



Sweetheart: Unlocked Mates

Book 8

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Levi

He left behind his clutch, his parents, and siblings for the chance of finding his mate. The person who was meant to be just for him. The perfect match promised by the fates for the chosen ones.

Finding his mate nearly brought Levi to his knees with happiness. Mason, a park ranger, was everything he could have ever wanted as a partner. As his boy. Except Levi wasn't used to talking to people, especially humans like Mason. What started as an attempt to connect through a dating app had led to Mason turning Levi away. Struggling, Levi tries to forget his dreams and leave Mason in peace but the fates have other ideas.

Mason

Running and hiding were two things Mason knows how to do well. He'd been born to a monster that had taught Mason and his twin to hunt and destroy those in the paranormal world, but Mason figured out the human that raised him was the real monster and he'd wanted no part of killing anyone.

He'd found a home, a job, friends but he was still missing the connection that he craved. Mason had thought he'd met the man of his dreams through a dating app, but the man refused to meet him. After a night of too much alcohol and loneliness, Mason made a huge mistake. He had to put that man out of his mind though. His survival depended on Mason keeping himself safe. Out of the hands of his father.

Mason believed he'd gotten away but when the past comes for him, he has to turn to the men that live five miles from the state park and might have their own secrets. One of the men that Mason can't stop thinking about...until he realizes he knows that firm strong chest.

Fate doesn't like to be ignored. Levi and Mason are about to learn that no matter how many obstacles are in their path, what is meant to be will be. Danger is around the corner and only the strong will survive.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Mason

Mason Benard checked his backpack, ensuring he had the essentials for a long hike before hefting the weight over one shoulder. The small rundown cabin he was fixing up didn't show a lot of progress, but Mason was happy with what he'd accomplished so far. He should really be spending his day off working on the floors or sanding the kitchen cabinets, but he was too unsettled to stay indoors.

Spring had finally arrived. After a long and stressful winter, Mason was ready to be outside and back into a routine.

Stepping into the early morning sun, Mason lifted his face while breathing deeply. He loved the little piece of heaven that he'd found for himself. No more city traffic, horns honking, or people yelling. No more family coming into his apartment whenever they wanted, no matter how often Mason asked them not to. No more having to be at his father's beck and call when his father decided another monster needed to be tracked. Mason had finally put his foot down, joining his cousin and twin brother and leaving the family business behind him.

Getting a job with the State Park Service had been easy enough. His twin was an expert at forging documents and Mason instantly had the requirements to become a park ranger. When he was told that there was an abandoned ranger station on the edge of park land close to where the forest butted up against private land, Mason had been thrilled.

A cabin out in the middle of nowhere. Perfect.

In the few short months that he'd been living at the cabin, Mason had started to make it his own. A home that he wouldn't be yanked away from at his father's wishes. He was a thirty-two-year-old man, and it was time for Mason to live the kind of life he wanted.

Not that Mason knew what to do with himself yet.

Making the rounds of the state park, where he answered questions and gave directions to tourists, wasn't exactly the challenge Mason was looking for. He had his cabin remodel to keep him busy outside of work and there was a decent club where he could pick up men. Mason was pleased that his choice in male bed partners was not limited for settling down in such a small town. He had a lot of time to make up. His father hadn't given him or his brother freedom to experiment while growing up or in their late teens or twenties. Mason spent the first month in town fucking as many men or being fucked by them as he could.

Mason always brought the men to his cabin and seeing their faces when they were presented with the rundown cabin was almost comical. Not all men made it inside but the ones who did deserved a piece of Mason's ass.

No one had stuck around afterwards.

Not that Mason minded. He enjoyed getting fucked. Just because he was missing a connection with any of his choices didn't mean he was making a mistake.

Mason knew better than anyone that finding a real connection with someone only led to heartache. If his father hadn't chased away Mason's boyfriends, then his old job would have. Not like he could explain to a lover that he had to skip out on a date or leave the bed in the middle of the night because his father 'found' another monster.

Yeah, he was better off finding men at clubs and getting his.

Except the loneliness wouldn't go away. He'd tried to at least get to know a few of the men and date. He'd even set up a profile on a gay dating app at the insistence of his twin. Mason had only found one man that he even bothered to chat with.

Stone had been sweet, funny, and a welcome distraction from the major life changes Mason had been making.

The only problem had been that while Stone was always up for chatting through the app, he'd refused to meet Mason in person.

At first Mason had been amused. Stone was obviously shy. Sort of naïve. The pictures though. Fuck! Mason had stared at the pictures that Stone sent to him. Never of his face. But that chest...those thighs. Sadly, Mason hadn't gotten any dick pictures although he'd been hoping, and now he'd not get anything ever again.

After too much whiskey, a voicemail from his father, and feeling sorry for himself, Mason had sent a message that he'd regretted the next morning. It had been too late. Stone was gone. He must have deleted the app, because Mason had even made a fake profile, trying to find the guy again. No luck.

Shaking his head, Mason pushed all thoughts of Stone.

Nothing he could do about it. He'd fucked up and the sweetest, most attractive—as far as he could tell—man that Mason had ever talked to was gone. Poof.

Stepping off the front deck, Mason set out for his hike. He wanted to get to know the area around his cabin better. There were no designated hiking trails but Mason was an experienced outdoorsman so he knew he would be fine. He also wanted to check out the private land that butted up against his.

