

Phoebe Sean



Never Cry Wolf



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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

NEVER CRY WOLF

By Phoebe Sean

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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NEVER CRY WOLF

By Phoebe Sean

Photo Description

A man is naked, on his stomach on the floor, bound by thick rope in intricate knots, with his legs and arms stretched back, tied with the rope wrapped many times to keep him still. He is also gagged.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Never thought I'd be here at this phase of my life, chasing mice or bats or whatever the hell it is making that noise behind these industrial building walls. But there's nothing wrong with pest control, so my grandmother tells me.

The creatures making all the racket tonight are elusive. If I don't take care of this tonight they'll find another company so this is it. Turned around in the dark room I trip over something on the floor and hit a wall hard and flail as it crumbles and I fall face first inside. I scramble to find my flashlight and when I do I find this. A nude man bound hand and foot face down on the floor. I don't know who he is but I have to help. I know he doesn't deserve to be imprisoned in this room and tied this way.

Or does he?

No dub-con, rape, torture, etc. No bed hopping Looking for something paranormal or with a little paranormal flair. The tied man can be an MC or not. And would like the guys to be older, at least thirty-five. Heat level, your choice.

Sincerely,

Issa

Story Info

Genre: paranormal

Tags: werewolf, Montreal, soulmates/bonded, blue collar, homophobia, pack politics

Word Count: 32,763

Dedication

To Dominic and Frédérique, as promised.

To Philippe.

And to Issa, thanks for the prompt. Hope you like it.

Acknowledgements

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NEVER CRY WOLF

By Phoebe Sean

Chapter 1

“Shit, it’s cold,” I mumbled as I parked my truck behind the construction site. March in Montreal is never warm, but this year was particularly cold and it was getting us behind schedule.

Four o’clock in the morning was brutal, but in this weather it was insane. I had to take my glove off to turn the key in the padlock, and my fingers froze numb in two seconds.

I had to check those traps before the other guys came into work at six. I could’ve asked one of the younger guys but, as foreman, I thought it’d be pretty lame to get them to do the shitty job of exterminating our little friends—if there were any—before we closed the walls, so here I was, freezing my balls off. There was no one to warm my bed or wait for me anyway.

Closing the door behind me as quickly as possible, I stopped for a second to get my bearings and turn my flashlight on. I couldn’t see a thing, but I could hear something. Grunting? Mice didn’t grunt, did they? Rats or raccoons, on the other hand, who knew...? Sweeping the beam of light around, my boot caught on a wire or something, and I stumbled right into a piece of drywall that had been put there temporarily. I just remembered its presence as I fell with it and landed in what would be the next room. My flashlight flew out of my hand and switched off. The racket it created echoed in the skeleton construction. Dust and crud flew up my nose and made me sneeze.

“Fucking fuck!” Yeah, I know, my vocabulary is remarkable.

As I lay there catching my breath, the grunting seemed much closer. Since meeting grunting rodents was not on my bucket list, I fumbled until I found my flashlight and clicked it back on.

The grunting got louder as I turned around to the most unexpected vision on a construction site at four in the morning.

I heard a gasp and knew it was mine, because the guy tied up on the ground had a gag in his mouth and was wearing a blindfold.

“Guess I found the source for the grunting noises.” All thoughts of killing rodents vanished. I bent down and removed his blindfold.

The most beautiful pale brown, almost golden eyes I had ever seen were throwing daggers at me. If looks could kill...

I admit I was completely frozen in place. It's not just that the guy was tied up. It was the intricate rope work holding him immobile that was worth a closer look. Thick rope was keeping him on his stomach, wrapped four times over, starting from his neck then tied in complicated knots, reaching both his arms, maintaining them tightly behind his back, going under him at the hips and coming up to wrap around his legs, bent at the knees, all the way to his ankles stretched over his back and ass. The rope was coiled around his limbs many times before continuing on its journey all over his body, which was just muscle and more muscle.

Oh yeah, did I mention he was stark-naked? What the hell was I interrupting?

His grunting and angry stare got me to refocus on the situation. I removed the gag.

The man spat out, "Get me the fuck outta here!" Then, like an afterthought, he added, "Who sent you?"

"No one sent me! What about you? Are you hurt? Should I call the cops?" I asked, as I took my gloves off and reached for my knife. There weren't any visible injuries.

"No cops. Absolutely no cops. Just untie me," he grumbled. He stopped moving suddenly. It almost looked like he was sniffing my hand... I was suddenly overly conscious of the strawberry-scented soap I used. Not very manly, but too late for a second first impression. His eyes closed slowly, in pleasure or in pain, it was hard to tell.

"What the hell are you doing here? Who did this to you? Should I call someone?" I was working on cutting the rope but it was really thick, the kind used for mooring small boats. His body should've been cold, but his skin was hot, like the blood coursing underneath was boiling. His skin was burning me. He couldn't have been there long.

"Never mind, just get me free so I can get the hell outta here. You never saw me, you understand?" he said, his voice rasping and his eyes hard.

"What are you doing here?" I asked one more time. The rope across his back was finally cut enough that he could free his arms. He immediately put his hands on the floor near his shoulders and yanked himself up and twisted so he was sitting. He grabbed my knife from my hands—"Hey!"—and cut his feet free.

“You never saw me, got it? I was already gone when you got here,” he said through gritted teeth.

In a second he was standing up, throwing the knife down, his package right in my face—fuck me—before he spun around and ran for the door. “I wish I could stay, but...” he called over this shoulder.

“Wait! You’ll freeze!” I yelled as I got up and started after him. The door slammed behind him before I reached the entrance. When I opened the door, he was gone. Vanished. I stepped out and looked around. The street was empty. It was dark but the streetlamps were still on at this hour. I walked behind the building to the alley, but all I saw was a big dog running at the other end. The guy was really gone.

I stood there, wondering what the hell had just happened.

The bitter cold got me back into the building. I went to the small room and wondered what to do with the rope. Should I get rid of it? Show it to my boss when he came in?

Should I call the police? And tell them what? This gorgeous guy was tied up on the floor and when I cut him free, he ran outside naked at minus twenty-two degrees and vanished into thin air? Yeah, right.

There was no way the guy could survive in this weather more than a few minutes without suffering at least major frostbite. My gut churned as I went back out to my truck. I drove around the neighborhood for fifteen minutes, slowing down at cramped spaces in alleyways in case hypothermia had set in and he had taken refuge somewhere against the wind. Nothing.

Maybe he lived somewhere nearby. Maybe this was a stupid prank. But the guy wasn’t college-age. He was close to my age, early thirties at least. You don’t play stupid pranks on your friends at that age, not if you’re smart or experienced enough to know he could have seriously suffered in this cold. The heating appliances we kept in the building were turned off during the night. And why was I even worried about a perfect stranger?

I went back to work; there wasn’t anything I could do for the guy now. Although getting his number would have been nice. The man was simply beautiful and there was a chance his eyes were even more breathtaking when they weren’t spewing pure rage. I would’ve liked the opportunity to see for myself.

At least I got fodder for the next few whacking off sessions.

Once back in the building, I went in search of the rodent traps I had set the night before. A couple of mice had bit the dust, pun intended. We'd be able to close the walls later today.

I was in the back of the building when I heard someone come in. It wasn't even five yet. Who was here this early?

I stopped in my tracks when I heard what sounded like my boss George whisper, "Where the fuck is he?"

Someone answered, "He's gone, the rope's cut."

"Ssshhh, Tom's truck's outside, moron," George whispered. Then much louder, "Tom? You in here?"

Well, I couldn't very well hide, now could I?

"George? Is that you?" I yelled as I walked toward them. I heard the front door close. When I got to the entrance, George was alone.

"Starting pretty early this morning?" he asked with a tight smile.

I held up the two traps. "Thought I'd clear these away before the other guys came in. What are you doing here?"

"I was gonna do the same thing," he answered flatly.

We both knew that was a lie. No way the contractor was gonna get up at four-thirty in the morning to come clean up vermin. That was my job. Plus, as far as I knew, George hadn't even known I'd set traps the night before. He could have guessed, it had had to be done, but I doubted it.

"Say, do you know what happened to this wall here?" he asked, pointing to the fallen drywall.

"No, it was like that when I came in." The lie just flowed from my lips. The image of those amber eyes telling me I'd never seen them was still at the forefront of my mind. I walked over to the broken drywall when George took a step toward it, blocking me.

"Don't worry about it, I'll take care of it. In fact, I'll get whoever's responsible for leaving it there to clean it up. Why don't you go get us some coffees while I turn on the heat?"

"Sure, let me just get rid of these," I said, holding up the traps with the dead mice splattered on them. I threw the traps in the container in the alley.

I got in my truck feeling odd, scared even. George obviously had something to do with the tied-up guy and his accomplice had taken off before I had gotten to the entrance. I drove to the Second Cup a couple of blocks over.

As I washed my hands in the coffee shop washroom, I went through the events.

Someone had tied up a guy, taking great care in the knots so it would have been impossible for him to get free or even to move around. The guy had disappeared in minus twenty-degree weather without clothes or shoes. And he specifically told me not to tell anyone I had seen him or to call the cops. Hence my lie to George after he and someone whose voice I didn't hear enough to recognize came in looking for him. Maybe George was part of some weird BDSM sex club that dealt with ropes and stuff. Not my thing, but who am I to judge? Then again, why bring a member to the construction site? Didn't they have private, secure places for that? And there was that question—who sent you; not who are you.

I could just bet the rope cuttings would be gone by the time I returned to the site with the coffees.

I was right. When I handed George his double espresso latte, the room next to the entrance had been cleaned of any evidence that there ever was a man tied up like a pretzel in there.

The guys started trickling in around six and we were very busy the whole day. I didn't think of Mr. Mystery again until I left around four that afternoon. I was exhausted, but I had promised my grandmother I'd visit her after work that day.

Chapter 2

Grandma was in her room watching television. Her smile when she saw me always made my day a whole lot better, and today was no exception. She always made me feel like a star. Her star.

“Hey there sweetie, come in,” she said, holding her hand out.

I took her small, wrinkled, and cold fingers in mine and bent to kiss her weathered cheek. The television was put on mute.

“Hi, Grandma. How’s it going today?”

“I’m fine, can’t complain. Well, I could but it would cost too much,” she said. It’s something she said all the time, and I had never heard anyone say it except her in all my life; I wasn’t even sure what it meant. She smiled, her front tooth long since broken from biting into an ill-intentioned baguette.

“So what brings you out here in this bad weather? You look tired,” she said, frowning.

I took a seat on her bed, the only other flat surface in her small room.

“I wanted to say hi, and yeah, I’m tired. I went in at four this morning.”

“Four!? What’s that boss of yours thinking making you go in that early? Aren’t you unionized? You should file a complaint!” Of course, Grandma would presume that my boss forced me to go in at four a.m.

“I went in on my own, Grandma.” Sadly, that didn’t seem to make her happier. In fact, she looked downright disappointed.

“Oh. Well. If you’re crazy enough to get up in the middle of the night to go to work... you need a life.”

“I had to set traps for rats, we’re putting up the walls.”

“Oh... well, in that case, there’s nothing wrong with pest control,” she said, smiling.

“Strange thing happened—I found a naked man tied up on the floor.”

That got her attention. Thought she’d get a kick out of it.

Her head swiveled towards me, eyes wide, muted television forgotten.

“What? What do you mean a naked man tied up?”

“Just what I said. I untied him and he took off running. Told me not to call the cops or say anything to anyone.”

“Tommy! That’s terrible! You called the police?”

“No. Look, the guy was okay, he ran away and I even tried to find him and he was nowhere. I’m sure he’s fine. Probably a joke someone played on him. Maybe I even busted the joke; maybe the pranksters meant for him to be found by a bunch of construction guys at six. Who knows? Don’t worry. He was probably just embarrassed at being found naked.”

“Hmmm...” She pondered this for a few seconds. “Still, maybe the cops should know. Just file a report? He could’ve died of cold!”

“Well, he was hot as hell when I cut the rope so he mustn’t have been there long. Don’t worry, I’m sure he’s fine.”

Then she turned to me with a twinkle in her eye. “So he was hot? Did you get a good look at his hiney?”

I laughed. “Grandma, seriously.”

“What? You’re not gettin’ any younger, Tommy. Neither am I for that matter. So tell an old woman about the naked guy you found this morning and give her some excitement,” she said, slapping me on the knee.

You had to give it to her. She was ninety-four, her only son, my dad, had passed away two years before, and she was stuck in this old folks’ home till her death. She hadn’t been able to walk on her own since she was ninety, she was confined to a wheelchair; although sometimes she liked to make the chair go forward with her feet as if she were walking. She couldn’t cook anymore either. I think she missed cooking more than walking. I sure did.

Her room was the standard in this privately owned and operated nursing home. All the furniture was hers, but she had a private bathroom equipped for her wheelchair. When I moved her from the house where I grew up and my dad lived until his death, she’d been eating cake all day and couldn’t go out anymore. Her health had failed slowly but surely, and there weren’t any renovations done throughout the years to accommodate her changing needs. I knew she was well taken care of in this place, but I would have preferred to keep her with me. Unfortunately, I couldn’t be with her all day and I lived on the top floor of a duplex I had renovated myself.

She had been my rock through the years. I could do no wrong as far as she was concerned so when I came out as gay, she was my champion. My father... not so much.

“He had the palest amber eyes I’ve ever seen, Grandma. He was beautiful. And yes, his hiney was fantastic,” I told her.

She was smiling with her mouth open, hanging on my every word.

“Do you think you’ll see him again?” She sounded almost wistful.

“Probably not. After his ordeal this morning, he won’t be hanging around the site anytime soon.”

We kept chatting until she got tired. I left her to her evening activities: dinner in the dining room, a bath, more television until bedtime, a prayer thrown in there for good conscience.

I couldn’t wait to get home when I left Grandma’s. The temperature had warmed up a bit during the day, but it was back to disappearing-dick weather by nightfall. I had to scrape the windows on the truck before I could leave, everything was frosted. With the heat set to defrost on high and my hat down to my lashes, I drove home.

I lived in the Mile-End borough of Montreal. I had bought the second floor of a duplex and renovated it myself. I was proud of my work. The original moldings and tiles could be saved so it kept some of its charm. I had tried to design a kitchen that would blend in with the rest of the apartment, but the bathroom was all new. I had had to gut it out and was pretty happy with the large bathtub I had fit in. It was large enough for two people. Maybe someday I’d meet the man who’d share it with me.

I parked my truck and got out. The bitter wind whipped my face and made my nose hair feel crisp when I breathed. I started up the steps to my apartment when I heard a grunt. What the fuck? I was having auditory hallucinations. Then I heard a soft “Excuse me.”

Through the stairs, between the staircase and the house, peering up at me, were the most beautiful amber eyes I’d ever seen. The same exact amber eyes I’d seen that morning. I was face to face with Mystery Man, crouched behind the staircase among the snow and sparse bush branches, as naked as the day he was born but dirty with bits of crap in his hair. Steam was coming off his skin.

“I need your help,” he grumbled.

“What the fuck are you doing there? Where are your clothes? Who are you? Do you need a doctor?” Once they started, the questions just kept on coming.

“Look, I just need some clothes. I can’t get back to my apartment like this. Can you help me?”

I was contemplating how reasonable it would be to just throw him some clothes off my balcony. His testicles and cock were just hanging there, apparently impervious to the temperature. However, the size of my testicles told me we should get out of this cold and in the house.

Instead I said, "I'm calling the police." I was taking my glove off when he reached for my arm between the stairs, and I swear I felt the heat from his hand through my coat.

"No, no, no. No need for the police, everything's fine. I know you don't know me, but I'm not a bad guy. I just moved to Montreal and I don't know anyone. If you could spare some clothes and some water, I'd really appreciate it. Then I promise I'll leave."

"How did you find me?"

"I followed you from work."

"How? I think I would've noticed a naked guy running next to my truck."

"Look, I ran into some trouble that I wish I could explain, but right now I can't. It's freezing, you must be cold. Can we go up? I'll wait outside on the porch if you could just bring me some water and maybe some clothes."

It was dark but I could still see his features and his eyes didn't look like they were spewing hatred. In fact, they looked sincere and imploring.

It was minus twenty with the wind chill factor. This guy was naked standing in snow. I didn't know him and, as dangerous as letting a stranger in my house could be, I couldn't leave him out like that. For some reason, I felt I needed to help him. It's not like he could walk into a diner and ask to use the phone.

"Sure. Come on up. But I'm warning you, anything funny or out of the ordinary, I'm calling the cops." I started up my steps and heard him follow.

When we got to my porch, I opened the door, got in and said, "Come in."

"That's alright. I'll wait here." He put his hands on his hips, like it was a summer day and he was waiting for the bus.

"Don't be silly. Come on in so I can close the door." I turned on the exterior light. It startled him and he almost jumped in the entrance, as if to avoid the light. I knew he could see me ogling him but it couldn't be helped. He must've known what kind of impression he was making, showing up naked in this weather.

The entrance was suddenly very small. He took up a lot of room. This was a big man. Bigger than me and I'm six one.

I took off my winter gear and went to the kitchen. He followed. I turned on the cold water and, as I was reaching for a glass, he bent down and drank right from the tap with big slurping sounds.

His skin was covered with a sheen of sweat. He was tall and muscular and, in that position, I got a really good view of his ass. I felt a stirring in my boxers and was happy to have a long wool sweater hiding it. I had enough time to notice he had small scratches here and there, and his feet and hands were very dirty. Again, this weird need to take care of him crept up, and I held back from stroking his skin to soothe it.

When he was finished drinking, he stood and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand—yuck—and looked sheepish.

“Sorry. I was really thirsty.” He washed his hands, used the towel hanging from a hook on the cabinet door and kept it to hide his package.

“No shit. Where have you been since this morning? How come you didn't just go home?”

His eyes looked pained and he frowned.

“I was walking around and trying to keep warm until I could find some clothes but people don't hang their laundry out to dry in this weather. I hid in an alley, under a heating vent. I can't very well stroll in like this without getting arrested or shocking my neighbors. My stuff's still in my apartment. Once I get some clothes on I can ask my landlord to open my door for me.”

