



Dinner at
Foxy's

Law and Supernatural Order Book Three

SILVIA ONYX

DINNER AT FOXY'S

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Also by Silvia Onyx

Dinner at Foxy's by Silvia Onyx

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Silvia Onyx is a new pen name for the paranormal stories of author Silvia Violet. *Dinner at Foxy's* was previously offered by Silvia Violet. I hope you enjoy reading this series as much as I enjoyed writing it.

SILAS

I'm Silas Bixby, and I'm a proud member of the Atlanta Police Department. Ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to be a cop. My grandad was on the force, and I admired him more than anyone else in my life. Some days I still miss him so much it hurts. He was killed in the line of duty when I was ten, which meant my mom wanted me to do anything but put myself in danger, especially after the shifters and vampires came out.

I tried to fulfill her expectations, to love God, revile the non-humans, and go to law school to fight for human (that would be human only, not shifter or vampire) rights. I failed. I met some shifters and realized they weren't the monsters I'd been taught they were. I quit law school, graduated from the police academy several months later, and I've been living my dream for the last two years. My mom gave me frequent lectures for months, but she's finally accepted it.

Every day on the job is different. Some are full on insanely fucked-up. Some are dull. Others are frustrating as hell. This is one of the slow ones, so I stop for lunch at Foxy's Chicken Shack, a place Wolf and Jason recommended. Wolf's one of the experienced cops at my precinct, and he is, in fact, a werewolf. Jason's a deer shifter and one of the best techs in the crime lab. The two of them say Foxy's has the best chicken in town, and if there's one thing I'm sure they know, it's good food.

Based on Jason's rather lascivious description, the man standing at the counter taking orders is Foxy himself,

otherwise known as Luke. He's every bit as hot as Jason promised. Did I mention I like men? I'm a gay, shifter-loving cop, soooo not what my mama wanted. She still loves me, though.

Luke gives me a blatant once-over, one that makes my cock twitch in anticipation. Jason warned me Luke's an outrageous flirt; he's also beautiful red hair and arms I want to run my tongue over. He oozes dominance and wicked know-how, which pushes just about every button I have. I hold back a sigh as I indulge in a bit of staring myself.

"What can I do for you?" Luke asks in a low voice with an accent that marks him as Georgia born and bred.

Oh, the things I'd like him to do for me, if only I had the nerve to tell him. I glance at the menu posted above his head.

"Um...I'd like..." I almost blurt out chicken as if that tells him anything.

"White meat or dark?" he asks, still using that sexy drawl that is fucking with my ability to think.

"Legs." The word comes out too loud, and heat fills my face. I must look like a fucking idiot. "The...um...leg plate. With slaw and fries."

"What level of spice?" he asks and points to a chart next to him.

"Um..." I choose from the middle range of the list. "I'll try the Eff You Up sauce." *Does it really have to be named that?*

Luke grins. "You got it." The implication that I could have a lot more than food if I were interested hangs between us. But I'm not. Interested, that is. Well, I am, but, you see, I'm cursed. Other men have no problem with casual sex, but I want a relationship. That shouldn't be so hard, right? Problem is I want a relationship with someone who isn't an asshole or a cheater or who thinks my wanting to be dominated in bed means I like to be ordered around when we aren't fucking.

Then there's the fact that I'm a cop, not something Luke could've missed since I'm in uniform. While he's never been arrested, rumor has it he's not averse to supplementing Foxy's

income through illegal gambling or brokering deals for petty criminals. His cousins run a crime ring specializing in weapons and stolen cars. They're everything humans fear about shifters—strong, powerful, and utterly unconcerned with anyone's welfare but their own.

A waitress delivers my food and gives me a shy, interested smile. Things would be a lot easier for me if she were what I wanted rather than her boss, but I gave up on trying to be someone else when I gave up on law school.

“Thank you.”

“You're very welcome. Let me know if you need anything else,” she says and then heads back behind the counter.

The food smells delicious; the peppery flavor is already making my nose tingle. I love my food scorching hot, so normally I take the hottest a restaurant has to offer, but Wolf warned me that even Foxy's “mild” sauce could leave your lips burning for hours. I would've assumed Wolf's recommendation was a case of a big tough werewolf thinking the poor little human couldn't take the heat, but apparently he wouldn't even try the Stab You in the Gut sauce—the second hottest on Foxy's scale—on a dare.

Here goes. I take a bite, and wow! My eyes are watering, but the flavor is so fucking good. Bite number two solidifies the decision. This is not only the best chicken, it's the best fucking meal in town.

I glance up and see Luke watching me. He's got a pen in his mouth, and he's fiddling with it like he can't decide whether to bite it or suck it. Why is that so fucking sexy? He pulls the pen from between his lips and smiles at me. I want to smile back, but I'm still chewing. I try to make my face look normal even though the sauce is burning the shit out of me. Can Luke really take the hottest sauce? Fucking hell, what would it do to you? The idea of him eating it while watching me with that casually sexy look on his face is so fucking erotic. Possibly that means there's something wrong with me.

He breaks eye contact when another customer approaches the counter, and I force myself to look away. From hearing Wolf

and Jason joke about Luke, I get the sense he's the kind of man who does one-night only, no repeats. Still, I've been telling myself I need to get over my casual-sex hang-ups, especially considering my taste in men seems to run from generic cheating bastard to steal-from-me-to-bail-your-crush-out-of-jail asshole.

I finish my lunch and give one last—probably absurdly transparent—look at Luke. Then I head back out for the rest of my shift. Hopefully things will pick up a bit more this afternoon. I need something to distract me from fantasies of him following me home, overpowering me, holding me down, and fucking me until I beg for mercy.

LUKE

I'm Luke, and I'm a fox. Okay, I'm a fox *shifter*, but I'm also hot, a smooth-talker, and I give one wild ride. I run a restaurant in Atlanta. We sell the best damn fried chicken you've ever eaten. That's right. I'm a bona fide fox in the henhouse. Our chicken comes in spicy, spicier, and fuck-me-I'm-on-fire.

The dinner shift is crazy tonight even though my best people are in the kitchen. I don't know who decided to send me all the large parties, prize-winners for most finicky order, and downright bitchy-as-fuck complainers, but they are all out in force tonight.

I'm about to take a break. I need a whiskey, but a large sweet tea will have to do since I'm working.

The door chimes as it swings open, and I glance up, expecting another party of nine, half of them gluten-free vegans—at a fucking chicken shack—but, no... Fuck me. It's that gorgeous blond twink in a cop's uniform, the one who's become a regular. His baby face makes him look like he's playing dress-up. I want to run my hands—and my tongue—over every inch of his smooth, pale skin. He glances my way, and his eyes widen for just a second, then his tongue slides out to moisten his lips.

Maybe this night is about to improve. Officer Blond and Surely-Not-As-Young-As-He-Looks moves my way. Oh yes. Come to Daddy.

I thought you didn't do cops.

Sometimes I hate my fucking conscience.

Nothing but trouble there.

I'm not like the rest of my family. I don't run guns or steal cars. I don't hurt people or use them, but some of my business interests aren't exactly what you'd call legal. Hell, the simple fact that I'm a fox shifter makes me suspicious to most people. However, this is one officer of the law I wouldn't mind having a close acquaintance with.

The hottie in blue reaches the counter. "What can I do for you, Officer?" I ask.

His cheeks pinken adorably, but he holds eye contact. "You're the owner, right? Luke Redtail."

"That's me." I wink, and he glances away. This is going to be fun.

"I'm Officer Bixby, and I need to ask you some questions in connection with an investigation. Is there somewhere private we could go?"

My bed. It's right upstairs. "I've got an office in the back. Let me get someone to run the register."

As I turn toward the kitchen I see my uncle standing in the small side parking lot. My uncle who's supposed to be dead. What is he doing here? "Oh fuck!"

As he throws the object in his hand, I scream, "Get down! Now!" I grab my cop and haul him over the counter. Thank God for shifter strength. I wrap myself around him, but in the shock of the blast, we hit the floor.

For a few seconds I'm blind and deaf, but once my senses begin to return I realize I'm alive. Did my uncle—my uncle who's supposed to be *dead*—really just throw a fucking bomb at my restaurant? I glance around. Everything is still standing despite the smoke hanging in the air and the ringing in my ears. Not an actual bomb, then; a flashbang. People are shouting, but they seem very far away, and all I can think about is the man under me.

“Bixby!” I yell—or at least I think I do. Sound is still distorted. He doesn’t respond. I check his pulse. It’s strong, so I try another tactic. I stroke his cheek. “Wake up, baby!”

Whoa. What the fuck is wrong with me? I’ve known him like two minutes, but...

His eyes open, and I can breathe again.

When I reach behind him to try and help him sit up, I encounter something sticky behind his head. Blood. Fuck, his head must have slammed against the floor when we fell.

“F-Foxy?” His eyes are wide, the pupils huge, but he’s alive and coherent enough to recognize me, more or less.

He reaches up and puts an arm around my neck. My gaze falls to his lips. They look soft and so pink against his pale skin. I lean in, needing a taste. He pulls me closer.

“Luke? Luke, are you all right?”

It’s Beth, my front-end manager. I rescued her from some bullies who don’t care for half-breed shifters. She’s been there when I needed her so many times, and tonight is no exception. The last thing I need to do is kiss a cop with a concussion, a cop who came here to question me.

“Stay right there. Help is on the way.”

Thank God she’s ignoring the state she caught me in. “Is anyone else hurt?” I ask.

“Some scrapes. One lady may have a broken arm, nothing serious.”

“It was...” I’m still disoriented, seeing spots and not hearing right.

“I know. Martin saw. He tried to catch the bastard, but he wasn’t fast enough.”

My uncle probably didn’t even run. He’s likely hiding in plain sight, watching the chaos. He’s the poster boy for sly fox.

I hear sirens wailing. They’re close if I’m judging right. I look around, and for the first time really see the smashed window,

the smoke, and the people who look terrified. As bad as it is, I know it could have been so much worse.

“Are you okay?” Bixby asks. His voice sounds much too far away.

“Of course. I...” My stomach heaves. I grab a trash can just in time.

“This isn’t your fault,” Beth says.

Isn’t it? People are hurt because I dared to leave the family business. What if it had been a real bomb? Then they would be dead. Because of me. If I’d stayed with the family, though, my uncle would’ve expected me to kill when he deemed it necessary.

“Is everyone in the kitchen okay?” I ask when my stomach finishes emptying itself.

She nods. “Yeah, they’re all fine.”

I turn to see my cop hanging on the counter. He’s risen onto his knees, but he’s wavering.

“What the fuck are you doing, Bixby? Sit down.” I see paramedics leaping from an ambulance in the parking lot and making their way to the door.

“Silas,” he says.

“What?”

“My name is Silas, and I’ve got to help. It’s my duty.”

I grab him around the waist to prevent him trying to stand. “You’re barely fucking conscious, *Silas*.” His name sounds damn good. Another sign I’m losing it.

“I’m okay. My head just hurts,” he protests.

“I think you’ve got a concussion. Sit down!”

Finally, with pressure from me, he sinks back to the floor. The paramedics reach us a few seconds later, followed by a police detective I recognize. Once I see that Silas is being attended to, I turn to the detective. “I’m Luke Redtail. I’m the owner here.”

The detective frowns. “Has someone taken a look at you?”

“What? No, I’m fine.”

The man clearly disagrees. I look down and realize my hand is covered in blood. “It’s not mine. It’s Officer Bixby’s.” I gesture behind me to where the paramedics are examining him. “He’s got a head injury.”

The detective inclines his head toward Silas. “How did he come by that injury?”

I’m starting to seriously dislike this man. “He was knocked to the ground in the blast.”

“Was he now?”

I lose it. “You think I did this? You think I hit Silas? You think I want my business to go under? You think since I’m a fox I couldn’t be the victim here?”

“Silas is it now? What is the nature of your relationship?”

“Fuck off. I’m going to find a real cop.” The detective tries to grab my arm as I turn to walk away. Somehow I manage not to punch him.

“Don’t touch me,” I growl.

He lets go. I can smell fear on him. Foxes might not be as intimidating as wolves or bears, but we’re still fucking strong and unpredictable.

“Let me handle this.”

I turn to see the newcomer. It’s Drew Danvers, vampire cop. There’s no point in punching him. I’d just end up with a broken hand. A vamp can make a shifter look like a weakling.

At least Danvers can be counted on not to be prejudiced. He’s a decent man from all I’ve seen of him in the news.

“Tell me what happened,” he says.

I glance over at Silas. A paramedic is helping him walk to the ambulance, so he must not be too bad off.

“My uncle threw a flashbang through the window.”

“Your uncle?” Danvers asks, obviously wanting more detail.

“Oscar Redtail.”

“The Oscar Redtail who died when he allegedly set his warehouse on fire to destroy evidence in a weapons-running case?”

“The very one.”

“You’re certain it was him?”

I nod.

Danvers pauses for a few seconds as if he’s thinking.

“You’re not going to challenge me on that?” I ask.

“No. His body was never found, and if you say it’s your uncle, then there’s a chance it is. What prompted this attack?”

I shake my head. “I have no idea.”

Danvers raises a brow. “Now I’m going to challenge you.”

Of course he is. “He hates me because I refuse to join the family business. He views it as a betrayal, but I’ve not had contact with any of my family in months. I have no idea what provoked him.”

Danvers nods. “So this is one of those deals where no one’s allowed to walk away?”

“Exactly. My uncle and his sons see me as a blight on my kind. Sort of like being on the side of the good guys when you’re a vampire.”

Danvers narrows his eyes, and all my animal senses go on alert. Have I gone too far?

After a chilling few seconds, he smiles. “Right. Like that.”

No way am I going to believe Danvers likes or trusts me, but he’s less antagonistic than other cops I’ve encountered. Maybe because he really does get what it’s like to have people constantly making assumptions about you.

“So you’re certain Oscar Redtail threw the explosive?”

“I am.”

“How did you react?”

The question throws me. What does he expect me to have done? “I yelled to everyone to take cover and tried to pull Officer Bixby to safety.”

“Why?” he asks.

“Why what?”

“Why did you try to protect Bixby?”

“He was standing right in front of me.”

Danvers studies me. “How well do you know him?”

“I’ve seen him patrolling the area. I’ve taken his order a few times, but we’ve never spoken other than that.” *I’ve jerked off thinking about what I’d like to do to him, but surely that’s not relevant.*

Danvers nods and gets that considering look again.

“If a man was standing by you, and you thought someone was about to blow you up, wouldn’t you try to help him?”

“Yes, but...”

“But what? You’re a cop, and I’m just a worthless fox?”

“No, but you’re unusual for your kind, like me.”

I snort.

“Have you seen your uncle any other times since his ‘death’?”

I shake my head.

“Yet you don’t seem shocked that he’s alive.”

“I figured he was laying low, sending instructions to my idiot cousins from some hideout. Faking his death seems perfectly in keeping with his character.”

“Why do you think he chose now to show himself?”

I wish I knew. “Maybe because my cousins got themselves arrested.”

My attention is distracted by Silas arguing with the paramedics, probably telling them he needs to help Danvers with the case when he ought to be getting a ride to the hospital.

I look back at Danvers and realize he's caught me.

"I wanted to make sure he's okay. I tried to break his fall, but he banged his head pretty hard. He was out of it at first, and..."

Danvers smirks.

I refuse to let him see me glance at Silas again, though I'm dying to see who wins the argument. I want to go tell Silas off for even thinking of refusing care, but that would only draw negative attention. He doesn't need an association with me fucking up his career.

Instinctively, I know he's a good cop, an honest one, even as green as he is.

I nod at Danvers. I have nothing else to say that won't make him smirk even more.

"I'll make sure he takes care of himself," he says.

"Thank you."

"I'm going to have to ask you to send your people home; the CSI team will need to go over everything here."

"Any idea if I can get in to clean up later tonight?" I ask.

Danvers shakes his head. "Sorry, I can't be sure."

I know what matters most is that none of the injuries are severe. My business is doing well, but a few days of being closed and the word spreading that we're a target isn't going to do a damn thing for me.

"They'll come back," Danvers says.

"What?"

"The customers. They'll come back. Everyone loves a scandal, and I hear your chicken is a-fucking-mazing."

"Customers don't love getting blown up, though."

Danvers turns serious. "You think your uncle will be back?"

"I think this was a warning."

"If he contacts you, we need to know," Danvers says.

I nod, but we both know that's not going to happen. This is family business, and that's how it'll get handled—in the family.

“Do you want me to send someone to watch the place? You live upstairs, right?”

I shake my head, but I know he'll do it anyway. I'll have to avoid them when I leave later to get the information I need.

Danvers pulls a business card from his pocket. “Here's my...” He stops and smiles, a look of pure pleasure on his face. I follow his line of sight and see a stunning man heading our way, a deer shifter by the smell of him.

“He's hot as fuck, isn't he?” I ask.

Danvers scowls, and I suddenly sense his power as if he's preparing for an attack. It's like someone flipped the switch from good cop to bad cop.

I raise my hands. “Wow, man. He's all yours.”

“Damn right he is, and if anyone...”

He pauses again as the hot shifter reaches us.