Mason's boss had specifically ordered him to stay away from the private land.

Like that would even be possible. It just showed that his boss knew nothing about Mason.

The trees seemed to welcome him, the canopy of leaves above his head keeping the early morning sun hidden. It was a little chilly, but Mason had dressed in layers for that reason.

The sounds of animals waking up caught his attention.

He passed a tree with a small family of squirrels squeaking at one another.

“Good morning,” he greeted his little furry friends.

A rabbit darted out in front of him before hopping up onto a downed trunk.

“Well, aren’t you cute,” Mason told the rabbit.

Yes, he was talking to the forest animals. No, he wasn’t embarrassed. It wasn’t like there was another human around to hear him being silly. Mason had always loved animals even though his father had thought that made him soft.

Animals didn’t judge. Animals lived simple lives and Mason envied them for that.

Two hours into his hike and Mason was in love with his new home. The hope for the future was bright as he spotted a couple of birds watching him. The forest of this state park was filled with life. The animals appeared curious as to what the sweaty human was doing stumbling around in their territory.

Deciding it was time for a break, Mason found a soft spot on the moss-covered ground and sat with his back to a large oak tree.

Mason pulled out a bottle of water and protein bar as he peered around his surroundings. He was only a few feet from where the state park property ended, and the private land started.

There was a buzz in the air that prickled at the back of his neck. He'd trained too long to ignore such a strong pulse.

Magic.

At this point in his life, Mason could practically taste magic.

He quickly scarfed down his snack before gulping the water. Mason kept still, trying to see if he could tell what magical being had been around. Was this why he'd felt himself being watched lately? Just last week while he'd been chopping wood for his fireplace, Mason swore he hadn't been alone.

Mason had called himself crazy. Knew he was paranoid but couldn't shake the feeling that he was being watched. Even talking to his twin hadn't calmed him down.

Stuffing his trash and the empty water bottle back into his bag, Mason began to rise when he spotted something silver glint from under a pile of leaves. He dropped his pack before carefully crawling over.

What he saw made his stomach turn.

A fucking bear trap!

There was no hunting in the state park, and he knew that the private land was protected as well. This trap had been set by someone who shouldn't be in the area. He grabbed his bag to pull out a small tool set and went about dismantling the trap. He needed to show his boss but... He glanced through the trees.

What about the private landowner?

Mason could see a huge house with several other well-constructed buildings scattered around the property. A thought struck before Mason could talk himself out of it. He'd wanted to meet the neighbors. Now he had a reason.

He carefully set the trap inside his bag before he rose.

The minute he stepped over the invisible barrier, his core burned.

There was definite magic being used around here.

Now Mason was even more curious.

The backyard was filled with toys scattered around and a very nice deck with a large table and several chairs. It appeared his neighbors had a big family. A tall playset, pool, and sandbox were also visible. And they had kids that needed to be warned about the traps.

The back door was right there but Mason took the time to walk around to the front. He knocked on the massive door of the big house.

"Levi! Can you get that?"

"I just got back from a run!"

"The boys are finger painting! Do you want to come help in here instead?"

"I'll get the door."

Mason held in his laugh at the disgruntled statement before the front door opened. He

stared at the most attractive man he'd ever seen. The man wore only a pair of gray cotton shorts that hung from his hips as sweat dripped down the center of his chest.

Fuck! Mason licked his lips. He wanted to chase after that sweat as it went lower and lower reaching... Damn! He forced his eyes up to the face of a man with wide gray eyes that stared at him.

Neither of them said anything. The tension strung tight between them.

Those eyes. That mouth. The chest!

The door slammed in his face.

Fuck!

"Axel!" The previously disgruntled voice now sounded panicked.

Mason heard feet running quickly away from him. There was no way that man could know who Mason was. Or more correctly who he had been.

He knocked again.

The door swung open but this time a tall dark-haired man stepped out of the house, forcing Mason to retreat.

"Help you?" the man asked firmly.

Shit! This man was not human. Mason could feel his instincts wanting him to either fight or take flight. To get the fuck away from him.

He cleared his throat. He was normal now. A normal human who didn't know that

monsters existed. “I’m Mason Benard. From the ranger station about five miles that way.” He tilted his head in the direction of his cabin. “I was out on a hike and came across something worrisome.”

The man looked over his shoulder then back at Mason. “Park ranger?”

“Yes, sir.” Stay calm, Mason, he chided. He doesn’t know anything.

“Okay.” The man reached out and closed the front door tightly. “What is this about?”

Mason lifted his pack. “Like I said, I was out hiking and had taken a break. I found this.” He set his pack on the ground and pulled out the bear trap.

The guy growled. He fucking growled. “Can you show me where you found that?”

Mason was surprised into answering. “Sure.” He hadn’t expected the forceful demand.

The guy raised his fingers to his mouth before letting out a sharp whistle. Two men seemed to step out of the shadows. Both just as dark and deadly as the man in front of him.

Holy shit! What had Mason gotten himself into now? And more importantly, where was the bare-chested hottie that had run away from him? Because there was no doubt in Mason’s mind that the stranger with the gray eyes had run from him.

