



TJ NICHOLS

Wolf
Lust

OUTCAST PACK SERIES

WOLF LUST

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TJ NICHOLS

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CONTENTS

[Wolf Lust](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Other books by TJ Nichols](#)

[About the Author](#)

Simon Hume gave up everything when he left his pack and marriage. Some days, he wonders if he did the right thing, but his ex-wife has moved on, and they are better friends than they were lovers. But trying to date when everything has changed, he's on the wrong side of thirty-five, and he's still figuring out how to be a gay wolf shifter is harder than he expected. While he'd never say it aloud, he's lonely and enjoyed being married. Drew and River's wedding is not easing that feeling.

Miles McCallum knows that if he doesn't take the chance soon, it's going to slip through his fingers. But whenever he is about to ask his wolf best friend out, the words never form because Simon is way out of his league. With the alcohol flowing at the wedding and Simon more than happy to dance with him, Miles knows this is it, and he isn't going to leave the party with his tail between his legs.

Can one night that could be written off as a drunken mistake become more when neither of them wants to mess up their friendship or be forced to leave the pack if things don't work out?

Wolf Lust is a steamy friends-to-lovers wolf shifter romance featuring a wolf who's scared to risk his heart only to find it safely held by the man who has secretly wanted him from the day they first met.

PROLOGUE

12 months earlier

IT WASN'T A FORMAL GATHERING; they didn't have them as they weren't an actual pack. They were a random collection of packless—either because they'd left to make things easy for their family or were officially cast out—gay wolves who'd gotten invited to run on Kyle's rural property. Most of them knew Con and had hooked up with him at some point; Miles would like to say that he wasn't part of that club, but he was, even though it was pre-Gideon.

And he hadn't been invited to run back then because Con hadn't met Kyle yet, so the idea of being able to gather with other gay wolves was a dream that didn't even exist.

If Con was bothered by being around his exes, he didn't show it. Well, were they exes when it had lasted one night or less? But today there was a new face at Kyle's for the run.

“You found another one? Is that like your secret superpower?” Miles teased.

Con lifted his hands. “Not me this time.”

“I invited him,” Sam said. “Mark knows Simon's ex-wife's brother.”

Like that wasn't a mouthful to remember. So much so that it took Miles a moment to fully process, and when he did, the question fell out of his mouth before he could stop it. “Ex-wife?”

All eyes turned to Simon, who stared at the ground. He was tall and dark-haired, but that was about all Miles could see

of him. He smelled delicious, though. He wanted to say like oranges and sunshine, but that was stupid because wolves always smelled warm and who the fuck smelled like oranges?

“I was married. I thought I could make myself fit in to the pack.” Simon lifted his gaze. He had dark brown eyes that were full of painful things he didn’t want to speak about. He wasn’t the only wolf to have that look in his eyes. “We separated a year ago because I couldn’t do it any longer, and she didn’t want me to pretend. It was months in the making.”

“Oh.” That was a bit different and a bit tragic. And he felt like an ass for asking. “Does that make it easier or worse?”

“I don’t know.” Simon extended his hand, and Miles hesitated.

His thumbnail was black and cracked from where he’d dropped a brick on it, and as usual, his hands were rougher than coarse grit sandpaper. They were not the kind of hands that guys wanted feeling them up.

“Miles.”

Simon’s grip was firm, and he didn’t flinch away. His lips had a nice curve that Miles wanted to lick to see what he tasted like. It wasn’t often that a man had such an instant effect on Miles. Surrounded by wolves was not the time to radiate lust because they’d all become aware in about three seconds.

“You a tradie?”

“Yeah.” There was no point in denying the obvious. He took his hand back. “Bricklayer. You?”

“Chemistry teacher.”

That meant he was smart. Hot and smart. For a moment, Miles let himself imagine what it would be like to date another wolf instead of having to hide this part of himself from Gideon. It was that or tell Gideon about the paranormal world, and he wasn’t ready to do that. He’d had a conversation about it with Sam not that long ago. Given that Sam was a Coven Agent, it had seemed like a good place to start. These days, the Coven wasn’t too keen on telling any human anything.

Lying to Gideon about being a shifter wasn't the same as lying to your wife about being gay, though. Gay or bi? He had more questions. They formed at the tip of his tongue, ready to leap into the world.

Then Simon gave him a fleeting smile that brightened his eyes. In that second, Miles wanted to kiss him more than he wanted to talk.

Simon looked away, and the moment was over.

Miles took a breath and tried to push down the annoying spike of lust. Simon's life wasn't any of his business, and he had enough dramas of his own. When he came out here for a run, he told Gideon he was catching up with old friends. Gideon had asked if he could come a couple of times, and Miles had told him no one brings a partner.

It wasn't a good answer, and Gideon hated it, so Miles didn't run very often.

"We're really informal," Kyle said. "But I ask that you don't invite anyone without checking with me since this is my home. Otherwise, just text me and ask if they can come up. Usually, it's not a problem. It's a big house with spare bedrooms."

Simon nodded. "I have my kids every other weekend, so I don't know how often I'll get up here."

Sam put a hand on Simon's shoulder. "It's an open invitation, not a requirement. Most of us live in the city—"

"Which isn't always easy," Miles said. "Running into another wolf, the first thing they ask is what pack you're from." Saying none brought an automatic sneer and invited trouble. Sometimes he lied and said his old pack. He hadn't been kicked out, but only because he'd left first.

In that heartbeat, he knew why Simon had tried so hard to fit in. Having a place to belong mattered. He wasn't sure where he belonged. And while he loved Gideon, telling him about the paranormal world didn't feel right. The more he thought about it, the less he wanted to do it, which probably said something about his relationship.

Simon had a bigger set of balls than him. He'd left everything so that he didn't have to live a lie.

"Shall we run? Or do we want to sit around and talk about our exes?" Kyle grinned at Con.

Con flipped him the bird and pulled off his shirt.

Miles was still undoing his laces, giving his semi time to disappear, when Con, Sam, and Kyle walked outside naked and ready to shift.

"So there's no hierarchy?" Simon folded his shirt and placed it on the back of the sofa.

It took Miles a moment to realize Simon was talking to him. He glanced up and felt the heat of lust swoop through his blood. "No. We aren't a pack." How could they be? Packs had couples and kids, and the only couple they had were Sam and Mark, and Mark wasn't even a wolf. He was a witch. "Just respect that this is Kyle's place, and he lets us use it. Have you been getting out much since the, um, split?"

"Not really." He raked his fingers through his hair. "I haven't dated in over a decade, and it's all changed. And I'd never..." He shrugged.

"Never been with a guy before?" He took off his shoes and socks, wanting to keep his clothes on for as long as possible, which was a weird feeling.

"I have now. But I don't want to just hook-up like Con. Not that there's anything wrong with that."

Miles laughed. "Sam warned you about him?"

"Yes. He's a familiar to a witch. That's unusual for a wolf."

"I guess." Sam could be prickly and, from what he'd heard, literally made people disappear. He covered up all kinds of things that the Coven didn't want humans to know about. That Mark was a cop only made their relationship even stranger.

Miles tugged off his shirt and then his jeans. He needed this run, and not only to enjoy the shift. But he was aware of

the way Simon's gaze drifted over him. He had a small outline of a wolf tattooed on the back of his hip. He'd had it done in Bali with a group of human friends about five years ago. They'd been obsessed with finding their inner animal, something he'd found amusing at the time. He didn't speak to any of them anymore.

"Coming?" Beyond the big glass windows, three wolves waited on the lawn. "They're waiting."

"I haven't shifted with anyone for a while." Even as Simon spoke, he shucked his jeans.

"We won't bite." But Miles wanted to. There was something about Simon that made his heart beat a little faster, despite the reasons not to go there.

The top one being that he had a boyfriend waiting at home.

Coming a close second and third were Simon's divorce and the fact that he was smart and professional, and Miles was a high school dropout. Simon walked past him, his perfect ass begging to be bitten.

Instead, Miles bit his own lip, hoping the sting would kill the sudden heat in his blood.

CHAPTER ONE

EVEN THOUGH THEY'D driven out to Kyle's place together, the way they had so many times, Miles still stopped and stared when Simon walked out of the bedroom in the gray suit. Was this the first time he'd seen Simon in a suit?

Miles had seen him in slacks and a shirt, but now he was all buttoned up, and Miles wanted nothing more than to undo the top button and lick his throat. Maybe bite him a little.

For one dizzying moment, he wanted to be the one getting married today. To Simon.

He shook his head, trying to clear the thought.

"What's wrong? Did I miss a spot shaving?" Simon ran his hand over his cheek and jaw.

"Nah, you look great." Could he sound any rougher and less educated? *Nah*. What was wrong with a simple and normal no?

Simon smiled and lifted an eyebrow. "I took too long. You should've knocked."

"I've just gotten out of the shower. It's fine." And he was keeping a firm grip on the towel so that it didn't betray the rising lust and heat in his blood. He'd been planning on giving Simon another couple of minutes before knocking. Now he wanted to drag him back into the bedroom and help get him naked.

Even though Kyle's place had four bedrooms, when the whole pack was there, it meant sharing. That he often shared with Simon had never been an issue. They were friends and

often drove up together. Hell, he'd seen him and every other wolf there naked more times than he could count. That wasn't the problem either.

He was the problem.

Every so often, his body would respond to Simon in a way that a friend shouldn't. For the last year, he'd managed to push it away. And he would keep pushing it down. If he didn't, he was going to fuck things up. He glanced up, and Simon's lips curved.

Miles' dick jumped beneath the towel as if it was trying to get noticed. Great, now Simon would smell the lust on him. And he was standing there, dripping on the carpet because he didn't know what to do. He was making this weird without even trying.

Simon's gaze flicked over him, and for a moment, Miles was sure there was something there, but that had to be his own imagination because in the year he'd known Simon, he'd never given Miles any indication that he was interested. The man was hard to read at the best of times.

And he was way out of Miles' league.

The only reason their social lives overlapped was because they were gay wolves. And they happened to live within fifteen minutes of each other, which made sharing a car out to the pack lands smart.

"Looking good." Sam nodded at Simon as he walked past. "You going like that, Miles? Bit undressed, don't you think?"

Miles flipped his middle finger up at him, but Sam had already gone past. "I'd better get dressed. I don't want to make you late."

Because stringing himself up in a suit and tie was exactly how he wanted to spend the rest of the day now that he was half-hard and trying not to think about what Simon looked like out of the suit.

Like most wolves, Simon was all lean muscle. Unlike most wolves, there was something about him that hit Miles in all the right spots and had from the day they'd first met. Breaking up

with Gideon hadn't helped. If Simon noticed, he'd never said anything. Which meant he wasn't interested in being anything more than friends.

Simon's smile widened. "I don't know. I think you can pull off the white towel look. Shows off your tan."

The tan came from laying bricks all day. His fingers curled even as he bathed in the compliment. Most guys didn't want his callused hands rubbing their dick or any part of them. That had always been Gideon's biggest complaint.

Simon's hands weren't rough; they were smooth, and often ink stained. They were clean today...and Miles wanted them all over him. He was no longer half-hard. He adjusted his grip on the towel, hoping that beyond the scent of lust, the evidence was hidden. "I don't want to steal the attention from Drew and River."

He brushed past and stepped into the room, shutting the door behind him as fast as he could. Miles leaned against the wood and tipped his head back. Every breath was laced with the scent of Simon. His skin. His soap. His clothes.

Scents that he was so familiar with they shouldn't make him hard.

Sure, he'd thought him hot when he'd first showed up, but Simon had been a mess as well, trying to figure out the aftermath of the divorce. And Miles had been involved with Gideon.

Six months ago, that had ended. Mostly because Miles couldn't be bothered to maintain the lie. He understood now why Simon hadn't been able to continue with his marriage. The lie became this thing that was always there.

He cursed himself. He should've seen this spark of lust turning into something more months ago when catching up with Simon became the highlight of his week and he hadn't put any effort into meeting anyone else. At first, he'd told himself he was getting over Gideon.

Then it was that he didn't want to date a human because he didn't like lying.

He was a fucking idiot.

It was Simon he wanted to date.

He opened his eyes and glanced at the two single beds. Simon's side was tidy as always, and his own bag had exploded over the floor and his bed. With a sigh, he peeled himself off the door. For half a second, he considered jerking off, but the last thing he wanted was for Simon to walk in and smell it. Even though it had happened in the past, this was different, and he was sure he'd walked in after Simon had on a couple of occasions.

There was a downside to being around so many wolves, and that was there were very few secrets because someone always either sensed or smelled something. Were they already wondering what was up with him?

He dressed, glad he wasn't part of the wedding party, so he didn't need to go all out in the gray suit, white shirt, and green tie—which he was sure would look lovely in the photos. He rolled up the sleeves of his white shirt and buttoned up the black and gray waistcoat. He'd brought a tie but wasn't sure that he needed it.

He shoved it in his pocket, put his shoes on, then ran his fingers through his hair, knowing it already looked fine. He wanted to look more than fine. He wanted Simon to notice him. To see him as more than a friend.

He shook his head. It was never going to happen.

It had been a surprise to see Simon look so...so extra hot, that was all. He was definitely not lusting after his friend who wasn't interested in him.

His dick said otherwise.

What he needed was a distraction. Weddings were an excuse to hook-up, and it had been months since he'd been with anyone. But he liked hanging out with Simon. They always had fun. And he didn't want to ruin that by dating someone new.

As much as he tried to convince himself it was only lust, deeper down, he knew it wasn't and that it was too late to pull

back. Somehow his heart had gotten ahead of him, and he didn't know how to reel it back in.

With a sigh, he left the room and joined everyone in the main living area.

River was with his human friends and would meet them at the winery for the actual wedding. Kyle, Simon, and Con were all in gray suits as part of the wedding party. Everyone else was in an assortment of colors ranging from cream to blue and black.

"Tie or no tie?" Miles held up the dark gray slip of fabric that matched the gray on his waistcoat. The last wedding he'd been to was super casual. This was definitely more of a production.

The pack, including Cooper, Kyle's leopard shifter boyfriend, turned to stare at him. Their gazes skimmed over him, assessing, but there was only one that caused his skin to prickle with awareness and then heat.

He lifted his gaze from the tie, even though he knew it was a bad idea, to meet Simon's dark eyes. Simon didn't look away. His lips curved.

That was definitely the kind of look that a man gave when he was interested. He wasn't imagining it. No, he had to be reading too much into it.

"Tie," several said as the others said, "no tie."

Miles glanced at his pack. "Super helpful, guys."

Some of them were tieless. Justin had opted for a bowtie, but he could pull that kind of thing.

"Whatever makes you comfortable," Simon added.

Kyle laughed. "Why are we dressed like this if we're supposed to be comfortable?"

The others joined in. He had a point. But it wasn't about them. This was River and Drew's day. The only wolf not there was Brandon because he was already at the vineyard making sure everything was perfect. When he organized something, it had to be done right.

That he was now wearing an engagement ring and was a familiar to a witch was something they were all getting used to. Miles would have voted Brandon as the wolf least likely to ever get married. If he was wrong about that, what else was he wrong about?

“I’ll ditch the tie, then I’m ready. Is everyone else ready?”

Kyle looked over his pack and nodded. The only reason the ceremony wasn’t being held on pack territory was because of River and Drew’s human friends. That and Drew had wanted something less wolf-centric for his raised-a-hunter-husband-to-be.

That and Miles was sure Drew didn’t want to be sharing a room with River where everyone would know exactly what was going on. From the winery, it was an easy excuse to stay at the nearby bed and breakfast for the night before heading off to a resort in Thailand for their honeymoon.

They had it all figured out.

He was still living in an apartment that he shared with a human friend who knew nothing about shifters and witches and would probably run screaming if he did find out. He tossed the tie on his bed, then picked it up and hung it over the back of the chair, trying not to be such a slob.

He needed to sort his shit out before he turned thirty because no one wanted to date someone who was still the same disorganized mess they were at twenty.

CHAPTER TWO

SIMON'S SMILE FELT FORCED, but no one called him on it. He really hoped that he wasn't ruining the photos. He was happy for them, but this was the first wedding he'd been to since his divorce, and it was ripping open a wound he hadn't realized existed.

No, that wasn't quite true. He'd noticed it when Drew had proposed to River. A twinge that had turned into a bruise and then discontent. He'd been divorced for two years and separated for longer. The loss shouldn't still smart.

But it did. And not because he missed his ex-wife. They talked all the time because of the kids. They were much better as friends than they had ever been as lovers, and that was his fault. He hadn't wanted to be gay, and all that meant. Zach was smarter and braver than him. If he'd been a better person, he wouldn't have wasted ten years of Jenny's life to protect his own. He hadn't wanted to be kicked out when they separated; he'd left the pack.

Then floundered around, not sure what to do with himself and hating his new freedom.

The rest of the pack watched the wedding party smile and pose and be rearranged by the photographer. If the photographer thought that Drew wanting a photo with his *friends* at the end was weird, he didn't say anything.

Simon's gaze flicked to Miles. His dark blond hair made him stand out, and the white shirt with the sleeves rolled up was a look that worked for him. No tie was definitely the right

choice. He snapped his gaze back to the photographer as new orders were given.

River laughed as he stepped away, and all the wolves formed up. Was this the first official pack photo?

“You two switch,” the photographer said.

Then Miles was standing next to him. He could feel the tension rolling off the younger man. There’d been something off with him all day, but he’d been too wrapped up in his own bullshit and then the wedding to ask him what was going on.

With the photos done, they all made their way to the vineyard restaurant.

Simon slowed until he was walking at the back with Miles. He tugged at his tie, loosening it so he could take it off and slip it into his pocket now that the official part was over. “How are you going?”

Miles inhaled sharply. “Fine. Could do with a drink.”

“Same.”

“Are you okay?” Miles glanced at him.

“Yes.” Great, now they were both lying, and that was something he tried to avoid these days. “Not really, but it’s kind of weird.”

“Like, how weird?” Miles lowered his voice. “Weirder than a wolf marrying a hunter?”

Simon grinned. “Not that weird. Just thinking about weddings and divorces and being single and how much I hate dating, but then if I don’t, I’m going to remain single...” And adding that he didn’t like being single, something he’d realized a year ago when he’d first joined the pack, sounded a little too desperate.

“You feel like you’ve dated everyone you’d be interested in, and you keep meeting the same people?”

