



# Sex and Suspicion

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult, M-m Romance

**Description:** Fate is unpredictable...

Jake Kolly, a young and ambitious photographer, seeks the perfect sunset shot along the beautiful but secretive Bay Harbor.

Unbeknownst to him, this picturesque landscape hides a hidden world—the territory of the powerful Bay Harbor Wolf Pack. When an unexpected and violent encounter with a rogue wolf leaves Jake injured and bewildered, he's saved by Hayes Castian, a formidable security guard and member of the Bay Harbor Wolves.

In the chaos, Hayes discovers a truth that will irrevocably change both their lives: Jake is his fated mate. As Hayes navigates the challenges of introducing a human to the supernatural world, Jake grapples with the shocking reality of shifters and the powerful, undeniable pull he feels toward his rescuer.

With an Alpha set on expanding his pack's influence and the mysteries surrounding Jake's brother, Aidan, Hayes must protect his fragile new mate while convincing him to accept a destiny he never imagined.

Dive into a world of fated mates, hidden dangers, and the thrilling discovery of a love that transcends worlds in 'Sex and Suspicion' – Bay Harbor Wolves Vol. 9

**Total Pages (Source):** 10

## CHAPTER ONE

"The patrols have been doubled, and I have two teams guarding the beach," Zayn reported to Alpha Henrik. "And Derek and Leo have completed their relocation to the cliffs." He finished with a knowing grin. "Those people on the cliffs have no idea what's about to hit them."

"If there is trouble on the cliffs, he will root it out and take care of it," Henrik commented, confident in his brother's skills.

"The beach is also a concern. It continues to be a weak spot in our security," Zayn explained the number of supposed tourists that had been caught on pack lands over the past two weeks. "It's summer, and the area, although pack lands and private property, is also a beach and connects to public lands. We need to come up with a way to deter the people from venturing beyond the rocks." The rocks and the grass line define the border, but the city saw portions of that beachfront as community and public property. It was an ongoing battle.

"We don't own the water or the land under the water, unfortunately. I love the Bay, but keeping a secure border isn't easy when there is a beach and a bay involved." Henrik rubbed his chin and glanced out his office window at the Bay in question. "But it is damn beautiful to look at." He smiled.

"The patrols will influence people to stay back or move on. Most people don't like the presence of men in suits looking official walking the beach. It makes them nervous."

“Security getting used to the suits?” Henrik laughed.

"They understand the necessity of the look, and they're getting used to it, but they have to work on shifting. The suit trips them up, but it is getting better." Zayn laughed.

"As we grow and expand our influence, the suit will start to define us in many arenas, so we all will have to get used to the look and learn to function swiftly within the new constraints." Henrik reminded.

"I'm not looking forward to wearing one on the regular, but changing times and all." Zayn nodded his understanding.

"I plan to elevate this pack and expand our lands, and dressing correctly is all part of the package of influence." Henrik drove it home, making his plans clear.

"No one is complaining, Henrik. Most appreciate the power that comes with an expensive suit. Everything is a tool in this game, even wardrobe." Zayn nodded his head.

“Speaking of tools, I have a meeting next week with Sensor Properties, the company handling the property sale next door, and I plan to bring Derek with me," Henrik smirked. "Derek doesn't have to wear a suit to be intimidating. The man just needs to appear."

“Derek has a way about him that speaks death with every step and every glance. The meeting should be interesting.” Zayn laughed.

"It will definitely be interesting." Henrik wanted to impress the people selling that land with an understanding of who the Bay Harbor Group was and what they were willing to do to secure that property. The land was two hundred acres vacant and

wooded that butted up to the eastern border of the pack lands, and Henrik wanted it. Derek was going to be there to strictly frighten people.

Hayes Castian was a security guard with the Bay Harbor Wolves. He'd grown up in the Pack and had been trained from an early age to join the guards. He'd served under the Beta Zayn for many years, working on special projects and doing his share of ground patrols.

The ground patrols were constant and required a good number of soldiers and guards, so everyone did their rotations. Hayes was scheduled to cover the beachfront for the next two months along with Travis Cane. He and Travis had worked together before, both as guards and in the field. They were friends and worked well together.

They were to start at ten this evening and end at ten in the morning. Each pair would have twelve-hour shifts for the next five days. Hayes liked working nights. He preferred the quiet and the stillness of the night, and working the beach would provide an added peace. It was a beautiful area, especially at night.

Hayes was meeting Travis in the dining hall located not far from the pack house. They provided meals for soldiers, guards, and anyone in the Pack who needed or wanted a meal at any time of the day. The hall was always open. Alpha Henrik provided his people with homes, land, jobs, food, protection, support, and anything the Pack needed to thrive, Alpha Henrik gave. Hayes was honored to be a guard and a soldier serving his Alpha and his Pack.

"I hear that the Alpha is looking at buying the property to the east of us. Two hundred acres of wild country." Travis commented while they ate their dinner. "I also heard that he plans to bring Derek with him to negotiations." That had Hayes looking up from his roast beef with a surprised expression.

"He's taking Derek to a business meeting to help with negotiations?" Hayes asked

with a heavy dose of skepticism. "He's more likely to scare the living hell out of them."

"I think that's Alpha Henrik's intent," Travis responded with a grin. "He brings Derek along when he wants to make an impression without having to say a word."

"All I can say is that I'm glad that guy is on our side," Hayes stated, and Travis agreed. Derek was hard and cold, but he loved three things, his mate, his brother, and his Pack. Derek's loyalty was solid, and without end, he was the type of person every leader hoped to have at their side. Alpha Henrik was fortunate to have his brother and a trusted group of men that surrounded him who were without reproach. They were all men that would gladly lay down their lives for him. His brother, his second, and his team of enforcers helped to make this pack the success that it is.

The soldiers and guards took the same oath and served him with the same level of dedication and loyalty. The Bay Harbor Wolf Pack was led and protected by the best in the shifter world as far as Hayes was concerned. There were and had been issues in the membership, but they were being dealt with, and according to Travis, who heard all the gossip, a new system for membership was being drawn up by none other than Derek Vaughn.

"Derek and his mate have relocated to the cliffs, and I hear he's shaking up the place." Travis continued with local gossip.

"The last undesirables that were taken out had lived on the cliffs, and apparently, they're worried that a bad element may be taking root up there," Hayes added his two cents worth.

"Derek will finish any remaining bad element."

"No doubt."

Jake Kolly had dinner with his brother Aidan and then excused himself to go to his room. Jake had lived with his brother ever since he'd moved to Eastport four months ago. They moved from Detroit, where their parents still reside. Aidan had a job offer with Sensor Properties and asked Jake to come with him.

He had just graduated and was working a couple lame jobs, so he was more than excited about moving. Unfortunately, he's ended up working a couple of lame jobs in Eastport, so life had not exactly improved that much yet, but he had hope. What did improve was his photography. Eastport was on the Bay, and it was also adjacent to acres of beautiful wilderness.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

Jake was a photographer, and sunsets were his current obsession. The Bay was perfect. He loved the color, mood, and atmosphere he could get there. The best location was the beach adjacent to that gated community just outside of town. He'd been out there a couple times and got some great shots, but the weather tonight should prove to be ideal for some wonderful color.

"Are you heading out?" Aidan asked. He was relaxing in the living room of their apartment, watching something on television.

"Yeah, I'll probably be late. I want to do a series and include some of the moon, which is supposed to be full tonight." Jake couldn't hide his excitement, and his brother chuckled.

"Just be careful. I hear the security at that place can get rough with people." Aidan knew where he was headed and did not trust that gated community on the Bay.

"The beach is public property. I have every right to be there."

"Assholes are assholes for a reason. It's a character flaw, and they usually don't give a rat's ass about your rights." Aidan was the pragmatic one, and his assessments were usually correct. But Jake was willing to risk upsetting the security of the Bay Harbor Community to get the shots he wanted. He was building a portfolio in hopes of making his love of photography into a viable business, so he needed these shots.