Something about the man tickled at the back of his mind but when the stranger in front of him held out a hand, Mason was forced to focus on him instead.

“My name’s Axel. This is Gavin and Trevor,” he introduced.

Mason really wanted the name of the guy who'd answered the door! "Nice to meet you all." He shook each of their hands.

"If you wouldn't mind showing us where you found that trap, we'd appreciate it. We've been fighting hunters and poachers for a while now."

"Happy to!" Glancing over his shoulder one last time, Mason hoped to catch a glimpse of the attractive stranger, but the door remained closed.

* * * * *

Levi

'If you don't want to meet, stop messaging me. I'm done with you.'

Stop messaging me. Stop messaging me.

The words Levi would never forget echoed in his head. He raced from the backdoor of the house and past the tree line where the portal to Hell had been set up for him to use.

It was easy enough to activate the portal and before long, Levi was stepping into the room that he'd been given in Adam and Mal's house. Tears that he'd been holding back fell and Levi was powerless to stop them. It hurt so much to know that the handsome park ranger was his mate. Levi had never come face-to-face with his mate before. Been close enough to smell him.

Mason Benard. That was his mate's name. He shouldn't know that, but Levi had done some sneaking around the old cabin that his mate lived in and had found bills made out in the man's name. He hadn't told his friends about that. Or how he'd lain in Mason's bed that one time.

Levi hadn't done anything bad. He'd just wanted to be surrounded by his mate's scent. Instead of it making Levi feel better, Levi had been devastated. That was when he'd decided to visit his friends in the Hell realm.

He'd only returned home when he'd thought he could make better choices. Like not watching his mate take a different man to bed every week. Not that Levi watched the actual act, but he knew what it meant when two men couldn't keep their hands off each other and stumbled into a room tugging at clothes while kissing. He did live in a house full of mated couples.

It was very different when one of those men was meant to be with Levi.

Levi had ruined things with his mate before they'd even spoken one word out loud to each other. He'd been so scared that he'd thought it would be a good idea to try chatting with his mate through an app he'd spotted on Mason's phone.

Lawson had helped Levi set up an account, posted a picture of Levi's chest without his shirt, and even matched him with his mate.

The chatting seemed to have been going well. His mate had asked for more pictures even! They chatted on the app for hours at a time. He knew so many things about his mate that Levi had already fallen in love.

Sitting on his favorite perch on the roof, Levi could watch his mate while they exchanged messages. Levi had felt like they'd started to build something. Then out of nowhere Mason had told Levi to stop messaging him.

Levi had sat and stared at those words for an hour while his heart broke before he did the responsible thing. He'd deleted his profile and the app from his phone.

He'd broken the only real connection that he had with his mate.

It had been harder to stop watching his mate.

Levi wasn't a stalker. No matter what Lawson and Adam said. He hadn't been stalking his mate! He'd been looking out for him. But as more men filled Mason's life, Levi had been going slowly insane and made the decision that it would be better for both of them if he went away.

Being in the Hell realm allowed Levi to forget that his mate was probably out with another man. He could pretend that he was fine. He could fight and train with the demon warriors until he was exhausted and fall asleep without dreaming about being with his mate.

Maybe he should just stay in the Hell realm?

He jumped at the knock on his bedroom door.

"Levi? Are you here?" Mal called out.

"I'm here," Levi said quietly. He didn't need to raise his voice. Mal would hear him.

"Axel called. May I come in?" Mal asked.

Levi wiped at the tears on his cheeks. "Yeah."

The door opened and Mal peeked around. The tall demon's blood-red eyes melted when they saw him. "Levi."

"I'm fine." His voice broke.

Mal wrapped his strong arms around him, and Levi was pulled into that massive chest. There were few men taller and wider than Levi, but the Master of Hell was a

giant of a demon. Levi allowed himself a few moments of just leaning on the bigger man.

“I got you,” Mal murmured. He held Levi tight.

“I’m fine,” Levi repeated even as more tears fell. He caught a sob in the back of his throat.

“You don’t have to be,” Mal said gently. “It’s okay to be hurt.”

Those words had the dam breaking. Levi had been bottling everything up so his friends wouldn’t see him as a burden. He wanted to be a strong, valuable member of the family, but he was so tired. Too tired to care anymore.

He allowed himself to cry for the loss of a mate that Levi had spent his entire life dreaming about. Levi had left his clutch—his birth family—to chase the chance of maybe one day meeting his special person. Everything that he sacrificed was for nothing. His parents had marked him a traitor for leaving his clutch, but Levi had still believed that when he found his mate everything he went through would be worth it.

Levi wailed into Mal’s neck as the realization of his failures overwhelmed him. He would be utterly alone for the rest of his existence. Being immortal no longer held any appeal for him. Not if he would spend all those years without the love that had been promised to him.

His legs became weak, but Mal was there to lift Levi and carry him to bed. Levi clung harder to the demon even as he felt a part of his soul died within. Mal sat with Levi cuddled up against him. A second later another set of arms embraced him from behind. Levi sighed as Adam’s weight was added against him.

“It’s going to be okay,” Adam whispered. “I swear we’ll figure all this out. You’re

not alone.”

He wasn't alone. Levi had people that loved him. That he loved in return. But was life worth living if the one person meant for him was no longer an option?