“What happened?” the guy asks, and I realize he's with the CSI team. He looks my way and smiles. “And who is this?”

Normally I'd be all about the appreciative look he's giving me, but I have no interest in getting between Danvers and him.

Danvers glares at the young buck. “This is Luke. He owns the place. Someone, probably his uncle, threw a smoke bomb through the window. Apparently, he needed to shake things up tonight.”

The young man looks around. “I guess it worked. I saw Silas getting into an ambulance.”

“Thank God,” I say before I can help myself.

“Is he okay?”

Danvers looks toward me as if expecting me to answer.

“I'm fairly certain he's got a concussion, but he should be fine.”

The deer shifter smiles. “Yeah, he’s tougher than he looks, and the guys who were working on him are some of the best.” He holds out his hand. “I’m Jason Fleetfoot. I’m—”

“My boyfriend,” Danvers says. “And off-limits.”

“I already got the off-limits part.”

Jason grins at Danvers. “You’re so hot when you go all scary protective vampire on me.”

Few men would dare tease a vampire like that, but Danvers just smiles back, and I can only imagine how sweet his revenge will be.

“Don’t you have a job to do?” Danvers asks.

“Indeed I do,” Jason says, then turns to me. “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” I say, more cheekily than I should.

Danvers puts on his cold vamp face again and hands me his card. “Call me if you see your uncle again, but do not go looking for him.”

I nod.

“I want your word.”

“The word of a fox? What good is that?”

“Do you want to get yourself or someone you care about killed?” Danvers asks.

“I’ve got some sense. I’ve lived this long without my family shooting me.”

“Just call me if you learn anything.”

“All right,” I say, and we leave it at that. At least Danvers isn’t stupid enough to think I’m going to listen to his order to stay away from my uncle.

SILAS

My head aches like nothing I'd ever experienced. I'm sore all over, and my hands haven't stopped shaking since I've been awake. I can't remember anything about the few minutes before the explosion—they tell me it was a stun grenade—or what happened right after. That worries me a lot more than the pain.

I remember entering Foxy's Chicken Shack, seeing Luke, and having to fight the urge to throw myself at him. Holy fuck, he's hot.

Focus.

Pain shoots through my head. I squeeze my eyes shut and massage my forehead. That's what happens every time I try to dredge up my memories. Nothing comes to me this time except the sensation of Luke's arms around me. I remember his smile, the way he looked at me, what I fantasized about, and then... No, he hadn't actually kissed me, had he? Surely that was fantasy too. Maybe all of it was.

But it couldn't be. Danvers told me Luke hauled me over the counter and tried to protect me.

The doctor I saw earlier pulls aside the curtain and steps into my ER cubicle, interrupting my thought process.

“A nurse will be here soon with a prescription for pain medication and a list of instructions, but I'd really like you to stay the night.”

I start to shake my head and wince. My queasiness ramps up, and my stomach threatens to revolt on me.

“I want to go home.”

“Do you have someone who can check on you tonight and a few times tomorrow?” he asks.

“Yeah, I do.” I don’t, though, not really, and I have every intention of going to work tomorrow night.

He sighs. “Call us or your regular doctor if anything gets worse, especially if you’re vomiting or you experience any more memory loss.”

“You said the fact that I don’t remember the explosion isn’t anything to worry about.”

The doctor nods. “That’s right. Memory loss during the time of the concussion is normal. Experiencing memory loss over the next few days would be cause for more testing.”

I hope to God I won’t end up with more holes in my memory. “Okay. I’ll let you know.”

He gives me a stern look. “Rest. You shouldn’t perform any vigorous activity for at least a week.”

A fucking week? “But I—”

He glares at me.

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. We’ll get you out of here soon. Call someone to pick you up while you wait. You shouldn’t be on your own.”

Soon is likely an hour in ER speak, so I have some time. I scroll through the contacts in my phone. I could call my mom, but I don’t want to. She’ll go nuts and try to get me to quit my job, but who else can I call? My siblings have moved too far away, and they’d tell mom anyway. They never dared defy her. My last disastrous boyfriend moved out six months ago when I caught him getting head from our “friend” on the sofa that used to sit in my grandmother’s living room.

Ugh. Why did I have to think of him, and why the hell is his number still in my phone? I delete it, but the nausea his

memory dredges up is still there. I'm such a fucking sap to actually attach romantic feelings to sex. What the hell is wrong with me that I can't just get off like other men?

My head is pounding. I should give in to the doctor's urging to stay, but I fucking hate hospitals.

Jason is the closest thing I have to a friend, and he's at the crime scene where I wish I was. There are several other cops who'd come, but we're so fucking shorthanded I don't want to bother them.

For a crazy second I think about calling the restaurant and seeing if Luke will come get me. Obviously, that's the concussion talking.

He felt so good on top of me.

Fuck. I really need to stop thinking about him.

I look at the time. I've been here so long Jason's shift is about to end. Maybe he can give me a lift home. I won't bother him after that. I'll just set my alarm to wake me up.

I'm texting him when Danvers strides into my cubicle without so much as a warning.

"Jason sent me to check on you," he announces.

"I'm fine."

He rolls his eyes. "Yeah, you look it."

I almost flip him off before self-preservation kicks in. It's never wise to piss off a vampire.

"Are they checking you in?" he asks.

"No, I'm going home."

He gives me a skeptical look.

"I fucking hate hospitals, okay?"

"Well, they don't do a damn thing for your personality, that's for sure. You want a ride home?"

For a second I consider refusing, but that would be too petty. "Yeah, I do. I'm supposed to get a prescription and discharge instructions. Then I can get out of here."

“I’ll wait in the lobby.”

“You don’t have to.”

“You’ve been a good friend to Jason, so, yeah, I do.”

Danvers walks me to the door of my apartment, apparently concerned I might keel over on the sidewalk.

“Set your alarm for thirty minutes from now,” he orders. “If you lie down, you shouldn’t sleep too long.”

I’m desperate for some real sleep even though I know he’s right. “I’ve got to—”

“Do it.”

“Yes, sir.”

“And don’t even think about trying to come to work tomorrow night.”

Can he read my fucking mind? “I wasn’t.”

His glare gives me chills.

“Fine. How did you know?”

“You’re a cop, and you think you have something to prove, so I can’t expect you to have the sense to rest when you need to and not come to work half out of it. You got anything else to add about last night?”

I start to shake my head and catch myself. Damn, that’s already getting old. “I still can’t remember anything.”

“Okay, if that changes, let me know,” he says. His tone is softer now, like he’s actually concerned about me.

“I will.”

“Did you actually question Luke, or do you not remember that either?”

“I... I don’t think so. I don’t remember getting past introducing myself.”

“And you’d never met him before?” Danvers asks.

“Not really; only when he served me at Foxy’s. Why?”

He shrugs. “Just curious.”

There’s more, but I’m not going to get it out of him, so I say good night or rather good morning.

I wake to a banging sound. Is it inside my head? It sure as hell feels like it. Sun is streaming through my window, so I shut my eyes against it and pull the covers over my head.

The sound continues. Why the fuck won’t it stop? Maybe I should have another pain pill.

“Silas! Silas, you better answer this door, or I’m going to break it down.”

A woman’s voice. Is that Natalie?

I push myself to a sitting position, and the room starts spinning. *Fuck.*

“Silas!”

My name seems to bounce around in my skull, making me nauseous.

“Coming!” Maybe. If I’m lucky. I shift slowly, one leg at a time, until I can attempt to stand.

I grab the edge of the nightstand as the room whirls around me. I’m determined to make it to the door, but every fucking step feels like it’s going to make my head explode. Finally, I reach my destination, wrestle with the locks, and yank the door open. Jason’s sister, Natalie, is standing there. “I was about to shift and kick it in,” she scolds. “What took— Oh, you really look awful.”

No way do I look as bad as I feel, or she would’ve run screaming.

I sway on my feet, and she grabs my arm.

“Let me help you.” She laces her arm through mine and practically pulls me to the couch.

Don't puke. Don't puke. My stomach is not impressed by my mental efforts. I close my eyes and take careful breaths.

“You should be in the hospital,” she says.

“No shit.”

“So you admit it?”

“Yeah, but I'm not going back. I fucking hate hospitals.”

Natalie laughs. “I think that's the first time I've ever heard you cuss.”

Everyone thinks I'm younger than I am, and the fact that my mom ingrained her no-cussing rule so well doesn't help. “I cuss, but I was taught to be a gentleman.” Wow, that sounds lame.

“I like that about you,” Natalie says.

“Thanks, but people treat me like a kid because I'm polite. I'm tired of people trying to save me.”

“We all need saving some of the time.”

I hate how right she is. “I guess I'm a mess right now.”

“You've got a concussion; you're allowed to be a mess.”

“I hate this. I really need to get back to work.”

“Eventually, but right now my job is to see that you're resting. If you overdo it, Jason and Drew will be pissed at me, and I really don't want to deal with that.”

I smile for maybe the first time since leaving the hospital. “Danvers is a bit scary.”

“He's a good man, though.”

I nod, and my head doesn't explode. Maybe I'm going to live after all.

“So Jason sent you?” I ask.

“He said you shouldn't be alone, but you're too much of a stubborn fuck to ask for help.”

“He has that right. Did he tell you what happened last night?”

“A little, and I saw something about it on the news. I love Foxy’s Chicken. I hope he can reopen soon.”

“Me too. Do you know the owner?”

“Luke? Not really. I’ve seen him in the restaurant, though.”

She pauses, and I look up to see her watching me knowingly.

“He’s hot as fuck, isn’t he?”

“I don’t—”

The look she gives me dares me to protest. “Okay, he’s damn hot, but I need to talk to him about the case.”

“I’m sure someone else is taking care of that.”

I sigh. “It’s not really the case, not exactly. I... I can’t remember what happened to me, and it’s...disturbing.”

She frowns. “That would freak me out too.”

“I tried calling Foxy’s last night when I got home, but no one answered.” I shouldn’t ask her and yet... If I want to talk to him, what choice do I have? “Would you go down there, or...”

She exhales audibly. “You’re going to get me in trouble.”

“With Jason?”

“And Wolf”—her boyfriend—“or Drew, or even Lt. Morrison.”

“Never mind.” I shouldn’t have asked.

She shakes her head. “I’m going to do it. I don’t let them tell me what to do.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. You deserve to find out the whole story.”

“Full disclosure. The doctor told me not to push, to let the memories come back naturally.”

She snorts, sounding very like the deer she is. “Doctors. You’ll feel a lot better once you can remember.”

“Yeah, I think I will.”

“So what do I say to Luke?”

“Ask him to come here and talk to me. I doubt he’ll want to, but—”

“Did he get a look at you?” Natalie asks.

“Obviously, since he tried to save me.”

Natalie sighs. “Then he’ll come.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because you’re rather hot yourself.”

I try to protest, but Natalie doesn’t let me. “Luke or I will be back soon. Try not to do anything else to disobey doctor’s orders while I’m gone. I’ll be in enough trouble for helping you break who knows how many regs. I, at least, need to keep you alive.”

“Don’t worry about me. It’s not as bad as it looks.”

“Do you think I’m an idiot, or are you that delusional?”

She’s out the door before I have a chance to answer.

LUKE

I'm in fox form, approaching my cousin, Harry's lake house —lake compound more like—from the surrounding woods. I suspect he and his brothers are running all their operations from here. I'm less than half a mile from the house, and I'm scenting cat shifter. At least three of them. The smell is strong and rank, a deliberate marking.

The family has never worked with cat shifters. Why would they start now? But if the cats are rivals, how did they get this close without being detected, and why haven't my cousins covered over their scent markings?

As nauseating as the smell is, I put my snout to the ground and sniff, trying to learn anything I can. As the cats' scent grows stronger, I also detect motor oil, gasoline, and leather, meaning they also work with cars. *Is this an alliance?*

I force myself to move along the line of scent markers to see what else I can learn. I've now detected five different cats. Something big is going on, and I need to know what.

I move closer to the house, alert for sounds of danger. A twig pops, and I freeze, scenting the air, trying to catch anything other than the cat stink.

A rabbit. My fox instincts want me to give chase, but my human side knows I have to stay focused.

I continue on my path toward the house, tension building with each step. Several paces farther on, I hear a click, and light floods the area.

“Freeze!” a man shouts.

I run. He shoots at me but misses. I don't slow down. He might aim better next time.

How the fuck did I miss the security system? I'm usually better than that.

Finally I've run far enough that the man has given up chasing me. I'm going to have to do more research about local cat-shifter gangs. At home. In human form. After a big dinner. I won't be having chicken tonight. Before I shift, I'm going after that rabbit.

“Luke?” It's my front manager, Beth. She insisted on coming in to help clean up the last of the debris so we could reopen.

“What do you need?”

“There's a woman named Natalie out front. I recognize her as a customer. She says she has a message for you from the cute little cop.”

I jump up and nearly knock Beth down in my haste. So much for playing down my interest.

Beth smirks. “I like you like this. Get his number, or I'll get it for you.”

I scowl and walk past her. I don't need to get involved with a cop. Hell, I don't believe in getting involved with anyone.

I recognize Natalie. She's a deer shifter, probably related to the CSI guy from last night. What's his name? Jack? No, Jason. But Natalie usually comes in with Wolf, the werewolf cop.

“I'm Luke.” I hold out my hand. She shakes with a firm grip. “Beth told me Silas sent you.”

She nods. “He wants to talk to you.”

“So why did he send you?”

She glares at me. “Because he’s in so much pain he can barely walk across the room to answer the door, and you aren’t answering your phone.”

I pull my phone from my pocket and glance at the screen.

“The restaurant phone,” she says. “He doesn’t have your number.”

Oh, right. Why am I acting like an asshole with no brains?

Because you want this guy and wish you didn’t.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking how slowly he’d heal. We don’t answer the phone when we’re closed.”

“He’s not like us. He’s human, and he gets hurt easily.”

I have a feeling she’s not just talking about physical pain. She’s warning me off.

“If he’s that bad off, what is he doing working?”

“He’s on medical leave. This isn’t official business, or I wouldn’t be here. He shouldn’t be talking to you at all, but he’s got some questions, personal ones.”

I glance at my watch. I’ve got a few more hours’ work I should finish so we can reopen once the windows are installed.

“How urgent are these personal matters?”

“He doesn’t remember the explosion. He knows he came into Foxy’s to question you, but he has no memory of anything from then until he was in the ambulance. It’s making him crazy. Drew—Detective Danvers—told him what the witnesses said, but he wants to talk to you about it. I suspect he wants your theory on what happened too.”

I should stay away. I’m no good for Silas. Involvement with him wouldn’t do a damn thing for me either. Foxes are meant to be loners, but I can’t get him out of my head. I’ve wasted half the time I was supposed to be working daydreaming about some unofficial business I’d like to conduct with him.

“So where will I find him?”

“You’ll talk to him?”

I nod. "I'll tell him everything he wants to know."

"Everything?" She looks skeptical.

"Even a fox can be honest on occasion."

She narrows her eyes. "Why?"

"I like him."

"Don't hurt him. He's a good man."

"And I'm not?"

Natalie sighs. "I don't know you except by reputation, so maybe I'm being unfair, but don't take advantage of him."

I'm angry when I have no right to be. My reputation says taking advantage of him is exactly what I'd do. "He's a big boy. He can take care of himself."

She glares at me, and I see the strength in her. If she were in deer form, I'd be in danger of being kicked. "Silas tries hard to seem strong even when he's hurt and vulnerable, and I... Forget it." She huffs and heads toward the door.

"Wait," I call out. I need to see Silas. I can't let my stupid hurt feelings get in the way. "I won't hurt him. I mean that. I'm known as a player, but I make my intentions clear. If someone isn't okay with a no-strings-attached fuck, then I walk away. I like giving pleasure, not making people miserable. I'm not like my cousins. Anything beyond talking is Silas's call."

She looks away and fidgets a bit. "I shouldn't be doing this."

"What? Encouraging me to see Silas?"

She nods. "He's part of the investigation. He might eventually need to question you officially."

"And I'll cooperate with his every need." The innuendo comes out before I can stop it. It's reflex.

Natalie shakes her head. "You can't help yourself, can you?"

"No, but I'll keep my word. Where does he live?"

She studies me for a few seconds. I wait her out until she gives me his address.

Half an hour later I knock on his door. “Silas! It’s Luke.”

No answer.

I knock harder.

Still nothing.

What if he’s lost consciousness? Stubborn bastard should be in the hospital. I yell a few more times and rattle the door. The flimsy thing wouldn’t do shit to keep a shifter out. Talk about vulnerable.

I drive my shoulder against the door until it gives and charge into the room.

He’s lying on the couch. He stirs but doesn’t fully wake.

“Silas! Fuck!” I pull out my phone to call 911, but he opens his eyes.

I kneel beside the couch. “You okay?”

“L-Luke?”

“Yeah.”

“Did I kiss you?”

I sputter. “What?”

He frowns. “Dream. It was a dream.”

His gaze drops to my lips. I should step back, give him a chance to shake off the dream, but I can’t.

He looks back up at me, pupils dilated. “Not really thinking straight right now.”

