

Ari is so
much
better



Of Ocelots and Sexy Yetis

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ALICE WINTERS

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Chapter One

I leap through the snow in my ocelot form, bounding after a rabbit that was an absolute *fool* of a creature to think it could sass me, the greatest hunter to have ever hunted in these woods.

“Why are you chasing the rabbit?” Quinn, my alpha and the best friend ever alive, says as he watches me. He’s in his wolf form, being all “majestic” and just *watching* the rabbit even though he could pounce on that little fucker and tear him to shreds for the injustice it’s caused me.

“It sassed me. So now I’m going to tear into its soft flesh, and I might even bring its carcass home to spit out upon your pillow,” I decide. *“I thought we were best friends foreva?”*

Quinn, in all his black-furred glory, turns his fluffy ass around and continues toward home. *“We are, but not even that can make me chase a rabbit around for you. I’m cold, and it looks like it’s going to snow some more, so I’m headed home.”*

“I will meet you later with my rabbit fur gloves.”

“Do you even know how to skin a rabbit? It probably weighs more than you. Come on.”

How dare he degrade me like that? *“This is my duty, Quinn. This is what I was born to do.”*

Quinn sighs and heads for home without another word. It must be tough having no fun in life.

I continue trekking through the snow after the rabbit. I will show Quinn and he’ll be all “Wow, Ari, you really *are* the best” and I’ll have to

be all “I knew that from the moment I was born. Why’d it take *you* so long to figure it out?” The whole pack will probably throw a party and make a big deal of it and I’ll have to pretend to be modest even though we all know I’m not.

The rabbit bolts and I race after it, deeper into the trees. When it reaches the creek, it does a hard right turn, nearly tripping me as I realize I don’t know if I *want* to grab it. What if it has fleas? Or a tick on it? Or it’s dirty? I mean... maybe most of those icky things are dead in the winter but... what if it has *parasites*?

Oh.

My.

God.

I nearly touched that thing! WITH MY MOUTH!

Who the fuck thought this was a good idea?

I shudder as I realize that I’m going to have to go find a skinned rabbit somewhere to bring home to Quinn so I don’t look like a fool and...

What the fuck is that!?

I skirt back, sinking down in the snow as I try to blend in. And as I wait and watch, Sasquatch, at least ten feet—no! *fifteen* feet tall, thuds his way over toward me. The man... no, *monster*, is clearly not of this world as he looks around and tugs on his hood a little more.

He looks this way and that as the snow thickens to the point where visibility is becoming worse.

I decide that the rabbit can just fuck off, so I turn around and dash for home. At least I’m not too far and come sliding into the village in time for someone to nail me in the side with a snowball.

I look over at Kaiya, one of my pack members, in horror. I shift into my human form as she grins at me. “You are dead to me. Hear me? Dead,” I

growl before running, butt ass naked, to Quinn's house. I don't bother knocking—why knock when we're the best friends to have ever friended—and let myself in.

“QUINN!” I yell.

“Let's see this rabbit,” Quinn says as he comes around the corner sipping his hot chocolate after clearly not having made me one.

“I found something even *better*,” I say.

“Yeah? And what was that? A squirrel? Maybe a field mouse?”

I narrow my eyes at him as I feel my love for him lessen just a little.

“No. Sasquatch. I literally saw fucking *Sasquatch*.”

Quinn takes a ridiculously long drink of his hot chocolate as he scrutinizes me. “What do you mean?”

“So there I was, inches away from snapping the neck of that stupid rabbit when fucking *Sasquatch*, Big Foot, Yeti, the Abominable Snowman, whatever you want to call him, came out from around a tree.”

“Uh-huh... and did he do something to you? Like... try to hurt you or something?”

“No! Of course not, I was so slick and sly I just plopped right down onto the ground and I hid so damn good he never noticed me,” I say.