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Mason

Grinning, Mason stepped into his favorite diner while spotting his prey. It had been two weeks since Mason had first laid eyes on the man who'd answered the door nearly naked and deliciously sweaty from what had clearly been a long hard run. Mason liked hard things. He couldn't get the man out of his head and finally Mason had tracked him down.

It had taken Mason all of twenty-four hours before he realized what had been tickling at the back of his brain.

The scar. The handsome stranger had a scar over his left pec. Over where his heart was. That scar. Yeah, Mason had seen it before. In the profile picture of Stone.

The handsome stranger that had nearly knocked Mason off his feet with need was the same one that Mason had been obsessed with over an online app. The same man that Mason had stupidly told to stop messaging him.

Once he realized the stranger was Stone, Mason couldn't stop himself from needing to see the man again. Mason had become a little too obsessed. Normal people didn't sit out in the woods watching a house full of men waiting to see one in particular. Something kept bringing him and Stone together and Mason just wanted to figure out if that pull meant what he thought.

He'd set out to learn everything he could about Stone's real life, but he hadn't learned much. Mason hadn't seen the handsome stranger at all in the two weeks he'd been watching for him. Although, Mason had learned a whole lot about the men that lived

with Stone and had his suspicions already of what might be going on in Mason's new adopted town.

Men of all ages lived in the big house. Although there were no actual children like Mason had first assumed. The men were involved in several very interesting relationship dynamics. At least two relationships consisted of three partners. Mason did not have a problem with poly relationships, but he would not be sharing his gray-eyed man with anyone else. He was possessive enough to know that a poly relationship wasn't for him.

Also, several of the men indulged in age regression, daddy kink, and there was even one young man who dressed as a pup. Mason was intrigued. Mason and his twin had belonged to a BDSM club in the city and had often snuck out to indulge in their own kinks after coming of age.

While Jason leaned more toward the SM part of the community, Mason enjoyed the softer side. He'd gravitated toward the few Daddy Doms in the club, but it had always felt fake since they'd lacked any sort of connection.

Hope bloomed and settled in Mason's chest that this time he might have found where he actually belonged. Someone that might be into the same things as he while also wanting something more than just one night. Stone had to have been on that app for a reason after all.

There was just one concern. Mason knew something strange was going on with the men of the big house. Something that would place Mason firmly in enemy territory if they knew who he really was.

The number of disappearances and sudden appearances that happened around the house astounded him. Mason could sit for hours leaning against his now claimed tree and watch men coming out of the woods and toward the house with no apparent

arrival. They just sort of popped into existence.

He'd already known that these men were part of the paranormal or supernatural world and that popping up confirmed it.

Which meant Mason's obsession must be paranormal as well.

Before they could go much further, Mason was going to have to confess his role in the paranormal community and why he was currently hiding out in an abandoned cabin playing at being a park ranger. If Stone found out who he was without Mason being the one to tell him, it would ruin everything Mason wanted with Stone.

First, he had to get his gray-eyed hottie to talk to him.

Mason waved to one of the waitresses he'd become friendly with before pointing over to the booth occupied by one man. He strolled over, trying to appear casual even as his heart raced.

As he walked closer to the booth, he noticed the man's head bent over a sketch pad. Was he an artist? From what Mason could see in the bold strikes of pencil against paper, it would appear so.

Mason stopped beside the table. "That's amazing."

The man startled and squeaked before he slammed his hand over the page.

"Hello." Mason smiled. "I don't think we formally met. I'm Mason Benard. A park ranger stationed about five miles from your house. We sort of met the other day?" He held out his hand.

Now Stone could totally ignore him. Mason half expected him to. Did he know

Mason was the person from the dating app? Mason hadn't shared any pictures with his face shown but he'd figured out this was Stone, so it was possible the reverse was true. That would explain the door being slammed in his face.

The man slowly reached out a hand.

Mason grabbed onto it. "And you are?"

Gray eyes widened. "Levi."

Levi, not Stone, interesting. Not that Mason had used his real name. On dating apps, he went by the moniker Ranger Rick with his profile one of his uniform shirt open showing off his hairless and toned chest. "It's very nice to meet you, Levi." Mason forced himself to let go of Levi's hand. "Mind if I join you?"

Levi glanced around the diner. Yes, there were several empty tables. No, Mason did not want to sit at any of them. He wanted to be as close to Levi as possible. In the chats, Stone had always seemed super sweet, well educated, and fun. That couldn't have been an act. Not as often as they messaged. He prayed Levi would give him a chance.

"Please?" Mason asked quietly. He was almost desperate. There was so much he wanted to say but Mason didn't want to scare Stone...Levi away either. His brother often called Mason out for coming on too strong. Or the fact that Mason tended to latch on too hard to other people. It wasn't Mason's fault that he knew what he wanted.

"Okay," Levi responded just as softly.

Mason slid into the booth across from Levi and smiled as he ran his gaze over the handsome man. Levi wore his light hair cut short, allowing Mason an unobstructed

view of his face. Levi's high cheekbones were as sharp as that intense gaze. Levi wore a soft gray T-shirt that made his eyes pop. Mason could look at Levi for days. Except his obvious appraisal was making Levi shift uncomfortably in his seat.

"Are you an artist?" Mason motioned back toward the sketch pad.

"Uh." Levi looked around frantically again.

