Chapter Five – Levi

Lucy's face looked rather green, but that was understandable. Coyote shifter pregnancies, even when one of the parents was human, progressed differently than human pregnancies.

For starters, the gestation period was typically only sixty-three to seventy days rather than nine months. It didn't give her much time to come to terms with the accidental nature of the pregnancy. And then, even after the birth, the baby – or babies, as Coyotes often had multiples – would take another two months to fully develop. When they were first born they were small, weighing only a few ounces, with their eyes and ears still shut. They would need a warm, safe place to continue growing until they were at the typical human newborn stage. After that, they aged like humans, but getting there would be difficult.

Levi squeezed Lucy's hand, smiling at her. She didn't return the smile, instead turning away from him. It must be that she was feeling sick, although she often seemed to be in this shell-shocked state lately.

"I don't know if this is the best time for me to meet the rest of the pack," Lucy said as he pulled her down the cracked sidewalk to the large warehouse that doubled as the pack's best nightclub.

Brightly colored lights spilled from the warehouse door, and the percussive music already made Levi want to dance. But he forced himself to stop and turn to Lucy, knowing he needed to listen to her worries and reassure her. It was part of being a responsible mate and father, after all.

"What's wrong?" He smoothed her hair from off her face. "Is it the noise?"

"No."

Levi frowned for a moment. "This is supposed to be the celebration for our successful neighborhood cleanup. You can see how much better everything looks. The litter's all gone, and we've painted fences and buildings. Look, over there! Flowers! This is the first great thing I've accomplished in my life, and I want you to be a part of it. But if you want to rest, I can take you to my apartment—"

Lucy shook her head. "No. Let's just go in. You wanted to introduce me to your brother, anyway."

"I did." Levi squeezed her hand again and led her in.

Even though they had been seeing a lot of each other for almost two weeks now, she had resisted getting closer to his family. They had spent a lot of time together,

though. Most of the time they had spent cleaning up the space she rented for her bakery. She told him about her parents while they scrubbed down the walls. He in turn answered all her questions about the pack while they swept the floor. Almost every day they spent the whole day together, working. At night they often watched a movie and had dinner together at her apartment until she told him it was time to go.

During that time, they only rarely kissed, at Lucy's insistence. She wanted to get to know him better without hormones getting in the way. When he invited her to the party, he was afraid she was going to say no. But she was there, and they entered the warehouse holding hands.

The great thing about this place was that it was huge, and the whole pack could fit inside with only minimal bumping into each other. A buffet-style bar was set up along the far wall with various refreshments like cake, chips, and pizza. Garbage bags were hung up along the walls. Levi scanned the room and soon found Steven on an upper balcony. He led Lucy through the crowd to the stairs. As the climbed up, Levi frowned. These things had some rust on them… repairs were necessary.

"Maybe my next project will be a community improvement fundraiser," he mentioned off-hand. "Get stuff fixed up around here."

Lucy didn't reply.

The balcony space was less crowded than down below. Steven leaned on the edge, looking over the pack with a worried expression. Heather and several others chatted while swaying to the music. Levi pulled Lucy over to his brother, beaming. Whatever Steven was worried about – and he was always worrying – could wait. Now was a time of celebration!

"Steven, I want you to meet Lucy," Levi said, raising his voice to be heard over the din. "Lucy, this is Steven. He's my brother and Alpha of the Coyote pack."

Lucy's smile was clearly strained. "Pleased to meet you."

"And you." Steven shook Lucy's hand, doing just as poor a job at looking happy.

Levi frowned between the two of them. What was going on? His brother and his mate had to get along… Life would be miserable otherwise. He cleared his throat, bringing the attention back to him. "Lucy's pregnant. I mean, we all knew that already, but I was thinking that I should take her to the shifter Hospital. Human Hospitals don't have the equipment and knowledge to treat us properly," he added for Lucy's sake. "And—"

"I need to talk to you." Steven grasped Levi's elbow. "Heather, can you come stand with Lucy for a moment?"

Heather moved over to Lucy. Good, that would help. Both were human with Coyote mates, after all. Steven dragged Levi down the rusty stairs and out the back door. There, the Alpha turned to him with such a serious expression Levi wanted to laugh.

"Levi, she's not your mate."

"What?" Levi scoffed. "Of course she's my mate. She's pregnant and I'm the father."

Steven shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose. "That means nothing to her. You have to remember that humans operate by different rules than Coyotes. Even among us, a female getting pregnant by a male doesn't mean that they'll stay together. And humans… They like to take things slow. How long have you even known this girl?"