"The weather is perfect tonight, and the cloud cover is just right. I have to get these pictures." Jake slipped his backpack over his shoulder and opened the door. He glanced back at his brother before leaving. "I'll be okay."

"If you have any problems, call me. I don't know what I'll do, but I will do something." He smiled.

"Thanks." With that, Jake took off, eager to get to his preferred location before dusk.

He drove to the boat launch, which provided a large area of free parking. It was a half mile from the border of the Bay Harbor property. Jake had entered the beach in front of the lodge or hotel or whatever they called it. There were always lights on and activity of some sort, so Jake had assumed it was a public house of some sort.

He'd been to the location on two other occasions and had gotten some breathtaking shots. The sky was perfect this evening, and the moon was to be full, so tonight's work was going to be fantastic. He just knew it. So far, he'd managed to avoid the security people by keeping close to the water and not moving too far into Bay Harbor property.

The Bay Harbor community was gated, extremely secretive, and quite large. Jake had tried to find out information about it, but there was little to gather apart from the property specs and the charter that was established years ago. It was a place that was not based on income or influence, but they were very selective when it came to new residents. Jake had no idea what the rules of inclusion entailed, and it piqued his curiosity.

Aidan said Bay Harbor was a cult, and new recruits had to be indoctrinated into their crazy religion, but he also said that the community owned and operated the Indigo Hotel. That hotel was exclusive and catered to the elite of this area and the state. It was not the type of place a religious cult would be operating. People around town didn't really talk about them and clammed up when questioned, which just made the mystery more enticing.

Jake found his spot and quietly set up his equipment in anticipation of a perfect



sunset. Glancing around, he noticed a couple of men in suits standing off to his left, further down the beach. They were watching him, but they didn't approach him. Jake tried to ignore them and focused on his work.

## CHAPTER TWO

"It's the same guy that was here last Saturday and again on Monday," Travis commented as he stood next to Hayes. "Just a local kid taking pictures of the sunset, it would seem."

"I don't like how close he gets to the pack house. Every time he comes, he sets up just a little closer." Hayes didn't have a lot of trust where the humans were concerned. Others had tried over the years to trespass on pack lands, and some had succeeded and done damage.

"I think he's harmless." Travis declared with a tired sigh. "I'm going to do a circle around the front and along the hedge line."

"I'm going to watch the photographer. He gets any nearer the grass line on the beach, and I'm going to run him off." Hayes never took his eyes off the intruder. Travis laughed.

"Radio me if you need help." He smiled.

"I think I can handle the little human on my own." Hayes gave him the side eye. "The camera could be a cover, you know, just a way to look innocent." Travis continued to laugh as he walked away.

Hayes had a strange feeling about this human, and he wasn't going to let him out of his sight. If he had nefarious intent, then Hayes was going to be close by to put a stop to it.

The humans usually leaned into property damage, such as tearing up the beach or destroying the landscaping. One bastard even set fire to the garden at the edge of the backyard. There was no telling what this man might have in mind. He was getting an odd feeling while watching the man. It wasn't exactly a bad feeling, but it was concerning.

He kept his eyes on him, watching him handle his cameras and equipment. The man appeared focused on what he was doing, but that was easy to fake. When he took several steps back, coming ever closer to the grass line that stood as the hard border on the beach, Hayes moved toward him, slowly decreasing the distance between them. Hayes was ready to act if this man tried anything.

Travis was right in that the man did not give off the air of someone intending harm, but neither he nor Travis were mind readers, so anything was possible. The fact that he came at night and gave the impression of an innocent photographer as he moved ever closer to the pack lands was enough for Hayes to suspect him.

Hayes was focused so completely on the movements of the man with the camera that he failed to notice the figure rushing down from the backyard of the pack house. The dark figure cleared the small rock cliff and landed on the grass, and that's when Hayes saw what was about to take place.

The figure transformed into a wolf as it flew through the air toward the man on the beach. Hayes began running and tearing off his suit as he shifted and leaped at the young wolf that had taken the man to the ground. There were shouts and blood in the air. The man was bleeding profusely, and the young wolf continued to try and tear at him with his claws.

Hayes pulled the wolf up and away from the injured human. He held him and shifted back to his human form, although the young wolf did not. "Shift!" Hayes demanded, but the wolf cowered and refused. Travis came rushing to the area, and Hayes tossed

the young wolf at him.

“Hold him. He attacked the human on the beach without cause.” Hayes turned to the human who was lying motionless and quickly scooped him up into his arms and ran for the pack house. There was a doctor residing there, and he was hoping that he was not too late. The wound on the man’s neck was serious.

He was light, and his body slender in his arms. There was not much to him. He was not capable of withstanding a wolf attack, and he should never have been targeted in such a way. Hurting a human is always a last resort and is never done on a whim.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

Hayes crossed the deck and entered through the glass doors that led to the kitchen. It was the quickest way into the heart of the house. He shouted for help, and Seamus appeared from out of the study.

“What is it, Hayes?” He asked as he rushed up to meet him.

“Human was attacked on the beach by a wolf.” Hayes felt the blood on his hands and scented the aroma enveloping him, and the ramifications were heartbreaking. He held himself back and cut off his emotions in order to serve this man and get him the help he needed. There was no time for his feelings to come to the surface. His time would come later.

“Follow me.” Seamus made a call as he led him to a sterile room on the basement level. They were met there by the Doctor and one of his nurses. The Doctor was a wolf, but he was trained in human physiology as well, considering there were several humans in the Pack now. Hayes was thankful for that stroke of luck. He held the man close, clutching him desperately to his chest.

“Lay him on the table.” The Doctor instructed, but Hayes hesitated for just a moment. Seamus gave him a knowing look and nodded.

“It's okay, Hayes. The Doctor will help him.” Hayes pulled out of his strange fog, gently placed the man on the table, and reluctantly stepped back. His eyes held the man, and his wolf began to push back to the surface, not in an aggressive fashion but simply curious and wanting to see and get close to this man.

Seamus tossed Hayes some sweats, and he pulled them on. The suit hadn't fared well

during his shift, leaving most of it in shreds on the beach. He managed to get the jacket and tie off before his wolf took over and shifted in order to save their mate. Yes, the small man, unconscious and bleeding, was his mate.

Everything had been a blur, and Hayes wasn't sure when it was that he suspected their connection, but once that blood was in the air, there was no doubt who this man was. Hayes was inundated with a wave of emotions that scrambled his control and his mind in general.

In order to maintain a modicum of control, he focused on the man on the table and his immediate welfare. He blocked the surge of instant reactions that came to the forefront, desperately holding himself back and holding himself still in the face of all this chaos. His mate would be best served by a cool head.

The man on the table stared at him with scared eyes that called out to him. Hayes wanted to calm and soothe his fears, but all he could do was hold him with his gaze and channel peace and quietness.

Hayes could hear the beat of the man's heart pounding out, the anxious terror still evident in his expression. The Doctor worked effectively, and the man did not resist. His lack of response was concerning, and Hayes was compelled to speak.

"What's your name, sweetheart?" Hayes said the first thing that came to mind. The man blinked, and his lips parted, but nothing was said for several seconds. He just stared and folded in on himself. "Tell me your name," Hayes said in a tone that was both soft and persuasive.

"Jake." The word was spoken so quietly that if he wasn't a wolf, he would not have heard it.

"Hayes." He said and placed a hand on his chest, indicating that was his name. Jake

blinked, and his hand moved as if he was reaching for him, and that was all Hayes could take. He didn't care about anything at that point except getting to his injured and despondent mate. The moment he had spoken, all things fell into place. His thoughts and feelings became laser-focused on one man, and his name was Jake.

Hayes moved up close to the side of the table, took Jake's hand, and held it secure in his. The touch was electric, sending jolts of awareness and understanding through him. Jake was experiencing something as well, but Hayes was not sure what. Jake looked at their joined hands and kept blinking and then looked up at Hayes.

“Thanks for saving me from that monster.” He said with a little more strength. Hayes’ presence was clearly influencing his feelings and giving him strength.