Fuck! Should Mason address the dating app and his fuck-up or not? Would that help or make Levi even more uncomfortable?

Levi suddenly rolled his shoulders back then lifted his chin. "Why do you want to know?"

Damn, this sweet man had some fire inside him. Good. Mason needed a man with a firm hand. He tended to get himself in trouble.

Mason grinned. "Isn't this how you get to know someone? Ask them questions? Talk to them?"

"You want to get to know me?"

"I do." How to phrase this? "We're neighbors so we're bound to run into each other. Maybe we could be friends."

"Friends," Levi repeated.

Or more. Mason didn't think that Levi was ready for Mason to tell him what he really wanted to do. Like pushing Levi onto his back and climbing on top. He could take, what Mason imagined, was an impressive dick and rock Levi's world. Then snuggle for several hours before doing it again. And again.

Fuck, Mason loved bottoming. He loved being fucked. He wanted Levi. Damn it, he needed to get ahold of himself. Spreading his legs, Mason tried to give himself more breathing room as his hard cock pressed against the zipper of his pants.

The waitress walked up to the table and set a mug of coffee in front of Mason before placing a plate in front of Levi.

Great timing. Levi couldn't run until at least after he ate.

"Your usual, Ranger?" Sally asked.

"Yes please." He nodded. He sipped his coffee as she walked away. The diner's strong coffee always gave him a bit of a burst. Fuck! Mason would be lost without coffee.

Levi reached for his club sandwich but quickly dropped his hand back to his side.

"Please eat," Mason told him.

"I..."

"I am imposing on you for company. No need to wait on me. Eat before your food gets cold."

"Not imposing on me," Levi mumbled while reaching again for his sandwich.

Mason smiled. Maybe Levi didn't mind his presence too much. "So, artist?"

Levi took a bite and swallowed then reluctantly answered. "Tattoo artist. I own the shop in town."

“The one across the street?” Mason perked up. He’d been inside the shop, but Levi hadn’t been there. Mason would have noticed. “I met with Steve about having some work done.”

“Oh.” Levi’s shoulders dropped. “He’s very talented.”

But Mason wanted Levi’s hands on him. Hopefully Levi felt the same. “I don’t remember seeing you there.” Mason was being pushy. It didn’t seem that Levi wanted to talk about himself though.

Levi shrugged before dipping a fry into ketchup. “I don’t take walk-ins and only come in when I have an appointment. Steve does a good job of running the shop for me.”

“Which means that if I want to see you, I shouldn’t hang around the tattoo shop?”

Levi choked on the french fry he’d just popped into his mouth.

Was it something he said? Mason mentally snickered. Levi was fun to tease.

“Wh...what?” Levi asked.

“If I want to see you,” Mason said. “How would I go about that? You don’t spend much time in your shop so—” He waved his hand around.

Levi took a drink of his ice water. He slammed the cup down. “Are you messing with me?”

“No.” Mason widened his eyes. “I swear.”

Levi grunted.

Mason was not giving up. “You should give me your number.” That was a brilliant idea. Levi, when he’d been Stone, had seemed much more comfortable talking when they’d messaged through the dating app.

“What is even happening right now?” Levi mumbled.

“I’m hitting on you,” Mason said slowly so there would be no more misunderstandings.

Levi shook his head. “I...I don’t...what?”

Mason noticed the waitress walking over with a plate. He stole a fry from Levi’s plate before pushing it toward him. “Eat.”

He was happy when Levi picked up his sandwich and took another bite.

“Thanks, Sally.” Mason waited until she’d set the roast beef, mashed potatoes, corn, and roll in front of him. He took a deep breath before smiling. “This looks great.”

“Just holler if either of you need anything else.” She walked away and Mason glanced back at Levi, who was staring at him.

Mason stabbed his fork into his potatoes. “Here is the thing. I find you incredibly attractive. I think we should go on a date.”

“Are you always this forward?” Levi asked.

“No. Yes. Sometimes.” Damn, Mason hadn’t had to work this hard to get a man in a very long time. He just knew that Levi was going to turn him down and Mason needed to avoid that. It appeared it was time to come clean. At least with one secret that Mason held. “Besides, we’re not complete strangers. Are we, Stone?”

Levi jerked back like he'd been shocked. He paled considerably, which was obvious with his smooth tan complexion. "How—"

Mason smiled. "How'd I know it was you?"

Levi nodded, the shock evident.

"The scar on your chest. I saw it in your profile picture and the pictures you sent privately to me and then again when you answered the door without a shirt." The question really was. "How'd you recognize me?"

"I have to go!" Levi climbed out of the booth. He quickly pulled out his wallet and dropped cash onto the table.

"You don't have to run from me again," Mason said quietly. He should have kept his fucking mouth closed. "We need to talk about this."

"Bye!"

Mason reached out and snagged Levi's wrist.

Levi froze.

"You forgot your sketch pad." Mason grabbed the pencil on the table with his free hand then the sketch pad. He flipped the pad over and wrote his number messily on the back. "That's my number." He handed over the pad.

Levi accepted it even though his gaze never left where Mason had grabbed him.

Mason rubbed his thumb over the pulse point in Levi's wrist. "I hope you'll call me. I'd really like to talk to you again. To clear up a few things."

