Tom said, his voice still flat but his eyes swimming with emotion. Sammy felt her chest tighten and she almost couldn’t breathe. *At least Mike doesn’t hate you,* she tried to console herself. Tom stood up then and came over to her. He brushed his hand against her cheek and hope swelled in her breast.

“I would like to work through this, I’m not quite ready to give up just yet.” He whispered, stroking her cheek. Mike stood up, his lion roaring with jealousy. He’d be damned if he let this tiger claim what was his. He came over to Sammy and could feel the possessiveness radiating off of Tom.

“I’m not about to give you up, either.” He said, kissing her neck. Sammy’s head was swimming with so many emotions and sensations she didn’t know which way was up. Mike’s lips on her throat felt so good—like fire branding her, and Tom’s fingers were gentle like a feather teasing her making her want more. She closed her eyes for a moment and when she opened them the guys were staring at each other challengingly.

“I’m prepared to do anything to prove that I’m the best match for her.” Tom said, his voice deep and rumbling with determination. Mike arched a brow at him and gave a smirk.

“As am I. It looks like it’s time to show her so that she can finally choose.” Mike suggested. Sammy looked from one to the other, her brow furrowed with confusion.

“What do you mean?” She asked, her words coming out as a breathy whisper. They turned their eyes on her and she felt desire course through her. Tom leaned down and kissed her passionately and more deeply than he had the night before. Sammy snaked her hands around his neck and moaned against his mouth. When he pulled back she was dazed and no longer cared what was going on. She blinked, and had only a moment or two to gasp for air before Mike crushed her against him. It was just as electrifying as his first kiss, and with Tom’s kiss igniting her nerves just before she felt like she was soaring. When he pulled back, the haze cleared just enough for her to take in their determined smirks and bulging erections.

“Oh,” Was all she was able to say as the realization hit her. She felt a surge of shyness overcome her and a blush rose to her cheeks. She couldn’t do what they were proposing, that was absurd! She’d only had sex with a handful of men before, and never—not even in her wildest fantasies—had she had sex with two at once. Tom leaned down and began placing light kisses along her throat, making her eyes flutter close. She felt Mike’s hand on her breast, kneading her peaked nipple through the cotton of her blouse.

She moaned and tried to cling to some sense of reality. She couldn’t do this, she didn’t do things like this. Tom’s hand came up to cup her other breast and she felt his mouth close over her nipple through the fabric of her shirt and bra. She opened her eyes and looked down at the two gorgeous men that wanted her so badly they were willing to put aside their differences to compete with each other on a sensual level. Maybe she could do this, just once.

# Chapter 7

Tom couldn’t believe he was going along with this, but if this is what it took to show her that they were meant to be together then he was going to do it. She deserved to be with someone who would love and care for her forever and he was positive that ‘forever’ was not what Mike was going to be promising her. His tiger roared and once he felt Sammy relax into his hands he knew there was no going back.

He and Mike pulled back and together began stripping Sammy’s clothes off. Mike pulled the hem of her blouse over her head, his lion growling with appreciation as her large breasts were exposed. He ran his hands up her stomach and Sammy shivered as he reached around to unhook her bra. Mike smiled, Sammy needed someone who was adventurous and daring.

He could make sure she lived every moment to the fullest beside him, and he was sure Tom wasn’t offering her anything near that exciting. Her bra fell to the floor and Sammy gasped at the sudden chill of the air on her bare skin. Mike’s lips closed over one of her nipples while he massaged her other breast. Sammy moaned and her knees became weak as Tom unzipped her jeans and pulled them down her legs. She stepped out of them and felt completely dazed as his hand slowly trailed up the inside of her leg, applying just enough pressure to signal for her to take a step to the side and part her legs for him.

Sammy couldn’t believe this was happening. Her brain couldn’t wrap around it and it felt like a dream. A really, *really* good dream. Mike’s tongue on her breasts and Tom’s hands on her thighs was driving her crazy. Tom pulled her panties down and Sammy felt a brief wave of shyness at being completely naked with all of her curves visible for these two men to devour but it was quickly washed away when Tom’s lips closed around her clit and she let out a soft cry.