Hayes nodded and responded. “You’re welcome.” The smile that came to his face was genuine and heartfelt, and it was all for this young man. A human, he would have never thought that Fate would bless him with a young human so fragile and beautiful. He knew there was something special about him the moment he laid eyes on him, even from such a distance.

Never did he think that while he was there watching, observing, and waiting for trouble, the man he was scrutinizing was his mate. The sense of familiarity that he felt he dismissed as having met or seen the man before in some other context. The Doctor looked over at him speculatively and then stepped back from the table before giving Hayes Jake’s status.

“He has minor abrasions on his arms and a deep one-inch laceration to his neck, which I stitched but should heal quickly. Other than that, he is suffering from basic panic and distress over the event that landed him here in my care.” The Doctor patted Hayes on the shoulder. “He will be fine; just stay close and keep him calm. There is nothing to worry about, Hayes.”

"Thank you, doctor." Doctor Stevenson had sensed the connection between them, and it appears so did Alpha Henrik. Hayes turned when the door swung open, and Alpha Henrik came into the room. He spoke to the Doctor and then came over to stand beside Hayes.

"Don't worry, we will work this out. Fate always acts with a purpose, and her destiny is never thwarted." He assured, and Hayes was surprised at how much that statement relaxed him. Suddenly, he felt empowered and ready. The feeling of being scattered and confused was gone. The Doctor had given Jake a sedative, and he gradually fell into a deep sleep.

The Alpha motioned for Hayes to step out into the hall with him. The door was left open so Hayes could keep watch on his mate. "Travis reported that Jimmy Lee shifted and attacked the young man while he was on the beach taking pictures." Alpha Henrik was asking for clarification.

"Yes, I don't know what the catalyst for his rage was. The young man's name is Jake. I was watching him and feeling a strange sense of familiarity, so I didn't let him get out of my sight. He didn't do anything, no aggressive moves toward the property, and he did not trespass." Hayes shook his head, mystified by why Jimmy would feel the need to attack.

"Travis is holding Jimmy in the stockade, but he's not forthcoming with his reasoning for the attack as yet. We'll get to the bottom of it and, in the meantime, take care of you, mate. I've arranged for you to have a room on the second floor. It would be better to keep Jake here until we figure this out and you have a chance to bring him into the Pack." The Alpha was clearly concerned about the cause of the attack, but he was also being supportive of Hayes.

"He saw a lot. Jimmy shifted, and then I shifted. It was quite the free-for-all." Hayes shook his head.

“He’s your mate, he’ll understand. He’s scared, but he is not scared of you, and that’s the important thing.” He patted Hayes on the shoulder and then headed out, most likely to meet again with Travis and Jimmy. Hayes went back to stand at Jake’s bedside.

He finally had a moment to really look at his mate to see everything that made him so special. He was young, that was obvious, and his face possessed an innocence that was charming. His hair hung long past his ears and was a lovely reddish blond, and his eyes were an intense and beautiful light brown. His complexion was creamy and soft, just aching to be caressed. Everything about young Jake attracted Hayes and made his blood burn for him.

Hayes threaded his fingers through Jake’s hair several times and then scooped him up into his arms and carried him out of the room. Jake was still unconscious, and the Doctor told him that he’d be out for a few hours. It would give him time to get them settled in the bedroom upstairs and give him time to figure out how he was going to explain all of this to his unsuspecting mate.

He was very pleased with his mate. Humans made fantastic partners, but explaining the supernatural was long and arduous. He wished there was an easier way. Jake had witnessed plenty, and hopefully, he remembered everything he saw. Hayes would start there and build on what he already knew, and hopefully, his young mate would keep an open mind.

The bedroom was large and plush, with a big king bed in the middle of the room and an attached bath. It was perfect for their time together. Hayes owned a small bungalow on the edge of town. He liked the privacy it gave him, and it also allowed him to keep watch on the border. His home was only a few feet away from the border, which separated pack lands from state lands. He hoped that Jake liked his home and would be comfortable there.



## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

He placed Jake on the bed and made him comfortable. The Doctor had removed Jake's sweater, and the t-shirt he was wearing was covered in blood. Hayes carefully took it off him and then got a basin of hot water and a washcloth from the bathroom. Taking a seat on the edge of the bed, he slowly and methodically cleaned his mate, removing all remnants of blood and dirt. He left his jeans but removed his tennis shoes and his socks.

The process of washing Jake brought Hayes a peace that touched him deep in his soul. Being with his mate and caring for him helped to overcome the pain of not protecting him from the attack. It was crazy to feel responsible since he had no idea that Jimmy would do such a thing, but still, in his heart, he felt like he should have known and should have prevented it from happening.

He finished and then covered Jake in one of the thick, soft blankets, tucking him in and dropping a kiss on his forehead. "When you wake, we will talk, my love." He said and was rewarded with a soft moan, which made him smile, and he dropped another kiss before responding to the light knock on his door.

"How's he doing?" Zayn stepped in, and Hayes closed the door. "The Alpha filled me in on what happened, and I'm sorry your mate was injured."

"Yeah, me too." Hayes rubbed the back of his neck, feeling suddenly agitated.

"It'll be okay, Hayes. You got to him before Jimmy could do any lasting damage. Your mate will recover." Zayn sensed his difficulty and easily calmed him down, which Hayes appreciated.

"This . . ." He gestured toward Jake on the bed. "This was so unexpected, and then to realize that the man bleeding out on the beach was my mate really threw me for a bit."

"Understandable, Hayes, but you handled it even with the fiercest instincts and hormones raging through your system. You managed the situation." Zayn patted his shoulder. "Stop beating yourself up and bask in the presence of your newfound mate. Your life will forever be changed, my friend, and I mean that in the best way possible." He smiled.

"I know, and I am grateful, shocked that Fate chose me but very grateful."

"I have some information on him." Hayes gave him his full attention, eager to know more about his young mate.

"His full name is Jake Kolly. He's nineteen years old, and he's originally from the Detroit area. He moved here a few months ago with his older brother Aidan. He's an aspiring photographer working side jobs along with working part-time at that vintage theater on Langly." His mate was just getting settled in the area. It was too bad that his introduction to the Pack involved being attacked. Hayes wished they could have met under better circumstances.

"He and his brother live together, so he may come looking for him. Don't worry about it, we'll deal with the brother. Just take care of your mate and get him settled as soon as possible." Hayes understood the possible threat that Jake posed as a human with the knowledge of the supernatural. They had one hell of a lot to discuss when he woke up.

### CHAPTER THREE

It was well past midnight when Aidan started to become concerned about his brother

Jake. He'd gone to the beach area near Bay Harbor before without incident and was always home before midnight. Aidan didn't trust the community that resided there, believing them to be some kind of weird faction or sect or perhaps a crazy militia.

He walked the floor, peering out the windows, and waited, and then, around three, began calling and texting. Jake was fierce about his independence and minimal interference from his big brother, but this was outside his normal habits, so Aidan felt justified in taking action. The fact he didn't answer and didn't respond to the texts just made his worry deepen further.

At five, Aidan called Danny, Jake's friend from the theater where they both worked and asked if he'd seen or heard from Jake that night. He woke him, and he sounded groggy but came full awake when he heard Aidan's concern.

"I haven't spoken to him since early yesterday. He said that he was going to take more pictures of the sunset off the Bay. He's gotten some great shots there." Danny told him all that he knew. "Do you want me to head over there and check it out?" That was kind of him to offer.

"No, not yet. I'll go if I don't hear from him before morning. He has fallen asleep in his car before, so I'm hoping that's the issue here." Aidan responded thoughtfully, but his gut was telling him something was wrong.

"If you need me, call."

"I will." Thoughts of that odd, gated community and hearing Jake make comments regarding their guards and extensive security had Aidan grabbing his coat and heading out. He would look for Jake's car and then decide what to do from there.

