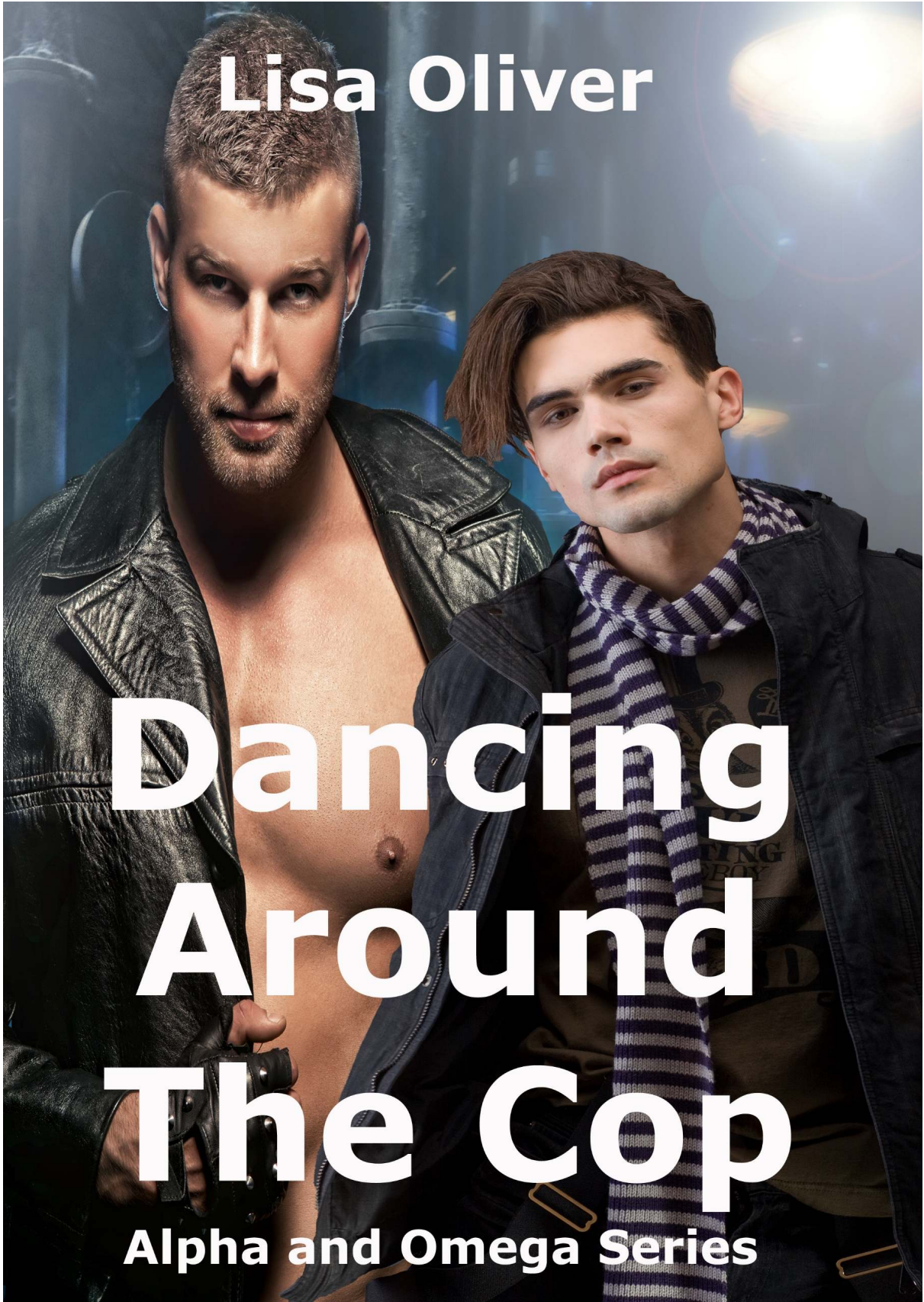


The book cover features two men in a dark, industrial setting. The man on the left is shirtless, wearing a black leather jacket, and has a short beard. The man on the right is wearing a dark jacket and a purple and white striped scarf. The background is dark with some blue and yellow light sources.

Lisa Oliver

Dancing Around The Cop

Alpha and Omega Series

Dancing Around The Cop
An Alpha and Omega Standalone
By Lisa Oliver

Dancing Around The Cop (Alpha and Omega Series)

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Dancing Around The Cop is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

This story was set in Houston, Texas and while the author has been liberal with her interpretation of the city streets, and the club names are all fictitious Houston does run a very successful Pride Week every year and details about that can be found at <https://pridehouston.org>. Houston Pride has been operating for more than 36 years and has a huge positive impact on the LGBTQ community in the area. Their Pride Week is held in honor of the Stonewall Riots in 1969. You can read more about that on the web link provided.

Dedication

Thank you to all of the lovely people who email me, comment on my blog or contact me on Facebook – your positive support means the world to me.

My work wouldn't be complete without the talents of a couple of beta readers, who mean the world to me.

Thank you to Janet, for keeping me sane through the writing process; Kristy for shouting out the name of my new books all over Facebook – you are my one woman street team and I love you for it; and last but definitely not least, Stephanie for your invaluable help and advice with this book.

You all rock!

Chapter One

"What makes the perfect kiss?"

Terry ducked his head, so Roy couldn't see the roll of his eyes. Normally he didn't mind Roy's outspokenness, but here, really? They were in a sports bar for goodness sake. He cast a quick look around, but for the moment it seemed he and his three friends were safe from prying ears.

"Dreamy lips," Charlie said with a sigh as he fiddled with the straw in his cocktail, his own pink lips pouty as though he was actually on the receiving end of what he was talking about. "It's got to include dreamy lips."

"Stubble. That five o'clock shadow look, so that you can feel it for a few days," Joel said. Terry didn't think that Joel even had to worry about shaving yet, his skin was smooth and silky and currently slightly flushed but whether it was from the alcohol, or the topic of conversation, Terry couldn't tell. "I adore that Max has stubble."

"Your Max isn't here. I'm talking about the ultimate kiss, not some pathetic dribble from some overgrown lout," Roy said snarkily and this time it was a grin that Terry hid. Roy hated hearing about anyone's boyfriends, especially when he couldn't seem to get anyone to like him longer than a twenty minute hook up. Roy dressed and looked like a perfect Angel twink with his shoulder length dark hair, and his trim body, but his mouth got him into trouble more times that Terry could count.

"Max is the perfect kisser," Joel defended his boyfriend. He'd been with Max for more than three years and wouldn't let anyone talk bad about the man. Terry couldn't blame him. Max was tall, muscled and the sweetest man he'd ever met. And he adored Joel with a passion.

"Not too much slobber," Charlie threw in, probably hoping to stop the inevitable cat fight.

"Just enough pressure to start off with. Deepening into something passionate, fiery and positively dominating. So you

can feel it in your toes," Terry said. He dreamed of being kissed like that.

"You read too much crap," Roy said, still in a snit over Joel's comments. "You wouldn't know a real kiss if it hit you over the head."

"If it was hitting me over the head, then it clearly wasn't done right. I'd want to feel it in my balls," Terry flung back. He might be embarrassed about his virgin status, but he didn't need his so-called friends taking pot shots at him.

"Oho, in your balls, aye? That's a different kind of kiss, honey," Charlie said putting his arm around Terry's shoulder. "Maybe you should take Norman up on his offer, and then you'd get a chance to tell the difference."

Terry didn't have to fake the shudder he felt, thinking about Norman, his boss. The man was almost as wide as he was tall, with a pudgy face and beady eyes that always seemed to be trained on Terry's ass. He'd been propositioning Terry for months, ever since Terry had started working with the ladies at the Code Blue Club. It was a dream job, but Norman was a nightmare. He made Terry's skin crawl just thinking about him.

"Talk about something else," he said, shoving at Charlie's arm. "It makes my balls shrink just thinking about him."

"You're going to have to put out to him sometime, babe," Roy said and this time there was no sarcasm in his tone. Just a lot of pity in his eyes. "All the ladies there have to do the deed with him at least once. If you want your virginity to go to someone special, you'd better get onto it pretty fast."

"That's sexual harassment," Terry snapped. "I'm not doing it and I'm not losing my job because of it. Just because I'm gay doesn't make me a freaking rent boy."

"You look like a rent boy to me, faggot and we don't like your types in here," a harsh voice broke in and Terry looked up to see four big scruffy looking men crowding their booth.

"We were just going," Charlie said, picking up his purse from the table. "Weren't we boys." He made a shoo movement with his hands, clearly desperate to get out. Joel looked just as scared, his eyes darting around, probably looking for Max, who was at the other end of town in a meeting.

Terry made to stand up too, but Roy pulled him back down. "We're not doing anything wrong," Roy said, his perfectly plucked dark eyebrow raised in disdain. "We are paying for our drinks, having a laugh like friends do. Go back to your game and leave us alone."

Terry sighed, but he made no move from Roy's side. Roy had been his friend since he'd first come to Houston four years before and while Roy could be snarky, and rude, he was also the first person to drop everything and come to your aid if you needed him. This wasn't the first time their flashy style, make up and fine features had caused problems with bigots and it wouldn't be the last. But there were times when Terry really wished Roy would just shut his mouth. This was one of them.

One of the big louts thumped beef cake hands on the table, causing Joel to squeak and try and climb into Charlie's slender arms. Terry just watched carefully. He wouldn't start anything, he never started anything, but he was damned if he was going to let his friends get beaten up either. He was tiny, only five foot four and slim, almost willowy in build. But he was an Omega wolf and the bigots in front of him were pure human.

"We don't want your kind in here." The man's lips were turned up in a snarl. Terry caught a glimpse of broken teeth set in an ungroomed face. This idiot was never going to win any beauty contests.

"And I told you," Roy said bravely, "that my friends and I aren't doing anything wrong. We will finish our drinks and leave when we're ready."

"You will leave now," the behemoth yelled, as with a sweep of his arm, he knocked all of the glasses onto the floor, where they fell with a huge crash. The whole sports bar went silent. There

weren't that many people in the place, which is why Roy had picked it out. The four friends just wanted somewhere to have a quick drink before heading to the club. At the time Terry hadn't seen anything wrong with the idea, but now? Yep, now it was a horrible idea.

Roy stood up, all five foot six of him, and glared at the man intent on making them leave.

"I was drinking that," he said. "I demand you buy us another round, and leave me and my friends in peace."

"And I said you aren't welcome here." The idiot reached over and grabbed Roy by the neck of his brilliant pink t-shirt, and pulled the smaller man towards him. Just like that, the fight was on. Terry and his friends were small, but Terry had faith in his friends who had all grown up rough. If they couldn't fight they ran, and they were good at it. He leapt over the table as one of the other men made a grab for Joel, knocking the man to the ground.

Unable to see how his friends were faring, Terry rolled and swerved, ducking one punch, jumping over a kick, trying to stay out of the reach of big hands. If he got grabbed it would be a lot harder to stay unhurt, although Terry knew he was a damn sight stronger than his friends. The fight had turned into a full scale brawl, with furniture crashing, glass breaking as other bar patrons got into the action. Terry had no idea who was on whose side, so he concentrated on defending himself.

A stray boot caught him on his hip and Terry stumbled. One strong arm caught him around his waist as a single gunshot went off. Everyone froze.

"Police! No body move." A stern voice rang out and Terry groaned. Wriggling out of the arm that was still holding him, Terry looked around for his friends. Roy was sitting on the floor, holding his hands to his face, blood seeping through them. Ignoring the activity around him, as the police started rounding people up, Terry hurried over to Roy, pulling the man's hands from his face.

"Oh crap sweetie," he said softly. "You're gonna have one hell of a shiner in the morning."

"My nose. What about my nose," Roy whimpered.

Tilting Roy's head from one side to the other, Terry shook his head. "It's not broken sweetie, just a bit puffy. Nothing there to scar or give you a permanent bump."

"Thank God," Roy said, looking around. "Did you see Joel and Charlie? Did they get out?"

Terry turned his head, looking over his shoulder and stared straight into the most enticingly well filled out pants he'd ever seen. Big package encased in expensive pants. Totally yummy. Suppressing a gulp, Terry turned his eyes up and looked into the most perfect face he could ever dream up. Lean with a well-defined jaw line, a perfectly straight nose, two piercing pale green eyes framed by dark eyebrows and the most luscious set of lips known to man, surrounded by dark stubble.

A perfect face. A perfectly formed angry face – those eyes were looking at him as though they could see straight into his soul. Terry gave a discreet sniff, and inhaled the intoxicating scent of double chocolate, cream and brandy. He whimpered and then in a panic, he turned back to Roy, shaking his head. Maybe the perfection behind him would just disappear.

"I can't see them," he said in a rush. "But I think it's time we got out of here."

"You two aren't going anywhere."

Fuck it. Terry almost stamped his foot in frustration. That voice. Steel clad velvet. Yes, Terry knew that was usually how romance writers described a cock, but Terry couldn't think of any other way to describe the man's voice. It was just as perfect as the man's face. Why couldn't the Adonis have a permanent squeak or something just to make him more human? But of course the Adonis behind him was anything but human.

Standing up, Terry kept his back to the God in human form, and held his hand out to Roy, helping his friend off the floor. He had to trust...

"We didn't start this fight, we weren't doing anything wrong, and we don't have to stay here. I know our rights," Roy said, focusing the man's attention on him. Sometimes Roy's mouth could be useful.

"You will need to give a statement." Terry wondered if that voice could sound anything but clipped and angry, and if it could, what would it feel like as it washed over his ears then.

"There's nothing to say." Roy stamped his foot, his hands gripping his hips, working himself into a right tantrum. "My friends and I were having a quiet drink, minding our own business. Four guys came over and told us we had to leave because, well, the idiots clearly didn't have any fashion sense or they wouldn't have insulted the way we looked. They broke our drink glasses, then one idiot grabbed me, and I don't know anything else. They were clearly in the wrong. They started it, so why don't you go and hassle them."

"Can you corroborate that statement?"

Damn, those eyes were on him again, Terry could feel them burning down his body. That had to mean Mr. Perfection was talking to him. Fuck, what did he say?

"Can you corroborate what your friend said?" And there was that voice again. Gods, Terry wanted to wallow in it. He opened his mouth and tried to say something. Closed it. Swallowed and then tried again.

"Yes. Absolutely yes. We weren't doing anything wrong. They came over and picked a fight with us. They probably didn't like my jacket, or maybe they objected to Roy's lovely top." What a stupid thing to say. Duh!

Terry refused to look at the bigger man. He just couldn't. But then Mr. Perfection said in a low soft voice, "It's a very lovely jacket. I've never seen anything like it before."

Terry looked down at the clothing in question. He was confused. Admittedly it was one of his own creations – a colorful mix of blues and yellows, reds, pinks and purples. He had made the jacket from scraps of cloth from his other designs and to him, every piece told a story. Davina's deep blue cocktail dress, Lucy's bright red sheath dress, Morgana's yellow frothy concoction that took hours to sew up. They were all there, permanent reminders of the work he loved so much, but not really anything that anyone else could appreciate. But this Alpha wolf in front of him, liked it. Terry wanted to break out in a happy dance, but he knew that wouldn't be appropriate, especially given as the man in question was still staring at him and still had anger hardening that lovely face.

"Yes, well if you want fashion tips, come and see us at Club Blue," Roy said, grabbing hold of Terry's arm and breaking him out of his trance. "We have other places to be, and I have to change my clothes. I've got blood on me and my shirt is ruined, just trash bag material. I could scream."

"Hand over your ID's and you'll be free to go." That steel was back in the policeman's voice and Terry wondered if he'd imagined the softness he'd heard before. There was nothing soft about the man in front of him.

He fumbled in the pocket of his skin tight jeans for his driver's license and handed it over, keeping his eyes on the floor. Moments later it was handed back to him and the voice said, "You're free to go."

With a snort, Roy grabbed Terrance's arm again and propelled him past the policeman. Taking one last sniff, Terry didn't imagine the growl he heard as Roy led him away. He couldn't even think about what that might have meant. All he knew was Roy was taking him away from the one man who was meant to be his for all eternity, and the big fucking Alpha hadn't even noticed him. He hadn't even offered his name. Bastard.

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Zander stood motionless as he watched the two young men pick their way through the debris towards the exit of the club. The mouthy one, Roy was apparently still talking loudly to his friend, Terrence, according to his license. Zander's head had already reduced that to Terry, or baby, or... He shook his head. Not going to happen. But nothing could stop Zander from watching the slight wisp of perfection walking out of the door. Terry kept his head down, probably not even listening to his friend, his stance hunched and almost...broken. Yes that was the word, and Zander knew he was to blame for the young man's mood.

He couldn't believe it when he spotted Terry for the first time. With Sully ragging on in his ear about two Detectives having to attend a bar brawl, Zander just wanted to get in, get the job done and head out for something to eat. The radio call had said anyone in the area had to respond, and he had turned the car around and responded. He didn't care about Sully's comments on how it was beneath their pay code. Zander had been working twelve hour shifts trying to crack a drug ring that was being operated out of the inner city area, and he needed sleep and food not necessarily in that order.

From what they'd been told, the fight started simply enough. Four big men against four smaller, more colorful ones, was how the bartender had put it. But then for some reason other patrons had joined in, and all hell had broken loose. By the time Sully and Zander had rolled up, uniforms were trying to break up some of the outer fringes of the fight, but Zander's eyes had been immediately drawn to the center of it. A flash of color, multiple colors actually, stood out from the drab greens, blues and browns of the other patrons clothing. Zander felt drawn to the little man wearing it, and didn't resist.

By the time he had gotten up behind Terry, the small man was kneeling on the ground, checking out someone who was obviously a friend. The pink t-shirt was a dead giveaway, along with the Kohl ringed eyes, the lip gloss and what used to be coiffed hair. The friend with the blood on his face was clearly gay. But it was Terry who grabbed his attention, or more

specifically, Terry's scent – berries heated under the sun with cream, alongside the unmistakable undertones of Omega wolf. Even among the smell of spilled booze, sweat and dirt engrained in the carpet, Zander's nose could pick up Terry's signature scent.

Zander had never gotten an erection so fast. It was as if every molecule of blood headed south to his pants and when Terry had looked over his shoulder, his shy dark eyes registering shock and confusion, it took every single ounce of Zander's control not to leap on the man then and there. Terry was perfect in every way. Tiny, slim, but with toned arms that suggested muscles everywhere else, slender hips, and the most perfectly formed full lips Zander had ever seen. But he stopped himself. He could never make a move on this man, his mate. No matter how much his wolf snarled and fought in his head, no matter how much Zander yearned to grab that slim body and pull it towards him...he couldn't.

"Hopefully that's the last we'll see of those little queens around here. Want to get a pizza?" Sully's arm wrapped over his shoulder as his longtime partner on the force broke Zander out of his trance. Right there was his reason that Zander was watching his mate walk out the door. Sully hated gays and he was Zander's partner. They had protected each other's backs for more than ten years, since they had met in the academy. Zander had never tried to change his friend's attitude – he knew there was no point. But right now, if Sully didn't shut his mouth, Zander was going to shut it for him.

"Hey, what's wrong? One of those little flamers give you a bit too much lip? Did you get a load of the jacket on the little one? Fuck, who dresses those people?"

Zander breathed deeply, and then again. He'd had years of perfecting the art of controlling his emotions. As an Alpha wolf choosing to live a human life, he had no choice. But he'd never struggled like he was in that moment. His anger was roaring up inside of him and he wanted nothing more than to grab Sully's neck and tear out his throat. It was bad enough when Sully took

any opportunity he could to slander the gay community, but insulting his mate was more than Zander could stand.

"I'm going home," he said, trying to keep the snarl out of his voice. "Long day, catch you tomorrow, yes?"

"You sure? We haven't eaten yet, but hey, okay. See you at eight."

Sully had a puzzled look on his clean cut all American face, but he dropped his arm from Zander's shoulder and Zander moved purposefully towards the door. There was a part of him that longed to see that sweet little man just one more time. His mate, his one and only. Another part hoped he wouldn't because if he did, Zander wasn't sure how much longer he'd be able to control himself.

But as he burst through the door of the bar and scanned the street, there was no sign of his colorful little Omega and a pain zinged through Zander's heart, even as he breathed a sigh of relief. Houston was a big place, there was no reason for his and Terry's path to ever cross again. So why the hell did he feel like his reason for living had just disappeared? Oh yeah. Because he had.

Chapter Two

After a night spent crying, Terry got up with the sun, determined to pull himself together. His mate didn't want him. He would have to live with that. Mr. Perfection was probably straight, and it really didn't matter if there were shades of gay in the man, lurking in the darkness, nothing was going to change the fact that his Alpha let him walk away. In fact, told him to go. Terry shook his head as his mind wandered over the night before. There would have to be some gay element in the big policeman otherwise the Fates wouldn't have paired them together, but clearly Mr. Perfection was never going to acknowledge it. What Terry should be worrying about was himself. A wolf could get really depressed super-fast if their mate rejected them.

Flicking a quick look at the huge clock on his apartment wall, Terry saw that it was after six in the morning. Picking up his phone, he plopped down into his one armchair and clicked the top contact listing. The ring tone sounded just twice before the call was answered.

"Terry, is that you? What's wrong sweetie?"

Letting out a sigh, Terry said quickly. "I met my mate, Mom, but he doesn't want me."

"Oh honey, that can't be true. How could anyone not want you?"

God bless his mother. Terry knew he was lucky. Born in the backwaters of Ohio, his parents had been surprised but staunchly supportive when he had shifted into his pure white wolf form for the first time. They were lone wolves, true mates, and while they had always warned Terry of the dangers of wandering into any wolf pack territory, they had totally supported his decision to go to college at the Art Institute in Houston, which was where he had met Roy, Joel and Charlie.

When the four men decided to stay on in Houston and get work, Terry's parents had supported that decision too. There were no known wolf packs in the area, so his parents thought he would be safe. The chances of ever meeting his mate were slim, but they were more concerned with his safety. Male Omegas weren't

usually treated well in a pack situation and Terry's parents made sure that he knew that as much as he knew how much they loved him and accepted him the way he was.

"He's an Alpha wolf, Mom. A Detective. I'm guessing he's straight."

His mother laughed. "He might look like he's straight, hon, and he might act like it, but believe me, if you two are mates then he ain't straight. Now tell me what happened. Where did you meet him, and what did he do?"

Terry told his story, his heart warming when his mother got upset that he and his friends had been attacked, and being encouraging when Terry explained meeting Mr. Perfection.

"Did he sniff you?"

Terry thought back. "Yes, I'm fairly sure he did, when he said he liked my jacket."

His mother laughed again and as much as Terry loved the sound, his own heart was breaking. And his mother, being a Mom, seemed to understand.

"Sweetie, he won't be able to stay away from you."

"How can you be so sure?" The way Terry remembered things his so-called mate was a man with an iron will – not the type to break easily.

"He's not going to be able to have sex unless it's with you. One sniff, and the bonding process starts to take hold. That's what happens with an Omega, hon. He can try, but his dick isn't going to respond to anyone but you."

Terry giggled, and then he laughed. And just as quickly he stopped. "Hang on a minute," he said in a rush. "That means I won't be able to either." Gods, he was going to die a virgin.

"No hon, you won't, not now you have his scent in your nose. Your wolf won't allow it and you'll get sick if anyone tries to touch you intimately."

"But I've never...That's not fair. I thought that rule only applied when wolves had been intimate with their mate. I'll never get the chance..." Terry wailed.

"Oh hon, I so am glad you have saved yourself," his mother's voice certainly sounded happy over the phone, but Terry didn't think he had anything to be happy about. His mate was straight and Terry couldn't experience even a bit of sex, not even the fringes of it, with anyone else now. How freaking unfair was that?

"Sweetie, your mate is an Alpha wolf. When he realizes you're untouched, believe me, it's going to blow his mind. You will be so glad you waited. And you're right, with other wolves they have to be claimed first, but an Alpha and Omega pairing – the Fates decided to work a little harder on those because they are so special and quite rare."

"That is so old fashioned, and so unfair," Terry grumbled even as he thought of giving his virginity to someone like Mr. Perfection. Would the man be sweet and gentle? Would he really prefer Terry's inexperience to someone like Roy? Knowing his luck the answer was a big fat no, on both counts.

"There's nothing wrong with waiting for the right person. At least you know you have a mate. Now all you have to do is wait for him to sort his shit out." his mother reminded him.

"But what if he never..."

"He will," Terry's mother cut him off firmly. "Take my word for it. He's an Alpha wolf. You won't want to hear it, but he's probably been having sex since before you were born. He's not going to want to go without it and he'll come running to you soon enough."

"So it will just be sex?" Could Terry feel any worse? He'd spent his years at college devouring romance novels and he knew he was holding out for true love. His friends, all human, thought it was a sappy idea and totally unrealistic. But Terry knew just how possible it was in the shifter world. His parents were a shining example of it.

"Just because he comes running to you for sex, doesn't mean you have to give in to him. Remember all wolf shifters love their mates, and usually fairly quickly too. The sex is a means to connect with a person, the love will happen in its' own time. If you want to wait for love with this mate of yours, then he will have no choice but to wait for you. He can never hurt you, and I promise you sweetie, he will love you, just like we do," his mother said, and on his end of the phone Terry grinned.

His mother was right. He knew what true love looked like. If Mr. Perfection was going to come running, expecting him to roll over and present his ass, well that man had another thing coming. There was a good reason he'd never gone with the bar pickups who seemed to come onto him in droves. He was waiting for love and he would keep waiting for it, until it hit his Mr. Fucking Perfection in the head.

"Thanks Mom," he said warmly, feeling a lot better.

"Keep me posted, hon," his mother said as she rang off.

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"I've got us dates for tonight – dinner and dancing. I'll pick you up at eight. Sound good?"

Zander had been working at his desk for more than two hours when Sully walked in. Not that he was getting anything done. All he could think about was Terry. He'd checked up the man on the police computer and found out where he lived and that he had no criminal record at all. He had traced the man through his birth certificate and learned his mate had never been in a pack, which was a good thing, given his Omega status. Academic records showed that Terry had studied at the Arts Institute here in Houston and graduated with honors in fashion design. Tax records showed he was working as a costume designer for Club Blue.

Quickly minimizing his screen that showed a collection of dresses that Terry had submitted for a drag queen competition the year before, Zander forced a smile to his face. A date. That is what he needed. With a girl no less, which would keep his partner

happy. Sully was good at securing Zander his random fucks – neither men were interested in permanent partners and Zander wasn't that fussy with where he stuck his dick. Sully might not know about the men he'd visited over the years in a neighboring town, but so long as he went out on dates with his partner and friend, then no one ever had to know about his secret desires. He planned to keep it that way.

"Sounds good. They know the score right?" He said because it was expected of him and because for the first time ever, he really needed to know. Any guilt he felt about betraying his mate, Zander quickly pushed to the back of his mind. He hadn't even touched the man, so Terry had no hold over him and nor should he expect to. He couldn't have a mate, and if he was thinking about Terry's perfect buns, and shy expression when he put his moves on this unsuspecting girl, then no one would worry about it except him. But there was no way he was going with a girl who expected more than dinner and a roll in the sheets.

"Two air hostesses in town for one night. Met them at the coffee shop," Sully said with a leer. "They even have hotel rooms – separate ones, so we don't have to fork out for anything but dinner."

Zander's smile got bigger. Absolutely perfect. Closing out the screen he had open, Zander got back to work. He had a date, he was going to get laid, which would be a relief to his blue balls, and maybe his wolf would give stop giving him so much grief about letting his male mate go.

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"Damn, shit and fucking hell!"

Zander swore as he fought with the locks on the front door of his house, slamming his way inside. The neighborhood was silent, everyone fast asleep, but Zander wasn't sure if he would ever sleep again. Still cursing, Zander crossed his living room in the dark, his wolf eyesight keeping him clear of the furniture. Reaching into his kitchen cupboard, Zander pulled out a bottle of whiskey he kept for special occasions, and not even bothering

with a glass, opened the bottle and tipped some of the contents down his throat.

Nope. He still didn't feel any better. He took another swig, feeling the whiskey burn down his throat and hit his gut with a wallop.

Collapsing onto his couch, Zander stared moodily into the darkness, the bottle of whiskey in his hand. The scenes from his date from hell played through his mind. His discomfort started as soon as he and Sully had met the two women at the restaurant. Being a wolf shifter, Zander was an affectionate guy, but the moment he went near his date for the evening, a beautiful girl with a wonderful figure, his wolf had snapped and snarled in his head. Zander had been so surprised he had barely managed to cover it, settling for a handshake instead of his customary kiss on the cheek.

The situation didn't get any better as the evening progressed. Every time Rebecca, his date, touched him, Zander felt like fire ants were crawling under his skin. Rebecca was a touchy feely type of girl, and while she was exactly the type of person Zander usually went for – friendly, fun and totally gorgeous to look at – by the end of the meal, Zander was wound so tightly he thought he would snap.

The dancing afterwards was worse. Rebecca was an amazing dancer, sexy, smooth and she moved like a gazelle. Normally that would have had Zander panting after her and looking for a way to take her home as soon as possible. But not tonight. Not in the slightest. For the first time ever, he tried to prolong their stay at the dance club, even though Sully was clearly wanting to get to the bedroom side of the evening. But Zander already knew that wasn't happening for him and kept ordering drink after drink after drink, until the girls begged off too.

"I should have taken my own fucking car," Zander growled into the darkness of his house. The freaking trip back to the hotel was even worse. Rebecca in his lap, stroking him all over. Zander trying not to shudder – not with lust – but with revulsion. By the time they got to the hotel, Zander couldn't stand it anymore.

Feigning food poisoning, he made his excuses and left, getting a cab home.

"What the hell is happening to me?" Zander yelled into the darkness. Immediately the picture of Terry on his knees, those wonderfully expressive eyes staring up at him, hit the front of his mind. Zander's cock, which had been limp and unresponsive all evening, suddenly sprung to attention causing Zander's balls to throb and his heart to pound.

Swigging another large gulp of whiskey, Zander sat in his couch, looking at nothing, thinking about Terry. Maybe it wasn't meeting Terry that was causing his little issue. Maybe it's just since meeting his mate, and his mate being male, that his cock needed to vent inside a male first, before he went back to taking women to bed. Zander's mind was clear enough to think he might be barking up the wrong tree, but fuzzy enough thanks to the alcohol, to consider giving it a try. He had two days off and he would head out to Dallas as soon as he'd had some sleep. It was a long drive, but fuck it. Zander was going to get some ass if it killed him and he refused to even think about what might happen if his dick failed to perform. That just wasn't an option.

Chapter Three

Four days later

Terry was just pinning up the last of Davina's hem when his phone rang. Glancing at the screen, he didn't recognize the number so he ignored it, focusing on the dress.

"Get your phone honey," Davina rasped above his head. "I'm dying for a smoke."

"Those things will kill you," Terry said with a smile, reaching for his phone, as Davina stepped off the raised platform and headed outside.

"So long as I'm a beautiful corpse, darling." Davina waved him off, already pulling out her cigarette packet from her bra. Terry had seen bras filled with a lot worse things. Accepting the call, Terry said, "Terry Martin speaking."

"Mr. Martin. It's Detective Zander Samuels. We met the other night at the sports bar incident."

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God. It was him. Mr. Perfection. Terry would know that steel laced voice anywhere. His mother was right. The man was after him. Terry's face went red, his breathing started to race and his cock started knocking at the zipper of his pants demanding attention. Oh my God.

"Mr. Martin, are you still there? I need you to come down to the station to talk about the fight."

Mr. Perfection's words were like a bucket of cold water over his head, and Terry snarled – he actually snarled.

"Are you going to arrest me for something, Detective Samuels, because you already have my statement and there is nothing else I can add to your enquiry."

"No, no, of course not. It's just some things have come up with the case that I would like to talk to you about." Did the big detective sound defensive? Terry dismissed that thought as quickly as it came – there was no way the big Alpha wolf was anything but cool, calm and fucking arrogant. That was the

problem with Alpha wolves, too full of themselves. Terry had never met one before Zander, but his mother had told him enough stories about it.

"You'll need to speak to my friend Roy," he said forcing himself to be professional. "I was just a bystander. I didn't say anything and only hit anyone to defend myself and the people I was with. I honestly don't have anything else to add."

Zander's voice got so low, Terry had to rely on his enhanced senses to hear him. "You know what this is about, pretty boy. I *need* to see *you*." Terry could hear the blatant sex in the man's voice and fanned his face with his other hand. He had to be strong though, his mother didn't raise no slut.

"Well I don't consider meeting you in an interview room at the local station as a proper first date. You'll have to do better than that."

With a determined press of his finger, Terry ended the call, before his knees gave way and he slumped to the floor. He'd done it. He'd blown off Mr. Perfection. Had he gone totally mad? He could have lost his virginity by nightfall. Be claimed and wanted by someone who was meant to stay with him forever. And he'd blown the man off.