Before he knew it, Levi yanked his wrist from Mason's hold and, clutching his sketch pad, literally ran from the diner.

Mason had to admit defeat. At least for the time being.

* * * * *

Levi

He hadn't been to his favorite spot at home in almost a month. Not since before he left to stay in the Hell realm the first time. Levi had missed his rooftop oasis but knew he couldn't keep himself from peering over to where Mason lived.

Even now his eyes kept sweeping in the direction that he knew Mason would be as he huddled on one of his couches. Levi still didn't understand what had happened at the diner earlier. Mason knew who he was. He'd called Levi Stone. Acting like he hadn't told Levi to stop messaging him. Like he hadn't broken Levi's heart, leaving him devastated.

Pulling the soft blanket tighter around his shoulders, Levi rested his chin on his knee as he wrapped his arms around his legs.

Levi resisted transforming into his other form. He'd be warmer but he would also be stuck in transition for hours. If Mason showed up with another man at the cabin like he'd done before, there was no way Levi wanted to be locked away and have to see. The time that had happened had nearly driven Levi out of his mind.

Not that he expected Mason to be with another man just hours after hitting on Levi, but Levi wouldn't blame him if he did. Levi had run like the coward he was.

The trapdoor from the interior of the house opened.

Levi didn't know who was coming to check on him and didn't know whether to wave them off.

When Gavin popped his head up from the opening, Levi was relieved. He loved all his chosen family, but he didn't feel like explaining what was going on in his head. It was also getting harder to be around the mated couples when his own mate had basically told him to fuck off. The boys wanted to cheer him up, but Levi could only handle so many good intentions and inspirational talks.

Gavin was different though. Gavin would sit with him for hours and never expect Levi to talk. Usually. Gavin was also very opinionated and sometimes he made sure Levi was listening. Gavin disappeared for a moment. He reappeared and climbed onto the roof with a mug in his hand.

Levi really hoped that mug was for him.

Crossing the roof quickly to pass Levi the mug of hot tea, Gavin frowned at him.

"Thank you," Levi told his friend.

"I figured you might be cold out here. The nights are still chilly even though spring is trying to break through."

Levi nodded, it was chilly, but he loved his special oasis. He took a sip of the hot liquid. Mmm, the special tea that Drake made him.

Gavin sat beside him. His shoulder against Levi's offering silent comfort. "You want to talk about it?"

He quickly shook his head.

“Okay.” Gavin shrugged. He seemed to settle in next to Levi by slouching and stretching his legs out.

It appeared that Gavin wouldn’t push Levi but also wouldn’t let him suffer all alone. Levi really did appreciate the support that he received from everyone. At least he knew that Gavin understood more than most the loss that Levi was feeling. Gavin might not have met his mate yet but the emptiness that Levi felt was shared by his friend. They’d filled long nights together just talking about what they were hoping to find with their mates.

Levi sipped his tea before he rested his temple on Gavin’s leather-clad shoulder. The familiar scent of leather, oil, and sweat from the older leather jacket Gavin favored was a comfort. Gavin’s natural scent of smoke, rain, and something dark was nearly hidden behind the other scents but it was there.

“Adam showed me the sketch for his tattoo. It was amazing.”

He stiffened. Levi couldn’t help it. He’d been working on the sketch for Adam. Adam’s Mate Mal had been promoted to one of the Duke’s of Hell. The symbol of his position had appeared on Mal with the promotion. Adam wanted to surprise Mal with a matching mark. It was a nice idea and Levi wanted the tattoo to be perfect. He’d finally finished it right before Mason had approached his table.

“Trouble at the shop?” Gavin growled.

Levi snorted. “No.” His friends meant well but just because Levi didn’t like confrontations didn’t mean he was helpless. If Levi needed, he could take care of himself and his business. He was a freaking guard for the family. He’d defended his family numerous times. Just because he was hurting didn’t make him weak. He was still a badass even if he often cried himself to sleep. No one needed to know that detail anyway.

“You sure?” Gavin pushed.

It appeared Gavin wasn’t going to let this go.

“I was working on the sketch when my mate approached me today,” he confessed.

Gavin nodded slowly.

Levi sighed. Maybe he did want to talk to someone about earlier after all. “I was at the diner waiting for my lunch when he stopped by my booth and asked to join me.”

“He just walked up and asked if he could join you?”

Keeping his head on Gavin’s shoulder, he nodded.

“Why?”

“That’s what I was wondering. He said that we should be friends. Friends!” That still flabbergasted him. How could they be friends when all Levi wanted to do was touch Mason? To hold him?

“If he doesn’t know the two of you had chatted before—”

“He knows,” Levi interrupted. “He even called me Stone.”

“How?” Gavin demanded.

“The scar.” Levi rubbed his palm over his heart where his shirt hid the mark his father had left on him when Levi had left the clutch. The reminder that he had abandoned his family.

“Fuck!” Gavin spat.

That pretty much summed up how Levi felt. He’d had the scar for so long that he didn’t notice it much. He’d considered tattooing over it, but Levi wasn’t ashamed of the choice he’d made. All his life all he wanted was to find his mate. That would have been impossible if he’d stayed with his birth family.