“Maybe?” That and he didn’t want some twenty-year-old who was looking for a daddy when he was figuring himself out and had his own kids. He also didn’t want to lie to humans,

and he wasn't as comfortable as some men were at his age. Half the time, he felt as though one hand was on the closet door so he could run back inside. He'd spent most of his life there. It was a comfortable space.

Miles smiled. He always had a ready smile. The only reason...no, there were many reasons why they had never dated. When they'd first met, Miles had been with his human boyfriend. When they'd broken up, Miles had needed space to process, and Simon had been trying to go on one date a week—a challenge Miles had set for him that had lasted eleven dates. Miles seemed to breeze through life in a way Simon had never experienced. He had an ease and light about him that was attractive...addictive. Being around Miles made him feel like he hadn't thrown everything away to be a selfish, deviant prick—his ex-brother-in-law's parting words.

Simon shrugged. "Perhaps I'm not as past the divorce as I thought I was."

"Is it one of those things you can tick off and say you're done with? I wasn't kicked out of home," he said carefully as two of River's very human friends walked past. "But being advised it would be best if I left still has bite some days."

"I kicked myself out. It was easier."

Miles considered him for a moment. "Was it?"

"I didn't want to make things weird and difficult for Jenny and the kids."

"So you bit your own tail off so they wouldn't suffer."

Simon gave a low laugh. "When you put it like that..." He wanted to say something, but he didn't know what. This pack had been a lifeline that he desperately needed. But without Miles, he'd have been totally lost; he still was half the time.

He'd lost friends in the separation, wolf and human, some because they were more Jenny's than his, and others because they thought coming out over thirty was more midlife crisis than being unable to continue living the lie. He hoped that by the time his kids were shifting, no one would be getting kicked out of their pack for being gay. Having the Outcast Pack

recognized had put the packs on notice. They would either lose members and this pack, and others like it, would grow, or they'd become more inclusive.

The restaurant's function room was buzzing with conversation, and it was pretty obvious that it was a gay wedding from the number of men. There were some women, but they were outnumbered. It was also noticeable that there weren't any parents or grandparents in attendance. River's excuse was easy. His parents were dead, and he lied about his grandparents and said they didn't travel.

Drew had it a bit tougher. His sister had been the only one to accept. A falling out was what he said to human friends, and he said the same thing to River's friends if asked. No wolves asked. They didn't need to, as they all understood.

The function room had been set up with the cake on display to one side, along with the gifts and one big U-shaped table bracketing the dance floor. From where people were sitting, it was wolves at one end and humans at the other, with River and Drew in the middle.

"I guess we find our seats and wait for the food and speeches," Miles said.

"I'm in that middle bit, and I think I'm the only single one."

"Well, I think you've got a pretty good chance of picking up tonight." Miles grinned, his eyebrows lifting, then turned and walked away.

THE WORDS HAD BEEN out of his mouth before he could stop them, and then, because he couldn't shove them back in, he'd turned and run. His cheeks were on fire. He hadn't meant that Simon could pick him up tonight, yet that is how it sounded in his ears.

Hopefully, only because he was overly worried about anyone realizing that he had, for some reason, started to like

Simon too much. He needed to avoid him for a few weeks. Find someone, or several someones, to hook-up with and move on.

It wouldn't last.

He sat between Justin and Evan, just up from a couple of other shifters. He poured himself some wine, and when he took a sip, he noticed that Simon was right in his line of view.

Simon lifted his glass.

Miles smiled. Fuck, it was going to be a long night. Then he remembered that they were sharing a room. So he either drank enough that he could blame the alcohol, or he didn't drink at all, so he made sure that he behaved himself and didn't make a mess of this.

Because whatever this was would pass.

But every time he blinked, he saw Simon step out of the room wearing the suit. It was burned into his brain in a way that seeing him naked had never been. That he knew Simon was an uncut grower with a birthmark on the back of his right hip—exactly where Miles had the wolf tattoo, had never bothered him. He could go around the table and name three unique features about every wolf that only lovers should know because shifting involved more nudity than the humans at the other end of the table would be comfortable with.

Yet Simon in a suit was the thing that was making his pants tight.

“So who do you think will be next?” Justin asked.

Miles blinked and turned to look at him. “Next?”

“Yeah, next to get married. Weren't you listening?”

“Nah, I was elsewhere.”

“Well, who do you think it will be? Brandon's engaged, but...” Evan said.

Brandon couldn't be rushed. Ross had probably needed to tackle him to the ground to shove the ring on. “Kyle.”

“Why do you think he’ll be next?” Justin leaned in and lowered his voice. “What’s he said to you?”

“Nothing.” However, when Cooper looked at Kyle, there was something there. “It will be Cooper who does the asking.”

“Nope. It will be Zach who asks Con,” Evan said.

Zach wasn’t ready to be getting married. He’d only just stepped out of the closet, and Con wasn’t the settling down type. Although Zach seemed to have calmed him and Con seemed happier, like the chip on his shoulder had gotten smaller.

Those with the notch taken out of their ear that marked them as outcasts tended to wear it with a snarl.

He was lucky his pack hadn’t been that regressive. If he’d stayed, it would’ve meant not dating. Which was bullshit, so he’d walked. His gaze danced back to Simon as the waiters brought around the entrée.

He couldn’t imagine shoving everything down so much that he was almost able to believe the lie to belong.

CHAPTER THREE

WATCHING Drew and River cut the cake—a two-tier creation that went from the palest of pinks to the brightest on the base and decorated with a spill of leaves that matched the green they were both wearing—had poured salt into the wound. It wasn't that Simon regretted the divorce or even marrying Jenny in the first place. It was more that he was worried he'd never find it again, and worse, that he'd never had it in the first place. He remembered convincing himself that everyone felt like they were making a mistake and that he was marrying a friend, so of course it didn't feel giddy.

But watching Drew, it was clear that whatever he had, Simon had never felt.

Had never let himself feel.

He scrubbed his face and refilled his wineglass. He hadn't expected today to hurt when all he wanted to be was happy. He'd expected to be happy sooner.

Maybe he didn't deserve to be.

Not everyone was.

What he needed was air, not wine.

But he couldn't get up yet because River and Drew were dancing. Once everyone was up and moving, and talking to people they hadn't yet talked to, then he'd slip out for a bit.

It felt like twenty minutes, not two, before River beckoned everyone else onto the floor. And even then, he waited until half the people were standing before making for the door and the cool evening air.

He breathed in, liking the cold in his lungs and the way his skin prickled. He shoved his hands into his pockets and walked into the darkness, wishing that he could shed his clothes and go for a run, but there were too many people around to even risk that.

The idea made his lips curve.

He smelled Miles before he heard him and turned, sticking a smile to his face that he would make himself wear for a little longer before feigning a headache and leaving.

“It’s a nice night for a run...what are the odds they’d see us among the vines?” Miles said with a grin as though he knew what Simon had been thinking.

“I haven’t drunk enough to consider actually doing that.” Another three glasses of wine and ditching his clothes to run on four feet among the vines might look like a good idea.

“I think I have because it’s looking fucking tempting.”

The longer Simon stood there, the more tempting it became. “We should go in before we do something that will cause a problem.” He extended his hand to Miles. “You want to dance?”

“That is not the kind of dancing I can do.”

“I learned when I...when I got married. It’s easy.” And if he was dancing and thinking about his feet, he wouldn’t be feeling sorry for himself.

Miles hesitated.

Simon let his hand lower and told himself it didn’t matter; he could dance with other people. It was only that things were easier with Miles.

Miles reached out and caught his hand. “If I step on your feet, don’t blame me.”

His calloused palm rubbed against Simon’s in a way that sent a ribbon of heat through his blood. “Follow my lead, and you’ll be fine.”

They started walking back toward the function room. Miles slowed. “I don’t think we should go in holding hands.”

“Good point.” Simon released him and missed his touch immediately, which was ridiculous because it was Miles. Miles who always had someone, yet he hadn’t brought anyone to the wedding, and Simon didn’t remember him mentioning anyone since...it had been weeks since Miles had mentioned a date or a hook-up or anything. He hadn’t been serious about anyone since Gideon. He couldn’t imagine Miles ever being serious, and it was one of the things Simon appreciated about him because even when things were shit, Miles burned away the darkness.

No one else had ever done that for him. But then, he never felt as relaxed as he did when he was around Miles. Miles wasn’t just his friend; he was his best friend.

They stepped inside as a couple of people when out for a smoke.

“Remember you brought this disaster on yourself,” Miles muttered.

“You’re not going to be that bad.”

“You say that now, but you’ll be cursing me for crushing your toes.”

“If you really don’t want to—”

Miles snatched up Simon’s hand. “It’s a wedding, and you asked me to dance, and I’m not going to pike.”

“Okay.” Simon put his arm around Miles’ waist and pulled him closer. “Just put your hand on my shoulder and follow.”

Miles looked down as though he needed to watch his feet to make sure they behaved.

“Eyes up.”

Miles’ dark blue eyes locked with his. The moment they did, his grip on Simon’s hand tightened, and the muscles in his back tensed.

He really was nervous about dancing.

If Simon was worrying about Miles, he wouldn't be thinking about himself. He wanted to have fun without thinking about what might happen. The way his life was looking at the moment, he was going to end up single and slowly growing more miserable with each year until he was that grouchy old—

“Hey, I haven't stepped on your toes yet, so try to smile,” Miles broke into his thoughts.

“Sorry, I was elsewhere.”

“And nowhere good.”

He wasn't able to answer that honestly, so he concentrated on moving and guiding Miles—and keeping his toes safe. They made it through what was left of the song.

“That wasn't too traumatic, was it?”

Miles shook his head as he released Simon and pulled away. “You'll have them all lining up to dance with you.”

Simon's lips curved, wishing that were true. He watched as Miles sat with Justin, who wouldn't be doing any dancing because of the moon boot he was wearing.

In that moment, all he wanted to do was drag Miles back onto the dance floor because, with Miles in his arms, everything felt good.

IF SIMON HAD PULLED him any closer, he'd have discovered just how much Miles was enjoying the dance. Although it wasn't the dance as such, it was the way Simon's attention had been on him, the way his hand had rested on his lower back, and his fingers had wrapped around his hand as if he didn't care how rough his skin was.

His leg bounced under the table as he watched Simon dance with a couple of other guys. Watched as his lips moved as he chatted with his dance partner—one of River's human friends, as Miles didn't know him.

He didn't like the way the man's hand slid a bit too low.

"Were you listening?" Justin waved his hand in front of Miles' face. "Or are you scoping out a new target? Which one? Human?"

"No one okay. I'm not here to pick up." He should be. Then he wouldn't be tracking Simon like he was getting ready to go in for the kill.

"Everyone is here to pick up if they're single. Weddings put people in a mood."

"So why aren't you out there hunting?"

"I might...later. More wine?"

"Sure." Not that the wine was helping. No, he wanted to dance with Simon again. He wanted to press up against him and let him know exactly what he wanted to do with him, and it wasn't going for a friendly run.

He felt better when Brandon danced with Simon, and not because Brandon was mated to a witch—who couldn't be there because of his rugby commitments. Brandon didn't seem bothered. Though if his famous rugby-playing mate had been with him, it might have been a distraction. Enough to keep his eyes off Simon?

Probably not.

Simon walked over, and for a heartbeat, Miles thought he'd said something out loud that he shouldn't have. He picked up Miles' wine, had a drink, and then nodded at Miles. "Enough sitting, come on."

Because there weren't plenty of other people Simon could dance with.

His heart beat a little quicker at the knowledge that it was him Simon wanted to dance with. Hopefully, there was so much noise and lust in the room that the wolves wouldn't be able to sense the way his body was betraying him.

It was the damn suit.

Then Simon took off the jacket and draped it over a chair.

That wasn't any better.

Simon's hand landed on his shoulder, and he leaned down, his breath on Miles' ear. "It's not formal dancing anymore, so you have no excuses."

He glanced at Justin; he'd be leaving him sitting, but it wasn't as if he'd be alone.

With a sigh and a roll of his eyes as though the last thing he wanted to do was dance, Miles got up. Simon grabbed his hand as though he expected Miles to bolt out the door instead of walking to the dance floor.

He almost freaked out. It was too much contact. People would notice and say something. What if they already thought there was something going on?

Was he overthinking it? He was the one with a bad case of need-to-get-in-your-pants, not Simon. That was enough to calm him. It was in his head. It was his issue. Simon was never going to be interested in someone who'd ditched school to learn a trade.

"I'm not good at any dancing," Miles repeated the warning before his feet hit the dancefloor for the second time. He was sure Simon heard; the music wasn't that loud because he could hear what people were saying nearby. It had been kept to a level that wasn't going to give the more sensitive wolves a headache—no doubt Brandon knew exactly what that volume was to the decibel and had given specific instructions.

Simon spun him so they were face to face. His hands settled on Miles' hips as though he wanted to make sure Miles didn't slip away. "If you stopped telling yourself that and gave yourself a chance, you might be."

"You're a tough love kind of teacher, aren't you?" His hands moved to Simon's shoulders and easily rested them as if they belonged there. Was that the right place to put them?

Should he put them somewhere else?

Simon didn't seem bothered. "Have you ever dealt with thirty seventeen-year-olds who'd rather be anywhere than learning about covalent bonding?"

He'd been that seventeen-year-old. No, that wasn't true. He hadn't done science in year eleven.

"I have no idea what that is, but dealing with that many teenagers doesn't sound fun." That was close to his idea of hell. Even though he'd once been the apprentice on site, that didn't stop him from groaning whenever there was a new one who was grass green and all lip because they knew everything.

"It's the admin that's the worst. I'd rather be in the classroom than doing paperwork."

"Bet you see some interesting things written on the exam papers."

"Bet you were the kid writing those interesting things."

It was said with a smile, but Miles' cheeks burned. Was it that obvious that he hadn't given finishing school a proper shot? "If I'd had a teacher like you, maybe I'd have turned up to class and paid attention."

He wanted to swallow the words as they fell out of his mouth but couldn't. The wine had loosened his tongue, and Simon's arms around him were making him forget he should be keeping some distance.

"That right?" Simon's eyebrow quirked up.

That little arch made his dick twitch. He'd seen it a hundred times before, but it hit differently tonight.

Maybe he did need to hunt safer prey. Someone who wouldn't care if he slinked out of their bed before dawn. Not that he was thinking about being in Simon's bed. Except now he was. He tripped on Simon's foot, swore, and ended up pressed closer because Simon had kept hold of him to stop him from falling.

He hadn't landed on his ass.

But he was still falling. His heart was diving as though it were a race to the ground. There was no way Simon hadn't noticed the hard dick rubbing against him. His pulse drowned out all other noise, and the room became too hot.

He lifted his chin, hoping to laugh it off or something. But for the first time tonight, his tongue didn't work, and he couldn't force any words.

Simon's eyebrow lifted as though he wasn't sure what was happening, and his hands were on Miles' hips. Each fingertip left a burning impression through the fabric of the suit pants.

Before he could do something dumb—dumber—he broke away and clawed his way off the dancefloor and out into the night. He needed air. He needed to stop drinking and dancing and get control of himself so he didn't look like a bigger idiot. He paced around the side of the building and along the path to the old tree where some of River and Drew's photos had been taken.

The music pulsed through the night. They'd be wrapping up soon, and everyone would head off to wherever they were staying. When he went back to Kyle's, he'd shift and spend the night outside and alone.

It would be safer.

He leaned against the tree and stared up at the stars through the branches. Weddings made people stupid. He was single, but he wasn't desperate to be married or anything like that. But it might be nice to have someone.

It had been a while since he'd had someone he could call a boyfriend. Six months. While a two-year relationship wasn't the same as a ten-year marriage, they had bonded over the breakups and then dating dramas. While he'd still been with Gideon, he'd helped Simon start dating and...

Footsteps.

He pushed away from the tree and considered walking further away. He didn't want to go back in. He was done with the party. But his feet didn't move as his brain registered that it was Simon.

Simon. Simon. Simon.

That was the only thought his brain could pull together, making it impossible for him to form a reason for being such a tool.

“My turn to see if you’re okay?”

“Yeah.” He ran his fingers through his hair, wishing he was grabbing Simon’s hair and pulling him close to claim his lips so neither of them had to talk. “I didn’t come out here to throw up if that’s what you’re wondering.”

Simon leaned against the tree next to him. “You want to blame the alcohol or the wedding for today’s weirdness?”

“Both.” He didn’t know if they were talking about the stumble or the hard-on or the general vibe between them. He didn’t want to think. He wanted to press up against Simon, so they molded against the tree.

He reeked of wine and lust. Out here, he wouldn’t be lost among the scents of all the other people. He closed his eyes and tried to think of something, anything other than the man next to him and how much he wanted him, but the scent of desire was all over his skin. The battle was lost. All he could do was apologize and hope he didn’t lose Simon as a friend.

“Same.” Then Simon moved, and Miles found himself pressed against the tree as Simon’s lips found his.

His kiss was tentative, as though he expected Miles to shove him away and ask what the hell he was doing. Miles’ fingers curled around Simon’s belt and tugged him closer, needing to feel every inch of him. He flicked his tongue over Simon’s lips, wanting more.

Simon’s mouth opened, and he groaned as he leaned against Miles. This time, Miles felt the length of Simon’s cock rub against his through their clothes. Despite the relief that it wasn’t just him, it was almost too much. His fingers found their way to the fly of Simon’s pants, needing to touch him.

Taste him.

If they were blaming the alcohol and wedding, then so be it.

He needed this itch out of his blood.

Simon’s hand closed around his wrist before he could work the button open. “Not here.”

Miles glared at him. They were far enough away from the venue that no one would find them. But Simon had found him. Wolves would be able to smell them. “Where?”

Simon’s lips met his again, and he moved his hips, rocking against Miles’ hand. He curled his fingers, desperate for more.

“Let’s leave, go back to Kyle’s before everyone else.” Simon’s words ghosted over Miles’ lips. Simon wasn’t that drunk if he was thinking ahead. “We can have another drink, say goodbye, and pretend I have a headache.”

“Just say I threw up and I’m wasted.” That way, he didn’t need to go back in reeking of lust. “I’ll call the cab.”

Simon studied him for a heartbeat, then nodded. “Make the call.”