"Terry, darling, why are you on the floor? Are you okay? Was the call bad news from home?"

Suddenly Terry was wrapped up in what seemed like miles of chiffon and silk as Davina put her burly arms around him. In her other life, Davina was a truck driver called David, and Terry got the impression that David ate far too many pies when he was in his truck. But the comfort was nice, and Terry let himself wallow in the smell of musk and cigarette smoke for a moment, before pulling himself together.

"I just blew off the most perfect man in the Universe," he said sadly.

"Why on earth would you do that?"

"Because he wanted to meet me at the police station, and I wanted a date," Terry wailed.

Davina picked Terry up and set him on his feet. Terry found himself confronting two very stormy, bloodshot eyes. "Now you listen to me, my precious. If he can't treat you right, and take you out somewhere nice, then he ain't worth it. No man's got a dick worth putting up with shit for, you hear me?"

Terry thought that Davina probably had that last part wrong, but she was right about the first sentiment. Sure Mr. Perfection's dick was probably long, thick and absolutely amazing, but Terry deserved better than to have a first conversation with his mate in a police interview room.

Nodding his head, to show he understood, Terry stood up straighter, and then helped Davina up back onto the platform above him, while Terry got to work hemming the last piece of the gown.

"So he's a policeman, ha?" Davina said, looking intently at the beading on the bodice of her new gown.

Terry nodded.

"Gotta love a man in uniform," Davina said with a sigh.

"Only if he loves me first. Otherwise he's a prick with no sense of style," Terry said, grinning up at her.

Davina's laughter warmed Terry's heart as he got back to work.

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Zander growled, and barely resisted the urge to send his phone through the nearest wall. His mate, that tiny little wolf who was lucky if he was a hundred pounds soaking wet and an Omega to boot, had said no to meeting him. Him! An Alpha wolf. Even without the mate connection, Terry should have come running as soon as he heard Zander's voice. Omegas were submissive, meant to obey the stronger wolf. At least that is what his Father had told him.

Groaning, Zander thumped his head on his desk. He'd had the whole thing all planned as well. He would see Terry under the guise of conducting an interview, get the man alone in one of the rooms, and at least get his cock sucked. For goodness sake, it wasn't as though that was too much to ask, was it? Then back to Terry's place for a quick fuck and claim, and then Zander could get his dick licked and sat on anytime he liked. Free sex on tap anytime he wanted it, and no one need ever know about it. Zander could keep a secret and it wasn't as though he and Terry ran with the same people. He'd just tell Terry the score, and because they were mates and he was the Alpha, Terry would understand and keep things quiet on his end.

"Where were you this weekend, I thought we could try those hostesses again, since you were sick last time. Rebecca seemed awfully keen to catch up with you again." Oh fuck, why did Sully have to always corner him when he had more important things to think about? Like how to get Terry around his dick that was hard every time the infuriating man hit any of his brain cells. In other words all the time.

"You're seeing Suzy again? That's not like you. Getting the house in the burbs vibe or something are you?"

Zander wasn't in the mood to make nice, and he definitely couldn't have another date with Rebecca. One failure was more than enough. His efforts in Dallas were just as pitiful and by the time Zander had headed out for the long drive back to Houston, he had made some serious decisions.

He would find Terry. Claim his mate. Then hide him and just visit him when his dick demanded. A simple plan, and Zander had been so confident that it would work, he even delayed another day to catch up on some of his cases, before ringing his little mate. He thought he could give his mate at least one night of his time seeing as it would be their first time together. After that he would just snatch an hour when he could, so that Sully wouldn't suspect anything and he could focus on his work and the life he already had.

"Suzy's nice. She's not around much. Don't see the harm in meeting up with her when she is," Sully said, a flush creeping up his lightly tanned face. Sully was a good looking man. Not Zander's type at all, but he had clear skin, strong bones, and bright blue eyes. He was a devil with the ladies, which was why he and Zander got on so well together.

"Yeah, well, don't go roping me into your plans," Zander said, thinking quickly. "I've got a bit of tail of my own I'm chasing, and no," he said when he saw Sully open his mouth, "she doesn't have a friend for you. Back off."

Actually Terry did have that Roy bloke, but somehow Zander couldn't see Sully going for someone like him. Not after his comments at the sports bar. Pursuing Terry was going to have to be a solo mission and if Sully was interested in Susy, then all the better for him.

Or so Zander thought until Sully opened his mouth again. "Awesome. We can double date. Just let me know when and I'll get in touch with Suzy and see when she's free. Her and Rebecca fly into town every three days."

When pigs fly, Zander thought as he smiled and nodded, hoping to shut Sully up. There was no way Zander was ever double dating with his partner again, and for the first time since he met his friend, he hoped that Sully would get serious with a girl. Maybe then he would leave Zander alone. Terry mentioned going on a date and that wasn't something Zander was prepared to do. He didn't want to go out with the man, he just wanted to have sex. He was Alpha. Alpha equaled high sex drive. Didn't his little mate even realize that? And for Zander, things were getting desperate with both his cock and his wolf. If he was ever going to have sex again, then he had better put his thinking cap on.

Chapter Four

"What about that one?"

"Too skinny."

"The one next to him."

"Pimples, ugh."

"That one over there with the denim shirt?"

"Denim? Are you kidding me, do I look like I'd ride a cowboy?"

"For a virgin you sure are picky," Roy said, giving up on his quest to find Terry a hookup for the night, at least for the moment. Terry knew his friend well, and Roy never gave up. For a moment Terry had been tempted to tell his friend the whole truth. How he was a wolf shifter, how he had met his mate and what that meant in the scheme of things, including the tiny little fact that only Zander would be able to take his wretched virginity now. But Terry stopped himself. Roy was open minded but Terry didn't think he was open to hearing that his friend of four years could turn into a wolf at will.

It had been two days since Zander had rung with his outlandish request for an interview, and Terry had been going out of his mind, alternating between convincing himself he had done the right thing in staying strong and holding out for a relationship, and crying because he was sure he'd never see his mate again. His mother kept telling him that Zander wouldn't give up on him. His friends, deciding he was too distracted for words, staged an intervention and pulled Terry out for the night. Fortunately they were in Club Blue so at least the chances of getting punched by bigots were fairly slim. The place had decent bouncers who made sure everyone was safe.

"Come and dance with me, Terry" Max said suddenly. Terry looked over in shock. Max never danced with any of them except Joel. Everyone knew that he and Joel were skin tight and would never cheat on each other, not even getting close on the dance floor with someone else. Max's invitation broke the bro code they all lived by on so many levels. But Joel gave him a small grin

and nodded his head, so with a shrug of his shoulders, Terry got up and let Max lead him to the dance floor. He did love to dance, but he was usually too shy to dance with anyone but his friends. But he'd never danced with Max on his own.

Instead of leading him into the middle of the dancers, Max led him to the far edge, away from the sight of the table where the rest of his friends were having fun. The music was quieter there, and Terry reminded himself to relax and try and give the illusion he was happy. It wasn't his friends' fault that he couldn't think of anything but a certain arrogant detective.

Max danced close to him, but didn't touch him, for which Terry was eternally grateful. With every passing day it was getting harder to accept the affectionate touches from his friends, and Terry had wondered how long it would be before he got to be a complete outcast. With gloomy thoughts of being the perpetual virgin spinning through his brain as his body moved automatically to the music, Terry almost jumped out of his skin when Max finally did speak to him.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of, being scared about anal sex for the first time," Max said quietly.

"I'm not," Terry lied. Actually he had been before meeting Zander, but now he knew he had a mate, and knew as well that mates couldn't hurt one another, he had gotten over that fear pretty quickly.

"It's okay," Max persisted. "Look Joel and I have been talking, and you know, you're twenty four. Being a virgin at that age is almost unheard of."

"I just haven't met the right guy yet. It takes trust you know." Terry felt his face flush and was glad of the dim lighting. He really didn't want to be having this conversation, especially with someone he considered a friend.

"Exactly." Max beamed. "So that was why me and Joel, well we wondered if you'd be interested in a threesome with us, for your first time. I know you trust us and I'll make sure you have the night of your life. Once you've done it once, then you will have

more confidence in meeting other men – you’ll be able to find someone for yourself.”

“I can’t,” Terry said quickly, his mind reeling. He knew his friends cared about him and would do anything for him, the same as he would for them. But this was one giant step too far.

“It’s okay to be nervous, but me and Joel will see you right, I promise.”

“Look, it’s not that, okay. I trust you guys more than you could ever know and that is a really sweet offer, even if it is a bit weird.” Terry tried to keep the smile on his face. He didn’t want Max to get angry with him.

“I’ve met someone,” Terry continued. That part at least was true. “He and I haven’t done anything yet, but I think he could be important to me, you know.” Go him. Being all honest and actually not telling the truth.

Max gave a huge smile. “That’s freaking awesome. So when do we get to meet this guy of yours?”

“Er, yeah, well that’s the problem,” Terry said. He was fairly sure his straight mate would never want to hang out with his gay friends. But he wasn’t going to mention the straight angle to any of his friends. He would just be dissed further for being silly enough to moon over some straight guy. “He just wants me for sex, and I’m hanging out for a date. Silly, I know, but hey, it will be my first time and I want it to mean something.”

“If he just wants sex then he is not the person for you,” Max said firmly, pulling Terry in for a hug. “We all know you’re a relationship kind of guy.”

“Don’t see how you can think that,” Terry said, his words muffled by Max’s chest. “I’ve never had even a date before.”

“It’ll come, my friend,” Max’s voice soothed him as they rocked together to the music. “And if it doesn’t then you come and see me and Joel. We’ll make things right for you.”

Terry wasn't going to cry, he just wasn't. But it was hard not to. Why couldn't his mate, the one man who was given to him by the Fates, treat him with the same amount of kindness and respect? Max and Joel only had the best of intentions at heart, even if their offer made Terry feel a little uncomfortable. But deep inside Terry had always known he would find his mate one day, and he had hung onto the belief his mate would accept him for who he was. That was why he had never taken up the human offers he'd had for dates, kissing and blowjobs in the bathroom. He wanted romance and by hell, he wasn't giving up his virginity, or his pride, until he got it.

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Zander growled as he watched Terry leaving his friend's car with a smile and a wave, heading up the steps to his dingy front door. It was two o'clock in the morning and from the tight jeans his mate was wearing and a barely there top under his colorful jacket, Terry had been out having fun. While he'd been sitting in the dark for hours, reduced to staking out his mate. As Zander watched Terry open the door, stepping inside without a care about his safety, he struggled with what he should do.

When he'd arrived, the plan had been simple. He'd grabbed some takeout food on the way to Terry's place and planned to use the offer of food as a way to get in the door. In his mind, Terry would be so overwhelmed by his presence, his Alpha personality and the fact that Zander had brought food with him that any talking about a date would go out the window. Food constituted a date right? But Terry hadn't been home, and over the hours that Zander had waited for him he'd eaten everything. Given how late it was, chances were Terry would be getting ready for bed, and was hardly likely to want a horny visitor.

But maybe he would? Zander thought with a grin. The mate pull had to work in his favor, right? He was the Alpha of the two and Terry was only an Omega. Grin firmly in place, Zander got out of his car and hurried across the street. He needed to get his mate to move to a new neighborhood if he was going to keep

visiting Terry at his home. His car wouldn't be safe for too long where it was parked.

Knocking loudly on the door, Zander strained his ears to hear signs of any movement inside the apartment. He heard a shuffle of feet on carpet and then the unmistakable click of a gun.

"I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it," Zander heard Terry yell out. "Go away or I'll call the police."

Nice to know his little mate wasn't stupid, but the last thing Zander wanted was for Terry to call the police. That would be too embarrassing for words.

"Terry, it's me, Detective Samuels. Open up, I want to talk to you," he called out through the door. He tried to keep his voice down. It was entirely the wrong neighborhood for him to be advertising his position.

"Zander? What are you doing here at this time of night?" Terry opened the door, but left the chain on, which the policeman side of Zander appreciated, even if his horny side didn't. Zander could see he'd been right and his little mate was ready for bed. An adorable pair of sleep pants hugged those narrow hips, but Terry's chest was pale skinned in the dim shadow of the street light. Zander felt his eyes widen at the sight and he wanted so desperately to touch – to see if the skin was as soft as it promised to be.

"I said, what are you doing here at this hour? This is hardly time to come picking me up for a date. Most polite people at least call first and make a time."

Fuck. That D word again. Zander winced and then tried to look reassuring, sexy and Alpha all in the one go. Not an easy thing to pull off, but Zander had years of practice.

"I was here earlier. I had even brought food. I thought we could talk."

"I know exactly what you're here for and it's got nothing to do with food or talking," Terry said with a snort that Zander found unusually sexy.

Zander lowered his voice and was pleased when Terry seemed to lean in to hear him. "You know what I want little one. It's the mating curse. I can smell your arousal from here. You feel it too. We can have an arrangement, you and I. No need for anyone else to know. Just let me in, let me claim you and I promise I'll give you a night you'll never forget."

See, look at him being all charming and seductive. Unfortunately his little mate must be lacking in the brain department somehow because Terry didn't seem to get the gift Zander was offering. If anything he pulled back and a scowl marred his beautifully fine face.

"Corny much? I'll spell this out for you really carefully, so even your Alpha brain can understand. I'm a virgin. Untouched and pure as the fur on my wolfen skin. For anyone to get in my ass I demand at least dinner and a proper date first. Takeout food is not a date. Banging on my door at two o'clock in the morning isn't a date. I know what a date is, and I'm not putting out until I've had a fucking date. I deserve some romance, you idiot, especially seeing as we are mates. You got that? And as for your arrangement you can stuff it. I won't be anyone's dirty little secret, especially my mate's. Now good night." And without waiting for a reply Terry slammed the door in Zander's face.

Zander walked slowly back to his car. He didn't want to leave, but he wasn't about to keep hanging around on Terry's doorstep if the man wasn't going to let him in. He should be really angry at the way Terry had spoken to him, Terry being a lesser ranked wolf and all, but Zander found himself grinning instead. The little Omega had a lot of fire in that tiny, definitely sexy body. His virginity was an amazing bonus. Zander had never expected that, especially as he knew Terry was twenty four and had been to college and living away from home for years. Zander felt a swell of pride at thinking his would be the only hands that touched that delectable body, his mouth would be the only one that Terry kissed and his ass was Zander's for all eternity. Only his.

Feeling a shiver of excitement, something usually reserved for drug busts and taking down criminals, Zander started his car, his head full of plans. His mate wanted romance. Wanted a date. But he said he only wanted *a* date, before he'd give up access to his body. Zander was a smart man, he could work something out with Terry without compromising any other part of his life. He had heard about what Terry had said about not wanting to be a secret, but they were mates. Once claimed, Terry would do whatever he said because he would be the dominant one in their relationship. He just had to put a bit more time in, and all of his problems would be solved. Quickly though, he hoped. Zander wanted to feel that tight ass around his cock more than he wanted anything in the world.

Chapter Five

"More flowers, dearie. That hard-to-get thing you've got going on is really working for you, isn't it."

Terry face flushed beetroot red as he accepted yet another bunch of gorgeous flowers – the fifth one he'd received since shutting the door on Zander's face the week before. Every day the arrangement was different. Today his mate had picked out pink roses with white alstroemeria. Yesterday it had been a bouquet of rainbow roses and the day before that a gorgeous array of purple hydrangea, light pink spray roses and white Asiatic lilies. Terry adored them all – he loved flowers of all kinds, but it was more than a bit embarrassing having them arrive at work like they did.

Ignoring Davina, Lucy and Morgana's excited gossip, Terry pulled out the card, and slipped it into his pocket. He would read it when he got home. The cards never said much anyway. Day one had been simply signed with Zander's name. Day two had said "thinking of you." Day three gave a hint of a promise in its "looking forward to seeing you soon," while day four had said, "be ready for our date night." Presumptuous Alpha Bastard, Terry thought fondly. Zander wasn't asking for a date, he was already assuming Terry would go.

"And you would go to, you idiot," Terry muttered to himself as he hunted around for his scissors. Thinking he had left them in the supply cupboard, he slipped out of the fitting room, heading for the small room at the end of the hall that held all of his sewing supplies, among other things. Terry knew he was lucky to get such a large workspace, especially in a club situation. But the Divas of Club Blue insisted on having the best in costumes and designers, and they loved Terry's work. After a lot of cajoling on their part, Norman had let Terry use an empty closet sized space to store his threads, fabrics and sewing tools.

Opening the door, and flicking on the switch, Terry frowned when the room remained dark. Norman might not mind spending money on clothes and keeping his stars happy, but he was a

bugger for getting basic things like bulbs replaced and leaks fixed. Reminding himself to bring a new light bulb from home, Terry used his wolf senses to search out for his scissors. Just as he thought, he saw them glinting on the shelf at the back of the room. As he reached to pick them up, the half-light of the room suddenly went dark, and Terry heard the sound of the door closing and a torch being flicked on.

"Hello, Terry. Finally alone at last I see. It's not easy getting you away from your many friends."

"Norman. I didn't know we had a meeting, or I would have come to your office," Terry said as he palmed the scissors he had picked up. Being distracted had become a habit since Zander had come into his life, and Terry cursed himself for not being more careful. He had done his best to stay out of his bosses clutches, but now it looked like his luck might have run out.

"We have an unofficial rule here at Club Blue," Norman said, coming closer. "A rule about keeping the boss happy at all times. You are going to get on your knees and suck my dick boy, or I won't be happy, and if I'm not happy I might just fire you. So what are you going to do to keep me happy?"

"I won't exchange sexual favors for my job," Terry said fiercely, clutching the scissors in his hand. "That's sexual harassment and I'll sue you for every cent you've got if you come any closer. I know my rights. Touch me and I'll do you for assault."

"No one is going to believe you boy," Norman said, coming so close that Terry could smell alcohol on the man's breath. "Your nothing but a little faggot, with a mouth built for me to fuck. Now get on your knees and open wide, because I'm not giving you a choice."

Clutching the scissors he was too scared to use, Terry did the only other thing he could think of. He opened his mouth and screamed as loud as he could stopping only when Norman backhanded him across the face. Terry fell to his knees. His head was throbbing, his lip was split and he watched in horror as

Norman was fiddling with his pants, getting them open, pulling out an obscenely fat, blessedly short dick.

"No," Terry screamed once more as Norman grabbed his head, forcing him towards his crotch. Terry could feel his wolf struggling, but he didn't dare shift. He screamed again as Norman hit him with his free hand.

"Suck my dick," Norman yelled, his face so red that Terry hoped the man would have a heart attack.

"I said no," Terry yelled, and without thinking he swung his hand containing the scissors, catching Norman across the top of his thigh, missing the cock by inches. Blood poured out the wound and Norman staggered back, falling to the floor. Just then the door to the supply room burst open and two uniformed police officers burst in, followed by the one face Terry didn't want to see. Detective Samuels with another blond man, also in a suit, probably his partner.

"That man attacked me," Norman yelled as soon as he saw the uniforms. "Arrest him immediately and get me an ambulance. Throw the book at him. He tried to kill me."

Terry trembled as the two uniformed men came towards him. His eyes were drawn to Zander even as he dropped the scissors, putting his hands behind his back when he was ordered to, feeling the cuffs tighten harshly around his wrists. All he could do was shake his head, his eyes pleading with Zander to do something, anything. But there was absolutely no emotion on the Alpha's face.

It wasn't until the two uniforms were dragging him away that Zander stopped them, and Terry looked up, hope shining in his eyes. His mate would make things right, surely he would.

"Make sure the suspect sees a doctor before you take him in for questioning," Zander said, his tone curt and professional. A chilling contrast to the seductive tones he had used just a few nights before. Terry dropped his head. Zander didn't want him. Clearly never did. It really didn't matter what happened to him now, as far as Terry was concerned he might as well be dead.

No one said anything to him as he was half pulled, half pushed through the fitting room where the Divas were standing, horror etched on their faces. Terry was just about to go out of the door, when Davina yelled out, "Stay strong, little darling. I'll get you a lawyer, the best money can buy. That pig Norman deserved everything he got and we'll make sure we get you out."

Thank the Fates he had friends, because with what he'd been given in the mate stakes, Terry really needed people on his side right now.

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Zander had never felt so helpless in his life than when he saw his tiny unclaimed mate being led away in handcuffs. The anger he felt seeing the bruises and blood on Terry's face was nothing compared to the pain that ripped through his body when Terry looked to him for help and he turned the man down. He had no doubts that whatever Terry had done, the man currently complaining loudly as he was taken out on a stretcher clearly deserved it. But the only way he could think to help his mate, without revealing their connection was by doing his job.

"Do you want to tell me what we're doing here, again?" Sully said quietly as Zander went back into the larger fitting room they had come through. He'd briefly seen the three drag queens in various stages of dress as he'd hurried through to the crime scene, but now he wanted to talk to them in person. Nothing had come through in the call they'd gotten over the radio. Just a message about someone screaming. As soon as Zander had heard the address, he'd done a U-turn in the street and headed for Club Blue. His wolf knew something had happened to his mate, and in that instant, he couldn't help himself.

"Our job," Zander said shortly.

"Our job's done," Sully said, not bothering to lower his voice this time. "One man made a complaint. The other one is in handcuffs. What else is there to do?"

"Haven't you ever heard of innocent until proven guilty?" Zander snarled turning on his friend for the first time in their long

friendship. "That boy in there was hurt, badly and yet he was the one in handcuffs. Doesn't that strike you as just a little bit off?"

"You didn't stop him from being taken. I presume you knew he was guilty, and who really cares. It was a faggot quarrel that got out of hand," Sully said, and Zander didn't know what to say to that.

He knew Terry was innocent, but if he'd opened his mouth and said or done anything then Sully and the uniformed officers would have known. They would have guessed somehow that Terry was important to him and Zander couldn't take that risk. When he had opened his mouth, he knew his callous words had shattered any hopes of getting close to his mate anytime soon, if ever. Surprisingly the never having sex again didn't even factor into his thinking. It was the hurt and then the defeat in Terry's stance as he was led away that killed Zander. Now he had to try and make things right.

"Why did you arrest our boy? He was just protecting himself," one woman/man said angrily. Zander didn't see anything attractive in someone that looked like he should be driving a truck, wearing a dress. But then, he could also see, that once made up and wearing a wig, the guy would probably make a lovely, if very big, woman.

"Ladies," he said remembering his manners. "Can anyone tell me who made the call to the police in the first place, and why?"

"There was screaming. We heard our Terry scream and we knew it was that fucking Norman, so Dav here rang for the police," another one of the drag queens said. She had a bright red wig on, which went surprisingly well with the red dress she was half wearing.

"What do you mean you knew it was Norman? I take it you mean, Norman Biggs, the owner here who was taken away in an ambulance," Sully asked.

"Norman has a rule," an equally big blond Diva said, pushing close to Sully making the man step back. Zander hid a half smile.

It wasn't often something made his homophobic friend uncomfortable, but these half transformed drag queens sure did. "A fucking rule about getting sexual services in exchange for keeping a job. Everyone in the club knows about it, everyone puts up with it. The guy's got a little dick anyway, so it's not a big deal. But our Terry deserves better than that. He's decent, and honest and innocent and if you don't get him out of those handcuffs and back here where he belongs then you are in big shit."

"I don't take kindly to being threatened sir...er mam...er... who are you anyway?" Sully finally recovered enough to ask.

"My name," the blond said, stepping into Sully's personal space again, "is Madam Morgana, but you can call me Bert. I'm your police commissioner's brother and as soon as I've given my statement I will be making some family calls."

For the first time since he'd come into the club, Zander felt a glimmer of hope that things would work out for Terry at least. He couldn't bear the thought of his little mate having to spend the night in the cells. Those animals in there would eat Terry alive, and that was without the damage it would do to Terry's wolf spirit. Pulling out his notebook, Zander said firmly, "I need names, dates, complaints, anything you can tell me about Norman Biggs. I promise you have our full attention and we will get your friend out of jail."

Chapter Six

Terry sighed and turned over in his bed to look at the clock. It showed 11.15 and he guessed from the light peering in around the cracks in his curtains that it was almost lunch time. Not that he felt inclined to eat. He hadn't eaten in the three days since they'd released him from police custody. Thank God he hadn't been kept in overnight.

Terry tried to smile as he remembered the lawyer that Davina had gotten for him, bouncing into the interview room like a fairy on crack, threatening the two police officers who were guarding him with everything from castration to job loss if the cuffs weren't removed from his wrists immediately and some beverages provided. Terry had asked for a bottle of water. He didn't think his stomach would be able to hold anything else.

What was even more shocking, and maybe he would think even funny someday, was when the police commissioner himself came in and introduced himself, making arrangements for the charges to be dropped because they were done in self-defense. Who knew Morgana had a brother? The lawyer, Marcel or something equally exotic had pressed a card in his hand when he dropped Terry off at home, making him promise to call about suing Norman for assault and sexual harassment. Apparently some of the other employees at the club were forming a class action suit against the man.

But Terry hadn't called the lawyer. He hadn't bothered to dress or shower. In fact, he hadn't done anything. His wolf was quiet, almost silent in his head, probably traumatized by being locked up even for a short while. Or maybe he was missing Zander too. Because through it all, despite all of the help that his friends had given him, the one person who could have helped him, who should have wanted to protect him hadn't done a single fucking thing. Terry hadn't seen Zander since he'd been led out of the club. No phone calls, no visits, no flowers, nothing. It was like the man never existed.

The only thing Terry had from Zander was the last card that had come with the flowers, the card that he had slipped into his pocket before his altercation with Norman. The card had been as brief as the others, simply telling Terry to be ready at six o'clock that night for a dinner date. Given that Terry was still in the cells at the time, Terry didn't consider it blowing Zander off by not turning up. Zander knew where he was. Knowing how callous the bastard was, he probably took someone else out on a date and no matter how hard he tried, Terry couldn't bring himself to care. Zander had made his position clear the day he was arrested. The big man might be an Alpha wolf, but he lived by human ideals. Terry's dream of an HEA went up in smoke the moment Zander watched him being cuffed.

All of the protectiveness, the possessiveness and the desire to protect a mate from all harm – Zander must have been absent the day those things were handed out. Terry had to face the fact that his mate was a dud in the wolf department, and the mate department. Every shifter knew how badly an animal spirit could react to being caged in. But his mate did nothing to stop it, and while Terry hated himself for moping around like a sad sack, he honestly didn't have the energy to do anything else. He had no job, he had no life and his mate didn't want him. There was nothing to get out of bed for.

"Terry. Terry, where are you babe, you've got company."

Fuck, why did he give Roy a key to his apartment? Couldn't he mope in peace? But he knew better than to try and stay in bed, Roy would just come and find him. Pushing aside the covers, Terry went to get up, and then sat on the side of the bed, as his head started to spin. Perhaps three days without food was a bit long.

"Terry you stupid fool, you look like shit. You smell like shit, and I bet you haven't eaten have you? No, no, stay in bed, we'll bring the food to you, but for goodness sake, let me open a window in here."

Roy bustled about, opening the curtains and windows, plumping Terry's pillows, picking up his clothes off the floor. That was Roy's way. He was snarky, rude and too belligerent for his size most days, but he had a wickedly kind heart and Terry knew that Roy cared for him in his own way. Strangely enough Roy's fussing gave Terry a spot of hope. He might not have anything else, but he had really good friends. Sure enough in trooped Charlie and Joel, with Max by his side. But Terry was surprised to see Davina, Lucy and Morgana all coming in too – carrying bowls of food that had Terry's stomach rumbling.

"How are you feeling, precious? Is your head feeling any better?" Davina asked, sitting down heavily on one side of the bed and patting his hand.

"I'm fine, really." Terry managed a watery smile. Physically he was. Norman had given him a black eye and a split lip, but that was the sum total of his injuries. Mentally Terry knew it would take him a lot longer to forget the sheer lust and hatred in Norman's eyes when he tried to force him to give him a blow job. His ex-boss featured heavily in his nightmares.

"Well, that's good, sweetie, because we've got news," Morgana said, sitting on the other side of the bed.

"Oh it's so exciting," Joel said, bouncing up and down on his toes, his blond curls framing his face. "You'll never guess..."

"I get to do the sets," Charlie cut in. "And Max is in charge of catering, while Roy's on lighting and special effects. Joel is going to help Max, so even he's included."

"Included in what?" Terry was confused. He was thrilled that his friends seemed to have some big event they were planning for, but it wasn't like he'd be setting foot inside Club Blue again and he didn't have any other contacts.

"It's for Houston Pride Week, coming up in about three months' time," Roy explained taking the soup bowl out of Terry's hand and replacing it with a cup of hot chocolate and a muffin. Terry didn't remember eating the soup but he must have done, and he

picked up the muffin and nibbled on it. It was delicious, and Terry started to take bigger bites. Maybe he would be okay.

"Darling, they are putting on a Diva Show Night," Davina explained. "Anyone who is anybody will be there, and you, my clever little precious, have been signed on to do all of the costumes for the Houston entrants. More than twenty costumes in all. Isn't it fabulous?"

For a moment, Terry felt a glimmer of creativity surge through his body, but he quickly squashed it. As far as he knew most of the work done by the Houston Pride Week was on a voluntary basis and he needed a job, like quickly. He didn't have the resources to donate his time, as much as he'd like to.

"It's paid," Lucy said brightly, her hair, lipstick and dress all bright red as usual. "We made sure of that and with the connections you make with the Divas you will have plenty of freelance work to keep you going for as long as you want. And I might have twisted the arm of the event organizers to allow you to promote some of your designs, for the escorts to wear who will be walking the ladies up and down the cat walk. That's bound to bring you more work."

"You didn't twist his arm, sweetie, you blew the man in his office, admit it," Morgana said, slapping her friend on the arm.

Lucy raised an artfully drawn on eye brow. "Twisted, blew, who cares, Terry the job is yours. Say yes, and you'll have more work than you can handle. Trust us to look out for you, aye? The way you do for us."

Terry looked around at his friends. Joel and Charlie looking so excited for him, Max calm and happy as always. Roy was fossicking through Terry's wardrobe, but that was normal for him. Davina, Morgana and Lucy were all just looking at him expectantly.

"I'll do it," he said in a rush, bracing himself for the onslaught of squeals, hugs and kisses. This was the job of his dreams, and he wasn't going to turn away the chance to work with some of the biggest Diva names in Houston, and promote his own designs in

men's clothing at the same time. It was too good an opportunity to miss. His heart might be broken, but Terry lived for color and he vowed and declared to himself that no one would ever know how he felt. If he was going to die a virgin, he was going to be a colorful one.

Chapter Seven

"Well, well, well, an Omega wolf, unclaimed and looking totally delicious. What an absolutely delightful surprise." The lawyer hit a button on a box on his desk and added, "Angela, hold all my calls. I'm not to be disturbed."

Fucking hell. What were the chances? Meeting another Alpha wolf was not on Terry's list of things to do when he walked into the lawyer's office that morning. He was supposed to be signing his contract for working with Houston Pride Week. It was a simple job. Should have taken five minutes and then he was going to look at some studio space that Charlie had hunted out for him where he could work. Instead he was confronted with a lone wolf, in a decidedly sharp suit, who was eyeing him like he was lunch.

"Mr. Thorne?" He said nervously. "I'm Terrence Martin. I'm supposed to be here to sign a contract." He didn't want to talk about his being an Omega, or being unclaimed or anything else. He just wanted to work, but he couldn't start until the paperwork was done. The low rent on the studio lease was dependent on seeing the contract. This lethal looking wolf shifter was the one thing that could stop all that, if he had a mind to.

"Yes, yes, of course. Take a seat. Tell me about yourself," the man's voice was pleasant but the order was clear. Mr. Thorne was as tall as Zander and probably just as built if the way his expensive suit was cut was any indication. But where Zander was dark, with his permanent five o'clock stubble and his dark hair, Mr. Thorne had white blond hair that hung down to his shoulders, brilliant blue eyes and a clean strong chin. He was a good looking man and pre-Zander, Terry would have been attracted to him.

Terry edged towards a chair, and sat down, twisting his fingers in his lap as he wondered what on earth the lawyer wanted him to say. But maybe this wolf had a spot more compassion than Zander did, because he smiled and said in a softer voice.

"You're an Omega wolf, yes?"

Terry nodded.

"And you have family here, a pack you belong to?"

Terry started to shake his head and then stopped. "I have parents who love me," he said trying to keep his voice firm and calm. "They live in Ohio and I've never been in a pack. My parents didn't think it would be safe for me. I keep in touch with them all the time."

"Your parents were probably right, keeping you away from other wolves. There are definitely very few wolves here," Mr. Thorne said. "As far as I know only myself and that arrogant bastard Samuels who works for the vice squad live in Houston. That doesn't give you many options in terms of protection and care though. That can't be easy for you."

"I'm doing okay. I have friends. Plenty of good human friends who don't know what I am, but don't care. And that bastard Samuels as you called him. He's my mate," Terry whispered. "But he doesn't want me, and yeah, I can't do anything about that. My human friends are good to me. I don't need protection or a pack or anything else."

