

Epilogue

Jules

Five years later . . .

I awake to the feeling of something kicking my insides and roll over with a huff. At eight months pregnant, it's impossible to get comfortable, and I wake up at least six times during the night to find a better position.

Poor Dimitri. Me and my two giant pregnancy pillows take up most of our bed, leaving only a tiny bit of space for my six-foot-four shifter husband.

Sunlight is peeking through the trees on the other side of the lake, which is new for me. With a business to run and two small kids at home, I almost never get to sleep until sunrise.

But then I remember that today is my birthday. The sound of excited little shrieks drift up from the floorboards, followed by patient shushing.

Grinning, I heave myself out of bed and pull on one of Dimitri's T-shirts. They're the only things that fit me right now, but I'm not complaining. They smell like him — burnt cedar and spice. Maybe it's the pregnancy hormones, but a single whiff of Dimitri's scent is enough to get me going these days.

I throw on a robe over the T-shirt and pad downstairs. The place is kind of a wreck, the way a house always is when you have two little monsters running around. Naked Barbies, plastic trucks, and blocks are scattered everywhere.

I don't clean anymore. I'm the CEO of White Glove Maid Service, and one of our own housekeepers works for us five days a week.

Still, old habits die hard. With great effort, I bend down to pick up a few stray blocks and toss them in a bin on my way to the kitchen. The smell of coffee and cinnamon rolls wafts down the hallway, and my mouth immediately begins to water.

I have exactly two cravings these days: sugary carbs and Dimitri.

Waverly's excited shriek greets me as I walk into the kitchen, and my four-year-old launches herself off the stool she was using and careens into my belly.

"Oaff!" I grunt, though her violent hugs don't hurt. I'm more worried about the tiny girl ricocheting off my enormous belly.

“Happy birthday, Mommy!” she cries, her arms not quite reaching around my middle as she squeezes me. “Guess what? Guess what?”

“What?” I ask.

“Nana’s here!”

My face breaks into a wide grin as I turn toward Nana, who’s seated at the kitchen table surrounded by another troop of Barbies.

“Nana!” I cry, crossing the room at a waddle and throwing my arms around her.

“Happy birthday, honey,” she chuckles, wrapping one arm around my back while patting my belly with the other. “And happy *almost*-birthday to you, little one.”

“I’m so glad you came.”

“I wouldn’t miss it.”

For years, Dimitri and I have been trying to get Nana to move in with us, but she loves her home too much to leave it. At least now I don’t have to worry about her affording groceries. She’ll live out the rest of her days in comfort, and since her knee surgery, she’s getting around much better.

“Happy berf-day, Mama!” echoes my youngest.

I turn toward Jessup, who’s got an icing package in one hand and an impressive amount of the stuff smeared all over his face. He’s wriggling in Dimitri’s arms, trying to get to me.

I glance around the colorful kitchen, which Dimitri and the kids have decorated with balloons and streamers. It looks as though a party-supply store threw up in here, and my heart swells with joy.

“Thank you,” I say, meeting Dimitri’s gaze.

He’s shirtless, and his chest is streaked with frosting — no doubt Jessup’s doing. There are dark circles under his eyes from our son’s middle-of-the-night wakings, but the moment our eyes meet, Dimitri’s whole face softens with tenderness.

He releases Jessup, who shoots across the room and careens into my thighs. I glimpse the creation they were working on — a pan of warm, gooey cinnamon rolls covered in rainbow sprinkles. Jessup has stuck little candles in each roll, and a few of them are caked in icing.

When Waverly was born, Dimitri stepped down as CEO — not because anyone thought he should, but because he wanted to spend more time at home. He still sits on the board and

owns billions in stock, but he cares more about our growing family than his growing company.

“Happy birthday,” Dimitri rumbles, amber flooding his hazel eyes as he stalks across the kitchen toward me.

Nana is oblivious to the heat in his gaze, but my body responds the same way it did the first time I saw him.

Somehow, I love frosting-covered Dimitri even more than the CEO version.

Waverly and Jessup cling to my legs as my mate closes the distance between us. But the second Dimitri draws me in for a kiss, Waverly pushes away with a loud “Ew!”

Jessup keeps his arms locked around me as Dimitri parts my lips in a scorching kiss. He cups my face in his warm, rough hands — his lips and teeth making me a promise that sends a shiver through my whole body.

“Mama! Mama!” Jessup cries. “We made you berf-day cake!”

“Cinnamon rolls,” Waverly corrects.

“Sim-min rolls,” Jessup parrots.

“They look delicious,” I say in earnest as my stomach gives a low rumble.

The kids careen toward the table, Jessup climbing into the high chair that he’s almost grown too big for. “I want cake!”

Dimitri pulls back and meets my gaze with a look that makes my knees go wobbly. Then he turns to light the candles and sets the pan in front of me. Jessup’s eyes grow huge as he watches the flames sputter, and Waverly begins an off-key rendition of “Happy Birthday.”

Nana and Jessup join in, and when it’s time to make a wish and blow out the candles, I look up and meet Dimitri’s gaze.

There’s no gift that can compare to spending every day with this man. Dimitri — the man who can set my body aflame with a single look. The man who makes our kids infinite grilled-cheese sandwiches and gets up at night to banish monsters so that I can sleep. The man who has given me beautiful children and made sure my nana is taken care of.

For the first time in my life, I don’t know what to wish for. I have everything I could ever want and so much more.