Nothing straight about my thoughts either.

He licks his lips, making my pulse pound in my ears. I want to lean over and taste him. He wouldn’t resist, but he’s loopy from pain medicine or the concussion or both, and I can’t take advantage of that. I lean back. “Natalie said you wanted to talk to me.”

“Yeah.” His voice is scratchy with sleep.

“Should I get you some water?”

He nods.

I bring him a cup of water. He downs most of it and frowns.

“What’s wrong?”

“I have no idea when I last ate.”

I glance toward his kitchen. “You got anything here?”

“I doubt it.”

I pick up the pill bottle from the end table. “You shouldn’t be on these without food.” I wince at my scolding tone. Since when do I care about rules like that?

“Maybe it’s that instead of the concussion that’s making me feel so bad.”

“Maybe it’s all of the above.” And maybe the stubborn little bastard needs someone to take care of him. I guess for now that’s going to have to be me, the guy who usually likes to come and run. But with Silas, despite what his fuzzy memories tell him, I’ve never even gotten a kiss.

I pull out my phone. “What do you want?”

He closes his eyes, and I think he’s fallen back asleep. But then he says, “Pad Thai. I know that’s weird, but it’s the only thing I can think of that doesn’t make me feel sick. There’s a place I order from that’s not far from here.”

I smile. “Thai Palace. I know it.” Something about the hot little Southern boy wanting Thai food for comfort is so fucking... Adorable? That is not a word I intend to start using. But whatever I might call it, it’s not doing a damn thing to shut down my need to take care of him. I want to make him comfortable. I shake my head. It must be pent-up sexual needs fucking with my head.

I call in our order and have it delivered.

“While we wait on food, you want to tell me what’s so urgent you had to talk to me while you still look like death?”

He frowns. “Do I...?”

“What?”

“Look that bad?”

“You’re hurt, and...fuck, you don’t really look that bad, just paler than usual and all mussed up.” Which is killing me after the buttoned-up cop look.

He gives me that shy smile that makes my cock suggest all manner of lewd things I could do to make him blush more. But a few seconds later, he gets that fucking lost look on his face, and all I want to do is make it go away.

“I can’t remember what happened last night. When I try my head hurts worse. I walked into the restaurant. I saw you, and then there were paramedics around me. Other than that it’s just flashes. Your voice. And... I really didn’t kiss you?”

Oh, how I wish he had. Should I tell him how close he came? “No, you didn’t. I touched your face to get you to wake up; that’s probably what you’re remembering.”

“No, I...never mind.” His face is red now, no longer deathly pale. “Tell me everything, please. I don’t care what the doctor says. I won’t feel better until I know.”

I recount everything I can remember, except for the almost kiss that Beth interrupted. I’m too embarrassed to admit how close I actually came to kissing him while he was bleeding and out of it. Or how bad I still want to, despite the concussion and painkillers, despite his fuzzy memories. I want to pull him to me and kiss the fuck out of him. I want him moaning as I push into his mouth, and that isn’t the only thing I want to be inside of.

The doorbell rings before my thoughts go any further.

Silas directs me to his napkins and utensils, and we eat sitting on the couch. We don’t talk much. I’m hungrier than I’d realized before opening my yellow curry. “Damn, that’s good.”

Silas smiles. “Yeah, it is. I get their takeout a lot.”

I’m glad to see Silas has a good appetite. He polishes off most of his Pad Thai in a few minutes. Then he slows down, and I

catch him watching me, grinning.

“What?” I ask.

“You don’t want to hear it...” Color comes into his cheeks again, and his eyes look far more focused than they did when I woke him. The focus is all on me, and my cock likes that a lot.

“Yes?” What am I hoping he’ll say? *Wanna fuck?* I’m sure that’s even more against doctor’s orders than trying to remember what happened last night.

“My mom used to read to me from Aesop’s fables a lot. I loved the one about the fox and the stork, yet here I am having dinner with a fox.”

I smile. “And enjoying every bite. I’ve got no tricks planned. I swear.”

“Why did he do it?”

His change of subject throws me. “My uncle?”

He nods and then winces. “I keep forgetting not to do that.”

I scold myself for being disappointed that he wants to talk about the case instead of the sexual tension hanging between us. “My uncle hates me, but that’s nothing new. I have no idea why he came after me now.”

“You knew he was alive?” Silas asks.

“I suspected it, but I didn’t have proof.”

I look up from my curry and catch him checking me out. He looks away quickly and starts fiddling with the blanket he’s been using. “Tell me what you know about your cousins.”

The cop voice. Why the fuck does that turn me on?

Because you want to bend him over in his tight little uniform pants and take the law in your hands.

“On the record?” My voice sounds rough, like I’ve been doing what I’m fantasizing about.

He looks back at me, studying me for a few moments, a cop’s assessment, not a lover’s. “I’m on medical leave, so nothing is on the record.”

“But you have every intention of using what I say when you’re back at work.”

“Don’t you want your uncle prosecuted?”

“I do, but—”

“You don’t trust cops.” He’s far more alert now that he’s eaten. I could almost think he’s back to his normal self.

“Cops—hell, most people—don’t trust foxes.”

“Should we?” he asks. He watches me, and I know he’s trying to read me. I pick up our now empty takeout boxes and carry them to the kitchen, needing to be away from his scrutiny.

“Give me a day or two. I’ll have more info for you then.” Did I really just say that? Am I going to work with the cops? Do I want Silas that badly?

You want justice. And yeah, you want him that badly.

“Don’t do something stupid,” Silas says.

I raise my brows. “You’re the one who refused to stay in the hospital.”

“I... I don’t like hospitals, okay?”

“Who does?”

“No one, I guess, but I had a bad experience.”

I wait silently, letting him decide to tell me or not.

He shifts position until he’s lying on his side with his head resting on the pillows he’s stacked on the end of the couch. I’m about to ask if he’s okay and if he needs more of his pain meds when he starts talking.

“When I was eighteen some guys beat me up because I’m gay. I fought back, but there were three of them and I ended up in the hospital. My nurse the first night told me it was my fault, that if I were a real man, I wouldn’t have gotten myself in trouble.”

Fiery anger rushes through me. “How dare she? Did you say something?”

“I couldn’t talk. My jaw was broken.”

“That’s...” To be so vulnerable and have someone who should be caring for you abuse you.

“Horrible? Yeah, it was.”

“If I’d known, I would’ve...”

“What? Doctored me yourself?”

“I would’ve tried or gone with you.”

“But you barely know me.”

I want to find that nurse and the guys who hurt Silas and tear them apart. “No one deserves to be treated like that.”

He smiles, and he looks so soft and young. “Thank you.”

I want to hug him, but I keep my hands clenched so I don’t give in to the urge. I’ve never been one to give comfort like that. Foxes aren’t cuddlers, and I sure as hell have never been nurtured. Yet I want to wrap my arms around Silas and do my best.

Fuck! It hasn’t been twenty-four hours since he came to the restaurant to question me, and he’s got me way off-kilter. I’d normally be running as fast as I could. But that’s the last thing I want to do. It must be the stress of my uncle returning. I’ll be back to myself once I find out what he wants.

You wanted Silas before your uncle showed up.

Shut up.

The first time you saw him...

“I’m glad you didn’t stay at the hospital. Do you need anything?”

“I need information.”

“You *want* information.”

“No, I... I want to be a detective, and I have to prove I can be proactive and help solve cases.”

I study him closely. “How old are you?”

He glares at me. “I’m twenty-five.”

He looks all of nineteen, though I’d known he had to be older.

“But that’s irrelevant. The minimum required service before applying for a detective position is two years, and I’ve hit that.”

Determined fucker, isn’t he? “So you want to figure out what’s going on and impress Danvers.”

“I...yeah.”

“I went sniffing around my eldest cousin’s house.”

“You mean that literally, don’t you? Sniffing, as a fox.”

I smile. “Yeah, I do. I hunted a bit too. Caught a rabbit for dinner. It’s so much easier than cooking, but I guess you don’t want to hear about that.”

He tries so hard not to look repulsed. It’s adorable.

“I’ll get you something.” Or die trying. Please don’t let it be door number two.

“Don’t endanger yourself for me. That’s not what I meant.”

He’s far more worth it than most of the people or things I’ve nearly gotten killed over. “I take risks everyday by defying my family and choosing my own life. I think you already took the brunt of that.”

“Your uncle will try again, won’t he?”

“I could answer that better if I knew exactly what it is he wants—me scared or me dead. I’m thinking scared since it was just a flashbang. I’m guessing it’s a warning that he wants something from me.”

“But if you don’t give him what he wants...”

“Then he might try to kill me. I’ll worry about that when it happens.”

Silas starts to protest, but I hold up my hand. “I’ve had my family’s crimes hanging over me my whole life. I’m used to the risk.”

“You should have someone protecting you.”

“Then that person would be in danger.”

Silas frowns. “I fucking hate being unable to do anything.”

“Even if you had clearance from your doc, I’d never let you confront my family with me because: One. I already almost got you killed. Two. You’d be putting your job at risk. Three. I work alone.”

“What are you, Batman?”

I snort. “Hardly. Just because some wiseass decided to call fruit bats flying foxes that doesn’t make us related.”

He laughs. “Just be careful. Please. I don’t want you hurt.”

My chest constricts. I want—no, *need*—to kiss him. “I should go.”

Silas sits up quickly, and the color drains from his face. “Fuck, I’m dizzy. I thought that was getting better.”

“Are you sure you’re okay on your own?”

“Yeah, I’m...yeah.”

“I can get a doctor to come here and take another look at you.”

“How? No one makes house calls for poor-ass cops.”

“My friend would. She’s a shifter, but—”

“I don’t have anything against shifters. Jason, Wolf, and Natalie are some of the best people I know, and you don’t seem so bad either.”

That shy smile is going to do me in. I give him my best foxy grin in return. “Don’t let that get around.”

He tries to stand. I grab his arm, but he pulls away. “I need to go to the bathroom.”

“At least let me help you walk there.”

“Okay.” His voice quavers, and I know right then that I’ll do whatever it takes to protect him. I don’t care that he’s a cop or that he might have to interrogate me officially. I have no intention of acting within the law when it comes to dealing with my family. Not that I actually think of them as family now. I’ve made my own family—most of them work at the restaurant, a few of them are friends from business classes, and now there’s Silas.

Wait. What the fuck am I saying? Relationships can't happen this fast, not even friendship. And yet...

Silas shivers, and I realize how cold he feels, even for a human. I hold him up and help him cross the small apartment. "Let me call my friend Lucy."

"The shifter doc?"

"Yes."

We make it to the bathroom before he says, "Okay."

"Really?" I'd expected more protest.

"I'm probably crazy, but I trust you."

He turns and looks at me, and my heart skitters like I'm a kit with his first crush.

"I wish you had," he says, his voice low, breathy.

"Had what?"

"Kissed me."

"Siiiiilas." I groan.

"I'm sorry, but—"

"I almost did." *I'm so going to regret this.*

He smiles. "Yeah?"

"I want to say I stopped because you were hurt and only half conscious, but that wasn't it. Beth, my manager, walked in and caught us."

He leans against the bathroom doorframe and looks up at me, lips parted, eyes dark.

No. No. No. I can't kiss a man when he's under the influence of pain meds and a concussion. Or can I? Oh, fuck.

I brush his lips with mine. A barely there kiss.

He gasps. That small intake of breath is so fucking erotic. I can't resist having more.

He reaches up and cups the back of my head, pulling me to him, and my attempt at following some gentlemanly code

that's already foreign to me vanishes.

I kiss him for real, tasting him, slipping my tongue between his parted lips, pressing our bodies together, letting him feel how much I want him. I slide my arm around his waist, holding him up. Fuck! What am I doing? He's too dizzy to stand.

I pull back, and we stare at one another, breaths ragged.

"Tell me that kiss really happened."

"It did." My cock is abso-fucking-lutely sure of that. "It was stupid, but it happened."

"Stupid?" He looks hurt.

"Oh, fuck, I don't mean... It was hot. God, so hot, but you're in pain, and—"

"I know what I'm doing."

"You weren't even sure it was real."

"That's not the concussion. A guy like you..."

"Tell me you're not about to say you can't believe I'm into you. Do you know how fucking hot you are?"

He huffs. "Be serious."

"I'm way serious. Your skin. Your hair." I reach out and slide my fingers through his thick blond hair because I can't resist. It's as soft as it looks. "Fucking gorgeous."

He licks his lips, and I catch myself leaning in for another taste. I step back so rapidly I almost fall. "Are you okay? Can you manage?" I gesture into the bathroom.

"Oh, yeah. I'm fine. But I wish..." The wistful look on his face does things to me it shouldn't.

"This whole...whatever we've got going is insane, but whether or not we ever pursue it, we're not fucking until you're healed."

He sucks in his breath, and his eyes widen.

"Go on. Do what you need to. Then I'll help you get settled in bed or on the couch." I pray he'll choose the couch. If I have

to tuck him in bed, my baser nature might win out.

SILAS

I haven't heard from Luke since he came by three nights ago. Why the hell hadn't I asked for his number?

Because you were too busy checking him out and basically begging him to fuck you.

I ignore that irritating, critical voice. At least I'm feeling better. His friend Lucy came by, checked me over, and gave me some herbs that have helped better than anything the doc at the hospital did for me. I can sit up without being dizzy and look at the screen of my laptop without feeling like my head might explode, which is good because I have every intention of learning more about Luke and his family. After all, I have to have something to do to keep from going stir-crazy.

All I'd known about Luke when Danvers sent me over—other than the fact that he was hot as hell and made the best chicken ever—was that he was related to the leaders of a crime ring. His cousins had recently been arrested after a case involving a young man under the protection of Lt. Morrison's boyfriend, Brandon. They had managed, likely through bribery, to be allowed out on bond.

I wonder if Brandon would talk to me. Of course even asking him could get me in trouble with the lieutenant since I'm still on leave. That's the last thing I need since I'm hoping to be one of the youngest APD detectives ever. I could blame my stupid behavior the other night on the concussion and pain meds—not that I didn't know what I was doing with Luke—but now, looking for trouble is downright stupid. Part of me

doesn't care. Part of me is tired of being the guy who always follows the rules.

One way or another I'm going to find out about Luke's past and help him—and Danvers—figure out what's going on with Luke's family. I'm making an assumption that Luke is as innocent as he says he is. Something any investigator knows not to do. Then again, some of the best decisions are the ones based on gut feelings.

I contemplate calling Brandon, but at this time of night he's probably at his club, Shift. The thought of the throbbing music makes my head start aching again. I'll have to stick with what I can find online for now.

My phone rings as I'm reading about the arrest of three fox shifters, all sons of Oscar Redtail. Initially, they were charged with first degree murder, grand larceny, reckless endangerment, and assault, but the murder charges were dropped on a technicality—in other words, the judge was bribed—and they'd yet to be indicted on the other charges. I glance at my phone. It's Danvers calling. I better answer.

“Bixby.”

“Bad news. We just picked up your man breaking into his cousin's house.”

“My man?” I ask, though I know he must mean Luke.

“Luke Redtail. Remember him? I hear he came over the other night.”

My pulse speeds up and throbbing pain in my head sends me to the couch to lie down. I haven't taken anything stronger than ibuprofen today, but that's a good thing. I need a clear head to deal with this.

“I needed to ask him about the accident,” I explain. “I still can't remember what happened, and it's driving me crazy.”

“The doctor said—”

“Like you would listen to a doctor.” Oh, fuck, I think I crossed a line with that. At this rate, my suddenly volatile temper's

going to get me fired faster than my interest in Luke. Have I developed a self-destructive streak or what? “I’m sorry, sir.”

“Of course I never listen to fucking doctors, or I didn’t as a human. I don’t need the bastards now. That doesn’t mean I don’t expect you to follow medical advice. We need you fit for duty ASAP.”

“Yes, sir.” It was easier to pretend to agree, then ignore him.

“So all you did with Mr. Redtail was ask about the incident at Foxy’s?”

“Um...yes, that’s it.” God, I’m the worst liar ever.

“Are you trying to get fired? Because you’re doing a damn fine job of it.”

“No, sir. I love my job. In fact, I actually...”

Danvers makes an impatient sound. “Actually what?”

“I want to make detective, sir.”

He whistles. “This soon, huh?”

Surprisingly, there’s no mockery in his tone. “Yes.”

“Then quit fucking suspects.”

“*Is* he a suspect?” Could I blame my sassy mouth on my concussion?

“I sent you to question him.”

“True, but we usually question family even if we have no reason to believe they’re involved.”

“As far as I can tell, Luke, while far from a law-abiding citizen, is a decent man, but he’s still involved in the case, more so now thanks to his fucking fool attempt to do the investigative work for us.”

“I’m not sleeping with him, sir. Even if I wanted to, I was in no shape the night he was here.”

Danvers sighs. “I forget how slowly humans heal.”

“Right; us weaklings don’t take damage like you do.” What would it be like to suddenly not be human anymore? As

awesome as it would be to heal quickly and be essentially immortal, I don't think I want to find out.

"Did this concussion rattle your brain worse than I think? You're usually not this caustic."

What is going on with me? "Maybe it did, sir. I don't feel like myself."