Mr. Thorne came around the desk, and pulled up a chair next to Terry, putting a hand on Terry's knee. Expecting to feel edgy, like he did when anyone else touched him, Terry felt comforted instead. He could tell how strong Mr. Thorne's wolf was, and his own wolf was happy to belly up in his head. Unlike Zander, this wolf was compassionate and caring as well, and Terry's wolf responded to that, but then his wolf wanted Zander in a big way. Why the hell couldn't his mate have compassion and caring in his DNA? Terry pushed those thoughts out of his head and focused on the wolf beside him. He needed that contract. The ache in his heart at any thought of Zander was becoming an old and familiar friend, and Terry was tired of it. So tired. He just hoped it didn't show.

"I think you had better tell me about it."

Mr. Thorne was a stranger, Terry knew that. But somehow his wolf knew that the stronger male could be trusted, so he opened

his mouth and it all spilled out. His meeting with Zander and how the man had sent him away. The visit in the middle of the night, and how Terry had sent him away. The flowers, the assault, and how, when Terry needed him most, Zander hadn't been there to help him. Through it all, Mr. Thorne kept silent, simply patting his leg and offering him comfort.

"Terry," Mr. Thorne said when he'd finally finished. He felt strung out and anxious and it took all of his strength not to burst into tears. "There is nothing wrong with wanting a mate who will date you and take care of you, especially if you've never been with anyone else. Not all wolf shifters want to just jump into bed at the first sniff. Some of us have values and appreciate getting to know someone first. The mate pull makes it difficult with the whole lust side of things, but not impossible. You're not asking for too much from your mate."

"Zander wanted me to be his dirty little secret. He didn't want us to live together or anything. He just wanted to visit me for sex whenever he felt like it. He didn't want to care for me, or protect me like you tell me I need. He just wanted sex. My parents weren't like that, so why should I be treated that way?"

"Your mate's problem is that partner of his, Sully Roberts," Mr. Thorne said thoughtfully. "The man is a raving homophobe if ever I saw one. He can't stand me and fortunately we don't see each other that often. But from what I've seen since they came to Houston, they're virtually never apart. They even double date for goodness sake, far too often to be considered healthy in my opinion."

"I knew the man was fucking straight. Why did the Fates give me a straight mate?" Terry mumbled under his breath. Mr. Thorne laughed. It was a pleasant sound, one that Terry wouldn't mind hearing again. For a moment he wished that the handsome looking wolf beside him was his mate instead, but then he felt a pang at being disloyal to Zander. He wasn't like that and he wasn't about to start being an asshole, just because that seemed to be the only thing Zander was good at.

"Your Zander is no more straight than I am," the lawyer said. "He goes out of town for his hookups though. I know, I've seen him in the past, although I will admit I haven't seen much of him lately. I'm guessing that's because he sniffed you. You'll be the only one who can ring his bell from now on. God, I bet he's going through hell, especially with Sully by his side." Mr. Thorne laughed again, but Terry felt nothing but anger and he let it show.

The only person he'd been able to talk to about the whole stupid mess was his mother, and she just kept saying that Zander would come to him – unfortunately she couldn't say when, and Terry privately thought that his mate was just stubborn enough to go without sex for life, rather than take up with him. And God, there were the tears again. He was such a wimp. He clung onto his anger, because that was better than showing his weakness.

"Great, so my mate is a slut who doesn't do relationships. I don't see how that's going to help me. You know, my mother said he would come back to me, that he wouldn't be able to stay away. I've never known her to be wrong before. But Zander is as stubborn as a freaking ox, and I can't see that situation changing anytime soon."

Mr. Thorne looked thoughtful for a moment, and then he said, "Your mother is right on the one hand, but so are you. Zander is a stubborn fuck. He's good at his job, and no one else in his department would have a problem with his relationship with you, except his partner Sully. What he doesn't realize though, is that if he does stay away then he'll lose his wolf eventually, because believe me his wolf will be pining for you and giving him hell. His wolf will be as stubborn and as pushy as he is."

"But he'll go mad without his wolf." Terry was horrified. Zander had treated him with nothing but contempt since they met, but the thought of that proud wolf shifter losing half of his soul was more than Terry could bear. Not that there was anything Terry could do about it. He couldn't force Zander to mate him. He didn't even want to. Zander had made it plain that even if he was claimed, then he would be nothing more than a dirty little

secret, and it broke Terry's heart to think of living like that. What a fucking mess, for both of them.

"I don't think Zander understands the importance of an Omega wolf, or what would happen to him if you two mated," Mr. Thorne said.

"What do you mean? I'm sure Zander thinks Omegas are so far down the totem pole they don't even register. He certainly treated me like I wasn't important."

"There's a part in us Alphas that are hard wired to caring about their Omegas, especially a mate. That need to protect, to love and care for someone not as strong as we are. It's a part of who we are. That's why so many lone Alpha wolves end up with Omega mates."

"Zander doesn't feel like that," Terry scoffed. "If he did he wouldn't have allowed me to be handcuffed, or put in a jail cell, or anything at all. He would have been round to see me, at least to make sure I was okay after I was hurt. He didn't do any of that."

"You just haven't seen him, little wolf," Mr. Thorne said kindly. "He'll have been around, I can guarantee it. What I do think your friend needs is a bit of a push to stake his claim and that is something I can help you with."

"I don't want him to claim me. I don't want to be his sordid little secret. I deserve better in my life than a mate who hides me away. I'd rather not have a mate." Terry felt sick. He'd been proud of who he was his whole life and the thought of never having the loving relationship he'd seen growing up with his parents, was enough to make him want to run off to the mountains and live alone the rest of his life. At least his wolf would have somewhere to run free.

"Zander may think that's what will happen, but that's not how it will turn out," Mr. Thorne said confidently. "Especially not if I'm around. You need a shifter friend little one, and I want to fill that position. I don't doubt that your human friends are marvelous people, I know some of them socially and they're a great bunch.

But this is a shifter matter, and has to be solved the wolf way. So I propose we start again. Hi Terry, my name's Richard. I think you are a truly lovely young man and I would really like to take you out to lunch, just as soon as we get your papers signed. Are you free?"

"I'm free." Terry was stunned by the turn of events, but he had to admit he felt safe with Richard. Somehow he knew that the Alpha wolf wouldn't hurt him, even though they weren't mates, and Terry wasn't stupid. If Zander caught wind of him being with another wolf, even as friends, he would go ballistic. Unfortunately Terry didn't think it would make any difference to his stubborn mate although he felt compelled to try. Knowing Zander could lose his wolf was making Terry totally revisit the whole 'I don't want to be claimed' line of thinking.

Chapter Eight

"I don't know what the hell's wrong with you, but if you don't pull your shit together soon, I swear I am putting in for a new partner."

"I told you, I've got a lot on my mind," Zander snapped back automatically, his attention elsewhere. It wasn't the first time his best friend had ragged at him, and it probably wouldn't be the last.

"Yeah, shit that for some reason you don't talk to me about. I thought we told each other everything," Sully grumbled, although he went back to eating his meal. Not that Zander cared. Sully's voice had barely registered above the noise in the small pizzeria they were having lunch at. The food was lovely, as always, but Zander couldn't stop looking at the small table in the back, where that fucking lawyer, Richard Thorne was having lunch with his mate, again. That had to have been the third time this week, and for some reason the pesky wolf always seemed to know where Zander and Sully would be taking a break, and he just fucking turned up with Terry on his arm.

Every time he turned around, that was all he could see. His mate, his beautiful shy Terry being escorted around town, Richard never far from his side. Zander had never even spotted his mate before he met him at that disastrous bar fight, but now. Lunch, dinner, movies - Richard had even brought Terry with him down to the police station when he came to drop off some papers one time. Zander damn near lost his shit in front of his work mates at the sight of Richard's arm casually around Terry's waist. He had to disappear into the bathroom until he could get his teeth under control.

Zander knew enough about the mating curse to know that Richard was playing with him. He knew that the only other lone Alpha wolf in town wouldn't be having actual sex with his mate. Although any human seeing the two men together would certainly think they were fucking like bunnies. Terry would never be aroused by that arrogant son of a bitch, or by anyone but

him. The mating curse bit both ways. But lately a more disturbing thought had been teasing Zander's brain. There was nothing to stop Richard claiming Terry through a bond mating if he cared about him.

Zander didn't think the man was heartless enough to try and have sex with Terry when Terry would never be able to feel any sense of arousal, but if they exchanged bites, the two men would still be mated. Richard would be the one looking out for Terry. Shit, Terry would probably move in with him, which would mean Zander would never ever have a chance of getting close to him.

Every time the idea of Terry wearing a mating scar that didn't result from Zander's teeth hit his head, his own teeth clenched and his wolf was getting right stroppy about the situation. For a wolf the case was simple – Terry belonged to them and that meant any other wolf that went within ten feet of the little man was fair game for teeth in his throat of a different kind. Zander was worn out simply trying to keep his other half under control.

What Zander didn't expect to feel was the pain in his heart when he saw how Terry seemed to be responding to the attention from the other Alpha wolf. He positively glowed, chatting away to Richard like they were old friends, with Richard looking on adoringly like Terry was the best thing since raw steak. It was making Zander sick as he battled his own feelings of possessiveness, and anger. But it wasn't as though he could say or do anything, because Richard seemed to only turn up when he was with Sully, and Sully, his best friend and work partner, was totally oblivious to everything that was going on. Zander was trapped, and hurting and that was not a good way for a wolf shifter to be. Someone was going to get really hurt if something didn't change soon, and Zander had a horrible feeling it might be his mate.

Zander watched as Richard excused himself and disappeared in the direction of the bathrooms. Finally, an opportunity to talk to the bastard alone. Standing up, Zander ignored the shocked look on Sully's face, as he headed towards the back of the restaurant. He didn't dare look at Terry. Although the urge to talk to his

mate was so strong it was almost unbearable, with Sully in the restaurant, he couldn't do it. But he could deal with that swarmy lawyer who seemed determined to stake a claim on his mate. Slamming open the bathroom door, he wasn't surprised to see Richard leaning against the sink bench, his arms crossed and a smug smile on his face. Yeah, the asshole knew exactly what he was doing. What Zander wanted to know was why.

"What the hell are you doing with my mate?" Zander growled, keeping his voice low. Even now he was conscious of the fact that Sully could follow him at any minute, and that was the last thing he wanted. Plus which there were humans around, lots of them, so Zander had to keep his claws and teeth under control.

"Looking after him, caring for him, taking him out on dates because that's what he likes to do. What's it to you? You've already made it plain you don't want him. Someone should be caring for him, why not me?"

"You can't touch him, you can't have sex with him, so why are you wasting your time with him?"

Richard shook his head and stepped closer, lowering his voice. "You don't know anything about Omega wolves do you, you stupid smuck? You don't understand how it makes me stronger just being with him, caring for him the way an Alpha should. There's a whole lot more to being mates than sex, my friend. Warmth, companionship, caring. Terry's a fun person to be with and my wolf wants to look after him. I'm spending time with him because I want to claim him as a bond mate. And when the time is right, I will. You've had long enough to make things right."

Zander was stunned for just a moment. The thought of someone else marking his mate's beautiful neck, when it should be him, had the hairs growing longer on his arms, and he felt his teeth drop. "You'll find your own mate. What will happen to Terry then?" He said, desperately trying to control his shift.

Bond mates were common in a world where fated mates were hard to find, but if a fated mate did come along, they trumped

everything. That was a sacrosanct wolf law that no pack ever broke. Mates were the most important aspect of a shifter's life.

A flash of pain crossed Richard's face but he quickly collected himself and his handsome face was an impassive mask once more. "My mate's been dead some ten years now. Our bond broke with his passing, and I know I'll never have another one. Terry will make the perfect companion and my wolf would never forgive me if anything happened to him, I want to keep him safe, and you won't do it."

Zander felt a momentary pang of sorrow for the other wolf. It was never easy losing a mate, and the fact that Richard survived meant that he had to be stronger than he looked, which did not auger well for him.

"But he'll never be able to get a hard-on with you. Don't you care?" Zander understood the need to take a bond mate, but at least usually the two people concerned could be intimate with each other. Richard's behavior wasn't making any sense.

"He doesn't need a hard-on to take care of my needs. His trust in me grows with every passing day. His wolf is not averse to my touch, or to him touching me. Terry has a lot of firsts I can take care of for him – his first kiss, giving someone a hand job, a blow job even. And believe me, having him in my arms at night while we're sleeping is something I dream about, and I'm going to make it happen. Don't you worry about us."

"You can't have him, he's mine."

The words were automatic, but Zander knew it was more than that. He was losing control of his mating situation and he really didn't like it. Somehow in his crazy mixed up head he'd always believed that Terry would one day come back to him, would want him and would live with the restrictions that Zander had to keep in place if he didn't want to lose his partnership with Sully. A friendship that Zander thought he had to hold onto at all costs. But now he wasn't so sure. If he lost his mate permanently then he...fuck, he might as well be dead.

"The big difference between you and me, my friend," Richard continued, "Is that I want to be with him anywhere, anytime. I watch him sleep – it's so cute, did you know he snuffles in his sleep? I *want* to take care of him and my wolf is so fucking proud when we go out together. If Terry accepts me as a bond mate, then he will always come first in my life. You – all that is going to happen to you is you're going to lose your wolf spirit, if you persist with this stupidity. You'll go mad within weeks and will probably end up dead, or in a mental institution. For what? To protect your reputation with one homophobic, human idiot you call a partner? Terry mourns you every single day and you want to stay friends with Sully?"

The anger left Zander as though someone had flicked a switch. Terry was grieving, over him, despite everything he'd done. Grieving, well that had to mean he still wanted him, no matter how callously Zander had behaved. Hanging his head, he felt a trickle of wetness fall down his face as pain gripped his heart and strangled it. Tears. Fuck, he'd never cried before. Usually when confronted with any emotion Zander would force it away – suppress it, just like he'd done from the moment he decided to live in the human world. But he couldn't do it today. Terry was too important. He might not like it but the arrogant wolf shifter who had been doing his job, looking after *his* mate, was right.

A mate should always come first, should always be the most important person in a wolf shifter's life. It had been that way since the beginning of time and Zander had been so worried about keeping his partnership with Sully, he'd forgotten the very heart of what it meant to be a wolf shifter. If Terry did accept Richard's bond, then Zander would lose everything, including the chance to be in love for the very first time in his life.

"What can I do? I fucked up more badly than you can know." His voice sounded broken even to his own ears, but Zander couldn't care less if he appeared weak. If Richard took him out in this clean but tiny bathroom, then it was nothing less than he deserved. He had to know if there was a chance that he could fix things with Terry. He had to make things right, and if that

meant losing Sully, well, there wasn't anything he could do about it. Terry had always deserved his full focus, from the moment they'd met. Fuck. The little sweetheart deserved everything Zander could possibly give him and a thousand times more.

"I do know how you've fucked up, I made Terry tell me. But you still have a chance," Richard said. "Look, your friend will be getting anxious, we both have work to do this afternoon, and I want to make sure Terry is okay. I told him you would probably come in here to talk to me, and I know he will be worried sick about it. He's terrified we'll fight and he hates the very thought of either one of us getting hurt. Omegas are like that. Come and see me tonight, okay? I'll stay late at the office. Terry has a meeting with his Diva friends, so we'll be alone. I'll help you come up with a plan to win him back."

Richard was right, again, which did nothing to make Zander feel any better. Even though he wanted to rush back into the restaurant and claim Terry right there over the table so no one else could take him away, he forced himself to be patient. He could wait until tonight. He quickly washed his hands and face at the sink, while Richard waited for him. As the two men walked out of the door, he said quietly, "Why are you doing this for me? Why didn't you just push Terry into letting you claim him, if you care for him so much? Is all this just a game to you, baiting me?"

"Don't ever doubt how much I care for him, Samuels," Richard said, for the first time a deep growl evident in his tone.

"Terry means the world to me, but his wolf longs for you. I've had my life with my true mate and I wouldn't have missed a second of it. Believe me, what Terry could have with you is so much more than I can give him. I care enough about him to want to see him have that with you. So you get one chance, one more chance. You ever fuck it up again, and I will take him as my own and I'll fucking rip your throat out just to break your bond. You have my promise on that. He's too special to be wandering about the world on his own without protection or love. What I don't understand is why you haven't seen that before."

"I never even thought of that," Zander said, as shame hit him all over again. But it was the truth. He had recognized that Terry lived in a bad neighborhood, but never thought about protecting him. He knew Terry had gotten hurt at work, and probably lost his job, but he didn't know if his mate was worrying about money now. Fuck, the number of ways Zander had let his mate down were increasing the more he thought about it.

"Well you'd better start thinking, with your wolf instincts, not your fucking human ideas. I'll see you tonight."

Richard headed back towards Terry, who did look really anxious, while Zander looked around for Sully. He wasn't surprised to see that his partner had left, probably headed back to the office. It was a five mile walk, but Zander was going to use that time to clear his head and start to think of ways to show Terry how special he was.

How the hell could he have forgotten the very foundations of wolf shifter society? The importance of a true mate. Heading out of the restaurant, Zander thought for a minute and then changed direction, deciding to head for his home instead. Drug crimes were a fact of life, take one criminal down and another takes his place. It was a never ending battle, one that Zander normally enjoyed fighting. But drugs were human problems, perpetuated by humans on other humans and today, Zander needed to think like a wolf.

Lengthening his stride, Zander hurried home. He had a sudden urge to phone his father, who was still Alpha of Zander's ex-home pack. Although they hadn't spoken in years, since Zander had left the pack rather than challenge the man who raised him, Zander knew his father would hear him out, talk to him. The older man would be disappointed in him for losing his way, but if anyone could offer him some advice on how to woo his mate, then it would be his father. Hopefully between him and Richard, Zander would be in with a chance of being the mate that Terry deserved.

Chapter Nine

"I'm so nervous I think I'm going to throw up," Terry whispered as he smoothed non-existent wrinkles out of his collared shirt. He was dressing for a date with Zander. He was actually going on a date with Zander! He still had no idea what happened in the bathroom of the pizzeria, had no idea if Zander had changed his attitude or anything else. All he knew was Richard had asked him to give Zander the chance to be the mate he was supposed to be. Terry trusted Richard, so he agreed. But thank goodness Richard had come over to give him some moral support before Zander arrived, or Terry was sure he'd be in a huddled mess under his blankets. He hunted out his colorful jacket, the one that always made him feel good, and shrugged it over his shoulders.

"You're going to be fine," Richard said coming up behind him and giving him a hug. Terry still felt a bit of a tingle in his skin when Richard touched him, but he was getting better with it. The fact that in all the times they had gone out on dates, Richard had never been anything but a perfect gentleman really helped. Terry saw Richard as a mentor, someone who looked out for him, and the lack of sexual intent went a long way towards soothing Terry's nerves. Glancing up in the mirror at Richard's reflection, Terry noticed that Richard was also dressed up. He always looked smart, but Terry could tell that his friend had made a bit more of an effort this evening.

"Where are you going this evening? You're looking pretty spiffy."

"You don't look so bad yourself," Richard said with a grin. "Actually I have a date too, with your friend Roy actually. The couple of times I've talked to him, he seems like a really nice guy, and seeing as you are off out with your mate, I thought why not see what happens. Are you okay with that?"

Terry was surprised to find he didn't mind, but then although Richard had proven he was the most attentive friend he could ever had, he would never get jealous over anyone Richard showed attention to. He wasn't like that. But he was surprised

in Richard's choice of date. He didn't think Roy had ever actually been asked out on a date before, and he said so.

"I think all men deserve the chance to be treated properly," Richard said. "Roy may have a mouth on him, but he's really cute. Looks a lot like you actually and that happens to be a look I'm attracted to."

"You know he's going to want to blow you in the bathroom before dinner don't you?" Terry wasn't being mean about his friend, he loved Roy like a brother. But he did know that Roy felt his only value was in what he could provide sexually, and he was damn proud of his oral skills. Unfortunately Roy tended to get even more sarcastic if he was turned down. In fact he could turn into a real drama queen if things didn't go his way.

"Roy needs someone who puts his needs first, and who shows that they can care about the whole package, not just his wicked mouth. You let me worry about your friend, and you worry about your mate who, if my nose tells me correctly, has arrived to pick you up. Do you want me to get the door?"

"Yes please," Terry whimpered as he ran to the bathroom. He wasn't just nervous, he was terrified. Not of Zander, but of his own feelings. He'd been through so much hurt with the big Alpha already and they'd never even had a proper conversation. The man had never shown him any affection or any of the traits a good mate would have – and yet thanks to their brief interactions, or despite them, Terry felt like his heart had been blasted with a machine gun. It had so many holes in it. He wasn't sure he could survive much more.

The only reason Terry had agreed to give Zander a fighting chance, was because Richard had talked openly and honestly about his own mate, and the life they had shared together. Richard's mate had been human and it was clear from everything that Richard had said, that he adored his mate the way any wolf shifter should do.

Richard had told him that Zander had those same feelings, he'd just spent too much time thinking like a human, and had let his

fears get in the way. It was the thought of Zander being afraid of anything at all, that convinced Terry he needed to put his hurt behind him and give things a go. Wolf shifters only got one mate, and no matter what the Fates might have been thinking when they paired him with Zander, Terry had to trust that somewhere under that arrogant exterior was the man who was perfect for him in every way.

And now Richard was going out on a date with Roy, and Terry well, he'd better get out of the bathroom before his mate thought he had stood him up. No matter how badly he'd been hurt by Zander, Terry would never knowingly cause *him* any pain. Taking a deep breath, Terry squared his shoulders, gave his shirt one last smooth down and headed out to the living area, where Zander was waiting.

Seeing his mate standing so tall, and so wonderfully edible, had Terry's cock rising and he gasped at the impact simply being in the same room with Zander could cause him. Zander was a good ten inches taller than him and at least three times as wide. Dressed in a dark charcoal suit jacket and matching pants, with a plain black silk shirt underneath, Terry was reminded again of his initial moniker for the man – Mr. Perfection.

Zander had taken the time to shave, his dark hair was tidy and if Terry wasn't mistaken, freshly cut, and in his hand Zander had one dark pink rose, which he held out to Terry as though asking him to take it. Thank you. The flower was meant as a thank you, and Terry was touched by the gesture. Forcing his feet to move, he took the flower, and cupped it in his hand. It was easier to enjoy the soft bloom than it was to look at Zander. The man fair took his breath away.

"Are you ready to go?" Zander asked in that husky deep voice that made Terry's knees tremble. "I made dinner reservations in town."

In town? His mate was really making an effort if he was prepared to be seen in public with him. Casting a quick look at Richard who was waiting by the door, Terry nodded. "I just need to grab

my keys." Still holding the rose, grabbing his keys from the bowl by the door, Terry went to head out, but Richard stopped him, taking the rose from him.

"You go. I'll put this in water for you and then lock the door when I leave. Give him a chance little one," he whispered.

"I will," Terry smiled. "And no blowjobs in the bathroom, okay? Roy deserves more than that from you. You both mean the world to me."

Richard gave him a mock salute and headed through to Terry's tiny kitchen and Terry looked up at Zander meeting his eyes with a hopeful smile. Zander held out his arm, and Terry slipped his hand around the elbow, swamped by a whole raft of sensations that came from touching his man in such a simple way. They hadn't even left the house yet, and Terry was worrying about how they would get through dinner. Being so close to his mate was causing his wolf to throw a party in his head, and his cock to try and get out of his pants. Talk about sensation overload.

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Zander was tongue tied. Not a common occurrence for him. He usually had no trouble talking to a wide range of people. It said so on his resume, damn it. But the moment Terry had come out of his room, Zander had been struck mute. Terry was wearing his bright jacket that Zander totally loved, combined with a black shirt and long black pants. His dark hair fell over a face that was too pale to be healthy, and Zander worried if his little mate had been eating enough. The whole effect was of innocence, and a sweetness that Zander could never achieve. In that one moment, Zander understood what his father had told him the day before.

His mate was an Omega, and he, Alpha wolf and fucking idiot, had been charged by the Fates to look out for this man. To protect him and care for him and make sure that Terry was happy in every aspect of his life. In return his Omega would be loving, loyal and totally devoted, providing Zander with an inner

strength he didn't even know he needed until he'd talked to his father.

Unfortunately Zander didn't know what was in Terry's life apart from Richard, and his father had agreed that his first step should be finding out more about the intriguing man who ticked all of his boxes more than once.

He managed to get them out to his car without any problems. Terry flashed him another shy smile when he opened the door for him and seemed impressed with the cleanliness of his mustang, if the smile and the caress of the dashboard was any indication. But as Zander carefully eased away from the curb, and they headed into town, he still wasn't sure what to say. He just knew he had to say something. So he opened his mouth and said the first thing that came into his head.

"How's your new job going?"

Yes! That had to be okay because Terry's smile got bigger. Thank you Richard. "Really great. I have more than twenty costumes to do in all, but the ladies are just so much fun to work with. They just love my designs and are so supportive."

"You actually design all of the clothes yourself?" Zander was impressed. He had zero creativity, but he'd seen the clothes that the ladies from Club Blue wore, and honestly thought they had come off some couture's rack. To hear his mate had designed and fitted them showed some real skills.

"It's what I love to do," Terry said, his smile still in place. "I adore color and working with the ladies who refuse to wear anything beige or basic, it really stretches my skills, not to mention the obvious fitting challenges. This new job is a huge opportunity for me and I'm determined not to let my friends down."

"I feel a bit like that about my job," Zander admitted, surprised to find that even though they were so different, he and Terry appeared to share similar work ethics. "About not letting people down at least. There's nothing creative about catching drug dealers, and in a lot of ways it's a bit of a thankless task. But

someone has to do it and my wolf loves the hunting side of the equation. It gets a bit hard when we catch someone we know is bad in every way, and my wolf can't go in for the kill. Life is a lot simpler in the animal kingdom, but I learned to handle that dichotomy a long time ago."

"It must be hard," Terry said softly. "Seeing only bad things in your day, dealing with people most of us would rather forget existed. I can't imagine what that must be like, but I know it can't be easy. You must be such a strong person."

"Strong in one respect," Zander admitted, "but totally idiotic in others."

They had arrived at the restaurant in double quick time, and Zander was lucky, snapping up a parking space right outside. He'd always had a soft spot for his car and felt safer having it parked under lights. Also he didn't want his mate walking around the streets after dark, even with him by his side. Zander was all too aware that the criminal underbelly of Houston didn't always stay hidden.

Maneuvering his car into the space, Zander turned off the engine and for a moment all was quiet. When Zander turned to look at Terry he saw those dark expressive eyes just eating him up and that single look made him feel ten foot tall and bullet proof. Unfortunately he was about to be pulled down a few feet. His father had impressed on him the importance of being open and honest with his mate and Zander had to try and apologize for what he had done since the two men had met for the first time.

"I handled things with you really badly, right from the start," he said. "I let you get hurt, I didn't protect you and I wanted to force you into a situation that would have been unbearable for both of us. I admit it. I was stupid, and arrogant, selfish and yeah, didn't think. I didn't value the gift the Fates have given me with you. The only thing I can say in my defense is that I didn't want to lose the partner I have been with for the last ten years. But that was no excuse. What I did was unforgiveable and

I am truly sorry. You have no idea how grateful I am that you're giving me another chance."

Terry looked down at his fingers, which were twisting around themselves. Zander couldn't help himself and he reached out grabbing those slender fingers, enjoying the simple touch. Terry's fingers were soft under his callouses, his hands smooth, but the fingers were long and slender, and Zander could imagine how they would feel on other parts of his body. His hopes that things might be okay increased when Terry didn't pull his hands away.

"It's going to take a while, okay?" Terry said quietly. "You really hurt me, and although my wolf and cock are going crazy now you're here, I'm worried that your connection to your partner is going to keep you away from me again. I couldn't cope if you pulled me in and then kicked me away again. I'm nowhere near as strong as you are."

"You have every right to feel that way. I'm just sorry I gave you cause to. I haven't told Sully, that's my partner, about you before now, because there wasn't anything to say, but I will. Before, when we first met, I was too scared and in my stupidity I thought I could stay away from you even though you are the most perfect being I could ever envisage. Now you've given me another chance, well, I'm not going to hide what I have with you, and if it means getting another partner or working alone, then so be it. You should have always been my first focus, and you will be from this moment on, I give you my word."

"He doesn't like gays does he?" Terry said. "Davina and Lucy told me what he was like at the club the day I was arrested. Your partner doesn't like the idea of it."

"No he doesn't. I don't know why, all I know is that he can get really mouthy about it, especially on the job. He's a good guy, don't get me wrong, but for some reason anyone different brings out the worst in him. I don't know why he hasn't been pulled up for it before now." Zander cared about his partner and friend,

but he was the first to admit he didn't understand the man. They just clicked and he'd never really thought anything beyond that.

"So was bringing me to a public place such a good idea?" Terry said looking around. He was right. The restaurant was not only smack in the middle of town, but it was also one that Zander had been to quite often when double dating with Sully.

"I'm not going to hide you. They have great food here, so let's go in and enjoy our meal. I'm hoping you will give me the chance to talk more to you later, about us, I mean."

Terry sat there for a moment, that shy smile on his face. Then he said, "I'll kinda need my hands back to get out of the car."

Zander blushed. He felt his face heat up and for the first time in his fucking life, he knew his face was red with embarrassment. Because sure enough, Terry's hands were still encased firmly in his, and while they had been talking, Zander had apparently been rubbing small circles on the soft skin. He knew, because he was still doing it. Giving himself a mental shrug, Zander brought his hand up and kissed Terry's fingers gently before releasing them. His wolf didn't let him miss the soft gasp and the look of wonder that shone on Terry's features even in the dim light. That was something worth seeing.

Chapter Ten

Zander couldn't have been more attentive and despite the fact that Terry had been on many dates with Richard, sitting in the restaurant with Zander meant so much more on so many levels. Richard took him out as a friend, a protector. He kept unwanted attentions away from Terry, allowing him to enjoy himself. There were a few times when Terry wondered if his friend wanted more, but Richard never said anything. In fact all he did was be totally supportive of Zander being his mate. Sitting in the restaurant with his mate now, Terry could see that Richard was right. Going out with Richard had been fun. Being out with Zander – well, Zander was the possibility that Terry could have real love in his life, and that gave the evening an added sparkle.

In a lot of ways Zander and Richard were alike, and Terry guessed that was because they were both Alpha wolves. They were used to being confident and in charge. Terry always had a good time when he went out with Richard, and found him easy to talk to, but this meal with Zander could be the start of something wonderful, something special. Just like Terry had always dreamed a new romance would be. He prayed with all that he was that nothing would stuff it up.

The restaurant was the perfect setting for a first date. The hostess was a lovely lady who didn't blink an eyelid at Zander escorting him as his date, although it was clear from the way she greeted his mate, that he was a regular at the place. Terry forced himself not to think about the countless women that had enjoyed Zander's attention. Thinking about his mate's past wasn't going to help him forge a future with the man.

The two men were led to a quiet booth towards the back of the room. The room itself was light and airy, although in the evening light, the red checkered table clothes, the dark wood furniture and the small fire that blazed in the fireplace on the wall, gave the place a homely feel. The waitress was a lovely young girl who openly checked out Zander before winking at Terry. Terry smiled back, feeling smug. Yes, Zander was someone worth looking at. The dinner, when it arrived was hot, and totally

delicious. Terry had ordered an Italian pasta dish that he couldn't even pronounce and Zander, predictably, had a giant steak that took up almost the entire plate.

But the neat thing about the evening was that the two men talked, having a regular, normal conversation. Okay, Terry knew he was the one doing most of the talking, although Zander didn't seem to mind. He told his mate about some of the funny things that Davina and the other ladies did when they came for their fittings. He talked about Joel and Max, Charlie and Roy, how they came to be friends and how wonderful the men had been, helping him get his new job, and all the work they were doing for Pride Week.

It did cross Terry's mind that maybe he was talking too much, but he wanted his mate to see that he did have a good life, complete with loving friends who were like family to him. He hoped one day that Zander would love the people around him as much as he did. The only person he didn't mention was Richard, because that would have been rude, especially when Zander was trying so hard.

"You are lucky to have so many friends," Zander observed when Terry finally stopped for a breather.

Dessert had arrived – a chocolate gateaux, which was one of Terry's favorites, with lashings of whipped cream. Swallowing down an absolutely delicious mouthful, Terry resisted moaning as the combination of flavors on his tongue finally slid down his throat and said, "But you work with so many people every day. Surely you have friends on the force."

Zander shrugged, and Terry thought his mate wasn't going to say anything more, but then he said, "It's always been Sully and me, ever since the academy. We met there on our first day, got posted here and worked our way up through the ranks together. We made Detective on the same day and have been paired up for the best part of ten years. I know the other men and women of course, but Sully is the only person I could call a friend."