CHAPTER FOUR

SIMON SHOULD'VE SMARTENED up and sobered up in the taxi to Kyle's. Instead, he felt more drunk, like the fresh air was somehow making him dizzy. That or it was the taste of Miles on his lips and the scent of him on his clothes.

When Justin had heard they were leaving, he'd also wanted to go, claiming his foot was killing him, and Simon could only agree. Justin sat in the front while Simon sat in the back with the allegedly drunk Miles.

Miles had closed his eyes as if he were asleep, and Simon tried not to look at him.

Tried.

But the roughness of Miles' stubble on his cheek was fresh. The sweep of his tongue on his neck. The taste of his skin, his lips...

It was a bad idea.

It was one time.

They were both single and wanted it. So what did it matter?

It didn't, and no one else had to know. And it wasn't as if others in the pack hadn't slept together at various times. It wasn't true, but there was the occasional joke about the pack being made up of Con's exes.

The taxi pulled up at the house, and Simon paid as Justin and Miles got out. "There'll be more wanting to head up here."

The taxi driver nodded. "I know. Weddings in town are always good for business."

By the time he walked up the steps, Justin was already inside. Miles waited by the door with a predatory glint in his eyes. "Want to run?"

That was the last thing Simon wanted to do with Miles. He grabbed Miles' waistcoat and pulled him close for a kiss. "No."

"He might hear."

Simon paused, knowing that he should care, but he wasn't quite able to drag it to the surface. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been this drunk. When he'd felt so light and untroubled, his muscles loose and blood hot. And he was sure the last three glasses of wine he'd had were still hitting his system.

The moment Miles had tripped while dancing and crashed into him, he'd been unable to do anything but think about the way he'd felt against him. It was static over his skin. Even now, it made his breath catch. "Shower?"

"Okay." Miles grabbed his hand, and they slunk into the dark house. They didn't need lights. When Miles glanced at him, his eyes were bright as his wolf rose to the surface. He loved that look of wildness that humans lacked. How often had Miles glanced at him before they shifted with that same gleam? How long had he hidden this desire, or had he missed it because he wasn't looking?

A grin formed on Simon's lips. With Justin in the house, it felt as if they were sneaking around, and it was fun.

They made it to the bedroom that they always shared, the single beds separated by bedside tables. He kicked off his shoes and tossed the jacket on the chair.

Miles pushed him against the wall and kissed him hard enough that he was certain his lips would be bruised. His fingers worked open the buttons on Simon's shirt, then his rough hands were splaying over his ribs and moving up his chest.

He tipped his head back and tried to stifle a laugh at the tickle. Miles's tongue flicked over the hollow of his throat, then teeth nipped at the skin, and the laugh turned into a half-smothered moan.

"I've been wanting to do that since I saw you in the suit," Miles whispered in his ear before nipping at his earlobe.

Miles had been standing there in the towel, skin wet from the shower. That he'd wanted to lick the water off his skin was a normal response to seeing a hot, wet man and one he'd smothered for years.

Now he could indulge.

And he was with another wolf, which meant he didn't have to hide that part of himself, either. He hadn't been with another shifter since his divorce. He wasn't sure why now because he liked the way Miles nipped his throat and then worked lower, leaving wet trails of heat everywhere his lips and teeth touched. Miles undid the belt and then worked open Simon's pants. His hand pushed into Simon's briefs and wrapped around his cock. The rough grip sparked deep within him and made the need in his blood something wild and dangerous.

Miles dropped to his knees and licked along Simon's length before teasing the head and taking him in his mouth. Simon bit his lip to suppress the groan, but he didn't want Miles on his knees. No matter how good it felt...or looked.

His fingers speared into Miles' dark blond hair, then he tugged him up and claimed his mouth. They stumbled back, landing on his bed.

Simon caged Miles' body and claimed his lips. He ground against him, needing to feel him. "This isn't the shower."

"If you want to go there..." Miles kissed him. "You need to get off me."

That was the smart thing to do, but now that Miles was in his bed and half-naked, he didn't want to move. "I don't want to."

He fumbled between them, trying to undo Miles' pants.

“Let me...” Miles twisted so they were on their sides. He freed his cock and hooked a leg over Simon’s hip.

Simon ran his hand over Miles’ jaw and his chest, kissing him, needing every part of him. He hissed as Miles grasped both of their cocks and stroked.

The room spun around him as his hips rocked, seeking the edge of his climax.

“Oh, fuck,” Miles groaned.

Simon glanced down, watching as Miles came, spilling over his hand and shirt. Miles grabbed Simon’s hair with his free hand and tilted his head to take a kiss. His tongue darted into Simon’s mouth, and in the slick fist that Miles was making around them, Simon came.

He could barely breathe. All he could see and smell and feel was Miles.

The dark room danced around him. He lowered his head to Miles’ shoulder.

“Mmm.” He needed to move, but if he did, he wasn’t sure what would happen. “We should stay here.”

“Yeah.”

MILES WASN’T sure what woke him, the sun slicing through the window, the pins and needles in his arm, his bladder, or the buttons digging into his ribs. Whatever it was, he didn’t want to be awake because now he was aware of the dryness of his tongue and the pulse of a headache right behind his eyeballs.

He didn’t need to open his eyes to know there was a man lying on his arm, and that man was Simon. They must have fallen into bed without undressing because they were drunk. For a second, he imagined them stumbling into the room, supporting each other.

But that’s where things diverged.

Because he had the distinct memory of having Simon's dick in his mouth at some point. He winced and hoped that was wishful thinking, not reality, even though it was something he'd wanted.

He cracked open his eye, not ready to move even though his arm had gone from pins and needles to something more like nails being pushed through his skin.

Simon lay next to him...sort of.

They were a little more entwined than he'd expected. His gaze skimmed over them. They were both kind of dressed in that they wore pants and shirts, but they were unbuttoned in the wrong places. His dick was more awake than he was and clearly not impacted by any kind of hangover.

He closed his eye and tipped his head back.

He envied those people who got so drunk they didn't remember because at least they could plead ignorance and move on. He swallowed, in desperate need of a drink—water, not wine—and to brush his teeth.

As much as he'd like to lie there and wait until Simon woke up, he had to move. He glanced at Simon again. His dark hair curled over his forehead. His eyelashes were longer than Miles had realized, or maybe he'd never noticed. For a moment, it was tempting to place a kiss on his lips, but hangover morning breath was not something they needed to share.

“Hey, I need my arm back.” He gave his arm a tug, hoping to dislodge Simon enough that he could pull free.

Simon grunted and rolled onto his back, shirt spread, pants open like a debauched rockstar. Miles sat up and grinned, but it faded fast as he took in the state of his own clothes in more detail. That was definitely cum on his waistcoat. Was that a dry clean only issue?

He flexed his fingers, willing his hand back to life.

All he had to do was go to the bathroom. But he didn't know who was up, and he couldn't go out there like this. He eased off the bed and unbuttoned his waistcoat with fingers

that were numb and about three times as big. He tossed it on the floor, and added his shirt to the pile, then his pants. Strolling out in his briefs was acceptable, though usually, he'd have made the walk naked. They were all shifters and someone being naked was a typical occurrence.

Better be normal.

So that's what he did.

He passed no one on the way there, battled with his wood to take a piss, brushed his teeth, drank what felt like a gallon of water, and shuffled back to the bedroom, hoping he could find another couple of hours sleep before everyone was up and making noise.

Simon was sitting on the edge of the bed, elbows resting on his knees, head in his hands.

Oh, shit. That wasn't a good sign.

"You right?"

Simon nodded and winced, but his gaze lingered on Miles for a few seconds too long. How much did he remember? Should he say something? Or were they going to pretend whatever had happened hadn't happened?

The latter was the smart thing.

Anything else was dangerous.

"Just need..."

Miles wanted the next word to be 'you.' To squish up next to him in the single bed even if he didn't go back to sleep.

"To get out of this and have a drink. And remind myself never to drink wine again. My brain is glued to my skull."

"Yeah." Miles forced a smile. "I don't think it was the wine, though. It was the quantity."

Simon nodded slowly and stood as though everything hurt.

Miles licked his lip, torn between asking if he needed a hand and sliding into his unslept-in bed. What would he have

done Before Drunk Fucking? BDF, he'd have gotten back into bed and left him to it. Right. He flicked back the sheet.

“Do I need to apologize?” Simon’s voice was pitched low, for his ears only.

“No. We’re good.”

Then he walked out the door.

Miles flopped onto the bed and pulled the sheet up. He should’ve said something. That was the moment. But what was the right thing to say?

When Simon returned, he got into his own bed. The gap between them was too much. Miles closed his eyes, willing sleep to come. It was going to be fine. By the time they had breakfast and went for a run, it would be one of those things that had happened.

A thing they didn’t talk about, even though they talked about everything.

A thing he wouldn’t be able to forget because now he had memories instead of empty wants.

If he’d had another drink or two, then perhaps he’d be unable to remember, though it was more likely he’d have thrown up on Simon. A small part of him wondered if that might have been better because that was something they could laugh about and tell the others...this wasn’t.

Simon gave a soft snore that was almost a gasp.

Miles opened his eyes, and the sound punched him in the heart, even though he’d heard it many times before. He rolled onto his side to watch Simon sleep.

He blinked, and when he opened his eyes, Simon wasn’t there, and it was three hours later.

CHAPTER FIVE

SIMON PACED BACK to the house on four feet. There was no cure for a hangover like a run. He didn't understand how humans did it, slogging through the day, feeling like death and regretting the night before.

At least he only had one of those problems to deal with.

He'd known from the moment Miles had woken him as he got out of bed. The memory had been sharp and clear and far too pleasant. While the shift had been for his own recovery, meandering through the bush had been for his peace of mind.

He hadn't found any.

There wasn't a single answer out there.

He'd fucked, or gotten off, with his best friend, and while he'd like to say it was amazing, they'd both been too drunk for it to be anything close to that. He was sure that Miles remembered.

And he knew Miles had wanted...

...it wasn't only Miles who wanted.

If he hadn't gone after him, this mess might have been avoided. Or it might have happened anyway.

It couldn't happen again.

They had to pretend it had never happened because he couldn't handle having to leave another pack because of a failed relationship. He couldn't start over a second time. The wedding had brought up everything that he thought he'd moved past. He found a sunny spot on the lawn and huffed out

a breath as he lay down in sight of the house, not ready to be a human again.

Ugh, how could he have made such a mess?

Wasn't he old enough to behave better?

Apparently not.

Cooper, in leopard form, slunk out of the house and made for some tufts of grass before having a chew and retreating deeper into the bush where he thought he was out of earshot—he wasn't. And it was a bit too late for throwing up to help with a hangover.

The leopard wandered back onto the lawn, flopped dramatically onto his side, and played dead. Cooper was young enough that hangovers shouldn't touch him.

For a while, it was only the two of them, and nothing was said. In part because everyone was figuring out how to communicate with Cooper when shifted—it wasn't only that they made different noises, but leopard and wolf body language was different.

Simon's nose twitched at the scent of meat. His ears turned toward the house, then Brandon walked out with a tray of beef patties and another of buns.

He glanced at Cooper and Simon. "On a scale of one to four, how dead are you feeling?"

Simon rolled onto his back and lifted all four feet.

Cooper didn't move.

"Cooper, you deserve to be dead. Though I think everyone enjoyed the lap dance you gave Kyle."

The leopard grunted and lifted one paw with one claw extended.

At every wedding Simon had ever been to, there was always one who got a bit carried away. That it was Cooper was unexpected.

"You want your breakfast burger raw or cooked? Four feet or two?" He turned on the barbeque.

If he ate raw meat, he'd have to stay as a wolf for longer because his stomach was a little fragile. Although if he stayed as a wolf, he didn't have to deal with anything. It was tempting.

Brandon looked at him.

Did he know?

He was pretty sure they hadn't kissed on the dance floor. They had definitely kissed outside. How many people had seen him go after Miles?

Simon forced himself up and padded toward the house.

"After you've grabbed pants, can you bring out the eggs and cheese?" Brandon called after him.

Simon had tossed a pair of track pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt over a dining chair on his way out. He sat on the floor and summoned up the shifting heat, knowing that he'd feel much better after the second shift. The run through the dewy bush had helped his body, if not his head. Nothing was going to stop the dizzying worries from chasing their tails.

His back cracked, and his fingertips throbbed as the claws became nails.

"Son of a bitch." Still kneeling on the floor, he shook out his hands. The beds of his nails pulsed as though he'd slammed them in a door. His toes felt much the same.

For some shifters, it was the tail that hurt the most. For others, the teeth. For him, it was the nails when he returned to human. Miles hated the fur in both directions. He said it was like a thousand spiders breaking out of his skin or trying to climb back in. Every time he shifted, it came with a full-body shudder that was kind of cute.

He caught the thought. Had it always been cute? The first time he'd seen it, it had been funny. The second time when Miles had shifted back to human, it had been even funnier, and it had distracted him from the pain in his hands.

Huh, it still did.

He stood and pulled on his clothing—it was too cold to run around in only a pair of shorts, the way they often did in summer.

He helped himself to a glass of juice as he gathered up the items Brandon had asked for and added barbeque sauce to the list—because a breakfast burger without sauce was lame.

Physically, he felt fine. But there was a knot lodged in his chest that was only going to become tighter when he saw Miles.

Justin hobbled out on crutches. “I’d offer to help...”

“I’ve got it.” He wasn’t carrying that much. “How’s the leg?”

How much did you hear?

Justin drew in a breath. “It’s not the leg so much as being around you lot. It’s making the need to shift a lot harder to resist. I don’t want to have my follow-up x-ray and for the doctors to be freaked out and overly curious.”

“How much longer?”

“The longest I’ve gone without shifting is seven weeks. I know some can go longer...but it’s not pleasant. I think the pain meds are helping dull the need a bit.”

“I meant until your next appointment.”

“Two weeks, then another two weeks after that. Then I’ll chance it. I’m healing faster than a human anyway, so...” he shrugged. “If the bone hadn’t been shattered, this wouldn’t have even been an issue.”

No one wanted to shift with bits of bone floating around because they could end up in the wrong place doing much more damage. Shifting to heal was always a bit of a risk, more so depending on the cause. Being shot meant removing the bullet—Drew still wore the scar.

“Breakfast burger?”

“Yeah, I smelled the food, and I can’t take a tablet until I eat.” He glanced at the open sliding door. “Miles not up?”

Simon's heart knocked against his ribs, and he froze. "Not yet."

"He drank a lot."

"Yeah." They all had. It was the first official pack wedding. Now one couple had done it, the others would follow. Marriages, kids, and divorces rippled through friends and packs. He'd seen it happen and been a part of it.

He glanced at Justin, and Justin gave him a pointed look. Was Justin waiting for him to say something?

"It's good that you look out for him. He needs it."

Simon laughed, but it was jagged in his throat. "I think it was the other way around." His first few months in the pack, he'd needed someone to guide him through everything, and Miles had been there. Always up for a talk, and then when he'd broken up with Gideon, they'd often get together for dinner and TV.

"I meant after his breakup."

He hadn't done anything special. They'd just hung out. Two single guys comparing breakups and grumbling about how much dating sucked. "I was returning the favor."

Justin's eyebrows knitted, then he shook his head, but he didn't press.

However, Simon was sure he suspected something. Had they been noisy? Or was it something else that alerted him? It didn't matter. It was a mistake. That was all.

One that he didn't know how to explain, only that once he'd smelled the lust on Miles' skin, he'd been unable to walk away. That was on him. He'd kissed Miles. And dragged him across the line from friends to lovers, and Simon didn't know how to go back.

Or if it was even possible.

He took the food out to Brandon and helped for a bit, knowing the smell of food would wake the rest of them up. Including Miles.

It was the first time he wasn't looking forward to seeing him, and he didn't like the greasy feeling.

CHAPTER SIX

MILES SHOWERED and dressed before braving the pack. Mostly because he was stalling and partly because he didn't want to go out there smelling like old wine and stale sex. So, of course, by the time he fronted up, he was overdressed compared to the others and feeling more than a little rough because of the hangover, and his stomach was grumbling loud enough to wake the neighbors who were far enough away that their houses couldn't be seen.

Evan and Cooper were shifted. Kyle, Sam, and Mark were sitting at the outdoor setting, and Brandon and Simon were plating up the breakfast leftovers.

At least there was something left.

“Breakfast burger?” Simon asked. Was Miles imagining a tightness in his voice?

“Yeah, that would be great.”

Simon put one together and handed it to him.

“Thanks. I might grab a coffee.”

He should have shifted, then showered and eaten. He could always shift without running, but it wasn't as fun. It wasn't as much fun on his own either.

Inside, he leaned his hip against the kitchen counter as he waited for the coffee machine.

It was Simon who came in and put the food in the fridge, and Miles didn't have anything to say. BDF, he'd have said something, but he didn't know what.

Now he was too aware of the way the track pants clung to Simon's thighs and his ass and did little to conceal that he wasn't wearing underwear. His junk was hanging there like some kind of forbidden fruit that Miles shouldn't even be looking at.

He lifted his gaze. It wasn't that he'd never noticed Simon before; it was that there'd been some kind of wall between them that had made what happened seem too farfetched to even consider.

"Can you make me one?"

Miles licked the sauce off his fingers and grabbed the cup. "Have this one."

"You sure?"

"Yeah." Miles glanced at the others out the back. This wasn't the place to talk if they were even going to.

Simon's fingers brushed his, and they both froze. He was damn sure he heard Simon's breath catch. At least it wasn't only him being weird.

Miles swallowed and held Simon's gaze. He had to say something. "Not just the wine?"

What was he hoping for? For Simon to say he'd been lusting after him since they met? Yes, that was exactly what he wanted to hear.

"No. But—"

Miles turned on the coffee machine so he didn't have to hear the rest.

Simon put a hand on his shoulder and leaned in. "This isn't the time."

It could be if he was going to say, 'let's see where this goes.'

Miles closed his eyes. "Yeah. Whatever."

It didn't matter. He'd known it was a mistake and that it was only going to hurt later because he'd wanted it so much. He'd thought it would be worth it, though. He couldn't even

say that because they'd been too fucking drunk, and they had barely done anything.

“Miles...”

Miles glared at him. “We have a ninety-minute drive home.”

And wasn't that going to be fun? Usually, he loved that time, especially if they were on their own. They talked about everything from stuff on the news to what Simon's kids were up to, to the latest drama at their jobs—there was always something going on at school or on the building site.

