

UNRAVELING
THE
THREADS
OF FATE

BONUS SHORT STORY

ALICE WINTERS

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***Please wait to read this short until after you've finished Unraveling the Threads of Fate

Alex

As I watch the people move around me, all dressed in their finest, I can't help but wonder how I ever ended up here. How could I have gone from questioning the purpose of my life to being so absolutely happy? I never realized how much my life would change the moment Bishop stepped into it. And seeing my family and the man who is now my husband makes me happier than I could ever have imagined.

Cali is laughing as Elijah swings her around, trying to do some kind of swing dance move that sets her off into a fit of giggles. Edward is trying to coerce his partner to her feet. My father is watching from a table.

And Bishop... Bishop is watching me.

"What are you staring at?" Bishop asks.

"You jealous?" I tease.

"Well, I assumed once we were married your eyes would always be fixated only on me forever and ever," he jokes as he glances down at his newly placed ring. The smile on his face when he looks at it immediately makes me smile.

"I was just going to walk around giving you doe eyes?" I ask.

"Yes!"

"I'd be smashing into walls and everything."

"Nope! Because I would be there to catch you! Wrapping you up in my loving arms."

I raise an eyebrow at this crazy man who I love too much. I can tell that I love him too much because even when he says insane things, I still just love him. “There’s something about you...”

“Something spectacular?” he asks.

I grin at him. “Yep, definitely what I was going to say.”

He runs his fingers through his hair before smoldering at me. “I know.”

That makes me laugh as I shake my head at him. The music is pounding and people are laughing and moving around us. And I love every moment of it but I also long for a single moment where it’s just us.

“Want to step outside for a second?” I ask.

“Sure,” he says as I grab his hand, sliding my fingers between his as I make my way out of the hall and through the front door, into the night. I can still hear the music chasing after us, but it’s quieter now.

“Everything alright? You haven’t seen something crazy, right?” Bishop asks. Poor Bishop always assumes we’ll have another thread incident whenever I’m upset. “Or was it me asking you to stare at me forever? Was that overkill?”

“Nah, I loved the idea of forever staring into your soul,” I joke. “Forever and ever, just staring at you. Might get a bit awkward at times but I made a commitment. I think it was somewhere in the vows, right?”

“All but when I go to the bathroom.”

“Now you’re getting picky? We’ve been married...”—I glance at my watch—“two hours and you’re already demanding things.”

“That’s me. Bishop the Demander!”

I shake my head. “Honestly, I just wanted a moment with only you.”

His smile widens. “You can have all the moments you want.”

I take his hand and look down at the thread wrapped around his finger before pulling him in closer. Even though I've had that thread to reassure me for quite a while, I feel happy to see the ring there, something that shows others who can't see that he's mine. I drape my arms around his neck as he drapes his around mine and we gently sway to the music leaking into the parking lot.

"It's such a lovely night; clearly this was meant to be," he says.

"So if it was raining, you'd have left me at the altar?"

Bishop shrugs. "Definitely would have considered it. I mean... you did shoot me previously."

"You were supposed to forget that," I say.

"Are you going to shoot me again to make me forget?" Bishop asks, like he's nervous.

"I might!" I tease. "Depends whether you straighten up at all."

"I promise to be a good boy," he says. "Don't want you to pull out your ruler and spank me like the bad boy I am."

I can't help but grin at him. "You're so ridiculous and I love it."

How can someone's smile make me feel so much happiness? So much everything?

"We should like... run naked through the woods or something," Bishop announces.

I stop our slow dance so abruptly that he steps on me. "Excuse me, what?"

"It's a full moon, that's what soul mates do on a full moon," he decides.

"We're not freaking werewolves."

"Oh... I... right. *Totally* not a werewolf."

I grin at him. “I love you, but you’d one hundred percent be a golden retriever.”

“That’s fine... I guess if you don’t want to be involved in my soul mate ritual, we can go inside...”

I shake my head, but honestly... honestly, I don’t hate the idea. “The first one to reach that pond butt-ass naked wins,” I declare as I take off at a run into the woods.

“Hold on! I thought you were making fun of me!”

“I totally was,” I yell. “Don’t you dare snag your tux on anything running through these trees!”

“Alex, it’s okay if the tux gets snagged. It’s not that big of a deal.”

“I plan to pawn this bitch. Who knows what you paid for it. I’d probably faint if I found out,” I say as he runs after me.

“I plan to stuff mine so when I’m away on business trips you can spoon it and think of me. I can even make a secret love hole in it if you want.”

“Dear god, no. I do not want.”

Bishop’s cackles follow after me as I try to shake that imagery out of my head. “You don’t want a secret Bishop 2.0 love hole?”

I pull my tie free and stuff it into a pocket before unbuttoning my vest and shirt. “Stop saying it!”

“The love hole part?”

“Damn you for being faster than me,” I say as I try to outrun him and this conversation. When we reach the pond tucked back from building a far enough distance that no one could tell that we’re in it, I shed the clothes, laying them neatly on my shoes so they don’t get dirty, and rush for the pond.

I take one step into it and realize that even if the spring air is warm enough, the pond definitely is not. “On second thought—”

Bishop grabs me and drags me in after him. He trips and we both go falling into the water. Thankfully, I keep my head above water as I cling onto him.

“Bishop, it’s fucking cold.”

“My balls are being sucked back into my body, but I won,” he decides.

“Did you? What did you win?” I cling desperately to him. “Frostbitten balls?”

“Yesssss. But I still won.”