Terry wished he'd never brought up the subject, but Sully's name was out there now, sitting like an elephant between them. He couldn't ignore it.

"Sully's not going to approve of me, or of you being with me, is he?"

"Nope," Zander said shortly and his handsome face closed off for a moment. But then, it was like the guy decided he really did need to make an effort and he went on. "You mentioned before how hard it is, seeing the same shit with a different shirt on every day, and you were right. Sully always had my back, whenever bad stuff went down, the same as I do for him. He understands the things we see every day and how it can affect us. We work long hours, so we'd usually grab a meal together when the shift was finished. We nearly always double dated – a new woman every week was his motto, and I didn't have a problem with that at the time. Days off we'd hang at each other's places, watch sport, go out drinking together, pick up women together. He's just always been there, and I didn't think I was ready to let that go. The only thing I really did on my own was go out of town when the urge for a male body got too much and I didn't do that very often. It was the one facet of my life that Sully didn't share. Well, that and my wolf of course. But for everything else, Sully was there."

"Haven't you ever been in a relationship? Had someone special in your life apart from Sully? Someone who was just there for you?"

Zander shook his head. "Never. Before I went into the academy I was young and stupid and just looking to get my rocks off. When I met Sully, he was out to prove what type of a player he was for whatever reason, and I guess I just went along with it. We're both older now, and I was kinda hoping Sully would settle down over time, but I haven't seen any evidence of it yet."

"So you're not gay, you're bi-sexual then?" Terry wasn't sure if he liked hearing just how experienced his mate was with men and women, but he reminded himself his mate was sharing stuff

with him, and that was a positive. Zander wasn't trying to sugarcoat anything, he was just telling Terry how he had lived up until now. At least that is what Terry hoped he was doing.

"I prefer men," Zander said. "But hey, I'm an Alpha wolf. If I'm horny enough I can go with a woman, and I always made sure I treated them right. It sounds like I have acted like a real bastard, and I suppose I have, but I've never led anyone on, or been dishonest with them in any way. In all truthfulness..."

Zander trailed off and Terry had the overwhelming urge to reach for the man's hand where it rested on the table. But they were in public, and no matter how hard Zander was trying, Terry didn't think his mate was ready for PDA. Not with a man at least.

"I filled my life up," Zander continued. "Work and casual fucking. That's all I had in my life. I only went on dates because that was the polite thing to do, and it's not as though I cook or anything, so I didn't have a problem going out for a meal. But it wasn't until I met you, I realized there was so much I was missing, so much to life and love that I hadn't made time for. Talking to Richard, and to my Father, shit, my life has been so empty and I hadn't even realized it. I don't want to be that person anymore."

"What sorts of things were you missing?" Terry didn't want to push but he really wanted to hear what his Alpha mate dreamed about. Was there any chance at all that they might finally be on the same page when it came to being mates?

Zander looked like he was going to answer too, but just as he opened his mouth to speak, a shadow fell over their table and Terry looked up and saw Sully and a pretty blond woman standing there. Sully was glaring at Terry as though he was nothing more than a bug under his shoe and he felt Zander bristle at his side.

"Zander, didn't realize you hadn't eaten tonight. You should have come out with me and Suzy. Your friend Rebecca is in town and she asked after you. I know she would have loved to make up a foursome."

"As you can see, I already have company," Zander said. His mate had that plastic smile on his face, the one that never quite reaches the eyes, but Terry could see the tension fair emanating off of Zander's shoulders. Looking at Sully, he could see the same degree of tension and every cell in Terry's body urged him to protect his mate.

"Detective Samuels was kind enough to offer me a meal. He's been helping me with some advice about how to get help for my sister. She's trying to get rehabilitation for a drug problem," Terry lied glibly. Only Zander would be able to smell the deceit.

"Anyone at the station could have given you that advice, there are pamphlets available and everything. That's hardly a Detective's job."

Fuck. Sully was a suspicious son of a bitch. Terry didn't know what the hell his mate saw in the man. All Terry could see was an arrogant asshole who got his kicks from hating others.

"I know," said Terry smiling sweetly. "But the Police Commissioner recommended that I talk to Detective Samuels specifically, him being on the drug squad and everything. I'm a friend of the Police Commissioner's brother. Madam Morgana put in a word for me with the powers that be and here we are."

"You mean Morgana, the drag queen? I think she is absolutely fabulous," the blond standing beside Sully gushed. "Do you really know her personally?"

"I design all her outfits," Terry replied, his grin widening at the excitement in the pretty woman's face, and Sully's deepening look of anger. Not sure where the spark of devilment came from, he continued, "I can get you tickets to her next show if you like, maybe even introduce you to her backstage. I'm sure your partner here would love it."

"You would do that for us? Oh Sully, did you hear that? How exciting. I've wanted to go to one of their shows for months, but they are always booked out. Oh, oh," she said, grabbing a pen and a piece of paper from her tiny purse.

"Here, let me give you my number. I'm Suzy, by the way. So you design all of those lovely clothes? They're amazing, better than anything you could buy in a store."

"Thanks Suzy. If you ever need a frock for a special occasion, just let me know. I'll be happy to do a one-off design just for you. With your coloring and awesome figure, you could wear just about anything and make it look good."

Terry handed Suzy his card, and took the piece of paper with her number on it. Suzy was still rabbiting on to Sully about the amazing Divas and their exotic costumes. Terry had to force himself to look at the table cloth. He didn't dare look at Zander and he would laugh out loud if he had to watch Sully's face any longer. The man looked like someone had shit in his pants and then slapped him on the ass. Finally they left, Suzy pledging undying friendship and Sully, well he looked like he wished his date would just shut up.

"She seems like a nice lady," Terry said brightly, scraping the last of his gateau off of the plate. He didn't even remember eating it, and he kind of wished he had another piece. He didn't get cake like that very often.

"You didn't have to do that," Zander growled quietly. "I told you I'm not ashamed of being seen with you. I didn't have a problem with Sully thinking we were on a date. He's going to find out soon enough."

Giving his fork one last lick, just in case he had missed anything, Terry put it back on the plate and smiled at his scowling mate and hopefully soon to be lover. "I know you aren't ashamed of me. I believe you. You brought me here, on a lovely date, with tablecloths and everything. I couldn't have asked for more. But if you'd thrown our new relationship in your friend's face then it would have ruined the whole evening for both of us. I didn't want that to happen. I'm your mate too you know. It is just as much my job to protect you, as it is for you to protect me. Who knows, if Sully keeps Suzy around then maybe things won't be as bad as you think they'll be. Suzy seems to like me well enough."

Zander looked like he was going to argue, but then his face cleared and he smiled. A genuine, I'm happy and I don't care who knows it kind of smile and just like that Terry's world became a warmer place.

"Fancy a night cap?" The big man's eyebrows were raised and how Zander managed to pull off a combination of lust and hope all in the one look, Terry would never know. He just nodded. His tummy, which was still working on that delicious gateau, fluttered a bit, but Terry squashed his nerves down firmly. He wanted to be claimed. He wanted this big, gorgeous looking Alpha to belong to him, even if they still had a lot of things to work out. He'd settle for his very first kiss if that was the only thing on offer, but God he hoped for so much more.

Chapter Eleven

Zander was sick and tired of fighting his wolf, something he'd been doing since they first spied Terry all those weeks ago in the bar. His wolf wanted the Omega. He didn't need a reason. In his wolf's eyes Terry was his from day one. And his wolf was getting pretty darn snarly at Zander for not getting close enough to the sweet little Omega. Driving Terry to see his house for the first time, Zander was now not only dealing with a wolf who wanted his teeth in the pretty boy's neck, but a totally unexpected fit of nerves. He was an Alpha, fuck it all. Alphas didn't get nervous. But Zander was sure that is what the butterflies in his stomach meant.

Every human instinct in Zander told him that he needed to take things slow. Terry might be his mate, but Zander had been nothing but a complete bastard to him from the moment they met. In fact, he almost turned the car around so he could take Terry back to his apartment. It was only his Father's words, about sharing, letting his mate into his life, giving him a chance to see the type of man Zander was, that kept him heading to his own address.

All too soon Zander pulled into his driveway. He would have put his car in the garage, but he didn't want Terry to think he was being presumptuous. He planned to make his mate a cup of coffee, or even a small drink, maybe beg a first kiss. They would have to talk some more, because Zander had a lot of groveling to do over his past behavior, and then he would take Terry home just like a decent *man* would do. A mate would fuck him into the mattress, but Zander had to rely on his human instincts when it came to wooing his mate. He didn't think Terry was anywhere near ready for him to pounce on him, teeth bared and cock waving urgently, even if Terry was a wolf shifter too.

And that plan worked up to a point. Zander escorted Terry inside his small and rather sparsely furnished house, inviting his mate to look around while he went to put some coffee on. He tried to imagine seeing his place through his mate's eyes and could admit to himself that maybe it was a little 'functional'. He

couldn't think of any other word to describe it. Even though he had lived in the house for six years, the sparse white walls, the dark solid furniture and the decided lack of pictures or knick knacks made the place appear unlivd in. The couch was comfortable and the television screen was as big as he could buy. The only reason the house was clean was because Zander had a woman come in once a week. Well that, and the fact that he was barely ever home.

Still, Terry didn't say anything. Just wandered around, peering at the few books that Zander had, rifling through his DVD selection. Then he headed off down the short hallway towards the three bedrooms, one of which Zander had turned into a work out room, the bathroom – shit, Zander hoped he'd left that clean – and yep, there wasn't anything else.

Zander was in the kitchen where he was pleased to see he had coffee beans, milk and sugar at least, but he had lost track of what Terry was doing, and that ramped up his anxiety levels. What if his mate found him lacking in some way? Did he put his gun in the safe like he was supposed to? Racking his brains, he tried to recreate the steps he'd taken when he came home to get ready for his date. Yep. He was fairly sure the gun had been put away where it belonged. But what would Terry say if he found the one in his bedside drawer, and oh shit and fucking hell, he should have gotten rid of the half empty box of condoms in his bathroom. Another human reminder of what he'd done to hurt his mate.

A tray. He needed a tray for the coffee jug, the mugs, the milk and the sugar. Shit, he'd forgotten spoons, how could his little wolf put sugar in his cup without spoons? Zander yanked open the kitchen drawer so hard half the contents went crashing to the floor. He heard Terry yell out, "are you okay Zander?"

"Yes, just a few knives and forks. Coffee's in the living room when you're ready."

Giving up on the spilled utensils, and the hope of ever finding a tray, Zander grabbed the coffee pot and the mugs – he'd make

two trips. Which he did. But Terry was still in his house doing whatever it was he was doing. Should he go and look for him, or would that look untrusting? Not sure what to do, Zander sat on the couch and poured himself a coffee. Maybe he should turn the television on, but then he was sure that was a rude thing to do on a date. He flung the remote on the corner of the couch and tapped his fingers on his knee. What was Terry doing and what should he do?

Zander was still trying to work out his fuddled thoughts, when Terry sauntered into the living room, and came over to the couch, straddling Zander's legs, planting his tight little behind on Zander's lap and hooking his arms around Zander's neck. Talk about invasion of personal space. It was awesome. Those dark and strongly expressive eyes looked deep into Zander's and rather than take it as a challenge, Zander felt strangely cared about. A foreign feeling for him, but Zander thought he might like it.

"You seriously need some color in your life," Terry said firmly. "There's no heart in this house, and your wardrobe, ugh, don't get me started about your clothes. Honestly Zander don't you wear anything that's not black, grey or dark blue?"

"I need those clothes for work?" Zander said hopefully. "They look good on me, and..." Yeah. He had nothing. He bought dark clothes because they didn't show blood, and because some woman had told him years ago they went well with his coloring.

"I am not suggesting that you wear pink and purple shirts to work or anything," Terry said. "I know you need to look professional and smart and the total bad ass that you are. But what about when you take your ladies out? Haven't you ever wanted to wear something else then? Pale green maybe to match your eyes?"

"I won't be taking anyone out except you from now on," Zander said quickly. He really didn't want to discuss anything about the ladies he'd been out with before, or the fact that he didn't care what he wore then. "If you want me to wear more colorful shirts

and stuff when we go out, I'm sure I can buy some from somewhere."

Clothes. Clothes? It was normal for Terry to talk about clothes, it was his life after all. But Zander was having real trouble thinking about anything at all now his mate was so close and they were alone. He couldn't do anything about the smell of his arousal and he just hoped that Terry wouldn't get offended or scared off by it. As much as he wanted to pull Terry closer and taste those full sweet lips, he fisted his hands into the couch, and hung on, trying to keep his dirty thoughts from showing on his face.

His sweet mate was smiling at him. "I think," Terry said pertly, "that once we're mated, then I'll probably add a bit of color to your home and wardrobe, and given that you are in serious need of a makeover, I think you should probably claim me tonight. This is going to be a long project."

"Tonight?" Surely his voice didn't break, but Zander had a horrible feeling it probably did. He couldn't believe his ears. Terry wanted to be claimed, after all he had done? Because the little man thought he needed a makeover? Nothing was making sense.

"Yes, tonight would be best," Terry said as casually as if he was discussing the weather. "Face it, your wolf will be a lot happier if you claim me. Don't think I can't feel the tension in those hunky muscles of yours. Once claimed, whether your human mind wants to or not, your wolf will make darn sure you don't hurt me anymore by doing stupid things and face it darlin' you need someone to look after you and that's what my wolf was born to do. Might as well go with it."

"Don't I have a lot to make up for first? You know, groveling and explaining and stuff?" Zander didn't know why he was opening his mouth, but he felt that he should. Both Richard and his father had made it plain that he had a lot of work to do if Terry was ever going to accept him. In the meantime his wolf was snarling in his head, wanting to know why Terry was still all of two inches

away, and his cock was threatening to explode in his pants. If Terry moved so much as an inch, he would be making a colossal mess, he was sure of it.

"We're mates," Terry said simply. "You have a lifetime to make things up to me, and you will, I'll make sure of that. If you ever treat me anything less than the awesome person I am then you'll be sorry. I might not be able to kick your ass, but once we're mated every time you upset me, you will be feeling it too. My mother told me so, and I believe her. So unless you're a masochist, you'd better be nice to me."

"My father told me the same thing, and I promise you, I will be the mate I should have been in the first place," Zander said faintly. "Are you honestly sure you want to do this now? I mean, we still barely know each other. You're a virgin and...and..."

"Yes, I am," Terry said, still calm, and Zander felt like his little mate was in total control of the conversation. "You are going to have to put up with that little problem and deal with it, however you do, you know, whatever." Terry waved his hand in the air as if he wasn't sure what he was talking about, but Zander got the general idea. In fact, his body was positively trembling at the ideas he was getting. His mate still wanted him and Gods, Zander wanted too.

"Remember," Terry continued, "I did tell you that night at my apartment, if you took me out on a date then I would put out. You took me on a lovely date, better than I could've ever hoped for and that is more than a lot of new mates get. My mother explained it's usually wham bam and sink your teeth in. You took the time to listen to me and give me the date I asked for. That's more than my mother got, believe me, and by the Fates I hope she never repeats that story again. But for now I'm willing and able and I think it's about time I learned what all the fuss about sex is about. Don't you want to claim me?"

Zander searched those wonderfully dark eyes and saw nothing but honesty and sincerity. Although he definitely didn't deserve his mate, Zander wasn't going to hurt him further by turning him

down. He would take what Terry was offering and he would make damn fucking sure that he never gave his mate any cause to grieve over him again.

"I want to claim you more than I have ever wanted anyone or anything in my whole life." And wasn't that the truth.

"I've never even had a kiss before," Terry said and this time there was just a tiny touch of uncertainty in his Omega's tone.

"Just follow my lead," Zander said softly. He unclenched his hands from their grip on the couch and settled them around Terry's tiny waist. His fingers almost met in the middle. Leaning forward he carefully placed his closed lips on those two shapely cushions that graced Terry's face and just pressed, gently. Terry's lips were as soft as he imagined they would be. He pressed a little harder and then forced himself to pull back. Terry gave a little groan, and the slender arms around Zander's neck tightened.

"I might not know much about kissing, but I know there is a lot more to it than that," Terry complained quietly.

"There sure is," Zander promised. Raising one hand to Terry's nape, holding him firm, the other sliding around Terry's waist to pull the man closer, Zander tilted Terry's head gently to one side and then closed the distance between them again. Terry moaned and let his mouth fall open a little, something Zander took full advantage of. Slipping his tongue just inside of Terry's mouth he was greeted by a taste finer than anything that had ever tempted his taste buds before. By the Fates Zander made a silent vow that he would never take this precious man for granted ever again.

Chapter Twelve

Terry was all about sweetness, his berry scent that some might think would normally be tart, was soft and sugary, with the impression of cream adding to his sensuality. Zander had kissed a lot of people, mostly women, and a few men when a hookup demanded it, but nothing compared to kissing his mate. He let his tongue go deeper, and then got the shock of his life when Terry sucked on it, tentatively at first but then with more confidence and strength. And holy fuck if that action didn't just resonate in his cock – it was like his tongue and dick had a direct line to each other and Zander found himself humping up against Terry's slim frame, cursing the fact they were still fully clothed.

Skin. He needed to feel Terry's skin. He'd only seen a hint of it that one time, at Terry's apartment, but now his fingers were determined to find out if it was as soft as he remembered. Scrunching up the bottom of Terry's shirt and jacket, he slid the fingers of one hand up his mate's spine and wanted to groan out loud. Silky smooth, gorgeously soft, but defined little muscles all the way through. Could his mate be any more perfect? Suddenly touching wasn't enough, Zander needed to see his mate naked more than he needed his next breath.

Planting his feet firmly on the floor, Zander stood up, still holding Terry tightly in his grip. Terry cottoned on pretty quick to what was going on and even though his mouth didn't deviate from what it was doing, Terry's legs clamped around Zander's hips as though they were made to be there. Zander could feel the hardness of Terry's cock behind the man's pants and the heat sent a burning through his own body. Zander had enjoyed sex more times than he could count, but nobody had ever set his body on fire like Terry did.

Finding his way to the bedroom was the easy part, getting his mate to disengage his tongue and his legs wasn't so easy. Finally Zander pulled his whole head back and was thrilled to see Terry's eyes held nothing but lust, and that mouth – God his mate's lips puffed up beautifully. Zander wanted to kiss him all over again.

"Is it clothes off time now?" Terry asked cheekily.

"Definitely clothes off," Zander agreed. As soon as Terry let go of him, he shucked his own clothes onto the floor in record speed and was pleased to see that Terry had no reservations either. Terry's jacket went one way, his shirt went flying over Zander's head, and then Terry unzipped his pants and Zander caught a flash of pink. Not flesh pink, but bright flashy pink.

"Stop," he rasped out. Terry looked up at him, the first tinge of uncertainty on his face.

"Please, let me do it." Dropping his hands beside his body, Terry lay back on the bed, watching him warily. Zander was fascinated by the pink flash that was winking at him from underneath the darkness of Terry's pants. Climbing up onto the bed, he reached out, pulling down the rest of Terry's zipper and slowly, so fucking slowly peeling back the black material.

Underneath those austere looking pants, Terry was wearing pink satin and lace. His hard length was straining the material and there was already a small wet patch causing a translucent spot in that area. Zander groaned, totally transfixed.

"You don't like them?" Terry should never sound so unsure, but Zander would have to accept that trust took time. What he could do is let his mate know that Zander's particular kink, was for satin and silk underwear, especially when it contained a cock. No one knew that about him, but Terry deserved to know.

"I fucking love them," he said with a growl as he buried his face in the opening of Terry's pants, mouthing over the hard satin covered cock and inhaling his mate's scent with every breath. Terry gasped, then moaned and the wet spot got wider. Zander lapped at it, feeling the head of Terry's cock under the silk. Keeping his mouth busy, Zander carefully peeled Terry's pants down his legs before sitting up to ease them off of dainty feet.

Looking down at his mate, Zander knew he was looking at the perfect man for him. Terry was slender but beautifully formed, light muscles rippling under that deliciously soft pale skin, his bright pink underwear clinging to thin hips, stretched over

Terry's hardened length. Zander had never seen anything so wickedly decadent in his life. An angelic face and sexy undies, what a combination.

"You're so beautiful," he said, not bothering to hide the awe in his voice. How he had ever thought that he could callously use his mate for sex alone seemed so ridiculous now, Zander couldn't believe he had been so stupid. Lowering himself cautiously because he wasn't sure if his mate could take his weight, Zander sighed as his skin met Terry's, and then groaned long and loud as his cock kissed the satin of Terry's boy shorts. He knew he was humping again, his fucking hips were on automatic. But the feel of Terry's underwear against his own cock was so erotic, that Zander couldn't stop.

Fisting his hand in that delightful length of hair on the top of Terry's head, Zander bent and kissed his mate again. And again. And again. Every muscle Terry touched tingled, the man's smooth fingers caressed hesitantly over his skin, sending Zander's heat levels higher with every stroke. Zander's wolf was urging him to get inside of his mate, and clamp down on that slender neck, but Zander wanted to wallow in the sensation of touch. It had been so fucking long, and Zander hadn't realized until that moment, just how starved he was for someone to hold him and caress him. He never knew someone could make his body sing.

"Please," Terry burst out with a moan long minutes later as Zander nibbled his neck. "My ass feels funny and I can't hold on..."

It took a moment for Zander's mind to catch up. He hadn't touched Terry's ass yet. But then his brain clicked and he moved quickly. Terry's body was ready for him, like Omegas of old. Zander had remembered his father telling him that when Terry was ready for mating his body would take care of all the prep. While Zander had been embarrassed his father had even mentioned the sex act at all, he was so grateful now, otherwise he might have thought his mate was mental.

Sitting up again, he carefully pulled Terry's sexy underwear off, there was no way he wanted to destroy something so delicate and sexy. Terry lifted his legs in the air, gripping his own knees, and Zander was faced with a soft looking, well lubed twinkling asshole just waiting for him to sink into.

"Are you sure?"

"I ache, I need. I've never been this horny in my life, and my ass is on fire. How much surer do I need to be? Get in there and do something about it."

Trusting his mate to know his own body, Zander lined up and pushed in, determined to take his time. Even though he came with a self-prep mechanism, this was still Terry's first time and Zander wasn't lacking in the cock department. But as soon as he had pushed through what was supposed to be tight guardian muscles, it was as though Terry's body sucked him in and Zander fell forward, having just enough time to put his hands on either side of Terry's head.

Heat. Terry's insides were like a cream-lined silk furnace. No. That didn't make sense, but yet it did. Terry's insides were soft, yet firm, sucking him in, welcoming him, heating up like nothing had before. Zander's hips moved of their own accord and he found himself balls deep in no time. As soon as he felt the brush of Terry's body against his pelvis, Zander forced himself to hold still this time, unsure how Terry would cope with his size. Terry had his eyes closed, and his body writhed in small sensuous movements, tempting Zander with every twitch. How was Zander supposed to resist something so wickedly seductive? He wasn't.

"Put your legs around me, little one," Zander said, as he braced himself on his hands. He knew the moment he moved it was all going to be over far too quickly. Slim calves slipped around his torso and Terry's hands gripped Zander around the neck and those puffed up lips opened again.

"Will you please fucking move. I won't break. I'm an Omega, damn it."

Maybe he could go slowly. Ha. Who was he kidding? The moment Zander flexed his hips, sliding free of that delicious heat, he was sucked back in again. Within two strokes he was speeding up, five strokes later he was pounding like a machine. Through it all Terry made the sexiest noises, moaning, whimpering, sharing his pleasure and spurring Zander on. Zander was helpless to resist so he gave up trying.

Twisting his body slightly, causing his dick angle to change, had Terry yelling out his pleasure. Zander reached down between them, hunching over so he could kiss his mate and pump his cock all at the same time. In a matter of seconds his hand was coated with warm goo as Terry wrenched his mouth away from Zander's and yelled into the night. Zander had just a moment to appreciate the wonder that was his mate's face in the throes of ecstasy, when his own balls gave him a warning. It was time.

Terry must have sensed it too because he tilted his neck, offering such sweet submission. Zander's wolf howled and Zander didn't hesitate, plunging his teeth into the tightly stretched skin, marking his mate for all eternity.

"Oh Mother of God," Terry yelled as Zander felt his mate's body spasm again and that was it for him. With the sweet taste of blood on his tongue, his teeth lodged firmly in his mate's neck, Zander's own orgasm took over. Pushing his hips as hard as he could against Terry's tight bum cheeks, Zander let his pleasure overtake him, his seed pulsing into Terry's willing body in what felt like a never ending stream. As Zander rode the wave, emotions hit him, and he instinctively knew there was one thing he could give his mate. Disengaging his own teeth, Zander lapped the wound quickly to stop the bleeding and then tilted his own neck.

"Bite me, quick," he said. At least he thought that was what he said, but it was hard to know when his endorphins were pinging, his brain was mush and his body was humming like it was filled with electricity. Terry got the idea though. Sharp teeth pierced his erogenous zone where neck meets shoulder and Zander's

body soared as his second orgasm hit him before the first was finished. Fucking hell, what an explosion.

Beneath him he felt Terry's body twitch, more fluids soaking their joined skin. He was aware that Terry had withdrawn his teeth and was gently licking at his skin to help him heal. He could feel Terry's insides clenching him, drawing out his orgasm until he thought he was going to pass out and all Zander could do was hang on for the ride. It was incredible, exhilarating, and for the first time in his life, Zander felt whole. More importantly he had a new purpose in life. To keep Terry close, cherish him, protect him, and love him until the end of time.

Zander finally got it.

Chapter Thirteen

Waking up encased in strong arms, and surrounded by a huge solid body was a new sensation for Terry, but it was one he thought he could quickly get used to. Zander's room might be sterile in appearance, but the bed was big and comfortable, Zander's body keeping him perfectly warm. Terry didn't think he had ever slept so well. But now, it was the dreaded "morning after" that his friends used to talk about, and he wasn't quite sure what he should do.

Terry remembered what his mother had said, about how when mates were claimed they didn't like to be apart longer than necessary. Both he and Zander had jobs, so doing their own thing for the bulk of business hours was going to be a fact of life. Didn't his mate say that he and Sully worked long hours? If that was true then Terry was going to have to be used to spending a lot of time working himself. He didn't want to be one of those wimpy mates that sat around moaning because their other half wasn't around.

Maybe he should leave before Zander woke up? Then his big mate wouldn't feel awkward about him being in his face. As wonderful as Zander had been the night before, Terry couldn't forget that his mate had planned that Terry keep his own place after he was claimed, and that Zander would just visit him when he could. Did that still apply? Terry racked his brains thinking about the things Zander had said the night before. There had been a lot of positives said – about being a good mate, and about the caring and protective side of things, which yeah, Terry had totally loved. But no specifics on how they would fit their lives together.

Oh shit, Terry didn't know what to do. In his own head there was nowhere he would rather be than curled up in Zander's arms. It was the heavenly place he'd been dreaming of since he read his first romance novel. But no. He should leave. Terry knew after all the caring his mate had shown him during their date, and beyond, he would be crushed if Zander turned all cold and hard again in the light of day. Far better to leave now, before that

possibility came up. Maybe if he wasn't around then his mate might miss him, and come and look for him or something.

Although he thought it was probably a bit late for all that nonsense, Terry wondered if he needed to play a bit hard to get. Then he just as quickly decided that playing hard to get was too stupid for words. He'd been got, good and proper. But how the hell did he show his mate he wasn't some clingy whiny person, but a male with his own life? Terry had no experience at all playing the mating game, or the dating game for that matter. The worry that Zander would turn against him now morning had come, was really making him anxious though. Yes. He should get up and get out of Zander's house before the man woke up.

A strong arm tightening around his midsection put paid to that idea.

"Wolves don't play hard to get, precious," Zander's sleep-ridden voice growled out softly. "That's human shit, and I think I've done enough stupid human things to keep us apart up to now, don't you think? Go with your wolf instincts and let's start thinking about how true mates would handle things instead. I don't want you leaving me."

"I didn't want to leave," Terry said, rolling over and looking into his mate's gorgeous pale eyes that were fixed firmly on him. They didn't look angry or anything. In fact there was a definite twinkle among the green flecks. "But how did you even know what I was thinking?"

Apparently we've been blessed with a mind link. Terry felt Zander's voice in his head. It felt so personal, so intimate, he wanted to shriek and yell in happiness, and then kiss his mate senseless. But he reminded himself he was a mated wolf now and so he tried to take the mature approach. Thinking very deliberately he sent out, *why us do you think?*

Perhaps because the Fates knew we could never work together, given our career paths. But this way we can still keep in touch.

"You heard me!" This time Terry did lean forward and kiss his mate. Zander had definite stubble in the morning, and Terry

found it added a whole new dimension to the kissing side of things. Joel had been right. Stubble burn was quite delicious.

"Hmm, I sure did, and I am so glad we have this," Zander said, peppering his face with kisses. "It means anytime we're apart, we can still touch base with each other."

"Will you hear everything I think? 'Cos I think then it would suck to be you," Terry said, tilting his head back as Zander worked his way around his throat. Stubble burn in all sorts of places. Yum. Maybe he'd developed a new kink.

No, precious, just what you want me to hear.

Terry jumped a bit because Zander's mouth was still busy, now working up a hickey on his neck. Hmmm, that was another positively wicked sensation. Who knew his neck could feel so sensitive, especially around his mating mark, oh. Damn, that felt good. Terry wanted to ask how come his mate knew what he was thinking when he woke up because he hadn't been thinking at his mate, but rather about him. But Zander distracted him by latching onto his nipple and giving it a little nip. He moaned and arched his body, encouraging his mate to do more, something Zander seemed happy to do. In the meantime his own hands were drawn to the smooth hardness of Zander's body. He hadn't had much time to explore the night before, so swept up in the new sensations his mate had been giving him. But now.

Or not, he thought as the sound of loud pounding on Zander's front door broke the two men apart. Zander cursed and rolled off of him, grabbing his rumpled pants from the floor and throwing them on. Then, as Terry's ears caught the unmistakable click of a door lock being turned Zander seemed to have second thoughts, and jumped back into the bed again, grabbing the covers so that Terry's body wasn't on display. While Terry appreciated the thought, he would far rather know what was going on.

"Zander? What the fuck man, you still in bed? You lazy sod. Get up and let's go get some breakfast and you can tell me what you were doing with that little faggot last night."

Okay. He'd rather not know what was going on, although he could hazard a guess. Terry definitely remembered the voice from the night before. Seemed Sully had a key to Zander's house, just like Roy had one to his.

Yep, that would be Sully. Standing at the bedroom doorway, his mouth open so wide he could catch flies, the look of shock on his face so comical Terry almost laughed. Which would have been a dumb thing to do considering Sully's shock quickly morphed into anger. Terry took the more sensible course of action and tried to make himself look as small as possible, which wasn't hard to do given that Zander was looming over him protectively.

"What's up, Sully? It's our day off and I don't remember us having plans," Zander said. Casual words but Terry could feel the tension in that huge body. His wolf wanted to comfort his mate. He wanted to disappear. Terry decided to stay still and hoped Sully wouldn't notice him.

"I wanted to know what you were doing with that little fairy. But I can guess what you've been doing. What, you're queer now? A fucking bum bandit? What the hell is that little shrimp doing in your bed?"

"I've always preferred men in my bed, Sully. I just hadn't found one in this town I was keen on keeping around until now." Zander flashed Terry a tight smile that didn't make Terry feel any better. Sully's normally handsome face was twisted in rage, going so red that Terry was worried he would blow a blood vessel.

"You can't be serious. Ten fucking years we've been friends. Ten years! You know how I feel about fucking queers. How could you do this to me?"

"Do this to *you*?" Zander sat up and the covers fell from his shoulders, revealing his muscled chest. A heaving muscled chest. Shit, his mate was getting angry and given that Sully was being so rude Terry was starting to get really worried that Zander would shift. Alpha wolves were more protective than most, and Zander had claimed him now.

"I'm not doing anything to *you*," Zander said, his voice rising to match his own anger. "I'm doing something I want to do, with someone I care about very much, so watch your fucking language. I don't see how this has anything to do with you. We're partners, yes. Friends, hell yes. But this, what I do in my bed, in my own home, has got nothing to do with you. It doesn't change who I am or our friendship."

Sully went silent for a moment, and then his eyes narrowed and Terry tensed. He really didn't want to know what was going to come out of the man's mouth next, but he knew it wouldn't be anything good.

"You're doing this for a promotion, aren't you? Ever since we broke up that pub brawl and you saw this little shit for the first time, something's been different with you. You knew the Police Commissioner had a soft spot because of his weird brother, and you're angling for a promotion. You sick bastard."

"This has nothing to do with my career. Terry is my mate and you'd better shut the fuck up right now," Zander growled, his words almost garbled because, oh shit, Zander's teeth had dropped. And then poof. Seconds later a huge black wolf was standing where Zander had been laying, and yep, that wolf was pissed off. Terry discretely pulled Zander's pants off from where they had got tangled during the change.