“Wait—you've been walking around Montreal naked since this morning? You should be dead, dude! At least some frostbite. But look at you. Apart from the dirt and scratches, you're fine! Not even white patches of skin!”

“I have a strong metabolism. Don't worry about it. Do you have any spare clothes? Maybe some shoes?”

He had to be lying, right? He couldn't be saying the truth, but for what it was worth, I believed him.

“How about a shower?” He could've really used one. He smelled of wet dog.

“I don't want to trouble you, and I really have to get back. It's okay, just some clothes and I'll be out of your way. When I get the chance, I'll bring 'em back clean.”

"I'm not worried about the clothes." I started for my bedroom so I yelled over my shoulder: "But you're really freaking me out, man. Fuck, does that mean you haven't eaten or drunk since this morning?" I had reached my bedroom but I turned back towards the kitchen. The guy had to be starving.

"I'll make some dinner. In the meantime, you want a snack?" I opened my fridge and looked through it.

"This is fine. Can I have some of this?" He asked, holding the Sugar Crisps box I had left on the counter this morning.

"Sure," I said looking around the kitchen. I grabbed a bowl and a spoon for him.

His eyes followed me around the room. He was almost smiling. It made me self-conscious. Did I put deodorant on this morning? Did I have stale breath?

He said, "It's okay, thanks. By the way, I'm Dylan. What's your name?"

I realized I hadn't introduced myself yet and here I was running around my kitchen trying to feed this guy. I turned towards him and stuck out my hand. "I'm Tom. Nice to meet you, Dylan." He shook my hand. Electricity shot through my arm all the way to my heart, which started pounding.

"Not that I don't appreciate the food, Tom, but I'm starting to be a little embarrassed standing in your kitchen without any clothes on," he said, staring into my eyes with a small smile.

He didn't look embarrassed one iota about his nudity. He was still holding my hand, like he didn't want to let go. I didn't either. His other hand was still protecting his modesty.

I thought he was running a fever his hand was so hot. I felt it all the way up my arm. His stare, however, was creating another kind of warmth in a lower region of my body. Thank goodness for extra layers.

"Yes, right. Well," I said, extracting my hand, "you probably know how to pour milk so I'll let you take care of that and I'll go get those clothes." I cleared my throat. I pulled milk out from the fridge and went to my bedroom. I felt his eyes on me until I walked through the door.

I stood in my bedroom for a few seconds trying to compose myself. A naked, attractive stranger was eating cereal in my kitchen. A naked stranger who should be dead or at least in hospital suffering from exposure and dehydration if his story was true. And what was wrong with me that my stomach had butterflies from a simple handshake?

I came back to the kitchen with a bunch of clothes in my arms and found him leaning on my counter, eating his cereal like it was the best meal he'd ever had. I stopped and stared. His muscles were so defined he must've worked out every day. His black hair was long, down to his shoulders, and wavy, streaked with gray—no, not gray, shiny silver strands. Straight nose, high cheekbones and full lips. The towel was gone, back on its hook. I made a mental note to put it in the laundry.

He turned toward me and stopped chewing. He was back to being completely nude. "Tom?" he asked, eyebrows raised. I was staring. The guy had no shame.

"Yeah, sorry. Here, these might be tight but at least they'll keep you warm," I said, dumping the clothes on a chair.

"I'm sure they're fine. Thanks a lot. I owe you," he said, finishing his meager meal.

He came around the counter and picked through the clothes. He started with the socks—funny, I would've started with the boxers—then the underwear, the jogging pants, the Henley and finally the sweater which I could've sworn he sniffed before putting on. He sat to put on my old size thirteen running shoes and winced.

"Too small?" I asked.

"A bit, but it's okay. I won't be wearing them for long." He put on both shoes and stood. I had also found an old jacket, a hat and gloves.

He shrugged into the jacket but left the rest. "I won't be needing the hat or gloves, but thanks."

"It's minus twenty something out there, Dylan. I won't miss them. You can take them," I said, trying to sound reassuring.

"Strong constitution. I don't get cold easily," he said, smiling. And what a beautiful smile it was. Now that he was dressed, Dylan's tension had eased noticeably.

"No shit. I'm still wondering how you're not frozen solid in an alley," I said. "Are you okay to get back to your place?"

"Yeah, I'll walk. Thanks."

I fished in my pocket and came up with three dollars. "Here, at least take the bus and metro. It'll go faster and you won't be in the cold too long. I know," I

said quickly as I saw he was starting to protest, “you don’t get cold easily. But still, no human in their right mind would walk when they could take a bus.” I got a smile for that.

“Okay, thanks. I’ll pay you back when I return the clothes,” he said, taking the money I was offering. I didn’t know what it was, but I was starting to like this guy. When he smiled, his eyes crinkled at the corners and it made him seem more approachable, not like when I had untied him and all that was coming off him was anger and fear. Speaking of which...

“Hey, can I ask how you ended up at the site tied up?”

Wrong question. His smile fell, then he caught himself and chuckled drily, “Oh, you know, just guys pulling a fast one on me. Don’t worry about it. Anyway, it would be better if no one knew I was here or that you saw me this morning. You don’t want to get involved.”

“You have to admit it looked weird,” I said as offhandedly as I could.

“Yeah, I know. Listen, I’m grateful for all you’ve done for me,” he said as he turned and strode to the front door. “Thanks again.”

And he was out of the apartment. Son of a bitch.

I rushed to the door and opened it to a gust of wind. “Hey! Wait! I’ll drive you to the metro,” I yelled, but he was already down the stairs and walking briskly.

“Thanks, Tom,” he yelled over his shoulder. He never stopped. I watched him disappear down the dark street, the steam from his breath vanishing quickly.

Chapter 3

The next morning when I got to work, George had a surprise for me.

“Tom, can you come see me in the office please?”

I had just gotten through the front door when I heard him call me. The site office was the room opposite to the one where Dylan had been tied up. We had put the walls up the day before.

I entered the office and Dylan was standing there with George. He was facing the door and his eyes went wide but his mouth was closed in a hard line. He looked worried and shot me what could hardly be interpreted as anything other than a warning. George was bent over the plans laid out on a long table. When he heard me, he looked up.

“Tom Colucci, this is Dylan Scott. He’ll be joining us from now on and I’d like you to show him around the site.”

“Welcome, Dylan. I’m Tom,” I said as I extended my hand toward him.

Tension seeped from his shoulders. Relief replaced the fear in his eyes.

“Good to meet you,” he mumbled as he shook my hand. That hotness again with accompanying tummy butterflies.

“I was thinking he could work with you today,” George said. Turning to Dylan, he added, “Would you mind giving us a minute?”

“Sure,” he said, and left.

George feigned looking at the plans but I could tell he wasn’t really paying attention to them.

“Tom, I want you to keep a close eye on Dylan. He’s new to town and I’m doing a friend a favor by hiring him, but we need to keep him on a tight leash. He’s going through some trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Nothing illegal, and it’s got nothing to do with work, just some personal crap. Anyway, just let me know how he works out. He’s not in the union yet.”

So I was to babysit Dylan Scott, who only the morning before was trussed up in the next room. What the hell was he doing here?

I joined my team and we worked hard until the break at ten, at which time Dylan came to stand next to me, drinking from a huge coffee.

“Hey, thanks for not giving me away.” He was looking at his cup, not at me, being very discreet. He was standing maybe a foot from me, but I felt his energy like a vibration. He cut his eyes my way for a second and there was warmth there.

“Yeah, sure.” I was having my breakfast sandwich. “Are you going to tell me what’s going on? What you’re doing back here?”

“Nope.” And he walked away, smirking into his coffee, playfulness in his eyes. “As long as we don’t know each other, everything’ll be fine.”

I finished my sandwich and went back to work. During the lunch break, Dylan came to sit next to me. I did my best not to let on that we’d met before. I wanted to keep Dylan’s secret, whatever it was. Then his thigh rubbed against mine under the table and I almost jumped out of my seat. When I looked his way, he was just chewing his food, and the beginning of a smile appeared at the corner of his mouth. The bastard knew.

When we finished at four, I caught up to Dylan on his way out. “So how was your first day?”

“Okay.” The corner of his mouth lifted in a half-smile. “I appreciate you showing me around, Tom,” he said.

“You want a lift?” I offered.

Dylan was walking towards George’s truck, head tucked down. He slowly turned around but kept walking backwards. “No, thanks, I have to leave with George.” He turned back towards George’s truck, but not before I caught a look of... longing maybe, in his eyes.

“See you tomorrow.”

I got in my truck. For the first time in a long time, it felt lonely.

I stopped by my grandmother’s place on my way home. She looked like she was napping in her chair, but when I came in, she opened one eye and, when she saw me, she perked up.

“Hello, my darling boy! What are you doing here?” I bent to kiss her cheek. “You’re so cold! Why don’t you go to the kitchen and get some coffee? I have biscuits here somewhere...” she said as she started to get up from her wheelchair, holding the blanket draped on her knees.

“I’m fine, Grandma, stop.” Her piercing gaze scrutinized me to make sure I was truthful, and, satisfied, she sat down again.

“How’s work?”

“Fine. We’re close to lock-up, probably done by the end of the week. How are you?”

“I’m as good as can be. Although Mr. Tremblay from next door came in again today, thinking I was his wife. He started yelling at me that I wasn’t ready to go to church and that I had to get a move on. Pfff. This place is going to hell in a handbasket. And the mashed potatoes at lunch were runny.” She frowned and rubbed her forehead, then suddenly turned toward me, potatoes forgotten. “How was your day? Still cold out?”

“Yeah, it’s cold, but getting milder. I think it’s gonna snow. And remember that guy I was telling you about? Well, he was at my place last night when I got home, naked, said he followed me home,”—here my grandmother’s eyes went wide—“and asked to borrow clothes then took off. Now today, he’s at the job site and George is putting him on my team, says I have to watch out for him. Nuts, right?”

“He was naked outside for a whole day? He must’ve been frozen! Why didn’t you take him to the hospital?”

Under normal circumstances, that’s what I would have done.

“That’s the funny part. He was hot as hell”—Grandma smiled wide at this—“when I shook his hand,” I said, putting emphasis on those last words, “and apart from being really thirsty and hungry, he seemed alright! And this morning, we acted like we didn’t know each other and he worked with us all day and left with George. There’s something fishy going on,” I told her. “George is involved, but there doesn’t seem to be any animosity between them.”

“Now don’t start any trouble. If the man is alright, then there’s no reason for you to get involved more than you did. You gave him clothes, you did the right thing. It is strange, though, isn’t it? Him just showing up at your place? How come he didn’t have anywhere else to go?”

“He said he just moved here. And this morning, George said the guy was having some problems. My impression was that George was keeping an eye on him for some reason,” I said. “And, Grandma, I am involved whether I want to or not. He came to my place, asked me not to tell anyone I’d seen him, and now he shows up at my work and I have to watch him all day.”

Grandma thought about this a bit and then said, "Is there something you're not telling me?"

"No, why?"

She looked me in the eye and said, "There's something about this man, isn't there?"

I couldn't hold her stare. "I don't know. Yeah, there's something about him, but I don't know what it is. I just feel..." Words wouldn't come to finish that sentence. I was suddenly embarrassed. Why was I making such a big deal about it anyway?

"What's going on, Tommy?"

I fidgeted like a schoolboy and tried to make it look like I was getting more comfortable on her bed, which was impossible. I stared at the floor.

"I don't know what it is, but I feel like I have to watch over this guy. I know it sounds weird. I don't know why I even care," I said with a dry chuckle, "but I can't escape feeling like I should help him." I sighed. "Plus, he's really good-looking."

I finally looked at her again. My grandmother's eyebrows were raised and she was holding her chin in her hand.

"I see," was all she said.

I rolled my eyes. "And what is it you see?" I asked, smirking.

She smiled. "You like this man. Or at least he's affecting you," she added when I snapped my tongue at the word "like".

"I don't know him," I said, hoping she'd let it go, but without high expectations.

"How long has it been since Jeff?" she asked.

Jean-François, or Jeff as everyone called him, was my last steady boyfriend. We had met in a bar some years ago and stayed together six years. We lived together for five of those years before I left him. Not only was he not sad about my leaving, but he replaced me within three months. As far as I knew, he was still with that guy. Our breakup was no big deal to him. I was the one who was completely devastated to realize our relationship was unhealthy and had to end it, and I was heartbroken that he could find someone else so easily, so quickly, to take my place. Not that I thought I was so special, but it just made it more

obvious that he had never cared for me as I had cared for him. Not by a long shot.

“Four years,” I said, sighing deep and long. “But Jeff has nothing to do with this, Grandma.”

“Not Jeff personally, but it’s been four years and you haven’t let anyone in. I know you go out sometimes, but you haven’t talked about a man in a long time. You even have a gleam in your eye, Tommy. You didn’t even have that for Jeff,” she said with a warm smile. “This one’s special.”

I knew she cared about me and she was worried I’d be alone forever. So was I for that matter.

“What’s his name?” she asked abruptly.

“Dylan. Dylan Scott. Why?”

“Now I know what to call him, that’s all,” she said, still holding her chin in her hand, smiling. “I get the feeling I’ll hear more about him,” she said, giggling.

“I don’t know. I don’t even know if he’s gay,” I said, but I had wondered if I affected him the way he affected me, if he felt our energies colliding like I did. He hadn’t talked to the other guys today, just kept mostly to himself except when he was talking to me or rubbing his thigh against mine under the table.

“Only one way to find out. Ask him out,” Grandma suggested.

“Are you nuts? That would just be weird. Hey, I saw you naked, would you like to go dancing? Yeah, right.” We laughed.

She said, “Tom, if you like this man, don’t let him slip through your fingers. Life is too short for regrets. The worst-case scenario is he’ll say no. Big deal. Then you move on. But at least you’ll know you gave it a shot.” She patted my arm with her frail, spotted hand. Her hands had cared for me, cooked for me, wiped my face, patted my cheeks and ruffled my hair my whole life. Her touch was kind, soothing. “Did you talk to Paul about him yet?” she asked.

“No, I haven’t heard from Paul this week.” Paul was my best friend and Grandma’s adopted grandchild.

“Talk to Paul, Tom.” She winked.

“Okay. I’ll think about it,” I answered. “I’m gonna go now. I’m hungry,” I said, regretting it right away. Her face fell.

“Why didn’t you say anything? Come, we’ll go to the kitchen and see if there’s something edible. I have biscuits somewhere here too. I might have some leftover chocolate from Christmas...” she rambled on, getting up stiffly and heading over to her bureau, putting her blanket aside.

“No, no, it’s okay. I’m fine. I just have to go make dinner.”

She turned toward me, sadness etching her face. I knew one of her biggest joys in life had been feeding me and she was in no shape to do it anymore, and I had just reminded her of that. I felt like an ass.

“Have a biscuit before you go, to tide you over,” she said, turning back to her bureau. I let her find the biscuits and ate three, to make her happy. As I dusted the crumbs off her bed, she smiled. “Better?” she asked.

“Oh yeah. I’m good now.” And so was she.

Chapter 4

I was exhausted when I got home around five. I hate March. It's the last official winter month, but the cold weather doesn't let up until at least mid-April, and every year I get fed up with the cold and the snow. Before Christmas, fine. After Christmas, they can take it all away. At least the days were getting longer.

That night, big fat snowflakes were falling, giving Montreal a white, new coat. The fresh snow covered the dirty, uneven snow mounds left over from the previous snowfall, like a clean canvas. The light reflecting on the flakes made them look like they were peppered with diamond dust. It was pretty, but I was still sick of it. My boots made a crunching sound on the stairs, the only noise on the quiet street at this hour. Snow meant milder temperatures, followed by a cold front the next day or two.

I banged the snow off my boots on the door frame and entered my apartment. It seemed lonely tonight. I was usually pretty happy with my routine of work, grandmother and home, but tonight the apartment felt unusually empty. There had been a large presence warming it last night, and I caught myself longing for it.

I thought maybe I could ask him out, like Grandma had suggested. There would be three possible scenarios. If he were straight, I'd know right away. If he were homophobic, I'd get the shit kicked out of me. If he were gay, maybe he'd consider going for a beer. I know we could've gone for a beer whether he was straight or gay, but I wanted to take him to the Village and if he were straight, he'd probably be uncomfortable.

The Gay Village in Montreal was a great place to go out, but not to live as far as I was concerned. It had become very trendy for gays, but was still a trashy neighborhood in an old part of downtown Montreal. The more southeast you went, the trashier it became. It was the perfect place to make out with your boyfriend on the street though. No one would look twice, apart from a few tourists perhaps.

While in the shower, I was thinking about the last time I'd gone out in the Village, and those thoughts led to Dylan. Was he gay? If so, was he available? Would I be his type? My soapy hands strayed from my chest to my growing cock. He was certainly my type. Quiet, discreet, gorgeous. I closed my eyes and

imagined they were his hands on me. His big, hot, calloused hands. The left one would stroke my abs, go up to my nipples and pinch them, the other would pump my cock slowly, sensuously, expertly. His lips would graze my neck from behind. His breath would tickle my ear. His dick heavy with desire would rub between my butt cheeks...

Sperm shot out in ribbons on the tiles in front of me, like I was sixteen again. A fantastic orgasm ripped me apart like wildfire. I had to hold on to the wall not to fall, my legs had turned to mush.

After my shower, I watched the news with a plate of steak and grilled vegetables on my lap. I heard crunching noises on my steps and went to see who was coming up. When I reached the entrance, something banged on the door and the crunching noises receded. I opened the door to see Dylan going down the steps. He turned when he heard me.

“Sorry,” he said. “I didn’t want to disturb you.” He motioned with his hand. “I left your clothes and three bucks in the bag.”

I turned and saw a full plastic bag hanging from the doorknob.

“You didn’t have to do that. It could’ve waited until tomorrow at work,” I said.

Dylan stood on the stairs. “I won’t be working there anymore.”

I was cold, holding the door open, but I didn’t want him to leave. “Do you want to come in? You came all this way,” I said, trying not to sound too desperate.

“I’m sure you’re busy. I don’t want to intrude,” he said. He had reached the sidewalk. He was going to run from me again. For the third time.

“I’m not busy, in fact, I’d like the company,” I said, epically failing at not sounding desperate.