"Well, do your best to get yourself in line. I'm coming over to find out more about the nature of your discussion with Luke."

"I can come—"

"No, you'll stay put. I won't have you doing anything else stupid."

I spend the time while I wait—possibly to be suspended—digging further into Luke's family despite that being the last thing Danvers would want me doing. Well, besides fucking Luke. His cousins sure are a nasty bunch.

I check my watch. Danvers will be here any minute. I close my laptop, leave it on the bed, and settle myself on the couch. I start flipping through channels so I'll look like I'm innocently resting and watching TV.

Keep your mouth shut, and let him do the talking.

I could do that, right? I don't know what was wrong with me on the phone. I'm typically a model of efficiency and obedience. Maybe I am tired of being so fucking good, of sucking up, of looking for a way to make myself shine. Still, I have to keep myself in line with Danvers. He's not a by-the-rules guy, but I can only push him so far.

Danvers lets himself into my apartment after only a single knock. Apparently Jason has given him my key.

"Don't I have to invite you in?" I ask as he shuts the door behind him.

"Invite me in?" His look of disgust makes me smile. "What are they teaching in the supernaturals course at the academy these days?"

Bigoted, outdated nonsense. "Fuck all."

“Shoot us on sight probably.”

I shrug. “Something like that.”

“Bixby, you’re a good cop, one who actually cares. You ask good questions. You do your job without complaining. You’re proactive. But there are rules you can’t break.”

I nod, glad it no longer makes me queasy.

“I came over here because I want to talk to you without anyone listening in, even to my side of the conversation. I need you to be honest. I’m not here to bust you, but if I catch you fraternizing with a suspect again, I will write you up. You got that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Also, do not ask Natalie to help you break the regs again, any regs, APD’s or a doctor’s.”

“Yes, sir,” I say, looking at my feet. I feel like a scolded schoolboy, not that I ever had a vampire as a teacher.

Danvers smiles. “I know she volunteered to help you, but neither Wolf nor I want her involved in this.”

And no one but Lt. Morrison contradicts Wolf and Danvers.

“Yes, sir.”

Danvers chuckles. “All politeness now, huh?”

“I don’t know what got into me on the phone.” By the way, Danvers is way scarier in person.

“I kind of like you all mouthy.”

If I didn’t know how crazy he is for Jason, I’d think he’s flirting with me, which is unsettling, more because Danvers is really fucking hot than because he’s a vamp.

“I want to know everything Redtail told you,” Danvers says.

“Everything?”

“Feel free to leave out the dirty talk.”

Heat rises to my face. I stumble over the first few words, but I manage to tell him everything he needs to know. At least I can leave out all the intimate details, like how thick Luke’s thighs

are and how his hands are surprisingly gentle. Or how he has this way of rubbing his thumb over my waist as he kisses me that's just...unnh. Even though it feels like a betrayal, I tell Danvers that Luke's planning to get information for me.

If I'd been talking to some detective I didn't know, I wouldn't have mentioned it. What does that say about me? I've been a loyal cop for the last two years. I believe in justice, in telling the truth, but I would have lied by omission for Luke, a man I just met, a man who likely has nothing to give me but a good fuck or two. If only I could blame this idiocy on the concussion.

I trust Danvers, though. If Luke is lying and he's really involved with the family business, I'll have to do my job, but if he's innocent, Danvers won't try to pin anything on him just because he's itching to make an arrest or because Luke's a fox.

"Thank you," Danvers says. "I'm going to go talk to the idiot. If he tells us what he's found out, I'll drop the B&E charges. The last thing I care about is the sanctity of these bastards' home, but I can't act like it didn't happen. He's lucky they didn't shoot him or worse."

"Worse?" Do I really want to think about that?

"Rumor has it some of the crime ring's enforcers are werewolves they keep locked up, barely fed. Basically, they've turned them savage."

"Oh my God, that's sick. It's..." I'm too horrified to think of another adjective.

"Yeah, it is, but since they aren't human, it's hard to find anyone who cares enough to try to stop it. If we can nail these bastards, maybe we can help the wolves if they're not too far gone."

Before I'd actually worked as a cop I would've asked how the hell it was possible the foxes were getting away with this, but now I knew. Between lack of manpower, dirty cops, dirtier government officials, and human prejudice, it's a wonder any law enforcement takes place at all. Any crime that isn't directly harming humans tends to be ignored.

So few charges stick anyway. The courts are swamped with cases, and it's far too easy to pay someone off and get a trial dismissed. People like Luke's family post bail and head back out to continue their life of crime, probably never seeing a courtroom.

"Should Jason or I check on you later?" Danvers asks.

"No, I'm okay."

"Then remember, you're on medical leave. That means no work. You don't talk to suspects or look for new angles or dig into Luke's past."

Could vampires actually read your fucking mind? I hadn't thought so.

Danvers narrows his eyes at me. "It's a good thing Jason likes you so much, or I'd be tempted to suspend you for more than medical reasons. Stay away from everyone involved with this case except me. Rest, get better, and I'll send you back out there. But if I even think you're going to find your way to Luke's bed—"

"I never said—"

"You don't need to say anything. The man is hot, and he goes after what he wants."

"I thought you didn't know him."

"I know of him, and I know his type," Danvers says.

"Thanks, Mom."

Danvers smiles. "The sass returns."

"I'll stay away until the case is over." Will I really? I'm not sure I can.

"Good. Otherwise, I don't give a goddamn who you fuck as long as it doesn't create a hassle for me or get you fired. I do not want to break in another rookie."

Danvers leaves before I can think of anything to say in response. That was a compliment, right?

My laptop is calling to me. I need to figure out what prompted the attack on Foxy's. Every step I take seems to make my brain bang against my skull. Is the return of my headache a sign I should forget it?

Resting will help you heal faster so you can get back on the job.

I ignore my conscience like I'm ignoring the pain, open my laptop, and continue digging. I scroll through a page that pops up but seems unrelated. It contains pictures from fundraising events, but—wait. Is that Luke?

It is. It has to be. What is he doing at a party that according to the caption is hosted by his cousins? He told me he'd barely spoken to them in years, but there he is, in a photo less than a year old, wearing a fucking tux—which, holy hell, he looks fine in—and holding a glass of champagne.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. Is Luke working with them after all? Is Foxy's some kind of front? Am I that naive? If so, he's a damn good con, but like I said, I have terrible taste in men.

Foxy's is open again. He's probably there.

No. Danvers will find out. I'm certain vamps don't have all the powers people attribute to them, but Danvers always seems to know things he shouldn't.

My stomach rumbles. How long has it been since I've eaten? The fact that I'm asking probably means too long. I close my laptop and stand. It takes a few seconds to get my balance, but at least I can walk across the apartment at a normal pace now.

I open the freezer and discover a few frozen burritos hiding behind a nearly empty tub of ice cream. My stomach lets me know that eating one is a terrible idea. I check the next shelf and find a few ham and cheese hot pockets. Not the best option, but better. I heat one in the microwave. As I wait, I keep glancing at my phone. I could call Foxy's just to see if Luke is there.

I pick up the phone and twirl it in my hands.

Put it down, and let Danvers handle this.

This time, I let my conscience win. When I finish eating I head for the couch because it's closer than my bed and I'm exhausted. I stare at the black screen of the TV, trying to decide if I can actually stay awake to watch something.

My phone rings, startling me. I don't recognize the number, but I answer anyway.

"I got info. You want it?" It's Luke.

Tell him to call Danvers. That's the right thing to do, but I want him to come over.

"Silas? You there?"

"Yeah, I am. Did you talk to Danvers?"

"Yes, the vampire interrogation squad just left."

"So he didn't arrest you?"

"No, I gave him enough intel to get him off my back."

"Danvers is a good guy, and he's fair."

"Yeah, I get that. So you want to talk?"

What do I say?

Tell him you can't risk your job. It's not too late to stop this train.

But it is. It had been too late the minute Luke yanked me over the counter.

The counter? "Oh my God, I remember."

"Your memory is back? All of it?"

He sounds nearly as excited as I am. "Not everything, at least I don't think so. I remember you hauling me over the counter." I also remember the feel of his body on top of mine, shielding me. But the rest is still fuzzy. "You want to come over?"

"Yeah, I've got to run by Foxy's, but I'll be there in less than an hour."

"Okay."

After we end the call, I sniff myself and wince. I fucking stink. How bad had I smelled three days ago? It's a wonder Luke

was willing to kiss me.

I head for the shower. I'm a bit dizzy after a day with too little rest and too little food. At least if I slip and fall, it will stop me from ruining my career over a hot shifter who probably just wants a piece of my ass.

By the time I step out of the shower, I'm worn out, like I've been for a ten-mile run, but I don't smell like a sewage factory. I down four ibuprofen. I need something stronger, but I can't be in a pain-pill fog when Luke arrives.

God only knows what I might do to Luke or, better yet, let him do to me under that influence. Only his self-control and my pain kept us from fucking the other night. The feel of his hard cock rubbing against mine had been amazing. If I hadn't worried I'd pass out from the pain in my head, I would've dropped to my knees to suck him off as soon as he stopped kissing me.

What if he's not what he seems? What if he's in as deep as his cousins—selling illegal weapons, torturing wolves, killing anyone who gets in the way? Should I confront him about what I'd found? Danvers would be pissed as fuck if I did.

Another memory flashes into my mind. Luke is watching me. The look on his face is hungry. He looks more like a fox than ever, like I'm prey and he's trapped me. His mouth is inches from mine, and I'm reaching for him, stroking his cheek. His skin is so warm.

This memory is real. I'm sure of it. There are none of the fogged edges of a dream or fantasy.

A knock on the door breaks through my thoughts.

“Silas! It's Luke.”

“Just a sec!” I walk—slowly, oh so slowly—to the door and let him in.

LUKE

When Silas opens the door, all I can do is stare. He's wet from a shower. A white T-shirt clings to his torso, damp in spots where he didn't dry off well. Sweatpants hang low on his slim hips. If I had to guess, I'd say he didn't have anything on underneath them. Fuck. I swore I wasn't going to touch. I was just going to pass on info, but... Yeah. I'm in trouble.

"I shouldn't be here. Danvers warned me off, but I gave you my word."

Silas nods. "Yeah, he warned me off too, but I'm feeling reckless today."

As far as I can tell, he's been feeling reckless since I met him, but he's a big boy and it's his choice whether or not to play by the rules. I don't need another person to feel protective over or any more fucking guilt.

"Would you like a beer or something?" Silas asks as I step inside.

"Yeah, a beer would be great."

He's twitchy, and I can smell his unease as we walk to the kitchen. He hands me my beer across the bar and then leans against the counter. He's staying out of reach, which is probably best for both of us.

"My cousins moved their headquarters—the place where they keep the weapons they're selling and where sales take place—after my uncle 'died.'" I make air quotes, and Silas huffs. "I've

confirmed that they're now using my eldest cousin's lake house, but as you know, I didn't manage to get inside."

"You got caught breaking in."

"Fucking bastard has some new kind of security system I couldn't disable, so the cops showed up before I got in. My uncle's been there; I could smell him."

"How can you be sure?"

"Foxes don't have the sense of smell of dogs or bears, but we can sure as hell tell when one of us has been around, not that the evidence would stand up in court."

Silas's face wrinkles in disgust. "Why can't judges take shifter abilities seriously?"

I roll my eyes. "Don't hold your breath for that to happen. I did learn a few things, though."

"How?"

I get lost looking into his eyes. Their green is so bright, and I want to watch them widen as I push inside him. "Um... It's best I don't tell you that."

"Did you tell Danvers?"

"The information, not the methods."

"And he didn't insist on more?"

"He wants my cousins, and he's willing to bargain to get them. I may not follow every little law, but I'm a saint compared to them."

"Be careful. I don't want you to get arrested."

"Me either, but I can't let this go. They're planning something. Something big."

"A sale?"

I shake my head. "I don't think so. I get the feeling it's bigger than that. I think they're going to take over another crime organization. I smelled strangers at Harry's house, cat shifters. We don't have any cat allies, and they'd marked the perimeter. We sure as hell don't put up with that."

He frowns, and I love the way his nose wrinkles when he does. Fucking hell, I'm so far gone for this man in a way I never thought I'd be.

“You think your family's selling out?”

“There's no selling in their world. It's take or be taken. My guess is they're pretending to look weaker than they are so they can launch a surprise attack and claim more territory for themselves.”

“Physical territory?” he asks.

I don't want to tell him more, not because I'd always sworn that while I didn't want any part in the family business, I wasn't a fucking snitch. I don't want to tell him because he seems so fucking innocent. He's not. He wouldn't have survived two years as a cop if he were, but my world is so ugly, and he's...not. “Maybe physical territory, but it's more about rights to a larger section of town, a bigger game. Whatever is going on, it's not good, and I've got to stop it even if it means I go down with them.”

Silas's expression hardens. “Tell me the truth. Are you involved in this in any way?”

I shake my head. “Not now. I was as a teenager. I...” I turn away, not wanting to see the disappointment on his face. “I did things for my father and my uncle that make me sick when I think about them, things I'll never get over, but I got out when I was twenty, and I haven't been a part of anything they do since.”

I look back, and he's watching me warily. I smell fear and anger. He doesn't believe me. What the fuck have I done to make him think I'd work with those bastards?

“I found a picture of you at a fundraiser Harry hosted last year. What were you doing there?”

Fuck. He would have to see that. Do I make up a story or tell the truth—something that doesn't come naturally to a Redtail?

“Luke?”

“All right. Every once in a while, Harry or my uncle ask a favor of me. Ask isn’t really the right word. They threaten me, threaten people I care about, and I agree to make it look as though I work with them, but I don’t hurt anyone for them. I just show up.”

“And I’m guessing you didn’t tell Danvers this?”

I shake my head. “No.”

“And you wish I wouldn’t.”

“Do what you like.”

“Luke, what I’d like is to believe you’re innocent.”

The look on his face is so open, so real. He does want that.

“How did you get out?” he asks.

I run a hand over my hair. I’ve never told anyone the whole story, and I don’t want to now. If I dredge it all up, I might fall apart. I’ve pushed it aside, compartmentalized it. That’s how I get through shit like this when their world collides with mine again. “My father died. He had some provisions in his will that helped me get out. Apparently, he wished he’d had the nerve to do what I’ve done.”

He nods. “It’s pretty amazing you turned out so good.”

There’s something more to his words, but I can’t tell what. “I wouldn’t say good. I’m as sneaky as any other fox.”

Silas scowls. “You aren’t a fucking stereotype.”

I shrug. “Maybe not. I guess something must have gone wrong in the genes, and I was born with a conscience. As a kid, I went along with what I had to because I knew I’d be beaten or worse if I didn’t, but I always hated my uncle’s cruelty. I hated that we stole from people or...much worse. I didn’t want to profit off other people like that. I wish I had some great story, a doting grandmother who showed me love or a stranger who was kind to me, but I just wanted to make people feel good, so now I cook them fucking amazing chicken.”

Silas presses his lips together like he’s trying not to laugh. I can feel his tension oozing away. My words have put him at

ease.

“It’s okay to laugh. The whole fox in the henhouse thing is a marketing gimmick. It makes people feel more comfortable about slumming at a shifter place.”

Silas steps around the counter. He’s close now. I want to pull him to me. I inhale deeply, taking in his scent.

He lays a hand over mine. “I don’t... I never thought of it as slumming.”

“Thank you.” The words come out low and soft. Having people make assumptions about me because I’m a fox hurts, even if I won’t usually admit it.

Silas smiles and caresses the back of my hand with his thumb. Is it an unconscious gesture? Is he trying to soothe me?

“I grew up being taught hate. My mom believes humans having sex with shifters is bestiality, but once I got to know some shifters, I realized they weren’t at all like I’d been taught. They acted more ‘human’ than plenty of the biological humans I knew.”

“There are plenty of shifters out there who use their strength to hurt others.”

“There are, but...” He takes another step toward me. “I don’t mind being touched by a shifter or...”

“Being fucked by one?” There’s no point in sugarcoating it. We both know what we want.

He licks his lips. “Yeah.”

“So have you ever...?” I shake my head as soon as the words are out of my mouth. “Don’t answer that.”

“No, you’d be the first.” His gaze captures mine, and he looks so young, so innocent.

“We shouldn’t.”

“I know,” he says, sounding so damn disappointed.

I stand. “I guess I’d better go.”

“Or, you could stay for dinner?”

Like a date. A date that's not going to end in sex. Nope. I don't do that. Except tonight I want to.

"I could make spaghetti," he suggests before I answer. Will he be that eager to please in bed?

I shake my head. "No cooking. You're still healing."

"I could order pizza."

If I don't leave now, I'll take him to bed. I glance at my watch. "I should go check on Foxy's before closing."

"Okay. I guess you should go, then."

I take a few steps away from him. How can it be so fucking hard to just walk out the door?

I turn back.

Don't do this.

"I want to stay, but not for dinner."

"I know," he says, that innocent yet seductive look on his face. The one that's going to drive me fucking crazy.

"Are you on pain meds?" I ask. I need to be sure he really knows what he's doing.