His parents’ decision to isolate the clutch from both other paranormal and humans before Levi had even been born was stated as a protection for him and his siblings. Levi had disagreed. His parents had been true mates and Levi didn’t understand why they would deny their children the same love. The decision to leave had cost Levi the only family and connections that he’d ever known. If it wasn’t for Axel and the rest of his found family, Levi would have been utterly alone.

“What are you going to do?” Gavin asked, pulling Levi from his thoughts.

“He gave me his phone number,” Levi said.

“Are you going to call him?”

That was what Levi had been sitting up here contemplating. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Levi,” Gavin said quietly.

“I...can’t. I won’t survive him changing his mind again. It’s better to just leave everything as is.”

“Maybe give it some more time.”

No, Levi was sure this was for the best. “I’ll think about it.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Mason

Levi hadn't called. As Mason lay in his cold and lonely bed, he cursed himself and his big mouth. He'd known that Levi was a flight risk, but Mason had stupidly pushed him. To make matters worse, Mason hadn't caught sight of Levi for another week.

Where did the man spend his time? Mason had spotted almost every other resident of the big house where Levi lived at some point during the week. Levi was nowhere to be found.

He pounded the mattress in frustration.

Damn it! Mason was not going to give up. Not after the connection he'd shared with Levi when Mason had been talking to him as Stone. Something deep had been happening and Mason regretted ever sending that stupid message when he'd been drunk sad. Drunk sad was bad. Very very bad.

He just needed to see Levi again and Mason would figure out what to say to make everything better.

Mason jerked upright in bed at the sudden loud explosion of what had to be a hunting rifle.

"Fuck!" Mason leapt out of bed and grabbed the closest pair of pants. He yanked on whatever clothing he could before quickly getting his boots on. He barely remembered to grab his weapon from the nightstand drawer as he ran from the room.

He raced through the small cabin and out the door.

Stopping on the front deck, he peered around, trying to figure out where the sound had come from. There was no fucking hunting in protected lands! Why couldn't these assholes get that?

The silence in the forest was eerie.

The hunters would probably be long gone before Mason could catch up with them. It wasn't safe for him to wander around the forest at night. Still...Mason couldn't go back to sleep now. He needed to check on Levi. There was no way he'd be able to sleep until he saw for himself that Levi wasn't hurt or worse. He stomped down the steps in the direction that was becoming quite familiar.

He'd just take a little peek and make sure everything was okay.

As he walked under the thick canopy of the trees with the darkness pressing in from every side, Mason regretted not grabbing a flashlight. If it wasn't for his father's torture, oh training—Mason meant training sessions—Mason wasn't sure he would be able to push forward. His father had loved to drop Mason and his brother off in the middle of nowhere, telling them to make their way home on their own. For his father, it was a test to see if Mason and his twin could live up to the impossible expectations that his father held.

Using the tall oak trees as a guide, Mason was glad that he practically knew the path by memory. It wasn't like he could see shit.

Making sure to keep his footsteps quiet, Mason made his way toward the man he had to make sure was safe. His heart thumped fast as his entire body remained tight and on edge.

Mason heard the voices first.

“There is a bullet in the tree,” someone said. His voice a barely there grumble.

“Adam’s going to be pissed,” someone else said.

“They went that way,” a third voice added.

“I can follow their trail.”

That! That was Levi. No way in hell was Mason letting Levi chase after anyone with a hunting rifle.

“No, not tonight. I’ll take my pack,” a fifth person said.

How many men were out here in the woods?

“It’ll be safer and we don’t know why someone would be this close to the house,” the fifth person added.

Stepping around a large trunk, Mason could finally see with the help of the moonlight coming from a small opening above them. Five men stood staring at one of the trees. Mason’s tree. The one he camped out at when he watched for Levi.

He hadn’t made a sound. Mason knew he didn’t. Years of walking on silent feet had taught him how to move without anyone being able to know he was there. That didn’t stop all five men from turning toward him when Mason stepped forward.

Not one of them looked friendly.

“I heard a gunshot,” he said as he raised the hand that didn’t hold his weapon.

“Are you hurt?” Levi demanded as he stalked forward. When he was close enough, Levi grabbed Mason by his upper arms tight.

Mason liked this turn of events. Levi might be wary of him but there was something deeper between the two of them. “I’m fine. I came running when I heard the shot,” Mason told him. Look at his man all growly and protective. Yummy!

“You ran toward the gunfire?” Levi asked. Oh, his man could scowl.

“It is sort of my job,” Mason said with a smile. Not that he found this situation amusing but he did like Levi’s reaction to him being there.

Levi grunted although he didn’t let Mason go.

“Find anything?” Mason asked. He at least needed to investigate this incident. He was the park ranger, and they were inside the state park property.

The man he recognized as Axel nodded. “Hunter.”

Mason shrugged, not sure what to believe. He didn’t let on that he’d heard the men talking. Mason hadn’t figured out how to tell Levi who he was. “I heard one shot?” He needed to verify.

“Same,” Axel agreed. “We were out here within minutes, but they were already gone.”

“You should go home,” Levi told him.

Mason frowned. “There is someone walking around with a hunting rifle.”

“And you could get shot!” Levi nearly shouted.

Wow, that was sexy. No, focus! “Levi—”

Levi sighed and let go of Mason. Mason instantly felt the chill in the air. He liked having Levi’s warm hands on him. “Is there any sign where they went?”