He smiled. He thought about it a couple of seconds, which seemed like a year to me. “Okay, just for a minute,” he said, coming back up. I welcomed him in my home, this time dressed.

I got him settled on the couch with a beer in no time. I sat across from him in my favorite chair. From this viewpoint, I could observe him all I wanted. I found he fit nicely in my place. A flannel shirt covered a T-shirt that molded his pecs superbly. His strong thighs were encased in worn jeans. He sat comfortably, legs stretched out, arm on top of the couch.

Dylan commented on my apartment, I told him about the renovations I'd done and he complimented me on my work. He drank his beer slowly.

"You live alone?" he asked me.

"Yes. You?"

"Yeah." He took a sip of beer.

"You said you hadn't been in Montreal for long."

"I moved from Colorado a couple of weeks ago. Found a small apartment near the Beaudry metro station. When I get a decent job, I'll move."

Interesting. Beaudry station was right in the Gay Village. Did he want to move because he'd realized he was living in a gay community or because his apartment was too small?

"How come you're not working with us anymore?" I asked.

Dylan starting ripping the label off the beer bottle, a habit I usually thought was juvenile and messy but funny enough, was fine with me when it was Dylan doing it.

"George didn't need me after all," he said, his head down, looking at me through the hair falling in his eyes. "Have you been working with him for long?"

"Three years."

"Is he a good boss?"

I thought about it for a couple of seconds. George could be abrupt and demanding but if you did your job well, he was satisfied. "Yeah, I guess. How do you know him?"

"A... mutual friend from back home recommended me to George and he's been watching over me since I got here, making sure I settle in alright."

What was that hesitation? Was the person a friend or not? Then it struck me—this person was perhaps part of the peculiar sex club Dylan and George were members of.

"So have you?" I asked. Dylan seemed lost in thought. He focused back to our conversation and lifted his eyebrows, like he hadn't heard my question. "Have you settled in alright?" I asked.

"Yeah, I have a place to live, even if it's pretty small. I was hoping to work with George but that didn't pan out."

“What are you going to do now? Do you have something else lined up?”

He readjusted himself on the couch, scratching his throat loudly. Was I being intrusive? I took a pull from my beer and waited.

Finally, he said, “I’ll find something. I’m good with my hands.”

That look through the hair again. Was there subtext to go with those words? Wishful thinking on my part most likely.

“What did you do back in Colorado?”

“I worked in construction mostly. I’m gonna have to go through the steps to get recognized by the SCQ which should take a few months. I was a bartender for a while when I was younger, maybe I could find something like that for now.” The SCQ was the Syndicat de Construction du Québec, the provincial construction union. There were many criteria to meet in order to work in construction in Quebec.

“Do you speak any French? You’d need at least the basics to work in a bar in Montreal, unless you find something in an English neighborhood like Montreal West or NDG.”

“NDG?”

“Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. It’s on the other side of the mountain.”

“Oh yeah! I remember reading about that when I was looking for a place in Montreal when I was still in Denver. It’s mostly English-speaking, right?”

“Right. But if you researched Montreal before coming, how did you end up near Beaudry?”

Dylan leaned forward and rested his forearms on his thighs. “Because I’m gay and I read that’s where the gay community lives in Montreal.” He let that sink in for a moment then asked, “I’m guessing this doesn’t surprise you?”

My stomach had lifted in my throat, making it hard to breathe. I managed to articulate, “Pfff... Takes one to know one.”

His lips lifted at the corners in a crooked smile. “I know,” he said, smirking.

“Are you saying I look gay?”

“You look fine.” When my eyebrows went up, he added, “I just sensed it.”

My heart was having a boxing match with my ribs. He was gay, that was a good thing, right? Only now, I couldn’t ignore my attraction anymore.

He finished his beer and put the bottle down on the coffee table. "I should go. Thanks for the beer," he said, standing.

"You don't have to go," I said.

"Yeah, I do," he said with regret in his voice. His back was to me so maybe I was imagining it.

I followed him to the door. As he was putting his coat on, his scent wafted my way, a mix of outdoors, snow and what probably was his own musky, clean smell. There was an underlying fresh-cut grass and sun-baked dog fur odor too, not at all unpleasant.

Dylan held his hand out. "Thanks," he almost whispered. As we shook hands, our eyes met and the current between us was there again. His strong, warm fingers were holding my hand tightly, like they didn't want to let go.

He pulled me to him, his eyes on mine still, and our bodies lined up, almost touching. There was heat emanating from his body. Time stood still. I heard a growl that appeared to come from deep in his chest.

"Dylan, did you just... growl?" I whispered, our faces only a couple of inches apart. His eyes went wide, and a blush crept up his cheeks as he suddenly let go of my hand and took a step back. My body missed his heat right away.

He coughed and thumped his chest with a fist, looking away from me, unexpectedly shy after that display. "Sorry. Must be catching something," he grumbled. He turned, opened the door and was out in a second. "See you around," he said over his shoulder. I thought I heard "I hope" after that, but maybe it was just my imagination.

I went to stand in the doorway and watched him leave. "Yeah, take care."

He was gone. As I got back in my apartment and closed the door, I realized I didn't have his phone number or any way of contacting him. I knew his full name at least and I could probably track him down, but we hadn't voluntarily exchanged numbers.

I suddenly felt very alone.

Time to call Paul.

Chapter 5

It was Friday night and we were standing near the bar at Club 80, drinks in hand—Heineken for me and a Cosmo for Paul—far enough away from the dance floor to still hear each other if we spoke near the other's ear. The music blaring from the wall-to-wall speakers in the back of the bar kept anyone around us from hearing our conversation.

Paul had been my best friend since sixth grade, when we realized we both had a crush on Martin Thibeault. This was not obvious until we almost got into a fist fight to be the one to protect Martin from getting a beating from another bigger kid. We forgot about Martin when he decided to rat everyone out and were friends ever since.

“So find him, it can't be that hard,” Paul was saying.

“How? I don't know exactly where he lives and he probably doesn't have a landline. You can't find cell numbers.”

“Ask George, he probably knows where to reach him,” suggested Paul.

“Nope, not going there. There's something weird going on between those two and I'm not sure I want to get involved.”

“Anything noteworthy happen when you guys worked together?”

“You mean besides my awkwardness? No, not really.”

“Well, finish that beer and let's dance. We'll think of something later,” Paul said, putting his empty glass on the bar on his way to the dance floor.

Paul loved to dance. Too bad he wasn't very good at it, but you had to give him points for going out there and shaking everything he had with such gusto and energy. Even when we were in high school, he never got laughed at because he was the one laughing the hardest and having the most fun.

The bass thumps made me confuse the music and my heartbeats. I didn't know if I was having palpitations or if Beyonce's “Single Ladies” was using my body as extra percussions. It was easy to get lost in the heat, the smell of sweat, the anticipation and the loud music.

Paul was twisting around, shaking his shoulders, slapping his hips, lifting a foot here, a knee there, and the more I laughed the worse it got. Guys around us either observed him as if he was another species or laughed with him. He was

engaging me in a raunchy two-step when his smile faltered as he saw something over my shoulder. His eyes had gotten wide when I yelled, "Dude! What's wrong?"

Paul stood on tiptoe to speak directly in my ear, "I don't know, but there's a big guy behind you that's staring at us and he looks like he wants to kill me." As he finished his sentence, I sensed him. I knew who was behind me. I turned my head, still in Paul's arms. I heard Paul mumble something that sounded like "Lemme guess..."

Dylan was standing on the dance floor, a forgotten beer dangling from his hand, arms away from his body, legs apart, chin forward, appearing ready to pounce. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought the emotion vibrating from him was jealousy, or even possession.

Paul let me go like I was suddenly covered in poison ivy. Facing Dylan, I waited, not moving. The music was still making the fillings in my back teeth vibrate, but all I could see and hear was Dylan. I sensed more than heard his growl. His nostrils had flared, and his jaw was clenched so tight I was worried we'd have to bring him to a mechanic to have it pried open.

He walked toward me, his eyes staring into mine, cutting through people dancing without an apology or an afterthought. At that moment, there was no confusion between my heart and the bass from the speakers—my heart was winning in the overbearing sound competition. I couldn't hear anything but my pulse. My mouth went dry.

Dylan stopped when his chest thumped mine and a tingling feeling started in my pecs and travelled all over to the tips of my hands, my toes, my nose. I had to look up to meet his stare. Even in the club's darkness, the golden shade of his irises was sharp and clear. I remember wondering at that moment if he wore contacts. "Who's that?" he said, his voice sounding like the purring of a Harley, still looking right at me. That, I heard.

"Uh... Hey, Dylan," I managed to say. I admit I was a little flustered at this display of alpha behavior—hovering between flattered and annoyed. Who was he to question who I was with, but then did that mean he cared?

"Who is that?" he asked again with that voice. "I thought you said you weren't dating anyone."

"I'm not. This is my friend Paul." I turned to Paul, who was just staring at Dylan, unmoving. I yelled, "Paul, this is Dylan."

"I guessed," Paul yelled over the music, still staring at Dylan. He bent to speak in my ear. "You weren't kidding. He is huge."

I turned to Dylan again, who was smirking slightly. There was no way he could've heard that comment. Still, he held out his hand to shake the one Paul was offering. "Nice to meet you, Paul. Tom and I are gonna leave now. Bye," he said. He didn't need to yell, his voice carried over the music. I looked over at Paul who mouthed "call me" with his index and pinky to his ear and mouth.

Dylan grabbed my hand, pivoted and pulled me toward the exit. After a few steps, I realized I was being dragged out by a guy who was possibly a member of a weird BDSM sex club and I was letting him. What the fuck was I doing?

"Hey! Hey! Dylan, wait!" I yelled, practically running behind him, trying but not succeeding in getting my hand back. He just kept walking, dodging people, making a path for me. We reached the coat check. Dylan finally let go of my hand to pull his ticket from his pocket.

"How come you're so sure I wanna leave with you?" I asked. His eyes went from his ticket to my face, the only part of his body in movement. The coat check attendant took his ticket from his hand without him reacting. My pulse had gone down to a more healthy rhythm and I felt more confident.

"Well, do you wanna leave with me?"

"Yes," I answered immediately, no forethought necessary. Of course I wanted to go with him. I had been thinking about him since he had left my apartment with my heart that other night. My body flushed as I realized this, standing at the coat check in a club next to the most interesting man I had met in a long time, probably my life.

He smiled that shy half-smile I was starting to love. "Good," he said.

When we were out of the club, Dylan started walking west. "This way," was all he said.

"Where are we going?"

"My place. It's close."

Nervous butterflies flew to my stomach. He was taking me home. How smart was it for me to go to a stranger's house in the middle of the night? Maybe he just wanted a one-night stand. Maybe he wanted to tie me up to his bed and torture me until morning. Was I ready for that?

I had had my share of meaningless sex since Jeff. Guys I hooked up with in bars or in the club, mostly quick blow jobs in the john or hand jobs in the alley

in summer. I never went to someone's home and I never invited them to mine. Sometimes, if the guy seemed nice, I'd take him to a rooming house nearby and rent a cheap room for the night, but I never stayed till morning. Good, safe sex was all I needed. A cuddle was nice, but not necessary. At thirty-three, I was still active, but the need to come five times a day had gone, along with a bit of hair and the feeling of invincibility. I had been reckless in my late teens but was grateful I wasn't suffering from a deadly sexually transmitted disease and intended to keep it that way.

Our boots crunched the snow beneath our feet as we silently made our way to his apartment.

"Don't overthink it," Dylan said, cutting the silence.

"What do you mean?"

"I can feel you thinking if this is a bad move, if you're safe. Don't worry, I'd never hurt you."

We had been walking side by side, hunched down in our coats, looking straight ahead. When he said this, I looked at him. I believed him. He was watching me, warmth and care in his eyes. It was hard to swallow.

"It's just that I should tell you I'm not into any kinky stuff. If that's what you have in mind, I think we should call it a night." That wasn't so hard.

He looked confused. "Kinky stuff?"

I stopped in my tracks. He stopped too, turned to face me.

"You know, bondage, ropes, stuff like that. I don't judge people and whatever you do with George or anyone else is none of my business—"

Dylan cut me off. "What?" He started laughing. "Is that what you think?"

"Well, what would you think if you found someone tied up with complicated knots and shit?" I was miffed at being laughed at. My assumption was legitimate.

Dylan laughed some more. "And with George? Hell no!" He giggled a little then said, "Why bring George into this?"

"After you left he came to look for you with another guy. They were expecting you to be there, I guess." That stopped the hilarity.

"What other guy?" Dylan asked, suddenly very serious.

"I don't know, I didn't recognize his voice."

“They saw you?” Now he looked worried.

“Yeah, I was in the building to collect traps when I found you. You took off in the cold, butt naked. I drove around to find you, make sure you were alright”—at this Dylan’s eyes got all warm and his expression softened—“and when I couldn’t find you, I went back in the building and took care of the pest control. I heard George and this guy come in, whispering that you weren’t there anymore, that the ropes were cut, then George told the guy to shut up, that my truck was outside and that’s when the guy left in a hurry. By the time I reached George, he was alone. I lied, told him I didn’t know why the piece of drywall had fallen. He got rid of me, sent me off for some coffee and by the time I came back, he had cleaned up the ropes. Now you know the whole story.”

Dylan had been listening to me attentively. When I finished my story, his gaze fell to the ground.

“And you didn’t recognize this guy with George?”

“Nope, although I could hardly hear him. Is everything alright, Dylan?”

He quickly looked up again, straight into my eyes. “Yes, everything’s fine now. Come on,” he said as he started walking again.

“Wait, what about the kink?” I asked, unmoving.

“No kink. Come on,” he said again, over his shoulder.

I caught up to him and we walked in silence the rest of the way.

He was right; his apartment was really close to Club 80. It was a small one-bedroom apartment over a diner on a side street crossing Sainte-Catherine Street. It was quiet at this time of night. We walked into the living room where boxes were still lined up against the walls. Next to it was a small kitchen with the tiniest counter space I’d ever seen, a small stove and a mini-fridge. A small table with two chairs and a couch were the only furniture in the room which was maybe twelve by fifteen feet. Still, a wide window would let in lots of light during the day, making it more cheerful. It was covered with a dark sheet.

I liked the fact that Dylan made no excuses for the appearance of his place. He had just moved in but most guys I knew would have made up reasons for the dreary look, the lack of decor, and the unopened boxes. As it was, Dylan took off his boots and hung up his coat, holding out his hand for mine. I mimicked him, getting rid of my boots and giving him my coat.

“Sit down. You wanna beer?” he asked as he rummaged in his tiny fridge. It looked like it could only hold a few beers and not much else.

“Sure, thanks.” I sat on the couch, which was a small two-seater. A love seat, my mom called those. Appropriate.

The *psshhht* of bottle caps being opened was the only sound in the apartment. I could still hear my pulse though, drumming loudly.

“Relax,” Dylan said, sitting next to me, handing me a beer. “I can hear you think,” he said, smiling, as he raised his beer bottle in a silent toast. We both faced the wall, shoulder to shoulder, too close to turn our heads to look at each other without it being awkward.

“Thanks. Nice place.” That got a laugh.

“It was the only apartment I found around here that had garage space available nearby.”

“You have a car?”

“No, a Harley.”

“Oh! George rides a Harley too.”

“Yeah, that’s how I got to meet him. We’re all part of the same motorcycle club.”

“Cool.” That explained the George thing. It made me feel immensely better.

The love seat was very small for two big guys, or one normal size and one very big one. Our entire bodies were touching from shoulder to knee; mine was tingling too. When I lifted the bottle to my lips, my arm rubbed against his. He felt like he suffered from a high fever permanently. It had gotten hot in the cramped space.

“I’ll take you for a ride when the snow melts,” he said. That low, chest-deep rumble was contributing to my heart arrhythmia.

“Sure, that’d be fun,” I mumbled, realizing he was making plans for us in the next few months. My head was swimming, my skin felt prickly. Was it the beer? I hadn’t had enough for this reaction, surely.

“So... do you often grab guys in bars by the hand and drag them back here?” I took a sip of beer to keep my composure.

When he didn’t answer, I turned to face him. His eyes were on me, warm and glowing, crinkled at the corners. “No.” His lips lifted in a small smile.

My stomach was in my throat in a second. With my swimming head and beating heart, I felt like I’d explode from sensory meltdown.

“I like you, Tom. From the second you entered the site that night.” Dylan lifted his arm and had to back away to put it behind me, on the couch. “You’re special,” he added. He bent his head and smelled my hair.

I closed my eyes, giving in. He could have sniffed me all over if he had wanted to. I knew then that what I was feeling was exceptional. This had never happened to me, not even with Jeff, this sense of connection. I turned and found his lips, like they were just waiting for mine.

His mouth and face were so hot, I stopped to ask, “Are you alright? Do you have a fever?” I opened my eyes but his were still closed, our noses were against one another, our faces touching and our lips moving on each other’s. From the movement in his chest, I knew he was laughing inside.

“I’m fine. I’m always hot,” he said, taking my mouth again.

I leaned into him and we kissed. A lot. It was divine. All the kisses I had had before were just preliminaries to the real thing. Head-spinning, heart-thumping, cock-exciting kisses that soon became a tango of tongues, stroking against each other, demanding control and giving it. Dylan tasted of promise, hope, and expensive beer. My life at that point had been travelling to get to this, like I had been on the road forever and Dylan was my destination. Other men had been pit stops, learning stations, life preparation.

Our legs had become entangled on the small couch, beer bottles had been put down, and we were embracing, our bodies pressing together to make one pulsating heap of want.

Dylan growled, inhaling deeply. “You smell so good,” he mumbled against my lips before ravaging my mouth again. His hand was holding my head, fingers curled in my hair in a possessive gesture. I opened my eyes to see him watching me like a predator, raw hunger ingrained in amber.

He pulled back and stood, his hand running from my head down my shoulder and my arm to take my hand. I accepted the invitation and stood. He walked backward holding my hand, a small smile curving his lips, and led me to his bedroom.

The room was small and made even smaller by the king-size bed taking up most of the space. A bedside lamp was lit. Dylan drew me to him and his mouth was on mine again. I pulled his T-shirt from his jeans. He made a desperate, grunting sound from deep within his chest. He let go of my lips and kissed his way down my jaw and bit my neck. “I want you so bad,” he said.