Jake opened his eyes and tentatively glanced around the room. He had no idea where he was, but it did not feel threatening. For some strange reason, he was not afraid,

confused but not afraid. He looked to his left, and there was the guard who'd watched him from down the beach. This is the one who . . . turned into something huge and fought off the wild dog that had jumped him from behind. The vision was frightening as it filled his mind.

The memory was blurry and chaotic, but this man intervened and probably saved Jake's life. He was looking at Jake with an expression of relief and what looked to Jake like anticipation. He was one handsome son of a gun, that was for sure. The hand he had on top of Jake's was sending jolts of intense awareness through Jake, heating him up in ways that should not be happening, considering what he'd been through.

Jake raised his hand and felt the wound on his neck that had been stitched up by the Doctor. "Why did that dog attack me?" He asked the first thing that came to mind. Hayes, the man's name was Hayes. Jake remembered that he'd told him his name. Hayes held his hand a little tighter and leaned over the edge of the bed, getting closer to Jake before speaking.

"I don't know, but I'm sorry that it happened." Hayes had a voice that was pure sex and sent goosebumps rippling across Jake's flesh. His dark eyes held onto Jake's, and they seemed to be asking for something.

"I saw you coming running toward me, tearing off your clothes, and then you changed. Was I hallucinating? You were a large, ferocious animal. You tore that dog off me and tossed him away like he was nothing." Jake's memories were coming back, but they were not making sense at all. "How can that be?"

Hayes didn't say anything at first. He just held Jake's hand. He didn't deny anything, and he didn't try to explain it away with platitudes like being overwrought or claiming it was too dark to see clearly. Jake wasn't sure how he felt about Hayes' hesitation. Hayes was a man in a dark suit, and then he was a huge wolf. He was too

large to be a dog and too fierce. The animal was a large black wolf.

"You were a wolf, and then you were a man," Jake stated it clearly and waited.

"I was watching you because of how close you were to our border. We've experienced vandalism and trespassers over the past few months, so I was keeping track of you." Hayes was starting at the beginning, which was probably good.

"I was just taking pictures like before." Jake defended himself.

"I know that now, but I'm part of security here at Bay Harbor, and my job is to patrol the beach." He was just doing his job, and Jake could understand that. He nodded to Hayes, who then continued.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

"Jimmy was crossing the backyard of the pack house, not sure where he was coming from or where he was going. He's a pack member and can freely access this area without question, so I was not paying him any attention, and for that, I am sorry." Hayes reached out with his other hand and brushed the hair back from Jake's forehead. It was an intimate gesture that Jake thoroughly enjoyed. This attraction he was feeling for Hayes made no sense, but it was getting stronger by the minute.

"He saw you there on the beach taking pictures and then, for some reason, ran at you, shifted, and attacked. I don't know why. He's currently being questioned." Okay, there was one hell of a lot in this explanation to unpack. Jake simply stared at him and blinked repeatedly while trying to pull together a response.

"What are you trying to tell me?" He asked.

"You saw it. You saw who we are." Things started clicking in Jake's head, and the thoughts that were coming to him had to be crazy. What he was beginning to understand was outrageous and not real.

"It's not real, I was scared and seeing things that weren't there." Jake sat up abruptly and scrambled for an explanation he could accept. Hayes moved to the edge of the bed and placed his arm around Jake while still holding his hand in a firm grip.

"It was real. What you saw was the truth."

"That dog was a man?"

"Yes."

“You’re a huge black wolf?”

“Yes.” Jake tried to jerk away from him, but Hayes was holding him fast. His breathing became labored, and his heart felt like it would pound right out of his chest.

"This is crazy, absolutely fucking crazy." Jake was shouting, and he couldn't stop. He needed to get out of there.

"Look at me," Hayes demanded, and Jake did what he asked without even thinking. It was a natural response to his tense words, and again, it made no sense, but it felt completely right. "You wandered into a secret that has existed since time began." Hayes let his eyes travel over Jake's expression, trying to read his reaction and understanding.

“There is a reason for all the folklore surrounding the supernatural and mystical beasts. It was founded in truth. Yes, I am a wolf, and this is a wolf pack. The Bay Harbor Community is the Bay Harbor Wolf Pack led by Alpha Henrik Vaughn.” Hayes fell silent as he continued to watch Jake very closely.

His hands still held him in place, but not aggressively. In his heart, he knew what Hayes was telling him was real, but his mind tried to deny it and tried to find alternative answers for the things he saw and the explanation Hayes was providing. “It’s impossible.” He uttered breathlessly.

“You saw it with your own eyes. You saw me shift, and you saw me shift back.” He spoke strong and clear and held Jake’s gaze solidly. “You saw Jimmy shift back to human when Travis took him away. How do you explain that?”

"I don't know." Jake was losing this. He had nothing apart from perhaps being delusional, but there was no reason for him to suddenly experience delusions out of nowhere. His mind was spinning, and he wanted to scream. Hayes suddenly stepped

back and shifted right there in front of him in the full light of the room.

Jake jumped back with his back against the headboard and stared at the large animal pacing the room and coming gradually closer. The animal, a wolf, stared at him with those same dark eyes as Hayes, and his fur was reminiscent of Hayes' sleek black hair. He recognized this animal, and slowly, he found himself relaxing, moving across the bed toward him.

The wolf came closer. He was so large that he stood taller than the bed, and when he approached, Jake tentatively reached out his hand. The wolf, Hayes, laid his head on Jake's leg, and Jake ran his hand through the soft, thick fur. The touch was magical. He knew this wolf. He knew this man, but from where and how? The questions bombarded him for several seconds, and then suddenly, it didn't matter.

He saw something in the depth of that stare that called to him on a level he could not deny. He felt the soul of that gorgeous black wolf touch his soul and claim him as his own. The wolf owned him at that moment, and he owned the wolf. They were meant to be one. "I know you." He whispered, and the wolf shifted into Hayes, standing there completely naked and looking every bit delicious.

He leaned closer, and Jake ran his hand over Hayes' naked shoulder and down his arm. He could not deny what he just saw, but the realization that shifters were real was a lot to take in and process. Hayes was worth the effort, and somehow, it was made very clear in that brief encounter that they were destined for one another.

"I believe you." Jake watched as Hayes sat down on the edge of the bed and took Jake into his arms. "How long have you known that I was yours?" This new reality was taking shape, and Jake had a few questions.

"I didn't know that you were my Fated mate until I picked you up in my arms and scented your blood. The scent and your touch made it very clear who you were."



“You didn’t know me when you were down the beach and giving me the stink eye?” Jake’s lips curved slightly into a soft smile.

"I didn't know you. I thought you were very handsome but also a little suspicious." Hayes pulled him snugly into his arms, and Jake ate up the attention. The fear and trepidation of a few minutes ago had completely faded away. Seeing Hayes shift and interact with the wolf made everything so clear.

“I should have known. I was compelled to watch you, feeling a draw to be near you. At the time, I thought it was instinct alerting me to trouble. But it was Fate bringing my mate to me." Jake looked up at Hayes, and their eyes connected, and what happened next was wonderful and natural.

Hayes looked down into those light brown eyes, and his heart went to pieces. He’d never felt such warmth and attraction as was emanating from this young man. He was laying himself wide open to Hayes, so honest and pure. Hayes couldn't stop himself, and he didn't try.

He took those plump red lips in a kiss that branded and claimed. It burned to the soul, leaving no doubt as to his desire. The touch and the taste were unlike anything in this world. His mate made his blood burn, and his heart beat out of his chest. The excitement was incredible. His wolf was demanding they mark and claim this gorgeous man, and Hayes was of the mind to agree with him. Why wait? What would be gained?

The kiss ended slowly, with Hayes trailing moist kisses down Jake's throat and across his shoulder, paying special care to the wound that was now nearly completely healed.

“You’re my mate," Hayes said the word again, feeling the surge of pride and longing rush through him. "Every shifter is promised a mate given to them by Fate. They are

their perfect match, their partner in life and eternal lover.”