I’m trying my hardest to suck all warmth from his body by wrapping my arms and legs around him while he paddles. “Don’t go farther from shore. What are you doing?”

“We’re starting this marriage off strong,” he says. “I want to see if you’d be willing to let me drown for my money. It’s the ultimate test!”

“Oh my god. There is something wrong with you,” I decide.

“We’re going... ‘*Under the sea—*’”

“Do not think breaking out in Disney songs will make this more romantic.”

“I don’t *think*; I know. Let me try a different one. Let’s see... let’s see... ooh. Here we go. ‘*It’s really me, it’s Bishop, breathe it in—*’”

I shake my head. “No.”

“*I know it’s a lot, the hair, the bod, when you’re staring at a god!*”

“You’re not going to win me over with songs from *Moana*. You’d probably win my sister’s heart though. God, we had to watch it over and over and over.”

I think Bishop decides that maybe I won't be wooed with that one and decides to do another shift, but in the wrong direction. "*Now I know I can be happy as a clam because I'm beautiful, baby—*"

I decide to just drown him before I have to hear more songs about how amazing he is. Immediately, I regret it because he just drags me down into the frigid underworld with him. He gives me a kiss underwater before we both break through the surface.

He comes up with wide eyes. "You really *do* just want me for my money!"

"It's a good thing you're sexy because this is husband abuse," I decide.

"H-Husband abuse? I take you out to a moonlit pond. I strip my clothes off so you can peruse my naked flesh. I *serenade* you with songs about how awesome I am, and it's husband abuse?"

That makes me laugh, and thankfully while he's distracted, he allows me to drag him over to the shore where life will hopefully come back to my limbs.

"We should probably get back to our reception, you know, the thing where the people are there to see *us*," I say.

"Well, I had to pay most of them on your side to even come and the ones on my side are just there because I'm rich, so I wouldn't fret too much," he says.

"How much did I get paid?" I ask.

"Oh, you hit the jackpot, baby. You get me."

I shake my head as I stand butt-naked in the spring night air and kiss him. "Well... you *are* the only thing I need. Well, and my sister and Pascal."

“Can we leave Pascal out of it? He’s decrepit by this age. He vomited a hairball *into* my shoe. I didn’t realize until my foot was *in* the shoe. I literally had to pay someone to clean it up for me.”

“You better not have!”

“I just screamed and people came running to clean it up,” he says.

“I hope you’re joking. Now... how do we dry off? I thought none of this through.” I shake my head. “My issue is that I literally just see your face and then do whatever you tell me to do.”

“I know. It’s adorable. Here, you can dry your face off with my underwear,” he says as he picks them up and comes at me.

“No!”

“I thought you loved me.”

“I thought so too!” I say as I back away. “Remember when you cried when you got your shoes wet in a puddle? Look at you now.”

“I know. I became a *man*,” he says as he tries dusting off the leaves sticking to his feet before putting his underwear on. I feel like I don’t have much more luck than him. “I’m so manly now. The other day, I was in the store and saw these shoes I really liked but halfway up to the register I actually looked at what they cost, and when I saw they were six hundred dollars, I felt like you’d get mad so I put them back.”

I hesitate because he bought me some really nice shoes the other day that he assured me were a good deal. “Please don’t tell me what happened next.”

“And then I saw a different pair *next* to them—”

“Dammit, Bishop. I’m going to have to see receipts for everything you buy me from now on.” I pick up the shoes in question. “I just ran through a freaking *forest* in these shoes!”

He just smiles. “And you looked stylish while doing it.”

“I’m going to put my pond-soaked feet into them.”

“It’s all good.”

“How much were they?”

“They were cheaper!”

“By what? A dollar?”

“At least!”

My heart. My fragile heart. “We’re having a talk later.”

“Before or after we consummate our marriage?”

“Before. That way if I don’t like your answer, you get to spend the evening with hand number one and hand number two,” I warn as I pull my clothes on. They stick to my wet body, and I can’t help but wonder if I smell, but it’s my fault for being pulled into one of Bishop’s antics just because he’s adorable.

We walk back to the reception hall hand in hand, and honestly, I don’t know if anyone even noticed we were missing. It was nice getting away for a moment. Having some time with just him and me. Somehow it made the evening even more magical.

“What *happened* to you?” Cali asks. “Did Bishop try drowning you?”

“He did. He thought he could get rid of me, but I’m resilient.”

“Is this because of that time you shot him?” she asks.

I glower at her as Elijah grins, clearly pleased with his date.

“Shhhh, we don’t want to anger him. I saw him appreciating the knife used to cut the cake earlier,” Bishop says.

“I was not! I literally just didn’t want to cut the cake with the wrong side!”

“Once I woke up in the middle of the night and he was playing with a rope. When I asked him what the rope was for, he said it was his favorite

‘chokey-chokey bye-bye rope.’ So either he’s into some kinky stuff or you better watch your back,” Cali says.

“You better watch your back too,” I grumble.

She just grins, proud of herself as I push her toward Elijah and grab Bishop. “I want to dance as far away from them as we can.”

Bishop catches Cali’s eyes. “I better listen. We all know what happens when I don’t.”

Cali nods while running a finger over her throat.

“I’m getting married to someone else,” I decide.

“Hey, Teach, I’m nineteen now. We could get married,” Elijah says.

“You’re hilarious,” I grumble.

They all laugh and laugh, all at my expense, but that’s fine, because seeing how happy my family is makes me happier than I ever could have imagined.

What a wonderful night.