"I dunno… A month? Thirty-two, thirty-three days. Does that really matter?"

"Of course it matters!" Steven threw his hands into the air. "You know how long I was with Heather before she decided that we were meant to be together."

Levi scowled. "I have no intention of waiting around for six months. Lucy is pregnant, she has to know we're mates by now. Besides, most mates know each other right away."

"Not humans. That's what I'm trying to say. You can't just assume she's on the same page as you are. You have to keep your emotional distance, otherwise, your heart is going to be ripped out and stomped all over."

"Sure. Fine, whatever." Levi rolled his eyes. Steven always thought he knew best. Not in this case. Lucy was his mate. "I'll keep my emotional distance. But since we're talking, do you know anything more about the dirty cop pushing drugs into our territory."

Steven sighed. "Not yet."

Levi scowled. "Okay. Okay, I've done it your way so far. I've been a model citizen and haven't gotten involved. But this needs to end, Steven. If you don't let me help protect the pack, I'll go rogue. If you want me to stay within your lines, then give me something to do that will drive this guy out by the morning."

"It's not that—" Steven cut himself off. "You know what? You're right. I have not been utilizing your strengths enough. Tomorrow morning, we will discuss what you can do."

"Good." Levi embraced his brother, then pounded his back. "Now let's get back to the party. The pack is waiting for us."

"The pack or Lucy?"

Levi ignored him. He was too pleased that his brother was finally going to accept his help to pay much mind to his paranoid ramblings about Lucy. Of course she was his mate. It was ridiculous to think anything else.

He quickly returned to the balcony and made a beeline for Lucy. She was standing little ways from the others, her cellphone pressed to her ear. Her face was white.

"But—" she cut herself off when Levi got closer. She swallowed. "Yes, sir."

She hung up the phone and turned away from him. Levi sidled up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, kissing her lightly on the neck. She shivered and leaned in against him like she always did, but she quickly pulled away. Her hand pressed to her mouth as she looked at him.

"Levi, you have to get out of here."

"What?"

"Look, there's no time to explain. But if you want to help your pack—"

"Slow down!" He reached for her, but she pulled away. "Lucy, what's wrong?"

Even as he spoke, the lights blinked off. The music cut out. The doors to the warehouse burst open. Dozens of people dressed head to toe in black body armor rushed in, holding assault rifles at the ready. They began shouting for people to drop to the floor, shining flashlights in their eyes. Levi ran to join Steven. Lucy reached for his arm, and he pulled her behind him.

Steven's voice rang out over the screams from down below. "What is going on here?"

The rifles were pointed in their direction. A dozen men hurtled up the steps. Levi snarled, standing protectively in front of Lucy while Steven shielded Heather. Giant white letters spelling 'Police' were splashed across their vests. He rolled to the balls of his feet, preparing to attack if necessary.

"On the floor!" one of the men shouted, shoving his gun into Levi's face. "Now!"

Steven made a twitching move, as though he wanted to punch the guy's lights out. Levi watched his brother. His own body burned with the desire to defend his pack from this threat, but he would follow Steven's lead. Even though there was still shouting going on, echoing in the warehouse, the whole pack had their eyes on Steven, waiting.

The Alpha swallowed hard. "Do as they say."

It went against all of his instincts, but Levi followed Steven as he knelt on the floor. Two of the cops grabbed him, pulling his arms behind his back. Levi snarled as they cuffed him.

"Thought you were clever, eh? Thought you could get away with it?"

Was that *Moose's* voice? What was he doing in a raid? From the corner of his eye, Levi saw Steven being cuffed as well. They were dragged to their feet and propelled down the stairs. A snarl burst from his chest as Heather and Lucy, both cuffed, were pulled after them.

Red and blue lights flashed outside. Levi was hustled towards a black van. He dug in his heels, trying to swivel to find Lucy.

"Not her," a voice rang out.

Levi threw himself to one side, dropping to the ground. Relief burst over his heart as Lucy was pulled out of the line and her handcuffs removed. She bit down on her lip as she met his eyes. Guilt was written all over her face. The man standing beside her clapped her on the shoulder.

"Congratulations, Detective," he said. "You've brought some dangerous criminals to justice."

Detective? Levi went limp as the men dragged him to his feet again and shoved him into the van with his brother. His mind reeled. What did that man mean, *detective*? Lucy wasn't a cop… Was she? The betrayal hit hard, making agony well in his chest. He threw back his head and howled his grief.

His mate had betrayed him.