Hayes knew he was giving way more information than Jake was probably capable of processing at the moment, but he needed to get across to him the importance of their connection. He needed to start to build the bond that would, in the end, seal them together as one. It was a compulsion and a burning need.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

He held him and shared with him the highlights of mating with a shifter, especially a wolf shifter. The healing, which Jake was already experiencing since his injuries were all but gone apart from the stitches on his shoulder, was of particular interest, as was the extended life span. He told him of the connection they would share that extended to the sharing of some thoughts and emotions.

“You will be able to read my mind?” That seemed to concern him but not terribly.

"No, really, it's more that I will be able to read your moods and thoughts that are emotionally laden. But remember, you will be able to read me too.” That seemed to calm any concern.

It pleased him that Jake did not seem bothered by the fact that they lay there together in each other's arms, and Hayes was completely naked. Jake appeared to find Hayes' body of particular interest. He cuddled into his side and continued to run the palm of his hand over Hayes' arm and side and chest and hip, causing a growing and hardening concern that Hayes would soon have to deal with.

“What’s going to happen to me?” Jake asked suddenly, and Hayes did not understand the question.

“What do you mean?”

“I saw you and Jimmy. I know the secret of Bay Harbor.” Gradually, Hayes realized that Jake did not understand anything that he’d tried to explain. He thought he’d been so clear and that the relationship was on track, but actually, they were still standing firmly on square one.

"Nothing will happen to you, my love. You are my mate. Everything I have told you is true. You are my Fated mate, and I will love, provide, and protect you until my last breath." He cupped Jake's cheek and kissed him hard and exacting.

"I trust you not to share the information you have been given. I trust you to protect our secret because we are connected, you and me. We are predestined, written in the stars. Fate has brought us together, and there isn't anything more powerful than that." Hayes hit all the high points with a solid determination to make himself crystal clear.

Jake was stunned by his declarations and the power with which he put them forward. He'd listened, but somewhere in his thinking, it struck him that they couldn't allow him to have the information and knowledge of the wolves and still let him go about his life.

He assumed there would be a cost to this awareness that he'd inadvertently gained. Hayes had said many lovely things that pointed to a life together, but how could that be. Mates, bonding, meant to be all sounded good and struck him as real and sincere, but his own fears kept circling him back to how and why.

He genuinely thought that they would threaten him or do something dastardly to gain his secrecy. But every time he looked at Hayes, he saw honesty and truth, and that did not mesh with the random fears that flashed through his mind. How could this gorgeous man of significant distinction be satisfied with him, a nineteen-year-old human who is still trying to find his place in the world? Why would Fate choose him?

"You are my mate. What happened with Jimmy was unfortunate, but either way, I still would have brought you in on the secret eventually. You having been front and center for a live presentation just made it easier for me.

You're not the only human mate in the Pack, and I'm sure there will be more in the future. It takes time to adjust, and I understand that, but open your mind and let it

happen. The truth will come to you.” It was coming to him now the warm understanding, the feeling of being the center of someone’s awareness.

Hayes held him there, cuddled together on this bed, and it was the most natural thing ever. Jake was at home in this man’s arms. This was the truth and the acceptance he was talking about.

“You’re all I need, sweetheart. You’re all I’ll ever need.” Hayes seemed to know exactly what he needed to hear. “You’re old enough to know your own mind and fearless enough to venture ever so close to the unknown, searching to satisfy your curiosities and your desires.”

"That sounds a little dirty," Jake whispered teasingly, feeling a sudden easy playfulness growing between them.

“I hope so.” Hayes moved his hand from Jake’s shoulder down to caress his hip and then moved to unfasten his jeans. Jake joined in by smoothing his hands over Hayes’ hot body, feeling the muscles tense and relax under his touch. It was hypnotic.

Hayes nuzzled his face into the crook of Jake’s neck and whispered. “I want you, Jake. Tell me you want me; tell me you want this too.” Jake started squirming out of his jeans in response to Hayes’ request.

"I want you, Hayes. I want this. Please don't stop. I was fascinated and drawn to you from the moment I saw you standing at the end of the property, watching me." Jake was going to be honest, completely honest.

“I couldn't see you clearly, but everything about you, the turn of your head, the way your hair moved in the evening breeze, and the way you stood so tall and strong made my heart race, and I couldn't take my eyes off you. I wanted you then, and that need has just grown.” This was sudden, yes, but natural and necessary.

Jake wanted this. He wanted this man to make love to him more than he wanted his next breath. He felt like he might die if Hayes did not take him now, immediately. He was looking his future right in the eyes, and it was going to be fucking amazing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Aidan found Jake's Dodge in the parking lot adjacent to the boat launch at the Bay. It was locked and empty; wherever Jake had gone, he took his photo equipment with him. Aidan looked around the large area. It was early morning, but soon, the lot would be full of trucks. The launch was always busy on a Saturday. Jake would not have left his car parked there unless he had no choice.

He looked down the beach and saw the lights of the Bay Harbor community, and terrible things came to mind. He didn't know who or what these people were, but the secrecy alone spoke of trouble.

They were strange, and that was a fact. According to what Aidan had heard since moving to Eastport, they could be unpredictable and protected their own . . . at all costs, whatever that means. Aidan took it to mean violence was not off the table with them.

The border of Bay Harbor was about a half mile from the parking lot and Jake's car. It was likely he was down there somewhere, or at least he had been down there. Aidan headed in that direction in hopes of getting a lead on where Jake might be. He continued to call and text, but Jake did not respond. The sun was up, and the morning air was cool and crisp off the Bay.

His worry grew with each step he took toward the large, main house of the community. It was a sprawling mansion of four stories with a yard that was huge and perfectly manicured. They didn't like people being on the beach near their property and had beefy security that put the run on anyone who got too close. Did Jake get too

close?

There was no sign of Jake nor any of his equipment, but Aidan looked carefully for any sign that he'd been there. He walked along the beach and looked up at the large imposing structure and then down along the shore in front of him. Two guards stood there dressed in suits, staring back at him. Aidan looked out at the Bay and recognized the scene. This was where Jake had taken his previous pictures, so it was likely he was there last night.

Taking a few steps closer to the grass line that delineated the public beach from the private property spurred the guards to start walking in his direction. He didn't cross the boundary, so when he stopped, they stopped. He had to find a way to get inside because his gut was telling him that these people had something to do with Jake's disappearance.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

His phone rang, and with another glance at the guards, he turned back the way he came and answered his phone; it was Danny. "I didn't realize it, but I got a text from him last night. I'll send it to you." Danny screenshotted the text and sent it to him. "He was down there near that Bay Harbor community."

"Thanks, Danny."

"Let me know when you find him."

"I will."

The text read, 'The night is perfect. I got some stunning pictures tonight. I'll show them to you tomorrow. The Bay Harbor people are watching me but not bothering me yet. This is the best location, so they're just going to have to get used to me being here.' The message was time stamped ten forty-six. When Aidan returned to the parking lot, he simply stood at his car and took in the entire scene, trying to figure out what might have happened there last night. His gut was telling him the Bay Harbor community knew what had happened to Jake, and he was going to make them talk. Their bullshit antics might put some people off, but Aidan wasn't that delicate.

Hayes held his mate close and finished stripping him of his remaining clothes. They were both naked now, and the sensations of his warm, eager flesh beneath Hayes' hands were immense. "I love the touch of your beautiful body, my love." Hayes was spewing every tender word and feeling that came to him. This was his mate, and honesty was easy.

He was short, and his body slender and firm but also soft in all the right places. He



was a lovely young man. "You want me, sweetheart?" Hayes teased and reached between them to caress Jake's hard, leaking cock. It was warm and inviting, and Hayes took it in a firm grip and began a rapid rhythm, stroking him and relishing the sensuous sounds of Jake's answering desire.

"Yes, I want you; I want you so fucking bad my mind is exploding with the need that I feel for you." The words were strained and held a measure of desperation that brought a sense of satisfaction to Hayes. His mate was aching for him. The connection was growing, and the draw was becoming fierce.