Quinn seems to think about this for a moment. “So... let me get this straight... at almost dark, in the middle of a raging snowstorm, you saw a... *presumably* human out in the thickest part of the woods *miles* from the hiking trails, and instead of shifting and going, ‘Hey, man, are you alright? Do you know your way out?’ you ran back to tell me about him?” Quinn asks.

I stare at Quinn as his annoyingly wise words sink in.

“Ari?” he asks.

I refuse to speak to him. I refuse to let him know that he may be, a tiny bit, possibly right.

“Ari?”

“Sooooo you’re saying that man... was probably a lost hiker and I just left him out to die in the snowstorm?” I ask as I let that sink in.

“That’s kind of what I’m feeling like happened,” Quinn says. He sighs and sets his hot chocolate down. “Come on. Let’s go find him. The probability of him just being out for a hike is next to none.” He grabs his phone to call his brother as I take his hot chocolate and help him finish it off.

Then when Quinn’s ready, we head outside where Graham, Quinn’s brother, and a few others come out to meet up with us.

They’ve all shifted so we can talk to each other and it’s a whole lot less freezing than standing naked, even though my coat isn’t as thick as theirs.

“Ari noticed a man out in the forest, so he’s going to lead us to the area and we can see if he needs help,” Quinn says as he starts moving.

“With his tiny little legs it’ll take us five years to find the man,” Trenton, the asshole of the crew, says. He’s a large bear shifter and pretty much the dumbest man alive. Like... it’s pitiful how dumb he is compared to me.

As we head out, snow pelts me in the face while I try to take the lead, but it’s growing increasingly hard to tell which direction I was in when all I can see is snow smacking into my eyeballs. Quinn and the others try to track my path but I’m soon wondering if I’ve destined this poor Yeti to death.

I’m not *super* sure it was my fault when I was positive the man was going to eat me.

I sigh as Quinn looks around. *“Was this the area?”*

Surveying the area proves to be pointless because everything is just a dark wonderland of snow. *“Maybe.”*

“We’re going to freeze to death out here,” Trenton complains.

Graham looks over at the large bear barreling through the snow. *“You have like a foot of fur.”*

He does, which I find completely unfair. *“I’m going to freeze to death! My fur isn’t thick enough! Quinn! Hold me!”*

“I can’t hold you or I would,” he says.

“Imagine if he’d have just led the man back the first time,” Trenton says.

I growl at him before catching the lightest smidge of a scent. I take a step to the side as the wind howls around me, and then suddenly I find myself plummeting through the snow. The snow must have been hanging over a ledge and even with my light weight, I drop down through. I flail, trying my hardest to catch onto something but when I land, I start sliding the rest of the way down. Suddenly, I’m rolling, tumbling and falling to the bottom where I finally land. Looking up, I hear a very strange noise before looking down at my feet and realizing I’m on ice.

Breaking ice, that is.

“Fuck,” I cry a moment before the ice cracks and I’m sucked under.

The cold shocks me as I flail and try to swim for the surface but when I hit the top, I smash into the ice covering the pond.

Panic fills me as I realize that I don’t know where the hole I fell through is to escape. I’m going to drown and freeze to death and I’m going to die, and I don’t know what to do.

Suddenly, I feel a hand grab onto me, pulling me out of death’s grasp. My guardian angel. My savior. My very own Yeti has saved me.

“Good thing I saw you fall,” he says as he proceeds to wring me out like I’m laundry and I realize that he saved me but now I’m just going to *freeze to death*.

He gives me a little shake, either to dislodge my brain or to get rid of more water, before he unzips his jacket.

He’s going to pull out a knife and gut me, isn’t he? My fur *is* quite beautiful but I don’t want to be a mini rug! The rug would be so small, the only room it’d make sense in is the bathroom and I don’t wanna be a bathroom rug!

The man stuffs me inside his shirt and zips the jacket back up as I feel the warmth from his bare chest press against me.

I sink into him as I shiver and shake, thankful for the warmth as the man moves. I really wish I could talk to him and tell him that Quinn and the others aren’t far away, but that would require me moving and shifting into my human form, and right now my limbs feel so frozen solid that I’m not sure I *can* move. So for just a moment, I allow myself to suck up alllll his warmth before realizing I need to at least talk to him.