Today the drama was them.

No, he wouldn't let it be a drama.

Simon sipped the coffee and smiled, and Miles' heart took flight. Maybe it wasn't all bad, and it was just a case of talking things through before letting everyone else have input.

Yeah, that made sense. And Simon did like to make sure of the ground before he took a step. But that didn't change the way Miles wanted to touch him, kiss him, and redo last night properly.

How could they decide when they didn't really remember?

IT WAS midday before Simon managed to leave Kyle's, citing assignments to grade. The truth was, he didn't want to leave things to fester between him and Miles any longer. There was a tension between them that he was sure everyone else could feel. He expected Sam to ask what was going on because Sam didn't miss anything.

Miles sat next to him, and for the first ten minutes, he didn't say anything, which was unusual. Was he waiting for him to go first?

What had he forgotten that he should be remembering?

His hands were suddenly sweaty on the steering wheel. “I don’t want this to be awkward.”

“Too late.”

He knew that, but he’d wanted Miles to grin and tell him it would be fine. That was how they worked. Miles brought the fun, and he brought the reality—except for when Miles had answered some of his questions about hooking up and how he hadn’t wanted to admit to anyone that he’d never done it with a man before, which had made some of his early experiences less than great.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have kissed you.”

Miles pressed his lips together and stared out the window. “I wanted you to kiss me.”

“You wanted more than that.” He glanced at Miles, wanting to know that he hadn’t imagined it or read all the signs wrong. He was so bad at this. As much as he hated hooking up, at least it was clear what was going to happen.

“I did...do.” Miles wasn’t smiling now. His blue eyes were serious, as though this was an issue of national security.

“Do?”

“Last night was a mess. I don’t know. You were looking like that, and then it was all I could think about, so by the time you wanted to dance with me, all I wanted was for you to drag me into a dark corner so we could fuck.”

Simon’s pulse quickened. “I don’t want to mess up what we have.”

But they could have so much more.

When they’d first met, he’d been too raw and too much of a mess to even think about dating. It had been an effort to put himself out there, to be sure it was men that he wanted to have sex with. He was damn sure now.

And he wanted Miles with every cell in his being.

But the fear of everything falling apart again held him back from saying those words.

“We’ve already done that. We can’t pretend it didn’t happen.”

“It was a drunk fumble.” It wasn’t his worst experience with a man, but there had been too much pent-up need for it to be anything but fast.

“Yeah. Like that’s the worst part.” Miles tossed him a grin.

The tension Simon had been holding eased. “Well, it is. I mean, I haven’t performed that badly since I was sixteen.”

He kept his gaze on the road, glad he had an excuse not to look at Miles, even though he wanted to gauge his reactions.

Miles snorted. “At least you hadn’t drunk so much you couldn’t get it up or get off.”

That might have been a blessing, but they were here now. “Is that what you were worried about?”

“I had been hoping you’d fuck me, but that didn’t happen.”

No, but they had both gotten off. What would it be like to be in Miles...or have Miles in him? That thought was a little too appealing. “What if I’d wanted you to fuck me?”

He’d only done that twice and only after extensive experimentation on his own. Neither had been great, but that was probably him. It would be different with Miles, and he needed to know.

Miles stared at him.

“What?” His gaze darted from the road to Miles. Was it unbelievable that he might like that sometimes? Miles had never made it a secret that he enjoyed to top and bottom. It had been one of the reasons he’d been tempted to try.

“You think you’re a bottom now?”

“Maybe I’m vers like you.” He shrugged. If he didn’t try how was he ever supposed to find out? “I don’t know. I’m trying to figure out what I like and who I am and how to live on my own. I’m like a nineteen-year-old with the hang ups of a middle-aged man.” At nineteen, he’d been at university and

pushing down every doubt. All the doubts had returned and brought friends.

“You’re not middle-aged. You aren’t even forty.”

“Thanks. You know what I mean, though. You must have been the same at nineteen?”

Miles was silent for what felt like forever, but Simon gave him the space to think. He wouldn’t have done that at nineteen. He’d have asked more questions and tried to force out an answer.

“At nineteen, I was busy pretending to be a lone wolf who didn’t need or want anyone. I fucked around a lot, and I had a group of human friends who didn’t know shit but thought they were cool. I don’t speak to any of them now.”

“I’m sorry. It’s hard to lose friends.” And he didn’t want to lose Miles. That scared him more than it should.

“Don’t be. They were dicks, and so was I. I was the kid you’d kick out of the classroom for being a distraction. The one who was failing and told you to fuck off because who cares about this shit?”

He’d heard all of that before, and worse. “Is that a direct quote from your younger self?”

“I’m paraphrasing, but it’s near enough. We weren’t the same at nineteen. And from where I’m sitting, it looks like you have your life together.” Miles lifted his hand. “You have your own place, a job you love—you’re the head of the science department, which means you’re also good at it—and your ex still likes you. And you like her.”

“And I wasted ten years of her life. Of my life. I can’t get that back. All this figuring shit out, guys my age did years ago.”

“You’re the reason I ended it with Gideon.”

“Me?” He remembered the breakup. Miles had said it was the natural end, and they both wanted other things. Miles had then moped about for weeks. They’d binge-watched TV shows on the weekend that Simon didn’t have his kids. They’d also

started going to a quiz night every other week—to go out to a place that wasn't about drinking and making sure you didn't go home alone. Miles was brilliant when it came to random weird facts.

“Well, you and Drew. River had just kicked him out for cheating. You were opening up about the divorce, and I realized I didn't want to live a lie, waiting for the kick in the ass to see me out the door. So I ended it. I think Gideon already had doubts and thought I was hiding something. It was better to get it over with.”

“And now that Drew and River are married?”

Miles grimaced. “I did the right thing. But I also vowed I wouldn't date another human.”

“But that was around the time you told me I had to get out there and go on a date once a week.”

“Yeah, because you were worried you'd never find anyone. You're a catch. Who wouldn't want to date you?”

He'd had several bad dates and a run of mediocre ones which suggested otherwise. “Nothing screams fun like a high school chemistry teacher.”

“Oh, come on. There were only two who wanted you to give them detention and spank them with a ruler.” Miles lifted his eyebrows.

“Three, actually. I couldn't bear telling you about another one.” He'd discovered he didn't like lying, even though no human was ever going to ask if he was a shifter. It was a lie by omission.

Miles cackled the same way he had when Simon had first told him. “There were a few good ones.”

Simon nodded. “There were, but not enough to make me want another date. That and they were all human.” He glanced at Miles. “I don't want to hide half of myself to fit in, not again.”

“The Coven needs a paranormal dating service.”

“You could’ve gone to the fated mate event.” That was where Brandon had met his fiancé.

“Do I look like I want to drop half a grand on a ticket? And also, ew. I don’t want a mate.”

“What do you want, then?” It was a dangerous question, but he had to ask.

Miles glanced at him. “Same as you. To not hide and to be myself. I’m a brickie, I swear, I prefer beer to wine, and I can’t dance. And when I go for a run, I like to chase rabbits and sometimes eat them.”

Simon smiled. “Remember when you had fluff stuck in your teeth after you’d shifted?”

Miles rolled his eyes. “I’m not allowed to forget that, am I? As soon as anyone catches anything, there’s always the joke about checking their teeth for fur.”

“It’s a good tip.” He took his eyes off the road to drink in Miles for a few seconds. They wanted the same thing—to not hide—and they were already friends. But they were in the same pack, not that it bothered Con, and he’d slept with half the members at some point, including Miles.

“You know we’re only friends because of the pack.”

“Yes,” Simon said cautiously, not sure where it was going but already not liking the direction.

“You wouldn’t date me. We wouldn’t even match on an app.”

“Is this you saying you’re not interested now you’re sober? Because that’s not what I’m sensing?” There was a light scent of lust on Miles’ skin.

“Oh, I’m interested, and I’d totally fuck you if that’s what you want. There’s no point in hiding it when you can smell it. And I know you’re interested.” Miles gave a little sniff, then sighed and pressed his lips together. “But I don’t know if we’d work as a couple. I looked at the room we shared this morning, and your side was neat, and mine looked like a laundry hamper exploded. We’re too different.”

“Are we? Really?” Simon didn’t think they were.

“I am a disorganized, uneducated mess.” Miles stared at his hands, then turned one over so it was palm up. “With shit hands.”

Simon placed his hand over the top, glad the car was an automatic, so he didn’t need to change gears. “I don’t think they’re shit.” He rubbed his thumb over a callous. Just that simple movement quickened his pulse. “I kind of like it.”

“Fuck off.” Miles went to snatch his hand back, but Simon held on and brought his fingers to his lips, kissing Miles’ fingertips. That wasn’t something a friend would do. “What was that for?”

“You’re too hard on yourself.”

“It’s what other people have told me.”

“And you listened?”

Miles shrugged. Simon was still holding his hand. He should let it go. While they wanted the same thing, Miles was right. They were different. They were good as friends...but as lovers?

As partners?

Could he see himself marrying Miles one day?

He couldn’t see himself marrying any man at the moment, even though he didn’t want to be single. If he dated Miles, was he using him to hide behind so he didn’t need to put himself out there? He let go of Miles’ hand and put his back on the steering wheel.

The scent of desire in the car wasn’t helping him think, and his jeans were biting into him, but he wasn’t going to adjust them because that would only draw attention to his rapidly hardening dick.

It had been the way Miles didn’t take anything too seriously that had first caught his eye. The way he’d extended his hand and helped Simon within the pack and outside of it. But back then, he hadn’t been in a place to even say what he liked, and all he wanted was to make it through the rest of the

week, then the month. That it had now been two years since he'd left Jenny was almost unfathomable when the first two weeks had been the most miserable of his entire life—not made any easier by the harassment of Jenny's brother.

That he was in a place where he was mostly happy was due to Miles.

“So what do you want to do?” Miles said after three songs and a news update had played on the radio.

Pull over and kiss him.

But that would only complicate things.

“As in?” Simon asked as though he wasn't sure what Miles meant, even though he was sure that he was asking about them.

“Us. The thing that happened last night. The way I see it, we have a few options. We forget about and continue as before and try not to be weird. We do it again, but sober and then see how we feel. Or we jump and try dating.”

“We already know all the stuff that dating is supposed to uncover.” Simon had shared things he'd never told another person.

“So we hang out during the week to watch our favorite TV shows, have already seen and discussed the dirty laundry, but we aren't getting the benefits of dating.”

“Which is?”

“Sex. That's why people date and marry. So they never need to find someone else to fuck.”

“There's more to it than that.”

“Like?”

Simon pressed his lips together. He'd been friends with Jenny before marrying her. Her family had joined the pack when he'd been fifteen, but they hadn't started dating until their last year of school. He'd thought his feelings would grow into love with time. They hadn't. Not the way they should've. “Love. Did you love Gideon?”

“Yeah. That’s why it hurt so much to end it.”

And he’d never been in love. He knew that now. Admiration and trust were great, but there’d been no spark and when he was turning her away more often than not because he couldn’t find enough interest to get hard, he’d realized there was a problem.

It was different with Miles, but there wasn’t the rush people talked about when they fell in love. What if that never happened, and he wasted ten years of Miles’ life?

He didn’t want to hurt Miles.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IT WAS as if they'd had just enough sex to make everything as awkward as fuck without having enough to be satisfying. Sitting there with nothing to do while Simon drove, with a hard-on throbbing against his jeans, wasn't helping his mood. That, and the way neither of them could find a way to move out of this stuck place.

Realistically, going back was impossible. Neither of them could magically forget—and he wasn't sure he wanted to because Simon rutting over him was a memory that he would bring out as soon as he had a few minutes alone. It was the drug he hadn't known he needed.

Miles tapped his fingers on his thigh, wanting to lift his hips and rearrange his junk. “Are you scared of falling in love?”

“I'm scared I won't know what it feels like. Or what if it doesn't happen? Or what if it does, but we break up for some reason?”

“Then we break up,” Miles said. “People break up for all kinds of reasons.”

Simon glanced at him. His eyes were dark brown, but there were flashes of gold that became more prominent when he shifted. With his dark hair and lean build, he must have been a very pretty twink at nineteen. It was a wonder he made it out of university convinced he was straight.

“What if we have a falling out because you support the wrong football team. What am I saying?” Miles shook his head. “You don't even follow football.”

“I do. Soccer is the real football.”

“Ugh. I’m not debating this again.” Because he never won. “Look, all I’m saying is that we are both single wolves who do not want to date humans. We’re already friends, so we can skip the awkward get-to-know-you and jump straight to the good part.”

“Which is?”

“The-get-you-naked part, but without the slinking out of bed in the middle of the night knowing that you’ll never hear from them again part.”

“So, friends with benefits?”

“Sure.” If that’s what Simon needed to call it, so he felt comfortable, then it was good enough for him. Maybe it was what they both needed at the moment. Something that was easy and fun and didn’t involve tearing open his skin to see if someone else found him acceptable. “We don’t have to tell anyone; we can see what happens with no expectations.”

Simon frowned as he concentrated on the road.

“Unless you really want to forget and move on.” Was he pushing too much? Did he want Simon more than Simon wanted him?

His lungs were tight, and his breathing shallow as he waited. And waited.

Simon’s tongue darted over his lip, and he swallowed hard. “I don’t want to lose you as a friend.”

“You won’t.” He put his hand on Simon’s thigh. “We’re still friends. Friends who sometimes get naked together.”

Simon’s pulse quickened, and the scent of lust on his skin became sharper. Miles wanted to lick him just to taste it again. His hand slid a little higher, aware that he was about to make a leap into uncharted territory. He’d never hooked up with a friend and had never remained friends with an ex afterward.

Simon’s hand covered his, their fingers lacing together as if they knew where to slot. “Do you want to stop by my place for a coffee?”

“You’re seriously inviting me in for coffee?”

“What do you want me to say? Do you want to stop by for sex?”

“Why not?”

“Because it feels wrong. Cheap.” Simon sighed. “And now I feel old.”

Miles laughed. “I’ll come in.” His fingers traced the curve of Simon’s ear. “But it’s not coffee that I want.”

BY THE TIME Simon pulled up at his place, Miles had talked himself in and out of the idea and back again. He wanted more than friends who had sex, and he hadn’t even realized until last night that it was Simon that he wanted. He didn’t need to go searching for the right person because he was next to him and had been part of his life for the last year.

That didn’t stop the gnawing doubts that Simon wouldn’t want him for anything more than sex or that they’d ruin their friendship. There were plenty of reasons why this might be a bad idea, but if they didn’t take the chance, that would be worse, or at least that’s where he was at now. In another ten minutes, his thoughts might have done a one-eighty.

Simon got out of the car and grabbed his bag, and Miles did the same, mostly because it would make it easier for him to catch a taxi home later. He followed Simon to the front door of the three-bedroom house, the way he had plenty of times before after they’d gone out, but this time it was different, the air was heavier, and with every step, he felt as though the ground might fall away. He wasn’t going in for a drink or to sit on the sofa and watch a movie .

And they both were both aware of the difference.

The air tasted different because it was full of lust with a twist of worry—not only his. Simon glanced over his shoulder as he unlocked the door, his lips parted as if he were about to say something.

If he called it off, Miles would have breathed a sigh of relief. Not because he didn't want Simon, but because it was too awkward.

"What if it's terrible even though we're sober?" Simon stepped inside.

"I'm so glad you have faith in my abilities."

"I'm more worried about mine. You said you can't dance. Well, this is me not being able to dance."

"Bullshit." Miles shut the front door and dropped his bag. "It's just sex."

"Yes, but it's different. I'd been with the same person for over a decade and—"

Miles kissed him because Simon was making excuses that he didn't need to. "You're overthinking it." He grabbed his hand and smiled. "Why don't you let me lead?"

Simon nodded, his lips finding Miles' mouth again. The kiss was softer this time, and Simon's free hand cupped his jaw, his thumb sweeping over the stubble on Miles' jaw as though he liked the feel. Miles closed his eyes and opened his mouth to the slide of Simon's tongue.

The little buzz this was creating spun through his blood, and he was sure that if he took a step, he was going to fall. He rocked back, needing air.

Simon lowered his gaze. "It feels so weird to be kissing you."

"No one has complained about my kissing, and they shouldn't complain about yours either."

"No, it's weird because it's you and..." Simon glanced up. "It's not that I don't want you."

Miles ran his fingertips up the front of Simon's thigh, over the pocket of his jeans, to the belt loop. He gave it a slight tug, pulling Simon closer, but not close enough that their bodies touched. "I'm a wolf too. I can tell how much you want me."

And he liked the scent of Simon's desire. It had been there last night when they were dancing; he was sure of it. But was it because of him, or the alcohol, or the wedding, or the dancing? Maybe all the stars had aligned to create this opportunity.

The corner of Simon's lips turned up. Miles kissed the dimple that formed and rubbed his cheek against Simon's, breathing in his scent. It was only then that he let his hand drift from the belt loop to where the hard length of Simon's dick pressed against the fabric.

His own jumped in anticipation.

He'd known something was amiss for the last few weeks, and Simon had asked him what was wrong a couple of times. Now he knew the answer. This is what he'd wanted, but it had been so far from his mind that he hadn't even known where to look.

"Come on, I want to taste your coffee," Miles whispered in his ear.

Simon laughed. "Please don't say that again."

Miles lifted his eyebrows. "You invited me in for coffee, and I'm very thirsty."

Simon blinked and looked at him as though he'd grown a second head. "You want coffee?"

"Jesus Christ, do you know how to flirt?"

"No...I'm not sure I ever did."

Miles exhaled, then grabbed the front of Simon's T-shirt and took a step forward so he was forced to step back. "How about this then? I want to suck your dick, then fuck you." With each word, he took another step, backing Simon toward the bedroom. "If that's what you still want, or you could—"

"Yes." Simon lowered his voice. "Say it again."

"That I want to fuck you?"

Simon nodded.

Miles noted the way his hand balled the front of Simon's T and the way he'd been marching him toward the bedroom. He didn't think he could. He was manhandling his best friend, and that wasn't him. But they were less than a meter from the bedroom, and it would be easy to take those last couple of steps.

Simon was right. This was kind of awkward. It was like they already knew too much.