Hayes rolled him gently onto his back and slowly stretched out over him. Looking down at the gorgeous face was all he ever needed in his life. The contentment that filled his heart and mind and touched his soul was astonishing. The need to mark and claim was coming over him with each touch, word, and declaration.

His wolf was laser-focused on completing the bond, pushing Hayes to get closer and move faster. The need to act fast was hounding him, but his mate was human and needed tenderness and care, so he slowed but did not alter his focus to mark and claim.

The lure of his body and the hypnotic effect of his scent had Hayes hard as a rock and his need at a razor's edge. The bond would bring the final awareness to his mate, making any further confusion or questions doubtful. The bond was just that, a bonding of their bodies and souls. Jake would become one with the wolf, and understanding would become complete.

Jake felt his body burning with a piercing need that he had never felt before. Never had he wanted anyone the way he wanted Hayes. He was handsome, of course, but the burn that had steadily turned into a raging inferno beneath his skin was only for Hayes. It started with his gaze and then grew with his touch and then completely ignited with his kiss.

His words of want caused a yearning in Jake that spurred him to clutch and grasp at his amazing body, needing him closer and craving his attention. "I need you, Hayes, I need more." He shared his desire and added the truth of what he was feeling. "My body is burning for you." Hayes pressed his hard cock against Jake and ground his hips in a salacious manner, making Jake whine with sensations sparking through him.

He watched as Hayes covered his fingers in a slick lubricant and then forced two of those fingers into Jake's tightentrance, stretching him with his large fingers and tantalizing him with the rapid thrusts. The heat that had been consuming him was now out of control. He moved his hips in time with Hayes' thrusts, needing to go deeper and harder and wanting him to fill him fuller.

"I got you, easy sweetheart. Take it as I give it easy, smooth sensations." His tone was sexy and velvety soft and yet deep with a timbre that sizzled across Jake's flesh. Suddenly the fingers were gone, and Jake felt the hard throbbing presence of Hayes' thick cock as he pressed lightly, at first testing the entrance and then firmly plunging inside.

The fullness was immediate and sent a throbbing sensation of pleasure surging through Jake. It beat with the beat of his heart and grew with each thrust, building to an explosive level. His breath caught in his throat, and he gripped Hayes by the upper arms, trying to steady himself and meet the powerful thrusts of his mate.

Jake wrapped his legs around Hayes' waist, lifting himself higher for impact and depth, and it was wonderful. He closed his eyes and dug his fingernails into Hayes' upper arm as the most intense satisfaction and gratification hit him there. Then Hayes hammered inside, going to the base, filling him so full he felt stretched to capacity but still ached for more. Hayes roared, locked his eyes on Jake's, and came hard, bursting stream after stream of hot seed, filling him, stimulating him, and leaving him breathless and panting.

Hayes' face shifted partially, his eyes turning feral and his face taking on the essence of his wolf. Jake could see the wolf staring at him, and he could feel him in his core. Hayes dropped his head and sunk his teeth into Jake's shoulder, biting down. Pain radiated for a split second, and then pleasure exploded through him, and he came. Jake climaxed, spilling his seed and coming over and over as the sensations raged along his nerves.

The bite released a vivid scene in his mind; it was Hayes, his wolf, and they were joining with him, the three of them becoming one. It was wild and ferocious and an experience that blew Jake's mind. The supernatural was part of him. Now, he felt it in every inch of his body and his mind. The outrageous was a reality, and Jake was a part of it now.

He felt Hayes remove his teeth and lick the wound, sending more sharp and titillating sensations through his being. He was floating on endorphins and the sense of belonging to the most magnificent man in the world. "You're mine now, Hayes, and like you said, no going back and no walking away. This is forever."

"Forever, Jake, this is forever you, me, and my wolf. Prepare for the marvelous and the miraculous because the world of the supernatural is now yours." Hayes slipped out, leaving a distinct loss, but then stretched out beside him and gathered Jake up into his arms. Hayes was a large man, tall and muscular, and Jake looked forward to a lifetime in his arms.

"Barlow, I need your help, Jake's missing, and I think it involves that sketchy community of weirdos on the bay." Aidan decided it was time to get help, and Deputy Barlow Katz was just the person to call. They had been friends since school, and Barlow was part of the reason Aidan had taken the job at Sensor and moved to Eastport. He told him that Eastport was an up-and-coming community with many prospects, and that proved to be true.

Aidan was very happy at Sensor Properties and comfortable in Eastport, but that Bay Harbor community had always caused him concern. It was the only negative in a land of positives. Barlow also saw them as suspicious but always beyond reach. If they did anything to Jake, they would pay and pay hard.

Deputy Katz agreed with Aidan's concerns and had also wondered about the secretive sect at Bay Harbor. He was more than ready to accompany Aidan to question those at Bay Harbor in connection with the disappearance of Jake Kolly. A search of his phone indicated that Jake's phone was inside the main house of the Bay Harbor group. It was important that they get inside, and neither Barlow nor Aidan were going to be deterred.

They approached the large, secure gate on foot, having parked on the main road. The distance from the gate to the main house was only about half a mile, an easy walk. Being on foot would allow them to make some observations along the way as long as the guards didn't demand to transport them.

"What's your business, Deputy Katz?" The guard came up to stand in front of them. He apparently was already familiar with Barlow Katz.

Barlow explained their reasons curt but clearly. "His phone is in your main house. Let us in, or I go for a warrant. Jake Kolly has been missing since yesterday, and his last known location was your beachfront."

The guards did not immediately respond; they just looked them up and down speculatively. His gaze shifted to Aidan. "And who are you?" That haughty self-importance hit Aidan the wrong way. Aidan, although about six inches shorter, defiantly stepped up to hold the man's gaze.

"My brother's phone is on your land. My brother came here to the beach out in front of your main house to take photos of the sunset. He hasn't been seen or heard from

since coming here. You're going to release him, or I'm going to tear this place apart." The guard's lip turned up slightly, showing his disdain, and Aidan got into his face, causing the guard to take a step back.

"You have no idea who I am, what I've done, and what I'm willing to do for Jake." Aidan spat. "Don't test me." Barlow reached out and placed his hand on Aidan's upper arm, and just then, someone joined them.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

“Derek.” Barlow addressed the man dressed in black who walked up to stand with the guard.

“Deputy Katz.” He responded in a tone that was both casual and threatening.

The guard gave the man a brief explanation of the situation and the request. “They claim that his phone is on the premises.” He ended with that same arrogance he’d sported since the beginning of their interactions.

"Let us in, or I'll be back with a warrant and twenty men ready to take this place apart," Barlow stated with all the authority he could muster. Derek was not impressed and simply glanced away and then back and trained his gaze on Aidan.

Aidan did not look away but rather held that blistering stare and channeled his anger and his rage back at the menacing man in black. Aidan was beyond caring about manners, laws, or protocol. All he wanted was to wipe the grins off their faces. Derek was playing with them, and it was pissing him off.

“I doubt you possess such authority, but please come in. Follow me.” Derek didn't move at first, still training his hard gaze on Aidan. If he wasn't so angry and fed up with the delays, Aidan probably would have been concerned about getting on the bad side of a man who obviously had one hell of a bad side. But right now, his thoughts were only with Jake and getting him away from these people.

He wasn't sure what was going on here, and he didn't trust these people. Derek turned around abruptly and started walking. Barlow fell into step immediately, and Aidan brought up the rear, keeping his eyes on a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree

swivel, taking in everything around him. The bad feelings he had at the gate just grew and expanded with each step they took further into the compound.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Jake felt the sun filling the room and felt the warmth of the body next to him and the arms holding him close, tucked in like a treasure. He ran his fingers across Hayes' arm and then held his hand, bringing it to his lips and peppering it with kisses. "I don't know how this has happened to me, but I will forever be grateful." He spoke softly on a hushed breath, fearful that the spell would be broken and he'd find himself back in his own bed alone and utterly ordinary once again.

"You have never been ordinary, my love." Hayes voiced his thoughts and surprised Jake with his accuracy.

"You read my mind?"