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"Hey, there was no way you could have known she was an undercover cop," Steven said, resting his hand on Levi's shoulder. Out of everybody that had been arrested, they were the only two that were being held.

Levi hadn't spoken since they were brought in the previous night. He just didn't have the strength to face the facts. Even when he was being interrogated about the bomb supplies in his bathroom under the sink – honestly, he hadn't

even heard of half those chemicals, and hadn't looked under his sink in about three months – he said nothing. They had already made up their mind that he was guilty, so what did it matter?

Lucy had already made up her mind that he was guilty.

A familiar, spicy-cupcake scent hit his nose. Despite himself, his head jerked up to see Lucy slip into the room on the other side of the bars that caged the Alpha and his brother. Levi's Coyote whimpered and he turned his face away.

"Levi, I'm sorry," Lucy whispered.

"I bet you are," he snapped. "Sorry that you ended up pregnant with my babies."

"Levi, no. That's not what I meant at all. I'm sorry that you're in here. I'm sorry that—"

"Go away, Lucy. The only reason you were with me was because you thought I was a drug dealer and a killer. You don't have to explain yourself. It's done. And when I'm out of here, because I *am* innocent, you'll never see me again."

Lucy grasped the bars that separated them and shook her head emphatically. "That's not what I want. I don't want any of this. Levi, I'm sorry that I used you. You don't know how sorry. But I am pregnant with your child. If all of it was just me using you, then I'd have been on birth control. I didn't want to hurt you. Please."

Levi turned away. "I can't trust anything you say."

"Isn't there anything I can do?"

"You've done enough," Steven growled. "My brother didn't kill anybody—"

"And I want to believe you," Lucy interrupted. "I want to. But I saw the supplies myself. How can you explain that?"

Levi shrugged listlessly. "I rarely stay in my apartment, and I always keep the door unlocked in case I lose my keys. Anybody could have put that bomb stuff in there, but it wasn't the pack. It wasn't *me*."

Lucy glanced at the door and moved closer. "Before he died, Knox said he was on something big and needed a little more time to find evidence for it. And Levi told

me he was working with you, Steven. Dirty cops running drugs through Coyote territory. Do you know who he suspected was their leader?"

"What does it matter? You still think I killed him," Levi snarled.

The human winced. "I… I did. And I'm sorry for that, Levi. I truly am. But I don't think you'd do it."

Levi slowly stepped forward. He was still angry that she had lied to him. That she had used his affection for her to infiltrate the pack and get them arrested. But she was still the mother of his child, and he wanted to believe the best of her.

"If you don't believe I did it, what am I doing here?"

"The evidence points towards you. My gut says you didn't do it, but I can't bring that to my superior. He'd say that I was just a woman who's letting her hormones get the best of her. Especially once they find out I'm pregnant." Lucy's eyes glimmered with tears.

Despite the situation, Levi found himself wanting to hold her, to comfort her and make sure she, his mate, felt safe.

Lucy swallowed, and a look of determination crossed her face. "If we're going to clear your name, I need to know who to go after."

"Anthony. Captain Johnathon Anthony." Steven looked at her seriously. "That's who Knox suspected."

"Captain Anthony? He runs a precinct up on the north side. He's not anywhere near…" She pulled in a deep breath. "Do you know where Knox would have hidden the evidence he found in his investigation?"

"No."

Lucy bowed her head for a moment, then nodded. "Alright. I'll just have to do what I was trained to do and detect."

Levi shivered. The last person to investigate into this got blown up. He needed time to process his emotions, to find a way past his anger. How could he do that if she died trying to undo what she had done? "Lucy—"

"I'm sorry. I never meant to use you, Levi." Lucy reached through the bars and pressed her hand to his face. "I know what I did was wrong, and I know you can't forgive me. I am so, so sorry. Once this is over, we'll decide what to do after the baby is born…"

"Lucy, no," Levi tried to grab her, but she slipped through his fingers like a silk ribbon. "Lucy!"

And then she was gone. Levi kicked at the door, shaking the bars. Panic welled in him. It didn't matter if Lucy had betrayed him. He couldn't let her get herself killed in this! He howled until Steven pulled him away from the door and threw him against the wall.

"Levi, stop it," he ordered. "Stop! These holding cells were designed to keep prisoners in. You can't fight your way out."

"She's going to get herself killed."

"No. You're getting out of here and helping her."

Levi stilled, staring at his brother in confusion. "But you just said—"

"You can't fight your way out." Steven grinned. "But you're not the only Bennet brother with a few tricks up his sleeve."