His grip eased, and instead of speaking, he claimed his lips. They didn't need to do any more talking. He pulled Simon's T-shirt up and broke the kiss to tug it the rest of the way off, tossing it aside so he could use his hands to work open Simon's jeans. Simon's hands were in his hair, his fingers pressing against his scalp, then he tipped Miles' head and nipped at his throat.

Not hard enough to break the skin or leave a mark, but enough to make him gasp. It had been so long since he'd been with another wolf, or even another shifter, that he'd forgotten what it was like to be bitten. It was a need he hadn't realized that he needed to have fulfilled.

Simon's tongue swept along the underside of his jaw before he nipped again, harder, as though he'd like to leave a mark. His nails raked over the denim, following the length of Miles' cock, and a shudder ran down his spine.

"I thought you couldn't dance?"

"I've used all my moves," Simon murmured.

"They're pretty good moves." He slid his hand into Simon's briefs, and his fingers grazed the head of his cock. "But as nice as it is standing here, I would like to get you naked." He licked Simon's lip but didn't kiss him.

Simon pulled Miles the rest of the way into the bedroom and pulled off his shirt. "It might be nice for us both to be naked this time."

"Since we're giving this our best shot," Miles agreed as he toed off his runners. He stripped off his own jeans and underwear as Simon sat on the edge of the neatly made bed

and took off his shoes. When Simon stood to remove his jeans, Miles knocked him back onto the bed.

Simon's eyes widened, then he leaned forward and gave Miles' cock a lick. That wasn't part of the plan, but now he was there, it was much harder to stop him as he took Miles a little deeper each time.

He sucked in a breath, torn between continuing and drawing back. He needed to draw back because he wanted more than a blow job. Simon wanted more than this. "You can suck me off another time, promise."

As he rocked back, he gave Simon another push.

This time, Simon lay back on the bed, feet flat on the floor. Miles leaned over him and licked his nipple until it became a hard peak, then he bit it. His hand cupped Simon's balls through the denim as he worked his way lower with little licks and nips. His tongue traced the line of hair that ran from Simon's belly button and led into the waistband of his briefs.

The musky scent of sex and the tang of pre-cum tempted him to yank Simon's jeans and briefs off so he could taste him. But he wanted to wait a little longer. He nuzzled against the fabric-covered length of Simon's cock, and he rocked his hips as though silently begging for more.

Miles teased him for a little longer before he tugged on the jeans. Simon lifted his hips, allowing Miles to pull them off. He dragged them all the way off, leaving Simon in only his black briefs. He ran his hands up Simon's thighs, not worrying about the callouses on his hands.

Simon groaned, so Miles did it again.

"Please..."

He mouthed Simon's cock through the fabric and licked the crease of his thigh. Then he nipped at the soft skin of his waist. Simon's heat and scent were making his blood sharp. It was familiar and strange in the same breath. Jarring and arousing. And it was messing with his head in the best possible way. He peeled the briefs down enough that he was

able to lick the hot, dark head of Simon's cock. He lapped the salty pre-cum from the slit.

Fuck this. He couldn't wait any longer. He yanked the briefs off and took Simon in his mouth, taking him deep.

When he glanced up, Simon was propped up on his elbows, watching.

Miles wrapped his fingers around the base. "Am I doing it wrong? Do you like it different?"

"No, I want to watch. You look so hot."

Miles licked the crown and sucked on the tip, keeping eye contact. Pre-cum coated his tongue. His pulse thudded in his ears as he drowned in Simon's dark eyes.

Simon's lips parted, and his hips lifted with each stroke that Miles made. "If you don't want to swallow, you need to stop."

Miles flattened his tongue against the underside of Simon's cock and sucked.

He heard the change in Simon's heart the moment before he spilled, flooding his mouth. Simon groaned; his head tipped back, baring his throat like he wanted it bitten.

And Miles was more than happy to oblige. He released Simon and moved to lick his collarbone and nip at his skin, but Simon grabbed the back of his head and pulled him in for a kiss, claiming his mouth with a fever Miles hadn't expected. Simon dragged him close as though he expected to be fucked in the next three seconds.

Yeah, he knew what that felt like, wanting to continue riding the high. But he hadn't planned that far ahead.

He propped himself up on one elbow. "Where's your lube?"

"Top of the wardrobe."

"Why would you have it up there?" That was so not handy.

"Because I have kids, and they open drawers."

“Right.” Miles eased off him and opened the wardrobe. Aside from folded-up bed linen, the only thing in the top was a shoebox. He grabbed it and flipped open the lid.

“I can—”

“Ooh. You did buy yourself some toys.” Miles grinned. There wasn’t much in the box, but he was glad that Simon had taken his suggestion. He pulled out a butt plug. “This is tiny, and this one isn’t much better.”

“Please don’t critique—”

“Please let me buy you something.” Because two little butt plugs and a small boring dildo were a start, but not a party.

“Like what?” Simon was sitting up, looking rather more concerned than he should be.

“I’ll surprise you.” He didn’t know what he was going to buy him, but it would be something fun. He put the box on the bedside table and pulled out a condom and lube. Shifters rarely got sick, as the switching between forms killed off most things. However, some didn’t take the chance, and he knew Simon didn’t from things he’d said about previous dates. “I haven’t been with anyone in a while.”

But he hadn’t done a test since getting together with Gideon.

“Probably wise to get a test if we’re only going to be sleeping with each other.” Simon watched as Miles rolled on the condom.

If he was only going to be fucking Simon, he’d do a test tomorrow. Hell, he’d run out and do it on his way home if a place was open. “Is that what you want?”

Did Simon want only him? That wasn’t friends who fucked. That was something else...wasn’t it? He didn’t want to hope too hard.

“I don’t know. What do you want?”

Miles held up the lube like it wasn’t obvious what he wanted. “Move back onto the bed.”

“Do you want me to roll over?”

“Hell, no.” He had the feeling Simon’s previous encounters had been the kind of thing where there wasn’t a whole lot, or any, kissing. “I want to kiss you. I want to see your face.” *As I fuck you.* That didn’t sound quite right. “I want to make sure you’re enjoying it.”

Simon moved and lay back with his head on the pillow, but he wasn’t as relaxed as he had been. Damn, he should’ve grabbed the lube before sucking him off.

“You still want it?”

“Yes. I feel a bit selfish getting all the attention.”

Miles leaned over and kissed him, his tongue flicking over Simon’s lower lip. “I can assure you that you are not being selfish.” This is exactly where he wanted Simon, though he wouldn’t have minded if Simon had been the one doing the fucking. “I am having a lot of fun.”

And he was going to make the most of it because common sense might suddenly wake up, and they’d realize this was a bad idea. Or Simon would wake up to the fact he could do better. Miles knew this wasn’t forever, and that hurt more than it should.

He didn’t want to lose Simon from his life.

Simon’s fingers pushed through his hair, and his teeth raked over Miles’ lip. He tasted the lingering salt of cum on his tongue. When Simon’s hand glided over his jaw, he couldn’t help but lean into the touch. Simon’s teeth pressed against the underside, and he nipped at the skin there.

“If you leave a mark not hidden by clothes, I’ll do the same to you.” His words were almost a growl...a challenge.

“Don’t tempt me.” Simon’s tongue flicked against Miles’ throat.

He wanted him to. But friends didn’t go around marking each other because they wanted other wolves to know. If it was hidden, that was different. Or at least he could justify to himself that it was.

He flicked the cap off the lube with his free hand and got some on his fingers. He stroked his cock, making it good and slick. Then realized that he hadn't thought this through very well because he was straddling Simon's thigh instead of between his legs, but he didn't want to move because he liked the way Simon was touching him.

The back of his hand brushed Simon's inner thigh, nudging his leg aside so he could find his hole. Simon got the hint, and without stopping his exploration of Miles' jaw and throat with his lips and teeth, he gripped Miles' hip as though to lift him.

Miles braced himself with one hand and lifted his leg so Simon could move his. For all his talk about not being able to dance in bed, he was doing better than Miles had managed at the wedding.

He teased Simon's hole with his finger, even though all he wanted to do was press in. His cock throbbed for attention and relief.

Simon's teeth pressed into the muscle of his shoulder, and he gasped. It stung, but his cock jumped as pleasure spiked.

"I couldn't resist. It's been so long." His fingers ruffled Miles' hair.

Miles grinned. He'd bite back. He just didn't know where. And Simon didn't know when. He leaned back and checked out the mark as though offended and not delighted. When he ran his fingers over the bite, they dipped into the impressions left by Simon's teeth. "That's going to leave a bruise."

Simon put a hand over his heart and feigned surprise. "Is it? I didn't even break the skin."

Miles ran his tongue over his teeth, aware that Simon was watching. He pressed his finger into Simon and curled it, knowing the moment he hit Simon's prostate from the way he sucked in a breath.

"You ever cum from being fucked?"

"No." His hips lifted, and he bent his knees as though offering himself. "Have you?"

“Yeah.” For these few moments, Simon was his, and nothing else mattered. Simon’s dick was already half-hard again. “Stroke yourself.”

Simon’s eyebrows drew together, but he did. As soon as he was hard, Miles removed his finger and pressed the head of his cock to Simon’s tight hole. Pausing for a moment before pushing in almost killed him, but he waited because Simon wasn’t used to it. Simon gave him the smallest nod, and Miles thrust into him. He leaned over, bracing himself as he moved, going deeper each time.

It was only when he looked up from where their bodies joined to Simon’s face that he was hit with the knowledge that he was fucking his best friend, and this wasn’t a drunken thing that could be moved past. This was very deliberate. His breath caught, but he couldn’t look away.

He didn’t want to.

He listened to every heartbeat, needing to be sure that Simon was enjoying it.

Simon put a hand on Miles’ chest and pushed.

Miles stopped. “Is it hurting?”

“Keep going. Just not over me.”

Miles grinned and gripped Simon’s thighs. “Like this?”

“Yes.”

The view was better. Simon spread out before him, jerking himself off while Miles fucked him. His balls were tight with the need to come, but he held back. Waiting for Simon.

Simon’s gaze flicked between Miles’s face and to where their bodies joined, his hand worked over his cock, and then he grunted, and his ass clenched around Miles as he came.

With a sigh, Miles gave in, pounding into Simon twice more before tipping over with a groan. He closed his eyes; breathing in the scent of lust and sweat and cum and Simon. When he opened his eyes, Simon had his shut.

Regret?

Or something else?

“You okay?”

“Mmm. Not sure I can move.”

“Good.” But he was going to have to. Before he did, he leaned over—not to kiss him but to leave his mark. His teeth pressed into Simon’s pec, next to his nipple. Simon’s back arched, and he groaned. Miles gave the bite a lick, then pulled away to clean up in the bathroom.

When he came back, Simon was stretched out on the bed.

“Did I break you?”

“No, but I don’t want to move yet.” His hand patted the bed next to him, and Miles couldn’t refuse the invitation.

He lay next to him, aware of each beat of Simon’s heart. His pulse echoed through his body. This wasn’t lust. It was love.

He’d fallen for his best friend. And he didn’t understand how it had happened, only that it had snuck up on him when he wasn’t looking.

This was a dangerous place to be but leaving wasn’t an option. Not when everything he’d ever wanted was right there, naked and next to him. He’d enjoy the fall, and he wouldn’t think about the ground waiting beneath.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THAT WAS NOT the kind of sex that happened between strangers. They knew each other too well for that. Cared about each other. They'd supported each other, Miles more so. The bite mark throbbed. Simon's ass throbbed. And he liked it.

He'd forgotten what it was like to be with another shifter. Someone who understood what it was like, without needing to explain. *Well, of course you want to bite, and you can tell from my heartbeat how much I'm into it.*

"Do you want to stay for dinner? I can order some pizza." He wanted to roll onto his side and kiss Miles' forehead and pull him close. They'd had pizza or ordered dinner plenty of times. This wasn't weird.

It took Miles several seconds before he answered. "I should probably go home and get organized for the week. Pray I have some clean work clothes, you know."

"Of course. I'm going to drop my suit at the dry cleaners after school because of..." He didn't need to explain, Miles knew why, and it was his cum that had gotten everywhere. "Do you want me to drop yours at the same time?"

"Um, sure. I haven't thought that far ahead."

Simon turned onto his side to face him. "This is weird now, isn't it?"

"Yeah," he said with a sigh. "I'm glad it's not just me. Not that I want you to be weirded out..."

"I'm not weirded out. It's...I don't know. I want to kiss you and say the sex was great, then go and shower and brush

my teeth, but I don't want to move either." When he got up, Miles would leave, and then he'd be alone with all of his doubts. Maybe this had been a bad idea. They weren't only friends, and they weren't dating.

If they were dating, what would be different?

He didn't know.

But he didn't want to settle for something that was good. Wasn't there supposed to be a rush and sparks and stuff? He'd never had any of that.

"We can lie here for a bit," Miles said. "I never asked you what you thought of the wedding?"

"It was pretty, and Drew and River seemed to like it. You?"

"For all the suit-wearing, it was fun. I'd ask Brandon to arrange my wedding...one day, when I get married. I'm not saying—"

"I know," Simon laughed. "I don't think I'd do the full wedding again. It was too stressful."

"You didn't enjoy it?"

"No. I was too worried about messing up and ruining it for Jenny. She was so into it."

Miles watched him, his blue eyes dark in the soft afternoon light. "She didn't know?"

"I didn't know. All that stuff Zach says about thinking it's normal to want to be with guys and squashing it down. I did."

"But at uni, there must have been gay guys in your classes."

"I'm sure there was, but they weren't wolves, and wolves aren't gay. So I couldn't be gay."

"Clearly you aren't. We're just two best friends who can't be bothered dating humans, so give each other a hand. Not gay at all," Miles said with a smirk.

“How did you know? Since you kicked yourself out, you must have known early on.”

“I wanted to get naked with guys. I only ever had crushes on guys—”

Simon frowned. “Like how?”

“What do you mean?” Miles’ eyebrow quirked up.

“What did they feel like?”

Miles stared at him. “When you have a crush on someone?”

Simon nodded.

Miles’ stare intensified as though he could peer into Simon’s head and find what was missing. “There’s a swoop and a rush of excitement when you see them, coupled with an awkward boner when you’re fifteen...or twenty-nine, given last night.” His gaze intensified. “You’ve never had a crush?”

“I don’t think so.”

“You’d know because it’s very distracting.”

Simon sighed. “Then no. But I’m attracted to men. I like being with men.” They lay in silence for what seemed like hours. “I’m broken, aren’t I?”

Miles ran his fingers over the side of Simon’s face and then along his jaw. “No, you’re just still figuring your shit out.” He pressed a soft kiss to his lips. “Twenty years too late, but hey?”

Simon reached out and tickled him.

Miles squirmed onto his back, trying to escape. He laughed, a sound that Simon loved to hear. He pinned Miles to the bed, half lying over him. They’d done much the same on the sofa, fully dressed. They’d played as wolves, so why did this feel so different? Like he was trying to rip the wheels off something that had been working just fine.

Miles panted. “And now what are you going to do?”

Simon glanced at his limp dick. He hadn't expected to come a second time, and a third was not going to happen so soon. "Not a lot."

He rolled off and sat up, wincing at the well-fucked feel of his ass. He'd definitely enjoyed it that time, but maybe that was because he enjoyed being with Miles.

Miles got off the bed and began to find his clothes and drag them on. "Are we still on for Wednesday?"

"Yes. We have a reputation to maintain." He was not going to let the rival quiz team win, which they would if they didn't show up.

"Shall I grab a ride?" Miles inclined his head at him.

"Um, give me a moment, and I'll shower and drop you home."

Miles shook his head. "What I should've said was that I'll grab a ride. You do what you need to, and I'll pick you up on Wednesday."

Simon let him leave. He showered, and when he came out to see if there was anything he could turn into dinner, Miles' waistcoat and pants were folded up and neatly placed on top of Simon's bag.

CHAPTER NINE

“SEASON two of the dragon shifter crime show just dropped. I know it’s a school night, but can I interest you in an episode?” Miles had the phone on speaker while he dressed. If Simon said yes, he should put on jeans and pretend to be civilized...though why he wasn’t sure. Simon had seen him naked and in track pants after shifting so many times. He didn’t need to try to impress him, yet a part of him wanted to. He wanted to see the heat in Simon’s eyes like there had been on the weekend.

Last night, they’d kind of dropped back into friends mode, and when he’d dropped Simon home after the quiz, there’d been no offer to come in. But there usually wasn’t. This was a weird middle ground, and he wasn’t sure if sex would be on offer tonight. He wanted it.

Did Simon?

“I know you have your kids this weekend, so if you want to wait until next week to start...” Miles gave him an easy out as he pulled on his navy-blue track pants.

“I’d forgotten it was this week.” Something clanked, and Simon swore.

“Are you right?”

“Dropped the knife. It missed my foot. Come around; dinner will be ready in ten. It’s chicken and pesto pasta.”

“Is there garlic bread?” Because he couldn’t have pasta without garlic bread.

“I think you ate my last one.” Miles heard Simon open the freezer. “I got nothing.”

“I’ll grab some on my way.” He hung up and shoved on his socks and runners. His roommate was in the kitchen, and the TV was going. He’d moved into this place with Gideon, but it was Gideon who’d left, and he’d needed someone else to pay the rent. But he was getting tired of the constant noise. “I’m heading out.”

He didn’t wait for an answer.

By the time he’d collected two garlic breads from the drive-through, it had taken him twenty minutes to reach Simon’s. Too long when his head was full of doubts and hopes, both armed and ready to fight to the death.

He took a breath that did nothing to settle the butterflies that swarmed from his belly up into his chest. He’d done this so many times before; it shouldn’t feel so different. Yet it did.

That he’d done a bit of research after Simon’s confession of never having experienced a crush didn’t help either. It was a bit too much like prying to figure out what was wrong with him. He’d thought it might be trauma from hiding in the closet and growing up in a pack that was restrictive, but when Zach talked about Con, there was more than lust.

It wasn’t trauma. Or at least not from what he’d read, and he was clearly an expert now—he’d read three articles on the internet.

Leave it. Enjoy what’s going on, and don’t destroy it by poking around.

With that reminder to himself, he got out of the car.

Simon opened the door before he knocked. “Thought you’d locked yourself in the car.”

“I was thinking about eating a garlic bread before I came in.” He held up the bag.

Simon smiled, the one that lit up his dark eyes and raised Miles’ temperature. If he leaned in for a kiss, how would it be received?

“You restrained yourself.”