God, I wish I could just shift inside his bundle of warmth, but instead, I wiggle and squeeze against it until my head pops out. Snow pelts me in the eyeballs and my whiskers seem to instantly freeze as I duck my head back in the shirt.

Fuck that shit.

Nooo, I can’t “fuck that.” I need to at least point him in the right direction.

I whine as I pop my head back out before scrambling out of his shirt and hitting the ground. I quickly shift into my human form as the man looks at me in surprise.

“You’re going to freeze!” he says.

“I’m aware!” I cry. “I’m wet and dirty and I’m going to freeze to death after heroically coming back out here to save *you*.”

“Save me?” he asks, and I watch in pure wonder as he takes his big jacket off and drapes it over my shoulders before zipping it up. He pulls the hood up and smiles at me even though he now has to be freezing himself, especially with the apparent wet spot on his shirt from my fur.

“Yes! I came out here to save you and my god, my feet are freezing.”

He scoops me up and holds me off the ground as my breath is taken away. “Is that better?”

He acts like he’s prepared to carry me wherever I wish to go like my own personal servant and my heart nearly explodes in my chest. *This* is the kind of attention I need. I *deserve*.

“As you were saying?” he shouts over the wind.

“OH! Right. So yeah, I saw you and maybe kind of ignored you and told my alpha about it and then he told me we needed to go save you, so we came back and I got separated from them and fell down that hill. What are you doing out here?”

He looks up at the hill I’d fallen down. “I was... hiking and... got lost. I can’t seem to find the road or the trail or... really anything. I’m completely turned around. Do you happen to know how to get out of here?”

“Of course! I’ve spent many hours in these woods.”

I look at my surroundings as the wind whips the snow around like it’s trying to create a snow tornado around me. The smells are all off, too. “So, from my prior knowledge of snowstorms, we’re going to stumble upon a lone cabin in the middle of the woods. There’s mysteriously going to already be wood there and a little pile of food and you’re going to have to take your clothes off to warm up and start the fire and hey! Are you listening to me!” I shout as he just starts carrying me off.

“Sort of. I think we need to keep moving or we’re going to freeze to death. Your hair already has ice crystals in it.”

“Yes, that’s because I’m freezing *to death*,” I say. “What’s your name?”

“Loglamb!” he shouts out over the roaring wind.

Weird but... whatever. “Ari,” I shout back.

“Nice to meet you, Ari. Let’s see if we can find a road or something.”

“I’ll shift and try to get you heading in the right direction. I might die in the process, but it’s my sacrifice. Please... make sure you sing songs of my bravery,” I say as I shift before jumping into the snow and sniffing around.

My feet are instantly frozen, and I dramatically decide that death is imminent and just flop onto my side, defeated.

He picks me up, dusts the snow off me, and stuffs me back in his shirt before wrapping us both up in his coat. Death has come for me and at least I’m going to die wrapped in the arms of a *very* muscular man. Why *is* he so muscular? Are hikers usually built like this? He smells good too, which is weird because I’d think most humans wandering around would get all stinky from working, but not this man. Strange.

Suddenly, the howling wind lessens, and I poke my head out as I see that he’s cramming his body in this little crevice.

“You have any idea which direction we should go in?” he asks.

I reluctantly climb out of his shirt before sniffing around. In here, out of the wind, I recognize the smells. This isn’t too horribly far from the village.

I shift and squat on the ground, freezing to death as he shrugs off his coat and wraps it around me again.

“So... I do know this area.”

“Okay.”

“And...”

Why is Quinn the one good at tracking? Why do I never bother to learn anything when Quinn’s just so good at it?

I clear my throat. “Using my amazing powers of deduction, I believe we are close to the village,” I say.

He gives me a big smile and without the hood on, I realize that he’s actually quite attractive. “That’s fantastic. Which direction? I’ll carry you.”