"Just ibuprofen. I didn't want my mind clouded."

I nod. "Okay, but are you sure?"

He licks his lips, and my cock comes to full attention. "I want to know what it's like."

"To be with a shifter?"

"To be with you."

"Fuck!"

He nods. "Yes."

I realize I've been played. He never intended to make dinner. He's as sly as any fox.

"I know it's risky, but everyone thinks we've already fucked."

"Is that a good reason to take a risk?"

“No.”

“Then we—”

“The fact that I can’t stop thinking about you is. That and the fact that I jerked off this morning fantasizing about you, and it wasn’t the first time.”

That takes me by surprise. “You mean you—”

“I wanted you the first time I saw you in Foxy’s.”

No way am I going to resist him when he says things like that. I want him, and I’m a man who takes what he wants.

And then moves on. Silas and I could fuck and move on, and no one would have to know. Except that isn’t going to happen. Because one fuck isn’t going to satisfy me.

I study him. His hair is curling a bit as it dries. His cheeks are pink, his lips moist. He drops his hand to his cock and rubs himself through his sweatpants.

“One more thing,” I say, my gaze never leaving his hand.

“Yes?” There’s a catch in his voice.

“I like to be in charge in bed. Are you good with that?”

“Oh God, yes.”

I’d thought so from the way he watched me, the way he kissed, but I don’t want him getting pissed off when I start ordering him around.

“Take your pants off. Now.”

His eyes widen, but he does as I ask. And I was right, he’s naked underneath.

I swallow hard as I give him a slow once-over, hoping to make him squirm. “You give off the impression that you’re a nice boy. Talk about sly. You’d put most of my kind to shame.”

He shakes his head. “I’ve never done anything quite like this.”

“But you’ve wanted to, so it’s a real part of you.”

“One I don’t let people see.”

“I’m glad you’re showing it to me. Now put your hand on your cock and stroke yourself. I want to watch.”

He’s blushing so hard his cheeks look sunburned. Why is that so fucking hot?

He wraps his hand around his cock and works it slowly. Up and down in lazy pulls.

“Look at me,” I demand.

A second passes, then another before he obeys. “Faster,” I say, holding his gaze.

He increases his speed, and I take a few steps toward him. I need to have all of his gorgeous creamy skin on display.

He watches me, gaze dropping to my lips. I lean in like I’m going to kiss him. As I move closer, his lips part. I take the edge of his T-shirt in my hands and lift. He lets go of his cock and raises his arms so I can pull it off.

I toss it aside and step back. “Keep going.”

This time, he doesn’t hesitate. He strokes himself, and I watch, taking in the sight of him naked; a thin line of soft blond hair descends from his navel and widens above his cock; the same fine hair dusts his thighs. I want to lick every inch of him, but not yet. I want him aching for it before I touch him.

“Run your other hand over your body. Start at your neck. Then touch your chest and your abdomen and fondle your balls.”

I lean against the door to stop myself from reaching for him. He’s no practiced performer, and yet watching him move is the most erotic thing I’ve ever seen. He tweaks his nipple as his hand moves over it, gasping as he does so. Then his fingers skim over his abs. When he plays with his balls, the tempo of his strokes increases. He closes his eyes and scrunches up his face. He’s going to come soon if I don’t stop him. Part of me wants to see that, but the rest only wants him coming after I’m buried deep in his ass.

“Stop!”

He slows his pace, but he’s still sliding his hand up and down as if stopping is impossible.

“Don’t you dare come yet.”

“Are you going to make me stop?” he challenges.

“Do you want me to?” I sure as hell like it rough, but I don’t want to hurt him. The adrenaline from sex is probably relieving his pain, but he’ll feel it again after we’re done.

He lets go of his cock. “I... I don’t know.”

“You like when I tell you what to do, though?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“Good, because watching you do what I say is hot as fuck. Now help me get out of these clothes.”

He reaches for the fastenings of my pants, groaning as he opens them and pulls out my cock. “I want to taste you.”

As I kick off my shoes, I debate whether I can handle his mouth on me. Working together, we manage to get my shirt, jeans, and boxers off.

“Do you need help getting to the bed? What’s the easiest way for you to suck me and not hurt your head?”

“Um...I think if you sit on the bed, and I kneel between your legs.”

I take his arm and walk him to the bedroom, wondering what he’d say if I just picked him up and carried him. It would be easy for me, but I’ve found most humans don’t like knowing how strong we really are.

Once we’re positioned, he looks up at me. “I’ve thought about this so many times, being on my knees for you.”

I groan. I’d fantasized about it too, about ordering him to hold still while I feed him my cock, about him swallowing every inch of it, about me thrusting against his mouth as he moans around me. In my fantasies he loves being face-fucked, begs for it, but no way can I do that with his head still hurting.

“You stop if anything hurts you, okay?”

He frowns. “I don’t want to stop.”

I take hold of his chin gently so he's looking right at me. "If I even think you're doing something that's causing you pain, I'll leave, and you won't get to come."

He swallows hard. "I... I don't want that."

"Then take care of yourself."

"Okay."

"Now suck me."

SILAS

I wet my lips as I lean forward, guiding his cock to my mouth with one hand. I lick the head, tasting his precum, loving how he shudders as I do so. He's every fantasy I have, all run together—an older man, one who dominates me in bed, a shifter, a redhead. I slide my lips down his cock, needing more. I have to make this count if I'm not going to get a repeat. I will not try to make this into a relationship. I can handle whatever he's willing to give.

I take him deeper, loving the feel of his cock against the back of my throat. He groans and slides his hands into my hair. I wince as the tips of his fingers brush the lump on the back of my head. Fucking concussion.

He lets go, and I pull back.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. I can't think around you," he says.

I love that I affect him like that. "It's okay. Just—"

"I'll keep my hands on the bed, okay? It might kill me, but I'll do it."

I smile. "Sorry to put your life at risk."

"Just don't stop; that's even more necessary for my survival."

I smile as I take his cock back into my mouth, sucking the tip, then slowly sinking down again until I've swallowed his whole length.

"Silas. Oh fuck! That's..."

I stay there as long as I can before I'm forced to pull off and drag in air. After a few breaths, I place my hands on his thighs and lick his shaft. I can feel the tension in his muscles as he restrains himself from grabbing me and pushing my head back down. With his shifter strength he could force me easily. That power in him is so fucking hot, the uncertainty as I wonder if he'll snap, knowing he's literally got animal instincts.

My ability to think vanishes as I take him down my throat again. Sucking, rubbing my tongue against him, loving the taste of him as precum leaks from his slit. I grab my cock and stroke myself, so fucking turned on by the sounds he's making, the way he's holding back, letting me set the pace when it's not natural to him.

"Stop!" he orders.

Reluctantly, I let him go, sit back on my heels, and try to ignore the spinning of the room. I can't let him realize how dizzy I am, or he might not fuck me.

I lick my lips. "So good."

"Goddamn right. You're amazing, but I want to come buried all the way in your ass, making you feel so full you can't even breathe."

"Holy fuck."

"If I fuck you from behind, will that hurt your head too much?"

"I don't care." I don't, right then. My head could fucking explode, and it wouldn't matter.

"Silas," he growls.

"It'll be fine; probably the best way."

I manage to climb on the bed and get into position without falling over, which is good.

"Lube? Condoms?" Impatience snaps in his voice.

He's got me so worked up I have to try twice to get any words out. "Bottom drawer." I point toward the nightstand.

Luke yanks the drawer out so hard it falls to the floor and the contents spill: dildos, three kinds of lube, a vibrating hand massager. Fuck, I forgot to hide those. It's been ages since I had someone over.

He picks up a huge dildo with ridges, glances at me, and grins.

I swallow hard. "I don't think..."

"Oh, I do. I think you'll look amazing with this up your ass."

He grabs one of the bottles of lube—my favorite kind, thick and lasting, but not goopy—and a strip of at least six condoms from the box. I know shifters have great recovery time, but what the hell is he planning?

He takes a pillow and pushes it under me. "Get comfortable, then don't move."

His commanding voice and his certainty that I'll obey are so fucking erotic. He has me so hot, all I need to do is rub my cock against the pillow for a few seconds and I'll come.

He slicks up the dildo and slides it along my crack, teasing me, circling my hole, pressing it against me, but not hard enough to enter me.

"Luke!" My voice is choked, desperate.

"Eager?"

"Fuck me, please."

He slaps my ass lightly. "Stay still, and don't talk."

I whimper, unable to hold it in.

"Fuck, I love dragging that sound out of you," he says.

He lays the dildo down and pushes a finger into me and then another. I grip the pillow so hard my hands hurt as I fight not to push back onto him or thrust my aching cock against the mattress.

He works me open. Then I feel the tip of the dildo again.

"I'm not sure I can do this."

"I'll go slow. If you need to stop, say red. If you need me to slow down, say yellow. Okay?"

“O-Okay.”

He slides it in just a little, and I try to remember how to breathe. “That thing is fucking huge.”

“You’re the one who bought it.”

“Yeah, but it’s been a while.”

“If it were up to me, I’d have this in your ass every day.”

Don’t tempt me. I might just beg you for that.

He pushes it in farther. My ass is on fire. It’s so thick and those damn ridges. I can’t help moving, twisting, panting.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“I... I want your cock.”

“You’ll get it, but I want to see you with this up your ass. I want to watch you writhe while I fuck you with it.”

I whimper again, an embarrassing sound, but it makes him groan.

“You ready to try more?” he asks.

“Yes.” It burns, but I want him to get off on seeing me take it.

He pushes it deeper, then pulls it out. When he slides it in again, it’s easier to take, but it still hurts. A few more times in and out and suddenly I fucking need it all despite the intense stretch.

He pushes it deeper than it’s gone before; the ridges slide over my sweet spot. “Fuck! Fuck!”

“Feels good now, doesn’t it?”

“I’m going to come if you keep that up.”

“Oh no, you’re not.”

“But—”

“You come when I say you do.” He pushes it in all the way this time, and I squirm in pleasure now, not pain.

“Silas. I...” Luke pulls the dildo all the way out. I suddenly feel so fucking empty.

“Luke?”

He doesn't answer. I turn to look at him even though the movement sends pain shooting through my head.

His eyes are now vertical slits like a fox's. His hand is no longer on my hip. I glance down to where it rests on the mattress. “Holy fuck. Are those claws?”

“I won't hurt you.” His voice is more gravelly than usual.

My heart pounds, and so does my head. This is foolish, reckless, dangerous, but I don't care. Luke is shaking and can't catch his breath. I'm doing this to him. Watching me with a fucking huge dildo up my ass is doing this to him.

“I know you won't.”

“You trust me?” he asks. “Because I wouldn't blame you if you didn't.”

“I do. I don't know why, but I do.”

“If I fuck you now, I won't be able to hold back. I'll make you beg, make you lose your fucking mind.”

“Please!”

I hear him tearing open a condom. I glance back. His claws have retracted.

“I didn't know you could do that,” I say.

“Do what?”

“Shift a little, then stop or reverse it.”

“They really don't teach cops anything, do they?”

I laugh. “Not much.”

“Really young shifters can't, and it can be very hard to control. Some guys like it when I use claws.”

“Fuck.” I'm both terrified and incredibly turned on by that.

“Get ready,” he says, positioning himself behind me.

I grip the pillow under me. His cock is smaller than the dildo, but not by much.

“Don’t come until I say you can,” he says as his cock breaches my hole.

“I don’t know if I can wait.” He pushes deeper. “Fuck! That’s... Fuck!”

“You can because I want you to.”

I suck in a breath.

“You love that, don’t you, me taking charge?”

“Fuck, yes. I’ve never been this hard in my life.”

“You’ve never had another guy play this game with you?” he asks.

“No.”

“I hate that for you, but I like being the first.” He pushes deeper, and I gasp.

“Good?”

That barely begins to describe it. “Fuck, yes.”

He gives me a few shallow thrusts. “You ready to be ridden hard?”

“Fuck. Me. Now.”

He slaps my ass. “I’m giving the orders here.”

Before I can respond he drives into me, and I gasp from the shock of suddenly being so full. I’m damn glad he used the dildo on me because now I don’t need time to adjust.

He tilts my hips to change the angle and plunges in again, hitting my sweet spot. “Yes! God, yes!”

He works me over and over until I’m panting, babbling, begging. Then he grabs my hips to hold me still and stays buried deep. When I wriggle, trying to get some friction, he scores me lightly with his claws.

“Fuck! That’s...” Hot. Scary. Beyond anything I’ve dreamed of.

“I won’t go further, okay? Not tonight and never if you don’t want me too.”

Does that mean...? Is this not a one-off for him?

I look over my shoulder, so drugged with pleasure my head doesn't hurt anymore. Sweat drips down his chest. His eyes have gone foxy again. He looks fucking amazing.

"It's hard to stay in control with you," he says. "You make me...crazy."

I can see the strain on his face as he pulls out, then pushes back into me, slower than I would have thought him capable of. He lies over my back, hands on the mattress beside me. "I'll buy you a new one if I rip this one up."

Holy fuck! Was he that far gone? "Fuck me, Luke!"

He snarls, and I feel his hot breath on my neck as he drives into me. The world darkens for a second, and I fight to hold onto reality. I fucking knew sex with Luke would be intense, but it's so much better than I'd guessed. Is it always like this with shifters? Or is it Luke?

He works his hips, powerful, deep strokes dragging over my prostate until I'm bucking under him like a bronco trying to throw its rider. I need to come right this second.

"Luke. Can't. Fuck. Can't hold back." My body is on fire. I'm going to come any second.

"You're incredible, you know that?" he whispers in my ear. His voice is rough, throaty.

"Let me come!"

"I love hearing you beg. I love how wild you are."

"God, Luke. I can't—"

"Come," he orders. He sinks his teeth into the curve of my shoulder. The pain spikes my pleasure as his hand wraps around my cock and works it. One stroke. Two. I lose it then, shooting so hard it's almost painful.

His orgasm follows mine. He slams into me again and again as he spills. I'd wanted to feel it for days, and I damn well would.

I collapse against the mattress, and he falls on top of me. I don't mind his weight. I want him there, surrounding me with

his scent, his warmth, and the knowledge that I've worn him out.

LUKE

I can't move. All I can do is lie here marveling that I just had the best sex of my life. I've had plenty of good sex. Hell, I've had fucking amazing sex—or so I thought—but I've never had anyone like Silas. I look down at where I've clawed his mattress. I've never lost it like that while fucking before. Thank God I kept from hurting Silas.

I should apologize, but I can barely remember how to breathe. Eventually, I'm going to have to pull out of his ass, but I don't want to. I want to stay buried in him forever. He's the perfect fit.

When my heart rate slows enough that I can sit up without feeling dizzy, I gather the strength to move. "Brace yourself," I warn him.

I raise myself on my arms, peeling our sweaty skin apart and sliding my cock from his ass.

He winces as he rolls to the side.

"Shit, is your head okay?"

"It will be. I kind of forgot about it until just now."

"We both did. That was fucking idiotic."

"I wanted you too much to care."

I gesture at the mattress. "That shouldn't have happened either."

Silas shrugs. "It's fine. It's...um...sexy as fuck actually."

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

I can't help but grin. He likes me *and* my fox. “You sure you're okay?”

“More than okay. That was fucking incredible.”

“It was.” No way in hell could I hide how much he's affected me. The fact that I'm not sure I care worries me more because even if I want more than a night or two with Silas, the thought of any kind of relationship with him is a joke. A fox shifter and a cop? No way in hell can that work. I have no intention of letting Silas wreck his career.

I sit up and look for my pants. “I should get going.”

Silas opens his mouth like he's going to say something, but he just nods. “Yeah, okay.”

Fuck. He wants me to stay.

Leave. If you stay, you'll never want to walk away. This was just a get-him-out-of-your-system fuck.

But he isn't out of my system. He is deep inside me as if I were the one who got fucked.

I grab my pants and pull them on, not bothering to clean myself up. I'll do that once I'm home. If I didn't need to guard Foxy's, I'd just shift and spend the night in my den in the woods. That might help me clear my head.

Silas sways when he stands and sits back down. “Shit! I guess I'm not getting up after all.”

“Do you need me to stay?” I don't want him keeling over and hitting his head again.

You'll take any excuse for more time with him, won't you? When did you become his nurse?

When my fucking uncle did this to him.

Your family has hurt plenty of others, and you didn't take them under your wing—or rather paw.

Fuck off.

Silas leans back against the headboard. “I’m fine. You can go.”

I’m not disappointed. Nope. No way. “Call me if you need something, or call someone, at least.”

“I will,” he promises.

Neither of us says anything else as I pull on my shirt, make sure my keys and wallet haven’t fallen out of my pants, and walk to the door of his apartment.

I turn back toward the bedroom before I leave. “I’ll get word to you if I learn more.” *But I won’t come over again. I’ll never keep my hands off you if I do.*

It’s dark when I reach the restaurant. Everyone has gone home. I stand by the back stairs for a few moments, enjoying the quiet. I pull the note from my pocket, the note I didn’t tell Silas about.

We know what’s in the box. If you want to protect your precious restaurant and the misfit nobodies who work for you, then give us what we want.