“Only just.” And he didn’t mean from eating the garlic bread. He took a step closer and tilted his head so all Simon had to do was close the distance. Was this a little too desperate?

Simon’s hand snaked around the back of his neck as his lips brushed over his in the lightest of kisses that did nothing to ease his hunger. “The garlic bread is not hiding your scent.”

“Damn.”

“And those are the pants with the hole in the ass.”

“They are not. The hole is in the leg.”

Simon’s free hand slid over Miles’ hip and ass, then the tip of his finger brushed his skin. “Ass.”

“Upper thigh. Besides, why were you looking hard enough to know exactly where the hole is?”

“It’s hard to miss.”

“Uh-huh. You keep telling yourself that. You want to let me in, or did you want to grope me in the doorway some more?”

“I guess we should eat dinner before it goes cold.” Simon stepped back. “I can always grope you after on the sofa?”

“I like the sound of that plan.” His skin was already pricking with anticipation. Maybe the awkwardness was a strange aphrodisiac.

Simon nodded and closed the door. “You wanted to last night.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to push.” At what point were they no longer friends who fucked but were accidentally together? And what the hell did that mean if Simon had never had a crush or been in love? If he was, what was the word he learned? Aromantic?

Miles couldn’t wrap his head around it, so he pushed it away. They weren’t dating, so it didn’t matter.

He put the garlic bread on the table that was already set, including wine glasses. That looked kind of date-like, but Simon often cooked dinner for them. And it wasn't as if this was the first time there'd been wine or beer or some other alcohol on the table.

“When did you realize that you wanted to...” He didn't want to say fuck because that sounded too casual, and this wasn't like that because they both cared too much. He cared about Simon, and if Simon hadn't kissed him, he'd have done everything he could not to cross that line—probably unsuccessfully. He'd have distanced himself, and then Simon would've been worried, and they'd have ended up here, or worse, no longer being friends.

Simon put two large bowls of chicken pasta on the table. There was no pretending to eat a human-sized meal with another shifter. “There was a moment soon after we met when I was trying to figure out the kind of guys I was attracted to.”

Miles pulled a face. “And you thought, yeah, bricklayer, that's my type?”

“No, not like that. It was more a process of noticing when someone caught my eye and working out why.” He sat. “I squashed the lust for so long that I had to give it space to grow back. So yes, I noticed the hole in those pants.”

“And you hid it?” He hadn't even known that Simon had experienced lusty thoughts about him.

“I'm very good at that. Wine? You have a few beers left in the fridge if you prefer.”

Miles grabbed a beer and poured it into the wine glass—because he wasn't a total feral.

“I do have beer glasses.”

“I didn't want to mess up the aesthetic of the table.”

“What about you? Were you hiding it?”

“The day I met you, I thought you were cute, fucked up, but cute. But that was all.” He stabbed a piece of chicken. He should have expected the question to be flipped on him. “The

first time I really wanted to fuck you was at the wedding. Seeing you in the suit...I don't know. It hit hard, and I did try to ignore it. But we're here now wherever this is." He lifted his glass. "To us?"

"To us." Simon tapped his glass against Miles' glass.

THERE WAS no time to change after work. There never was, but Simon didn't mind. As awkward as it had been at first having dinner with Jenny every second Friday, it was important, and it was something that he looked forward to. Jenny said the kids did too.

He parked near the playground where they always met. Her car was only a couple of bays away, but it took him a few minutes to find them. Olivia and George weren't happy playing in the area for small children anymore. They were growing up too fast. Every time he saw them, they'd changed that bit more. He hoped the world changed faster than they did.

He strode over the grass toward where they were running over the wooden bridge on the play equipment and then sliding down. Jenny sat on the bench to the side. She turned before he got close, having heard him, or caught his scent. Her lips curved, but her smile was thin. Something was wrong.

"Daddy!" Olivia squealed. She jumped off the ladder. At eight, she was still a few years away from shifting, but already she had a fearlessness and an ability to judge distances and speeds. She was a natural at sports, her teachers said. They were going to have to curb her abilities soon. Explain what she was, what they were, and why they couldn't be discovered.

She ran toward him, and he scooped her up and swung her around before setting her on the ground.

"You make that seem easy," Jenny said with a knowing tilt of her head.

Too easy. He was going to have to stop soon. "I know."

George made his way over less enthusiastically.

“There’s been some issues at school,” she murmured.

“I saw the email.” There hadn’t been any details beyond George and another boy had gotten into a scuffle. “What was the fight about?”

“The other boy said some unflattering things about you, and George took a swing and got lucky.”

Simon’s jaw locked.

“He punched him in the nose. There was blood everywhere.” Olivia used her hands to indicate blood gushing out of her nose.

Simon knelt. “Hey, buddy. Tough week?”

George glared at him. “Why didn’t you stay with Mummy?”

It took everything he had not to look away from his son and stare at the grass. “Because we didn’t love each other anymore, and we wanted each other to be able to be happy.” It was the same thing they’d been saying since the split, the lie that was mostly the truth but hid the reality.

He remembered too well the night they’d spent arguing and trying to find a way out of the mess he’d made. It had taken them a week to sort it out, and by then, they were closer than they had been for years.

“You kiss men,” George said.

“Yes.” There was no point in denying it. Not when the taste of Miles had been on his lips all day.

“If Mummy had been a man, you’d have stayed?”

“Mummy couldn’t be a man. Only girls can have babies, dummy.”

“Olivia, don’t call your brother names,” Jenny said with a tiredness that seemed as though she’d used that phrase a few too many times.

“It’s difficult, George. I get that. But next time some smartass kid calls me names, remember that I can’t hear them. Walk away.” He opened his arms, and George stepped into the embrace. “My love for you didn’t change.”

He did love his kids. He wanted them to thrive and be happy and have everything they ever wanted. And he loved Jenny in much the same way. The same way he always had as a very dear friend.

And Miles?

He loved him and couldn’t stand the thought of never seeing him again, but he didn’t feel the rush that Miles did. Yet when they were together, the lust was electric. That was something he’d never experienced, and it filled him with a static that made it hard to think.

He kissed the top of George’s head. “You want to play for a bit longer?”

George nodded. “Will you push me on the swing?”

“Of course.” It was only a few minutes before George was back chasing Olivia around the playground. Simon sat on the bench next to Jenny. “You’re tense.”

“You tried to wash off the scent of your lover.”

Damn it. “I’m sorry. I won’t...” Won’t what? See Miles again? Have sex again?

She sighed. “I’ve smelled him before, but something is different.”

He rested his elbows on his knees and raked his fingers through his hair. They’d only just become lovers, that’s what was different, and that wasn’t even the right term. He didn’t know what to say. “I have seen other people since we split.”

She shook her head. “I wanted you to say something first.”

“Say something about what?”

“You’ve been with him for months but never mentioned his name, even in passing.”

Simon opened his mouth and shut it again, not sure what to say. Jenny thought he'd been with Miles for months. She'd been smelling Miles on his skin for that long and not said anything?

She swallowed, a sure sign that she was nervous and about to deliver bad news. "I've been seeing someone, too."

Simon smiled. "Good."

"It's serious, Simon. I want to introduce him to the kids. I've been waiting for you to say that you were dating and happy. I wanted you to be first."

He turned to face her. "How did I never smell him? Is he a wolf?"

She smiled. "Perfume? I was careful not to see him the day before hand over? Or maybe you weren't looking? And yes, he's a wolf. Different pack, and he knows about you."

Simon looked away, knowing how difficult that must have been for her. "I bet that went down well."

"His pack voted to support yours, so it wasn't that bad. Next time, I want him to come to family dinner."

It was a punch to the gut that he should've been expecting. His kids would have a stepfather. And the new guy would be there all the time while he became the part-time dad. "Do they know?"

"I want to tell them. You need to tell them. Who is your boyfriend? Is he a wolf?"

"Yes. He's part of my pack." What was he doing? They weren't dating, were they? Seeing Miles was always the best part of his day. And they were seeing more of each other, and not only to have sex.

"Do you love him, Jen?"

The answer was in her eyes and her smile. She used to have that expression when she looked at him. And he'd tried hard to live up to that joy. Was he doing the same with Miles?

"Yes. It's different with Liam. We were young and—"

“And I was lying.”

Her hand brushed his knee. “Let’s not do that to each other. We’ve both moved on. Why don’t you bring him too? We’ll have a big family dinner and get the awkwardness over in one hit.”

Was that even possible?

“I don’t know.” Would Miles even want to come? If they weren’t dating, it wasn’t fair to his kids. They didn’t need to see every boyfriend. And how many had he had in the last two years? None. The only man who’d been a constant was Miles. The only man he wanted was Miles. Was that enough? He forced a smile. “I’ll ask him.”

CHAPTER TEN

MILES SLID onto Simon's lap and straddled his thighs. The credits were playing, and it would jump to the next episode of the paranormal crime show if he didn't hit pause, but the way Miles was kissing him made it hard for him to think about anything else except getting him naked.

He didn't want to ruin the moment by inviting him to the family dinner, which was is what he should be doing. It was too easy to loll on the sofa and continue kissing and touching and watching TV. His hands palmed Miles' ass and dragged his hips closer so he could feel the hard length of him rubbing against his own cock.

Tonight, there was the promise of not using condoms since they'd both gotten their tests back this week. He hadn't done that since before the split. So he kept his mouth closed about dinner. He'd ask another time and enjoy tonight.

His hands slid under Miles' long-sleeved T-shirt, then he tugged it off, breaking the kiss. Miles' eyes were dark, but heat shimmered in them, and the scent of desire clung to his skin.

The last two weeks since the wedding had been the best in a very long time. The only thing that would make them perfect was if Miles didn't leave. Miles didn't like his roommate, and there was room here. The only downside was when the kids were over. But that was all about to change, anyway.

Miles nipped at his lip. "What are you thinking about?"

"Everything."

“Sounds complicated. How about you reach into my pocket, grab the lube, and fuck me...bare.”

His dick twitched; he'd never done that. Not with a guy. They now had rules, no fucking other people. If they wanted to, they could, but it meant going back to being safe. He didn't want to be with anyone else. He was sure of that. But there was no spark of knowing Miles was THE ONE.

No butterflies, as Miles put it.

There was joy, and desire, and a need to touch him. The latter had existed for a while. They'd watch TV and be draped together like lounging wolves, except human. He should have realized then that Miles was something more than a friend. His hand skated over Miles' hip to find the pocket and pull out the little packet of lube.

“This your way of celebrating the results?”

“Yeah.”

“I can't fuck you until you take your pants off.”

Miles glanced at the offending clothes. “I should have planned that better.”

“I like you in this position.” He gave his ass a squeeze. “Especially when you rub your...” It felt silly to admit. “Your stubble on my cheek.”

Miles leaned in, his cheek grazing Simon's. “Like this?”

“Yes.”

For a few heartbeats, Miles didn't move except to roll his hips. “This would feel so much better if we were naked.”

Simon gripped Miles' ass and lifted him up. “Bedroom.”

“Why...oh. Kids, right.”

The last thing Simon wanted was his kids smelling that on the sofa. It was a shifter issue that humans never had to consider. Miles grinned at him over his shoulder, then dropped his pants and briefs in the same move, stepping out of them as he sauntered to the bedroom naked.

Simon admired the contour of his spine and the curve of his ass before getting up to follow him into the bedroom. He didn't know what he'd done to get so lucky.

Miles was waiting, pouncing, and kissing him up against the door frame as he worked open his jeans. "You really need to start wearing track pants with nothing underneath." His hand traced up the length of Simon's cock, then he shoved down his jeans and briefs.

Simon stripped off his shirt. "Shall I sit on the edge of the bed?"

"Nah, sit up by the headboard, then I'll have better leverage," Miles said between kisses.

Simon did as he was told, shoving the pillows out of the way and pulling Miles close as soon as he could. Miles settled back into the same position as they had been.

"You were right. So much better naked." His hands skimmed over Miles' back to his ass. "You love being on top, don't you?"

"Is that a problem?"

Simon shook his head. It wasn't what he was used to, though his experience with men was limited. "I kind of like it, as then I can reach all of you."

Miles' lips curved. "Where's the lube?"

Simon plucked it off the bed where he'd dropped it. "You want it now?"

"Five minutes ago." His tongue flicked over Simon's lip before diving in, and his hand stroked the length of his cock.

Simon ripped open the lube and slicked Miles' hole before using the rest on his own cock. That didn't feel as uncoordinated as it once had. He was sure some of his early encounters wondered if he was up to the job of topping them. He returned his hand to Miles, teasing him and enjoying the way he squirmed and pushed back, the way he panted in his ear.

He bit the lobe. “Come on, I’ve been thinking about this all day.”

Simon glanced down, angling himself so Miles could sink onto him. Miles took a breath, his nose bumped Simon’s, and Simon looked up, claiming his mouth as Miles sank onto him, surrounding him with his hot, tight heat. He bit back on the groan, even as his grip on Miles’ hip tightened.

Miles hummed with satisfaction. One of his hands remained on Simon’s shoulder, and the other grasped the headboard as he moved, sinking deeper. He rolled his hips, sinking all the way on.

All Simon could do was watch as Miles rode him. His eyes were half closed, and his lips were parted like some kind of scruffy, desperate god.

“You feel so fucking good,” Simon murmured. He wrapped his hand around Miles’ cock, loving the way it felt. The hot, hard length and the soft, slick head.

“Yeah, same.” He leaned in, kissing him hard, his teeth grazing Simon’s lip. “I want to bite you so much.”

“Do it.” Simon tilted his head, giving Miles his throat. He’d wear a tie tomorrow if he had to.

Miles bit low, where neck met shoulder. They both shuddered. Simon was sure he was leaving nail marks in Miles’ ass cheek. Marking him. He held Miles still as he came, spilling inside him. He groaned. *Fuck, that felt so good.*

And Miles wouldn’t be able to wash it off. There was something about knowing that other shifters would smell it and know.

Miles gasped, his cum splashing onto Simon’s stomach.

For several heartbeats, it was all Simon could do to breathe. He tipped his head back, the bite throbbing in time with his pulse.

Miles placed a soft kiss over the mark. “That was a bit harder than I thought. You should’ve yelped.”

“I didn’t want to.” He enjoyed having a partner who bit. Who he could trust with anything. And that was Miles.

“You’ve got that serious look again.” His thumb brushed over Simon’s lower lip, and Simon gave it a lick. He wanted to ask so many things but wasn’t sure where to start.

“What is it?” Miles pressed.

He didn’t want to see him off at the door and wait until next time. “Do you want to stay the night?”

Miles blinked.

“It’s too much. I shouldn’t have asked.”

Miles cupped Simon’s face with both hands. “I can stay. I want to stay, but I have to be up at five.”

“I’ll make you breakfast.”

“You don’t have to get up. I’m used to slinking out early.” He drew in a breath. “I need to move. Shower? Spare toothbrush?”

Simon nodded. “Yes to both.”

MILES LET the water drum on his head, hoping it knocked some sense into him. Friends who fucked was very different from staying over. The idea filled him with a kind of excitement and tension that not even a shift would shake out.

And when Simon watched him with that look in his eyes as though Miles was everything he wanted, he wanted to believe that was true, even though a part of him believed this wouldn’t last. He wasn’t the right fit. If they hadn’t been wolves...

But they were. And they had formed a friendship that now went beyond shifting and relationship and sex advice.

They were in some kind of relationship and having sex.

“Do you want me to wait?”

Miles opened his eyes and gave the glass door a push. “Nah, get in.”

It wasn't a huge shower like the one in Kyle's second bathroom, but it was bigger than the one in his apartment. He passed Simon the unscented soap—something that shifters really appreciated. Too many scents on the skin was the start of a bad day.

Miles rinsed off and admired the bite at the base of Simon's neck with a little too much pride. A dark bruise was already forming. And he knew from the sting on his ass cheek that the nail marks were just as deep.

The silence stretched between them.

He needed to know. “Can I ask why? I always thought you liked your own space.”

Simon swallowed and shook his head. “I hate it. I'm here by myself most of the time. My bed smells of you, and I can't face another night alone.” Water dripped off the end of his nose. “I'm aware of how that sounds.”

“It sounds like someone who doesn't want to be alone.” Miles pulled him into a hug, and Simon rested his head on Miles' shoulder.

“I didn't realize how much I liked being married until I left.”

“You don't need to explain.”

“It doesn't make sense.”

“Wolves are pack animals.”

“It's not that. I think I just miss the company. I like waking up next to someone. I like coming home to someone. I like having dinner with someone.”

With Simon, he didn't have to try. He didn't need to impress him. They hadn't been putting their best faces on to lure in the other person. There'd been no games or pretense. This was easy, and he'd never had that. He didn't know what to do with it.

“I should’ve noticed you were lonely.” His heart was breaking for Simon.

“I wasn’t when you were here. I don’t want to use you because—”

“If I didn’t want to be here, I wouldn’t be.” But what the hell were they doing? Because he was pretty sure that this wasn’t as casual as they thought it was going to be. Was he filling in until someone better came along?

But Simon wasn’t even looking. He’d stopped months ago. And so had he.

Miles exhaled. He’d take one day at a time. That was all either of them could do. “Come on, one of us has to be up early.”

Simon turned off the taps and got out, wrapping the towel around his waist before grabbing a clean one from the vanity cupboard and handing it to Miles.

“If you want me to stay over sometimes, would it be okay if I left some things here?”

“Of course. There’s space in the walk-in robe.” He held up two toothbrushes. “I only have spare kids’ brushes, dinosaur or princess?”

“Princess, clearly.” He took the pink one out of Simon’s hand with a grin.

“Really?”

He put his hand over his heart. “You don’t know my favorite color?”

“I didn’t, but I do now.”

And for some reason, that mattered a lot more than it should if they were only friends.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“IF YOU’RE BUSY, I can go,” Miles said before he was fully through the door.

Simon glanced up from the pile of papers. “I only have three more papers to grade, and dinner won’t be ready for another half hour, so have a seat.” He’d been hoping to be done but hadn’t quite gotten there. Jenny’s text had distracted him. He still hadn’t replied.

It wasn’t that he’d forgotten about the family dinner, but he’d pushed it aside because he didn’t know how to ask. They weren’t dating, but Miles was a part of his life, and he couldn’t imagine living without him.

Miles sat opposite him. “What’s wrong? Am I here too much now? I’ve gotten clingy, haven’t I?”