I sucked in a breath and ran my hands up his granite-hard abs and pecs and tweaked a nipple. We ground our dicks together. His erection was as hard as mine. He grabbed my ass and was rubbing up against me. “Oh baby,” he muttered, nipping at my neck. His hands reached for my fly, and he was pulling my zipper down when he bit me hard on the shoulder, leaving a mark.

I heard myself moan loudly. My heart was still beating in my ears. I was beyond aroused. I was about to detonate. My fly undone, he pulled my jeans and boxers down to my thighs in one quick, rough movement, letting my dick free to wave hello; it has good manners. When I managed to get Dylan liberated of his jeans and underwear, his dick waved back and kissed mine, a slobbering, wet kiss that was most welcome.

Our dicks getting acquainted, we got rid of our shirts. Seeing my chest, Dylan growled loudly—it almost freaked me out—and bent to lick my stomach up to between my pecs, sniffing deeply along the way.

I put my hands on his head and threaded my fingers in his long, thick, gorgeous hair. With just the light from the small lamp, his silver streaks glistened as if painted with real silver. He smelled like fresh-cut grass and snow, an unusual mixture you usually wouldn't associate with each other. It was driving me crazy and making me think of camping with him or being outdoors and running together.

Strange thought when you're about to fuck, no?

Dylan spun us around and threw me on my back on the bed. He got on his knees and pulled my pants all the way down and off, tugging my socks along. “Is this okay?” he asked.

“Oh yeah,” was my only answer. He got rid of the rest of his clothes and stood before me. What a sight. “You're gorgeous,” I heard myself say. I don't think I'd ever said that to another man and felt myself blush.

He smirked, fire in his eyes, and came down to lie on me, resting his elbows next to my head.

I *hmmmmfffed* a breath—the guy was heavy.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Sure.”

“Sorry,” he said, this time smiling like a devil. He didn't look sorry at all, he looked like he was very happy to crush me beneath him. His whole body was

feverish. His smile softened, and he looked into my eyes, running a finger through the hair on my brow, around my eye, down the side of my nose, to my cheek. "Is this okay?" he asked again, gently.

"It's great." No complaints from me. He traced my lips, which he bent to lick softly. I parted them and his tongue invaded my mouth, taking me and my breath away.

A blacksmith must've been hiding somewhere because someone had been heating his steel rod. Never had I felt a dick so hot it was almost unpleasant. Mine seemed almost cool next to it. I turned slightly and said, "Man, you're hot," which made him laugh.

"Thanks."

"No, I mean your skin is burning. Are you alright?"

Dylan kissed my neck, trailing his fingers on my head, through my hair. "I'm fine. My temperature goes up when I'm excited," he mumbled under my ear.

Good to know; if he got hot when excited, he must've been about ready to erupt.

"Why? Does it bother you?" he asked, pulling his head back so he could see my reaction.

"No, no, I was just worried you were coming down with something," I said reassuringly. I had been running my hands over his back and ass this whole time. I cupped his face with both hands. "I'm glad you're excited."

"That I am. I don't think I've ever been this hot before." The wonder and desire in his eyes moved me.

"Good to know."

I brought him down for a hard kiss, crushing his lips with mine, no tongue but lots of heat as I crossed my arms behind his head and kept him close to me. Our dicks ground against one another, creating a blissful friction. These were very happy dicks, weeping from joy. I knew I could come just like this and wanted to last.

"How do you want to do this?" I asked, pulling his face away just a little.

"For now, just like this. That's all I can stand," he said, grinding hard against me. It was very good.

We kissed again and rubbed and rubbed and our breathing rhythms joined together so we were inhaling and exhaling as one person, one entity, one body living on one lung, one heart. “Come on, Tom, come for me,” he said against my mouth. “I wanna see you come.” That did it. Boom! Off I jumped from the cliff, the sensation starting from the base of my dick like a lighted wick and leading the fire to my tip in an explosion of pure pleasure, resonating through my whole body. I know I yelled, and I heard Dylan growl, a fierce, scary noise as wet hotness spilled on my belly, much hotter than mine, and I wondered for just one second if it would leave blisters. Dylan’s dick was still spurting when he bit me hard on the side of my neck, enough to hurt, and he hugged me in his arms tightly.

“Ow,” I said, not unkindly. He licked the bite mark, as if to soothe it, lapping at my skin until it did, strangely enough, feel better.

Dylan rested his head next to mine, his heart beating so hard I could feel it where our chests touched. “You’re mine now,” he whispered roughly.

No argument there.

Chapter 6

“How are you feeling?” asked Dylan as he kissed my shoulder, running a finger on my chest through our combined semen. He was lying next to me after the best non-penetrative sex I’d ever had. And he cared how I was feeling. This guy was too much.

“Fine,” I managed to mumble. When he looked up through his lashes, I took a deep breath to calm down and reassured him. “Very fine in fact, thanks. You?”

“I’m wonderful,” he said, nuzzling my ear.

To say I was content and sated would be a massive understatement. I had just caught my breath and I felt elated, like I had wings and I was ready to take off and soar through the ceiling and fly with the stars. I was turning into a romance novel before his very eyes and I didn’t care.

We lay like that for probably a few minutes though it seemed like hours. Suddenly I was very cold when Dylan got up and walked in all his naked glory out of the room. He had a beautiful, perfect body. When they draw Atlas for the books, they can use him as a model. I heard his footsteps down the hall to what must have been the bathroom near the kitchen. He came back with a warm washcloth and a glass of water. He sat on the bed next to me and proceeded to clean me up, smiling that sweet half-smile while I drank.

No one had ever cleaned me up before. I felt... well, loved. I decided to live in the moment and soak in that feeling. Tomorrow would be just another day like all the others after a night of good fucking: some calmness, lots of temporary satisfaction with a bit of loneliness.

When he had finished cleaning off the result of our mutual pleasure, he bent and kissed my lips softly. He dumped the washcloth and lay beside me, covering us up with the duvet.

“Maybe I should go,” I said, unsure of what was expected of me. I put the glass on the night table, ready to get up.

Dylan stiffened, his arm still holding the duvet. “You wanna go?” he asked, his face blank, not showing anything but his voice betraying disappointment.

“What do you want me to do?”

"I want you to do whatever you want to. You can stay. I'd like you to stay," he finally said.

I snuggled against this man with burning flesh and a tender heart and said, "Alright, I'll stay."

Dylan let go a breath he'd been holding. He covered us and wrapped an arm around me, throwing a leg over mine.

"Are you sure we're gonna need that?" I asked about the duvet.

He chuckled. "I sleep with only a sheet usually. I thought you'd be cold."

"Are you staying with me through the night?"

"Yeah...?"

"I won't need the duvet. You're a regular furnace on your own, babe," I said, laughing.

"I like it," he said softly.

"That you're a regular furnace?"

"That you called me babe," he said before kissing me again.

We kissed, this time without urgency, savoring it, making it last. This was fun but scary. This was not your typical hookup. I didn't know what it was, but I didn't want it to stop. Of course, after a few minutes, the passion flared again and I felt his erection on my thigh, which caused a similar reaction in my own body.

"Do you have condoms?" I asked anxiously.

"We won't need condoms tonight," he answered, kissing my face everywhere: my eyelids, my nose, my cheeks.

"I really want you to take me, Dylan. Please," I begged.

"If I take you, I can't give you back."

What?

"What does that mean?"

"Just what I said. If I take you, I'll never give you back. You'll be mine forever." His expression was dead serious; he wasn't even joking.

I disengaged from his arms, my erection wilting.

"I don't understand. You don't fuck people unless they're yours for eternity?"

"People I fuck aren't mine forever." Where was Captain Subtext when you needed him? I had a feeling I was supposed to understand something more than the cryptic shit he was saying.

"So it's just me that you don't want to fuck? Listen, if I'm not your type or you only bottom, just say so—" Dylan cut me off, bringing me back in his arms and holding tight.

"I really wanna take you, Tom, you have no idea how much. I've dreamt of taking you since you set me free the other night. You're exactly my type. In fact—" He stopped and hid his face in my neck.

"Say what you were going to say."

"You're not ready to hear what I have to say. I'd better be careful or I'll scare you away," he said, rubbing his face in my hair.

"You're an obnoxious bastard. Who are you to decide if I'm ready for something?" I was more than a little insulted. He was taking this knight-in-shining-armor thing a little too far now.

He sighed deeply and flipped onto his back.

I needed that duvet then. I reached for it and turned on my side, facing him.

"I can go," I said sternly.

He closed his eyes, sighed again. "Please don't," he whispered.

"Then tell me what it is you don't think I can handle."

"Let me ask you this. Do you believe in magic?"

Scrrreeetch, the sound of a needle scratching an LP rang in my head. Talk about changing the subject. Unless he started talking about his magic dick...

"Uh... what does that have to do with the fact you won't fuck me unless I give myself to you for eternity?" Maybe staying over with a guy I'd only known a few days wasn't such a good idea after all, but I was willing to give him a chance to explain. In fact, I felt compelled to. Don't ask me why.

"Do you? Believe in magic? The supernatural? Mythical creatures?"

Well, fuck me. I was completely stunned and didn't know what the correct answer was. Was it yes and he would tell me he was a unicorn and I would

leave faster than you can say cracked? Or was the correct answer no and we would laugh and have great sex? Was this a test?

I considered it for a second.

“I never really thought about it. I guess there could be truth to all those stories, you know, since people have been talking about stuff like that for centuries. Obviously some people do believe—maybe they saw proof. Me? Not really. I mean, I never had reason to believe in the supernatural.”

“So if you could prove they existed, you’d believe? It’s not a definite no?”

It had become an interesting conversation, although talking about mythical creatures was not what I had been expecting three minutes before.

“Sure, I guess. What kind of creatures are we talking about here anyway?”

He had been looking at the ceiling since we had started talking. He turned on his side and we were face to face.

“What if I told you werewolves exist?”

My eyes grew wide and my jaw dropped a little, I couldn’t help it.

“Werewolves? I don’t know, I’d probably say, show me one, or ask how come we’ve never seen any? What about vampires? Do they exist? And what about dragons? I wouldn’t mind seeing one of those...” I got caught up in my imagination and hadn’t noticed Dylan closing his eyes in frustration.

“If I can prove to you that werewolves exist, would you be scared?” he asked, looking at me again, dead serious.

“Of course I’d be scared! We’re always scared of what we don’t know. What if they get rabid and start running around eating everybody?”

Uh oh. Dylan’s nostrils flared and his glare turned furious.

“Don’t be ridiculous. We don’t eat people.”

I would have been less surprised if he had told me he was from the future and all he needed to go back was a DeLorean and some plutonium.

Then I started laughing. Really busting a gut.

“You’re funny,” I said, chortling. “Okay, you got me. So what about werewolves? You believe in them?” I said with mirth.

Dylan flipped on his back again, blowing out a breath with his cheeks swollen.

“Tom, did you notice anything weird or funny about me?”

Shit, he was serious. Again.

“Like what?”

“Like my body temperature, for example. You noticed that was a bit higher than normal.”

“Yeah?” More a question than a statement. Where was he going with this? I had not had enough beer to imagine this conversation.

“What else did you notice?” asked poor Dylan, looking patiently at the ceiling.

“That you like to be tied up?”

“No! Not that! And for the record, I don't like to be tied up. Stop thinking about that. Christ. Okay. Moving on. What else?”

Testy, testy.

I thought for a bit. Every time he touched me I tingled all over, but I was certainly not going to mention this to him now. As wonderful as it was, this guy was turning into a mental case right before me.

“I don't know. What was I supposed to notice?”

“My size?”

I snorted. “Yeah, you're a big boy.”

He blushed. “Not just my dick. My size. Would you say I'm average size?”

“Definitely not. You're huge.”

“Did you hear me growl?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact, I did. How do you do that? It's freaky!”

He didn't answer this. He kept on with the questions.

“Did you wonder how I didn't get frostbite that day I ran around naked?”

“Well, yeah, I did, but then thought maybe you'd had to do something, you know, desperate to stay warm and you didn't want to tell me. Or you were downright lying.”

“Did you really think I was lying?”

I thought about it. “No, never.”

“You didn’t question my honesty?” he asked, smiling at me sideways.

“No, actually, I’m still wondering how come you didn’t die naked in minus twenty-degree weather. But I never really thought you were lying.”

“When you followed me out after cutting my ropes, did you find me?”

I was beginning to see where he was going, but I didn’t want to follow. This was getting scary but in a bad way.

“I drove around. You disappeared.”

“Did you see anything in the alley? Anything at all?”

I tried to remember, but I was having difficulty concentrating on the memories of that night when all I could do was try desperately to ignore the hair standing at the back of my neck.

“You know what? I feel like I need to be wearing at least boxers before continuing this conversation,” I said, deflecting. I had just had a flash of what I had seen at the end of the alley that night.

I got out of bed and looked for my boxers in the heap of clothes on the floor.

“What did you see, Tom?”

“I’m sorry, Dylan, I’m gonna have to go. I just remembered something. I have to...” I couldn’t lie to him. “I’m getting really uncomfortable with all this and I’m gonna go. I’m sorry. I know I said I’d stay but...”

“You’re freaked out.” He sighed deeply, a hopeless and forlorn sigh that ripped through me. I hated myself for disappointing him.

I finished getting dressed. He got up and put on his underwear.

We walked to the door together. I shrugged into my coat and pulled my hat on my head. Then I faced the man I’d thought I could maybe, possibly have a future with before finding out he was delusional.

Dylan was standing there, glorious and beautiful, with his amber eyes resting on me full of tenderness and affection.

“Can you tell me one thing before you go, Tom? Please?”

I owed him at least that.

“Okay?”

“What did you see in the alley?”

My heart sank. “A dog. A big, fucking dog, Dylan.”

I turned to go, unable to hold his gaze much longer, my heart breaking.

“It’s okay,” he said as I opened the door. “You’ll be back.”

I stopped abruptly. Arrogant much? I pivoted my head to look back at him over my shoulder.

“What makes you say that?”

“You’re my mate.”

Chapter 7

Three hours before I had been planning a night of beer and dancing with my best friend Paul. Three hours later I was standing in the door of an apartment rented by a gorgeous guy, with whom I had had great sex, who was hinting at being a werewolf and on top of that I was his (its?) mate.

I was having a wonderful evening.

“Do you know how crazy you sound?” I asked, utterly bewildered. This guy was too much. What was I still doing there?

“Think about it, Tom. Really dig deep. Don’t you feel it too?”

“Feel what?”

“The electricity when we touch, the connection. I know you feel it. You felt it when our legs touched under the table at work the other day. You almost jumped out of your skin. That was pretty funny, actually,” he said, chuckling.

I was miffed. “Well I’m glad you had fun, Dylan. But the joke’s over. I’m leaving.”

I turned and he grabbed my arm to stop me.

“I’m serious, Tom. You’re my mate. I’ve known since I smelled you when you showed up unexpected the other night. Remember I asked who sent you?”

Oh yeah, I had forgotten about that. Hold on—smelled me?

“You smelled me?” I knew I sounded disgusted, my nose scrunched up. I couldn’t hold it back.

“You know I did. I know you noticed. Come on, give it a chance. Think. You’ll see what I mean.” He had started sounding desperate.

“Okay, what about who sent me? Why did you ask that?”

“I thought someone from another pack sent you. I was tied up as some sort of ridiculous initiation by the new pack I’m trying to join. If I could get out of the ropes by myself without any help and without changing, I’d be accepted into their pack. They tied me up by force. Idiots.” He shook his head.

Was he for real? I decided to go with it for the time being.

“Why tie you up? Can’t you get out of anything? Don’t you have superstrength or some shit like that?”

“The whole point of tying one of us up like that is that if you change, you’re gonna break the rope. Also, if you manage not to break the rope, the position is extremely uncomfortable. Remember my arms and legs were bent back?”

If a human was tied up like he was, and changed into a dog, for example, two things would happen: either the ropes broke or the bones...

“Okay. I see. So what does that have to do with me?” I was tired, impatient and irritated. This night was going down the toilet fast.

“You’re not one of us, at least not completely. I could smell you were mostly human. But there’s something there. And you’re my mate. I can’t explain it. I can just smell it, sense it on you. Anyway, if someone had sent you to free me, it had to be from another pack. I don’t know any other packs in Montreal yet. So I was wondering if I was caught in a pack conflict.” His eyes softened. “But you were just a nice guy worried about me. You freed me. You don’t know what you did for me that night. I was off the hook. I was freed without changing. Although I ruined it immediately after that.” A frown had appeared at that last thought.

“Why?”

“We’re not allowed to change in or near a city. Ever. It’s an unbreakable rule. I broke it. I had to. I would’ve frozen if I hadn’t changed. That’s the dog you saw. It was me.”

I was just staring at him, his amber eyes—hold the phone! The color of his eyes! I’d never met anyone with amber eyes like that before. Another detail for later—all sweet and warm and I could see the hope in there, to be believed, to be trusted.

“What happens when you change in the city? When you break the rule?” Then, as another thought popped in my head, “Hey! That’s how you followed me! You weren’t running after my truck naked, you were in... you were changed to...”

“I was in my wolf form. Yes. And the punishment is less severe when you do it to survive but as the last resort, after you’ve tried everything else. I didn’t have a choice. My skin was blotching white, my feet were cut and I was getting really thirsty within a couple of hours. In wolf form, not only do we heal much faster, we don’t feel the cold.”

I closed my eyes and leaned on the doorframe. I couldn’t take much more of this. Dylan guessed my state of mind.

“Tom, do you want to come in and sleep a bit? I promise I’ll leave you alone if that’s what you want. I know it’s a lot to take in. If I were in your position, I’d probably break my face and leave.” He sounded dejected.

“Violence never solved anything. At least that’s what my grandmother told me,” I mumbled.

“And that’s why I love you.”

Oh for fuck’s sake. I opened my eyes to find Dylan standing there with his huge hand on his mouth, as if he could somehow hold the words in. Too late.

Talk about overwhelming.

“I’m going now. Goodbye, Dylan. Good luck.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to blurt that out. I’m really fucking this up.” He sounded like he was about to cry. “This is not how I imagined it would go...” I heard him mumble.