It’s unsigned, but I have no doubt who it’s from or what they want. I’m the only one with a key—and the location—of a safe deposit box my father tried to keep secret. There’s gold in it but also a book where he’d recorded very sensitive information about “clients.” I don’t know how my uncle and cousins found out about it ten years after he died, but no way in hell are they going to get it.

I beep my car locked and start up the steps to the apartment where I live above Foxy’s, but freeze when I smell gasoline and a fox shifter I vaguely recognize as one of my cousin’s associates. I leap over the banister and see him bent over in the dark alley. I tackle him, knocking the gas container from his hands. My cousin’s scent is all over him. They obviously sent him here. We grapple, and I end up on my back in a puddle of muck so foul it nearly blots out all other scents.

Fucking bastard was going to burn my restaurant down. I try to punch him, but he dodges. We wrestle, and just when I think I've got him, he slips my hold and shifts. For a second he's tangled in his clothing, but he frees himself and flees before I can grab him. He's nothing but a streak of red disappearing down the street. I shove my clothes off and shift, but I'm not fast enough to catch up. Once I'm sure I've lost him, I head back, realizing I never should have run off in anger, leaving my building unguarded.

I circle the structure, but there's no sign or scent of anyone else, so I shift back to human form, dress, and make a few calls, setting things in motion that I'll probably regret later. Once I've committed to walking into hell, I call Martin, my head cook and closest friend. He answers on the first ring.

"I need you. A fucking friend of the family just tried to set fire to Foxy's."

"Goddamn fucking fuck!"

"Exactly. I need someone here guarding the place while I go see what I can learn from Harry." Harry is the most dangerous of my cousins but also the most likely to talk first and shoot later rather than the other way around. Sure they need me if they want the key to my dad's box, but Harry's younger brothers are big on temper and short on brains.

"Give me twenty minutes," Martin says.

I sit at one of the tables on Foxy's small patio while I wait. Scenting the air. Hoping they send someone else so I can use up the adrenaline racing through me in a good, long fight.

Martin pulls up even quicker than expected.

"I owe you," I say when he gets out of the car.

"Never. I told you. I'm on call for you anytime." I'd hired Martin despite him being a wolf with a prison record. I'd given him a chance when no one else would, and he felt like he could never pay off that debt.

I give him a rundown of what happened. "I don't know how long I'll be gone."

“You shouldn’t go. It’s probably a trap. Don’t you think it’s convenient this fox appeared just after you got home, and he’d done nothing to mask his smell?”

I sigh. I’d thought of that too, but it doesn’t change anything. “I still have to go. I can’t put anyone else at risk.”

“Did you tell the police about the note?”

“No.” I had, but I couldn’t tell Martin no matter how much I hate keeping secrets from him.

“Not even that hot boy? I smell him on you, so don’t even try to say he’s nothing to you.”

Fuck. My cousins will smell him too. I hadn’t been thinking about that, but if they’re after something, they’re watching me closely, so they’ll already know about Silas. “No, I didn’t tell the hot little cop.”

“Is that what you called him in bed.”

I flip him off.

“Are you really going in alone to pit yourself against Harry and the rest?”

“I don’t have a fucking choice.”

“Once you’re at Harry’s they might not let you leave.”

I’m certain they won’t, not with the plan I have. “Call Beth. The two of you can run things while I’m gone, and if I don’t come back... You know the place is yours, right?”

“Fuck, Luke. Don’t do this. Even if you survive, the police will think you were in on whatever they’re planning from the beginning.”

“That’s likely part of Harry’s price to protect the rest of you.”

“You don’t need to do this.”

“Yes, I do.”

I hate seeing the sorrow in Martin’s eyes, so I turn away before I change my mind or tell him what I’m actually up to. He can’t know, no one can, not even Silas.

I drive out of the city, then pull off on a road meant for the forest service back when the state still employed rangers. It's overgrown, and branches scrape both sides of my truck. I doubt the cops will reimburse me for the damage. I see Danvers's car up ahead.

You guessed it. I'm about to set myself up as an informant, one thing I swore I'd never do. But why not? My family can't hate me more than they already do.

Danvers steps out of the car and faces me. "My men are getting the surveillance and backup in place. Once I fit you with the listening device, you'll head to your cousin's house."

"What happens to the device if I need to shift?"

Danvers gives me an evil grin and holds out his hand. If I didn't have such excellent night vision, I wouldn't have seen it, but in the middle of his palm lies a tiny microchip, or at least that's what I think it is.

"Transmitter only," he says.

"Great, so I'll have no way to communicate with you?"

Danvers shakes his head. "It's too risky. Your family's already going to be suspicious when you agree to their demands."

"I'm not going to agree easily. I'm not that stupid. They'll have to force me. They'll never believe it any other way."

"Try not to get yourself killed. We'd like to actually find out what they're doing."

Such compassion. "I can take care of myself."

"Of course. Maybe I should just cancel the backup."

I glare at him, and he holds up a hand.

"We appreciate what you're doing, and we'll back you up. You have my word."

I study the chip again. "Where does this go exactly?"

Danvers grins again, showing fangs. "In your ass."

"What?"

He chuckles. “Not like you’re thinking. We make an incision in the side of your ass cheek and insert it.”

“We? Insert it? You’re not putting that fucking thing inside me.”

“It’s totally safe.”

“You’re not qualified to—”

“No, I’m not.” He opens the car door, and a young woman steps out.

“This is Dr. Martinez from the coroner’s office.”

“Coroner? I’m not dead. Yet.”

“Do you want to be? This device allows us to hear your relatives’ confession and get you out of there once you get it.”

“Fuck, Danvers. You never—”

“Drop your pants, and put your hands on the back of the car,” Martinez says in a voice that makes it clear she’s not happy about being here.

“Oh, hell no.”

“I’m a doctor. Now get over yourself.”

I look up at Danvers, and he nods toward the car. This can’t be happening.

But of course it is. I think about how the last few days have gone. The explosion. Getting caught by the police. Fucking Silas. *Silas*. My family would come after him.

“Fine.” I unfasten my pants and push them down and— “Oh my fucking God that stings!”

It’s all over in less than two minutes.

“See? Not so bad.” Martinez, the sadist, grins at me as I buckle my pants. “Dead people are so much quieter, though.” She slips back into the car and shuts the door, which is a good thing. She does not want to hear what I think of her.

“Sadistic little fuck.”

Danvers laughs. “Yeah, she is. The chip is just below the skin, but it’s in an area that won’t change enough when you shift to force it out or render it ineffective.”

“Tell me you’ve tried this out.”

He nods. “Multiple times.”

“And it worked?”

“In ninety percent of the trials.”

“Danvers!”

He shows fangs again. “You’ll be fine. Now, I’m going over the rules one more time, and if you cross me, I will leave you out to dry.”

“Don’t tell anyone I’m working with you.” I use my most sarcastic tone. “Not Silas. Not anyone at the restaurant. Not anyone at all. They have to believe I’ve made a deal with my family.”

“Right.”

Silas and I wouldn’t have worked no matter what, but I hate to think of him assuming I’d lied to him all along.

“As soon as it’s over you can tell him,” Danvers says. I’m starting to believe vamps really can read thoughts.

I shrug. “It doesn’t matter.”

He studies me for a moment. “Maybe it matters more than you think.”

Just because he’s found lovey-dovey harmony doesn’t mean I will. Foxes are loners. Then again, so are vamps.

“Make them buy it,” Danvers says. “Then once we have clear words recorded, get out.”

“And you’ll protect my people and my property.”

Danvers smiles. “And your Silas.”

“He’s not—”

“Go.” Danvers points to my car.

I arrive at Harry's house a little after midnight. His guard opens the door before I have a chance to knock.

"Expecting me?"

The man's expression doesn't change. "He's in the library."

That's a laugh. As far as I know, neither my cousin, his wife, or any of the rest of their associates have read a book since being forced to in school.

When I enter the room, my cousin is sitting behind an absurdly large desk, sipping a whiskey.

"Compensating?" I ask, inclining my head toward the massive hunk of wood.

"I suppose civility is too much to ask from you," Harry says.

"Oh, right, crime is so civil."

He rolls his eyes. "You really are a prick."

You really are a fucking ass. "What is it you think I know?"

"Many things." He's always loved making a game of it.

"Why would I tell you anything?"

"To protect your horrid little restaurant and your new boyfriend. How old is he anyway? I do hope he's legal."

"He's n—" I stop myself. *Pretend he's under your protection.* Pretend nothing. I have every intention of protecting him. "You won't touch what's mine. No matter what I do or don't tell you."

"That's where you're wrong. We have the power here, not you. Your new piece of ass is in trouble unless..."

"I see sense and join you?"

"So you do understand. We have a vacancy in our organization, and we'd like you to fill it."

"Torturer? Salesman of faulty, overpriced weapons?"

He smiles. “No, head of our pleasure division.”

“Pleasure? You mean forcing teenagers to fuck people for money, most of which they never see.”

“Everyone is well compensated.”

I want to strangle him, but I have to play along. “No way in hell am I going to be a pimp for you.”

Harry presses a few keys on his laptop. “We’re watching your boy right now. He’s so young, so vulnerable.”

“Not as much as you think.” Are they really watching, or is that a scare tactic? “What the fuck do you think I know?”

“The location of your dad’s safe-deposit-box key.”

So I was right. “Why the sudden interest?”

“Did you finally open it?”

I hadn’t at first, not right after he died. I knew there was gold there, but it was blood money, and I didn’t want it. Of course, I didn’t want someone else to have it either, and it was there if I got truly desperate. A year or so after his death, I went and looked. I knew exactly what the box held.

“There’s nothing there you’d need. You’re rich enough as it is.”

“Oh, it’s not the money we want. It’s the notebook.”

“What notebook?” I’m playing a difficult game, bluffing because he expects it, but not really intending him to believe it.

Harry laughs. “You know exactly what notebook. With what’s coming for us, we need to be certain all former scores are settled, so you’re going to tell us where the box is and give us the key.”

“You’re sure of that, are you?”

He takes a sip of whiskey, savoring it. “You don’t want your boy to die or your restaurant to go up in smoke.”

“What guarantee do I have that won’t happen if I do give you the key?”

“My word. That’s all you get.”

“Last time you summoned me, you gave me your word you wouldn’t contact me again.”

“And we haven’t. Until now.”

“Which proves your word is worthless. You’ll say anything to get what you want.”

“Let’s put it this way. You give the key to me, and your chances of staying alive get a whole lot better. You join us, and they get really damn good.”

“Why’s this suddenly so important?”

Harry snorts. “You like to play innocent, but I know you keep tabs on us.”

I’m tired of playing around. The sooner I get him to reveal the details, the sooner I can end this nonsense. “You’re planning a takeover.”

He grins. “You always were a smart one. Too bad you’ve wasted your talent so far.”

I stay silent. I’m used to being insulted by him.

“The question is, are you smart enough to join us now?”

“No, I’m smart enough not to.” I turn to leave, but as I’d known they would, guards block my way. One puts his hand on his gun.

“Shoot me, and he’ll never find the safe deposit box,” I say.

Harry shrugs. “The key is somewhere. We’ll find it eventually.”

“True, but what about the box? It could be at any bank in the world. Whoever you tortured to find out about the notebook can’t have known the location.”

Harry ignores me and types something on his keyboard. Then he swivels the screen to face me. I’m looking at Silas’s apartment. Fuck, how did they install a camera without him noticing?

“You fucking bastard! You put a camera in his apartment?”
And now Danvers knows, so he can remove it.

“I told you we were watching your boy. Impressive performance the other night, by the way.”

Oh, hell no. They hadn't seen us. My stomach roils, and I fight the nausea. I won't let Harry see how sick he made me.

“I prefer women, but the cop looks like he's a good fuck.”

Mindless of the armed guards, my claws shoot out and I grab Harry by the front of his shirt and drag him halfway over the desk.

A gun presses against the back of my head, but I don't relent.
“Leave. Him. Alone.”

“Then do your duty by your family. Maybe we'll even let you out to fuck him on occasion. Having another cop in our pocket wouldn't be bad, even a baby one.”

I let him go and push at the guards behind me.

“Stand down,” he orders.

At least I can give in now and be convincing. “I'll work with you, but I want in on everything. Full partnership.”

“You think you deserve that?”

“I think you need someone with more than half a brain.”

“Fine. You're in.”

I hadn't thought it would be that easy, but his brothers really aren't the brightest bulbs.

“We have a briefing in two days. Until then you'll be our guest.”

“Do I get the luxury cell or a stone floor and bread and water rations?”

“Don't be melodramatic.” He pulls a USB drive from one of his desk drawers. “Take this, and learn about your new work. There's a laptop in your room. And yes, it's monitored.”

I look at the drive. Just what I wanted. Reading to get sick by.

Harry motions to the guards. “Get him out of here.”

My cousins aren't going to win this time. I'll see them brought down, no matter what I have to do.

SILAS

I've resisted texting or calling Luke for the last few days despite hearing nothing from him. There's a huge chance Danvers is tracing his phone, but I can't take it anymore. I need to know Luke's okay, or I need confirmation that he's a guilty, lying fuck. Not knowing what's up is killing me.

The image I pulled up a few days ago pops into my mind. Luke in a fucking tux—damn, I'd like to see that in person—at a “fundraiser” run by his cousin's fake charity. Had he told me the truth when I asked?

I'd gone by Foxy's yesterday and gotten some bullshit from his manager about him being out of town. I know she was lying, but why? Is he on the run? Is he in on things with his cousins? Is he in trouble?

I start typing a text to him, stop halfway, and call. There's nothing I can say in a text that doesn't sound desperate, angry, or psychotic. The call goes straight to voice mail as if his phone is turned off. I hang up without leaving a message.

Because I'm an idiot, I search for Danvers as soon as I turn up for my shift. When I find him he's about to head out the door. “Detective, wait up. I need to talk to you.”

He glares at me. “Simpson's got witnesses for you to question, and we need extra patrols around the park tonight.”

I can't let this go. “This is important.”

Danvers sighs. “I really hope this isn't a sign of what the night's going to be like.”

He finds an empty conference room and motions me inside.

“Hear me out before you yell at me.”

He rolls his eyes. “This is getting better and better.”

“I think Luke has either left town or gone missing.”

Danvers closes his eyes and runs a hand over his short hair.

“Why are you trying to contact him?”

“I know I’m not supposed to talk to him. Go ahead and write me up for it, but I’m asking you to check it out.”

Danvers’s expression hardens. “He’s working with his cousins.”

My heart skitters. I knew it was a possibility, and yet I never believed it could be true. I lean against a chair, dizzier than I’ve been since the first day after my concussion. “You’re sure?”

“Yes. I guess we were wrong about trusting him.”

“How do you know? I can’t... That doesn’t...” I’m making a fool of myself. Why the hell had I gotten so attached to this guy? I think about the way he touched me, cared for me, fucked my brains out. Was that all fake? Is he that damn sly?

“I guess he’s more of a fox than we thought,” Danvers says.

His words make something click. Danvers never makes those kinds of generalizations about shifters.

“What proof do you have?” I ask. “Maybe it’s a setup.”

“You really want to see the proof? Because you’re not going to like it.”

“I want to see it.”

He pulls out his tablet, brings up an audio recording, and hits Play.

“I’ll work with you, but I want in on everything. Full partnership.” It’s Luke’s voice.

No way. This isn’t what it sounds like. It can’t be.

“You think you deserve that?” another man asks.

Danvers pauses it. “That’s his cousin Harry.” He restarts the recording before I have a chance to comment.

“I think you need someone with more than half a brain,” Luke says.

The other man huffs. “Fine. You’re in. We have a briefing in two days. Until then you’ll be our guest.”

Danvers stops the recording. “Heard enough?”

I’m trying to decide if I’m going to vomit or pass out first.

“Why don’t you take the night off?” Danvers says. “You’re pale. I don’t think you’re ready to be on duty again.”

“I…” I want to say I’m fine. I don’t want to be such a fucking pansy that I can’t keep working when I find out some guy I’ve got a hard-on for is a lying son of a bitch.

“Take the night off. It’s an order.”

“Yes, sir.”

Danvers is trying to be kind, so I don’t argue with him anymore. I wander through the bullpen in a daze. Someone calls my name, but I don’t stop to find out who. It’s all I can do to put one foot in front of the other.

How could I have been so wrong? He’d taken me in completely. I’d let him fuck me, let him tell me what to do. So much for experimenting with casual sex. Maybe I’ll give up sex entirely. At least porn and my right hand don’t make me feel like I’ve been run over and stomped on.

I’ve been home for an hour, but all I’ve done is dry heave over the toilet, pace, and fanatically search the Internet for more on Luke. I look again at the picture of him at his cousin’s party. Something seems off, but is that just wishful thinking? Luke’s fucking gorgeous in the picture, but his face is strained, tense, and his hand is on his shirt cuff. He’d fiddled with the hem of his T-shirt when he’d said he was telling me everything, and I knew he was lying.

I'm probably being a fool, but what if... He said he'd find a way to bring them down, no matter what it took. He wants to protect his employees and keep his cousins from hurting anyone. What if he's only pretending to work with them? What if he's gone in thinking he has a way to stop what they've put in motion?