Simon put his hand over Miles’. His shirt rubbed over the bite in a pleasant reminder of the first night Miles stayed the night. When he shifted, it would heal. But Miles could always make another one. “I like you here. And I don’t think you’re clingy.”

Miles never came straight around after work, always going home to shower first and prepare for the coming day. Waking up next to him, even though it was ridiculously early, was the best part of his day.

“But? I can hear the but.”

He swallowed before drawing in a breath. It was better to get it over with. He should’ve done it days ago, but he’d been a bit distracted. “Jenny has been smelling you on my skin. Last

weekend she told me she wants the kids to meet her boyfriend and mine. She'd been waiting for me to say something first but had lost patience."

Miles frowned, and Simon rushed on. "She wants a big family dinner, with both new boyfriends and the kids. I should've told her we weren't dating, but I didn't."

But at the same time, he couldn't keep both parts of his life separate forever. That didn't make bringing them together any less terrifying. He wanted Miles, and Miles seemed happy. Yet he'd done all of this before and knew how it ended.

"I think we are dating. We aren't seeing other people."

Simon opened his mouth and shut it. Miles was right.

"If that's what you want," Miles said, as though ready to back away.

Was he being selfish in trying to keep Miles to himself when Miles could find someone who got that rush when he walked through the door? He was always happy to see him, but that was different. Jenny had asked him outright if he'd ever loved her, and he had, but not in the way she wanted. Was this a repeat of that mistake?

Miles was someone he wanted to be around and wanted the best for, but was that enough for either of them? Though he'd never had this electric lust before. It was addictive.

"If meeting Jen and the kids is too much, you'd say so, wouldn't you?"

"Forget that. I want to know if we *are* dating. You're asking me to meet your ex and her partner and your kids. That's a big deal. I'm happy to go, and I can be your fake boyfriend—"

"I don't want a fake boyfriend." He didn't want more lies.

"Neither do I." Miles glanced down at their linked hands. "I think I always wanted more than friends who fuck, but I know you can do better than me."

"Better?"

“I’m a high school dropout who slings bricks. I might make it to site manager or something eventually.”

“I don’t care what you do. I care about you. I want you in my life and in my bed.”

“Same.” Miles gave him a small smile, and it nearly broke Simon. “I didn’t know I wanted this, and now I can’t remember what I did before. How did I not notice?”

“You weren’t looking.” And neither was he, yet here they were.

“We’ll have to tell the pack at some point.”

Simon nodded. He wasn’t ready for that. “What if we don’t work as a couple?”

“Then we break up,” Miles said as though it meant nothing.

“I don’t want to lose you as a friend.”

“You’re not going to lose me.” Miles stood. “I’ll still come around. You cook better than me.”

“Miles...” He should be the one telling Miles that he could do better. That he deserved more. The words wouldn’t form on his tongue because he was selfish and wanted Miles all to himself.

Miles walked around and kissed his temple. “Finish your marking, and I’ll check dinner.”

IT WASN’T JUST the meeting of the kids and the ex—though that was a big enough deal. It was that they were now dating. They’d slid from friends who fuck to boyfriends almost too easily. When it was this easy, Miles didn’t trust it. He didn’t know what to say or if he should say anything, but he could see the doubts in Simon’s dark eyes.

And his brain kept spinning up new ways he could fuck this up.

They hardly spoke over dinner, both of them consumed by their thoughts.

He didn't want to sit around and watch TV the way they often did. He needed to do something. Sometimes he went to the gym just so he could be moving. Tonight was one of those nights. "Do you want to go for a run tonight?"

"I'm not driving out to Kyle's mid-week. I've tried it."

"Not there. Is that the only place you run?"

"It is now. I don't know any safe places."

"What did you do before you joined the pack?"

Simon was silent for several heartbeats. "Backyard mostly."

They'd all been there. Sometimes shifting indoors because they needed to and there was no place safe to go. "Con told me where he runs. There's a dog beach, though he said calling it a beach was a bit of wishful thinking." Miles put the plates in the dishwasher. "I need to run out the tension."

Simon shut the fridge. "Okay, we'll go."

"You're agreeing?"

"Yes. I can feel your stress, and I have my own, so perhaps a run will help. Even if it doesn't, it will be nice to go out and not have human concerns at the forefront."

"If it's stressing us both, would it be better if I didn't come to dinner?"

"I want you there, but I don't know how Olivia and George will react. What if I hate Jenny's boyfriend? Liam's going to be around my kids more than me. What if Liam hates me? Jen told him everything." Simon raked his fingers through his hair.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that stuff."

"And then is it going to be every family dinner, or is this a once-off? I like family dinner with Jen and the kids. It's—"

"Family time, but your family is no longer only four people. If Jen has another baby, how will you feel then? What

if you want another kid?”

Simon stared at him. “Do you want kids?”

“I don’t think so, but I haven’t given it much thought.” And now they were talking about imaginary kids, which wasn’t helping.

Simon drew in a breath and exhaled. “Even though I wanted her to move on, I didn’t think it would affect me.”

“And she probably feels the same. Maybe this is a dick thing to say, but you left her, so you can’t tell her you don’t want her introducing Liam to the kids.”

“Leaving was the right thing to do,” Simon snapped. “It wasn’t something I did on a whim.”

“I know.” Miles kept his voice soft. “You aren’t that kind of person.” Which made this all the more confusing because, to him, it felt like a rapid shift. The kind that left him unsteady on his feet and a little out of breath. “But you can’t tell her who to date any more than she can tell you who to date.”

“I don’t know how this is going to work.”

“This”—Miles indicated between the two of them—“or the family situation?”

“The family thing. I don’t know how I expected it to be, but it wasn’t like this.”

“Let’s go for that run.” They’d both feel better with some fur between their toes. His lips turned up as another possibility hit him that would make a run even better. “I bet there’s something you haven’t done as a wolf in a while.”

“What?” Simon’s eyebrows knitted, then his nostrils flared as he caught Miles’ scent. His eyes widened. “Have you? As a wolf? With a male wolf?”

Miles nodded. “It’s been a very long time. Want to try?”

“Um...” Simon looked at his hands as though he saw paws and claws. “How does that work?”

“I’ll do a little prep work, and then we can go.” He walked toward the bedroom.

“Did you suggest that to distract me?”

“Did it work?” Because it had worked for him.

“Yes...thank you.”

He glanced back, knowing he could distract Simon further.
“Want to help?”

“What does it involve?”

“Lube and a butt plug that can be pulled out with teeth.”
Because there was no prep with claws, aside from tongue, and he wasn’t sure if Simon was up for that.

He could see Simon thinking it through like it was a complex calculation he couldn’t quite solve. He must have fucked his ex-wife as a wolf at least once—every shifter he knew had when they had a shifter partner. He wasn’t sure about Cooper and Kyle, given one was a leopard and the other a wolf.

When Simon spoke, his voice was a whisper. “Can I be the one with the lube and butt plug?”

Miles almost couldn’t breathe as hunger gripped him and squeezed. “I’ve never mounted as a wolf.”

“I have...with Jenny. Do you want to try?”

“Yes. Really? You’d let me?” In some packs, that was the worst offence, even worse than bottoming as a human. “Are you sure?” Miles heard his voice going up with excitement like he was a pup, having made his first shift and caught his own tail.

“I trust you.” Simon’s lips curved. “And it’s a first we can do together.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

STARING at the metal object in the box, Simon wasn't so sure that trusting Miles had been a good idea. "That doesn't look like it should be put inside a person or a wolf."

Miles held the box out as though expecting Simon to be a bit more excited about the butt plug. "I bought it for you. I wasn't sure when to give it to you, but this is the perfect opportunity."

"But it's metal."

Miles bared his teeth. It wasn't a smile, and his eyes flashed in the light as he let the wolf within surface. He lifted an eyebrow. "Better for grabbing with pointy teeth. Silicone can get damaged."

Simon nodded; that made perfect sense now that he'd had a little longer to think it through. When he'd run with Jenny, this prep work, as Miles called it, hadn't been an issue.

Miles lowered the box. "If you don't like it, I can get you something else. I just thought—"

Simon reached for the metal plug and held it up. It had weight. "Don't you think it's a little big? And heavy?"

Both of Miles' eyebrows shot up. "It's not as thick as my dick."

"Yeah, but when shifted..." What was that going to feel like when he shifted with that in him?

Miles cackled and gave a little shudder. "It rubs in all the right places, like a whole-body orgasm without actually coming."

“And it doesn’t get lost?”

“No. It’s like shifting while holding your keys in your mouth or something. But, word of warning, you don’t want to become a size queen while shifting.”

“There is no danger of that ever happening.” Simon lifted his gaze from the plug to Miles. “Did Con teach you this?”

“Strangely, no. It was that holiday that got a little wild. The one where an older wolf and his human partner saw me and...”

Simon frowned. Miles had shared a few of his adventures and misadventures, and Simon was never sure if he’d missed out or had a lucky escape. “The three-way?”

“Yeah, that one. Except the human guy wasn’t there for the wolf thing—that would’ve been weird.” Miles put his hand over Simon’s, the metal in his hand already warming. “If you’ve changed your mind, it’s fine.”

And it would be because Miles didn’t push. Miles was more than happy to give Simon what he wanted. His excitement about mounting as a wolf had vibrated through Simon. He wanted to give him this. It wasn’t as though he didn’t have a small freak out about each new thing anyway.

He was aware that Miles was still watching him, giving him time to think.

Overthink. That’s what he did.

He nodded. “Are you sure this is the right size?”

“For you, yes.”

“And for you?”

“I like a little more fun.” Miles winked at him.

Simon rolled his eyes. “Of course you do.” He kissed Miles. “Thank you for the present. I hope it doesn’t get lost at the beach.”

“It won’t. But I do need to ask, and you don’t need to answer now, only before you shift. Do you want the knot?”

Simon rocked back on his heels. He hadn't even gotten that far through the process. "Hang on. So plug and lube first. Then we go to the beach and shift, and I run around with this in my butt?"

Miles nodded. "And then when you want some, I pull it out. Pretty standard."

Except they'd both have four feet and no hands. The handle almost appeared to be made for wolf teeth to grab. Was there a shifter out there making toys for other shifters?

He glanced at the plug again. "Does the knot fit?"

It hadn't been something that he'd ever discussed with Jenny. It had been assumed. Should he have asked? She'd never said anything.

Miles smiled. His lips brushed Simon's as his hand snaked around the back of his neck. "Of course it does. But I need to know, with words, if I'm pulling out or not." He laughed at his own joke. "Because it's going to take about ten minutes to separate, and that's forever if you don't want it."

"Does it hurt?" Because he was damn sure that Miles had done it at least once.

"No." He plucked the plug from Simon's hand. "This is the biggest thing going in your ass tonight. And even if you don't want the plug, you definitely want the lube. I want you to have lube."

There was that glint in Miles' eyes again. Even though his expression was neutral, the hope and excitement were in his scent.

"I ask too many questions." But he needed to know what was going to happen. If he'd been twenty years younger, would he have jumped in with both feet and without looking? He'd never done that, but was that because he'd always had something to hide?

"I like answering your questions. But I like showing you even more." His tongue flicked over Simon's lip. "So what do you want?"

Simon breathed in Miles' scent. His excitement threaded through Simon's blood. "I want a run on the beach with all the extras."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SIMON PULLED UP OUTSIDE MILES' apartment, only to find Miles already waiting with his hair still wet from the shower.

He got into the car, leaned across, and kissed Simon's cheek. "How did you sleep?"

Simon's cheeks burned; he'd crashed after their run, barely waking when Miles got up and left before dawn. He didn't know how Miles did it every day. "Very well."

"You're okay? You didn't say much after." His eyebrows jumped up as though to imply what had happened at the beach.

Simon hadn't known what to say after. He hadn't wanted to think. Returning to human had almost been a disappointment. Miles had driven them home, as he hadn't felt quite up to it. He'd had sex as a wolf before, but he'd never been the one being mounted, and it had been something completely different from being fucked as a human—which he hadn't even done a handful of times.

"I'm good. It was good. Weird. Fun." He pulled into traffic, knowing the route to the park by heart. His mind was back on the beach, with the salt wind in his fur, kicking up sand as he ran with Miles.

"Do it again fun or once-in-a-lifetime fun?"

Simon paused before speaking, even though he knew the answer. "I'd do it again. Last night, I almost didn't want to be human again."

They'd run, and chased, and played, and then at some point, the game turned into something else. The nips had changed, and Miles' scent had become sharper, and by the time it happened, his butt was in the air like he was a bitch in heat. He'd lost himself about then, consumed with need and wanting this thing between them to be more. Having sex shifted meant something. Or it did to him.

"There was a peace I hadn't felt before." Yet by the time Simon had eaten breakfast, the tension and worry about dinner were back.

"Yeah. When you let go like that, something else slips away."

Simon nodded. "You felt it too?"

"I always find doing it as a wolf a bit out of body...or out of head...or something. It's like the human mind can't compute, so it runs away."

That was exactly how it felt last night. "It wasn't like that with Jenny." And it wasn't because he'd been mounted for the first time because Miles felt it too.

"Maybe because you were holding back?"

"Maybe." Had he always been on guard, hoping she didn't notice something wasn't right? With Miles, he could be himself in a way that he'd never thought possible. "How about you? Did you have a good day?"

"Fine. Except for every time I thought about this afternoon, which was every other bloody minute." Miles slouched in the seat. "What if she hates me?"

"She won't hate you. Just watch the swearing around the kids."

"Will do. Anything else?"

"Be yourself...she'll love you." It was impossible not to love Miles.

Twenty minutes later, he parked next to Jen's car. He could see her and the kids, but no other man was with them. Had

Liam backed out? Simon wasn't sure if that made the situation better or worse.

Miles exhaled and wiped his palms on his jeans. "So this is where you go every other Friday."

"Yes. We talk, and the kids play, and then we have dinner. Then Olivia and George come home with me until I drop them at school on Monday morning. It's hardly any time." He missed them and missed most of their life because he wasn't there. "Come on."

They got out of the car and made their way over to the picnic table where Jenny was sitting with a takeaway coffee. She waved as though he hadn't spotted her the moment he'd parked.

As he got closer, she stood and gave him a quick hug. "Liam is going to pick up dinner on his way. He couldn't get off work early. I thought we'd have a picnic here so we have space to talk."

"That's a good plan." Some of the tension released, and Simon breathed a little easier. "Jenny, this is Miles. My boyfriend." The word didn't feel as strange on his tongue as he'd expected it to be. "Miles, Jenny, my ex-wife." Which also didn't feel as odd as it once had.

"Hi." Miles opened his arms to hug her—that was how humans would see it. But they were both getting a good sniff of each other.

Olivia and George ran over, sensing something was up.

"Who is this?" Olivia asked, her nose twitching and her eyebrows knitting together with concentration. "Do I know you?"

Simon smiled. "This is Miles. He's my boyfriend."

She considered Miles for several seconds, then glanced at him. "Will he be there on our weekend?"

"We aren't living together yet." Simon glanced at Miles. That was something they should talk about. But this was all so new that he didn't want to rush or push, and a little part of him

expected Miles to change his mind and declare that he wanted more. But Miles was smiling at him with a look in his eyes that made him want to run away.

It wasn't lust or happiness in Miles' eye. It was the way Jenny had once looked at him.

It was love.

And he'd never been able to live up to it. Because he didn't feel it, not the way they did. He didn't know how to feel it. The love he had for Jenny wasn't enough. And when he'd stopped trying, any attraction had dried up too.

With Miles, the attraction was different. Like a fuse had been lit, and the countdown was on until they had to touch.

"Okay." Olivia nodded her head. "Mummy said her boyfriend is coming for dinner. So that's three daddies and one mummy. Holly, at school, has two mummies and two daddies, and she says they hate each other," Olivia said with a little too much glee.

Jenny laughed. "We aren't going to start hating each other. We're going to be friends." She glanced at him, and he nodded. That was the intention. He wasn't going to make life any harder for his kids or Jenny because he'd fucked up. Was he dragging Miles into his mess?

No, Miles wanted to be here. He wanted to be around him, be with him, not just be his friend.

He picked up George. "And how are you going?"

"I don't want new daddies."

"I'll always be your dad, but you will have extra people who care about you."

"And I'm happy being called Miles. I'm not trying to step in." He was still smiling, but was he already regretting this? Simon could feel his tension, which meant Jenny could too, but maybe it was to be expected.

"Same for Liam. Our family is expanding," Jen added. When had she told the kids about Liam? They clearly weren't shocked by hearing his name.

“It’s not fair that I only see you on a weekend. Why can’t you take me to school every day?” George pulled back from the hug but didn’t squirm to be let down.

“We thought it best when you were little. You’d miss Mummy too much.”

George shook his head.

“I’ll talk to Mum about it, okay? She might miss you. Olivia would.”

“No, I wouldn’t. He’s annoying.” Olivia walked toward the swings. “Come and push me on the swing!”

“I’ll push her so you two can do what you need to.” Miles followed her without waiting. “Is it okay if I push you?” Miles called.

“Only if you push me really high!” She bounded onto the swing to wait.

Simon watched him walk over to the swings and give her a push as if he did it every other weekend.

George wriggled, and Simon set him down so he could join in.

When he was several meters away, he sighed and turned to Jen. “Have you spoken to Olivia about the changes?”

“No, but we need to. It’s becoming obvious that she’s noticing her heightened senses. She recognized Miles by scent.”

Simon nodded. “Her sports teacher will notice. You don’t want her getting put onto the track team.” Having to then run slow to be cut had eaten him up. The years between realizing he was different and shifting were the worst, closely followed by the first year of shifting, which is when he’d first noticed that boys were far more interesting than girls, and that was a problem in his old pack. “I can’t remember what my parents told me.

“My mother showed me. It terrified me, even though I knew it was her.”

“Let’s not do that, then. What do you want to do about George?” The fighting at school hadn’t stopped.

“He’s struggling. It might be good if we do alternate weeks for a bit. That will give me some time with Olivia. It’s too soon to tell George. Will that work for you?”

Simon watched Miles push both kids on the swings and ran through his class schedule. “He’ll have to use the after-school program a couple of days a week. But I can do the drop-offs.” The primary school wasn’t that far from the high school. He’d need to be really organized, as he wouldn’t have long before his first class.

“And what about Miles?”