I was halfway down the stairs by the time he said, “You’ll have more questions. I’m here. Anytime, Tom. And I’m sorry,” he added quickly when I opened the door that led to the street.

I didn’t say anything. I couldn’t. I started walking west, to my home. It smelled like winter, like dirty snow and car exhaust. I checked my phone. Paul had texted me four times.

What was that?

Hey! U Ok?

Then

Shld I send the cops?

And the last one

Pls call WHATVR TIME.

I phoned Paul, holding the phone under my hat to my ear. It rang three times.

“Are you alright?” was the first thing Paul said when he picked up. His voice was groggy but he seemed alert.

“I’m fine, thanks. Very tired though and I’m going home. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Where are you now?” The wind was making it difficult to hear him clearly.

"I'm on Sainte-Catherine, walking back. I'll catch a cab." I was walking into the mist from my breath and it was making my skin damp and cold.

"Booty call? You dawwwwg!" He was wide awake now.

"Yeah. Anyway. Go back to bed. I'll call you tomorrow," I said again before hanging up.

I woke up the next morning, groggy and slightly ill, feeling like I was missing something. Or someone. My heart was broken, I was sure of it. It was a dull ache, like pain from a chronic ailment, not throbbing but just there, dragging me down by its weight.

I missed Dylan. It was ridiculous, I hadn't known him that long, but after our lovemaking—it certainly wasn't fucking—the night before, I had felt close to him. Never had I felt so wanted, so cared for; never had my happiness been so important to anyone I had had sex with. No, not even Jeff. Far from it. I had always been convinced his orgasms, and especially his happiness, were more important than mine. I had been content in giving in to him and not asking for more. That was my mistake.

Then sex itself had been amazing with Dylan. Toe-curling, blood-boiling, blindness-inducing amazing. You didn't get that from being with just an ordinary guy.

And Dylan was far from ordinary. All the proof, aside from seeing him change in front of me, was there. All the things I couldn't explain before now had answers.

And that growl. Fucking sexy. And a bit scary.

Could I believe he was a werewolf? Yes. Could I admit to it? Phew... not really. Not yet.

That's where I was at on that Saturday morning. I was falling in love with a guy who said he was a werewolf and I was his mate. I did feel the connection, I just couldn't explain it.

But fuck me. A werewolf? To believe him, I had to accept that werewolves existed, then I had to believe he was one of them, therefore I had to believe there were more of them out there. Maybe I already knew some of them without knowing what they were. I had started listing people: Miss Mabel from next door—not. Jeff—definitely not. Chris, this cute guy I'd hooked up with a few times last year—not. My cousin Linda—no way. Her hands were always

freezing. I went on like that for a while and couldn't uncover any clues that people I knew could have been werewolves.

I spent the whole day eating cereal and watching television. I didn't get dressed. It kept turning around in my head, and I couldn't make sense of it. It was grueling. Aside from that, I had the heartbreak to endure.

Around suppertime, Paul phoned.

"Hey! You said you'd call me. What's up?"

"I'm not very good company today."

"You sound down. What happened last night after you left with Sasquatch?"

He didn't know how close he was to the truth.

"Don't call him that." If I knew how to growl, I would've.

"Oookayyyy. What happened?" he asked again.

"We went to his place, had sex and I left."

"That's it? Are you gonna see him again?"

"Probably not. I don't know, Paul."

"I thought you liked him? He's fucking gorgeous."

"I do. It's just... he's a member of a... of some motorcycle club and I don't know if I want to be part of that," I said, bending the truth a little but really it was sorta like that.

"What, like Sons of Anarchy?"

"I don't think they sell guns or produce porn, but yeah, with Harleys and everything. It's an exclusive club. I'd never really be a full-patch member," and that was the truth. How did I fit in a werewolf society? Even if we were mates, we hadn't had a chance to talk about me fitting in or being accepted as his gay mate. I had no idea how that worked.

And the fact that I was thinking about it was a sign that I was slowly losing my mind over this guy.

"Oh. Can he quit the club?"

"I don't think so." More like no way in hell.

Paul thought this over a bit and said, "Big deal, so he's a biker. Get on and enjoy the ride while it lasts, man!" Trust Paul to see a silver lining on a very black and heavy cloud.

“Yeah. Anyway, I gotta go. I’m gonna take a nap.”

“Wild sex then, huh? Good for you! It’s been a while. Maybe you can keep him as a fuck friend?”

“No. I don’t think I could just fuck him and leave him.”

“Oh no, damn! You’re falling for him?” I could hear the glee in Paul’s voice.

“Shut up, Paul. Seriously. I’m not in the mood.”

“Hey, I’m here, man, if you need to talk or anything, you know that, right?” His tone had changed. Paul was my best friend, I could count on him if things got bad. I could also count on him if things got too serious.

“I know, thanks. I’ll call if I need to, I promise.”

“Have a good nap. Are you going to brunch with Grandma tomorrow?”

“Yeah.”

“Say hi and kiss her for me, would you?”

“Sure thing. Bye.”

The next morning, I woke up around nine thirty. I showered and shaved, put on a nice shirt and went to meet my grandmother for brunch at the home.

I tried to go every Sunday. They served brunch in the dining room, and every resident could invite guests, provided they call first so a portion could be prepared for them, and they pay five dollars after the meal. It made my grandmother beyond happy to have me there and show me off to her neighbors, and I got a hot brunch cooked for me for the price of an egg and bacon plate at the local diner.

Grandma was in fine form when I got to her room. The minute she saw me, instead of smiling as usual, she frowned and asked, “What happened?”

“Hello, Grannie. How are you on this fine Sunday morning? Paul sends his love.” Deflection never gets me anywhere with her but it gave me a minute to prepare.

“Tommy? What happened? What’s wrong?”

“I look that bad?”

“You look like something the cat dragged in. Are you alright?”

In reality, I was far from alright. If I had thought I missed Dylan the day before, I was completely devastated that morning. Waking up was like right after my mother had passed away. After sleeping profoundly there's a second, a very short one, just as you regain consciousness, when the present hasn't caught up to you yet and you don't remember that tragedy has struck. You're blissfully unaware of the pain. Then BAM! Just like in a Batman episode from the sixties, the pain hits you in the heart and you relive the loss all over again. I had managed to lose a part of me that I had noticed was essential only a day before.

"I'm alright, don't worry. Just a little under the weather."

"I'll say. Are you ill? Did you catch one of those viruses that are putting everyone on their keisters? I saw that on the news last night. Emergency rooms all across the city are swamped with sick people because of this flu epidemic. There's a thirty-six-hour waiting period at the Royal Vic. Imagine that." She had stopped worrying about me during her rant but I knew she'd circle back any time now. "They make you wait when it's the flu because there's nothing they can do about it. They can't give you pills; viruses have to run their course. That's what they said on the news. So what happened to you? Is it the flu?" And she was back.

"Remember Dylan?"

"How could I forget?"

"I saw him on Friday."

She looked dismayed. "It didn't go well?"

"It went fine; actually it went more than fine." She started to smile, then her lips froze midway. "So?"

"So, then he told me something about himself that I can't begin to understand and I don't know if I can ever accept it." Grandma's tentative smile disappeared.

"What is it? Maybe it's something that can be fixed? Is it booze? Or gambling?"

"No. It's something he can't ever change. He was born that way." I was just saying that, I had no idea if he was bitten by a werewolf or if he was born to werewolf parents. It didn't make a difference. He couldn't change it.

Grandma thought about it for a minute. I could almost see her little hamster turning in its wheel trying to figure it out.

“He’s diabetic? He’s got MS?”

“No, no. Nothing like that. As far as I know, he’s in perfect health. He doesn’t seem to have a drinking or a gambling problem. He drives a Harley and is part of a motorcycle club but that’s hardly anything to worry about.”

“Tom, you like this man. What is it that you can’t overcome?”

Should I tell her? She had always kept my secrets. On the other hand, I didn’t want her to think I was losing my mind.

I got up and went to lock the door. I didn’t want a caretaker to walk in and overhear this conversation.

“Grandma, I’m gonna tell you something really weird and I don’t want you to freak out and you can’t ever tell anyone. Okay?” I had come back to sit next to her in one of the folding chairs she kept in her closet. She put her hand on my arm in a supportive gesture.

“You can tell me anything. I’ve seen quite a lot in my day,” she said, smiling encouragingly.

“You know how I told you his skin is always hot and he spent a day naked outside without any injury and he disappeared after I cut the rope off that night?”

Grandma was frowning, attempting to follow what I was saying.

“Yes? What about all that?”

“He’s a werewolf.”

Grandma withdrew her hand slowly and her eyes got as big as saucers, shocked. “Tommy, no!” She grew agitated, wringing her hands, and she looked absolutely horrified.

“I know, he sounds crazy. But I’m pretty sure he’s not. There’s a lot more that I haven’t told you yet that points to him being an actual werewolf. But that’s not the worst of it. He said I’m his—“

“Mate,” Grandma finished for me. Her eyes were still wide as barn doors, and her hand flew to her lips.

Now I was shocked and probably looked horrified.

Grandma gasped. She whispered, “It can’t be true...” Then continued, “Oh Tommy, please tell me you didn’t have sexual relations with him! Please!”

What the fucking fuck? My grandmother had *never* asked about my sex life, what the hell was she asking me that for? Ugh.

“Tom, I’m sorry. I don’t mean to pry, I know I’m being indiscreet, but tell me you didn’t have complete sexual relations with him. Did you?”

After I had recovered from my shock, I was able to ask her, “Why are you asking me that?”

“Just answer the question, and I’ll tell you.” She was still wringing her hands, a look of utter horror on her face. She muttered, “This can’t be happening.”

“No, in fact, he didn’t want to. He wanted to wait. He said I wasn’t ready,” I finally said.

She sagged in her chair, like a deflated balloon. She closed her eyes and sighed.

“Oh thank you, sweet baby Jesus!” And she crossed herself. Yes folks, my grandmother crossed herself upon hearing I didn’t have full-on penetrative sex with a guy. Kill me now.

I grunted my embarrassment. That brought her back to the subject at hand.

“Tom, I’m sorry. It’s just that if you had had complete relations, then you would be bound to him for the rest of your life, you see, and I don’t think you knew that, right?”

“What? What are you talking about? And how come you’re not on the floor from shock after learning your grandson is dating a werewolf?”

She had recovered her composure enough to smooth the blanket on her knees.

“There’s something you need to know about our family, Tom. Something my grandmother told me on her deathbed. Or what was to become her deathbed, seeing as she just wouldn’t die! Four years she stayed in that bed, lingering and hanging on, even though the priest kept giving her the last rites. The lady just wouldn’t give up. She died when she was a hundred and six.”

That fact I already knew. “What does this have to do with Dylan and sex, Grandma?”

“Right, right. Well, my Nonna Josephina told us stories sometimes when we went to visit her. Most of the time, my sister and I didn’t pay any attention to them as they were old stories we’d heard many times before. One day, when

she was having an unusually good day, she told us about her father having been the son of a werewolf and a human woman. The human woman had died giving birth to her father because only female werewolves could survive childbearing. Anyway, my grandmother only had a sister, and the werewolf gene was lost, but she still had some wolf blood in her, so our dad had some too and he passed it on to my sister and I and so forth. She said we had to watch out because other werewolves could sense it in us.”

Something about my conversation with Dylan jumped back at me. He had said I smelled mostly human. Was this what he was talking about? Just more questions. Great.

Grandma continued with her story. “My sister and I asked our dad about it, and he scoffed at it and told us to forget about it, they were just the ramblings of an old woman, but we didn’t forget. On our next visits, always thinking it would be the last time, we asked her about it, and she told us all about the mating. One werewolf would meet his mate and know right away who it was. They would have an instant connection and fall deeply in love with one another. She also told us how they would have to, well, consummate the union to complete the bonding between mates. Then the mates would live happily ever after.” She paused, smiling at the memory, her eyes unfocused. “Well, you can imagine how much we loved her stories. My sister and I would talk about how we’d wish to be mated to someone forever and if we could just meet the perfect werewolf. Of course, nothing like that ever happened to either of us but we sure would hope.”

“You never told me that, Grandma.”

“Of course I didn’t. What would you have said if I had told you? You would have thought I was nuts. Or that my grandmother was nuts and that craziness ran in the family. No, no, no. That was my thing with my sister. We never told anyone. My father had been very clear that we were to tell no one.”

“And now you believe your grandmother was right?” I was still processing all about Dylan and now I had my grandmother’s sanity to consider.

“Well, I always believed there must have been some truth to what she said, you know, where there’s smoke there’s fire and all that. Plus, my father was too quick in denying it and as I got older, I realized that probably meant he believed it and didn’t want us to get too curious. You can get hurt when you start poking in other people’s business sometimes and the more people have to protect, the more dangerous they become. I’m saying this to you now, Tom, be careful. You can’t ever tell anyone else about him.”

"I already know that, deep down. It's like something I know but don't know how I know. Like I feel he's telling the truth, but I couldn't tell you why."

"Oh Tom, you're in over your head already. The bonding's started. You fooled around, didn't you?"

I felt a hot flush creep up my face from my neck. I was more embarrassed now than when I told her I was gay, for Christ's sake.

"You don't have to tell me," she said. "Your face says it all. It's too late now. But he's a good guy. He could have had sex with you without telling you first, and you would've been bonded to him for life without you knowing anything about it. He's a good man."

There was a knock at the door. I went to open it quickly so the caretaker wouldn't have to use his or her key. As I opened the door, the lady said, "Is everything all right in here, Mrs. Colucci?"

"Yes, Edna, everything's fine, thanks," Grandma answered with a big smile.

"Brunch is served. Come on," Edna said.

I wheeled Grandma to the dining room and we had a nice brunch. I wasn't very hungry and ate much less than I usually do. My grandmother patted my arm a couple of times. When she was done, she said, "Why don't we take our coffee in my room?"

I was all for that. I wasn't in the mood to talk to the other seniors at her usual table. I noticed Mrs. DeSotto was disappointed that I wasn't engaging her in conversation like I do every Sunday and, although I felt a bit guilty, my mind was on Dylan and how important he had become to me in such a short time.

Back in her room, Grandma got comfortable again and continued right where we had left off. Her mind was still sharp, no doubt about it.

"Tom, you're gonna feel bad until you fix it with Dylan. You have to go talk to him."

"I just don't know what to say to him, what he wants from me. I have so many questions, and I don't know if I want the answers."

"That's not what I mean. You'll feel physically ill until you and Dylan work it out. He's probably in worse shape than you are."

"What do you mean?"

"If Nonna's story's true, when two mates find each other but don't complete the bond, something happens to them, like they get sick, until they fix it. I don't

remember exactly what Nonna said about that, but I recall there's something about the magic, and you can't stop it, and if you try, bad things happen," she said, smiling warmly. "You'll see, everything'll work out, honey. It's started anyway, you can't do much to stop it and if you try, you'll just be miserable."

I kissed her and hugged her longer that day than I usually did. What was I gonna do without her? Someday, life would take her away from me, then where would I be? Who would tell me about life and love and werewolf blood?

Chapter 8

I went to work the next day. I still don't know how I managed. It was very difficult to get out of bed. Depression had set in like the smell of skunk after you drive by roadkill. Even after you think it should be long gone, you can still smell it, taste it even. Great analogy, no? That's the mood I was in on that Monday morning.

We were almost done with the drywall; meanwhile another team was cutting and installing bricks on the outside. I would have thought the noise alone was enough to make me forget about Dylan for a while but no, he was always there, in the back of my mind, when he wasn't starring in the forefront of it.

Questions came to me without warning, random thoughts of what our future could be like if I was to concede that we could live together, with him turning into a beast once in a while. The plus side would be that I would never want for heat on cold winter nights for the rest of my life. But I couldn't come to a decision without answers first.

I needed to talk to Dylan. Grandma was right. I couldn't postpone it much longer.

That night I went home, managed to swallow scrambled eggs for dinner before falling into bed by nine o'clock. Unfortunately, I didn't get to sleep until one in the morning, tossing and turning more than the previous night which had been unpleasant already.

When I was alone without any noise or distraction was when it was the worst. If I closed my eyes, it was excruciating. Visions of Dylan crying, tormented and sick, calling out to me for help, made me want to vomit. I almost did once but dry heaves were the only relief I got. This had to be the most horrible time in my life, worse than when my mom died. And that had been massive.

The next day, I was ready to face George and ask him for Dylan's number. I didn't think I could stand seeing Dylan face to face but calling him seemed like a good alternative.

When I stepped into the site office, George looked up and gasped.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

“Listen, I know you probably have some confidentiality issues about this but do you think you could give me Dylan Scott’s number? I need to reach him,” I said without further preliminaries. I just wasn’t up to chatting and just getting those words out had taken a lot out of me.

“Why do you want his number? And are you sick or something? If you have the flu, you should go home. I don’t want everyone catching it.”

“I’m fine, just tired. Can I have his number? I’m pretty certain he won’t be angry, I’m sure he meant to give it to me. I saw him last Friday,” I added to make it sound more convincing.

“Oh yeah? Last Friday? Where?” What did he care all of a sudden?

“We bumped into each other at a club and had a beer. I wanted to talk to him about something he mentioned.” Just give me the number already, I thought.

“Did he tell you we belong to the same motorcycle club?”

“In fact, he did. But that’s not what I want to talk to him about.”

George was looking more and more wary. Maybe he didn’t know Dylan was gay?

“What do you think of him? I wanted to ask you in case he needs a job sometime when he gets his papers. Did everything go alright with him last week?”

“Yeah, he’s a good worker, from what I can tell. I didn’t get to see him much in action, he was here just one day,” I said.

“Did you get a chance to talk to him at all? Get to know him?”

What was he getting at? And I had thought I was acting weird.

“He seems nice,” I said, not knowing what he wanted me to say. He makes me want to dive off a cliff for him, I want to lick him from head to toe, I want to have his children even if I can’t bear them myself, I want to grow old with him. I didn’t think George was ready to hear this.

“Shit. So it’s you.” I looked up to watch George squinting at me with his hands on his hips like he’d found the cure to hangnails.

“It’s me what?” The number, George. Focus.