Mike drew her nipple between his teeth at the same time that Tom inserted a finger deep inside her and Sammy flung her head back in ecstasy. His fingers were gentle as they worked her, his lips and tongue sucking on her clit and building her slowly toward her release. Mike’s hands were rough and demanding, his teeth scrapping against her as he licked and sucked her. Mike slid one hand down her back, his nails scrapping along the way, and grabbed her ass. Sammy was feeling so many sensations at once it was overwhelming. Tom’s soft, sensual caresses had her whimpering her orgasm, but Mike’s roughness made her want to scream it.

Tom stood up and began removing his shirt while Mike walked behind her and did the same. Mike met Tom’s eyes determinedly.

“My turn.” He said, his voice gravely. Mike ran a hand down Sammy’s back and wrapped it around her front to cup her breast. He then let his pants drop to the floor. Sammy stared into Tom’s eyes as Mike pressed himself against her back, his nakedness pressing against her and making her eyes go wide at the feel of his width. Mike’s hand went between her legs and stroked along her tender flesh. Sammy shivered and Tom took a step forward, allowing her to brace herself on his shoulder. Mike pressed his hand gently on her back, signaling for her to bend over. Sammy leaned forward, bringing her face closer to Tom’s as Mike pulled his fingers from her and positioned himself at her opening.

Tom stared into her eyes with such passionate intensity that it made her crave him. He leaned down and captured her lips in a searing kiss as Mike rammed into her. Sammy gasped into Tom’s mouth as Mike pounded in and out of her, jolting her frame with each powerful thrust that she dug her fingers into Tom’s bare shoulders to remain upright. Tom reached up and tenderly cupped her face, deepening his kiss and sweeping his tongue possessively over hers. Her teeth scraped his lips in an accidental bite with one of Mike’s jarring thrusts and Tom moaned at the sensation.

He reached one hand down to massage her breasts while Mike gripped her hips roughly to maintain his pace. Sammy felt the pleasure climbing at dramatic intervals. Mike leaned down and bit her shoulder, his fingers pulling her hips against him in time with the rough tempo he had set. Sammy groaned and pushed against him, taking him deeper while she twisted her tongue around Tom’s. She clawed her nails down Tom’s chest and he moaned against her lips as they came to rest on the waistband of his jeans.

Sammy wasn’t sure what was making her so bold, but she didn’t care. The feel of Mike inside her made her want to feel Tom in her hands. She unzipped his pants and yanked them down so that he was bared. Tom’s breathing came in heavy puffs against her lips as she took the thick length of him in her hands and started pumping in time with Mike’s thrusts behind her. Sammy cried out as another orgasm overcame her, shooting pleasure throughout her entire body and down her shaking legs. Her hands pumped Tom faster, wanting to take him with her.

Mike growled against her back and gave one more powerful thrust that sent her rocking into Tom and he yelled his release. Tom threw his head back as her hands continued to work him. He felt his balls tighten with his impending release and he buried his head in her shoulder and bit her to muffle his cry as he came. Exhausted, the three of them stood there a moment, leaning against each other for support until they were able to stand on their own.

Sammy blinked, trying to regain some clarity as her body still shivered with the ebbing waves of her shattering orgasm. Tom closed his eyes and took deep breaths, taking the scent of her in with each fill of his lungs. Mike held her hips in place, his head still thrown back to take in deep gulps of air. He was so satisfied he wasn’t sure he could pull himself from her. She felt too good wrapped around him, he just wanted more. Tom eventually lifted his head and stared into Sammy’s eyes. Sammy met his gaze and felt her heart ache with such an intense feeling her logical mind didn’t want to believe it. Mike finally pulled out of her and the three of them stood there, unmoving now for an entirely different reason.

A deep blush rose to Sammy’s cheeks, she averted her eyes from Tom’s and bent down to pull her panties back on. They wanted her answer, and she had one, but she didn’t want to give it standing naked between them. Mike took a step back and started dressing as well, sensing that the clothing might make her more comfortable. While he and Tom were used to being naked around people—it happened every time they shifted after all, it was obvious that she wasn’t. Tom followed suit and pulled his pants back up, but he left his shirt unbuttoned.

