

## Chapter Five

After a few weeks, Clara wasn't sure how to explain her relationship with Nate. She had woken up the next morning to Nate cleaning her off gently with a soft warm cloth, his eyes soft and adoring. They had exchanged gentle kisses and a warm shower, but as soon as they entered the workplace they became two separate people again.

He explained to her that as much as he wanted to show affection to her during the day, the last thing he wanted was for her to end up with a bad reputation because of him. They could have each other in their free time and at night, but during the day they weren't lovers. They were employee and employer, and Clara was happy about this.

Things were going great until she started feeling nauseous in the mornings. After waking up and rushing to the bathroom immediately for a week straight, she shook off the idea of food poisoning or a stomach bug and quickly realized that they might have a far more severe problem on their plates.

She was pregnant, and she had no idea how she was going to tell Nate.

Sitting at her desk with her head in her hands, Clara groaned as she glared down at the decaf tea sitting on her desk, wishing desperately that she could have coffee or at least something with caffeine with it. She had a headache that could split a board and her stomach felt as though it was attempting to escape her body through her esophagus.

"You don't seem to be feeling well this morning," a voice hummed behind her, earning a grimace from Clara as she looked up. Her supervisor, Jeremy, was eyeing her slowly as he tapped a pencil on his clipboard. "Late night?" he asked, raising an eyebrow at the cup of tea on her desk. "I could get you something with some caffeine if you'd like. It might help." He grinned, his eyes flashing as if he knew.

She had never liked Jeremy. He was aloof and incredibly self-important. He had never liked her either but had never had an excuse to get rid of her. She was good at her job and close to the boss, and as his personal assistant, this seemed to infuriate him.

"No thank you," she grumbled, forcing a smile onto her lips as she looked up at him. "I'm trying to cut caffeine out of my diet. Healthier for you." She shrugged, her hand unconsciously fluttering to her stomach when she saw the irritated look on his face.

“Ah, I see. Good for you. I understand how difficult it is to give up one of your vices,” he rumbled, his pale eyes flickering towards Nate’s office before returning to Clara’s face. “Who knows, maybe you’ll be able to let this one go?” He smirked, turning and walking towards Nate’s door as it swung open.

“There you are, Jeremy. Would you mind running these files down to the first floor for me?” Nate asked, handing the man a stack of files before moving over to Clara.

Clara couldn’t help but notice the glare that Jeremy sent their way, her already unhappy stomach clenching at the near murderous look in his eyes. She knew that the man hated her, but she wasn’t sure why he had suddenly got so violent.

“Clara, I got your memo.” Nate smiled, meaning the text that she had sent him saying that they needed to meet up. “Would you like to get lunch and discuss it now?” he asked with a raised eyebrow, resting against her desk with a carefree smile.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to eat, but I do need to discuss this, so yes.” She nodded, moving to her feet and snagging her purse. “C’mon, let’s go,” she whispered to him, ignoring the worried look in her lover’s eyes as he followed her into the elevator.

“Is everything alright?” he asked, once they were alone in the small space, his hand reaching out to rest on her cheek, his thumb brushing over her warm cheek gently. Pressing against his warm palm, she hummed softly, reaching up to clutch at his hand gently.

“Everything is fine,” she mumbled. “I just have something I need to tell you that’s very important and potentially life changing.” She sighed as he pulled back before the doors opened. Nate looked back at her with a worried expression on his face but said nothing to push the matter.

The diner that they selected to eat at to be alone was a bit further away than anyone would normally travel to lunch, but it was quiet, and Clara enjoyed everything on the menu. Sitting across from her lover with a sigh, she smiled when Nate’s hand gently took her own and his lips pressed against her knuckles gently.

“Tell me what’s going on that is so life changing,” Nate ordered, his soft eyes locking onto her own with a concerned look on his features. Sighing softly, Clara lightly squeezed her lover’s fingers and ran her fingers through her hair slowly.

“Nate, I’m pregnant,” she mumbled, looking up at the other through her lashes to catch the change of expression on her lover’s face.

It seemed to take a moment for him to realize exactly what she was saying. His face was frozen in a sort of dazed expression, his mouth hanging open while he fought for the words he needed to say right then. Reaching out to touch his hand, she smiled when she seemed to draw him out of his daze, his eyes fluttering up to meet hers while a smile formed on his face.

“Sweetie, that's great!” He laughed, a beaming smile forming on his lips as he took her hands in his. “This is amazing! I mean, this changes a few things, of course, we’re going to have to announce our relationship to the company, but we can figure out the logistics and such later!” He grinned, earning a laugh from Clara as she rolled her eyes.