“I never would’ve guessed, but I should have...” he muttered to himself. Whatever.

“Do you think you could look up his number, please?”

“You’re the reason Dylan’s so bent out of shape, aren’t you, you bastard?”

Whoa. That was not what I was expecting. I had been prepared for arguments about privacy laws and confidentiality regulations that prohibited an employer from giving out an employee’s information, but this, no.

“What are you talking about, George?” I had no patience for this.

“You’re Dylan’s mate, aren’t you? I thought there was something when I introduced you both, but that was fast. What happened? Why did you turn your back on him?”

Fuck. George was a werewolf. It made sense with all the tying-up issue and his coming to get Dylan on that fated morning when my life was turned upside down.

“What do you know about that?”

“Oh come on, Tom. You’ve figured it out already, I can tell. How can you let him die like that? That’s just plain cruel.”

“What? Die? What the fuck are you going on about, George? What’s happened to him? Dylan’s dying?” My depressive state was quickly turning into a panicked one. My knees almost gave out.

“Calm down. You didn’t know, did you?” he said, stepping toward me. He led me to a chair. “Sit down. You’re white as a sheet. Don’t faint on me,” he said while getting me a bottle of water. “Here, drink this.”

I took the bottle he pressed in my hand, but it went unheeded. “What’s wrong with Dylan?”

“We can’t live long without our mates, Tom. Didn’t he tell you what would happen?”

“No, he most certainly did not tell me. I would’ve remembered that.”

“How are you feeling?”

“Who cares? What’s wrong with Dylan? We should go see him. Does he need a doctor?” I tried to get up but George held me down.

“Relax. He’s not dead yet. It’ll take longer than that. What’s he told you?”

When I didn’t answer, he added, “Talk to me so I can help you, Tom. Start by breathing, then talk.”

I gulped in some air, tried to put my thoughts in order and miserably failed. I just sat there.

“It’s okay, Tom. Tell me what you know,” George said soothingly.

“I’m his mate. He’s a werewolf,” I said, then I looked up at him and added, “but you already know that.”

“Yeah, I’m one too.” He had almost admitted it to me earlier anyway.

I took a second to digest all this and went on. “That’s it. I freaked out and left. Since then I’ve been feeling sick and very depressed. I don’t know what to do or what to think.”

“How do you feel?” George asked, pulling a chair in front of me and sitting down, facing me, watching me with keen eyes.

“Bad, I just told you. Really bad.”

“No, I mean how do you feel about him?”

“I think I’m falling in love with him.” The realization hit me as I said the words.

My eyes stung behind my lids. George went to lock the door.

“Okay, Tom. I owe you an apology, I thought he’d explained how it worked, and you knew what it was doing to him. But apparently you’re suffering too so it’s not only one-sided.”

“What’s wrong with him?”

George sighed. “When mates don’t bond or one leaves the other for whatever reason, which almost never happens by the way,” he said with a hard stare, “they get sick and wither away. For some it takes longer than others, but some die quickly, within months. You can’t live without your mate for long. Usually, nature works well and bonds you with the perfect match. Other times,” he said this with regret in his voice, “nature screws up and connects the wrong two people. It happens. Not often, but it does.” He lifted his hat, scratched his head and put his hat back on. “Why did you freak out?”

“George, he told me he’s a fucking werewolf! What did you expect me to do?” I said, surprised and pissed off.

“But as his mate, you’re supposed to be in love with him. Did that not happen?”

“I can tell you this now, after three days of pure torture without him, I can honestly say I’m falling in love with him, but I wasn’t ready for that on Friday night at two o’clock in the morning. But most importantly, how’s Dylan? What’s happening to him now?”

“I don’t know how much you know about magic. Did he tell you anything about that?”

“He told me there’s magic involved with werewolves. I learned from another source about the bonding ritual and what it entails,” at this I stared at George to make sure he understood what I was talking about, “and I know we didn’t complete it.”

“You mean to tell me you didn’t fuck each other’s brains out already? Wait a minute, if you didn’t, then how come you’re all twisted out of shape? Humans don’t react like that unless the bonding’s complete and they lose their mates.”

“I may have a drop of werewolf blood, George. I’m thinking that’s why.”

He managed to look even more surprised than when he realized I was Dylan’s mate.

“Oh shit. That’s why you smell so sweet.” That smell thing again. He got up and went back to the table, the discussion apparently over.

“There’s nothing worse than an incomplete bonding, man. Take the rest of the day off. Go see Dylan and fix this before you both lose your minds. You poor, dumb bastards.”

Chapter 9

Just driving over to Dylan's, I started feeling a bit better. The massive pain weighing on my chest became lighter and was soon mixed with anticipation. The closer I got, the better I felt. If only he hadn't changed his mind about me, we'd be okay. And if Grandma was right, he wouldn't be changing his mind anytime soon.

I parked on his street and looked up in time to see him let go of the curtain—or rather sheet—on the window. When I got to his door, he was opening it.

When I was a kid and went to La Ronde amusement park, there was a ride called the Rotor which is no longer there. You went down in a wooden circle and stood with your back against the wall and this thing would start turning and spinning around and the trick of this ride was that the bottom would be lowered and you would stay stuck to the walls by sheer centrifugal force. When poor unsuspecting girls wore skirts, if the wind decided to lift their skirt right before the centrifugal force was at its strongest, the skirt would be stuck in that position for the whole ride and the girl wouldn't be able to lift her arms to put her skirt back down, hence showing her underwear to one and all. Fun times.

Dylan was my Rotor. The minute he opened his arms, sheer force drew me into them, and I was stuck to his body, my head spinning and my breath cut off. Same thing. Except with him, the feeling was wonderful and I almost didn't feel like throwing up.

Being in his arms felt like home. "You feel like home," I told him without thinking too much.

"You are home to me," he answered, his voice choking.

"Is it always going to be so intense?"

"No, it gets better. Unless you decide you don't want this," he said, and he really sounded like he was about to cry.

I pulled my head back and noticed the dark circles under his eyes, his sunken cheeks, two-day-old beard flecked with silver making him look older, thinner.

"I did this to you?" My heart was sinking fast. As much as I was getting better on the way over here, it struck me that I was the reason for Dylan looking so rejected and sad. It made me feel like such a shit.

“You didn’t do anything. It’s the magic. Come on, let’s talk. I’m sure you have questions.” He pulled away from me but still held my hand and took me to the couch.

“Do you mind if I hold you while we talk? Please?” he asked gently.

I pushed him on the couch and sat in his lap. “Sure,” I said, putting my arms around his neck and leaning on him. My legs were dangling from the armrest but I didn’t care; I was where I was supposed to be. I would’ve killed anyone who tried to pry us apart. Now that I was here, I wasn’t letting him go.

He breathed a sigh of relief and it tugged on my heart.

“Dylan, are you alright?”

“I am now. I’ll be better in a few minutes. Don’t worry.”

“What’s happening?”

“I wasn’t sure so I called my uncle.”

“In Colorado?”

“Yeah. It seems we started the bonding Friday night but we didn’t complete it. The magic is draining from me.”

I looked up into his eyes. “What does that mean?” That’s what George must have been talking about concerning the magic.

The light in his eyes was dim, like the amber was cooling after a fire. “It means if you don’t want this, and nothing can force you, I’ll lose my magic.”

“What happens then?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“What would happen to me?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I’ve been feeling awful since Friday but on the way over I started feeling better, like I was coming to find a cure. I’m feeling better and better since I got here.”

“That doesn’t happen to human mates. I don’t understand,” he said, frowning.

“I have something to tell you. Apparently you’re not the only weird one, babe.” His eyebrows shot up. “My grandmother told me I have a few drops of werewolf blood from seven or eight generations ago.”

Dylan's whole body stiffened under me, his jaw had dropped and he stared at the wall.

"That's what it is! I knew there was something about your scent!" His hug crushed my ribs. "I didn't even stand a chance!" He laughed, and it was a fantastic sound.

"A chance of what?"

"Of not falling in love with you. I need to kiss you now."

Wow, what a kiss. He really needed it. It felt like he was drinking me in, like a plant deprived of water for too long when it starts to rain. His mouth was hot, his lips were soft but demanding, it was glorious.

But, wait...

"Are you saying you love me only because of the bond?" That was sadly a disappointing thought.

"The bond is magic that connects you to the person who's perfect for you. You're perfect for me, Tom. With your beautiful green and gold eyes, and your honest smile, and your big, strong heart willing to help a man you don't even know by welcoming him into your house and feeding him and clothing him and giving him money, and being concerned enough for a stranger to go look for him in the cold... I could go on and on, Tom. You're just so perfectly kind and good and thoughtful and beautiful," he said as he kissed me again. "You didn't even hesitate to lie for me to your boss, you kept my secret and you took care of me when I had no one in Montreal. That's why I love you, because you're my mate in every sense of the word."

Wow. Hearing him talk about me that way, even I would've fallen in love with me.

He hugged me close with a hand on the back of my head. I felt cherished, valued, loved.

"I didn't think it would happen so fast with you. When you came in and cut my ropes, I couldn't stay but I wanted to. You smelled like heaven and sunshine. I had to find you again. Sure, I would've preferred to be dressed for it," he laughed at this, "but I didn't know anyone else besides George, and I couldn't go to him since he was part of the pack that requested that stupid initiation. And I admit it, I was drawn to you. I wanted to see you again. And you were so nice. I thought I'd have time to date you properly, to woo you and

impress you and you'd fall in love with me because after all, we're mates and I knew it already."

"Lucky you. I didn't get the memo," I chuckled. I was feeling better and better, my depression was lifting slowly, the nausea was almost gone. Dylan looked a lot better too, although not recovered completely. "Is there anything I can do to help you right now?" I asked.

"You're doing it. You're here. I can feel the magic working. It's very weird. I never felt that before. The elders tell us how it's gonna happen when we meet our mates. How the magic takes over and you just know. And I've seen people from the pack lose their mates and slowly deteriorate, but I didn't understand it, really. The magic just drains out slowly. I watched my dad wither away after my mom died."

He flinched, and I held him close, kissing his neck. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay. She was only eighty-eight but, you know, shit happens."

I lifted my head at that. "Only eighty-eight?"

"We live long lives, we don't age as quickly as humans do."

"How old are you?"

"I'm fifty-four."

I would've fallen to the floor if Dylan hadn't caught me. He chuckled.

"You're fifty-four? Fuck! You look thirty-five! How does that happen?"

"We don't get sick, we heal quickly in wolf form and we can live up to a hundred and twenty, a hundred and thirty sometimes. If your family has wolf blood, you'll probably live long too. Which side of your family carries it?"

"My dad's."

"How old is he?"

"He died at sixty-two."

"Oh. Sorry. Well, maybe it's thinned out too much. Bummer..."

"He's not a good reference. He smoked three packs a day for forty years. Lung cancer got him. His mother, my Grandma, is still alive, she's ninety-four. Her father died at ninety-three and his mother died at a hundred and six."

That seemed to cheer him up. His smile lit up his whole face. He was certainly gorgeous.

“Great! I’ll keep you with me for a long time!” Then his smile fell. “Unless you don’t want this life. We still haven’t talked about that.”

I pulled back from his neck so he could see my face. There was raw anguish in his eyes.

“I’m falling in love with you, Dylan. Make no mistake. It’s fast and it’s out of control and it’s scaring the living crap out of me, but I don’t want to leave you again. I can’t, even if I wanted to. I can’t seem to function without you near me.” My voice was rough. “These last three days have been hell. Worse than when my mom died. Worse than when I left my ex, Jeff.” He growled.

“What?”

“I don’t like to hear about you with other men. I know I’m not your first, but I really, really hate it. I should’ve been your first.” His eyes were downcast, as if in shame or regret.

I put my finger under his chin and lifted his head so he’d look at me. I was surprised to see jealousy and possession in his eyes, not shame or regret. That was fucking sexy. Shouldn’t have been, I hated jealousy, but in this case, I’d let it go. It made me feel desired.

“I’m sure you’ve had other guys in your life, Dylan. Come on. I mean, look at you. I’m sure you weren’t wanting in the sex department.” I stroked his jaw, the two-day-old beard making a scratching sound. I wondered if he’d let me shave him.

“Getting my rocks off and making love to my mate are two very different things, Tom. I’ve never made love to anyone. I’ve never had a steady relationship either. I was waiting for my mate. You.” The honesty in that statement was humbling.

Wow. In fifty-four years this guy had never felt loved. I would be his first. Talk about responsibility. Well, I’d do it right if it was the last thing I did on this earth.

“I can tell you that the first time you kissed me, on Friday, on this very couch, the thought that came to me was that the other guys who kissed me before you were just practice along the way, leading me to you. I swear. It’s like you were the first to kiss me like that. It was glorious, babe.” I kissed him softly, hoping to convey my gratitude for making me feel that.

His hand at the back of my head held me there, and the kiss grew hotter, more passionate. He bit my lower lip, and I moaned. “You like to bite, eh?”

He laughed in his chest, soundless. "I like to bite you."

"I have a mark from Friday! You bit me after you came, then licked it better. Is that a wolf thing?"

"I guess. I wasn't thinking, but I know my wolf was close. Everything with you is different. Even that orgasm was ten times, no a hundred times more powerful than any I've had in my life before, by my own hand or someone else's. I'm scared too, just so you know. This is new for me. I've watched my friends find their mates and go nuts for a couple of weeks, but this is unexpected for me. I didn't know it would be so strong. At first I wondered why that was, but now I'm thinking it's the wolf blood in you. It's not as crazy or fast as if you were a full werewolf, but it's not the full-on romance that happens when a wolf's mate is human either. I felt it really fast and it's overwhelming, but you need time like a human. I'm sorry I can't rein it in, give you time."

"It's okay. It'll work out. We'll work it out, Dylan. Where there's love, there's a way, right?"

"I love you, Tom. I really, really do," he said, and I believed him completely.

"I know. I feel it."

"Can we go to the bedroom? You're probably not very comfortable here, and if we could be skin to skin, I'd feel better faster. Do you mind?" A glint of amusement lit up his eyes.

"Why do I have the feeling you're milking it?"

He laughed. "Maybe a bit. But I would feel better faster, that's true. You don't have to, though, I'll be fine like this too."

I untangled my legs, and Dylan helped me to my feet. "Come on." I walked to his bedroom, undressing and leaving my clothes wherever they fell. I was pretty sure he wouldn't mind. I heard him growling close behind me and I jumped and turned.

"Sorry, did I scare you?" His face wore a devilish grin.

"How do you do that? It sounded like a big fucking angry dog right next to my ear ready to pounce!"

"I wasn't holding back this time. The other times, I tried to catch it before it was out, but I failed a couple of times."

He was down to his boxers by the time we reached his bed. He was pulling those off when I asked, "You growled at the club, when I was dancing with Paul."

"Couldn't help it. Just came out. Jealousy. You were mine. Couldn't stand to see you with a guy." His stare had turned hot and heavy as he was fixated on my body, and his sentences were suddenly shorter.

The hair at the back of my neck had started rising, but in a good way.

"Dylan? You alright?" His nostrils had flared, his stance changed to that of a predator ready to pounce, his head down, his eyes flashing through his lashes, arms outstretched, erection stiff and proud.

"Tom, I don't think I can hold back. My wolf wants to come out and play. Can't control it. Last chance to stop and get dressed. Are you ready to be mine forever?"

This was it. I was more than ready. I walked forward, into his outstretched arms.

"I already am," I said as I crushed my mouth on his, teeth scraping, my tongue invading him, wanting to be possessed by this man in every possible way. Fuck the questions, fuck their answers. There would be time.

One of his hands was stroking my back, my ass, my shoulders, my head cradled by the other. I had one arm around his ribcage, with my other hand I took hold of his dick, hot and silky and so, so hard for me.

"I love you, Dylan," I said, and he growled, low and deep. So fucking sexy.

"I'm the luckiest man in the world," he muttered against my skin.

His hand reached into my crack and rubbed the entrance. The nerves were so sensitive it drove me wild. Dylan's temperature rose again, so much it was almost unpleasant, but it was also exciting as hell. I had never in my life wanted a dick inside me like I wanted Dylan's. He pushed a finger into my hole, and I almost cried out in pleasure. So fucking good. Without lube. It was different, that's for sure. It was as if his finger was supposed to be there, this whole time. His tongue was mimicking the in and out of his finger in me as it took possession of my mouth. My eardrums were ringing from my pulse beating in them so hard.

Dylan let go of my head and caught my hand on his dick. "Stop. You'll make me come."

“You have to come in me, Dylan. Please.”

“Oh I will, baby. I will,” he said, kissing me again, ravaging my mouth.

Then he pulled away and spun me around, throwing me on the bed so I lay flat on my stomach.

“Is this okay?” he asked as he opened the drawer of the nightstand, rummaging in there.

“Yeah, it’s more than okay.” I heard a bottle cap snap off, then his finger was back, all greased up and ready.

“Tell me if I hurt you. I’m having trouble holding back.” He lay down next to me, burning my skin.

“Don’t hold back,” I said, before I moaned as he entered two really hot fingers in my ass. The high temperature ignited my prostate, and I almost came right there, no need for a hand on my dick.

“Wait!” I cried out. “I’m gonna come!”

He growled as he pulled his fingers out and straddled me. That was such a turn-on, my dick was crying long streams of pre-cum on his sheets. I heard the bottle being handled again and then he was right there, at my entrance, asking for permission to enter.

I got up on my hands and knees and pushed back until his tip was past my muscles. A hot, white sensation went from my ass to my groin all the way to my throat, and I couldn’t breathe. Flashes of color were splashed behind my closed eyelids. His hand came up to my throat and pulled me up, so my back was to his chest, and our hearts were pounding as one. He was holding my weight with his other arm around my chest, stopping me from falling as I was only on my knees then. I reached back and put my hands on his ass, and he pumped into me, full of love and promise, as more colors flashed behind my eyes, greens and blues, and I was flying in a forest. No, I was running over a forest ground, protected by hot, soft fur. It smelled of fresh-cut grass, morning dew, sunshine, and snow, and it was wondrous and glorious and I started to come. The hot, white sensation boiled to red and shot through my ass, into my stomach until it burst from my throat in a loud groan, ribbons of cum flying out of my dick. Dylan was coming in my ass, and I felt it all, burning me, branding me. I heard his scream before his hand squeezed my throat, and he bit my neck, hard. He was still pumping into me and my prostate loved it, prolonging my orgasm.