Once Sammy was dressed again, she turned to the two half-naked men on her couch and her nerves returned full force. She liked both of them, and whatever had just happened had been the most incredible experience she’d ever had. But only one of them was right for her. Her eyes flitted from Mike to Tom, taking them both in.

Her heart lurched at Mike: he was the good bad boy she’d always dreamed about and she knew he would take her on such adventures that she would never regret choosing him. She felt panic start to rise within her and she glanced over at Tom and was immediately filled with calm. Her choice was obvious, she just hoped the other man would understand. Sammy ran her hands through her tangled hair and winced as a finger snagged on a knot. She let out a deep breath and took another one in to steady herself.

Mike watched her with a relaxed ease, he was prepared for what she was going to say and it was no mystery to him which one of them she would choose. Tom sat straight, his hands clasped between his knees and he tried to project an external stillness that contradicted everything raging within him. His tiger wanted to pounce on Mike and devour him, and he wanted to just wrap her in his arms and claim her as his mate once and for all. He did neither and instead sat very still, waiting for her to make her final decision.

“You both mean so much to me, and that was the most amazing experience with both of you. I couldn’t have done that with anyone else because I’ve never felt so close to anyone else as I do to the two of you.” Sammy started. She noticed Tom tense in the shoulders but he otherwise remained stoic and gave no other indication at her words. She looked over to Mike who slouched on her couch with a knowing smirk and his easy, relaxed natured urged her on.

“I have made my choice, and I can’t believe how lucky I am that I get to choose between the two of you. You are both remarkable men, and the fact that you were both willing to fight for me even after I lied to you, I-I’ve never been treated so well by any man before.” Sammy took a deep breath. *This is it, hopefully he still wants you, and hopefully the other won’t hate you too much,* she thought to herself.

“I have to follow my heart and everything inside me tells me that I belong with Tom.” She said, releasing a relieved breath. Tom’s head snapped up and his eyes widened in surprise. His tiger roared with elation and he couldn’t believe that he allowed himself to doubt that she would choose him. A large smile came over his face but out of respect for Mike he remained seated. Sammy wrung her hands and gave Mike an apologetic look. Mike’s smirk never wavered as he stood up. He bent down and kissed the back of her hand, like he had when they first met. His piercing blue eyes met hers and they twinkled with lighthearted understanding.

“It has been a pleasure meeting you Sammy. I am glad we had the time together that we did.” He said, straightening and pulling his t-shirt over his head. Sammy returned his smile and she relaxed with the knowledge that he didn’t hate her. Mike turned to Tom and offered him his hand. Tom stood up and shook it, giving him an appreciative nod. Mike smiled at both of them and walked to the door.

“Good luck you two! And Tom, be gentle with the mating ceremony.” Mike said with a playful wink. He left and closed the door behind him, leaving a grinning Tom and a frowning Sammy. Sammy turned to Tom and gave him an inquisitive look.

“What did he mean by that?” She asked. Tom chuckled and wrapped his arms around her. He leaned down and kissed her again.

“I’ll explain it to you later. Right now I want to get you in the shower and then I plan on making you mine.” He said with a growl. Sammy giggled and grabbed his hand, leading him to her bathroom.

“That sounds just fine to me.” She said, turning the shower on and undressing.

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Mike pulled up to his house and sat in his car for a minute. He leaned his head back against the headrest and let out a sigh. He wasn’t shocked by her decision, he could tell that Tom was her mate. He had thought though, for a minute, that she was his. He frowned. What surprised him more than anything, was that he had *wanted* her to be his mate. He had thought his mother’s insistence to find a mate to start his own pride with had been ridiculous, but after meeting Sammy he could see her point. Mike got out of his car and walked inside. His mother was rushing around picking up the house to make it presentable. Mike groaned, he had forgotten to tell her that Sammy had changed the plans.

“Oh sweetie, you’re back! Don’t worry, your father and I will be out of your mane here soon and you’ll have the whole place to yourself and your lady friend.” She said, hitting the pillows on the couch to fluff them. Mike shook his head and walked over to his mother. He bent down and wrapped her in a large hug, holding tight against her squirming.

“What are you doing? Put me down, I’m not done yet.” She said. When he didn’t, her motherly instincts kicked in and she hugged him back. “What happened?” She asked softly. Mike kissed the top of her head and released her.

