

Dinner Date

[Stanton]

It was hard to remain passive when Clover attacked. A grizzly bear is always up for a ght. My bear was struggling inside of me.

In bear culture, females are important. Even to natural bears, the female chooses her mate, the female raises the cubs, and the female decides when those cubs are old enough to go off on their own.

In werebear culture, the Ursa is not the support to the Urso. She is the reason he stays instead of wandering. She is the thing that grounds him and connects him to his sleuth.

A sleuth cannot be complete without an Ursa. She decides our name, she brings the sleuth together, she watches over everyone. She is the cushion to the Urso's harshness.

If an Alpha bear couldn't nd his mate when he was ready to settle down, usually he would select another viable female. All the single females in the area had started shaking their tails at me once they heard I was ready to settle down early.

Amanda was one of the most viable options for my chosen mate. She wasn't just the hostess at the restaurant, she was like a shadow manager for the business. She kept everyone in line.

The downside was that she was a black bear. She didn't have the fangs for dealing with the other breeds of bear and would need more support from me. Clover wasn't like that. Her magic would more than make up for the lack of a bear.

For a while there, I was worried Clover wasn't going to claim me in front of the other bears. Like I said, females choose their mates as natural bears. As part of our culture, females announce their ownership of males to their families. If the male is Alpha, like me, they have to announce it to any potential rivals.

One thing that is similar in all shapeshifter culture, was the desire for powerful mates. Much like our natural cousins search for the strongest breeding partner, we search for the ones who are powerful. Females are drawn to powerful males.

I was drawn from my thoughts as a reball formed in Clover's free hand. She turned and glared at the Blackwell family as they froze. Goddess, I wanted to get up and go to her. I was so proud of her.

"I am Ursa of this sleuth. To ght me is to ght your Urso. This is none of your business, step away." She ordered.

They stepped back and Amanda whimpered a little in Clover's grip. That drew Clover's attention back to her. Clover released her and Amanda dropped to the oor, gasping for air. Clover snuffed out the reball.

"What do you have to say for yourself, Amanda Blackwell?" Clover hissed.

"I... I... I'm sorry, Ursa. That was disrespectful. I won't do it again." Amanda cried.

"See that you don't. Now, go get us two more waters. And they better be clean." Clover snarled before stepping over Amanda and returning to her seat.

'That went better than expected. I thought she would pull out her magic long before she did.' Kuruk, my bear, said.

'She did. She smells like a grizzly. Clover used her animal magic to do that. She can't protect herself like we can, so she had to use her re magic to keep the Blackwells off her.' I replied.

'Our Ursa is resourceful and strong. Denitely a good match for us and our sleuth.'

I picked up my menu again and started looking through the options. I decided on their biggest steak with mashed potatoes and broccoli. I always got it, but I liked to pretend I thought about it rst.

When I put down my menu, I saw Clover glaring at me. I smiled at her and she didn't return my smile. Maybe I messed up a little.

Before I could say anything, Brenda, Amanda's younger sister, came up with our waters. She set them down carefully and kept her eyes down. She asked for our orders.

"I'll have my usual and a bottle of wine for the table." I told her.

"White or red, sir?" Brenda asked.

"One of each. That way my Ursa can decide what she wants to drink." I said.

"And for you, Ursa?"

"I'll have the Portobello mushroom steak with mashed potatoes and a salad. I'll try your house dressing, as long as it isn't ranch or any derivative of ranch." She told Brenda, wrinkling her nose adorably.

"Of course, Ursa." Brenda responded and took our menus before leaving.

I sipped my water. Clover still didn't look too happy with me.

"If you ever toss me into a situation like that again, I will punish you severely." Clover warned.

It would be a lie if I said that didn't turn me on a bit. The scent of bear mingling with her natural scent had lessened. This wasn't whatever drove her to attack Amanda.

"I thought your magic would guide you. It guided you to bite me rst, just like a dominant female bear." I reasoned.

"That was instinct. I'm not a violent person, Stanton. Threatening other people is not what I like to do at all. That's why I didn't threaten to hurt Steven when I called off the marriage arrangement." She said angrily. "I don't even eat meat. This isn't who I am."

"This is the only time you have to threaten anyone. Most of the diners here are bears in our sleuth. They had to know you could protect yourself. My Ursa needs to be strong. They all know that you are able to take care of yourself. They will tell others. You never have to do that again." I promised.

"Good. I didn't like it and I didn't like what I had to do in order to know what was going on. You need to teach me all the bear stuff. I don't like not knowing what's going on." Clover sighed. "It's too much like my life before, where someone had a plan for me and didn't feel the need to clue me in on it."

She looked sad. I really messed up. I would have to x this in any way possible. I didn't want my Ursa thinking I was trying to control her life without her knowledge.