The skin on my back felt raw. We fell forward, Dylan on top of me for a second before he leaned sideways as his dick disengaged from me. The loss I felt from that organ leaving my body almost made me weep but then my ass was on fire so it wasn't too sad.

Dylan gathered me in his arms and kissed my neck where he had bitten it. "Sorry, it's bleeding a little," he said as he kissed and licked it.

"You're an animal," I said, and that made me crack up. I laughed. Whether from nervous energy or just from an overload of emotion from what had just happened, I still don't know.

"Yes, but I'm *your* animal now. And you're mine forever. No one can touch you anymore. Are you ready for that?" My laugh quieted.

"If this is the kind of sex we're gonna have for the rest of our lives, I don't want anyone else touching me," I said lazily, letting myself relax in his arms. "Hey! The same goes for you, no?" I asked, lifting my head up.

"I can't get it up for anyone else anymore, Tom. You're it for me now. I hope you never stop desiring me or I'll be one poor, frustrated bastard."

"No danger of that. I'm psyched my mate is one gorgeous hunk of man and he's all mine," I said, cupping his face in my hands and kissing his nose.

"You think I'm gorgeous?" he said modestly.

"Oh come on, Dylan. You're fishing for compliments, now?" I teased.

"I'm serious. You think I'm gorgeous? Or is it just after-sex talk?" he asked.

I stared right into his amber irises. "You're beautiful to me, Dylan. I love you. But you're one hell of a good-looking guy. You must know that."

"Thanks," he said, eyes downcast. "I'm happy you think so. You're so handsome, I wouldn't want you to feel like you're settling."

That made me laugh. Hard. He looked up, and the sincerity in his look cut my hilarity off.

"You're serious. Dylan, why would you think that?"

"You're not compelled to find me attractive. You're mostly human. I just hope I please you as much as you please me."

"Are you saying you think I'm handsome because you're compelled by magic to do so? That's almost insulting." I pulled back a little, but his arms pulled me tighter to him.

“No, no, no. You’re beautiful to me, you’ll always be. But you’re so handsome too, with your green eyes and your auburn hair and your long muscles and lean stomach. I’m so lucky it’s you, you’re quite a catch,” he said, giving me a sweet kiss.

I flushed from the compliment. Really, this guy was good for my ego.

“How come you came to Canada? Did you know where I was? How does that work?”

“I came here because my mom was from Montreal. When I was forty, and it was pretty obvious that my mate wasn’t close to home, my mom suggested I come here. She spoke French with me, so I know enough to get by. It was her idea I might find my mate here. She was right. It’s too bad she’s not around for me to tell her. She’d be so happy,” he said the last part with a choked voice.

“I’m sorry she’s gone. How did she die, if werewolves don’t get sick and heal quickly?”

“Getting hit and dragged a hundred feet by a semi’ll do it.”

“Shit. I’m really sorry. That’s horrible.” I hugged him to me and stroked his back.

“She died instantly. There’s no coming back from that. Her neck was broken, her body mangled and torn apart. It was my dad that was hard to watch. Every day, the magic leaked out of him, little by little, until he was an old human with a failing body. He was glad to go, he told me. He wanted to be with her again. It took a little more than a year. It was agonizing to watch him. He’s at peace now.”

“Is that what would’ve happened to you if I hadn’t come back?”

“Eventually, yes.”

“That’s terribly sad. Couldn’t you get over it? Do any of you ever do?”

“For some it takes longer, they find reasons to hang on. But the point is that we don’t want to go on. Once we meet our mates, if we can’t have their love, we’d rather die. It’s the curse of the magic. You live for a long time, you’re strong, you’re healthy, but you need love. If you don’t have it, you can’t hold on to the magic and you die.”

“That is the most romantic, idiotic thing I’ve ever heard.”

Dylan chuckled. “It is what it is. I wish I’d had time to date you, Tom, explain all this to you before mating. How are you feeling now that the

bonding's complete?" He was rubbing his hand on my back and ass, down my thigh.

"Perfectly happy. By the way, is that your wolf I felt?"

Dylan was taken aback. "You felt that?" he asked, his eyes wide, a look of hope and wonder in his eyes.

"If by 'feeling that' you mean being carried through a forest with wonderful smells, protected by soft fur and feeling loved like never before, then yeah, I felt it. It *was* your wolf, right?" He smiled so wide I thought his face would break. A warm feeling swept over me, like I absorbed his joy.

"Yeah, that was me. My wolf. Wow. You're the first human to experience something like this that I've ever heard of. That little drop of wolf blood is really great," he said, nuzzling under my ear. "I'm so happy, Tom. I don't want to overwhelm you, but I'm so fucking happy I could cry," he said, and I felt something hot and wet on my neck.

My heart burst, and the back of my eyelids tickled. "It's okay, babe, you can tell me whatever you feel," I said into his hair, my voice catching. We stayed like that, in each other's arms, until I couldn't stand lying in my cum any longer.

"Do you mind if we get up and change the sheets? These are sticky," I finally said.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't even think of that. Do you want a washcloth?" he said as he disentangled his limbs from mine and started to get up.

"We could shower perhaps?" I asked, feeling horny suddenly.

He just turned his head over his shoulder. One look at my half-erection and his eyebrows raised in a suggestive manner. "Sure, we could do that," he answered, grinning. "Come here," he held out his hand.

I took it, and we stumbled to the bathroom, his erection growing by the second. It was entertaining to watch.

How he managed to blow me in such a small bath, being such a big man, I'll never know, but it was fucking awesome. I returned the favor and drank his hot cum down my throat like it was the best fucking liquid in the world. Delicious. Which made me think of something.

As we dried each other off, I said, "Dylan, we didn't use any protection."

“Not a problem. I can’t catch anything, and you’re fine. I can smell it on you. Your blood sugar is a little high, we’ll have to watch that. No more Sugar Crisps for you, babe,” he said, smiling.

“You’re shitting me.”

“Yeah!” He started laughing. “I can’t smell your blood sugar, but I would be able to smell disease and decay, and you smell just delicious,” he said, leaning in to sniff my neck before licking it.

“Funny, I was just thinking the same thing about your cum.”

“What?”

“It’s delicious,” I said before I gave him a short but hot kiss. He growled. “I love it when you do that.”

“As delicious as my jizz is, and I’m happy you enjoy it, you must be hungry for some real food? I know I am,” he said, slapping my ass on his way out of the bathroom.

We dressed, and he made us pasta with cream sauce and spinach, sprinkled with parmesan. The man could cook too. I was in heaven. Maybe I’d died when he’d choked me during his orgasm?

“I’ve never had anyone in me without a condom. That was really awesome.”

“I was your first?” he asked, proud and gleeful.

“Yup.” I was glad he was happy about that, but what did it say about Jeff and I that we had never trusted each other enough to stop using condoms? Jeff always said it was faster to clean up, but after we broke up, and he found someone so quickly, I had my suspicions that he had fucked around on me. Water under the bridge now.

“I’m gonna need a bigger couch,” he said as we were finishing our meal sitting at his small table.

“My couch is big enough. I even have a big bathtub and a separate shower. What do you think?”

“Are you asking me to move in with you, Tom?” He had been bringing a forkful of pasta to his mouth, and his movement had been interrupted by my statement. His fork just hung there, on the tip of his fingers, ready to fall.

“Why not? That’s where we’re gonna end up eventually, sooner or later. Whenever you’re ready, babe,” I said, and I was elated at the thought. Paul

would be so pleased I'd finally have someone to share my huge bath with. He had even offered to come over with his conquests so as not to waste the tub, but I had refused. What an ass.

Dylan just smiled at me, forgetting the food on his fork which fell limply back to his plate. The raw honesty of his feelings was stamped all over his face. I forgot my food too, although I was almost finished. We just sat there, gazing at each other like all those movie scenes when the heroes know they're in love. I had always thought those scenes were a bit much, but now I understood perfectly. Dylan was glowing and everything around him had disappeared, he was all I could see. My face was flushed, it was as if my skin was thick and warm, and my neck swelled, full of love and hope and promise.

This bonding thing was fantastic.

"Can I bring my bed?"

"Yeah, it's bigger than mine."

"What about my Harley?"

"We'll find a space nearby. We'll figure it out." I got up and took my plate and his to put in the sink which was... just behind me. "This place is tiny."

"I know. It was temporary anyway."

He had come up behind me and had wrapped his arms around me. I spun around to face him and gave him a kiss. "I really like doing that," I said.

"Cleaning up?"

"Kissing you."

"Oh. Good," he said, smiling again. He was doing a lot of that. Since our lovemaking, he was looking more and more like when I met him. His cheeks had filled in, the circles under his eyes had almost disappeared. I was good for him, and it made me giddy as all hell.

"So what do we do now?" I asked, almost jumping on my feet.

"What's that look for?" he asked, looking at me sideways.

"Nothing. I'm just wondering what we do now. How's this going to work? By the way, George knows about us." He flinched, but caught himself the next second.

"My uncle must've called him. He was pretty worried. I should probably call him again, tell him everything's fine."

"I should call my grannie too, she was pretty worried after that wolf blood conversation."

Dylan stiffened. "You can't ever tell anyone else about me, you know that, right?"

"Of course I know that. You think I'm stupid or something? I don't want anyone grabbing you and stuffing you in a cage and poking you with needles to experiment on you!"

He blew out a breath he'd been holding. "Good. I know that humans usually protect their mates by instinct, but I just wanted to make it clear. This is new to me too, you know. And I don't think you're stupid. How close are you to that friend of yours, Paul? Did you and he ever...?"

"No, never. He's my best friend, has been since school. He's great, you'll like him. He'll love you. But he'll never know about you, rest assured. I don't want anything happening to you, baby," I said, hugging him close. That Rotor ride thing again. I was sucked into his energy field like a magnet. He was the positive to my negative, and I was fine with that.

"Oh, I should mention that George will smell me on you. You'll carry my scent from now on. Don't worry, only other werewolves will be able to tell you're my mate." He kissed my nose, the corners of his eyes crinkled.

"Oh great. What, will I have guys smelling my ass everywhere?" That made him laugh.

"No. But a couple of werewolves in the club last Friday were looking at you with interest. I had to stake my claim." I pulled back from him, keeping my arms around his neck.

"Is that what that was?" I said, chuckling.

"Your scent is intoxicating, babe. Well, not anymore. Now it's mixed with mine so other werewolves will keep away from you. You're no longer available. But that's how I knew you were there. I had gone in for a beer to see if I could get a job bartending. Then I caught your scent, and you were all I could think about. I had to get to you. And don't I see you dancing with a guy?" He closed his eyes at the memory. "Christ, I almost changed right there."

This was flattering and a bit unnerving. "There were other weres at the club?"

"Yes, a few. We're everywhere, Tom. But in a city like this, with so many people, we have to be really careful, and we can never change in the city. I'll

have to refrain from changing for a month as punishment for what I did on the night we met.”

“How can they tell?”

“They can smell it. When we change, our scent is more potent. Other weres will know if I change, and it’ll get back to the pack. That’s why I had to stay with George that day after I changed. He had to vouch for me.”

“You would have died if you hadn’t,” I said, angry.

“Yeah, but what I should have done was send you away and take the initiation and what came with it. Instead, I escaped but had to change into my wolf form to survive. It was stupid, just like the initiation.”

“Why put new members through such a dumb initiation anyway?”

“When you have a pack in a big city, you don’t want a hothead who can’t contain his wolf, ready to change at any provocation. It’s to prove you can stay calm, face any situation without losing control of your wolf.”

“Oh. That makes sense. It’s not so stupid after all.”

“There are other ways of making sure the new member is okay without stripping him and tying him up like a hog.” He sniffed his contempt. I found that funny.

“It’s the naked thing that bothers you?” I said, chuckling.

“Why did they need to take my clothes? Those bastards.” He was funny when he was annoyed.

“Grandma sure liked that story,” I said, before thinking about what I was revealing.

His eyes got wide with shock and embarrassment.

“You told her?! Your *grandmother*? Oh fuck. I can’t ever meet her. I’ll die,” he said, his head dropping on my shoulder with a big sigh.

I laughed. “Once you get to know her, you’ll see, there’s not much that shocks her. She was worried about you though.”

“You talked to her about us?” He wasn’t embarrassed as much as curious now and maybe a little flattered.

“Well. I told her I found a guy naked and tied up—don’t worry, I played it down as a prank. When she got worried about you, I told her I went looking for

you and you were already gone, so you were probably safe at home. It made her feel better.”

“That was really very kind of you, Tom. I’m very touched you did that,” he said, all snugly again.

“You should probably know that she told me about the werewolf blood because I told her you were a werewolf.”

“I know. It’s okay. We can trust her, right?”

“She won’t tell anyone. She did tell me to fix it with you.”

“When I get over my shame, I’ll look forward to meeting her.”

“And Paul?”

He squinted, but said, “Sure. Paul too.”

“Don’t worry, he’s harmless.” I patted his ass reassuringly.

“Does he know about the rope and the nudity too?” he asked, almost afraid of the answer.

“Well... yeah,” I said, laughing. “Him I told all about your beautiful body and mesmerizing amber eyes—hey! Is that from the wolf thing?”

“What?”

“Your eye color. I’ve never seen anyone with amber eyes like yours before.”

“Yeah. A lot of wolves have brown eyes, just like humans, but some of us have gold or orange eyes, more like the grey wolf.”

“I thought you might be wearing contacts at the bar, I could still see your eye color clearly even in the dark,” I said, remembering.

“We have super night vision. Maybe my pupils don’t dilate as much. But contacts? Do I look like the type of guy who’ll take the time to put contacts in every morning?” He seemed slightly peeved.

“No, that’s why I meant to ask you. But now it makes sense. It’s the wolf in you.”

“I can’t wait for you to meet my wolf. It’ll have to wait a few weeks though,” he said, disappointment etched on his face.

“It’s okay, we have all the time in the world.”

Chapter 10

I went to work the next day after spending the night with Dylan, refreshed and energized.

“Good morning, Mr. Colucci,” George said with a big smile on his face. “Had a good evening, did you?”

“Yes, boss, thanks for the time off. Did a world of good,” I said, unable to hide my joy.

“I can tell. In more ways than one,” he said, winking.

Oh yeah, the scent thing. So he knew we fucked. Big deal.

He gestured toward the office, and I followed him. Once inside, he locked the door.

“Now you’re gonna have to come introduce yourself to the pack. Did Dylan tell you?”

“No, he didn’t. We talked about many things, but the pack wasn’t one of them.”

“Maybe they don’t do it that way in Colorado. Anyway, I’ll have to talk to Dylan. He’s not a full member yet, still affiliated to the Denver pack. Plus, he’s being punished. Did he tell you that?”

“Yes. You might as well know, I’m the one who cut the ropes that night and helped him escape.”

George’s eyes squinted, but he nodded. “I thought so. You were here before we came back to pick him up. He’s a feisty one, that Dylan. He’ll have to introduce his mate and you’re a guy. Many of us don’t care, but some elders aren’t too keen on the homosexual thing. Just beware, okay, Tom? It might be difficult, but I’ll do all I can. You’re a good man.”

He came up to me and put his hand on my shoulder, squeezing hard for a second. He let go and left the office. I stood there, processing this new development. I wondered if Dylan was aware of this. Probably not.

I went to work but miscalculated on hand-eye coordination and dropped my hammer a couple of times, enough for the guys to rib me for it.

I sent a text to Dylan.

Need to talk to u soon.

He answered quickly.

Meet u after work.

I confirmed and waited for the work day to end.

At four, Dylan was waiting by my truck. Just seeing him there lifted my spirits. I came up to him smiling, but held back on demonstrating my affection, not knowing if he was okay with that or not. I got my answer when he grabbed me and kissed me hard, in front of everyone. Some of the guys still around started hooting and clapping. I know I blushed bright red.

“Sorry, should’ve asked if that was alright,” Dylan said, smiling like the devil. I grunted, closing my eyes.

“Payback for telling my grandmother about the rope, I’m guessing?”

He laughed at that.

“Didn’t think of that, but sure, that works. I should have asked you first. Is it okay for me to kiss you in public?” he asked solemnly with a hint of amusement.

“Yeah, it’s fine. I’m just not used to it. I love it, in fact,” I said, giving him a quick kiss.

“You had a boyfriend. Didn’t you guys kiss in front of people?” he asked, genuinely curious.

“No, he didn’t want to attract that kind of attention,” I said, looking away.

“Well, I want to let the whole world know this beautiful man is mine, and I love him, and I want everyone to know it,” he said, hugging me close.

This guy could melt my heart with just a few words.

We got in the truck and headed to my home, which would soon be our home.

“Something on your mind?” he asked, facing me with his back to the car door.

“Yes. George said you had to introduce your mate to the pack and some of them wouldn’t be too happy with the gay thing. Did you know that?”

He blew out a breath. "I was expecting to have to introduce you, but I wasn't expecting to have a problem with the gay angle, being in Montreal. People are more open here, or so I thought."

"We're open, but we still have the few homophobes, especially the older generation. But have no illusions, there are still people who think being gay is unnatural or an illness, and these people raise kids with these ideas. Sometimes those ideas stick."

"Hmmm... well, I don't care. If they're not happy with us being together, I don't need them. I can apply to a different pack."

"How would that work?"

"It's a bit complicated. I'd need to meet with them, I won't have anyone to vouch for me, so they can do whatever they want to me in terms of initiations or requesting payments, and basically during that time, I have no protection, which means you have no protection either."

We were almost home. I had been looking forward to an evening of discovery, preferably sexual, with my new boyfriend, but the dark sky and damp weather seemed to be a premonition of the night's mood.

"What do you mean, protection? What kind of protection do you need?"

"If anything happens to me, like I need medical attention or I need to change, or some wolf decides to challenge me for some reason or other. Normal pack stuff. If you're not part of a pack, you don't get the protection."

"It's pretty serious. What happens if you have an accident?"

"Like what? A car accident?"

"Yeah, let's say you're hit by a bus. What happens?"