“She wasn’t my mate, but she did make me realize that you’re right, mom. I do need to find her whoever she is.” He said. His mother’s jaw dropped in shock and he turned and walked toward the kitchen, leaving her in her stunned silence.

# Chapter 8

Sammy rolled over in her bed and smiled at Tom’s relaxed face. His eyes were closed but she could tell that he wasn’t sleeping. She let her eyes roam over his beautifully sculpted body and sighed. She just felt right when she was with him—like she had known him forever and it was as if he’d always been there. Tom peeled open one of his eyes and smiled at her.

“What?” He asked, his voice tired and husky. Sammy smiled and ran her fingers up his chest, following the natural lines of his abs and circling one of his nipples until he groaned.

“Can I see him?” She asked, her voice an eager whisper. Tom opened both of his eyes and grinned at her. He leaned forward and gave her a sweet kiss on the tip of her nose.

“Okay, but I don’t want you to freak out. I still have complete control, I’m not going to maul you or anything.” Tom warned her. Sammy bit her lip and nodded, scooting back on the bed a bit to give him some more room. Tom watched her, making sure that she didn’t show any signs of uneasiness before he changed. It was a faster process than she expected. It took less than a minute for his human body to transform into a tiger. Sammy couldn’t help but to gasp.

He was beautiful. He reclined on his stomach, and the same warm brown eyes watched her while his tail twitch mischievously. Sammy giggled when he gave a particularly wide twitch of his tail and tapped her with it.

“May I touch you?” She asked, biting her lip hesitantly. Tom bowed his head toward her and nuzzled her. Sammy grinned and, taking that as a ‘yes’, smoothed her hands along his head and down the blades of his shoulders and the spine of his back. Tom gave a deep purr and closed his eyes. Her hands all over him felt incredible and he could feel his need growing for her.

He shifted back and pinned her beneath him. Sammy squeaked at the suddenness of it. Tom kissed her and grabbed both of her hands, pinning them above her head. Sammy moaned against his mouth and instinctively spread her legs, wanting him inside her. Tom pulled back and kissed her neck. His tongue darted out to lick her throat as his hands kept hers above her head.

When he knew that she wasn’t going to move them, he let his palms slide down her arms and sides. He trailed down her body until he got to her large breasts and took a bite of the soft flesh. Sammy moaned and arched against his lips, grinding her hips against him. Tom groaned and took her taught nipple into his mouth. Sammy gave a soft cry and wanted to grab his shoulders but remained with her hands above her head.

Tom released her nipple and trailed kisses down her stomach, giving little bites along the way. His hands reached up and squeezed her breasts, rolling her nipples between his fingers as his head dipped lower. He licked his tongue along her opening and Sammy cried out. His tongue drove her crazy while one hand dropped down to massage her clit. Sammy lifted her hips, trying to gain more pressure from him. Heat was building within her, swelling in her belly and spreading through her.

“Tom.” She called out, her orgasm rushing over her and leaving her tingling. Tom lifted his head and kissed the inside of her thigh. He loved being able to make his mate scream his name. Only his name. He crawled on top of her and stroked his erection along her wetness, making himself slick so that he could thrust inside her. He pushed himself inside her completely, his tip hitting the neck of her womb.

Sammy cried out and tossed her head back. She wrapped her legs around him and dug her fingers into his back. Tom pulled out slowly and thrust roughly back in. He built a slow and powerful pace, each thrust as hard as the first. His heart thudded in his chest and he growled with pleasure. She felt so tight around him he could hardly stand it.

“Open your eyes.” He whispered, longing to get lost in their green depths. Sammy opened her eyes and stared deeply into his, feeling their connection deepen and each thrust was magnified by the intensity of the love in his gaze. Sammy leaned up and captured his lips as she rocked against him, grinding her hips against his each time he pounded into her.

The pleasure was building so intensely Sammy could hardly breathe. If she thought he had made her shatter before, she felt like he was going to break her now and she only wanted more. Tom wasn’t going to be able to last much longer, not when she felt this good but he needed to take her with him. He reached down and pressed his thumb against her clit and Sammy opened her mouth in a soundless cry as she came harder than she could have imagined. Her vision went white and she felt her heart stop momentarily in her ecstasy.