“He’ll understand if I don’t see him that week.” But already Simon wasn’t looking forward to spending a week without him, and it hadn’t even happened yet.

Jen put her hand on his arm. “That’s not what I meant. Miles will be okay with George there for a week?”

Simon frowned. “As in, they are both there?”

“Yes. It’s going to happen. Liam and I are talking about moving in toward the end of the year. I’ve started running with his pack. I’m not ready to leave ours...mine...though. Your parents won’t take it well.”

Simon snorted. “I don’t care what they think.”

“They are their grandkids.”

“Yeah, and they can see them the same as any human grandparents. They don’t need to be there for their first run or anything.” He hadn’t forgiven them for what they’d said when he’d left Jenny. “What about your parents?”

“It’s not a problem.”

Jenny’s family had been more of a family pack within the main pack. Most of them didn’t hate him, but he felt awkward when he saw them at the kids’ birthdays. Jenny’s brother hated him, but months of petty harassment had led him to Mark and Sam and the Outcast Pack. And Miles. His gaze drifted back

over to him. Miles was now on a swing, and Olivia and George were pushing him. They were all laughing.

“You two are cute together.”

“Thanks.”

“How long has it been going on?”

“Um...” He didn’t want to say weeks as that was only when they’d started sleeping together. When had they started spending a couple of nights a week hanging out and talking? “About six months, but it was pretty casual for the first few. He’d just broken up with a human.”

“Ah.” Jen nodded. “You seem happy, relaxed. It’s good to see.”

Watching Miles play made his heart ache. He was perfect, and he didn’t even see it. “What if I can’t make it work?”

“Just because we didn’t work doesn’t mean anything.”

“I wasted ten years of your life.” That was something he could never give her back.

“You sound like my brother. And he’s still single, so don’t listen to him. I don’t think it was a waste. Do you? Really?”

He shook his head. At the time, Jenny was everything he thought he should want. And he’d tried. The last year had been difficult because he was tearing himself up, and she’d known that something was wrong.

“I think the fear is normal. It’s new, and there are no guarantees,” she said, as though she understood what Simon really meant.

“That’s true.”

“And for what it’s worth, I never thought you didn’t love me, even when you pulled away. What we had is very different from what I have with Liam.”

“What do you mean?”

“I think you did things because you thought I wanted them or it was expected. You were trying so hard to fit in. I can’t

imagine how difficult that was for you.”

“It wasn’t at first.” But otherwise, it was a fair assessment of their relationship.

She turned and smiled, her eyes lighting up and her scent changing, as a man walked over carrying three bags of takeout. Chicken and chips, from the smell. She greeted Liam with a hug and introduced them. He gave Liam a quick hug, getting his scent.

Then they appraised each other, and the hair on his arm prickled. Usually, the first thing another wolf asked was which pack he ran with.

“It’s good to meet you. Jenny told me all about you.”

Simon smiled but felt the tight edges pull at his cheeks. “Same.”

He sensed Miles, Olivia, and George walk over. Miles’ hand slipped around his waist to rest on the back pocket of Simon’s jeans. The open acknowledgement they were together made it hard to breathe, and for a moment, he expected the mood to sour.

“Miles, this is Liam.”

Miles extended his hand, and they shook. In this gathering, they weren’t the central couple. He and Jenny were because of the children, and it was their right to know those who were joining more closely. In time, that would be different. By the time Olivia was running, Jenny and Liam would be her family pack, and he would be peripheral. She would never run with his pack, and he hoped his son never needed to.

Jen began getting the food out of the bags, and George helped by eating the chips sticking out the top of the boxes. “Shall we eat?”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IT WAS the longest weekend of Miles' life. He wanted to drop round or call Simon because something had felt different when they'd left the park with George and Olivia. Simon had dropped him home with a quick kiss, but he could taste the trouble in the air.

Had he messed up somehow?

He'd turned the dinner over in his mind so many times, trying to find the problem. He'd talked to Jenny and Liam, and he hadn't mentioned shifters because the kids were too young to learn the truth. And watching Simon interact with his kids had been so sweet, it was impossible not to love him a little more. Miles worked with guys who did nothing but bitch about their exes, but Simon and Jenny behaved like old friends who were cheering each other on.

He'd expected to feel like an outsider, but that hadn't happened either. No one had sneered at his job, and no one had asked how he'd ended up in the Outcast Pack. That he ran with them was enough.

He'd written and deleted a dozen texts, and that was just today. Simon hadn't messaged him either, and that was weird. He couldn't remember the last time they'd gone so long without touching base, even if it was just a meme or an emoji.

He probably should've said something before dropping around, but it had reached the point where he couldn't even ask if Simon would be home. For several minutes he sat in the car, gathering his courage because he was worried that it was over. He wiped his hands on his jeans—yeah, he'd dressed up

this time because it felt like the right thing to do. If Simon wasn't home, he was going to the beach to run off the tension because he was about to sprout fur and explode out of his skin. Of course, even that beach was now filled with memories of Simon.

With a growl, he got out of the car and walked up to the door. He knocked before he gave himself the chance to slink back to the car and drive off.

"It's open," Simon said. His voice was quiet enough that a human wouldn't have heard.

Miles went in and shut the door. He leaned on it as he scanned the open-plan living area. Simon was sitting at the dining table, clearly working. Or at least he was staring at his laptop.

He took a few steps toward him. Usually, Simon would get up to greet him. Even before they started fucking, he'd give him a hug or something. There'd been so many little touches. How had he missed the signs? How had he stuffed it up?

"Did you have a good weekend?" It was a lame question, but he didn't know where to start.

"Yes." Simon closed the laptop but otherwise didn't move.

Something was definitely off.

"So what did I do wrong?" Because he had no idea, and if he didn't find out, he couldn't fix it. And he wanted to fix it. He wanted this to work. He wanted Simon and all the baggage that came with him—a year ago, he'd have run away screaming if someone had told him he'd be wanting an instant family.

"Nothing." Simon lifted his gaze and looked at him. There was a tiredness about him, a haunted look in his eyes. "You're perfect. It's me."

Miles' stomach listed sideways and slid away.

"I shouldn't have asked you to come on Friday. I shouldn't have wanted more than friends. It's not fair."

"Not fair? What are you talking about?"

“I see it in your eyes, and it terrifies me.”

“You’re afraid of being loved?” This wasn’t making any sense. When he blinked, all he saw was Simon in the suit, looking like everything he’d ever wanted. It was like his future had stood in front of him, waiting for him to take a chance. And he had. He loved Simon.

And now it was all falling apart.

Simon closed his eyes. “No. Yes. Because I can’t. And I don’t know why. I want to look at you and feel butterflies, but I don’t. I can’t change that.”

The words hurt, making his eyes sting. He’d been in love before and knew the look that Simon was talking about. But it wasn’t everything. They had something more, or he thought they had. “I can’t help that I fell for you.”

“I can’t love you the way you should be loved.” Simon opened his eyes. “I’m sorry. I—”

“No.” Miles sniffed. “You don’t get to make decisions for me.” He stalked over to the dining table and put his palms flat on the surface.

“You’re my best friend. I want you to be happy, and I don’t want to be the one who makes you sad.”

“Well, you’re doing a fucking good job of that at the moment.” Miles swallowed and held Simon’s gaze. “You know all the bad shit and dumb shit about me, and you still wanted to be with me.”

“Of course I want you. There is no one else I want to be with. I’ve known that for a while. I even did those stupid dates because you loved hearing how bad they were.”

“I did.” Because he’d wanted Simon to notice him and ask him out even though he hadn’t realized it at the time.

“I can’t imagine not being around you. You are a big part of my life, but you should have someone who wants to sweep you off your feet, not knock you into bed.”

“What if I don’t want to be swept off my feet? Butterflies settle. They don’t last.” He drew in a breath, knowing that he

needed to confess to his internet research. “And not everyone gets them. Some people don’t. You might be one of them.” He sat with a sigh and stared at the floor. “You might want to look up what it means to be aromantic. See if it makes sense to you.” He risked a glance up to gauge Simon’s reaction.

Simon was frowning.

Maybe he was wrong, but when he thought about all the conversations they’d had about love and dating and sex... “It’s not bad. It’s just you.”

“I don’t need another way to be different.”

Miles got that. Being a shifter among humans was trying at times. Add in everything else, and yeah, going for a run became kind of necessary to blow off the tension of trying to fit. But at the same time, Simon couldn’t be anyone but who he was. “You spent so long trying to fit in that you don’t know who you are.”

“That’s true, and until we started sleeping together, I could just be.”

“That’s how it should be. So stop trying to be what you think I want. What do you want?”

“I want you. I enjoy waking up with you and lying on the sofa watching TV while you fall asleep. I enjoy cooking you dinner and learning facts for quiz night.”

“I like that too.”

“But is it enough?”

“Why wouldn’t it be? I love you. You’re my best friend, who I really like fucking.” Miles grinned. “But I don’t want to be your friend and fuck buddy. I want to be your boyfriend, your first and only boyfriend. And maybe one day, we can sneak off to a registry office to get married since you don’t want Brandon to make it a production.”

“Olivia won’t like that. She’s already planning to be the flower girl at both weddings, which means two princess dresses.” Simon glanced down. “That’s when I began to doubt this. She was so excited, and I wasn’t.”

“And that’s fine.”

“Is it?”

Miles reached his hand over the table, giving Simon the chance to take it. “You bite and mark all your lovers?”

“All my lovers?” Simon laughed. “You make it sound as though I’ve had dozens.”

Miles knew it wasn’t even a dozen. “You know what I mean.”

“I don’t. And not just because they were human and might have freaked.” Simon’s fingertips brushed over his rough palm.

“There’s some who might have liked it.” Though not to the extent that a shifter did. “But instead of dwelling on what you think you should feel. Think about what you *do* feel because when you look at me, I see a depth of love and understanding that I’ve never seen before. I see a lust that wants to consume me. And I want to be consumed.”

“You lit that spark. I don’t know what changed—”

“I saw you in the suit, and something inside of me snapped. It was like I’d been holding back because we were friends, and all of a sudden, all I could think about was how I needed you to be more than my friend. I wanted it to be our wedding.”

“That’s what was going through your head while you were staring at me?”

“Yeah, and I spent the next few hours trying to stuff it all back in so that I wouldn’t mess things up, but then you kept wanting to dance.”

“Because you weren’t having fun.”

“I didn’t want you to realize I had a hard-on that was going nowhere.” That the function room was swamped with lust hadn’t helped his situation. “I didn’t expect you to want me.”

“Once I smelled your arousal, all I wanted to do was get you alone.”

“And here we are. We skipped the dating thing because we’d already done it. We’d already talked about everything.” All the embarrassing moments they’d shared while getting over their past relationships. The things he’d never told anyone, Simon knew it all. “Can we just enjoy being together?”

Simon’s fingers closed around his. “We can.”

“Good. Because I have been stressed all weekend because you didn’t message.”

“Neither did you.”

“Because I didn’t want to bug you while you were spending time with your kids.”

“You never bug me.” Simon stood, still holding Miles’ hand. He walked around the table toward Miles.

Miles stood, pulling him close to breathe him in.

In the kitchen, something started beeping.

“What is that?” Miles mumbled against Simon’s shoulder.

“Slow cooker. Dinner is ready.”

“So dinner and a movie?”

“Are you staying?”

“Where else am I going to go?”

“Home?”

“You are my home.”

Simon squeezed him harder. “You make this place a home.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SIMON SWUNG his bag over his shoulder and walked up to Kyle's front door. Miles locked his ute and followed him.

Cooper opened the door before he knocked. "You're just in time. The beef roast is almost ready."

His stomach growled as if he hadn't eaten in a week. "Great." He glanced at Miles. "Run after dinner?"

"Yeah. That sounds good. Hey, Kyle." Miles dropped his bag on the floor as if he were about to bolt straight out for a run.

"You've got your pick of rooms. It's only you two coming up this weekend."

Simon licked his lower lip. They'd agreed that they were going to tell Kyle because they wanted to share a bed, but that didn't make it any easier. "About that..."

Cooper and Kyle both paused to stare at them. Expectation hummed in the air.

Miles slipped his arm around Simon's waist, his hand finding the lip of his jeans pocket as though his hand belonged there. "We'll only need one bed."

"Finally." Cooper grinned as he poured two glasses of wine. "I wondered how long you two were going to keep it a secret."

"We haven't been together that long," Simon said.

"Sure. I kept hoping that you'd say something." Kyle started slicing the beef.

“No, seriously, we only got together after the wedding,” Simon added.

“Uh-huh. We all knew you were together at the wedding, and we were trying to figure out when it started.” Cooper brought over the glasses of wine. “So?”

“So, we literally got together the night of the wedding,” Miles said as he accepted the glass.

Simon rolled his eyes; he hadn’t expected to share the details.

“You’re serious?” Cooper stared at them.

“Yes.” Simon took a sip.

Kyle stopped carving and put down the knife. “We thought you’d been together for months but were keeping it quiet for some reason.”

“It was so quiet we didn’t know we were dating.” Simon wished they had gone straight out for the run.

Cooper snorted and began putting the plates and dishes of food on the table.

Simon put his glass down to help.

“Sit,” Kyle said.

“I sat in the car.” He wanted to move. Just coming here, his body became primed for a run; shifting heat shimmered at the base of his spine, ready to be set free. But he sat because the pack leader told him to.

“What made you think we were dating?” Miles asked as he took the seat next to Simon. That was a question Simon hadn’t thought to ask, as he’d have rather changed the topic.

Kyle brought the platter of rare beef over. “It was Sam who pointed it out. Must have been the first or second run after you broke up with Gideon. You two were running together so smooth.”

“I’m still learning wolf body language, but it’s like watching my parents run. They read signals that I don’t even notice,” Cooper added. “Zach and Con don’t run that tight.”

“Because they’re jostling for who’s in control. You two don’t. You’re a proper team.” Kyle passed the tongs to Simon. “Dig in.”

For a few heartbeats, Simon didn’t do anything. Couldn’t, as he processed Kyle’s words. “So the wolf part knew.”

“Same mind, but different priorities,” Miles said, as though that explained everything.

The doubts and fears that existed as a human didn’t matter when he was a wolf. When he ran with Miles, nothing else mattered but the two of them. There was a weightlessness in his heart and a freedom that he only found in those precious moments.

He glanced at Miles. The man who had been his partner for months, and he hadn’t even realized. Miles turned and smiled at him.

Simon’s lips turned up, and the ease he felt as a wolf was there. It was Miles who made him want to dance.

EPILOGUE

One week later

SIMON PUSHED wet hair off his face. “Have you seen the storm?”

“Yeah, site was washed out. No work.” Which sucked, but he’d made himself useful and gotten through some of the household tasks that needed done. “I did some shopping, laundry, and made dinner. It will be ready at five.”

“Thank you.” Simon kissed him on the cheek, his hand pausing on Miles’ hip for a second.

George dropped his shoes, socks, and school bag on the floor. Every other week George spent living with Simon. Simon and Jenny agreed that it was working out better for George, as the fighting at school had stopped. Their arrangement was simply negotiated over dinner because neither of them wanted human courts looking into wolf problems.

Miles was still living between his place and Simon’s, and until his flatmate found someone to take over Miles’ part of the rent or the lease expired, that would continue.

“So who has homework?” Miles asked, looking at George.

“Can I do it after dinner?”

“No. In this house, it’s homework before dinner.” Simon put his bag down. “Me included.”

If Simon had work to do, he tried to do it before dinner so they could spend the rest of the evening relaxing. That didn’t always go to plan. “Still doing reports?”

“Yes. Almost there.” Simon opened up George’s bag and pulled out the lunch box and a reading book.

“I can help George.”

“You sure? George?”

George nodded, and Simon handed over the book. It wasn’t very thick; how long could it take?

They sat on the sofa while Simon set up his laptop.

Halfway through the book—that was taking far longer than Miles expected, with George sounding out every other word—his phone rang. He ignored it.

Then Simon’s rang.

Miles’ heartbeat doubled as he looked over at Simon. That only happened when the pack was trying to get hold of them.

Simon’s gaze locked with his as he picked up his phone. His face tightened. “It’s Kyle.”

Miles checked his phone, and his stomach twisted. “He just called me.”

Simon answered. “What’s up?”

“Justin’s father called me. He missed an appointment about his leg. Have you heard or seen him since the wedding?” Kyle asked.

Miles heard every word and the worry in Kyle’s voice. He shook his head. He’d been so wrapped up with Simon that he hadn’t caught up with anyone else.

“Neither of us have,” Simon said carefully, even though they both knew that Justin wasn’t the type to skip appointments.

“What’s wrong, Daddy?” George was off the sofa, reading forgotten, and running toward Simon.

“His father called because he’s part of my pack. We need to find him,” Kyle said.

Simon nodded, his arm reaching for George, who was trying to climb into his lap. “Have you called Sam?”

“That’s my next call. Then I’m calling River. I hope I’m wrong, but it might be his grandfather.”

The twist became a punch that stopped Miles’ breath. If the hunters were taking wolves, no one was safe.



JUSTIN’S STORY is next in [Wolf Hunt](#).

WANT to know what book the TV show Miles and Simon were watching is based on? Check out the [Mytho series](#).

MYTHO BOOK 1: Lust and other Drugs

Police officer Jordan and dragon shifter Edra might have to work together, but they don’t trust each other—even if sparks do fly between them.

If anyone finds out Jordan’s a mytho sympathizer, it could kill his career. No one can know that he frequents the satyr

dens and uses the drug Bliss. Another satyr overdose might not get much attention, but two dead humans? That shouldn't be possible.

And it might not be an accident.

Edra, Mythological Services Liaison, has been covering up mytho crimes to protect the community's reputation. With a mayoral election looming, the last thing his people need is a scandal.

To get a murderer off the streets, Jordan and Edra will be spending a lot of time together, and it won't be easy to keep up with their deceptions... or to keep resisting each other.

OTHER BOOKS BY TJ NICHOLS

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Familiar Mates

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The Vet's Christmas Familiar
The Detective's Familiar
The Siren's Familiar
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The Seahorse Prince's Mate (novella)
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Urban fantasy where the hero always gets his man

TJ Nichols is the author of the Studies in Demonology and Familiar Mates series. They write mostly gay fantasy and paranormal romance, but sometimes gay action/horror as Toby J. Nichols.

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