“I’ve been applying at a few other corporations so we don’t have to worry too much about a scandal,” she explained, laughing when he leaned across the table to kiss her on the lips.

“We can figure all of this out once you get off maternity leave,” he insisted, squeezing her fingers with an adoring look on his face. “I just hope that the baby has your looks.” He grinned, pressing a kiss to her button nose and earning a soft hum from his lover.

“I’m just going to be happy if it comes out with all its toes and fingers,” she grinned, leaning back with a relieved sigh when he continued to all but bounce in his seat with excitement. “Why did I think you were going to be upset?” she asked, earning a laugh from the man.

“Not a clue! I love children! I just wish we could have gotten married first,” he lamented, earning a snort from Clara.

“No marriage until this thing is out of me. The last thing I want to do is try to fit a baby bump into a wedding dress,” she insisted, earning a shrug from Nate, who leaned in and kissed her once more “You’re my mate. The marriage is just for the press.” He winked, cupping her cheek in his palm. “I promise everything is going to be just fine, my love,” he whispered, rubbing circles on her cheek before pulling back with a sigh. “Now, what are we going to order?” he asked, lifting up the menu.

## Chapter Six

Clara's hope that Nate would be able to take her home after work was quickly destroyed when she realized after their lunch that the man had meetings that were going to run late. At least, she figured, she would be able to take a shower and relax before the alpha returned home.

Pulling into the garage of Nate's home a few minutes after leaving work, she slid out of her Elantra and locked it behind her. She hated coming home by herself. She could never shake the feeling that someone was watching her. That someone else was there.

Pulling her jacket a little further around her shoulders, Clara pushed open the door and slid inside, locking it behind her. Letting out a sigh of relief as she flipped on the lights in the hallway, she moved into their room and settled her purse on the bed.

Sliding out of her heels and pantsuit, she pulled on a lacy nightgown and a robe before moving into the kitchen. She hoped that Nate was ok with take out because she certainly wasn't feeling like cooking that evening. Nate was usually the cook, and he was pretty good at it. She had a tendency to burn whatever she put in a pan.

"Chinese or pizza..." she mumbled, wondering if she could have Nate swing by and pick up something at another restaurant so she had a broader range of choices. Lifting her cellphone out of her pocket, she felt a shriek fall from her lips as a hand caught her wrist.

Kicking and attempting to spin around, she screamed as a hand clamped over her mouth and her body was hefted up into the air by a pair of powerful arms. Kicking and screeching into the hand over her mouth, she let out a sob as she was forced down onto a chair. She felt the man holding her down snap something around her wrists and attach them to the chair arm.

"Stop!" she wailed, kicking her legs furiously as the man shoved a gag into her mouth, her eyes huge when she looked up into the eyes of her assailant.

"Oh hush now, Ms. Maddison," Jeremy grinned, kneeling beside her and attaching her kicking legs to the chair legs with a chuckle. "There's no need for these theatrics!" he hummed, earning a terrified noise from the woman as he eyed her slowly. "Honestly, struggling is just going to wind up hurting your fragile little body, or worse! The poor baby!"

Clara looked up at the man with a terrified look in her eyes, her body quivering as she looked down at her stomach. How did he know that she was pregnant? She hadn't told anyone but Nate, and that had only been earlier that day! Trembling as she watched the man circle her, she let out a terrified noise when she saw his fingertips shift into familiar claws, her eyes going wide with terror when his claw slid over her cheek slowly.

"Hush now, don't cry dear," Jeremy hummed, his eyes flickering over her form with a hungry look in his eyes. "You know I didn't have a problem with you until you started sticking your nose where it didn't belong," he spat, his eyes flashing murderously. "Nathaniel, he's a fantastic alpha, but he can't keep his damn head out of the clouds! If he had just listened to me and dropped you when I told him to, we wouldn't be in this mess!" he explained, earning a confused and mortified look from the woman.

Straining against the handcuffs attaching her to the sturdy wood of the chair frame, she let out a squeak when Jeremy slapped her across the face, her breath hitching in her throat as a muffled sob fell from her lips.

"You see, Clara, he's not just risking his own reputation by dating a pretty little upstart like yourself, he's risking the security of the pack!" Jeremy pointed out, his eyes changing from pale blue into something dangerous, the irises a poisonous yellow. "I have been his second in command for years, and I will not let you ruin this pack! I will not let that parasite inside of you risk everything that our people have worked for in this god forsaken company!" he snarled, grabbing her jaw and forcing her to look up at him,

"You understand that this isn't personal, of course?" he hummed, his nails digging into her chin painfully as she let out a weak noise of protest. "I've been keeping an eye on you for weeks, and I was hoping you would wise up and leave the bastard, but when I realized that you were pregnant? Oh, sweetheart, you didn't leave me much of a choice!" He laughed, lightly patting her cheek before moving over to the counter and lifting up a nasty looking blade.