Sully reared back in horror, fumbling around under his arm. Next thing Terry saw was the gun in the man's hand, pointed straight at his mate. Without thinking he grabbed the covers and moved in front of the wolf, who growled menacingly in Sully's direction.

"We're shifters," Terry said urgently, worried about the manic look in Sully's eyes. "Zander is totally aware in this form and is still the same person you've known for ten years. Put the gun down because I can't promise you he won't attack. He's protecting me and that gun isn't going to encourage him to back down anytime soon."

"Shifters, what do you mean shifters, like werewolves or some crap. It's not even full moon," Sully said, his eyes still wild. At least the gun dropped down a bit.

"Shifters, as in a person who shares their spirit with another animal and can change forms at will," Terry said, dropping his voice, trying to keep things calm. In his experience people always listened more closely if you talked softly.

"And that's why he's with you, screwing you? Because you're one of these animals as well?"

Zander growled and bared his teeth and Terry spoke up quickly. He didn't want to think about what might happen if Zander attacked his best friend. "Zander told you. We're true mates. It means we were brought together by the Fates to live together for the rest of our lives. It's like a human soul mate. Zander can understand everything you're saying and he's not happy with the way you're talking about me. Please, this doesn't need to change anything between you and him, but you need to back down."

"If it's like a soul mate then you need to fuck off. He can learn to live without a soul mate. Without a man in his bed," Sully said fiercely. "I'm not having my best friend turn into a fucking faggot because of some stupid curse. You leave town, fuck off and my friend will go back to the way he was. God, he's fucked more women than I have. Can't you see he's not gay? Going through this type of curse with you must be killing him, can't you see that?"

Growling again, Zander crouched on his haunches and Terry knew if he didn't do something quickly then there was going to be blood on the boring beige floors. As much as he wanted to see color in Zander's life he didn't think blood red would go with what he had in mind for the bedroom.

Pulling aside the coverlet, Terry pointed to his scabbed over scar, the mating mark he would wear proudly for the rest of his life. "Zander has bitten me, claimed me as his. It was his decision, what he wanted to do. If I leave then he'll die without me. He'll pine away because his animal spirit needs me now to survive.

That's what happens with mates. Do you really want your best friend to die just because he'll sleep with me from now on?"

For a moment Sully looked so lost that Terry almost felt sorry for him. At least the hand holding the gun dropped to his side. "Fuck, I don't know what to think," Sully whispered. "My friend turning into a wolf, turning gay, biting a man and having him naked in his bed. There is so much wrong with all of that, I can't think straight."

"We can't fight our nature. Finding and taking a mate, it's just what we do, who we are," Terry said. "Zander didn't want to lose your friendship which is why he's been so out of sorts since we met. He wanted me from the moment we met, but he didn't want to hurt you. You mean so much to him, please don't let this change how things are between you two. I'll stay out of your way, you won't even know I'm in Zander's life."

The wolf growled low and mean and then barked, a clear warning even to someone like Sully, who jumped but held his ground. Terry had the feeling he'd said something to upset his mate, but he was desperate to make Sully understand.

"I'll know!" Sully yelled after a long moment. "How can it not change anything? I mean the wolf thing, yeah, a huge shock, but you reckon Zander's always been like this so that's not enough to stop me being friends with him. I can handle that. But this, you," he said waving his hand in Terry's direction reminding him he was still naked under the covers. "That's fucking too sick to handle and I will never accept my friend sleeping with the likes of you. Tell your *mate* I'll put in for an immediate transfer. I can't stand to be around him anymore."

Zander growled again, but it was too late. Sully was gone from the door way and mere seconds later Terry heard the slam of the front door. Bowing his head, Terry let tears pour down his face. His heart ached with the hatred in Sully's voice. Even though he understood that there was nothing he and Zander could do to change their nature, he never wanted to be the cause of Zander losing the one man in his life he could call a friend.

Ever the optimist, Terry had hoped that over time, Sully would accept it because of the long term friendship he'd shared with his partner. But now it looked like that would never be possible.

There was a shimmer in the air, and Zander was back in human form. Comforting arms wrapped around his waist and Terry found himself pulled against Zander's wide chest. For some reason that made him cry even more. He should be comforting his mate, not the other way around, even if Terry couldn't deny how good it felt.

"It's okay, little one. It's okay, I knew this would happen." Zander's voice was soothing, but Terry could feel the agony his mate was feeling. It was like a sharp pain that ran through his heart, making it difficult for Terry to breathe.

"I just don't understand why," Terry sobbed, clinging onto Zander like a lifeline. "Why does he hate me so much? How can he turn against you after all you've been through? You even shifted to try and show him you couldn't help us being mates. Our biggest secret and still he wouldn't understand. How can someone have so much hate inside?"

"I shifted because I couldn't control myself anymore. He made me so angry and all I wanted to do was wrap my teeth around his throat, just to stop him from talking his shit. You stopped me from doing that, and believe me I really appreciate it, although if you ever put yourself between me and a gun again, I will tan your hide," Zander said. "I've listened to Sully put down gays for years and never said anything. Maybe I should have, but I didn't have a reason to before, and that's on me, not you. None of this was your fault. It's not you he hates, it's what you represent."

"I honestly didn't want you to lose your friend," Terry said, his sobs easing as he thought about what Zander had said.

"I gained a mate, and you're all I will ever need," Zander said and bless him, Terry could tell the man was trying to inject some happiness into his voice. "Now how soon can you move in with me?"

"Move in with you?" Terry's mind was fuddled enough as it was. Just thirty minutes before he was thinking about slipping out of Zander's house so he didn't have to face any negative morning aftermath. Well, they'd had the negativity all right, but it hadn't come from Zander. Fucking Sully.

Terry thought about his small dingy apartment. Although he did his best to keep it clean, it was never going to be more than what it was – a small shack in a bad neighborhood. It was on a month to month lease, Terry always hoping he could find somewhere better within his budget. Basically he could leave anytime and the landlord wouldn't care.

"I told you before that I want to be a mate you can be proud of. Yeah, your friends might think it's a bit weird you moving in so soon, but little one, I need you here, with me. Please tell me you'll move in with me."

Terry was going to have to come up with some form of defense when his mate used his deeply sensual voice in such a persuasive manner. How could he stand to say no when Zander was saying everything he wanted to hear? The plain and simple truth was that he couldn't, and once Terry accepted that, he knew what his answer would be.

"How many days off do you have?" He said. It wasn't as though he had a lot of stuff. A couple of trailer loads should do it. And the smile on Zander's face, as the wickedly handsome man bent to give him another kiss, told Terry he had said exactly the right thing.

Chapter Fourteen

Zander parked under the police building and took a deep calming breath. He and Terry had taken three days together and in Zander's opinion it was by far the best three days of his life. Terry was funny, kind, and already Zander felt his place was looking more like a home than a house. His mate could cook, had a wicked sense of humor and the sex...okay, probably not the best idea thinking about that just before he went into work. Zander adjusted the swelling in his pants and thought about getting out of his vehicle.

No one would ever know it to look at him, but Zander was a little anxious. He and Sully were known around the precinct as being hard working detectives and ladies men – in every sense of the word. Sully's reaction to Terry had been bad enough. Zander didn't think he could take it, if he got shunned by other officers as well. He didn't have many friends on the force, as he'd explained to his mate, but he had been on chatting terms with everyone he worked with.

"Stop being an idiot," he told himself firmly, getting out of the SUV and striding up familiar steps, just as he had done a million times before. He had a job to do, criminals to catch, cases to work on. If he had to do it on his own, well hell, he could do it. Zander knew he could put up with anything so long as he had Terry to go home to at night. He held onto that thought as he entered the building.

Marching through to his office, Zander smiled, and nodded when people called out to him, everything apparently normal. He felt a bit of a pang when he saw Sully wasn't at his desk, but then knowing what he did about his former best friend, Zander wasn't really surprised. Sully had probably taken personal leave. Determined not to worry about something he could do nothing about, Zander sat down, pulling out files, preparing to work just like any other day.

"Samuels, in my office now."

Crap. The Captain. Had Sully honestly put in for his transfer already? Without even trying to talk to him again? Ignoring the curious looks from some of the others in the large bull pen of an office, Zander stood back up, straightened his jacket and managed to walk over to the Captain's glass encased booth showing a lot more confidence than he felt.

The Captain indicated that he was to close the door, and to sit down, which Zander did. The Captain was a big man in his own right, although not as big as Zander. At six foot two, and nearly sixty years of age, the older man still retained much of the muscle tone he'd developed when he was walking the beat. But nothing could hide the signs of aging, the tired lines around the man's mouth, the weary slope of his shoulders. But those pale blue eyes were as sharp as ever and right now they were pinning Zander to his seat.

"I've had a complaint about your conduct." Well, at least the Captain didn't waste any words. Unfortunately the words he'd heard didn't make any sense to Zander.

"A complaint, Sir, what about?"

"Conduct unbecoming a police officer. Specifically sexual harassment. It's serious stuff, Samuel's."

"Sir, I don't know...I don't understand." Zander was stunned. He never went near anyone at work, never flirted with the ladies, although enough flirted with him. And he wouldn't have gone near any of the males he worked with, even if a few of them were gay.

The Captain opened a file on his desk. "According to the statement, three days ago you invited your partner, Roberts, to your home. He claims when he got there you were in bed with another slim male, and made lewd and crude suggestions about him joining you. He said you got angry with him when he refused and that he had to pull his gun so he could leave, although no shots were fired. He's seeking an immediate transfer due to emotional trauma."

"That's lies, all fucking lies," Zander snarled, gripping the arms of his chair in an effort to stop himself from shifting. His wolf had become harder to control since meeting their mate and the animal apparently held a grudge against Sully for the nasty things his partner had said about his mate. It seemed his animal spirit may have had a point, about Sully's grudge at least. But shifting in the office was not an option. "I would never do anything like that. I can't believe Sully would say such a thing."

The Captain looked at him sternly and then referred back to his file. "Is it true you are in a relationship with a Terry Martin, who was recently held as a suspect in the assault of Norman Biggs?"

"Yes sir. Terry was cleared of those charges because the actions were self-defense." Zander had promised Terry he wouldn't deny him as a mate, and he intended to keep that promise.

The Captain put down his file and leaned his elbows on the desk, fixing Zander with a strong gaze. "You know your partner has issues with the gay community. Why did you invite Sully over to your house when your friend was there?"

"I didn't sir." Zander thought for a moment and then explained. "Sully saw me and Terry at a local restaurant the night before. He made some rude comments about me being with Terry, and Terry gave him some excuse because he didn't want to out me to my partner. I never asked Sully to come to my house the following day. He came because he had some bee in his bonnet about me being seen with someone a bit...flamboyant. We had words, nothing sexual I promise you. He left and his last words were that he was putting in for a transfer because he couldn't stand to be around me anymore. I haven't heard from him since."

Leaning back in his chair, the Captain sighed. "What a fucking mess. Look, the way things stand, Sully has laid a formal complaint which will have to go through the proper channels. You have an appointment with IA in an hour and all I can suggest is that you tell the truth and let them decide what's going to

happen from there. I've got to tell you that this doesn't look good."

Zander was well aware of that. Sexual harassment in the workforce was a serious issue and while he totally understood how horrible it could be for a victim, he never thought he would be on the end of a complaint. He'd never ever approached anybody, male or female, that he worked with because of these type of complications.

"Am I being stood down?" He asked.

The Captain shook his head. "Not at this point, no. The allegation made suggested verbal rather than any physical assault. Sully admitted to pulling a gun on you, although I am failing to see why he would if you two were just having words. Don't doubt this is a serious matter but I don't see the point in the department paying for you to sit at home. It goes without saying that you won't be paired with Sully anymore and I won't be assigning you a new partner until this matter is cleared up."

Zander nodded his head and stood up. He couldn't hope for any better than that until the IA had completed its investigation. Not even sure if he wanted another partner, as he'd never worked with anyone except Sully, Zander went back to his desk and started looking at his files. He just hoped his little mate was having a better day. Maybe if his interview with the IA didn't take very long, he could go and surprise Terry with some lunch. The thought of seeing his little mate again made him feel a lot better, and Zander settled into his work.

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Terry fussed with his scarf and kept his head down when he heard the door of his studio open and the heavy clomp of man-sized stilettos hitting the floor. Morgana, Lucy and Davina were all due for fittings today and although he had scheduled them all separately, the three ladies always came in together. Knowing they liked nothing more than to gossip and tease, while scoffing down the treats that Terry provided from a bakery two doors down, Terry just hoped they would be too busy with their own

lives to notice anything different about him. He should have known he would be out of luck.

"There's something different about our boy, don't you think," Davina said in her typical rasp. God, that woman needed to stop smoking. Terry just kept working, he was putting in the final stitches on Lucy's dress – red of course.

"Hmmm," Morgana said, and Terry felt the three women circling him. "What's with the scarf Terry? It's not like you to hide your lovely neck."

"Can't a boy want to wear something different for a change?" Terry said, finishing off the stitch and holding the dress up, looking over it with a critical eye. He refused to look at any of his friends, reminding himself he didn't have a neon sign over his head saying "I've been fucked" in big letters. Although the state Zander left his neck might give things away. Terry couldn't hide the smile he got when he thought of his big rugged mate. For a man so big, so tough and so Alpha, the guy sure had some cute little traits. Covering Terry's neck with hickeys before he went to work was not one of them though. Possessive handsome bastard, he thought fondly.

"Oooh, there is something, look at that smile," Lucy squealed and that so didn't sound right coming from someone who worked as a butcher during the day.

Morgana grabbed Terry around the shoulders, turning him around, tilting Terry's head up with a beefy finger. "You met someone?"

Terry felt his face flush bright red, and nodded.

"Damn, you went to bed with him," Davina said, watching him just as closely. Terry managed another quick nod.

"Praise the Lord. Hallelujah, it's about bloody time," Lucy grinned. "Ladies we need coffee, some of those delicious donuts I see Terry got for us, and you young man had better sit right down and tell us all the juicy details. Was he hung like a horse?"

"Did he treat you right?" Davina was such a doll.

"He didn't hurt you did he? 'Cos if he did he'll have us to answer to."

"I want to know what this mystery man looks like. Have we met him? Come on, come on, details boy, details."

Shaking his head and trying not to laugh, Terry carefully put down Lucy's dress and went over to make himself a cup of coffee. He wasn't going to get any work done until his friends had satisfied themselves that he was happy, fine and well-fucked. And really, how hard was it to talk about his mate, when Zander was pretty much all he could think about.

Chapter Fifteen

Zander hurried towards Terry's studio, which was tucked down an alley just off the main street. The IA interview had been as good and as bad as it could be. One woman sympathetic and prepared to believe his side of the story, her male partner, another homophobe, demanding that Terry be brought in for questioning. The fact that Sully mentioned the gun was a huge deal, and of course Zander didn't have a plausible explanation as to why Sully had felt the need to take it out of its holster.

From the tone of the man's voice, Zander knew the idiot was prepared to hate Terry before he'd even met him, and he shuddered at the thought of subjecting his little mate to more problems. Zander was thrilled that Terry had been brought up with loving parents, who gave him the confidence to live as he pleased. Zander didn't want his happy Omega being subjected to any more sneers and put downs. Not that he had any choice in the matter.

Turning down the alley, Zander caught sight of a pudgy man, loitering by the door of Terry's workplace. The man looked up and Zander's eyes widened, but before he could open his mouth, Norman Biggs hurried off the other way. What the hell was that cretin doing near his mate?

Growling, in full protection mode, Zander reached the door and pushed it open quietly, his eyes searching the room quickly, looking for his mate. The room was partially partitioned and Zander easily caught the sound of at least three voices all talking loudly from the other side of it.

Terry, you here?

"Hang on a minute, ladies, I think I heard the door," Zander heard Terry say. Quick footsteps came around the partition and Terry was suddenly there in front of him. In his bright blue Henley and white jeans, Terry looked good enough to eat, although Zander scowled at the scarf Terry had thrown around his neck. Little shit was hiding his marks.

"Zander, I thought you'd be busy working today." Terry's smile faltered a bit when he saw Zander's scowl. He fingered the ends of his scarf, looking so shy and Zander's heart did a flip. He couldn't be mad at his mate even if Terry was being a sneak in covering up Zander's carefully placed indications of ownership. He'd have fun placing a few more, higher up, later on.

"I've come to take you to lunch, if you're free," he said resisting the urge to grab Terry close and ravish those wonderfully full lips. But footsteps clattering on the floor, behind Terry stopped him. Within seconds the three drag queens Zander remembered from Club Blue came around the corner and were eying him like chopped liver.

"Detective Samuels," the one Zander remembered as being known as Morgana said with a snide smile. "So you're the one who has snagged our lovely boy. I've heard so many delicious things about you. I must say I'm surprised. You don't strike me as the loving and caring type."

Loving and caring? That's what his mate had been saying about him to his friends? Zander felt a pang of relief. He must be doing something right.

"Terry brings out the best in me," Zander said with a professional smile. If anything Terry looked even more embarrassed and Zander felt his cock rise as Terry's cheeks flamed redder still. He hoped his little mate never lost his innocent look. It was so damn sexy.

"You certainly have the equipment to make a man happy in the short term," Davina said, eying his crotch with gleaming eyes. "But are you going to stick around the long term? That's what we want to know. Our friend can't get his creative groove on if he's nursing a broken heart."

"I'm not going to hurt him," Zander said hotly giving in to his desire to hold Terry close. Damn humans would never understand that Zander would rather cut his arm off than hurt Terry again. Terry's arm snaking around his waist helped him feel better. Fuck it, everything about Terry made him feel better

and Zander knew he'd get through his crisis with Sully purely and simply because Terry was in his corner. Richard was right, having the Omega in his life did make him stronger and Zander raised his head, meeting the curious gazes with a clear conscience.

"You're a good looking man," Lucy said suggestively. How did that woman manage to wink with such incredibly long eyelashes? "You'll have been around the block a few times, I'm sure. How do we know this isn't your standard spiel? Wooing young innocents, then leaving them when you get bored."

Zander swallowed the urge to growl. How dare this...this...person, question what he had with his mate? If they'd been wolf shifters they would have understood. But these people were just being fucking nosy, and rude.

They care about me.

Zander didn't know if it was his mate's sweet voice in his head, or the feeling of Terry's soft dark hair against his shirt, but he felt his anger drain away. Terry was right. These bristling drag queens, that could put the fear of God in anyone, did care about their friend, and if he didn't want to upset his mate, then he needed to keep his temper.

"Ladies," he said with what he'd been told was a disarming smile. "Nothing I could say would convince you that I am good enough for your friend. I get that. For my part, I'm glad Terry has people like you looking out for him. Hopefully, you'll trust me over time. Now if you'll excuse us, I want to take my boyfriend out for lunch."

"Boyfriend?" Three squealing voices looked so incongruous coming from such large people. Only Terry was quiet, but Zander could feel his warmth and that was enough.

"Boyfriend," Zander said firmly.

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OMG he called me his boyfriend, in front of the Divas. Terry wanted to do a very unmanly happy dance, but he resisted. No

point in looking like a total loon, although later he might just have to let it out. Feeling unbelievably content, Terry was happy to let Zander lead him back out onto the main road, and then across it towards the Pizzeria that Richard had taken him too. Was that really only four days before? Terry felt like his whole life had changed in just that short space of time.

Zander was quiet, but Terry had come to accept that was his mate's way in the three days they had spent alone. Unless the man was in flirty mode, and then it was like someone had flicked a switch inside of his mate and he was electrifying. Sexy. Devastating and yep, Terry admitted to himself, impossible to say no to. Not that Terry ever would. He loved his introduction to the world of sex and was a keen student for all that Zander could teach him.

But for the most part, Zander was a quiet man. He didn't chatter to simply fill a silence. When he did talk he nearly always had something important to say. The little bits of his life that Zander had shared gave Terry a bleak picture of a lone wolf, who'd had to hide his true nature for more years than Terry had been alive. His mate had cut most ties with his family when he'd left home, determined not to be pulled back into pack politics, or give in to pressure from his family to have pups.

Until he'd met Sully at the Police Academy, Zander had been used to being alone, moving from place to place and rarely forming friendships with anyone. Houston was the longest he'd ever lived anywhere apart from his home pack and Zander had mentioned that he may have to move again within the next ten years because of his failure to age. Apparently his police records showed him in his mid-thirties, but in actuality Zander was closer to sixty and yet he had the appearance of a sexy twenty five year old.

Keeping his own counsel, content just to be out with his mate, Terry let himself be seated, and watched with a fondness that was growing by the day as Zander ordered his favorite foods. There was nothing wrong with his old wolf's memory that's for

sure but then as he and Zander both would live until they were around five hundred, that wasn't surprising.

He was halfway through his creamy fettucine with chicken and spinach, when Zander spoke.

"Sweetie, I hate to wreck our peaceful lunch, but I have a bit of a problem and it could be a problem for you too."

Okay, well clearly calm was a transient state of being. Terry felt his good mood drop and his stomach threatened to expel the delicious pasta. Putting down his fork, he took a deep breath and then met his mate's eyes hiding his fear. If his mate was going to dump him, or whatever other bad news he might have about their mating, then Terry would meet his fate head on.

"It's nothing like that, I swear. I could never give you up, or what we have together," Zander said softly, his hand snaking out and covering Terry's on the table between them. It was the first time Zander had ever touched him in a public place and Terry's bouncy spirit just jumped back up again even as he cursed himself for forgetting their mind link. With being together so closely since they were blessed with that connection, it had barely been used.

"What's wrong? How can I help?"

Zander smiled and Terry's spirit bounced up further. Nothing could be wrong with the world when his mate had a smile on his face. But then Zander told him about what Sully had done, how he was effectively sabotaging Zander's career and Terry's wolf went into overdrive. How dare that jumped up piece of All-American handsomeness do something so cruel? Terry's wolf, usually a placid and quiet creature, was all for hunting the man down and biting him, hard.

"The guys at the IA want to talk to you. I'm a bit worried about how you'll handle it," Zander said, the pat on his hand turning into a full scale hold, which Terry was grateful for.

"Won't you be there?" Terry could lie through his eye teeth if he had to, but he'd cope better if Zander was with him.

But Zander shook his head. "No. They asked me to bring you in this afternoon and they're going to want to speak to you alone. It shouldn't take long, but it's just..." Zander trailed off.

"What's wrong?" Terry asked again.

"The guy who will be interviewing you, he thinks like Sully."

Terry looked down at his tight clothes. Nothing too outlandish, he had to work after all.

"So..." he said with a drawl. "It's probably good I found a scarf then isn't it. Think I've got time to put on some make up before I have to go before the execution squad?"

Zander may be laughing, which gave Terry's body a pleasant hum, but he was actually serious. If he was going to be hated for who he was, then he was going to go into that meeting with all guns blazing.

Chapter Sixteen

Terry hated the police building on sight. The memory of being taken in through the back door in handcuffs hadn't left him, and he didn't think it would any time soon. It wasn't much better walking through the front door, even with Zander by his side. The big man stayed close, which was one thing, but Terry wanted to disappear under his mate's arm. He didn't sense any hateful feelings although more than one curious look was thrown his way.

Zander led the way past the admin desk, and then out back, down a long corridor, before opening the door to a large room filled with desks, about half of which were occupied. No one seemed to pay too much attention to his mate, but Terry could feel eyes boring into him from all sides and as they crossed the room he forced himself to walk tall. He was awesome and he just had to remember that.

Stopping by a desk that was cluttered with files and what looked like random pieces of paper, Zander said, "take a seat, I'll ring the idiots and see if they're ready for you."

Zander plopped down in the seat behind the desk, and taking the seat beside it, Terry looked over his mate's workspace, trying to glean more clues about his man. Like his home, Zander's workspace was impersonal with nothing on it aside from his office tools, a computer shoved to the side, and a small picture of Zander and Sully which was probably taken when the two men graduated from the Academy. His mate looked sinfully delicious in a uniform.

Terry could have suggested some plants, or a few knick knacks to make the space a bit more personable, but glancing around the room, he saw that everyone else had the same drab spaces. He gave a discrete shudder. He would never be able to work in somewhere so...professional.

"Okay little one?" Zander whispered beside him and Terry nodded. Seeing his work space, and the environment that Zander spent so much time in all added to the puzzle that was

his mate. Terry was, by far the most colorful person in the office and he felt underdressed. For him at least.

"A little young to be a drug dealer. This a new informant, aye Samuels?" A rough voice sounded from the other side of the desk and Terry looked up to see an average looking man – brown hair, brown eyes, plain face and a brown suit. Definitely average.

"Watch your tongue, McKenzie. Terry's my boyfriend." Zander didn't look up from the papers he was working on as he answered, so only Terry could enjoy the look of shock, horror, and then as Zander slowly raised his head to look at the hapless man, the bland friendliness that came over McKenzie's face.

"I didn't know you were gay," McKenzie said, looking around as though he needed support.

"Wasn't any of your business," Zander said dismissively.

"But Sully, your dates, was that all lies?" Terry thought he should feel a bit sorry for McKenzie. Clearly this was a man who lived vicariously through office gossip and the gossip about Zander was about to head in a new direction.

"A man can swing on both sides of the fence," Terry said with a grin. "At the moment he's swinging my way."

"Samuel's has never even had a girlfriend. He has one-time dates and that's it. The gossip mills run to a different girl every week. Girls. Not males." McKenzie looked at Terry as if he held the answer to the biggest problem in the universe.

Terry looked across at Zander who was still working on his papers. McKenzie didn't appear to be someone important to his mate. Leaning forward in his chair, Terry beckoned the man forward and leaned into his ear.

"Once you've had dick, you'll never go back. You should give it a try sometime," he whispered so only McKenzie could hear, although given his Alpha status, Zander probably could too. Did his mate's lip twitch? Terry couldn't be sure, the movement was so fast.

"Really?" McKenzie looked stunned and horrified all in one go and that wasn't an easy look to achieve.

"Just try it," Terry said, leaning back and running a hand over his slim torso. He knew he looked good. He refused to leave the house unless his did and his work depended on it. Apparently McKenzie thought so too although after giving him and Zander another long look, he scurried away.

"You're incorrigible, mate," Zander said quietly, still looking busy.

"And you like it," Terry said just as quietly. He didn't think anyone could hear them. There was like a dead zone of empty desks around Zander's workspace although he saw McKenzie talking to another dark looking man by the door. Both men saw him watching them and disappeared out the door.

Terry sat quietly, not wanting to disturb his mate while the man was working. He spent his time imagining what he would do with the plain beige walls, tiled floor and untidy desks. The place could benefit from some plants, color on the walls and some filing cabinets. He was deep into imagining what sort of art he would install, when Zander's phone rang.

The man tensed, flicking a worried look at Terry before he answered it. A couple of grunts later, and Zander put the phone down and stood up.

"You're on," he said bluntly.

Once again Terry followed his mate through the room, down another long corridor before the man stopped in front of an unremarkable office door. To his surprise, Zander looked around quickly and then pulled Terry into his arms. Shocked, it took Terry a moment to respond, but then his arms seemed to get a life of their own and he quickly hugged his mate back. Zander's body was fast becoming a port in any storm for him, and he could never get enough of it.

"Don't let them get to you," Zander whispered into his hair. "Don't let anything they say upset you. Please, I couldn't bear it if they hurt you in any way."

"None of this is your fault, my mate," Terry said quietly, confident that Zander would hear him. "I know how fabulous I am, my Mother tells me so. I don't need to let the opinions of people that don't count ruin my day."

"You are. Fabulous I mean," Zander whispered. "I can't do without you."

"You won't have to," Terry promised, giving Zander one more squeeze before stepping away. Zander knocked on the door, his face terse and hard once more. Someone yelled out "enter" from within the office and Zander opened the door, ushering Terry inside.

Another brown/beige office, Terry thought before taking stock of the two people waiting for him.

"My boyfriend, Terry Martin."

"You can go, Detective Samuels," the woman behind the desk said. "We'll take it from here."

Zander nodded but Terry could see his mate wasn't happy. He guessed Zander wouldn't go very far. A moment later the door clicked shut and Terry was left facing a rather pleasant woman. She was probably about thirty five, blond short hair and dressed in a nice crisp navy suit. The man beside her radiated hostility that Terry could sense from ten foot away. Deciding that attack was the best form of defense, Terry strode over to the chair in front of the desk and sat down, smiling at the woman.

"Hi there, my name's Terry. Do you have any paper and a pen I can use? I forgot to get some from Zander before we came in."

"Yes, of course," the woman said with a bemused smile. She fossicked around in a desk drawer and pulled out a legal pad and a pen.

Terry smiled his thanks, checked that the pen worked and then looked up again.

"Now can I have your names please, and designation?"

"I'm Lieutenant Melissa Williams," the woman said, just as the man said, "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Thank you Lieutenant Williams," Terry said with a smile. Then he turned to the man.

"I know my rights," he said seriously this time. "I am recording your names and will take notes about this conversation, which I am entitled to do seeing as I am not a suspect or being interviewed about any crime. My lawyer friend, Richard Thorne told me it was a good idea to take the notes, seeing as I have a bit of a fluffy memory. Now you are?"

"You don't need a lawyer," Melissa said. "You aren't in any trouble, this is an internal investigation."

"I know," Terry said putting the smile back on his face. "It's about Sully and his homophobic attitude. You know hate crimes are illegal but when you look as wonderful as I do, you just attract those sorts sometimes."

He turned back to the man who was glowering. "What was your name and rank again?"

"Sargent Croydon," the man spat out.

Terry carefully wrote that down, determined not to rush. It was a simple power trick, but effective.

"Right," he said, once he'd finished writing. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

"How long have you known Detective Samuels and Detective Roberts?" Croydon asked.

"Well," Terry said, leaning back in his chair and crossing one ankle over his other knee. He knew it wouldn't do Zander any good to have these two people know how short their relationship was. They would never understand the mating concept.

Deflection was in order. "I can't say I know Detective Roberts at all. I mean the man hates my sheer existence and I've only spoken to him that day he turned up at Zander's house uninvited. I've never seen a man so..." He let his words run off as he tried to think of the right term to use.

"Upset?" Melissa supplied helpful.

Terry snorted. "Try full scale, about to have a heart attack and shoot somebody angry. I've never seen someone go so red in the face before. I thought I was going to just *die* when he started waving his gun about. Poor little old me, in bed with no clothes on when this mad man just bursts in and starts screaming at my boyfriend. I mean, how do you think *I* felt?"

"What were they yelling about? Detectives Samuels and Roberts?"

"Detective Roberts got some idea that Zander was trying on gay shoes in an effort to get a promotion. At least I think that was what his problem was. All sounded a bit farfetched for me."

"I work for the Police Commissioner's brother, Madam Morgana, as a dress designer." He added when both Melissa and Croydon looked at him blankly. "Roberts thought that Zander was sleeping with me in an effort to impress your big boss."

"That would hardly be a reason for Detective Roberts to pull out his gun." Croydon said.

"You're telling me. I mean what man pulls out a gun at the sight of two men in bed together. Pure homophobe, I tell you. Couldn't get much worse." Terry knew he was laying things on thick, but he had to get these two away from the gun angle. There was no way that he could explain about Zander turning all wolfy on the bed.

"So you do admit that you and Detective Samuels were in bed together when Detective Roberts arrived?" Croydon said.

"The nasty man woke us up!" Terry said crossly. "Like I need to be woken up by some mad man spouting crap about abominations and things like that. I don't need his shit. I think

Zander handled things fairly well considering how rude Detective Roberts was being. I mean no one invited him over. He definitely wasn't supposed to be in our bedroom. Zander hates it if anyone sees my body and I certainly don't want some gay-hater drooling over my boyfriend's chiseled abs. We're exclusive you know."

"So why didn't you make a report to the police about the threat with the gun and the hatred you claim Detective Roberts showed you?" Melissa looked like she was sympathetic but Terry wasn't going to trust her.

"Zander asked me not to. I mean, I was a mess when Detective Roberts left. All that yelling, screaming, and insults flying around. All before coffee. Not how I like to start my day. I don't know how Zander stayed so calm especially when that horrible man pulled his gun out. But Zander told me that Detective Roberts was too nice a man to actually shoot me, and what was I meant to do? Zander said that if I laid a complaint then his best friend in, like the whole world, would get in trouble, and no one was physically hurt, so I didn't worry about it. It would take more than a few insults to get me down."

"Detective Roberts claimed that his partner invited him over to the house, and then insisted that he join you in some weird threesome," Croydon persisted.

"Weird threesome, really?" Terry arched a brow, confident he could pull it off. He'd practiced in the mirror. "If you think it's weird then you are not doing it right. But no, seriously. Everyone knows that Detective Roberts hates people like me. I hardly think encouraging him to jump into bed with us was going to be a good idea, even if Zander or I fancied the man that way. Which we don't." Terry added for emphasis.

"So what you're saying, then, if I've heard your story right," Melissa said, throwing Croydon a dark look, "is that Detective Roberts came to your house..."