Tom roared his release and gave one last pump before filling her. As he came, he leaned down and bit her left breast right above her heart. Sammy cried out in pain as his teeth sunk deeply into her skin but the pain faded quickly and was replaced with pleasure as the sensation of their connection washed over her. Tom pulled back and rolled to the side, his body still shaking. He had done it, she was now his— forever. Sammy licked her lips and tried to refill her lungs with precious air. She turned her head toward him and smiled in contentment.

“What was that?” She asked, sensing the significance. Tom smiled at her and brushed her hair out of her eyes.

“I’ve marked you as my mate. You’re mine now, and I’m yours.” He told her, stroking her cheek. Sammy couldn’t contain her excitement and happiness. She rolled onto her side to face him, a large grin spreading across her features.

“I like that. I guess that means we’re getting married then.” She said, giggling. Tom chuckled and wrapped his arms around her pulling her close to his chest.

“As soon as possible.” He said. Sammy smiled and kissed him. She pulled back and nestled against his chest.

“I love you, Tom.” She said, closing her eyes as exhaustion overcame her. Tom nuzzled the top of her head and sighed contentedly.

“I love you too, Sammy.”

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Sammy heard her phone going off somewhere in her apartment but she couldn’t quite pin point it. She opened her eyes a crack and glanced at the clock. It was now 9:00pm and she had an inkling about who might be calling her at such an hour. Closing her eyes, she was resolute to go back to sleep and ignore Amanda’s call. She slipped back into a doze, but it wasn’t much longer before an insistent pounding came at her door. Sammy groaned and rolled over. The clock was now showing 10:30pm and she knew that the obnoxious person wasn’t about to leave. Damn her and her friendly determination.

“SAMMY! Open up! I know you’re in there!” Amanda shouted in a sing-songy voice. Tom groaned and rolled over, opening his eyes.

“Who the hell is that?” He asked groggily. Sammy heaved a heavy sigh and sat up, stretching her arms over her head.

“I’m sorry, but she’s not going to leave. You should probably put your pants on.” She said, pulling a camisole over her head and slipping her panties back on. Confused, Tom didn’t object but followed her instruction. Sammy found her sweat pants and tugged them up before trudging toward the front door. She slipped on a sweatshirt she had by the door to cover Tom’s bite mark. She paused at the door and could hear Tom following behind her sleepily.

She glanced over her shoulder and saw that he did pull on his pants but had opted to remain without a shirt. She arched a brow as she took in his deliciously strong chest and gave a nod. She was okay with that. Amanda continued to pound on her door, knocking in various melodic patterns that were starting to get annoying. Sammy flung the door open and had to take a step back to avoid getting hit by Amanda’s raised fist prepared to knock again.

“Sorry! What the hell was taking you so long? I’ve been calling for four hours and you’ve just been ignoring me. I was worried one of them got pissed off and ate you or something! I mean what the heck hap—oh, hello.” Amanda rambled, cutting herself off as she pushed through the front door and caught sight of Tom leaning against the kitchen counter. Amanda stopped dead in her tracks and her mouth dropped open as she openly gawked at Tom. Sammy rolled her eyes and closed the door behind her friend.

“I’m sorry I didn’t answer, Mandy. I got a little… busy.” She said shyly. Amanda gave a snort and nodded her head, her eyes still focused on Tom.

“I can tell. And I don’t blame you for getting busy with *that*.” Amanda said, speaking not-so-discretely out of the side of her mouth. Sammy’s blush deepened and she lowered her face into her upturned palms. Ignoring her friend’s embarrassment, Amanda stepped forward and held out her hand.

“I’m assuming you’re Tom, it’s a pleasure to finally meet you. I’m the best friend.” She introduced herself. Tom chuckled and shook her hand.

“Charmed…” He said, drawing it out in hopes that she would fill in her name.

“Amanda.” She said quickly before dropping his hand and spinning around to face a shocked Sammy.

“Wait, how’d you know I was going to pick him?” Sammy asked, unsure how her friend had figured it out before she had. Amanda smiled wickedly and crossed her arms.