I call Danvers; maybe I can plead insanity from the concussion and talk to Danvers again, or maybe he'll have me fired, and I'll make my mom's day.

"Why are you calling me?"

"I have a question."

He snarls. "It's a fucking bad night already. Wolf nearly ripped apart a suspect, and Reynolds got shot."

"Oh, God. Is he going to be okay?"

"Yes. He was hit in the leg, and it missed the artery. He'll be okay but off-duty for a while. What the fuck is your question?"

"Why would Luke play us? What good would it do? If he were going to work for his cousins, they would protect him."

"He was trying to look innocent."

"Why did he distance himself from them? Why go back now?"

Danvers snorts. "The game changed?"

"Was the information he gave you correct?"

"Yes." Something about his voice. It's stiffer, more vampiric than usual. He's lying.

Don't get your hopes up.

"That doesn't make sense."

Danvers groans. "Don't do this."

"Why would he come and tell me his suspicions about what they're up to if he's working with them?"

"To throw you off."

“If he’d lied to me, that would make sense, but he told me his best guess, and it was exactly what’s happening.”

“He knew you wanted info, and you couldn’t prove anything.”

“He could’ve made up any story. There are plenty of other plausible options.”

Danvers is nearly impossible to read, but odd inflections in his voice give him away. I’m on to something.

“He showed up at my apartment. I didn’t call him.”

“You weren’t supposed to see him.”

“That’s irrelevant.”

“I assure you, it’s not.” Danvers’s tone was glacial now.

“He’s working for you.”

“You...are probably going to make detective soon.”

“So that’s a yes.”

“Let me handle this situation. I do not want to hear from you again.”

“Good night.”

I hang up, very proud of myself—and relieved—but worried as fuck about Luke.

LUKE

I pace the luxurious bedroom they've placed me in—with guards at the door, of course. I'd forced myself to go through some of the files. They are as sickening as I expected; kids as young as fourteen work for them. I will sure as fuck hold on to the USB drive so Danvers can take a look.

I check the time again. They'll let me out soon if they really intend to bring me to this meeting. I suppose they might just shoot me after all, but I knew the risks the moment I agreed to this plan.

I finger the key to the safe deposit box. Harry's men searched me for weapons but never noticed it. Sloppy. A mistake they might die for once Harry realizes how stupid they are.

A sharp knock. Then one of the guards opens the door without waiting for me to respond.

"It's time," he announces like some badass in a movie. I repress my laugh and nod.

I follow him from the room, and another guard falls in line behind me. Should I be impressed that Harry thinks I need two men on me? I'm good in a fight, but these guys look strong as fuck. Of course, foxes win fights by trickery, not brute strength.

Harry, his dumber brothers, Brian and Ray, and, as I suspected, Uncle Oscar are all there, standing around holding whiskey glasses like they're in some old-fashioned gentlemen's club, not that any of them could be called a gentleman. Is this all a game to them, the lives they destroy? They'd always gotten off

on power and control while pretending to be what they aren't —well-respected businessmen.

"It's time," my uncle announces dramatically. "Are you in or out?"

He seriously thinks he's in some twentieth-century gangster film. "Are you going to tell me the plan?"

"Only after we have the key and the location of the box."

I pull the key from my pocket and hand it over.

Harry's eyes widen. "You've had it with you the whole time?"

I incline my head. "As you said. I'm not that dumb."

"No, I don't believe you are."

"Where is the box?" Uncle Oscar asks.

"In LA at First Trust Bank on Orange Street."

"When was your father in LA?" Harry asks.

I shrug. "Obviously, he was there at some point so he could get the box." As far as I know, my father has never been to LA. The box is in Athens, Georgia, at a bank on the UGA campus. I'm hoping by the time Uncle Oscar sends someone to LA, Danvers will have all he needs to bring these bastards down, and I'll be out of here.

Harry looks at his father, and Uncle Oscar nods. "Arthur would never have kept his valuables close. Hell, I'm surprised it's in the country."

Apparently, he didn't know my dad all that well after all.

"And your other responsibilities? Are you ready to take those on?" Harry asks.

"You've certainly got a nice crop of boys and girls for sale. I'm not surprised that part of the business is as lucrative as it is." The words almost stick in my throat, but I manage to spit them out with a smile.

"I didn't know you were interested in *girls*." My uncle gives me a disgusted look. He'd beaten the crap out of me when I'd come out.

“I can appreciate a woman’s form whether or not I want to fuck her.”

“What changed your mind about working with us?” Harry asks.

“I’m tired of running.” That’s as close to the truth as I can get.

“So we wore you down, huh?” Harry asks.

“You impressed me. I won’t play the part of immoral bastard for a smalltime crime ring.”

Ray moves like he’s going to use his fists to show me what he thinks, but Harry blocks him, and surprisingly, Ray backs down.

“Hear him out, boys,” Uncle Oscar says.

“Now, you’re going to be bigger.”

“Fuck right we are,” Ray says.

“And I want in.”

Harry looks to his father, and Oscar nods.

“After we tell you our plan, if you give any hint you’re backing out, you’re dead. As much as we’d like you for an ally, we have no problem killing you. Right after we kill everyone you care about.”

“I wanted to kill you anyway,” Ray says.

“We needed the box, you idiot,” Oscar says.

“I would’ve found it.”

“You’re lucky to find your dick to jerk it off.”

“You didn’t find the key on him,” Ray says.

Score one for Ray.

“That wasn’t me; it was the men you hired, ones you’ll dispose of as soon as this meeting ends.”

Ray smiles as if looking forward to it. He probably is, but he’s nowhere near as dangerous as Harry because his ugly character is so obvious. Brian, who has yet to speak at all, is

eerily quiet and shy. He's the one to watch. If any of them are going to break ranks, it's him.

"We have some guests we'll be meeting in a few minutes," Harry says. "We want them convinced we're going to fold our interests into theirs."

"When you're actually planning a coup?"

"Yes." Harry gestures toward me. "See, Ray? He has brains."

"Shut up."

"You're the one who needs to keep his mouth closed during this meeting," Oscar says. "Or I'll dispose of you too. You've caused enough trouble."

Harry turns to the guards. "Show our guests in."

"Yes, sir." The man leaves.

A few moments later the stink of cat fills the room, and the guard leads in four cat shifters. So I was right. My family has been dealing with cats, probably the same ones who, according to rumor, have been leaving bodies scattered around the city's shifter slums.

The man who's obviously the cats' leader looks me over. "You've brought someone new."

"Yes," Uncle Oscar responds. "My nephew."

"I see the family resemblance."

I hold out my hand. "How do you do, Mister...?"

"Knight, Baldwin Knight."

And now Danvers has a name. Probably a fake one, but hopefully it's enough.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Knight. I understand we'll be doing some business together."

"Actually, you'll be doing business for me." He lets his cat's purr leak into his voice. I wouldn't have been surprised if his literal claws were out when we shook hands instead of just his figurative ones.

Pain sears my hip as if I've been bitten.

“Are you all right?” Knight asks.

“Just a twinge. Old injury,” I lie. *What the fuck is going on?*

Another burst of pain that seems to burn my nerve endings. I can't hide it. I glance down, and holy fuck, smoke is rising from the side of my ass.

Ray looks at me, eyes wide. “What the shit?”

The transmitter. It's shorting out.

“What's going on?” Harry asks.

“A wire! He's wearing a fucking wire, and you didn't realize.” Ray lunges for me, but I grab him and turn, using him as a shield against the cats.

Knight turns on my uncle. “This is a setup, isn't it? You traitorous son of a bitch.”

He raises his gun and blows a hole through my uncle's head.

I don't have time to process my uncle's death. I slam Ray's arm against the wall until he drops his gun. I shove him away from me. He stumbles, and I grab his weapon and run.

One of the cats pursues me. He's fast, but I'm faster, though I don't think I can run for long. The pain in my ass is making me nauseous. I've got to get the microchip out, but without a knife I need to be in fox form so I can use my teeth. Shifting will leave me poorly defended against a gun-carrying human, so I keep running. I jerk my shirt off as I run and press it to the side of my ass to smother any actual sparks coming from the transmitter.

He shoots, and for a second I think he's missed. Then pain bursts through my shoulder. I nearly black out, but somehow I keep going. I glance over my shoulder and fire. The man drops to the ground. Hopefully, my shot did more to incapacitate him than his had me.

I find shelter, not as far away from the house as I'd like, but it will have to do. I can't go any farther. Danvers damn well better have recorded what happened. I fall to my knees, too weak to stand. I try to summon the energy to shift, but it's not

happening, so I pull out my phone and call the one person I need to talk to before I bleed out.

“Luke?”

I can't tell if Silas is relieved or angry. “I need you to listen to me. I swore not to tell, but I'm working undercover for Danvers. I want you to know the truth if I don't make it.”

“I figured it out,” he says. “Where are you? What's happened? You don't sound good.”

“In the woods. Harry's house. Near the lake. Lots of pines.” My voice is fading.

“What happened?”

“Don't worry about me. Tell Beth, my manager, that I...” Pain slices into me again, and the world darkens.

“Luke!”

“I'm sorry we didn't...get...more time.”

“Luke, what the fuck happened to you?”

“They shot me.”

“Don't you dare die on me. Shift.”

“Can't. Too tired.”

“Dammit, Luke. Fucking shift right fucking now.”

I try again because I want to please Silas. Everything hurts so much, my shoulder, my hip. I can't make my body cooperate.

“Not working.” I gasp.

“I'm going to find you,” Silas yells.

I wish he could I think as the world starts to fade away.

SILAS

“**L**uke? Luke!” Fuck! He’s probably passed out.

I call Danvers, no longer caring about anything but saving Luke. He doesn’t answer the first time, so I call back.

He answers with a gruff, “What is it?”

“Are you monitoring Luke?”

“We’re trying to, but something went wrong.”

“He called me. He’s been shot. He’s somewhere near his cousin’s house, and he’s too weak to shift.”

“Fuck,” Danvers yelled. “We’re on it.”

“I’m on my way to help.”

“No.”

I hang up and head to my car. I’m already in such deep shit with Danvers ignoring him now won’t make much difference.

Luke did everything he could to save me when he thought his uncle had an actual bomb, so I owe it to him to save him now, especially after assuming he’d lied when my instincts said otherwise.

When I arrive, Danvers is just pulling up by the police barricade near the entrance of Harry Redtail’s compound. Lt. Morrison is there, talking with a group of officers. Morrison is trustworthy and supportive, the best of what a cop should be. I don’t want to face him after screwing up like I have. I need to, though. He and Danvers are my way to Luke.

I tag along behind Danvers, and he ignores me.

“Any word on my guy?” Danvers asks the lieutenant.

Morrison shakes his head. “Wolf’s tracking him, but he’s gotten too far ahead for Jacobs to see him.”

“And of course he can’t use the radio in wolf form,” Danvers says.

Morrison nods. “There’s been several shots fired in the woods, so I don’t want to send anyone else in. If Luke’s in there, Wolf will find him.

But will he find him in time?

Morrison catches sight of me. “What’s Bixby doing here?”

“Luke called him.”

“He told me he’s close to the lake with lots of pines around him.”

Morrison pulls out his radio. “Jacobs? Any sign of Wolf?”

“I see him up ahead. He’s circling back to me.”

“Tell him our man is close to the lake, hiding where the pine trees are thick.”

“You got it.”

“I want to help,” I say.

Morrison shakes his head. “Too dangerous, and you’re off this case.”

“Luke—”

“Wouldn’t want you getting shot too,” Danvers says.

“What the fuck was he thinking going in there?”

“That he wasn’t going to let them win,” Danvers says. “He got us what we need. We have names and evidence we can use.”

“That’s great. I just hope he lives to be able to celebrate it.”

“He would’ve gone anyway, but this way at least we can prosecute without having to haul him in too.”

Morrison's radio chirrup. "We found him. He's got a single GSW." It's Wolf, obviously back in human form. "It's a clean through and through, but he's lost a lot of blood. I don't want to move him without getting him to shift, but I'm not having any luck."

"I want to go in," I say. "I'm his best chance. If anyone here can get him to shift, it's me."

Morrison looks at Danvers, who nods. Morrison sighs. "Go get a vest on." He turns away then and speaks into the radio. "Wolf, can you stay with him and send Jacobs out? He can guide Bixby in. He thinks our guy will shift for him."

"Sending him now," Wolf says.

Moments later I'm creeping through the woods behind Jacobs. We both have our guns drawn. I'm tense; every rustle of a leaf makes me think someone's there, ready to attack, but we make it to Luke safely. He looks really bad, paler than me and curled around himself on the ground.

"Luke," I call.

His eyes flutter open. "S-Silas?"

"Yes, it's me. You need to shift so you can heal, then we'll get you out of here."

"The evidence? Did Danvers—"

"Yes, but that's not what matters now. You've got to shift."

"I—"

"Luke! Please. Find the strength to shift. You're not going to make it out of here if you don't."

"I...can't."

"Yes, you can, and you will. Right fucking now."

"Silas, I—"

"Do it."

He shudders. For a moment I think he'll pass out, but instead he begins to transform. Moments later a fox lies before me instead of a man.

"Can you walk?" I ask.

Luke looks at me with his beautiful fox eyes, the ones that had looked down at me in bed. He stands, staggers a few feet, and collapses.

I take a step toward him, and he gives me a wary look. "I'm going to carry you."

His fur stands up, and he lifts his head for an eerie yowl.

"Argue all you want; I'm still going to do it."

Wolf's and Jacobs's radios crackle. "We believe one shooter is still on the loose," Morrison says.

"We need to get out of here now," Wolf says.

Luke glares at me and dips his elegant snout. Is that a nod? Is that permission?

Wolf speaks into his radio. "We're making our way out."

"We'll cover you," Lt. Morrison's replies.

I scoop Luke into my arms. His fur is soft, and his body is much warmer than a human's.

"I'll lead. Jacobs, take the rear," Wolf says.

I follow Wolf, listening for danger, glad he can hear much better than I can. I clutch Luke to me. He's breathing hard. Is it fear, pain, or both? His wound has stopped bleeding, but it looks ragged and painful. I've learned a little about the healing powers of shifters. If they can shift, they heal much faster and better than humans but never instantly like a vampire after a feeding.

Luke whines, and I realize I'm probably squeezing him too tight. "Sorry," I murmur, and he makes a throaty, content sound similar to a purr.

Three days later I still haven't heard from Luke. I stayed until he shifted back to his human form and was taken away in an ambulance despite his protests that he was fine. I've almost called or texted him countless times, but if he wanted to see me...

What if he's thinking the same thing?

We had some really good sex, and he needed the police to help with his cousins. That doesn't mean he's going to want to go out with a cop now.

I know from Danvers that he's fine. Of his family, only Brian survived—this time there were bodies so there's no question—and he's being held without bond.

Luke will have to testify, but it's out of our hands now.

Call him.

I reach into my pocket for my phone.

No. I can't. I need to move on. I need to focus on salvaging my career. I'm currently waiting to see Lt. Morrison. He was called in to an urgent meeting, and I've been cooling my heels for half an hour, praying he's not going to fire me.

Finally he enters his office. "Sorry about that. Bunch of City Hall bullshit, but I couldn't avoid it."

Like I said. Morrison is a good man.

"Good work helping with Redtail's rescue."

"Thank you, sir."

"Unfortunately, your earlier conduct with Redtail could have severely compromised the investigation and is against regulations."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"You're a good officer, Bixby."

"Thank you, sir."

“But we have to put the job first.”

“I know. I usually—”

He holds up a hand. “Yes, you do. So that’s why I’m giving you a one-week suspension and not expecting to have to discipline you again.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t disappoint me. I give second chances, but not thirds.”

Relief rushed through me. “I won’t, sir.”

“Go.” He gestures toward the door.

I walk out of his office, heart pounding. *I still have a job. I still have a job.* I haven’t ruined my future. Why the fuck had I been so reckless?

Because you’ve never sown any wild oats, and Luke is irresistible.

Too true.

I pass Danvers as I head out. “Things go okay?” he asks.

“Yes. A week of suspension, and I’ll be back.”

“Good. I’d miss you.”

That means a lot coming from Danvers. He rarely compliments anyone. “Thanks.”

“Don’t let that go to your head.”

“Of course not.”

“Since you’ve got free time on your hands, why not get some lunch? I hear Luke is back at Foxy’s.”

“I doubt that’s a good idea.”

Danvers frowns. “You know what he told me when I asked him why he was willing to snitch on his family now when he hadn’t been in the past?”

Do I want to know? “What?”

“That his cousins knew he cared about you, so you were a target. He wasn’t going to let you be harmed.”

“He really said that?”

“Do you think I make up cheesy shit like that?”

“No, I... Maybe I should get some lunch.”

“Yes, you should.”

When I arrive at Foxy’s, Beth, the front-end manager, is working the register. “He’s not here right now,” she says before I ask.

“Oh, okay.” I wish I could hide my disappointment, but I can’t.

“What can I get for you?” she asks.

I consider leaving. I’m not sure I can eat.

“He should be back soon. Stay, and you’ll probably get to see him.”