"Well, it's Zander's house, but I live there with him, yes."

"Came to Detective Samuels' house, broke in..."

"No he had a key. Zander had given him a key years ago as a security thing," Terry supplied helpfully.

"Saw you two in bed together." Melissa stopped as if expecting Terry to interrupt again, but Terry just nodded. She had got that part right.

"Got angry, yelled abusive words at you and Detective Samuels, pulled out his gun at one point because he was so angry at the thought of his friend sleeping with you, and then what? Left?"

"Pretty much," Terry said. "He told Zander that he couldn't stand to look at the man anymore because my boyfriend was sleeping with me, and that he was going to put in for a transfer."

"Detective Roberts has been on the force for ten years. He's a decorated officer and has a clean record. I don't think a man like that would pull a gun on anyone, just because he was angry."

Shit Croydon was like a dog with a bone, and he was clearly not on Zander's side. Or Terry's for that matter. Terry thought quickly.

"I take it you don't have a lot experience with hate, Sargent," he said, picking his way slowly. "Personally, I don't have a hateful bone in my body. But I've been on the other end of it more times than I can count. Hate is what causes grown men to pick on someone so much smaller, just because they act and dress differently. I've had knives pulled on me and Detective Roberts' gun is not the first one I've seen waved in front of me in a threatening manner."

"Texas has a hard line on gay rights, but they are my rights, upheld by Federal law," Terry continued. "Zander and I might have problems finding someone to marry us here, but we can always go somewhere else, and our marriage will be legal under the law of the land. Detective Roberts has a right to own a gun, not only because of the work he does, but also because Texans like their guns. I accept that. But I'm not doing anything illegal and neither is my boyfriend. Unfortunately, like everything else that is bigger in Texas, so is the hate some people feel about what we do in the privacy of our bedroom."

Melissa smiled, and gave him a nod, but Croydon still wasn't convinced. He shuffled some papers on the desk in front of him and then said, "It says here that Detectives Roberts and Samuels often used to double date, with women. Could that explain the shock Roberts might have felt at seeing you in Samuels' bed?"

"Zander's also been going out of town and getting his jollies with other men for years, Sargent. Detective Roberts didn't know about that, although he does now." Terry wasn't going to let the thought about the men or women that Zander had been with in the past upset him, although Croydon had clearly brought it up to rattle him. Sneaky shit.

"But seeing you two being intimate in bed together would have to have been a shock." Damn that Croydon and how dare he use the term intimate like it was a dirty word.

"I'm sure I would get a shock if I came into your bedroom, Sargent," Terry said reminding himself not to show any anger. "If you go into anyone's private space, without invitation I might add, then you can expect to be slightly surprised at least. As far as I'm concerned Detective Roberts clearly overstepped the friendship boundaries he had with Zander, and got an eyeful. His fault. He should have waited for Zander in the living room like any other visitor would do."

"But if Roberts saw you two, engaged in...sex play, then that would have justified his anger, don't you think?"

"Detective Roberts has been a homophobe for years, as I am sure your records show," Terry said clearly. "He didn't get a flash of prick. Zander was wearing his pants and he'd covered me with a blanket. We were not touching, kissing, screwing or anything else your mind can come up with. We were in bed together. Roberts woke us up when he came into the house. End of story."

"I still don't understand why Detective Roberts got the idea he was being propositioned. Sexual harassment is a serious complaint." Croydon was being a bulldog, but Terry had to admit the man had a point. Zander put it down to Sully wanting to ruin his career – a career he had built with his friend.

"For the same reason he thought it was okay to draw a gun on an unarmed man, and be rude and verbally abusive in Zander's home. The sight of me and Zander together upset him, maybe it was a trigger from some unknown traumatic event or something. Who knows? But I will state this as clearly as I know how. Detective Roberts had no right to come into our home, no right to judge what he assumed by seeing Zander and me in bed together, and it's as clear as the nose on my face that Roberts wanted to sabotage his friend's career after learning about me, and is using you two to do it."

Hmm, Melissa didn't like that idea, and even Croydon looked a little uneasy. After shuffling some papers, he was given a few PR words that included thanking him for his time, and then Terry was told he could leave.

Stepping out of the office he saw Zander waiting for him, leaning against the wall, worry etched over his handsome face. Seeing Terry, Zander peeled himself off the wall, and without even bothering to see if anyone else was around, he wrapped his body around Terry's and hung on tight.

"I'm so proud of you," he breathed in Terry's hair.

Chapter Seventeen

Zander needed Terry. Not like in, "oh it would be nice to be with someone," but a deep down clawing sexual need that wouldn't be assuaged until he was balls deep in Terry's tight little ass. There was nothing that could have torn him away from the office door while Terry was being interviewed and he thanked the Fates that he'd been able to hear everything his mate had been asked, and how Terry had responded. The strength Terry had shown, the control on his anger that Zander had felt through their bond, was totally belied by Terry's unassuming looks. His mate couldn't have handled the situation any better.

He knew there was nothing he could do about Sully or his accusations, although they still hurt. Now the case was reduced to he-said-he-said, Zander hoped it would be resolved quickly. There was a part of him that worried that Sully would get into trouble for pulling the gun, and for insulting a member of the public, but he really couldn't be bothered thinking about that now.

Hurrying Terry through the building, Zander headed for the parking garage. He wasn't able to wait until he got them both home. He was craving Terry's passion, his lack of inhibitions and the way he melted and moaned under Zander's touch. He knew that Terry had been hurt by Croydon's fucking comments about Zander's past, and Zander needed...he needed to remind himself and Terry that there would never be anyone else for either one of them. That he would never want anyone the way he wanted his mate.

With that thought in mind, Zander was surprised he managed to get them to his SUV before picking up his mate and plundering those full lips he was coming to crave with a passion. Terry didn't seem surprised, welcoming Zander with an open mouth, a long moan that Zander eagerly swallowed, his tight body plastered against Zander's so that nothing could pass between them. Zander's cock had swollen so fast his head spun, and for a long moment he closed his eyes and lost himself to the sensation of pleasure.

Not breaking their lip lock, Zander's fingers found the edges of Terry's scarf, and he felt his way to the casual knot, yanking it off when the knot yielded under his fingers. Stroking his fingers down Terry's neck, he was pleased to feel patches of slightly roughened skin. His mate was still wearing his marks, although it wasn't nearly enough to appease his need.

"Zander please." Terry's hushed plea was music to Zander's ears. Unlocking his vehicle one handed, Zander climbed in, still holding Terry and fumbling with the switch on the seat so he could push it back. Terry wasn't helping with his delicious little moans and the way his body wiggled all over Zander's chest as though the little man was trying to burrow through his clothes. Zander's cock was trapped in his pants, fast hitting the point of pain, and he knew he had to move things along.

"Take your pants off, precious," he said firmly, drinking in Terry's beautifully fine flushed face. Puffy lips were such a good look on his man, and while he would love nothing more than to see those same lips stretched wide around his cock, he wanted to be inside his mate with an intensity that was frightening.

Terry slipped off Zander's lap, kicking off his shoes and shimmying off his jeans. Zander was pleased to see that his mate had foregone underwear for the day. Nothing inflamed him more than his sweet mate's collection of sinful undergarments, but Zander had made a vow when he'd gotten his first peek at Terry's bright pink pair, that he would never rip them. He wasn't sure he'd be able to stop himself right now though.

Flipping open the button on his suit pants, Zander pulled the zip harshly, almost catching himself in the process. But the urgency he felt, that frigging need, it hadn't lessened any and as Terry revealed his soft skin and slender behind, it fed Zander's need. Impatient he grabbed his mate with one hand, pulling him to straddle him once more, his other hand holding his aching erection steady as Terry readied himself and then sunk down on to him.

"By the Fates, I love that you're an Omega," he groaned as his cock responded to the heat and silky smoothness of Terry's insides. Terry just grinned and rolled his hips, his innocent movements designed to inflame. Not that Zander needed any encouragement.

"Hold on," he said roughly and grabbing Terry's hips, he set a punishing pace, lifting and dropping Terry in sync with the upward thrusts of his hips. It was clumsy at best, but then that's what sex in a vehicle was – clumsy, messy but so fucking necessary. At least it was to Zander.

A wildness overtook him, his wolf crowding his senses and pushing him hard. Uncaring about the bruises he knew his fingers would leave on Terry's alabaster skin, Zander pushed and pushed, his hips driven by a force he couldn't control. Terry's arms were loose around his neck, his head thrown back as he submitted to the pummeling he was getting. Zander's wolf eyed the long arch of his mate's neck and Zander had to bite, he had to reestablish his claim on his delicious Omega.

Pulling Terry hard against his chest, Zander felt his teeth elongate and he ripped the neck of his mate's Henley seeking his mating mark. As his balls tightened to the point of no return, Zander sank his teeth into Terry's skin and Terry cried out, the bliss in his voice indescribable. Zander's orgasm rushed through his body as Terry's blood hit his tongue, that tight little ass clenching around his cock at the same time as Terry's spunk was mashed into his shirt. He carefully removed his teeth, lapping at Terry's skin to close the wound as the aftershocks flowed through him.

Terry slumped forward, resting his head on Zander's chest, panting hard. Zander's breathing pattern wasn't much better. Strange emotions wafted around his brain. A soothing relaxing afterglow for sure. Sex with Terry always left that type of feeling. But it was tempered with so much more. Zander wasn't sure if the emotions were his, or those of his mate, but they felt wonderful, right, and not for the first time, he wondered if this was what love felt like. If it was, he liked it.

"I'm so sorry," Zander said when he his breath had quietened down enough to speak. "I swear I've never acted like a sex-crazed beast before."

Terry snorted and then laughed, the happy sound reverberating off the walls of the SUV, reminding Zander where they were. Thank God for tinted windows he thought belatedly.

"I think I like your beastly side," Terry said. "Face it, our working days are just far too long. Although," he added, looking at the ruined neck of his Henley ruefully, "we might need to start carrying around some changes of clothes."

Zander had a bag of clothes in the back of his SUV. With the work he did it was a sensible thing to do. He felt a shaft of pride at the thought of his mate wearing one of his shirts back to his studio, and yep, he couldn't hide the grin.

"I meant clothes that would fit me," Terry said, matching his smile. "I'm going to swim in anything of yours."

"You look good in anything, my mate," Zander said, pecking those lips that were still swollen.

"And you have a silver tongue," Terry said, pulling off the remains of his top and cleaning himself up before dabbing at the mess he'd left on Zander's shirt. Appearing to give up, he flung his top into the back of the vehicle and snuggled close. Zander couldn't believe how perfect Terry felt, how he fit against him so effortlessly. He knew that he would do anything to keep this tiny man safe in his arms, and if it meant quitting his job, leaving the state, or even leaving the country, then he would be more than happy to do it. In a short space of time, Terry had become the sun his world revolved around.

Chapter Eighteen

Terry was in his zone. He had music blaring around his small studio space, and as he wasn't expecting any visitors, he was happily working on his newest creation – a dress for Destiny, a popular drag queen who worked in a separate club to Morgana, Davina and Lucy. He'd never worked with the androgynous looking singer before, but he loved Destiny's slim build and had come up with the perfect sheath dress to highlight Destiny's long legs and superlative behind.

Initially the thought of coming up with twenty new garments in just three months was totally daunting. A lot of the time spent with new designs was the endless consultations needed with the clients, to ensure that the finished outfit was perfect in every way. Fortunately Terry had been working on his portfolio for years, and had a number of designs, drawn but not made, that he pulled out every time he had a new client. His drawings gave the clients some ideas, and they usually just needed a bit of tweaking. With more than two hundred dress designs to choose from, not even the pickiest drag queen could claim they couldn't find anything to suit.

So engrossed in his work, Terry almost jumped a foot off his seat when he heard Roy yell out "Oh my God, well, he's still breathing at least." Terry winced at the sarcasm in Roy's tone and felt immediately guilty. Looking at the cross faces of Roy, Charlie, Joel, and even Max, didn't make him feel any better.

"He might be breathing, but I'm not sure he's right in the head," Joel said, coming closer. "What on earth have you got on? There's no way that shirt belongs to you."

Terry tugged at Zander's shirt, but not too hard because he needed the collar to hide the marks on his neck. As he'd said to Zander in the car, he did swim in his mate's clothing – the Alpha was just so freaking big. Too long to tuck into his jeans, Terry had worn the white shirt over his pants. Because of the length, he'd used the scarf from earlier as a belt around his waist, and yeah, it might have looked like he was going for an outdated

1980's look, better seen on a girl. But Terry didn't think it looked that bad. Zander's pride at his wearing it, more than made up for it.

"It's Zander's if you must know. I had an accident with my shirt earlier so he loaned me one of his."

"Accident, what accident?"

"What happened to your shirt?"

"Where the hell have you been, your landlord said you'd moved out of your apartment?"

"Who the hell's Zander? I thought you were going out with Richard."

"I'm going out with Richard."

"You went out with Terry's boyfriend, you slut!"

Stunned, all five men stopped talking. Joel, Charlie and Max were looking between Roy and Terry as though none of them could work out what to think. Charlie's face was bright red. Not surprising given that he was responsible for the slut comment.

"We need coffee," Terry said decisively, moving through his friends to the couches he had in the corner. "Clearly we've all got a lot to catch up on."

Sitting them all down, Terry explained how Richard had just been taking him out as a friend, and that he knew Roy had gone on a date with him, the same night he went out with Zander. He reminded Roy of who Zander was, and while his friend could remember all of Zander's attributes and described them in great detail to the others, he didn't look very happy. Terry finished up by saying that he had moved in with Zander after Zander had asked him too and that they had been spending all their time together, getting to know each other.

"Terry, sweetie," Max said quietly. "Surely it would have been a better idea to get to know the man first, *before* you moved in with him."

And see, this was the problem with having human friends. No matter how much Terry could explain how Zander was so much more than his hard exterior, he couldn't explain about them being mates. Damn, he should have given his situation a whole lot more thought before he had opened his mouth. But his friends were like family and they deserved to know at least some of the truth.

"I don't know what to tell you guys," Terry said. "Zander is the one for me. I know he is, so I didn't see the point in waiting." Okay, that sounded lame, even in his head, and he could see his friends were geared up to let him know what he'd done wrong.

"He might be great in the sack honey, and I'm sorry but you don't have the experience to even judge that, but you don't go moving in with someone just because they took your virginity," Joel said seriously. "I thought you wanted to trust someone to be your first."

"But that's it," Terry said, standing up and pacing the floor. "I do trust Zander. I can't explain it but I know he won't hurt me."

"The chances that he'll stray on you are pretty high, Ter, you know that. I mean a man like that, straight as a die. Richard told me he usually dated women."

"Richard had no right telling you anything about Zander," Terry said, flashing a cold look at Roy. "I didn't ask him about your date, or dates, because I trust you to tell me things yourself, if you want me to know. Zander has dated women, and been with other men, but he's with me now, and we're a committed couple."

"You can't know that," Charlie said, coming over and giving Terry a hug. Terry let himself be drawn back to the couch even though his thoughts were jumbled and he didn't know whether to lash out or cry with frustration. "Sweetheart, this isn't some romance novel. A man used to sampling a smorgasbord isn't going to settle for one type of meat, no matter how good it is."

"I can't explain, but Zander wouldn't cheat on me," Terry said, giving up on his anger. His friends were just worried about him, and from a human perspective, Terry couldn't blame them.

"He's like my soul mate," Terry continued. "I know you think that's rubbish that can only be found in fiction, but Zander and I have a connection – I can feel it every time he looks at me. My skin tingles as though waiting for his touch. My body hums until he gets closer. My heart leaps every time he walks into the room, and I can't help but smile at him. He's such a caring man in every way, I couldn't see my life without him."

"Sounds like a strong dose of lust to me," Max said, adding quickly, "not that I can blame you. I'm sure this guy is really good looking, charming and everything else you say. But Terry, you don't know him and he's the first bloke you've been with. To give up your apartment and just move in with him..."

"It's just a bit irresponsible, and that's not like you Terry. I suppose he told you he loves you and he'll never look at another person again. It's a common con, hon, and you can't tell us that he hasn't done that." Joel finished his boyfriend's thought and then added his own.

"No, he hasn't told me he loves me. I know it's too soon for that and I'm not stupid." Terry remembered the feelings he had experienced when he'd been with Zander earlier and knew they weren't all from him. But Zander hadn't used the "L" word, and Terry was just too shy to say it first. He knew his own heart though. He was just waiting for Zander's to catch up.

"I do hope you know what you're doing sweetie," Charlie said, patting his hand. "There are so many predators out there who would snap up a sweet young thing like you in a flash. I know you think you are doing the right thing, but no one can know a person in such a short space of time."

"I'm getting to know him, more and more every day. I know he seems all hard and stuff on the outside, but inside he's just really lonely. He wants me, I know he does and despite what you all might think, he's not the type to play around."

"These big guys will control you, they'll pull you away from your friends and before you know it you'll be homeless crying in the gutter because you've got nowhere to go. You have to take a tough line with these older guys sweetie, and make sure that he doesn't cut you off from the people who love you." Roy wasn't happy, but surely he knew enough from Richard to know Zander wasn't like that. Terry made a mental note to talk to his friend privately later. He didn't want Roy having a hate on for his mate before he'd even had time to get to know him and he didn't have a clue what Richard might have said about Zander.

"That's a good point, Roy. We haven't met him, and even though your already cohabitating, I do think we need to check him out. Let him know that you do have friends who care for you and won't let you be bullied or controlled," Joel said firmly. "Why don't you bring him down to the Watering Hole tonight? We'll have dinner, and a few drinks. Have some laughs. It'll be fun."

Terry wasn't sure what to say. It was one thing for Zander to say he wouldn't hide their relationship. It was a whole different scenario going out with a group of men who were out and proud and didn't care who knew it.

"He might be working, but I'll ask him," he said. That was the truth at least. Zander could be working – drug dealers didn't just operate between 8 am and 5 pm. Although Zander had already told him he would be home by 6 pm.

"If he's working, you can tell him to meet us there," Joel said, and Terry could tell his friend wouldn't be dissuaded. "Get changed and we'll see you down there in an hour. No later, or we'll send out search parties."

Terry wanted to explain that he had a dress to finish, and he didn't even know if he should text Zander in case the man was busy. But he smiled his agreement, seeing his friends out of the studio and then sat down on the couch again with a thump. Why did life have to be so complicated? Zander was going to hate this, he just knew it.

Chapter Nineteen

Zander refused to tug at his clothing like a teenager, as he stood just inside the doorway of the Watering Hole, looking around for Terry and his friends. But for the first time in longer than he could remember, he felt uncomfortable, and that wasn't a feeling an Alpha wolf could ever get used to. When he'd gotten Terry's text explaining about the dinner and drinks invitation with his friends, Zander's first instinct had been to beg off, citing that he had work to do. But Zander had been getting some pretty weird vibes from his mate through the afternoon, and guessed that his little Omega was finding it difficult explaining their bond to the nosy humans who shared his life.

Zander had never been an overly sociable man or wolf. When he had lived with his home pack, he'd been a strong Alpha, next in line to lead the pack. Most of the other wolves weren't comfortable being around him too often. The same thing had happened when he'd joined the Police Academy. There was something in his nature, in the way he held himself, or the sheer power that he knew emanated from his body, that seemed to make humans wary around him. Only Sully hadn't been bothered by it and that was why the two had become such fast friends.

It wasn't just his innate nature that was causing him problems now. Oh, his wolf wanted to find Terry. In fact his wolf never wanted to be apart from the man, no matter how impractical that might be. That was a shifter thing. No the problem was the venue and the fact that he'd dated two of the women that worked there. The potential for awkward confrontations, and that was without taking his relationship with Terry into account, was huge. Zander squared his shoulders, reminding himself that an Alpha never ran from anything.

"Hey, you got here, I didn't think that you'd show up." Terry's voice came at him suddenly, and Zander turned to see his mate standing to the side. Terry had obviously been home and showered, as his dark hair still seemed a bit damp on top. His tight green t-shirt was in direct contrast to the shirt Zander had loaned him and showed off every inch of Terry's trim physique.

Zander felt his body respond and acting on instinct he took the two paces to stand in front of his mate.

Don't I get a kiss hello? He felt the mind link gave them some modicum of privacy.

I didn't think you'd...I didn't want you to be...

Oh fuck. Right there. That was the reason Zander was so blessed to have Terry in his life. His little Omega was worried about him, putting his needs first. Worried about how he'd cope with openly gay friends in a very public situation. Worried that Zander would react badly to basically being "out" with a capital O. The realization settled Zander in a way he couldn't explain and he had no hesitation in leaning down and brushing his lips across Terrys'.

"Lead me to your friends, precious," he said quietly. "We'll do this and then we'll head home and I can do all the delicious things I've been thinking about all afternoon."

"Do they involve me?" Terry said, arched brow flashing along with a quick grin, as he turned and treated Zander to another look at tight ass muscles flexing in tight jeans. Without doubt, Zander's favorite sight in all the world. Actually second favorite, he amended. Naked would be better.

Terry led the way to a booth in the far corner of the room. No wonder Zander hadn't seen them when he walked in. The Watering Hole was a large open bar, with tables well-spaced apart for patrons and waiting staff alike. Along one wall was the bar itself, lined with gleaming bottles of every shape and size, the glasses hanging from a rack above the serving space. It was clean, bright and welcoming to everyone as Terry's friends looked right at home.

Terry slid into one side of the booth, scooting over so that there was room for Zander. The only man Zander recognized was the other dark twink that Terry had been tending to the night they met. Roy and, well, look at that, Richard Thorne sitting beside him looking like the cat who'd got the cream. Or a wolf sizing up a steak. Didn't take long for that Alpha wolf to change his

affections but Zander was pleased. He really didn't want to fight Richard for the right to be with his own mate.

Terry rattled off the names as Zander sized them all up. He hoped he was being discreet about it, but it was second nature to him. He didn't stop being a police detective when he clocked out of the office. Roy was dark, pretty and semi-hostile as he shook Zander's hand. Richard just smirked at him and told Roy that they had already met. Max, the only other big guy at the table was smaller than both Richard and himself and looked like a decently muscled boxer. He took Zander's hand in a strong grip, just beyond the bounds of politeness. Okay, someone to watch out for.

Joel, Max's partner was almost as small as Terry, blond where Terry was dark, with a thin face. Max clearly adored him, had no problem in showing it, and from what Zander could see, the feeling was mutual. Charlie was quiet, another dainty man who seemed to have a love for purple shirts, and jeans. Zander couldn't resist and peeked under the table. Nope. Not purple, the man's sneakers were bright yellow. Maybe Charlie was making a fashion statement he didn't know anything about, or maybe he was colorblind.

Feeling slightly uncomfortable, Zander rested an arm across Terry's shoulder, encouraging the man to snuggle into him and looked at Richard. "So how's life as a big criminal lawyer."

He and Richard had met through one of their cases. Richard had his own practice and occasionally defended big name clients although Terry had said he'd met the man through his contract with Houston Pride week. But given as he really didn't have anything in common with anyone else at the table, Zander felt he had to say something. Unfortunately it didn't look like the others were happy to let him get away with any social chit chat.

"Oh no," Roy said, breaking in firmly before Richard could answer. "You guys are not going to talk about work. We're here to make sure this big Detective is good enough for our friend. So spill Zander. Family, likes, dislikes, dating history – men and

women, and why you felt the need to have Terry living with you after only three days. God, you only went out on one date. Should we be worried that we'll find Terry's decomposing body in a landfill somewhere sometime in the future, or are you just some kind of a control freak?"

Beside him Terry giggled and then laughed out loud. "Really Roy? If you'd been any taller you should have been a cop. And if Zander was a serial killer do you honestly think he would admit that to any of us?"

Roy glared at Terry but didn't say anything. Zander covered Terry's hand that was warm on his thigh, and Terry entwined their fingers. He was grateful for the support. Looking around the table, Zander figured he could give them the potted version of his life – the one he normally trotted out for humans.

"I was born just outside of New Haven in Connecticut, my mother died at birth. I was raised by my father. When I left home I wandered around a bit then went to the Police Academy. I moved to Houston after I graduated and have worked my way up to Detective. I phone my father once in a blue moon. There are no siblings that I know of. When I'm not working, I watch sports on television or go out for a drink, usually with people I work with."

"I don't have a dating history," he continued when he saw Roy open his mouth. "I used to go out to get laid. Sometimes it meant dinner and dancing first. Sometimes it didn't. Men or women, didn't bother me. I was a heartless bastard and I'll be the first one to admit it. I've never lived with anyone, never been on a date that lasted longer than twenty four hours and no one has meant anything to me at all, until I met Terry. He means everything to me, so I won't be doing that any longer."

For a long moment no one around the table said anything although Richard gave a tiny nod of his head in Zander's direction. But Zander noticed Roy was wanting to say something, and yep...

"Still doesn't mean you're not a serial killer or a control freak."

Zander nodded, and Terry's fingers gripped his slightly and then lessened.

"You're quite right," Zander said. "But if I was a serial killer then you wouldn't find Terry's body decomposing in a landfill. I'm a police detective and I've got more smarts than to leave a body where it can be found. You're just going to have to trust that I'm not. As for being a control freak, Terry likes me just the way I am, so whether I am or not, doesn't concern you."

Again stunned silence, because there really wasn't anything you could say to that. Then Terry wriggled under his arm, and Zander looked down to see his mate's trusting face smiling up at him. "If you do kill me, then can you make sure we have lots of hot monkey-sex first? I want to die with a smile on my dial."

Zander snorted, and then he laughed out loud, as did Richard. Only Richard and Terry knew how it was impossible for one mate to physically hurt another. The other men at the table joined in after a moment, and the atmosphere around the table lightened, just a bit.

The laughter seemed to remind the men at the table that they were out, supposedly to have a good time. Food was ordered, drinks consumed and Zander was feeling a quiet buzz of contentment as the evening went on. Terry's friends were funny, clearly smart and creative and although Charlie was the only single one in the group, Zander understood that until he and Richard had entered the scene the four smaller men all used to get into quite a bit of trouble. Not intentionally, but it seemed that they often attracted the wrong sort of attention. Zander made a mental note that if for any reason, he couldn't be with his mate at any time then hopefully Richard would be around.

So when Charlie caught Zander's eye for the first time since they met, Zander was quietly confident he could handle anything that came his way.

"Why Terry? I mean he's cute and got the whole innocence thing going on, but why him, if you've been with so many other people in the past?"

Rather than brush the smaller man off, Zander gave his answer some thought. He couldn't mention about the whole mating concept, but he didn't want to lie either. Looking down at Terry's flushed face, his mate had enjoyed quite a few drinks with dinner, he smiled at the pouty kiss Terry threw his way, then looked back up at Charlie.

"I saw Terry after that fight in that sports bar and felt an instant connection," he said. "I'll admit it wasn't one I was prepared to follow up on. Most people in this town think I'm straight, not that it's a problem either way. The attraction was hot but I wasn't sure if I wanted a relationship, and I knew that was what Terry deserved. So I kept away. But for some reason after our first meeting I just kept seeing Terry everywhere... when I was working, when I was trying to have lunch..." he threw a meaningful look at Richard who just grinned.

"I wanted to be with him more than anything in my life and when I finally convinced him to go on a date with me, I wasn't prepared to let him go afterwards."

"Not that I was thinking about running away or anything," Terry said, a deep flush working its way up Terry's slender neck.

Zander smirked, and continued, "Call it kismet, call it fate, call it what you like. When I met Terry my life finally made sense. Terry filled the hole in my heart that I didn't even know I had. I'm not letting him go. I couldn't because he honestly means everything to me."

"Awww fuck, you're gonna make me cry. That's so sweet," Joel said clinging onto Max's chest.

"It's the truth," Zander said as sincerely as he knew how. Terry's eyes were also looking suspiciously wet, but his face was beaming. Clearly Zander had said the right thing.

Chapter Twenty

Zander had the urge to laugh out loud as Terry stumbled up the path to his house, their home. Being a wolf shifter, Terry couldn't get drunk, but he must have been feeling a bit of a buzz, and Zander admitted to feeling unusually mellow himself. Even though he had gotten through the evening without seeing anyone he knew, he had spent the night thinking about it, watching for it and being prepared to defend his choice of life partner, and to protect his Omega. It was almost anti-climactic that he hadn't had to do it.

The other thing that had totally blown Zander's mind was the fact that Terry clearly hadn't told any of his friends how much of a bastard Zander had been when he first met the man, or his involvement with the arrest incident. Zander tried to rationalize it – none of Terry's friends, well except for Richard, knew they were wolf shifters, or how they were supposed to act with each other. But even as humans, if Terry's friends had known how he'd ignored the need and hope in Terry's eyes that day, something he would never forget or forgive himself for, then maybe his reception might have been different.

As the evening had progressed, the food good, the drinks flowing, the young men clearly being left alone by any bigots thanks to the larger men at the table, Zander had this urge to say...something. He'd already apologized to Terry the day he claimed him. But anytime he'd tried to broach the subject since, Terry had smiled sweetly and said that he didn't have to worry about anything. It was sweet, a totally 'Terry-like' gesture, but Zander couldn't shift the guilt that was burning a hole in his gut. He was an Alpha wolf. He should have known better and he'd fucked up. He was determined to make amends for every little slight he'd forced on Terry prior to their claiming.

"Are you coming inside, or is there something more riveting than my ass on this porch," Terry teased, slipping into Zander's arms like he was born to fit. Which he was.

"Nope, nothing more riveting than that sexy ass," Zander said with a smile, a lightbulb moment going on in his head. "Can we talk for a minute though, before removing any clothes? You know how distracting I find that sexy body of yours and I do have something I need to say."

"My body's meant to be distracting to you," Terry said with an adorable little pout that Zander had a sudden urge to kiss. But if he did that then clothes would come off and yep...it was almost laughable at how pavlovian Zander's response to his mate was. Not that he minded.

Focusing on his mission, Zander ignored the pout and picked Terry up, got them inside, settled down on the couch and holding Terry tight in his arms, Zander started to speak. He wasn't sure what he was going to say, but he prayed the words would just come to him.

"Sweetheart, I hope by now you know how much you mean to me. I'm not the most demonstrative person in the world, but you are everything to me and I'm trying to get better at showing it."

"I know," Terry said, a happy smile on his beautifully fine face. "Can we kiss now?"

"Not yet. I haven't finished." Zander felt his face responding to Terry's happiness, and his cock, well that always perked up when Terry was near him. It was like his mate had it on a remote controlled switch.

"I can't help thinking about how badly I treated you. You didn't share that with your friends, you didn't tell anybody..."

"I told Richard. I knew he'd understand because he's like us."

Zander knew that Terry had told Richard what he'd done, but that was beside the point. Terry had four really good friends, who were like family to him and he never once complained to them.

"Richard doesn't count, although I am grudgingly glad you told him, and that he tried to help you out. It might have taken me longer to get my head out of my ass if he hadn't."

"I feel so sorry for Richard, losing his mate like he did. I hope things work out with him and Roy," Terry whispered. His hands had found their way under Zander's neckline and were in the process of drawing delicious little circles up his neck. Fuck, his mate was distraction personified and Zander forced himself to stay on track.

"Richard's a very strong shifter. I know my life would be over if something happened to you," Zander agreed. He had long figured that the only reason Richard was still alive was because his mate had been human, and so hadn't been able to bite and claim Richard in return, the way two wolf shifters did.

"The thing is, up until I left my pack, I had been taught the laws regarding mates. How important they were, how they were to be cared for and cherished. My Father damn near reamed me a new one over the phone when he heard my mate was an Omega and I hadn't stepped up and claimed you."

"He doesn't mind Omegas?"

"He adores Omegas, and okay, most of the ones he's met are female, but to my Father gender wasn't the issue. Our wolf status was."

"But we're people too. Not just our animal halves, and you and I, we live as humans, among humans, with human ideas. Surely your Father can understand that."

Fuck it all, Terry was going to kill him with kindness and understanding. Zander just knew it.

"That's not the point," Zander said trying to keep the frustration out of his voice. He wasn't angry with Terry, he was angry with himself.

"We were raised as wolf shifters, those core beliefs are as much a part of who we are as the color of our hair or how big we grow. My Father had every right to be angry at me. I was raised to lead my pack, to be a strong Alpha wolf. I gave that away because I refused to challenge my Father when the time came – I refused to even contemplate hurting the man who had raised

me. Instead I hurt my Father by leaving the pack. I couldn't stay. You might not understand this, not having lived in a pack, but my very presence in the pack was weakening it and I couldn't do that to my Father."

"You love your Father."

"He was an Alpha, not an easy man to love. He was harsh, he was fair, but he never forgot he was leader of his pack. I don't know if love is the right word, but he's the only family I've ever had," Zander said sadly. "I didn't want to leave, but pack law says only one Alpha can rule, and I couldn't take away my Father's reason for living."

"He and your mother weren't true mates?"