"Not exactly, but I'm beginning to know you and your fears, and you wear your thoughts on your sleeve." Hayes placed a kiss on his lips, lingering and exploring their softness and depth. "You taste lovely, like the sweetest candy and the most decadent dessert."

Jake joined in the kiss, giving as good as he got, taking Hayes' lips in an embrace that surprised him with an intensity that shocked even him. This love affair was explosive but also felt solid and sure.

It was a relationship that would get better and better with every hour, every day, every year, and he planned for many, many years. Hayes had explained the life span of the shifters hundreds of years on this earth, and Jake felt that even a century with his gorgeous lover would not be close to being enough. He felt a thrilling sensation when Hayes brushed his lips across the mating scar on his shoulder.

“That feels wonderful.” He gushed and squirmed.

“Your bonding scar will always be sensitive to my touch.” Jake looked at Hayes, taking in every aspect of his handsome face, and wondered what wonderful things lay in store for him. He’d had relationships before, but no one ever touched him physically, mentally, and emotionally like Hayes can touch him with just a glance. His heart completely opened to this man, and he welcomed him. The connection was perfect, and it was genuine.

"I'm falling in love with you, Hayes. At first, it was pure lust and a burning inferno of desire, but the raging emotions that took me have blossomed into something that has pierced my heart and touched my soul." His declaration was lovely and Hayes ate it up.

Hayes held him tenderly and rained soft kisses on his face and neck. "I love you too." His words were spoken deeply, his tone like gravel, but the love in his eyes was clear as day. "Every minute I spend with you, what I feel for you grows and expands. The power of a Fated bond is beautiful." Jake had all his focus on his breathtaking mate, his attention completely swallowed by the overwhelming satisfaction of being held and loved by such a man.

Hayes slid his hand down Jake's body and gripped his hard cock in his strong hand. It caused Jake to arch and moan sensuously, releasing a soft breath as the pleasure spiked through him. "I've never experienced a good morning quite as good as this." He crooned softly against Hayes' cheek.

"I'm only getting started, my love." He said and then slid down the length of Jake's body, tossing the blankets aside and baring them both to the cool morning air. Hayes removed his hand and abruptly took all of Jake's hard length down his throat. The gasp that caught Jake had him doubling up until Hayes eased him down and held his legs.



Hayes then took him in a harsh, merciless rhythm and pressure that about turned him inside out. Jake reached out and took hold of the blankets on either side of him, digging his fists deep and holding on. The ride was epic, and the blast-off was mind-blowing. Hayes brought him to the edge and dangled him over several times before finally allowing him to come.

Jake came hard, filling Hayes' throat with stream after stream of his seed, sending sharp sensations of exquisite pleasure shooting through his nerves and veins. Hayes played him until Jake was spent, completely spent. With a breathless moan, he reached out to him.

Hayes finished and, with a satisfied smile, crawled up Jake's body and took his lips in a kiss that conquered and owned every inch of Jake. "I love you, Jake." He said and then settled beside him once again as Jake calmed and brought his breath and his pounding heart back under control.

"I love you too." He managed between ragged pants and then wrapped himself around his wonderful mate. They dozed off for a while and then woke to the sound of Jake's phone.

"Where is my phone?" He asked, still half asleep but feeling the need to check the call.

"Right here." Hayes reached across him and grabbed it from the bedside table. He handed it to Jake, who immediately began cursing. "What's wrong? What is it?" Hayes demanded.

"Aidan has been calling and texting. I forgot to let him know I wasn't coming home. People are searching for me." Jake felt himself begin to hyperventilate, but Hayes held him and talked him down, calming his fears and settling his panic.

"Text him or call him and let him know you are okay."

"Yeah, yeah, I need to text him." Jake sent a quick text stating that he stayed overnight at a friend's and that he would call him soon and to not worry that he was okay. "There, that should calm the situation." Aidan was protective, and Jake was kicking himself for not texting him sooner.

The number of texts he received and their tone told him that Aidan was worried. He appreciated his brother's concern, but right now, with all the wonderful things coming his way and the changes entering his life, he'd just as soon not have to deal with an upset Aidan. He also didn't want to have to go into a lengthy explanation. His private life was his own, and Aidan didn't need to know everything.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

Aidan and Barlow followed the man called Derek through the compound, passing neatly manicured lawns and well-maintained homes. There was nothing out of the ordinary that Aidan could see, but still, the place left him feeling off and wary.

They had just reached the main house, which Derek called the Pack House when Aidan's phone went off. When he checked it, he saw that it was a text message from Jake. That was too convenient to be credible. He glanced over at Barlow. "Jake just sent me a text telling me he spent the night at a friend's and that he's okay." Barlow's expression told him that he didn't believe it either.

"What friend?" He shot back a text to Jake and waited. The response came quickly.

"I met him on the beach last night."

"Are you in the main house of that sketchy cult?"

"It's okay, I'm okay." Aidan passed his phone to Barlow, who read through the exchange and maintained his skepticism. They climbed the stairs to the broad and expansive porch, and Derek paused at the door and turned around to regard them with a blank expression. He just stood there saying nothing. The moment was heavily charged. Even the air seemed to snap between them.

"I'm not leaving here until I see him." Aidan made his stance very clear. "I know he's here, and no convenient text messages will make me believe that all is well and fine in his world," Aidan spoke, holding Derek's gaze and matching the weight of it with all the pent-up anger he felt at being lied to and distracted. "Bring him to me, or I will do everything in my power to fuck you up. I will not stop, and I will not falter, and I

will spend every hour of every day coming for you in every way possible.”

Derek stepped forward, coming within inches of Aidan, but Aidan held his ground. Everything he said was true. He would do whatever he had to in order to keep his brother safe, and no fucking cult was going to stop him. Barlow stood next to him in full support but let Aidan do the talking. “You’re a scary guy, Derek, but I’m too fucking mad to care, so keep that in mind as you practice your intimidation on me.”

“I’m beyond practice.” He gave a terrible laugh and then continued. “You’re brave for a mere human,” Derek stated without emotion, still looking like he couldn’t care less about them or the situation. He opened the door, and standing there was Henrik Vaughn, the leader of this group. His presence caught Aidan by surprise, and the fact that he was dealing with them told Aidan that his fears were on point, and his concern for Jake skyrocketed.

He asked to speak with Barlow or, rather, Deputy Katz, and they moved further into the large entryway, leaving him with Derek by the door. Derek kept his eyes on him, but gradually, the hatred abated, and his expression, although unreadable, seemed softer.

Aidan was tying himself in knots as he stood there and waited. They had Jake, and they were still jerking them around, and Aidan felt an unbearable helplessness begin to take him.

“Be careful.” Derek’s words were sharp yet kind. It was a warning that he did not have to give. Even so, Aidan found it all irritating beyond endurance. The seconds ticked by, and Jake was not there. The feeling that he had to get to him was building to an explosion. He turned and looked at Derek, piercing his gaze with his own, holding that darkness and not cowering. He would never cower to these people.

“I am well beyond the point of caring.” He said, as ice cold as the man before him.

Aidan slowly swung his gaze around the area, taking in the grand entrance and the wide staircase before him off to the right and the rooms that connected.

It was a massive home with so many places for them to be holding Jake, but he would destroy it all to find him. He felt Derek take a step closer to him, probably feeling the anger and agitation burning off him. Then he just lost it; probably not the best idea or the sharpest move, but it was all he had, and he was going to go with it.

“Where is Jake?” He shouted at the top of his lungs and ran for the staircase. “Where is my brother? What the fuck have you done with him?” He dodged Derek when he tried to grab him by the arm, dropped to his knees, and then quickly jumped back to his feet.

People were rushing him, and hordes of men appeared out of nowhere. Barlow was trying to do his job to block and also de-escalate, but suddenly, all was lost, and everyone came undone. Tense restraint and suspicious glances erupted into chaos.

Aidan didn't know where he was going, but he had to find Jake. He fought and scrambled to get away and get into the heart of the house, but they were too much, and they were too many.