Would he want to see me? I have to know. “Okay, I’ll have a Foxy sandwich with killer bee sauce, fries, and a sweet tea.”

“You got it,” Beth says.

I pull out my wallet, but she shakes her head. “It’s on the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Luke said you don’t pay here.”

“He did?”

“Yep. Take it up with him.”

“Okay, then.” I take my cup and head toward the self-serve beverage counter. I fill the cup with tea as my mind whirls. If Luke didn’t want to see me anymore, he wouldn’t have told Beth to give me free food. So why hadn’t he called me?

I take a bite and enjoy the burn of the spice and the tingle it leaves on my lips. Damn, Luke knows his hot sauce. He

knows other things too, things I'm desperate to feel again, but...

Oh, fuck. There he is, heading toward the door. My pulse quickens. I can barely swallow the bite in my mouth.

He reaches to open the door. When he turns and sees me. I smile. His eyes widen, and he lets go of the door and runs off.

I'm glad I've only started eating because I'm not sure I can keep even that single bite down. I scramble to stand. My chair clatters to the floor, and Beth rushes over.

"He texted me. He's coming back. Please wait and give him a chance."

"What?" I ask, not sure I heard her correctly.

"He'll be back. He asked me to have you wait."

"Why?"

She glances around, and I realize everyone is looking at us.

"Come with me." She picks up my basket of food and my tea. I follow, putting one foot in front of the other.

She pushes open the door to an office and sets my food on the desk.

"I've got to get back out front. I'll send him to you when he gets back."

"But I—"

"Please stay. He's been an ass ever since he returned to work, and I have a feeling you're the only one who can make him happy right now."

I shake my head. "He doesn't need me."

"He's stubborn as fuck, that's the truth, and he'll spout a bunch of bullshit about foxes not needing anyone, but shifters have a human side too, and he's been on his own too long."

"I don't think—"

"It's best you don't. Just hear him out," Beth pleads.

She leaves. When I look at the sandwich that had been so delicious a few moments ago, my stomach does a little flip-flop. I'm not about to risk another bite. I'm giving him five minutes and no more.

LUKE

I hadn't expected to survive my experiment as an undercover informant, and I sure as hell hadn't expected Silas to run to my rescue. I've been too much of a coward to call him since. Sure he'd saved me, but he's the type who'd think he owed me from the night my uncle showed up at Foxy's. I didn't call guys, didn't ask for second dates—hell, I didn't ask for dates at all, just to fuck. But with Silas... I wanted more and had no idea how to ask for it, so I hadn't.

When I finally went through all my dad's things, stuff that had been in boxes for over ten years I'd saved a book for Silas. When I saw him sitting at a table in Foxy's, I'd panicked like an idiot and run for the stairs so I could get the book for him. I got this idea that if I didn't give it to him tonight, everything would be fucked forever. I'm clearly losing it.

When I step into the restaurant, my heart's pounding. I'd given up on seeing Silas, and now I have no idea what to say. I thought he would visit during the days I spent in the hospital. Whenever I heard someone at the door of my room, I looked up hoping to see him. He never came. He'd called me over and over again when he wasn't supposed to, when he had every reason to think I'd betrayed him in the worst way, but once I was cleared, not a word. And now he shows up at Foxy's, and I take off.

He's not at the table anymore. Shit, I fucked this up. I look for Beth and see her at the counter. She gestures toward the back and mouths, *office*.

I clutch the book, a 1940s detective novel my father read until it was falling apart. Suddenly it seems like a ludicrous gift, but I can't go back now. I ease the door open. Silas looks up.

He's even more gorgeous than I remember, but his eyes are troubled, hurt.

"I'm sorry I left. I had this for you, and I didn't want to forget it." I hold out the book.

He takes it, obviously unsure what to say.

"It was my father's. I was so angry with him that I never went through his things after he died. He wouldn't stand up to my uncle or try to leave the family business even though my mother took off because of it. After everything that's happened, I finally decided it was time. I've also stopped being too stubborn to spend my inheritance, so I'm expanding into the space next door. I might even open a second location."

Silas looks at me, still questioning.

"This book was his favorite. He loved detective stories. So I thought that since I've fallen for someone who wants to be a detective, that man should have it."

Silas sucks in his breath. "Fallen for?"

My hands are sweaty, and I'm worried I might pass out. I've never said anything like that, never even thought it. "Yeah."

"But I thought..."

"You didn't call." Great. Now I sound like a whiny bastard.

"Neither did you."

"I know. Calling felt too... Fuck, I don't know... Strange. I didn't know what to say—would you think it was a booty call? Would you not want to talk to me again after I lied to you? Basically, I was a fucking coward."

Silas shakes his head. "No more than me, but when you got out of the hospital and didn't call I just thought that... You know... You..."

"Weren't interested?" How could he think that? "You saved my life."

“That didn’t mean you’d want to go out with me. You said you were a one-night guy.”

Wow, I’d fucked this up. “That was stupid. I mean, I was, but now... Things are different. You’re different.”

“I’ve never been good at casual, but I was trying with you.”

“How’d that go?”

Silas sighs. “I couldn’t think of anything but how much I wanted you, even when I thought you were working with your cousin, that everything you’d said to me had been a lie.”

“So all along you were hoping I’d call so you could see me again.”

“I want to do more than see you.”

I smile. “Me too.”

“I suppose we should figure out where to go from here. That would be the responsible thing to do, right?”

I grin. I’ve had it with being responsible. “You want to go upstairs?”

SILAS

I want Luke as badly as I ever did. I don't care if my desire is reckless or stupid. He almost died, and I want to celebrate that he didn't.

He glances at Beth as we walk by the counter. She smirks and gives him a thumbs-up. "I'll handle things down here."

We're both walking fast as we weave in and out of tables. Luke acknowledges a few customers, but he keeps moving. After exiting the restaurant, he leads me around back to the stairs that must go to his apartment. Once we're at the top, his hands are too shaky to unlock the door. He gets the key in on the third try. When the door swings open, he grabs me and yanks me inside before kicking the door closed and shoving me against it. He's not holding anything back. He kisses me like he wants to consume me.

I open my mouth to let him and grab his ass, sinking my fingers into the firm flesh and pulling him in tight. He winces, and I let go. "Still sore?"

He puts my hands back where they were. "Not enough to care."

I pull him to me again. This is so much better than talking. There's no hiding what we need now. I've been with men who wanted something casual, and it never felt like this.

I shove my hand down the back of Luke's pants, needing skin-to-skin contact. I'm impatient to be naked with him, but I don't want to break the kiss.

Finally he pulls away, and we stare at each other, panting.

“Hands against the wall,” he orders.

I groan. As hot as it is to have him tell me what to do, I don’t want to wait to have him in me.

He leans in and kisses my neck. “Play along. It’ll be worth it.”

I shiver as his breath tickles my neck. I do as he asks, placing my hands on the wall next to the door.

“Stay still,” he says as he drops to his knees.

Oh, fuck. No way in hell am I going to stay still if he’s...

He unfastens my pants, but instead of pulling my dick out, he leans in and nuzzles it, taking a deep breath.

“You smell so fucking good.”

I wonder if I could come just from listening to him talk like that.

He slides his lips along my length. Even through my briefs the sensation is almost too much. “Fuck!”

“I love how responsive you are,” Luke murmurs as he continues to rub and lick me.

I press my hands against the wall, wishing I had something to hold on to. “I need to touch you.”

“Not yet.”

I whine, and he chuckles, his warm breath heating my cock. “You’re amazing,” he says as he pulls my underwear down.

When he draws my cock into his mouth, I shout, “Luke!”

He takes me deeper, sucking relentlessly. Holy fuck! He has me right on the edge already. I can’t embarrass myself this way.

I push at his shoulders. “Please. It’s too much. I’m—”

He pulls off and looks up at me. Then he takes my hands and gently places them on the wall again. “Turn around.”

I eye him skeptically.

“Trust me.”

“Okay.” I present him with my ass.

He shoves my underwear and pants to my ankles. Then he pulls my ass cheeks apart and blows a warm stream of air over my hole. Holy fuck, is he...?

He licks me, tongue swiping over my ass. “Oh my God! Luke, you don’t have to—”

“Baby, I want to. I’ve been dying to get my tongue in you.”

“I wish I’d known. I’d have come around sooner.” I gasp as he laughs so close to me I feel the vibration. I kick my pants off so I can spread my legs more.

My legs shake with need as he circles my pucker with his tongue. I lean my head against the wall, trying desperately to stay upright as he pushes into me. His tongue is so warm, so wet, so fucking amazing. My cock drips precum, and I want to stroke myself.

As if he’s reading my mind, Luke reaches around and circles my shaft with his hand. He makes long, slow strokes that match the thrusts of his tongue.

“Luke! I... Oh my fucking God!”

When I’m right at the edge, he stops and sits back.

“Nooooo!”

“I want my cock in your ass when you come. I want to hear you make those little cries like you did before.”

I groan. “Can’t move. Need you.”

Luke ducks his head under my shoulder, forcing me to sling my arm around him. I gasp when he picks me up as easily as if I were a child. I know shifters are strong, but...

“It’s only fair since you carried me when I was wounded,” he says.

I huff. “You’d been shot.”

“And you’re as unable to hold yourself up as I was.”

I flip him off halfheartedly.

“To be fair, I’d partially healed myself, and I’ve left you to suffer.”

I moan. “Then do something about it.”

“Oh, I intend to.”

LUKE

I lay Silas on his back in the middle of the bed and reach under the pillow for the lube I've been making nightly use of. With my own hand. He's the only man I want right now, and that's not something I thought I'd say about anyone.

I toss it on the bed, and he raises a brow and smirks. "Been busy?"

"I've missed you."

"I missed you too. Every fucking night."

"Good."

I grab a condom from the nightstand, toss it on the bed next to the lube, and start undressing.

I love how Silas's eyes never stray from me as I pull off my shirt and shuck my pants. He gives me a slow once-over, and I swear I feel it like a touch. I want to rub myself all over him, to cover him in my scent.

Silas lifts his arms toward me as I crawl onto the bed between his spread legs. "Kiss me."

That's another thing I love about him, how good he is at kissing. Most men I've been with just want to get down to the fucking, but Silas can draw out a kiss until I'm ready to come just from his tongue in my mouth. He's that damn good.

"I love how you feel on top of me," he says as I stretch out over him.

“Mmm,” I respond, bringing our mouths together. We kiss slowly at first, despite how worked up we are, but the kiss ramps up quickly, and driving need has me thrusting against him, rubbing our cocks together.

It feels so good I almost want to come this way, but I’m desperate to feel his ass squeezing my cock. “Hold still,” I order, pushing up on my arms to shift the angle so we can slide together more easily. The pleasure is so intense it’s agonizing. My vision shifts to fox, and Silas licks his lips as he reaches up and caresses my face.

“Your eyes are gorgeous.”

His wide-eyed look has me fighting back claws. The predator in me wants to conquer him. “Baby, I need you.”

“Fuck me, Luke.”

How can he be so damn sexy? I don’t want to let go, but I force myself to sit back. I feel around to find the condom, which has been dislodged while we played around. It’s got to be here somewhere.

Silas laughs, and I look up.

“You’re adorable all frantic like that.”

I glare at him, but I can’t help laughing as I ready my cock for his ass.

I move into position. He lifts his legs onto my shoulders and gazes at me. “Don’t hold back.”

There’s a moment of tension. It lies thick between us. “There’s no more holding back when it comes to you. I want to take you and make you mine.”

“Please!”

I drive into him, and he gasps. His hands scrabble along my back. I don’t give him time to recover. I take him hard and fast until he’s panting and begging, and I’m about to lose my fucking mind. But the one thing I know, the one thing I’m certain of through my haze of lust is that I’m not letting him walk away again. I don’t care that this is happening too fast. I

don't care that he's a cop, and while I'm not my cousins, I don't exactly live by the law. We. Fit. Perfectly.

I punctuate the thought with deep thrusts that bury my cock as far in him as I can go. "Luke! Fuck!"

Silas's face is flushed. His eyes are a deep emerald, and he is so fucking beautiful. Sweat runs down his pale neck, and I contort myself to lick it off.

He groans. "Can't... Fuck! Can't hold back."

I reach between us and stroke his cock. In seconds he's spurting, coating me with his seed. As I keep working his cock, he whimpers, and it's too much. I'm right there too, driving into his ass and emptying myself until I collapse on him, too exhausted to move.

"Even better than last time." His words are stilted and breathy.

"Yes," I groan. "Can't breathe."

"Me either," Silas says.

I realize I'm crushing him. I roll to the side, and we both lie on our backs, staring at the ceiling. My mind whirls as I think how close I came to not seeing him again. He's so fucking amazing, and I lo— No, I'm not going there. I can't even think that yet.

Seriously?

Oh, fine. What the hell. "I fucking love you, okay?"

Silas laughs. A small snicker and then a full-on laughing fit that has him balled up, holding his sides.

"I never thought..." He can't talk he's laughing so hard. "I never thought that when a man finally said that to me..."

"That's what you get for falling for a fox."

"I fucking love you too," he says. Then his stomach growls loudly. "And you owe me dinner."

I slide from the bed. "Get yourself cleaned up and dressed, and I'll get you some."

SILAS

I sit at a table in Foxy's, happier than I'd thought possible an hour before. This time I'll have a lot more than one bite of sandwich. It's going to be a struggle not to inhale it. I even ordered an extra side of cheese grits.

I watch Luke as he stands behind the counter, talking to a customer, someone I recognize as a regular. He'd asked if I minded hanging out for a few minutes while he checked on things in the kitchen. I don't, not at all. I love how dedicated he is to the place, how he was willing to sacrifice himself to keep his people safe. And they truly are his people.

He looks up and catches me watching him. Heat rises into my face as he stares at me. He holds up a finger, asking me to wait another minute, and I smile. I'll wait for him as long as it takes.

Holy shit! I'm really in love with him, and he loves me back. He would literally risk his life for me. All my past luck with men seems like nothing now that I have a chance with Luke. I don't have to give up on love after all unless... No way was that Luke's sex high talking. He had meant it, right?

Luke brings out food and joins me.

I take a bite of sandwich and sigh. When I look up at Luke, he's watching me instead of eating and grinning like he knows something I don't.

“What?”

“You eat the same way you have sex—by throwing your whole self into it.”

I glance around, hoping no one’s listening. “Only when I eat here.”

Luke raises a brow.

“Or maybe a few other places, but not if I just eat, like, frozen pizza.”

“So if you have real food, you practically come while you eat?”

I grin and take another bite, ignoring the fact that my lips are on fire and playing up the sensuality of the moment.

Luke groans, and I fight the urge to look around again. *How much of a spectacle are we making?*

When I finish chewing, I point to Luke’s food. “Eat your dinner.”

“You’re the one giving orders now?”

“Maybe.”

“We could try that if you ever wanted to, but I don’t obey easily.”

My cock perks up at the very idea, even though I almost always prefer bottoming. “Maybe one day.”

Luke grins and takes a bite of his own dinner: a couple of chicken legs that look even spicier than mine. I wonder how it will taste to kiss him after all that hot sauce.

“So this is for real?” I ask, and he sputters, nearly spitting chicken across the table. “You didn’t just blurt out shit because you were high from coming, did you?”

He glares at me, and he’s the one who looks around this time. Then he looks back, right at me, pinning me with his gaze. “Fuck no. I meant everything I said.” He nods. “I never thought I’d fall for a cop, but here I am. I guess I’ll have to remain inside the law. Literally.”

I'm really glad I hadn't just taken a sip of beer. I shake my head. "I can't believe I fell for a shifter."

"Aw, everybody loves a fox."

"Maybe I just like that you can fulfill my every fantasy."

He grins. "I'll make sure I do exactly that."

"This is possible, right? A cop and fox?"

"More than possible. Necessary."

He's right. I won't walk away. I don't think he will either. We're in this together, and we'll make the best of it. Now that he's free of his family he can relax, and maybe I can work my way out of the hole I dug for myself by fucking a suspect, a very gorgeous suspect.

"Eat up." Luke gestures toward my plate. "The sooner we eat, the sooner we can get back upstairs and start working through that list of fantasies."

I'd never been gladder to sit down to dinner with a fox.

Thank you for purchasing *Dinner at Foxy's*. I hope you enjoyed it. Check out Jason and Drew's continuing story in [Hoofin' It to the Altar](#).

I've got a **free** bonus scene starring Luke and Silas. Grab it [here](#).

If you enjoy gay shapeshifter romance, you'll love the [Wild R Farm](#) series.

To learn more about Silvia Onyx, join my newsletter here: <https://readerlinks.com/l/3080195>. To see books from me and my alter ego, Silvia Violet, go to silviaviolet.com. You can chat with me on Facebook in [Silvia's Salon](#), and you can email me at silviaonyxauthor@gmail.com.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Silvia Onyx writes high heat paranormal romance with shifters of all descriptions. Her character-driven stories bring you right into the shifters' world. When not writing, Silvia loves to read, crochet, play with her oodles of planners and notebooks, and enjoy time with her family and beloved dogs. She also writes contemporary romance as Silvia Violet.

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