Zander shook his head. "No, they were bonded. My Father had given up looking and according to him he and my mother were happy for years until her death. He's only just over 100 now, so there is still hope he will find his true mate, and I wasn't going to take the pack away from him while he was still strong enough to rule it. But the pack was starting to become divided. Some of the younger men wanting to follow me, rather than my father. I did what I had to do."

"You're a good man," Terry said softly, resting his head on Zander's chest. Everything Terry did centered on comforting him, supporting him, and dare he even hope, loving him too. Zander wondered how the hell he'd ever thought he could live without the touches, affection and Terry's innate goodness. Which reminded him, yet again of the wrong he had done his mate at the start.

"I wasn't good to you. I was mean. I hurt you. I had this stupid idea that you would be nothing more than a means of getting off. I...fuck I should be flogged for what I thought I could get away with, taking you as a mate. I didn't value you, your Omega status, or even think about you as a person. I was consumed by my selfish needs and to hell with anyone else. I'm an absolute bastard and you should have kicked me to the curb from the get go."

Zander's self-loathing had returned in force, and if it wasn't for the presence of Terry on his lap, he would have stood up and started pacing the floor. His agitation was like an ant hill inside of him, churning up his insides, crawling over his skin.

"Stop doing this to yourself," Terry cried out, thumping Zander on the chest. "Stop beating yourself up for something that's over and done with. You're here with me now. You care about me now. You gave up your fucking best friend just so you could build a life with me. Don't let that life be built on the hatred you have for your stupid actions at the beginning."

Terry's face was bright red and Zander was horrified to see tears dripping down those fine cheek bones. He realized with a completely 'duh' moment that his poor mate had been subjected to all he was feeling through their mind link. He was actually hurting his dear sweet mate, with his self-directed anger. Snapping back to his senses, Zander tenderly wiped away the tears with his fingers, shaking his head at his own stupidity.

"I'm sorry precious. I didn't mean...I forgot for a moment...I don't want to hurt you anymore. I never wanted to hurt you."

"Then get over yourself," Terry said, with a big sniff and a small smile. "I get it, okay? You're this big strong Alpha. You couldn't get close to your pack. You didn't get close to anyone, except Sully. You're not used to caring for someone else and you were scared. Not a common thing for an Alpha maybe, but you didn't want your life to change. Change is a scary thing. Bigotry is a scary thing. The one person you did have in your life was the very reason you were staying away from me. I get it. I understand it. I forgive you for it. Now stop going on about it."

Sweet delicate face. Sweeter nature and yet Terry had the confidence of a man who'd been brought up with love and acceptance and that was a powerful thing. Zander might be the Alpha, but he suspected that Terry would always be the stronger man inside. It was that thought that made it easier for what he had to say next.

"I want you to claim me."

Terry furrowed his brow and tilted his head to the side, looking up into Zander's face.

"I already claimed you," he said. "You wear my mark. I bit you at the same time you claimed me."

Zander could feel a flush blooming over his face. "No. I meant claim me, claim me. Like I did to you."

Terry's was still looking puzzled but as Zander watched he could see the exact moment Terry understood what he meant. His dark eyes got darker still, and then they widened. Then they narrowed again and Terry's lips firmed in a straight line.

"No."

No? Who turned down the chance at an Alpha's ass? Apparently his mate would. Well fine. Zander would just have to put his persuasion techniques to good use. Terry had been interested at first. So perhaps nerves were getting at him; Terry being an Omega, and it being his first time as a top. Zander could work with that.

"It's a gift I can give to you," Zander said, hoping his face was projecting his sincerity. "I've never let anyone do anything like that before, so it would be a first for both of us. I want you to do it. I want to give this to you."

"Oh Zander," Terry shook his head, his dark hair flopping down over one eye as he rearranged himself so he was straddling Zander's legs. Hooking his arms around Zander's neck he looked deep into Zander's eyes, as though searching for his soul. Zander let him because he had nothing to hide.

"It's a very lovely thought," Terry said softly, his dark eyes soft and warm. "A wonderful gift. One that I would treasure. Something I never dreamed you would let me do. But please, Zander. Not like this. Not tonight. Not because you think you have to make something up to me. Why can't you just trust that I forgive you and let it go?"

Shit. Damn. Fucking Hell. His little sweetie was also damn perceptive, but Zander couldn't help feeling just a wee tinge of

relief. Alpha wolves did not bottom, at least not from what Zander had heard. While Zander was totally prepared to let himself be topped, confident he could control his wolf, Terry was right. It had been an offer made as a way of showing how sorry he was. And Terry knew that and, putting his needs first yet again, had turned him down. It was that realization that spurred the next words out of his mouth.

"But you will do it one day? When you're super sure about me?"

The warmth in Terry's eyes was intoxicating, his smile addictive and the brief kiss Terry gave him was enough to set every nerve ending in Zander's body on fire. Zander tightened his arms around Terry's hips, pulling the man closer so that their erections could greet each other through their pants. Not ideal, but it was a move in the right direction.

"I'm already sure about you, my big strong Alpha," Terry said, stroking his fingers down Zander's face softly. "And I would love for us to enjoy another first together. That first. But it should be a celebration for something positive, or to mark a special occasion, not a payment for something you feel you owe me. I couldn't do that to you."

"I love you," Zander blurted out. He'd never said those words to another person in his life, but he had to let his mate know how he felt. As the words spilled out, he knew they were true. His heart lifted as he saw the gleam in Terry's eyes, the wonder in that finely featured face and then the pure joy as the smaller man smiled – Yes! He'd been right to trust his mate with his heart.

"I love you too," Terry said, covering Zander's face with tiny kisses. "I never thought you'd say it, I never believed, but oh, you did, and now..."

"Now?" Zander couldn't stop his own teasing smile. He felt free, the weight of his past actions had eased. He'd shared his feelings and they had been returned tenfold. Terry loved him and that was enough for Zander to know he truly was forgiven.

"Now I want you to take me to bed and fuck me through the mattress. I need you to feel you inside of me, possessing me, wanting me, using that big cock of yours the way you're meant to."

"I'll always want you," Zander promised as he stood up with Terry clinging tightly to his body. Zander did want his mate, all the time. In fact, after the night they'd had, and after the talk they'd shared, he wasn't sure he would be able to wait until he got into the bedroom. His cock was throbbing with one purpose – to be inside of his mate. An idea Zander could totally get behind in a big way.

Chapter Twenty One

Terry had always had a thing for confident men, and while Zander didn't talk much, he was proving himself a man of action. Being the focus of so much single-minded attention was mind blowing. Terry had previously kept a tight lid on his emotions around his mate, not wanting to pressure Zander into making declarations he wasn't ready for. But the moment Zander had uttered those precious three words, it was like a tight band had loosened itself from around Terry's chest. He felt totally free to express his love for his mate in return. He couldn't believe his fairy tale of a true mate was actually coming true.

Although there was nothing remotely Disney-like going on at the moment. Clothes were discarded with indecent haste including the sound of ripping cloth, before Zander's huge body blanketed him, pushing his body into the mattress, stealing his breath. Terry was sure Zander was trying to tap his tonsils with that fat tongue of his, and as hands mapped his body, searching, teasing, rampant seduction with every touch, Terry's whole being went into overdrive. Mind, body and even his twin spirits, all overwhelmed by the sheer emotion pouring off his mate and coursing through his own body. Terry knew the whimpers and moans he could hear were his, but his brain wouldn't let him formulate any words. It was too caught up trying to process the pleasure Terry felt from every caress of Zander's hands and tongue. Fuck, he needed words!

Terry wanted to beg, to plead, to yell at Zander to get a move on. To shove that big cock his mate always seemed to have at the ready, straight in his ass until he couldn't get it any deeper. Until they were one. For the first time Terry resented the fact that he would never need any prep, that his body loosened, opened, and lubed itself the moment he became aroused around his fated one. If he wasn't ready, then maybe Zander would have stuck something in his ass by now. Fingers, tongue, a huge fucking cock. Terry didn't care, he just wanted it. His whole body ached with the need he couldn't keep inside.

Thank the Fates his mate seemed to be on the same wavelength. Terry felt a slight chill as Zander's body lifted from his, and then disorientation as Zander flipped him over onto his stomach. Hands gripped his hips pulling him into position, and with one swift thrust, Zander mounted him, his cock wedged in deep, Zander's chest hard over his back.

"Home," Zander whispered in his ear. "You're my home."

Terry's insides melted at Zander's uncharacteristic romance, but his body needed more than words. He wanted to feel Zander into next week.

Move.

Okay he might have yelled through their mind link, but Terry's whole body was a mass of tingly nerves and sensations he couldn't control or contain. He needed, he wanted, he didn't know which way was up, and the only thing that made any sense to him was the solid length filling him and the slap of skin on skin as Zander rutted hard, deep and fast – in and out of Terry's willing hole – like a demon possessed.

Underneath Terry rocked with him, going with the flow, getting caught up in Zander's rhythm, the big man's need for him piercing every part of his consciousness. There was so much Terry could feel. Zander's possessive nature, his own sexual need that appeared to burn through every part of Zander's body, his strength, the power of his wolf and underneath all of it, his deep love. Zander loved him and it added a special layer of meaning to the sex they shared. Terry had never expected the sex between them could get any better, but it had, and he reveled in the wonder of it.

When his orgasm hit him, Terry cried out as his spunk hit the sheets below. Relief he had reached satisfaction, regret that the end had come too quickly. But it seemed that Zander had a lot more control than he did and even as Terry felt his body lapse into afterglow status, Zander renewed his efforts, pushing harder, faster, grunting as their skin slapped together, his stubble caressing Terry's face and neck.

"You will come again before I'm finished," Zander promised and the deep huskiness of his voice had Terry's cock firming up again before it had even fully gone down. Collapsing his arms Terry laid his face to one side on the sheets, giving himself over to Zander's passion. The big man followed him down, his hips never missing a beat, and even as he wondered how the hell a man could do that, Terry couldn't ignore the flames that shot through him as Zander lovingly ran his canines over his mating mark.

Terry felt himself floating, his body anchored by the weight of Zander over him, his mate's cock inciting pleasure with every thrust. His mind, his soul, his wolf spirit – it was as though they were floating above him. All he could feel was pleasure, all he knew in that moment was Zander and although he could barely believe it, when he finally felt Zander's hips stutter, his thrusts becoming more erratic and the length inside of him swelled just that little bit more, Terry was ready. He was ready to come again, just like his mate had promised. He just needed one last thing...

Zander's teeth pierced his throat, one split second of pain, then wafts of pleasure flooding his body. Terry moaned, no energy left to cry out as he erupted, his sperm soaking the sheets beneath him at the same time as Zander's coated his insides. Then Zander's teeth were free, a brief lick and the last thing Terry heard as he fell into sleep was the caressing voice of his mate.

"I love you so very much."

Terry hoped he responded. He thought he got his mouth to say the words. But honestly he wasn't sure. Sticky, laying on a wet spot, none of that mattered either. He was asleep.

Chapter Twenty Two

Terry hummed quietly, an illusion of calm among the chaos in the dressing room at the back of the hall where the rehearsal for the Diva night was underway. It had been just over two months since he and Zander had got together and in that time both men had adjusted to living together and finding ways to show their love for each other. Zander took Terry out as regularly as his job allowed, never worrying about slur comments, or the odd looks some women gave him. It seemed to Terry that from the moment Zander had made his choice, and come to his senses, the man didn't blink at what other people thought about him. Zander was proving to be the most devoted of mates.

Terry had met some of Zander's work colleagues, they had double dated with Richard and Roy, gone to dinner with Joel, Charlie and Max, even Morgana, Davina and Lucy had joined them at a karaoke place one night. The only place Terry wouldn't go, even with Zander, was Club Blue, despite his friends telling him more than once that the odious Norman had gone into hiding since the class action suit against him had been filed. Terry wasn't about to run the risk of seeing the man again.

The two men had also gone for runs together in wolf form a few times, Zander driving the 50 miles north of the city to the Sam Houston National Forest area. Zander was always careful, making sure no hikers or campers were nearby before either of them shifted. No wolf of any kind had been seen in Texas since the 1970s and with Zander proving to be a big black animal, and Terry being smaller, but pure white, it was imperative they kept away from public trails. Terry had been stunned at how playful his big Alpha could be. Protective, but so much fun to play with. Terry had missed that, having only ever run with his parents in the past. But by far, his favorite times were when he and Zander were home alone together.

Only the day before, Zander had come home after a raid on some drug house or other. Terry had always thought his mate looked hot in anything, but it was the feral look in Zander's eyes that caught his attention from the moment bigger man had burst

through the door. Zander's wolf had been in control, hyped up on adrenaline and probably feeling antsy at the conclusion of a hunt and the lack of a kill. Terry had just enough time to get his jeans off before Zander pounced. Yep, nothing like being pounded up against a wall by a guy in full riot gear.

"Take that soppy look off your face, something's shrunk this dress. It won't do up!"

Evita, one of Terry's favorite new friends was standing right beside him, tugging at his dark blue chiffon outfit. The drag queen was right. The dress wasn't meeting around Evita's middle. Normally that would be grounds for a panic attack, especially with a full dress rehearsal going on, but Terry smiled.

"Step over here, lovely. This fitted you yesterday. So just how many cream donuts did you have before the show?" He tugged Evita around, not an easy feat when the man was at least four times bigger than he was. Working quickly, he opened up the part of the zip Evita had gotten done up and pulled out his trusty stitch ripper.

"I don't know what you're talking about young man. I..." Evita trailed off as Terry quickly ripped through a false seam. A quick check had the zip closing smoothly to the top and Evita's dress was fitting comfortably once more.

Evita gasped, turning to look at the full length mirror that Terry had on the wall by his make-shift work station. Pirouetting around on high heels when you weighed over 200lbs couldn't be easy, but Evita did it with grace and style.

"How did you...what did you...how did you know?"

"I don't just pay attention to your dresses, sweetheart," Terry said softly. "You eat when you get nervous and you still have a hint of cream on your teeth. I put in a false seam when I made your adjustments the other day just in case this happened."

Evita blushed, something else the big man shouldn't have been able to pull off. But Terry had seen Evita in full Diva mode, and she was beautiful – very big, but a stunning presence on stage.

"I can't help eating when I know I'm going on stage," Evita whispered, "but no one has ever taken my weight fluctuations into consideration before. But baked stuff makes me bloat up like nothing on earth."

"You might want to consider gluten free. But you look beautiful and that was all I was hoping for," Terry assured her. "Now go and get your face done and then get out on that stage and strut your stuff."

"You'll be getting a lot more work from me," Evita promised him as the drag queen dropped a kiss on Terry's head and wafted off to the makeup area.

Terry kept smiling as he tried to clean up some of the mess left by men who wanted their transformation to be perfect, but didn't think about little things like putting lids back on makeup jars, clothes in lockers or shoes on racks. The rehearsal was coming to an end. It was the last one before the real deal which was to be held in two days' time. He wondered how many other alterations he would have to make to twenty odd costumes between now and then. Terry had gotten to know his new clients well over the past three months and he was confident he was prepared for any eventuality.

Taking a quick glance at the clock on the wall, Terry picked up the pace. Zander said he would be off work in time to see the finale and to take him home. It had been, oh, almost ten hours since he'd seen his mate, and Terry wanted him with an intensity that was getting hard to hide. Thank goodness Zander usually felt the same way. Maybe they could have a quickie in the SUV again before they went home. Terry's ass clenched at the thought, and he got to work.

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Zander let himself into the hall, noting that all of the attention seemed to be onstage. There weren't many people around, only the Diva's and crew had been invited for the dress rehearsal. Zander couldn't see any sign of Terry, but his mate had warned him earlier that he would probably be busy backstage until the

rehearsal was over. On the night of the function itself, Terry would be introduced at the end of the show, as the designer of the clothes worn by the Diva's and their escorts, but as tonight was only a rehearsal for the ladies to go through their paces, Terry had said he would meet him in the hall, as soon as he was done. From what Zander could see, all of the ladies were on stage, so Terry shouldn't be too far away.

Wanting to stay out of the way, Zander made his way across the room to a chair in the shadows of a support column. He moved quickly and quietly, keeping an eye on everyone and everything else. For some reason his wolf was on edge, but Zander put it down to spending a full day interviewing drug addicts who had been pulled in from the raid the day before. A thankless and hopeless task in most cases and one that usually made it hard to hide his teeth. Unfortunately busting one set of drug filled lowlifes didn't mean the end of his case. It usually meant more work chasing up new leads, as one con after another tried to leverage their way out of long sentences by giving up their rivals.

On stage the music reached its climax. The ladies, all in Terry's creations held their pose for a long moment, and then a tall thin man walked on clapping and everyone relaxed.

"That's just perfect ladies. Do it exactly like that on the night and we'll be golden. You did wonderfully. Don't forget to store your outfits carefully out the back and I will see you all back here at 6pm sharp on Thursday."

The ladies started to move towards the back of the stage, chattering excitedly when all of a sudden a strange, loud voice rang out, silencing everyone.

"Hold up a minute, nobody move. The show's not over yet."

As if choreographed, the Divas in their brightly colored silk and satin moved aside, leaving Zander staring at his biggest nightmare. Terry was caught in the arms of Norman Biggs, a knife held to his throat, his arms apparently bound behind his back. His Omega looked calm, but he wasn't getting free in a hurry.

Flicking out his phone, his eyes never leaving the stage, Zander used his shadowed position to dial 911. Quietly giving his name, rank and badge number, he requested immediate assistance for an armed hostage situation, impatiently rattling off the address and brief details when asked.

"Are you armed, Detective?" the professional voice on the other end of the phone asked.

"Negative," Zander snapped back. He'd left his gun in his wagon. He didn't like to carry it when he got up close and personal with his mate. Unfortunately now Terry was far too up close and personal with another man, and definitely not in a good way. Terry's face was flushed red, probably because of the fat arm around his neck. There was a bruise forming on the side of his eye that sent Zander's anger through the roof. Forcing himself to hold it together, he heard instructions that he was to keep his identity secret, and to let the armed defenders take care of the situation. Shoving his phone back in his pocket, Zander edged closer to the stage.

Help's coming darling. Hang in there.

I'm fine. Don't do anything to get yourself hurt. Please, I couldn't bear it if something happened to you as well.

Terry's face might be calm, but the voice ringing inside Zander's head was frantic. Despite his situation, as soon as Terry had seen him, he had kept his eyes focused on Zander as though he was the only living thing keeping his little wolf sane. Zander would have given anything to have been able to shift and deal with Norman under pack laws.

Unfortunately the room was full of unaware humans. The knife was pressed hard against Terry's throat, a thin line of blood oozing from the side of it and Zander didn't dare risk anything in either form, although his wolf was a growling mess in his head. Zander forced himself to be calm and to go against every instinct in his shifter's body. He had to deal with this situation in the human way.

"What do you want Norman? This show has nothing to do with you," Morgana yelled out when it seemed like Norman wasn't going to say anything further. Probably too puffed up about the impact his entrance had caused. Zander was thankful though. If the ladies could distract Norman, or just keep him occupied, maybe he could spot a chance to save his mate.

"I want you all to drop your fucking lawsuit against me. You had no right telling all those lies about me," Norman yelled. As he dragged Terry closer to the middle of the stage, Zander was shocked at Norman's appearance. The man's rumpled clothing, bloodshot eyes and messed up hair – fuck, this was not good. Norman was a man on the edge and there was nothing more dangerous than someone with nothing to lose and a weapon in his hand.

"We can drop the lawsuit, Norman, that's fine. Whatever you say. Just let Terry go and we'll talk about it," Davina said, edging a bit closer.

"Get back! I don't trust any of you. I'll slit his throat before any of you can get to me."

Davina moved back, a nasty look on her face. She wasn't the only one. If looks could kill Norman would be dead in a hail of stilettos.

"You all lied about me," Norman continued, his voice reverberating around the room. "Ruined my reputation, wrecked my fucking life. My wife left me. Took my money and the kids. I've got nothing left. And it's all this little cocksucker's fault."

If you were married, you fucker, you shouldn't have been shoving your dick down young men's throats in the first place, Zander thought angrily. Norman's hand holding the knife trembled and Zander was terrified the deranged idiot was going to slit Terry's throat. Accidental or not, Terry would still be dead. Ignoring the instructions from the dispatch office, Zander stepped forward, pulling his badge out of his pocket, holding it up.

"Norman Biggs, I'm Detective Samuels. The armed defenders are on their way. There's no way out. Put the knife down and get down on the floor."

"Not until I get what I came for," Norman sneered, apparently unimpressed with Zander's tone or position.

"These people have already said they'll drop the lawsuit against you," Zander said, keeping his voice firm. "You've got what you wanted. Now drop the knife and get on the floor before you get into any further trouble."

The stage was a good five foot higher than the floor and although Zander knew he could leap it in human form if he had to, it would take too long. If there had been the slightest leeway, Zander would have taken it. But with blood already dripping down Terry's neck it wasn't an option. He noticed a flicker of movement behind Norman, but didn't take his eyes off the man with the knife.

"I've lost everything. My wife won't let me near her anymore. I'm as horny as hell and I want the fucking blow job I was denied fucking weeks ago. I want you all to watch this man gag on my cock, wishing you were in his place. I want you all to see what you've been missing and I want you to fucking weep over it, you bunch of lying assholes."

Well it was official. The man was clearly off his rocker and Terry obviously thought so too. In a flurry of movement Terry tried to kick out, but Norman was heavier and used his weight and the knife pressed further against Terry's skin to subdue him. Grabbing Terry's head Norman fisted his fingers into Terry's hair, forcing Terry to his knees. While Zander's wolf roared in his head, the violation tearing at his soul, Zander assessed the situation as calmly as he could.

Then he laughed and Norman looked at him in astonishment. Zander shrugged casually and said, "You didn't think it through you idiot. One hand in his hair, one on the knife. The young man's hands are tied behind his back. How you going to get your dick out? Don't you know the first thing about blowjobs? Your

dick has to be out of your pants first. You're at a fucking stalemate and you know it. Put the knife down and get on the floor and let's end this nonsense."

"I...er...I'll..." Norman mumbled, looking down at his hands, at Terry's mouth that was firmly closed and the anger that shone from Terry's dark eyes.

"Exactly," Zander said, taking the time to hop up onto the stage with a predatory grace. He didn't step towards Norman and Terry although everything screamed at him to do so. Blood was now pouring steadily down Terry's neck – it wasn't much, but one wrong move from that knife and it would be life threatening. The blade teetering on Terry's jugular jangled every one of Zander's nerves, and probably wasn't doing a lot for his mate.

"Now you could let me do it for you," Zander said in a friendly tone, as though they were talking about anything other than touching Norman's dick. "But I don't think you want me getting too close to you, do you?"

He flexed his muscles. Norman visibly gulped and stepped backward, forcing Terry to move with him or risk the knife digging deeper into his skin.

"Maybe you need someone smaller to get close to you. Like maybe that lady over there." Zander pointed to Destiny, who without doubt had to be the least threatening looking person in the room except for Terry.

What the fuck do you think you're doing?

Trust me precious, got this sorted.

Norman dithered, tilting his head to look down at Terry and then across to Destiny who was slowly moving forward, her hands outstretched to show she meant no harm. At the same time Zander casually moved another step closer, causing Norman to back up another couple of feet. Feeling cornered as Destiny took another couple of steps, Norman took one more step backwards and that was all Zander needed. He gave a short sharp nod of his head.

Coming up behind Norman, faster than should be possible, Sully grabbed hold of the hand with the knife, forcing it away from Terry's throat, the gun in his other hand kissing Norman's temple.

"You're under arrest asshole," Sully said. As soon as Norman felt the gun he let go of Terry's hair and Terry rolled on the floor, moving as far away from Norman as he could with his hands still bound. Before anyone else could move, Zander was there, picking Terry up, breaking the plastic ties that had cut into his wrists with his bare hands and holding his mate as close to his chest as he could. Over the top of Terry's head, Zander met Sully's eyes as his former partner led Norman away.

"Thank you," he mouthed and Sully gave a brief nod in return. It wasn't much, given their years of friendship, but it was a step in the right direction.

Chapter Twenty Three

Terry curled into Zander's arms with a moan of relief. They were finally home. After Sully had taken Norman away, and Zander had gotten him free, it had taken ages before the police could get to him because the drag queens all fussed around, asking him if he was okay, cursing Norman for being more of a dick than they had thought possible. Then the police wanted statements, although Zander was furious that they wouldn't allow him to be with Terry while he repeated his story over and over again.

Once the interviewing officer had taken down his statement, Zander was waiting impatiently pulling him into his arms, not caring who was watching them. He wouldn't let go while the paramedics checked out Terry's throat, the cuts on his wrists and the bruise on his face. He barely let go enough to drive them both home. Zander held Terry tightly as they both took a much needed shower, and Terry had to protest loudly before being allowed to pee in private. As soon as he stepped out of the bathroom Zander pulled him into his arms again. Now they were both curled up in bed and Terry felt warm, safe and loved.

"You were really controlled out there today," Terry offered quietly when Zander didn't seem inclined to talk. "That would have been so hard for you. I could see your wolf in your eyes. I could feel him through our bond. Norman was a dead man walking in any other situation."

Zander grunted, but then must have remembered he was doing his best to share things with Terry that he might not with anyone else. "A room full of humans and watching a knife being forced against your throat. Yeah, I've had better days."

"I thought you handled things really well. I take it you knew Sully was there."

"Yeah, I saw him when I moved closer to the stage. In the past, me and Sully had this thing. One of us being the distraction, the other one creeping up behind our suspect. An easy thing to do if

the criminal thinks that either one of us is on our own, like today."

"So is that why you laughed and got Norman to focus on you and Destiny?"

"Well, the guy was a fucking idiot," Zander said. "He didn't have nearly enough hands to force a blowjob. Destiny looked the least threatening of your friends and I thought Norman would go for it."

"She's a martial arts instructor. Got a black belt and everything."

Zander raised an eyebrow and then grinned. "Looks are deceiving then precious because in that gown I didn't think she could do much at all, but I was grateful for the added distraction."

"Don't underestimate my friends," Terry warned. He stroked his hands over Zander's chest, loving the play of muscles under his fingers. Zander heaved a huge sigh and leaned back on the headboard.

"I thought I was going to have a heart attack when I saw the blood on your throat. It took every ounce of strength not to shift and rip Norman's throat out."

"I'm sorry you had to see that. I don't think he would have killed me, he was just looking to force me into servicing him. The feel of his grubby cock against my ass when he was holding me...god, it makes me shiver to think about it. But I should have smelled him. Should have known someone was in the room with me. It's just there were so many other scents, and I didn't think for a moment I was in any danger until it was too late," Terry said, his voice almost a whisper as he let his fingers weave a spell over Zander's skin. Zander was equally tactile and Terry found himself relaxing under the soothing touch. It was quiet in their room, private, and with Zander curled around him, Terry knew he would be okay.

"Made me think about taking you back to my home pack. This thing today. Not being able to shift because of humans, not being

able to tear Norman's throat out for touching you and hurting you," Zander said out of the blue. "My Father said if I wanted the Alpha position then he would submit and leave me the pack any time I wanted it."

Terry pulled out of Zander's arms enough to look at his mate's face. His big Alpha looked as serious as a church on Sunday.

"Is that what you really want to do? Do they even gays in New Haven? Won't I be hated by the pack for being a male omega? Would the pack follow you if they knew you had a male mate? Could you do your job there? Could I? Where would we live? Oh my God, how could you spring something like this on me?"

Terry knew his brain was going a million miles a minute, but New Haven? A wolf pack? Every warning his mother ever gave him about staying away from a pack situation flooded into his head. His mom would be worried, his dad would be furious, he'd miss all his friends...

Zander laughed, his low chuckle sending a warm sensation through Terry's fingers.

"I didn't say we were going to do it, I said I'd been thinking about it. You'd be accepted, my pack has gay couples already. But with the job thing, probably not so much. New Haven has a huge gay community as part of the university there, and there are even some drag queens I think. But if we went then we would be spending too much time running the pack affairs and businesses to have any time for your creativity or my police work. I just...I could keep you safer if I knew I could let my wolf out anytime you were threatened."

"You'd have to spend all your time in wolf form, protecting my Omega ass from idiots trying to make me their sex toy or punching bag," Terry grumbled, not at all appeased. He didn't want to leave his job, the friends he had made or even Zander's house now he'd added a bit of color and some personal touches.

"It wouldn't be like that," Zander growled. Next thing Terry knew his head was tilted, his lips were being dominated by Zander's insistent mouth and yep, he would be the first to admit it –

Zander's mouth melted him every time. Conversation over. But even as his mate got down the business of bringing them both the pleasure they had come to crave, in the back of Terry's mind he knew this was a topic they would be coming back to in the future. There was no way he was going to let his Alpha move him away from all that he loved without some serious talking on both their parts. They would have to move one day, that was a given because of their lifespans and lack of aging. But Terry had only just found his feet in Houston and he didn't want to give that up.

Chapter Twenty Four

Zander really didn't want to let his little Omega out of the house the next morning, his wolf was still in high protection mode. Unfortunately he hadn't counted on Terry's amazing powers of persuasion. Apparently Zander would agree to just about anything when he was getting his brain sucked out of the slit in his dick. He'd never known that about himself until he had met his mate and he knew from the chuckle Terry had given him as he skipped out of the door, that he would have to be a bit more careful about his mate's powers of manipulation. Or not, he thought with a grin. It was a damn good blowjob and Terry assured him he would be with friends all day.

Hitting the coffee pot for a refill, Zander tried to relax. His Captain had given him a day off, something about not following established procedures in a hostage situation or some other such crap, and he wasn't sure what he was going to do with himself until lunchtime, which is the earliest possible time Terry had said he could see him. Now that all of Terry's client's had seen each other's costumes, apparently he had more than a few ruffled feathers to smooth down. Zander didn't envy his mate at all.

He was just about to sit on the couch, now complete with multi-colored cushions and blankets, when someone pounded at his front door. Zander frowned. He wasn't expecting anyone. The only visitor he used to get before Terry, was Sully and Sully had a key. Fixing his face to give the Jehovah Witnesses a damn good fright, because who else could it be, Zander felt his mouth drop open when he opened the door and found Sully standing on his porch. He quickly shut his mouth again, no point in looking like an idiot, especially when he wasn't sure what his ex-friend wanted.

For a long moment the two men looked at each other. Sully seemed nervous, which was not something Zander was used to seeing. But he didn't seem angry or aggressive so finally Zander stepped back, letting Sully go past him into the house. He didn't want a knock-down drag out fight on his front lawn if he could help it. Although...nope, he had no idea why his friend had

decided to turn up after damn near three months of shunning him and trying to wreck his career. Only one way to find out.

Plunking himself back on the couch, Zander nodded to the chair. He didn't want to say anything, although he had a lot he could say. He'd been in wolf form the last time Sully had confronted him and the memory of Sully pointing his gun at his mate, still caused his wolf to growl in his chest.

Sully sat, and looked around, a half-smile on his face. "Wow, I see Terry must have rubbed off on you." Zander shrugged although he had to admit that Terry had turned his house into something far more comfortable. There was art work on the walls, cushions and rugs on the floor, plants on the window sill and even flowers in a gaudily colored vase on the dining room table. Terry had managed to unearth some old photos of him and his father, and had placed them discretely on his television stand. Freshly printed, no one would know the pictures were almost a hundred years old.

"I'm sure you didn't come here to talk about interior decorating," Zander said. "Besides Terry is the one you would have to talk to about that. I just let him get on with it. I like it."

"So you two *are* living together?"

"Since the last time you were here," Zander replied, still not sure what Sully actually wanted. "It's good. We fit. I protect him, and he looks after me. I'm not about to give him up."

Zander wasn't used to feeling unsure around his friend. He and Sully had always got on together and Zander could admit to himself that he really missed their camaraderie. Sure, he'd met a lot more new people since he'd been living with Terry, and they all accepted him with only a few reservations. But Sully had been a big part of his life for a long time, and his absence still hurt.

Sully's shoulders were hunched, his fingers were meshed together as though he didn't want to fidget, and the overall look was tense.

"Yeah, about that," Sully said at last – Zander more than happy to wait the man out. "I'm sorry, okay. I...I...handled things badly. The business with the gun. Making a false complaint to the Captain." Sully jumped up and started pacing the floor, a move Zander had seen a hundred times. Long strides, hair being punished by hands that didn't seem to know what to do with themselves. Sully was going through some deep shit.

"I panicked okay," Sully said. "I panicked and then I opened my mouth and crap came out..."

"My wolf?" Zander thought he'd better address the elephant, or wolf in this case, in the room. He wanted Sully to feel comfortable talking about that at least. But Sully surprised him.

"No, not the wolf thing. So you can turn into a wolf, big deal. If I hadn't have been so freaked out about the jealousy thing, I probably would have sat down and learned more about it all. You're hiding some wicked shit there."

"You're jealous about my wolf? I got to tell you Sully I was born this way. It's not something you can pick up or learn."