Letting out a strangled noise, Clara shook her head and attempted to get her leg free, trembling as he twirled the blade in his hand nonchalantly. This man was going to kill her. He was going to kill her and her unborn child and Nate was never going to know.

"Don't worry, I'll make it painless. No reason to make you suffer for my dear Nathaniel's mistakes, hmm?" He chuckled, moving closer and trailing the blade over her shoulder slowly, slicing through the silky fabric of her robe easily to reveal the bloodless skin beneath. "It'll be quick! Just like ripping off a band-" He cut off with a roar of pain when her foot broke free from the binding, slamming into his groin and sending her falling backward with a cry.

Gasping as she writhed on the floor, she desperately fought to break free. The chair arm had snapped off from the back when she landed, and with her free hand, she tore desperately at the straps on her other wrist. Looking up as Jeremy lurched forward, she gasped, slapping his hand away from her and kicking upwards with a muffled shriek.

“You bitch!” he roared, attempting to get ahold of her as she writhed and thrashed away from him. She was not going down without a fight.

Gasping when he grabbed onto her hair, she yelped and felt her head lurch back. Kicking out with a cry, she managed to kick the blade away, grimacing when the blade cut into the pad of her foot in the process.

Panting and livid, Jeremy let out a snarl as he grabbed onto her throat. Lifting her up, he slammed her and what was remaining of the chair against the wall.

“Fine. I’ll do this the hard way then,” he snarled, his nails digging into her throat as she gagged and thrashed in his hold. Her vision swimming, Clara desperately clawed at his hand, her body going numb as she started losing consciousness.

Air rushed into her lungs a moment later. Landing on the ground with a painful thud, she looked up blearily as Jeremy went flying backward, her breath rasping and weak as she clutched at her throat. Coughing, she rolled over onto her side with a moan and felt hope swell in her chest as she saw Nate looming over a startled-looking Jeremy.

“How dare you touch her? She is my mate, you backstabbing whelp!” Nate roared as he threw Jeremy into the table, his eyes flashing as he shifted into his wolf form with a shudder. Dominant and stunning, his massive form loomed over Jeremy with a snarl that sent shudders down Clara’s spine.

“She was going to destroy you! Destroy us! What we’ve built for our pack!” Jeremy stuttered, stumbling away from the wolf as the man moved forward murderously. “I was trying to help you!” he cried, shifting into a wolf himself and yelping as Nathaniel leaped at him with a hiss of challenge.

Clara looked away with a shudder when Jeremy shrieked, her free hand pulling the gag free from her mouth before shakily breaking off the remaining chair on her arm and untying her legs. Moving to her feet with a grunt, she limped into the kitchen and picked up the bag that Jeremy had discarded. Finding the handcuff keys with ease, she shakily undid the cuffs and threw them aside with a shudder.

Across the room, she could hear the two wolves snarling and yipping as they bit and clawed at each other. Flinching at the sound of teeth sinking into flesh, she

sank down behind the counter with a shudder, snagging onto a dish towel to bind the wound on her foot. Nate would be fine. There was no way he would lose.

The fight continued for just a few minutes longer, and with a final shriek and a horrible crunch the world went silent.

Trembling, Clara felt her breath hitch and she grabbed Jeremy's discarded knife as a form moved around the counter. Brandishing it at her potential attacker, she let out a relieved noise when Nate held up his hands.

"Woah! Hey, it's ok! It's me," Nate panted, wiping the blood on his face away and waiting until she let the knife clatter to the ground before pulling her into his arms. "Are you ok?" he rasped, pressing his face to her shoulder and allowing her to crumble into his arms.

"He was going to kill me!" she croaked, shock rolling through her body while his powerful form cradled her to his chest gently. Pressing a kiss to the top of her head, Nate nodded, scooping her up into his arms with a shudder.

"I know he was. I'm so sorry, Clara," he whimpered, carrying her into the bedroom and quickly swaddling her in a blanket. "I'm taking you to the hospital. I'll call someone to take care of that bastard." He closed his eyes, a shudder rolling through his form. "I thought he was my best friend, and then I saw him standing over you like that. I never thought he would do something like that to anybody," he croaked, as he held her shaking form to his chest.

"You saved me," she whispered against his chest, tears staining his shirt as his grip tightened around her shaking form.

"Course I did, you're my everything," he whispered against her shoulder, trotting down the stairs towards his car. Melting against his chest, Clara allowed herself to be enveloped in his comforting embrace. She didn't think she could ever be more in love with a person than she was in that moment.