“Oh it was obvious from the way you talked about him that he was the one. I mean, Mike was cool and all—skydiving, who can beat that!—but it was evident that Tom was the one who had stolen your heart.” Amanda explained, looking at Sammy like she was an idiot. The longer Amanda stared at her the more she started to feel like an idiot.

“Then why didn’t you tell me that before I asked them both over?” Sammy exclaimed. Amanda shrugged.

“What, like you would have believed me? We both know you’re too stubborn for that.” Amanda said, giving her a knowing look. Sammy nodded and in the silence they heard a deep growl. Both girl’s heads snapped over to Tom where he was standing embarrassed in the kitchen.

“Sorry, ladies. I’ve worked up quite the appetite, who’s up for food?” He asked, walking toward Sammy. Sammy felt her own stomach growl in response and nodded.

“Oh yes. What do you want to order?” She asked, stepping up to his side. He instinctively wrapped his arm around her and turned toward Amanda to get her opinion. Amanda smiled widely at them and gave a noncommittal shrug.

“Pizza or Chinese is my vote.” She said. Sammy and Tom glanced at each other and nodded.

“Chinese.” They said in unison. Amanda started cracking up and shook her head.

“You guys are too freaking cute.” She said, bringing Sammy the phone and the menu for their favorite place that was stuck on her refrigerator. Sammy started to dial but Tom scooped up the phone and the menu and took control.

“It’s on me.” He said to her with a wink as the phone rang. Sammy smiled at him and walked over toward Amanda while he place their order.

“I can’t believe how lucky I am that I found him.” Sammy confessed, her eyes watching Tom’s bare back the entire time. Amanda nudge her and smiled.

“I guess it’s a good thing you have insomnia. Who knew it would eventually lead to you meeting the man of your dreams.” She joked. Sammy laughed and nodded. Tom hung up the phone and came back to stand by them.

“Well, best friend Amanda, it’s a good thing you came over. You can help Sammy plan the wedding.” He said, giving Sammy a wink.

“Wedding!?” Amanda shouted in disbelief. She turned her shocked face to Sammy’s for confirmation. Sammy nodded and a huge grin broke out on her face.

“And what the hell is that?!” Amanda shouted again, pointing to the bite on Sammy’s chest as the sleeve of her sweatshirt slipped down. Sammy winced and went to cover it back up but thought against it and left the sleeve where it was.

“That is the mark Tom gave me to make me his mate officially.” Sammy explained happily. Amanda raised an eyebrow and looked over at Tom. Tom wrapped his arms around Sammy’s waist and rest his head on top of hers.

“That makes it official to all shifters. We belong to each other and no one else. So since it’s official in my world, I figured why waste time making it official in hers.” Tom said, kissing the top of her head lovingly. Amanda narrowed her eyes and looked at Sammy.

“That seems pretty fast, yes?” She asked. Sammy shook her head and rested her hand on Tom’s chest.

“I guess, when you look at it objectively. But I’ve been waiting so long for him to come into my life that now that I’ve found him I just want to be with him. Why wait to start the rest of your life?” She asked. Tom gave her a squeeze and smiled broadly. He knew he had been right about her being his mate, and everything she did just emphasized it. Amanda’s face dissolved into a grin and a knock sounded at the door signaling the arrival of their late-night dinner. Tom unwrapped his arms from around his mate and went to the door, pulling cash out of his pocket to pay. Amanda stubbornly crossed her arms and pinned Sammy with her stubborn stare.

“Alright, you make a good case. But I get to be your maid of honor and you’re not allowed to say ‘no’.” Amanda conceded. Sammy laughed and hugged her friend.

“That sounds just fine to me.” She said, leading Amanda to the kitchen table where Tom was already dishing out the food.

“So what kind of wedding are we talking about? Big and expensive? Quirky and unique? Small and expensive?” Amanda asked, picking up her fork. Sammy looked over at Tom and kissed his cheek.

“Honestly, as long as I have this man and my best friend by my side I don’t care if we get married tomorrow at the court house or in a year on a beach.” Sammy said. Tom rubbed the pad of his thumb against her cheek and stared into her eyes.

“Tomorrow at the court house it is.” He said with a cheeky smile and leaned down to kiss her.

**THE END**