"Not the wolf thing. Terry!" Sully had stopped pacing and was standing there, facing him, but Zander still had no idea what Sully was talking about. Then a horrible thought crossed Zander's mind and he glared at his friend.

"You fancy Terry?"

But Sully shook his head. "Not Terry, no, although he's sweet and sexy and all, but no. What you have with Terry."

Right. A relationship. Zander cocked a grin. "You could have a relationship with any of the women you go out with, if you just tried dating them more than once."

"I don't want any of the women I've been out with. That's why I don't go out with them more than once."

"Well keep looking. That Suzy seemed nice and you went out with her a couple of times."

"Suzy's lovely," Sully said distractedly, "But you're not getting it. I don't want a woman in my life. Emphasis on woman."

Zander eyes widened and then he narrowed them again. He wasn't going to make any assumptions about something so important.

"Spit it out. Tell me the truth."

For one moment it looked like Sully was going to bolt. Zander could see the man's leg muscles tensing, his eyes wild, his hands clenched. But then, just as suddenly, Sully seemed to collapse in on himself and he sat with a heavy thump on the nearest chair.

"I'm gay, okay? I've always been gay, but I'm not allowed to be gay, so I hide it."

"How long?"

"I've been hiding it?" Sully shrugged. "Since just before the academy. My Dad caught me in a compromising position with a guy I really liked, a lot. Threatened me with everything he could think of – disowning me, not giving me any support while I was at the academy, even threatened to get me kicked out of the police training program before I had even got there. I crumbled, told my Dad I could go either way and that I would stick to women from then on. I didn't want to lose contact with my mother."

"Your Mother wouldn't have let you go, she adores you and you know that." Zander had only met Sully's parents a few times and while he could agree that Sully's father was an asshole of the highest order, Sully's mother was kind and caring and seemed to love everyone, no matter who they were.

"I didn't dare take the risk," Sully continued. "But my Dad was friends with the Chief at the academy, so I knew all my exploits with women would get back to him and that would keep him off my back, which it did. Then when we graduated and I couldn't seem to stop. My folks were happy, I could go home for Christmas. I've never had trouble attracting women. I guess I

got so caught up in my own lie, I couldn't help myself. But I could never feel anything for any of them if you catch my drift."

"But why, why attack me? Why the fucking slurs, the lies? Why the attitude? You pointed your gun at my mate." Zander wanted to be understanding, he really did. He knew only too well how hard coming out could be, but Sully had done some stupid shit to try and hide who he really was. Had been doing it for years as the most rampant homophobic idiot on the force and Zander was still paying for some of the fallout from that.

"I pointed the gun at you. You turned into a freaking wolf, man, what did you expect me to do? I wasn't going to shoot or anything. It was just instinct. You're fucking big in that form and I didn't know those teeth of yours weren't going to tear me to bits."

Zander chuckled even though he didn't mean to. Sully was a good detective, homophobic bent aside, and yeah, he probably would have done the same thing in similar circumstances. Besides, at the time he did want to tear his friend to bits, not something that Sully needed to know while he was in confession mode.

"My old man's been putting the wedding pressure on me. Get married, have kids, carry on the family name," Sully went on, shaking his head. "It's been going on for months. I tried to tell him I still liked men, and that I couldn't get it sorted with a woman. I told him that my sexual orientation didn't matter in the department, that I was a grown man and could live my own life. That just set him off again, ranting and raving at me that no son of his will be seen to be gay. I was a fucking mess I tell you. Then I came here to find you in bed with the prettiest man I've ever seen..."

"And you snapped." Zander could understand that too. Sully had clearly been under a lot of pressure and wouldn't have been able to share his secret any more than Zander had.

"I'll apologize, I will. To Terry I mean. I've already admitted I misread things during my visit here to the Department and I've

been temporarily transferred to Armed Defenders squad because they think I'm gun happy and need more training. But after last night, working together again for such a tiny minute just the way we used to...and then seeing the way you were with him...no shame, nothing but caring for your man. Fuck Zander, I didn't think it was possible for love to be like that. I've never felt that with a woman."

"It's almost impossible not to love our mates, and Terry – well, he found his way under my skin pretty quickly. It's a wolf thing although it could also have a lot to do with Terry being who he is. He's easy to love," Zander said, his smile genuine for the first time since Sully had arrived.

"So you knew, from the first moment you saw him? At that bar brawl?" Sully was leaning forward on his chair now, his face alive with curiosity.

"From the moment I scented him at the bar brawl," Zander clarified. "Shifters know their mate through their smell. My cock got hard in an instant, and the longing I had to take him into my arms to protect him, and then fuck him through the floor was unmistakable. There's no getting away from that for shifters."

"Cuts through all the dating game rubbish."

"A lot of shifters don't find their mates," Zander said. "So they play around like I did. Men, women, I didn't really care although I've always preferred men. You just don't commit to anyone though, cos if you find your mate and you're already with someone..."

"That could get messy." Sully looked like he understood. "So this biting thing, it's permanent, no more double dating for us?"

"I can't get a hard-on for anyone else. That night with Rebecca, when I got sick. I'd only scented Terry and I got sick from her being all over me like a rash."

"You're forced to be faithful? Are you sure it's not a curse?" Sully sounded incredulous.

"I *want* to be faithful," Zander corrected. "How can it be a curse when you find that one person in your life who will be everything you ever need? The one you know was born to be exactly what you want, who will complement you perfectly in every way so that you could never think of having anyone else again. You're immediately drawn to them, you're consumed by them and you don't want to think of anyone else. And when you make them yours, fuck the need to protect, to cherish, it never goes away. Not to mention the sex is off the charts good. Far better than with anyone else. Terry's a blessing in my life, never a curse."

"I want that," Sully said, slumping back in the chair. "If I had a relationship like that I could tell my father to fuck himself, and just be happy with a solid partner in my life."

"You can tell your father that anyway." Zander looked Sully straight in the eye. "The man I know wouldn't live a lie for a moment longer. You tell your dad, you stop with the gay-hating and I'll..." Zander thought for a moment. "Terry and I will take you to the clubs I used to go to out of town, and see if we can't find someone for you. Or, if you're really prepared to embrace your true self, there are plenty of places here we can go."

"You and Terry would still be my friends?" Sully sounded unsure and Zander remembered that his work partner was a lot like him and didn't have many other people he could count on. Perhaps that was why he had never rebelled against his father's wishes.

"You can spend Christmas with us. I never wanted to stop being friends. You've had my back for years, as I had yours," Zander said. "You put me in the position where I had to choose between living with my life mate, and being friends with you, and I didn't like it, but Terry will always come first. Doesn't mean I didn't miss having you around. Terry doesn't spend a lot of time watching sports and more than two beers gives him the giggles."

Sully grinned and just like that, Zander had his friend back. A friend who knew all of his secrets this time and who one day hopefully be back by his side on the force. Looking more like his old self, Sully said, "So, is there any coffee in the pot?"

Chapter Twenty Five

Terry was tired. Helping twenty odd men go through their transformations from normal working class males into drop-dead gorgeous females was hard work. Heel's split fabric, a couple of cat fights over who should go first at the makeup table, more complaints about outfits, that had fit perfectly two days previously, no longer hugging the men like they wanted the dresses to. He could hear the faint noises from the crowd as the winners for the various competitions were announced, and looked around for his jacket. It didn't really matter to him who won the competition. All of the clothing, for the ladies and their escorts, had been made by him, and that was going to be acknowledged at the end of the night. It was the Diva's personalities and talents that were being judged – Terry's work was just part of the show.

In deference to the bright costumes he'd created, Terry had opted to wear basic black for his evening. Admittedly his sleeveless t-shirt was skin-tight, as were his jeans. He completed his look with black boots, but planned to wear his multi-colored jacket as a confidence booster. He'd met Zander wearing that jacket, and yeah, Terry could be a bit superstitious sometimes.

Slipping his well-fitted jacket on over his shoulders, Terry bent down to check the buckles on his boots. The last thing he wanted was for one of them to go flying off on stage. A loud wolf whistle had him straightening up in a hurry and Terry looked over to see Zander coming into the room, followed by Sully. As pleased as he was to see his mate, he wasn't so sure about Sully. Zander had told him what his friend had said, Sully had apologized to him that same evening, but in Terry's eyes Sully's presence was still going to take some getting used to.

"What are you two doing here? I thought you were going to wait for me out front?" He said, hurrying into Zander's open arms and turning his mouth up for a quick kiss.

"Seems some overprotective bastard didn't like the idea of his partner being out on stage by himself," Sully said, his face split in a huge smile. "So he volunteered us for escort duty. Something to do with aesthetics, a boost to gay pride having two decorated detectives take part, and yeah, some other stuff about you being a bit nervous."

Terry looked into his mate's pale green eyes, and yes the annoying blond was right. Zander did look nervous for him, but then given the only time in his life Terry had been on stage, he had a knife to his throat, Terry figured he could forgive him. Both men did look exceptionally handsome, dressed in black camo gear and boots, their badges the only shine on their belts. Zander's dark hair was pulled back from his face and his designer stubble was immaculately groomed. Sully had gone for a clean face and tousled hair falling just slightly over his face.

"You're certainly a pair of gay dreams walking," Terry said, giving into the inevitable. If he was totally honest with himself, he did feel a lot better having two handsome, well-armed men by his side, even though he knew Norman would be locked up for some time to come. He followed Zander and Sully out to the corner of the stage, waiting for his cue.

"Ladies and Gentleman," Terry heard the MC say. "Thank you for coming here this evening. This one event, something that I am sure will be repeated in forthcoming Pride Weeks, has raised over fifty thousand dollars and will be used to help LGBTQ homeless youths."

The applause from the audience was huge and Terry gulped at having to stand out there in front of so many people. He much preferred to keep his role behind the scenes.

"While I know you will join me in thanking all of the people who worked so hard behind the scenes to make tonight a memorable event," The MC went on, "the ladies insisted that a special mention must be made for the designer and creator of all of the clothing you have seen onstage this evening. It is with great pride I introduce to you, Houston's newest and youngest clothing

designer, Mr. Terry Martin, accompanied by two of Houston's finest police officers, Detective Zander Samuels and Detective Sully Roberts."

Terry didn't have any choice but to step out on stage, caught as he was between two big men. Zander and Sully didn't seem to have a problem with the rush of applause that greeted them, but Terry was overwhelmed. Trying to get his bearings, Terry saw Joel and Max, Charlie, Roy and Richard all standing at the back hooting and hollering, clapping madly, but the rest of the audience was just a sea of faces.

"Look down the front," Zander whispered in his ear as he and Sully led Terry to the front of the stage, standing slightly behind him as Terry waved and wished the floor would open up and swallow him. Looking down, his eyes bulged from his head. Standing up, clapping madly, pride written all over their faces was Terry's mom and dad. Terry felt his eyes fill with tears and he leaned slightly towards Zander. His mate must have arranged all this, there was no way his parents could afford the flight from Ohio to Houston. By the Fates his mate was such a thoughtful man and Terry promised himself Zander would be well rewarded later.

Barely paying attention, Terry knew he accepted a huge bouquet of flowers from Madam Morgana. Davina and Lucy also kissing him on the cheek, the crowd still cheering. Then the MC came over, handing him a microphone. "Anything you'd like to say, Terry?"

Oh. My. God. Speak? Terry could barely stand. Accepting the held out microphone as though it was a bomb, Terry said hesitantly, "Thank you all so much. The ladies have been wonderful to work with, and yeah, if you like what you see be sure to look me up sometime. But really it's the beautiful and talented Houston drag queens we are celebrating tonight, so please, another big round of applause for them."

He waved an arm at the Divas, almost hitting Sully with the microphone. The ladies all came and surrounded him and the

two detectives on the stage, and as Terry leaned back against Zander's shoulder he could swear it was without doubt the second most amazing night of his life. His claiming would always rank first.

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Zander hurried into their bedroom, eager to be ready before Terry came in. Terry was busy chatting with his parents, getting them settled in the spare room. They had done the show, enjoyed the dinner afterwards, Terry's father only being slightly wary around Zander's stronger wolf. But it had been clear to Zander at least where Terry had gotten his confidence and his self-respect from. Terry's parents were so proud of him and they had no problem showing their love for their son. Zander just hoped that maybe one day soon he would be included in their affections.

Hurrying to the bathroom, Zander pulled out a tube of lube that had seen better days. With Terry having a self-prepping mechanism it wasn't something the two men ever had to use. But with what he had planned for his little mate, Zander had wished he bought a brand new, big, bottle of the stuff. Shucking off his clothes, he threw them towards the hamper in the corner of the bedroom before, laying himself out on the bed. Bending his legs and planting his feet firmly on the mattress Zander awkwardly reached between his legs, finding...yep, there it was. Now for lube.

Zander had prepared men for anal sex a hundred times, and seen it done just as often, but it was never something he had ever even tried to do to himself. Now, as he rimmed the edge of his tight hole nervously he had to admit he got a few tingles through into his groin. Determined to move things along, because Terry wouldn't be out of the room much longer, Zander pushed two fingers in and then just as quickly pulled them out. Damn and fucking hell that stung.

Applying more lube to his fingers, Zander persisted, pushing through his tight muscles with first one finger, and then a

second. One finger was okay, quite pleasurable in fact, but two took a bit more getting used to. To help keep him in the mood, Zander closed his eyes thinking of his mate, how sexy the little man always looked, how he showed his love in a dozen different ways every day. Zander had been so proud standing on that stage, hearing the applause and knowing it was all for the talented, pretty man standing with him. Just thinking about how Terry belonged to him and only him, had Zander's cock rising, his breath quickening and...wow would you look at that, it seemed his ass could take three fingers after all.

Zander rocked on his fingers. It was clumsy and awkward, but he knew that if he didn't get finished then Terry would probably dissuade him from his whole mission. Then he had another thought. I wonder...Zander arched off the bed, his cock flailing about wildly looking for friction.

"Did you just find your prostate, sweetheart?"

Zander turned his head to see Terry standing by the bed, a huge smile on his face, and his cock pulled out from his pants, Terry caressing it slowly with one hand. Zander was sure his face went ten degrees of red, but he nodded anyway.

"Er...yeah...never done that before."

"Do it again," Terry said, kicking off his boots and climbing on the bed, not even bothering to take the rest of his clothes off. Zander pushed with his fingers, blessing the fact they were so long, and twiddled them, before letting out a startled groan as he hit that little nub again.

Running a hand up Zander's tense thigh, Terry said softly, "Does this mean what I think it means, or are you just having some private fun?"

"I want you to...my gift, to top off your brilliant night...claim me, please." Now Terry was so close, his scent teasing his nostrils, the smell of Terry's need woven through it, Zander let his fingers slip out of his ass, closing his eyes and falling back onto the bed.

"Oh my darlin', you have no idea how powerful you look right now." Terry's husky murmur registered in Zander's brain before being forced out as Terry's fingers checked his work. Zander was glad he had taken the time to use his own fingers for a bit. His fingers were more in keeping with the size of his cock. Terry's digits were a lot slimmer although he was similarly well-endowed. Zander moaned as he felt Terry's hair kiss his abs before warm lips, took in the head of his cock. Okay, there was the positive side of letting someone else prep you.

Zander kept his eyes closed, relishing the feelings swarming through his body. Terry's warm mouth, his subtle yet strong fingers finding and then teasing with unerring accuracy that special place inside of him. Before he knew it Zander was moaning loudly, his fists clenched in the sheets as he concentrated entirely on the action going on around his hips. For a novice, Terry was a natural. His wolf, who Zander was sure would kick up a fuss at being invaded in such an intimate manner, was curled up relaxed in his head, apparently trusting Terry to look after him. This left Zander all the time in the world to feel, to absorb the new sensations, try them out, and fuck it all, if he didn't love every second of it.

"Time to claim your Alpha, mate," he finally growled when the teasing had gotten beyond pleasurable, morphing into need. "I've got to have your cock inside of me."

Terry slurped off Zander's cock and Zander felt those talented fingers leave his ass. For a moment he felt empty, bereft, but then he felt something bigger nudging at his entrance and he squeezed his eyelids even tighter, hoping he could stay relaxed.

"Look at me, love. Watch, so you know who you're with. This would not be a good time to shift," Terry teased softly.

Opening his eyes, Zander was greeted with a truly erotic sight. Terry still hadn't gotten undressed, just his jacket was gone. Terry was kneeling between his legs, his lightly muscled arms were holding Zander's thighs apart, his hair was mussed and those gorgeous soft lips that Zander loved so much were

glistening wet and puffy. The Omega's eyes were almost black with lust, and yet they warmed Zander to his very soul, letting him know he was loved.

"Thank you, sweetheart," Terry whispered. Zander felt a short twinge of pain and then a sense of fullness as Terry firmly pushed inside of him. Breathing out a long breath, Zander held Terry's eyes with his own, as his mate thrust slowly and steadily, willing Zander to relax and be open to him. Zander couldn't resist, he didn't want to. Terry was his love, his mate and for the first time in his long life, Zander was prepared to concede control in the bedroom, knowing that Terry would never hurt him.

When Terry's hips were finally snug against the back of Zander's thighs, he stopped moving, his hands still clasped around Zander's legs, his slender body quivering slightly in an effort not to move. In his eyes, Zander could see the love his mate had for him, hell he could feel it through their mind link along with so much more. Terry's wonder at being allowed to do something an Omega never had a chance to do, his thrill at his success earlier that day, his joy at Zander arranging for his parents to be with them, everything all tied up in the love that Zander never doubted that his mate felt.

"Move, precious," he growled. "Move and make me yours."

Terry swiveled his hips, as though not wanting to pull out of Zander's heat. Then he did it again, moaning softly. Zander could feel Terry's cock, branding him inside. Pleasure, that had retreated slightly when Terry's cock had penetrated him, came back in force, and Zander wiggled, trying to push up, encouraging his mate to get things moving.

"I do know how it's supposed to go," Terry said with a grin. "I'm just savoring." He drew the last word out, long syllables in a husky tone, swiveling his hips again, letting Zander know exactly how he felt.

"Savor next time," Zander moaned as the head of Terry's cock grazed his prostate. "For fuck's sake, fuck me."

"I'll get to do this again?" Terry might have sounded surprised, which Zander totally understood, but then his little mate pulled back and slammed into him, and Zander's brain got a loose connection. With a strength not usually seen in someone so slim, Terry clung to Zander's legs, pumping deep inside him, his thrusts long, firm and...claiming. This had been what Zander was looking for. Someone who would love him and want to claim him with the same intensity he'd claimed his mate.

"Oh fuck, love, this will be the shortest claiming in history," Terry cried out as he sped up his movements. "You feel too good, so tight, so...fuck, I've never felt anything like it around my cock before."

"Keep going, precious," Zander gritted out. He knew exactly what Terry was feeling. His own cock, which had been on edge most of the evening, was ready to explode untouched, another first for Zander, but he didn't care. Watching Terry's face, he could see the exact moment Terry lost his control. Pulling Terry down towards his chest, Zander curled up slightly.

"Bite me," was all he had time to say before he was treated to the foreign sensation of spunk coating his insides, then Terry's teeth were in his neck and Zander roared as his own orgasm erupted. Holy fuck, hell on the abdominals, but what an amazing feeling.

Once Terry had removed his teeth, licking softly at Zander's neck, Zander lay back, his brain was mush, his body was humming softly. He felt Terry's get up, the rustle of clothes, and the movement as Terry went to get cleaned up. Zander figured he should probably do the same thing, but before he could move, a soft warm cloth tenderly wiped over his come-stained abs and chest, before being swiped down and around his ass, which still felt a bit puffy. A clunk which Zander took to mean Terry had actually managed to throw the cloth into the hamper and then peace as Terry climbed up on the bed, into arms, snuggling down fitting perfectly against Zander's body, exactly as he was born to do.

Life couldn't be more perfect.

Chapter Twenty Six

Zander woke alone, to the smell of coffee, frying bacon and the sound of quiet chatter coming from the kitchen. Shit, Terry's parents were staying with them for five days. It wasn't polite to spend his time lolling around in bed if they had company. Not that bed was any fun without his mate around anyway, Zander thought looking at his morning wood ruefully. No time for that. Washing quickly and pulling on a pair of clean jeans, Zander didn't bother with a shirt, eager to get out to the kitchen. He'd missed his morning wake up kiss.

Terry's mom, Rachel was at the stove, cooking something in a big frypan. She looked up and smiled as Zander came in. "There you are sleepy head. Terry thought he would have to come and wake you. Come and give me a kiss good morning and then sit down and I'll dish you up some breakfast."

Confused, Zander walked over, leaning down and pecking Rachel on the cheek. Rachel wasn't much taller than Terry but she had the same fine features although her dark hair fell down her back. Turning, he saw Terry and his dad – George, already sitting down with almost empty plates in front of them. He quickly moved into the chair beside his mate, and leaned over, intending to give Terry a quick peck on the cheek as well. But Terry wasn't having any of that. A quick turn of Terry's head and Zander's lips were caught in the most pleasant of locks. Taking his time, Zander savored the taste of bacon and coffee on Terry's tongue before breaking off gently.

"Morning," Terry said with a happy grin.

Zander smiled, and then nodded at George, "Morning, sir."

"No need for this sir rubbish. Call me George," George said. "We all know who the stronger wolf is in this room."

Nodding again, Zander smiled as a huge plate of food appeared from beside him. Not sure what to say in a family get together because it wasn't something he was familiar with, he concentrated on eating – after the first mouthful he knew where Terry had learned to cook. Rachel's breakfast was amazing.

"So, Zander," George said, after he'd swallowed a few mouthfuls. "Terry tells us that you've mentioned taking up a position as Alpha for your home pack, in New Haven?"

"I've mentioned it," Zander said, too engrossed in his food to really worry about anything his...well, his father in law, he supposed, was concerned about.

"Yes, well, Terry's mother and I were hoping you would reconsider, for Terry's benefit." George's tone was respectful, but there was a tinge of warning in those words as well – words that had Zander paying a lot more attention.

Putting down his knife, Zander tucked his arm around his mate, and looked George squarely in the eye. George wasn't able to hold his gaze for very long, but Zander gave the man points for trying. As soon as George dropped his eyes, Zander said softly, "My Father did offer me the opportunity when he'd heard I'd met my mate. At the time I told him no, because I love my work, and I know Terry has built a good life for himself here as well. However, as a police detective, living as a human can be difficult for my wolf spirit, and after Terry was attacked by his ex-boss for the second time I might add, I found it really difficult not to act as a decent wolf should."

"We understand that Zander," Rachel said, slipping into the seat beside her husband and taking George's hand. "You're an Alpha and I'm so thankful that you are strong enough to keep our son safe. We've been blessed. But a pack, for an Omega, no matter how strong you are, it won't be a good life for Terry. That's why we left ours."

"What do you mean?" Terry said, apparently quite happy to rest against Zander's shoulder, but looking at his mom. "I thought you left your pack well before I was born. I didn't know it was my fault."

"It wasn't your fault, son," George said quickly. "Besides, we didn't know for sure you were an Omega until you shifted. But Rachel here, she sees things sometimes, and when we knew she

was pregnant with you, she..." George trailed off and dropped his eyes again.

"I had a premonition," Rachel said, patting George's hand. "Our Alpha wasn't a good man, and he hated the thought of male Omegas. He didn't treat his female ones very well either. When I told George that I was sure we would be giving birth to a male Omega, he believed me and we left. We've been lone wolves ever since and while it was hard, it was the best thing we could have ever done."

Zander thought for a moment, eating a bit more breakfast. He had been thinking of moving back to New Haven especially after he lost Sully's friendship. The attack on Terry had just solidified that idea. But Sully was back in his life, and fuck, he couldn't take Terry away from his successes, his friends, and the life he had created for himself. Terry was still young and deserved some happiness in the world he'd created for himself, instead of being buried in pack life from an early age.

"A lot of my reasoning for leaving Houston comes from trying to keep Terry safe. My wolf is hampered in a human world, but it is more than that. I have been in Houston for ten years and it won't be long before people notice that I'm not aging. We will have to move eventually."

"Tell them you've had a face lift in an effort to keep up with your younger lover," Terry said with a cheeky smile. "That should keep the gossips off your back for a while."

Zander mock growled and snapped his teeth at his mate, pleased when Terry laughed. He looked up to see Rachel and George smiling at him.

"I do know what packs are like, but a lot of their culture comes from the Alpha who leads them," Zander said. "My Father has always been a fair man and has no problems with gays or Omegas and he has raised his pack to be the same. That said," he added looking at Terry again, "My mate has just proven himself as the rising fashion consultant for Houston Pride Week, which I am hugely proud of. He has friends, and I have a job I'm

committed to. I'd like to think we can squeeze another five, eight or even ten years out of this place before we have to move. I do promise you, that if we move to New Haven, that we will talk to you about it first, and I would want to take you two on a visit there before any permanent decisions were made. I understand how much you have Terry's best interests at heart."

Rachel and George shared a long look, so Zander took the time to finish his breakfast and swig on the coffee Terry had thoughtfully provided.

"I really appreciate what you have told us, Zander," George said. "You don't have to take our feelings, or Terry's into account, especially when keeping Terry safe is your biggest concern. I would just like to ask, if you do decide to relocate to New Haven sometime in the future, would there be room in your pack for me and Rachel?"

"Definitely," Zander said firmly, while Terry gave a little clap and a jump beside him. Pulling Terry onto his lap, Zander added, "I can't blame you for wanting to keep your son safe. You've been doing it his whole life, I am well aware that I'm the newcomer in this little family. Thanks to you my little mate is happy, confident in who he is and on the cusp of a huge career. He's everything I could ever want in my life partner and I have you two to thank for it. If you ever want to move closer to us, if you need help of any kind, I'll do all I can to be there for you."

"You don't have to do that, love. You're a part of our family no matter what happens," Terry said, stroking Zander's face, a serious frown on his face.

"Terry, your mate is an Alpha," George said with a laugh. "I think we've just become a mini pack."

Meeting George's eyes across the top of Terry's head, Zander caught the older man's look of approval and he nodded, agreeing with George's statement. No matter what life threw at them, Zander knew that he now had two more people he would be responsible for, whether he moved Terry to New Haven or not. A huge part of Terry's sweetness, his ability to love and the way

he embraced life, was thanks to the two other people sharing their table. Two people who had been keeping Terry safe since before his mate was born. Zander would never forget the debt he owed Rachel and George.

Epilogue

Terry slid into the end of the booth, greeting his faithful friends with a smile and a nod. Since Pride Week, Terry had been inundated with orders for one-off, special occasion gowns from some of Houston's elite society. The hours were long, but the pay, which Richard had advised him on, was phenomenal.

"How's the rag trade going, Terry?" Roy asked, pushing a fancy pink cocktail towards him.

"Never better," Terry said. "You guys, what you did for me when I lost my job at Club Blue...I'll never forget it."

"Good, you can get the next drink in," Joel said, lifting his near empty glass. "Now what were we talking about?"

"Kissing," Charlie said. "And now, Terry's here, perhaps he'd like to update us on his impressions of the perfect kiss. By the way, Ter, where's your faithful shadow?"

"Zander will be along shortly. He and Sully went with Richard to pick up his brother from the airport. Where's Max?"

Roy sat back in the booth with a small smile on his face. He was still seeing Richard on a regular basis, and Terry had been pleased to see that some of his snarky manner had been worn down a bit. Not that Roy was a pushover, but love looked good on his friend.

"He'll be along shortly too," Joel said. "More meetings. I swear that man never has a day off lately."

"Blow jobs might help," Terry said with a smirk as he took a sip of his drink. Sweet, full of cream and some underlying kick of alcohol. Just perfect.

"I swear since you've been with that man of yours, you've become a right connoisseur in using bedroom tricks for manipulative purposes." Charlie and Joel were laughing at him, but Terry knew there was an element of truth to the statement. Not everything he tried worked of course, but with Zander, half the fun was trying things out. Frequently.

"Okay, back to kissing," Roy said, perching his elbows on the table, trying to look serious and failing miserably. It might have had something to do with his bright blue top, with matching sparkly eyeshadow. "The last time we tried to discuss this, we were rudely interrupted, however, from what I remember, Charlie was in favor of dreamy lips and not too much slobber, Joel liked the feel of stubble on his chin, particularly Max's lack of shaving, and Terry had some romantic notion about toes curling, passion and a spot of dominance. I'd like to add having strong arms to hold you while being kissed is a vital part of the experience. Have any of your opinions changed?"

"I haven't had much experience with kissing lately," Charlie said, drooping a little. "But Terry's loaned me some books and I am starting to see that kissing would be more than a meeting of the lips."

"I still concur that Max is by far the best kisser I've ever experienced and that's not going to change." Bless Joel, still so loyal to his man. It was lovely to see.

"And you Terry? Your circumstances have changed the most since we last tabled this discussion. What do you think?"

"I agree with all of you," Terry said, thinking about Zander. "The perfect kiss has to be more than four lips smacking together. The feel of a strong chin against yours is precious, the softness or hardness of lips doesn't matter, but the pressure they are used with does. It is definitely a whole body experience and if it doesn't curl your toes, then you ain't doing it right."

The four friends sat in silence for a moment, all probably reliving special moments in their lives. Roy was just about to speak again when two large shadows fell across the table.

"Oh not again," Terry said before he could stop himself. "Can't we go anywhere for a quiet drink without being hassled?"

"Not here, you can't," one of the strangers said. "Look at you," he waved a hand dismissively over the four men. "You're fucking fairies and don't belong around decent folk."

"I am not going to take umbrage at your use of the word fairies," Charlie said with a burst of spirit. "Clearly vocabulary is not one of your strong points. But we are waiting on other friends and have no intention of leaving until they get here."

"If your other friends look like you, then they ain't welcome here either," the other larger stranger said with what was supposed to be a menacing look. Terry thought he looked constipated and his friend wasn't much better.

"They don't look anything like us," Terry assured him, winking at Roy and leaning back in his seat. "Why don't you look for yourself?" He pointed his finger behind the men, who were both dumb enough to look. But then the sight of four, no make that, five big men all looking like they were ready to kill someone was something worth looking at.

Zander of course got there first. Pushing past one stranger, he slipped into the booth beside Terry, putting a possessive arm over his shoulder.

"This man bothering you sweet cakes? Blown away by your beauty and personality perhaps? Didn't you tell him you were taken?"

Before Terry could say anything one of the strangers blustered, "You're fucking kidding me. You're with these faggots?"

"We're all together, yes," Richard said, looking positively evil as he sat next to Roy, pulling the smaller man closer. "If you have a problem with us, then you might like to know that two of our party are part of Houston's finest police force, I'm a cut throat lawyer that eats idiots like you before breakfast, and my brother over there, he's a Marine. And while Max might work as a chef, he's also a middle weight boxing champion. Now, can we get on with our evening, or do we need to throw the trash out first?"

Okay, if looks could kill they would all be dead, but the two strangers had enough brain cells between them to know when they were beat, and they slinked away. Richard introduced his brother, known simply as Q, while Max got reacquainted with

Joel. What Terry couldn't understand was why Sully was looking at Q like he was the center attraction at a chocolate fair.

"They're mates, precious. Looks like Sully's got what he was looking for. You should have seen Q at the airport," Zander whispered, taking the opportunity to nibble his ear. Terry hoped his moan was quiet, but honestly the feeling was so delicious it was hard to keep his noises to himself.

Fortunately, or not depending on how you looked at it, Zander left his ear alone, settling for a hot hand on the top of his thigh, while he and the others around the table shared jokes, tall tales about work and the general nonsense that could only come from being with good friends.

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Now he was sitting with his Omega, Zander felt contentment fall over him like a warm blanket. He'd been feeling that way a lot just lately and he knew it all came down to being with his mate. His wolf wasn't as anxious and surly anymore. He and Sully were still good friends, but he was also finding himself more sociable than ever before and chatted and shared things with other work mates. He had a cozy home he longed to return to every minute he was away. And at the very heart of his perfect life was Terry.

Thinking back over all that he'd done and thought over the past six months – yep, some was good and some not so much. But Terry had been a constant in all of it. As he looked up at Q who was eying Sully like he was a big tasty steak, all while thinking the other man wasn't looking, Zander chuckled to himself. He could have danced around all he liked, lord knows he tried. But sooner or later, when it came to being mates, the Fates always played the winning hand. And as for Zander, he couldn't be happier.

The End

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About the Author

Lisa Oliver had been writing non-fiction books for years when visions of half dressed, buff men started invading her dreams. Unable to resist the lure of her stories, Lisa decided to switch to fiction books, and now stories about her men clamor to get out from under her fingertips.

When Lisa is not writing, she is usually reading with a cup of tea always at hand. Her grown children and grandchildren sometimes try and pry her away from the computer and have found that the best way to do it, is to promise her chocolate. Lisa will do anything for chocolate.

Lisa loves to hear from her readers and other writers. You can friend her on [Facebook here](#), or email her directly at yoursintuitively@gmail.com.