"I have to get picked up by other wolves and taken to a safe place where I can change and heal. No human doctor can examine me because my body temperature and my bone density and other stuff would give weird vital signs. They could potentially harm me if they treat me as if I were human. And I couldn't change into wolf form in a hospital, so I couldn't heal from whatever they did to me. I could die. Other than that, not much."

"What about the challenge you mentioned?"

At this, his face crumpled.

"That's another thing. But that hardly ever happens anymore. We're civilized people now, and that kind of event attracts attention. Don't worry about that."

I was worried anyway.

“That means we have to make it work with this pack, Dylan. If you have to leave me, do it. I don’t want anything to happen to you because of me. Maybe we should wait until you’re a full member before introducing me?”

He had jumped in his seat when I said, “if you have to leave me”. “Are you nuts? I can’t leave you! Ever! Worst case scenario, you’re coming with me and we’re going back to Colorado. That’s it.”

“Wait. I can’t leave Grannie here. She’s too old to travel and get settled somewhere else. I’d follow you anywhere in a minute, but I can’t leave her behind.”

He sat back and sighed, frowning. “Okay, we’ll make it work with this pack. We’ll see what they have to say. They may put conditions on my acceptance. I’ll talk to George and my uncle.”

I found parking not too far from my place, and we walked hand in hand till we got to the door. Dylan leaned in and gave me a quick kiss as I put the key in the lock. “Don’t worry, okay? It’ll be fine.”

Easy for him to say. This was supposed to be fun, a new beginning in our lives, full of happiness and great sex.

When we were settled, Dylan phoned his uncle Jamie. I was making supper when Paul sent me a text.

What are u up 2?

I answered

Dinner with D.

My cell rang two seconds later.

“What’s going on, man? The monster’s there?” I looked up guiltily and yes, Dylan’s brows shot up when Paul said that, which reminded me to ask about super wolf hearing. That had happened at the bar too. I smiled lamely at Dylan before turning around.

“Don’t call him that!” I whispered. “Dylan’s here, I’m making supper. How are you?”

“I’m fine, thanks. You sound better than last weekend. Anything good happen?”

“Yes, I’m with Dylan now. We’re together.”

“Alriiiiiight Tom my man! Good for you! How’s the sex?”

“I’m not telling you.”

His tone changed. “This is serious?”

“Yeah, very serious,” I said as I turned to watch Dylan. He was smiling at me, even though he was listening to his uncle. Touching and unnerving.

“Well, then, I’m happy for you. I won’t ask about the gorilla sex, I’m guessing this guy can perform, what with his size and those hands and—”

“Shut up, Paul.”

“Okay, okay. Sorry. So how’s Grannie?”

We talked about my grandmother for a while, then we talked about mundane stuff.

“You wanna go out for a beer Friday? Or dancing at Club 80 again? We were rudely interrupted last time,” he said, and I heard the smirk over the phone.

“I don’t know. We might have to do some club thing with the biker guys soon, it might be Friday, I’ll let you know.”

“Don’t forget me now that you’ve found true love, T, alright?” he said sounding forlorn, but I didn’t buy it.

“Yeah, yeah. Like you didn’t ignore me when you were going out with Roger-the-dick.” He laughed at that.

“Right. Keep me posted about Friday. Have a good night and kiss Dylan for me.”

“No way. Bye, Paul.” I said affectionately before hanging up.

Dylan was right behind me when I turned, and I jumped.

“Christ! Don’t do that!”

He laughed. “So, what are you waiting for?”

“For what?”

“Paul said to kiss me for him. Where’s my kiss?” he said, a bit too cheerfully.

“You have super hearing, don’t you.”

"Yup. First, my kiss." I gave him a big, sloppy one. "Thanks. Second, he calls me the monster?"

"Only this time. You *are* a tad big, you know. And you did growl and practically carry me away from him. I told him not to call you that anymore."

"I know, I heard you whisper it really loudly," he said, chuckling.

"You heard his comment in the club, right? About you being hot? Or huge? I don't remember exactly, but I could see it on your face you'd heard, although I thought it was impossible."

"I heard him. Funny guy. I have extra sensitive hearing, more so in wolf form, but even like this."

"So if I whisper dirty things from another room, you'll hear me?"

His gaze turned hot and heavy. "Yes, I will," he said, nodding. "Feel free to experiment." He gave me a quick kiss, smiling against my lips. "Okay," his smile faltered, "I spoke with my uncle. He knows of only two elders who don't like gays in this pack, but they have a lot of influence. We'll see. George will confirm it, but there's a meeting at the clubhouse in Pointe-aux-Trembles on Thursday evening. Can you make it? I need you there."

"Sure, I'll be there." I turned back to my task, but the lump of worry that had formed in my gut earlier was still there, cutting into my appetite.

We had a quiet dinner and sat in front of an episode of *Walking Dead*, snuggling close. Then we showered, had great quickie sex, and spooned in my queen-size bed that was a bit small for both of us. We'd be moving his bed in on the weekend, provided we didn't have to relocate to Colorado.

On Wednesday, George came over for a beer after work to discuss the meeting at the clubhouse. Dylan had come to pick me up so we arrived at the apartment at the same time.

"Sit down. What would you like to drink? Heineken? A Maudite?" I was picking up stuff and rearranging the magazines thrown on the coffee table.

George chuckled. "I'll have a Maudite, thanks. Leave that," he said, motioning with his hands at the coffee table.

I drew in a breath and went to the kitchen. Dylan had just sat down the minute his coat was off, and he was watching me with an amused expression. My boss and my new boyfriend were in my house, and I wasn't used to entertaining. They knew each other before I met Dylan because they were part

of the same motorcycle club but also because they were werewolves, which excluded me completely, and they were watching me flutter around like a hen. Yeah, nothing to be nervous about.

I went to get the beers, a Heineken for Dylan and Maudites for me and George, and I brought some nuts. My grandmother always said you should serve food with drink, and drink with food. I came back to the living room, and they just sat there, waiting for me, George smiling, Dylan almost laughing. No pressure.

I handed them their beers, and Dylan winked at me. Maybe he thought it would make me feel better, but it just made me feel more self-conscious.

“What’s gonna happen tomorrow?” Dylan asked George.

“John’ll introduce you to the whole pack. You’ll introduce Tom as your mate,” George’s eyes flicked to me for a second, “and you’ll state your request to join.”

“Who’s John?”

Dylan took this one. “John Tessier is the leader of the pack. George took me to see him that day I went in to work with you guys, because I had changed. John’s the one who sentenced me for a month.” I nodded and looked to George so he could continue.

“Then John’ll ask the members if anyone has something to say about that, and that’s when we expect either Lenny Bergeron, who sits as council, or Ted Smith, to speak up against your orientation. They’re both old-school and close to retirement, but they do have their friends backing them up.” When I sighed, George pressed on. “There’s no written rules here, boys, it’s usually just basic common sense, and the leader is bound to be fair and reasonable in all matters pertaining to pack membership and the safety of werewolves in general. I don’t see a problem with it, we have friends also.” He sipped his beer.

I looked to Dylan and saw his expression was calm and confident. He smiled at me and crunched some nuts before saying, “It’s not like in the books, Tom. We’re not gonna start tearing into each other. There’s no drain in the middle of the floor to make it easier to clean the blood.” He sniggered.

“Okay. What do I have to do? Or what can I do to make it easier?” I asked Dylan, then looked to George.

Dylan turned to George, who answered, “As a human mate, there’s not much you can do. Just stand by your man. Your scent already confirms you as

mated, you're not an overly aggressive man or challenging in any way, it should be fine. The others will sense your disposition. If you're nervous, it's alright. As long as they don't get the impression the new mates could be violent or threatening, things go smoothly. In your case, you have nothing to worry about."

I felt a little better, and I sensed Dylan was peaceful. I could feel his emotions sometimes, which was weird but not unpleasant and sometimes useful, like now. I trusted him completely on this.

"As for you, Dylan," George said, facing him, "you're already being punished for a major break in the rules, even if it was justified—which it could be argued that it wasn't, but you were lucky John was so lenient on you, so you can expect to have some kind of probation period or maybe a condition to your acceptance. Don't mention the gay part in your introduction, just say it like you would if you were with a woman, and let John take it from there. How did you guys do it in Colorado?"

"In our pack, gays don't introduce their mates to the pack formally. Too many elders are still against it and it just creates problems for nothing. One guy tried a couple of years ago and regretted it. The debate was just long-winded, bigoted comments being thrown around and it ended up hurting the couple. The guy's still part of the pack, but he doesn't get involved as much and lives with his boyfriend outside of pack territory. He's still protected and everything, and I'm sure the pack would protect his mate if anything were to happen, but they're happier being far away from the homophobes."

George was thoughtful for a minute. "We're lucky here in Canada, same-sex marriage is legally binding and everything, but there are still those who believe homosexuality is wrong. Maybe someday it won't matter to anyone; we can hope."

I didn't have much hope for that. There would always be people whose religious beliefs didn't accept homosexuality, groups who believed you could cure it, others who would still think it was gross because it tapped into something in themselves they didn't want awakened or seen. But at least, if gay rights were upheld and respected, we had a chance at a normal, happy life.

Chapter 11

Thursday came too soon. I wasn't ready to face these people. If there was a doubt that Dylan wouldn't be accepted or protected, I wanted out.

After a quick supper, Dylan held my hand while I drove to the clubhouse out in Pointe-aux-Trembles, at the furthest eastern tip of the Island of Montreal. Hidden in an industrial park, bleak and unassuming, stood a bunker-type construction with about sixty cars and trucks, most of them big monster trucks, in front. It wasn't hard to guess what kind of transportation Harley dudes preferred for the winter when they couldn't use their bikes.

We entered at the same time as others filed into the entrance, which opened on a great big hall with a raised dais at the far end. Three seats were set up behind a long table on the dais with a microphone in the middle. At least a hundred people were in attendance. Some people, men and women, stared at Dylan then took particular notice of me. I wondered if it was that weird scent I was giving off, mixed with Dylan's now. George was there with some other guys, and I was surprised to recognize Glenn and Henry from the construction crew. They just smiled at me in acknowledgement, no more.

Three men went up on the stage and took their places at the long table. The guy in the middle took hold of the microphone and addressed the assembly.

"Good evening, everyone," John Tessier said, and silence fell almost immediately. Wow. These people respected their leader.

"We're here to accept two new members with their mates in our pack. Dylan Scott and Terry Bower. First, Dylan Scott. Would you come and introduce yourself?"

Dylan squeezed my hand and walked up to a microphone set up on a stand on the floor, in front of the dais.

"Hello everyone, I'm Dylan Scott, of the Denver pack. I'm here with my mate, Tom Colucci, and I would like to pledge my loyalty to the pack, if you'll accept me," he said clearly. George moved to stand near him.

The man on the dais to the left of the leader stiffened when Dylan mentioned my name. There was some rumbling from the audience, but it soon quieted down when the leader tapped on the table right next to the microphone.

"Order, please. Thank you, Dylan. Who vouches for this man?"

"I do," George said in the microphone. "George Castonguay, sir."

"Great. Now, does anyone know of any reason why we shouldn't accept Dylan Scott and his mate into our pack and extend to them hospitality and protection?"

The man to his left raised his hand. "I do." He pulled the microphone toward himself.

My heart sank as I saw Dylan's shoulders drop. George had turned to him and had patted his arm in a gesture of support and patience.

"What do you have to say, Lenny?" the leader said.

"Well, sir, I have a problem with a stranger from another country asking to join our pack with a man as his mate. We don't know him or his mate, who is clearly not one of us and they, as homosexuals, can't contribute to creating strong offspring to continue our pack. I vote for them being denied."

A few people were nodding their heads, many more were shaking theirs. The leader pulled the microphone back.

"Is there anyone who wants to argue this point? If so, please do so now at the microphone."

The guys from the construction crew, Glenn and Henry, came up. Glenn spoke first, "I would like to point out that we have never refused someone's mate based on the fact that they can't procreate, as women not of our kind generally don't survive childbearing anyway so that argument is lame, with all due respect, sir." Lenny flinched at that.

"Duly noted, Glenn. Thank you. Next?" said the leader.

Henry came up to the microphone. "To refute the argument that we don't know Mr. Scott's mate, Sir, actually Glenn, George, and I have known Tom Colucci for three years and would be happy to vouch for his character. Not to accept them just because of who they sleep with, is not a proper reason to deny them our pack's protection. Tom is a good man, and Dylan is vouched for. I say we should grant their request."

Some people clapped and most nodded their heads.

The leader tapped the table again.

"I've heard both sides. Does the prospect have something to say?"

George nudged Dylan, who came up to the microphone again.

“Sir, with all due respect to you and to the members of this pack, I don’t feel the need to defend my orientation. If your pack accepts me as a member with my acknowledged mate, I’ll be very happy. If you don’t just because of my mate’s gender, then I probably wouldn’t be a good fit with this pack and I’ll move on, no grudges or challenges. If I am accepted, I will pledge my loyalty to all members and do everything in my power to protect this pack from any threat, as I would expect it of the other members toward me and my mate. Thank you.”

A general murmur spread across the assembly. George patted Dylan’s back. I was proud of my boyfriend, but found him a little reckless. I hoped this worked.

John Tessier tapped the table once. Silence once again swept the hall.

“We heard both sides of the issue. All those in favor of refusing membership to Dylan Scott and his mate Tom Colucci, based on the argument expressed by Lenny Bergeron, please raise your hand.”

Twelve hands went up. Mostly older people but some younger ones too. Disappointing but not too damaging.

“All those in favor of granting membership to Dylan Scott and Tom Colucci, based on the opposing arguments, please raise your hand.”

Eighty or so hands went up.

John Tessier said, “In light of recent events dealt with last week concerning Mr. Scott, it is hereby ordered that this pack is honored to extend its protection and loyalty to Dylan Scott and his mate Tom Colucci as of today, with a probation period of three months as is usually done with a new member from another country, pending the safe conclusion of the punishment Mr. Scott has yet to complete. Welcome, Dylan and Tom.” He tapped the table again and almost everyone cheered. Lenny didn’t; he just sat there, fuming.

Some people around me greeted me with smiles and congratulations. Dylan strode back to me through the crowd and hugged me fiercely to him.

“It’s done! Nothing to worry about anymore,” he said, letting go.

I saw George across the room and when our eyes met, he winked. Glenn gave me a thumbs up, and Henry gave me a warm smile.

Glenn’s intervention didn’t surprise me, but Henry’s was a revelation. He had always been very quiet and reserved, had done his work and gone home

without ever participating in the ribbing and teasing common to most construction crews. I was of course teased because I was gay, Didier couldn't live down the fact that he was French, and no one would ever let Sylvain forget he was deaf in one ear.

The obscene signs the guys would make to "help" Sylvain understand were pretty immature but funny, and Sylvain always saw the humor. I'll let you guess what they did to mime "I'm coming" when Sylvain called one of them over. But Henry never got involved, never laughed, always minded his own business. To find out he was a werewolf and he was willing to vouch for me was moving.

When we left after the other new guy was accepted without any argument, I made sure to thank George, Glenn and Henry. They brushed it off and wished us a good evening. I was gonna see them the next morning anyway. A round of good coffees would be appreciated.

We drove home talking about the events of the evening, happy about the outcome.

"This is great! Now our life together can start without anything threatening it," Dylan said, squeezing my hand. Driving with one hand wasn't always a good idea in Montreal during winter, but I was getting good at it.

"You still have a three-month probation period," I pointed out.

"Pfff no biggy. What could go wrong?" Dylan said, smiling, content.

"Let's hope nothing does. How about a burger?" I suggested.

"We ate before leaving! You're still hungry?"

"A celebratory burger. No? You're not hungry?" I asked, glancing at him quickly.

"I'm hungry, but not for food," he said, that devilish smile showing up.

"Oh, I see." I was up for that. "Fuck the burger, let's go home," I said.

"I'd rather you fucked me," he said and blushed.

"Dylan! You naughty boy." I was laughing.

"Can't wait to take you out on my Harley in a few weeks. Winter's almost over," he said, looking outside.

"Yeah, but you blink and it's back. Summer is so short," I said. "But you'll see, at the beginning of winter, with fresh, clean snow and Christmas lights

everywhere, Montreal is beautiful. And let's not forget the start of the hockey season! We missed it this year."

"Yeah! Go Avalanche!" Dylan said cheerfully. I put on the brakes in the middle of Sherbrooke Street, after checking for anyone behind me. We were alone in our lane.

"What? Avalanche? You're shitting me, right?"

"No, I'm a big Avalanche fan. Why?" Dylan said, surprise etched on his face.

"Don't you know they used to be the Quebec City Nordiques? The Canadiens' worst rivals?" I was sleeping with a traitor.

"Oh yeah! So?" He obviously didn't see the importance of this issue. Fuck werewolves, fuck packs, fuck protection, fuck gorgeous. This just couldn't be.

"Dylan, we have a serious problem."

Epilogue

“J’arrive.”

Whenever Dylan spoke to me in wolf form, it was in French. I heard the wolf’s thoughts in my head, but I couldn’t speak to him telepathically. Still, most humans couldn’t hear their mates at all, so I was lucky to have a few drops of wolf blood. We presumed that was the reason for this weird communication skill.

“J’ai faim.”

I knew that, he was always hungry when he came back from a run. We had rented a small cabin hidden in the woods in St-Michel-des-Saints in Lanaudiere, north of Montreal, an hour away from civilization. Here, Dylan could let his wolf run free for a few hours a day. I loved it. I got to read in quiet solitude with the smells of nature and sounds of wildlife, and to cook for my wolf when he returned, in his human form, gloriously naked and sweaty, smelling of wet dog which always reminded me of the time he was in my kitchen that first day I met him.

“J’ai hâte de te voir.”

Me too, honey, I look forward to seeing you too. Hurry up.

“Okay, je me dépêche.”

“Tu m’as entendu?”

“Oui!”

Fuck me! He heard that!

This bonding thing was fucking fabulous.

The End

Author Bio

Phoebe resides in Montreal, Canada. She currently lives with a rock star, a make-up artist and a gamer. She reads an average of three hundred books and short stories a year on the electronic devices she keeps breaking and replacing.

She'd like to thank the make-up artist and the gamer for naming the characters in this book.

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