Well, this is disappointing. I have to prove to this majestic hunk of a man that I really have no clue which way we’re going because I suck at being a shifter.

He gives me a soft smile and cups my face in his big hands. “I know it’s really hard with all the wind and snow, but I think if we work together, we can figure it out. So think about the last time you were here.”

I try to think about it before recalling a time when Quinn led me out here while unjustly proving how much faster he was than me. I might have told him he had stubbly little legs compared to his brother and was only good for looking cute, but that’s not my fault.

So... let’s see... We came right from the creek which was behind us. If we follow the creek, it’d be the long way, but it *would* lead us to the village without us getting turned around in the storm.

“Okay. There’s a creek that way and I think if we follow it, we could find the village without the snow turning us around.”

He gives me a huge smile and rubs the side of my head, which I find myself leaning into, feeling rather *pleased* by the affection.

“Will you marry me?” I ask.

He just chuckles and holds his shirt open. “Come on. Let’s go.”

Well, wasn't the *worst* proposal I've had. I mean, when I asked Quinn he just laughed viciously in my face.

I shift and jump in the man's shirt as he carries me off. I poke my head out every now and then.

"Found the creek!" he shouts. "I'm going to start following it!"

I smugly sit in his shirt as he trudges through the thick snow and before long, I start recognizing things, even through the low visibility.

"We must be getting close?" he asks and all I can do is make ocelot noises at him.

And just as I start to see a break in the trees, I see Quinn come running.

The moment he sees me sticking my head out, he looks insanely relieved. "Oh my god. Thank you... oh god. Ari, I thought you got lost and I couldn't find you. I just came back to the village to see if you'd made it back."

"He fell into the water, so he could use some warming up," Loglamb says. (I think if we got married, I'd have to insist he pick a different name. Is that mean? That's probably mean... fuck. Ari and Loglamb it is.)

Quinn ushers us into his house, which is closest, since we came in the back way. He plucks me out and sets me next to the fireplace before rushing around for clothes. "Thank you so much for bringing him back. I'm Quinn."

"Logan," the huge man says as he holds his hand out.

Well... *that* would have been embarrassing. Thank god his name was cleared up before I confessed my undying love to him.

I shift and Quinn piles blankets on top of me as I smile up at my very own Yeti. "Thanks for carrying me all this way."

"Thanks for helping me find the way. Without you, I'd probably have died out there," he says with a smile that makes the skin around his eyes

wrinkle.

He's perfect.

I can't stop staring at him.

A perfecter man does *not* exist.

Quinn kneels down and tightens the blanket around me. "You have to be creeping him out with that look."

I narrow my eyes and fixate them on Quinn. "*Excuse me?*"

"You're looking really freaking creepy right now," he whispers.

"I see what this is. You're jealous. He is *mine*."

Quinn looks concerned but decides to ignore me like the good friend he is. "Let me get you some hot chocolate, Logan. We'll warm you up and if you need to call anyone or if you want to stay here for the night, that works. But first, I'm going to let the others know I found you guys," he says before rushing for the door.

"Is that your alpha?" Logan asks.

I look at him in surprise. People *rarely* guess Quinn is alpha since he doesn't look like one. "He is. How could you tell?"

He shrugs. "I guess his presence. If you guys don't mind, I think I'll take you up on the offer to spend the night."

"Fantastic, you can stay forever if you want," I decide.

He chuckles. "I'm not sure I can do that, but it sounds nice."

Oh... I will sucker this man into never leaving, no matter what I need to do.

Ari's story will be continued in a novella (?) that I'm planning to release after book two comes out. We'll get to see how he suckers Logan in and refuses to let him go. But for now, just a little taste is all I have for you. I

hope you enjoyed it and look forward to more of our nosy, instigating, and slightly in love with himself ocelot. You can also preorder the second book here where there is PLENTY of Ari shenanigans:

<http://mybook.to/OfBetrayalandMonsters>