We started talking more causally. I wanted to get off the subjects that would upset her. She told me more about her family. I was eager to hear all about them. Our food was delivered a short time later.

"What about your family?" Clover asked before taking a bite of her salad.

"Oh. Well, my mom is Nez Perce and met my father when she and her family were on a trip. He was visiting family who had moved to the U.S. and was thrilled to nd his mate here. He's from Germany. They married and he got his citizenship. They live in Idaho, on the reservation. I have a younger sister, but I haven't seen her since I was fteen." I told her.

"Why not?"

"Unlike other werebears, Alphas are a little more connected to the natural bear. My sister is probably out searching for her mate or just wandering. When we reach the age of viability, our mother chases us out of our home, just like a mother bear will chase her cubs up a tree and leave once they're old enough to take care of themselves." I explained.

"That's terrible. Have you been back home since then?" She asked.

"No. I can't go back until I've established my sleuth and found my mate. Until then, I'm an errant Alpha cub. So I learned to ght and I established friendships with other bears and supernaturals of all sorts. I started doing mercenary work under another wandering Alpha. He trained me hard for a year and gave me a cellphone. He would call when he had jobs I could do. Extractions, mainly. Rescuing people. Gathering information. Sometimes just sending a message to someone. That was when Talia introduced me to Bellamy." I chuckled remembering the little wolf pup she'd been.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine. I'll be thirty in a couple months. That's when we usually start really looking for our mates, Alpha bears, I mean. I was seventeen when I met Bellamy. She was just seven years old. I never saw anyone pick up on things as fast as she did. She started making attack plans only weeks after we started traveling together. She picked up on shooting even faster. She was an amazing little girl." I smiled.

"You let a seven-year-old shoot a gun?! What the hell? She could have gotten hurt!" Clover fumed.

"I know it's hard to understand, because you grew up in a very human-like environent. Bellamy's parents were killed by hunters. She wanted to become stronger, to avenge them. Talia showed me how much Bellamy had learned traveling with her. You've met Bellamy. Anyone can see, she's not a normal girl, or a normal wolf." I said.

"That's no excuse. You will not be teaching our children how to shoot at seven." Clover scoffed.

"I love it when you talk about our cubs." I winked.

She laughed and shook her head. "I'm going to have to get used to you calling them that, aren't I?"

"They will be, though. They'll be bears, just like me." I told her.

"I know that werewolves get their wolf at seventeen, is that the same across the board?" Clover asked.

"No. In some species, they have their rst change along with their rst steps. We get our bear around eleven. Right before puberty hits. Alphas will get their bear younger. We need more time to train. I got mine at ve. My sister got hers at seven. We're trained how to ght and how to protect our people until we're considered viable. This is something our mother decides. Then, chased off into the world, like I said before." I said.

"I will not be chasing our children off at fteen. I can't imagine worrying about them and not being able to see them whenever I want." She replied sadly.

"You won't have to worry about it. Since they'll only be half bear, our children couldn't possibly have Alpha blood. You can keep them home until the time humans normally leave." I smiled.

"You aren't upset about not having Alpha bear children?" Clover asked.

"No. We're not like wolves. We don't hand down titles. If our children want to inherit the title, they have to come challenge their fater for it and beat him in a ght. We don't have the same hierarchy as wolves either. There is no Beta, Gamma, whatever, to help out. Sleuths are small. If anything, we're more like rogues. Resources, safety, and freedom are our main concerns. Some will take on a second Alpha bear as a second in command. If they do that, they usually hold a larger sleuth." I explained.

"Oh. And what will you be doing?"

"I'm actually going to reach out to my cousin, Randy. He's a couple years younger than me, but found his mate early. I'm going to see if he wants to be my second in command. He's having a rough time trying to start his own sleuth. I just have to hope you get along well with Becky."

"Becky?" She asked.

"His mate. She's a dhampyr, but only like a quarter vampire. She'll be nishing up her schooling in a year or so. She would be like your support. I think you'll like her, though. Becky's a sweet girl." I grinned.

I loved my cousin's mate. She was always funny and brought back the strangest things when she came home to visit. Randy was so in love with her. It was part of what drove me to search for my mate early. I wanted a little of that happiness. And seeing Bellamy and Lucien all the time made it worse.

"I'll do my best. I've only just met a vampire for the rst time. I don't know anything about dhampyrs." Clover chuckled.

"How's your food, tigress? Did they make it well?" I asked.

"It's very good. I'm really enjoying how many vegetarian options there are here." She grinned.

"Would you like some more wine?" I questioned, picking up the bottle.

"Just one more glass. I can't go getting drunk when I have you to deal with."

Taking her glass, I lled it with white wine. Clover took a sip and set it on the table. I was thrilled that she wasn't mad at me anymore. I wanted to make her happy.