Jake felt the upset in his core and knew that there was trouble. Hayes had ordered lunch delivered to their room, and they had just sat down to eat when the flood of emotion overcame him. "I think it's Aidan." He jumped up and ran to the door, but Hayes stopped him with a gentle hand on his shoulder.

“I feel it, too. Trouble downstairs, but let me go, and you stay here. This is my job, so just let me do it. It might be serious, and I don't want you getting hurt.” Hayes forced him back and then headed for the door himself, but Jake would not be deterred.

“It’s Aidan, I know it's Aidan. I can feel him. I should have called him.” He tried to

push past Hayes but was thwarted with each try. "Please, I have to go." He shouted, and Hayes reluctantly relented. Jake hated arguing, but he had to find Aidan. Whatever was going on, it was his fault. He was so caught up in his new lover he'd forgotten about his brother.

"Stay behind me, and if I tell you to go, promise me you will go back to the room and wait for me to come for you. This could be bad and violent, and you are not physically capable of taking on shifters. Promise you will listen to me." Hayes was adamant, and Jake understood his fear.

"I promise to do as you say."

"Okay." Hayes headed for the door with Jake right behind him. Jake knew it was not ideal for Hayes to have to do his job protecting this place and also look out for his safety, but Jake could not ignore the panic he was feeling. Aidan was near, and he was in trouble.

Hayes moved swiftly through the house with Jake tucked behind him. The disturbance was coming from the front of the house, and it sounded wild but odd. The minute he made it to the staircase and saw the fight down below he knew that it involved humans. The Alpha, Derek, and others were trying to restrain the two humans without harming them. But the humans were not giving in.

He recognized Deputy Katz and assumed the other was Jake's brother Aidan. Jake tried to push past him to get to Aidan, but again, Hayes stopped him. "Don't get in the middle of that," Hayes ordered.

"That's Aidan. They need to leave him alone." Jake cried out to his brother. "Aidan! Aidan! Stop. I'm okay. They aren't hurting me. Please stop." Aidan looked up at Jake and tried to break for the stairs, and one of the guards, without thinking, shifted into his wolf and leaped at Aidan. Derek intervened and took Aidan to the floor, pressing

him hard into the marble tile while the wolf quickly disappeared.

The others incapacitated the deputy, who had also witnessed the unfortunate shift. Aidan did not stop fighting, and Derek kept tightening his hold. Hayes stepped aside and let Jake run to his brother. Hayes followed, taking in the scene and wondering what was next.

“Take Deputy Katz to the infirmary and hold him there.” Alpha Henrik instructed, and two of his enforcers carried him away. The Alpha approached Derek, who was still holding Aidan firmly face down on the floor, but Aidan was still attempting to fight. Jake fell to his knees next to Aidan and began a long apology for not informing him and not answering his calls.

“I met someone, Aidan, and oh my God, he is amazing. I forgot all about everything. His name is Hayes Castian, and I know you’ll like him. He works security for the Bay Harbor community.” Aidan took a breath and finally stopped fighting Derek. He looked over at his brother and then up at Hayes, who was standing by his side.

“Is that Hayes?” He asked, and Jake confirmed.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:08 am*

"I don't like it, Jake." He stated honestly but did not elaborate.

"It's not what you think these people are good. Please understand." Aidan was not buying it. Alpha Henrik asked Derek to take Aidan to the infirmary and place him with Deputy Katz. They had a situation to work out, and the two men needed to be isolated until it was settled.

Derek stood and pulled Aidan to his feet. "You can walk, or I can carry you; it is your choice."

"I'll walk," Aidan stated and followed Derek. Jake and Hayes fell in behind as they all made their way to the infirmary. Hayes stopped and spoke briefly with the Alpha.

"Are you going to contact the Coven and have them send someone?" He asked.

"Yes, we need to clear their memories. I know Aidan is your mate's brother, but he cannot have this information. We can't take that risk, especially with such a hot-headed human." Hayes understood completely.

"Jake will understand." He told him.

Jake watched as his brother and Barlow were led into two separate and secure rooms, and then the door was locked behind them. It was awful; he wanted to help Aidan, but there was nothing he could do. Their eyes connected just as the door was closing, and it broke Jake's heart.

Hayes put his arm around him and drew him close. "It'll be okay, Jake. They saw too



much, and that memory must be removed before they can be released." Hayes explained to him that vampires have the ability to erase memories, and they can be very specific. "There's a coven in the area up on Old Mission Peninsula. The Alpha will contact them, and they will send someone to take care of the problem."

"My brother is not a problem," Jake stated emphatically, and Hayes backtracked immediately.

"Of course not, I didn't mean it like that."

"I also asked that memories be woven in, erasing the incident of today regarding you and Aidan. The vampire will plant a memory of you informing Aidan of your meeting someone and staying the night at Bay Harbor. They are very careful, and I promise you that Aidan will not be harmed, and his mind, apart from the incident of last night and today, will not be touched. You have my promise." Jake was struggling to come to terms with lying to his brother, but in the end, he saw the need and agreed.

"He has protected me my entire life. He has fought for me, gone to incredible lengths to support me and keep me safe, and now I'm lying to him and setting him apart from me and my life." Jake shook his head and buried his face in Hayes' chest.

"It has to be this way for his own safety and ours," Hayes told him, feeling his hurt and wishing he could take it away.

"They'll take the memory, but it will not change him." Derek came up to stand beside them. He stared at the door to Aidan's room as he spoke. "He is a protector, a defender, and family is everything. It's in his blood and his marrow. He was ready to die for you today, and that's just who he is and will always be. I understand him." Derek then turned and left the area without further comment.

"The Master is sending over two of his sentinels. They should be here within the hour." Zayn informed them. "It would be best if Aidan didn't see you until after;

otherwise, it will just make further memories to be erased.”

“Yes, but please let me know as soon as it's over,” Jake asked, still looking a bit uncomfortable. He knew why it had to be done; he just wished that the misunderstanding had never happened.

“I will,” Zayn responded. “He will be returned to his home and will wake up with new memories of the last two days. His worry and his visit here will no longer exist.” Jake nodded but said nothing.

Hayes took Jake out to the large back deck and made him comfortable. He brought him a large coffee and then sat down next to him, gathering him into his arms as they stared out at the beautiful Bay. “It will all work out, my love. Aidan will lose the worry, and he will gain some peace. Please don’t feel bad.”

“I hate hiding things from Aidan. It had never been our relationship to hide or to lie. This is difficult for me, but I know that it’s necessary.” He appreciated Jake's struggle but also appreciated the level of maturity he was displaying. His mate was kind and loving but also practical and realistic, and he couldn't ask for more than that.

“I love you, Jake, and I look forward to getting to know your brother and building a friendship.” Hayes was impressed with the man even though he thought Jake had been kidnapped and imprisoned by what he thought to be a cult. It made Hayes smile even in the midst of all the upset. Aidan was willing to do whatever it took to protect Jake, and on that score, they were alike, and he could see Aidan as a future ally.

“I love you too, Hayes, so much I can hardly contain it all. I’m so happy and so in love that I just wish that I could share it all with Aidan.” He burrowed into Hayes’ side.

“You’re going to get that wish, Jake.” Alpha Henrik and a smiling Derek stepped out onto the deck, and both Hayes and Jake turned in surprise. “The sentinels were

successful with Deputy Katz, but it appears they are unable to touch Aidan's mind."

"What does that mean?" Jake asked urgently.

"The only people whose minds cannot be touched are those who are in close proximity to their future Fated Mate. It means that Aidan belongs to someone in the Pack." Henrik explained and smiled.

Jake's eyes lit up with the knowledge that he did not have to leave his brother behind.

Jake turned to Hayes and pulled him in for a hard kiss. "Aidan is coming with me on this adventure."

"He's going to be one of us sweetheart." Hayes held his mate and thanked the Fates for their kindness.

Henrik turned to Derek. "Now we have to find the wolf that owns that hot head."

"Yeah, before he manages to find a way out of that room," Derek commented. "I wouldn't underestimate him."

THE END