“No. We got here too late,” Axel lied.

Mason glanced at the tree that had become his companion. Stepping closer, he narrowed his eyes until he saw the hole about five feet up the trunk. It pissed him off. Someone was either very stupid or they were up to something. It did not escape Mason’s notice that his tree had been targeted.

“Nothing I can do about it right now,” Mason admitted. “I’ll come back in the daytime to take pictures and do a report.” He had a very bad feeling that this was about him. If he put Levi in danger... No, Mason couldn’t think like that. There was no way that he would have been found. Mason had been careful. He and Jason had been working on the escape plan for years. Still, he couldn’t help but worry.

“Thanks for coming, Bo,” Axel said to the massive guy in black leather pants. “I want to get back to the boys. They’ll be worried.”

The massive man, Bo, nodded. “I’ll call you.” He walked away from the house. It wasn’t but a moment before the darkness of the woods swallowed him up.

“Levi,” Axel said as he looked toward Mason.

“I’ll walk the ranger home,” Levi said.

“Alright. Be careful. Gavin. Shawn.”

One of the men, dark hair, stained jeans with no shirt, looked at Mason with a smirk

on his face before he patted Levi's shoulder while passing them. There was a story there.

He had so many questions! Mason wasn't stupid enough to ask them but hopefully one day Mason would know these men well enough to finally get some answers.

Levi stood silently as his friends left. Which gave Mason the opportunity to eye his man up and down. Oh! How had Mason not noticed that Levi wore nothing but a pair of soft gray sweatpants? He didn't even have any shoes on.

So. Fucking. Sexy.

Even though goosebumps covered Levi's arms, he was the hottest man that Mason had ever been around. And sweet. Even when he was growly and protective, the sweetness came through. Mason wanted so bad to get Levi to trust him.

"You don't have to walk me back," Mason said. "I know the way." He wanted to spend more time with Levi but that wasn't fair. Mason knew the way back and he didn't want Levi out in the cold night for any longer than necessary.

Levi was still scowling. "It's not safe. I'll walk you back."

"But it's safe for you?" Mason challenged. He wasn't supposed to know that Levi was paranormal after all. Plus, there was someone or more than one person out with a gun. Mason didn't know of any paranormal who could withstand a bullet wound.

"I..." Levi faltered for a moment. "Have lived here for years. I know my way around."

"I've been hiking this area every day for weeks," Mason confessed. "I'm not exactly a novice."

“Come on.” Levi brushed past him. His voice held no room for further argument.

Damm it! He liked it when Levi had been all concerned Daddy and worried about Mason, but it made him hot when Levi was demanding. Turning, he followed behind Levi, smiling as Levi slowed down, giving Mason a chance to catch up. It was still dark as shit out there.

“I haven’t seen you around lately,” he said to start a conversation.

Levi side-eyed him. “Were you looking?”

If only Levi knew. Mason shrugged. “I did plainly tell you that I was interested in you. I even asked you on a date!”

“No,” Levi corrected. “You said we should go on a date. You didn’t ask.”

Same thing. Mason sighed. “You’re just being difficult.”

He didn’t miss when the corners of Levi’s lips went up for a quick second. It appeared Levi wasn’t as closed off as he projected. That gave Mason’s little heart some hope.

“So where do you want to go?” Mason asked. “Dinner of course. We could go to the diner again but that’s not very romantic. There’s that fancy restaurant, Crimson, that I can try to get reservations to.” Mason hadn’t eaten there yet but he’d heard all good things about the place.

Levi shook his head. “One of my housemates owns that restaurant. I don’t need reservations.”

“Perfect!” Mason beamed at him.

“I didn’t say I would take you,” Levi pointed out.

Mason waved that away. They were totally going on a date. This was like foreplay or something. “I have faith in you. Besides, I know you want to.” Mason danced beside Levi, which he hoped Levi would find cute. Mason could absolutely do cute!

That was until he tripped over a root and nearly fell face forward.

Levi moved so fast that Mason missed it. He did not miss the feeling of being held in strong naked arms and against a wide muscular chest. Mason might have nuzzled said chest.

“My hero!” Mason exclaimed.

Levi snorted before helping Mason stand on his own two feet.

“I think you should hold on to me,” Mason held out a hand. “I don’t want to fall and hurt myself after all.”

“Really?” Levi’s narrowed eyes showed he knew that Mason was messing with him.

“I could fall down and get a boo-boo,” Mason pointed out. Of course, then he could insist that Levi kissed said boo-boo. And more! Oh, the possibilities.

He was shocked when Levi laced their fingers together. That had actually worked. Oh yes, Daddy! Levi was totally a Daddy.

“You’re a menace,” Levi muttered.

Mason cackled. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.” It was freeing to be able to joke and tease around with Levi. Usually, his hookups happened so fast that Mason

got a few pickup lines in before they were hitting the sheets. It had been like this when he'd chatted with Levi as Stone as well. They'd been able to play around, and Mason had been so happy. He'd looked forward to their conversations.

There was no excuse for what Mason had done to Levi. He had wanted to meet the man, but he'd known Levi wasn't ready. Mason felt like absolute shit for pushing and then getting mad. Alcohol or not, Mason was an asshole.

He wanted to say something about the message, but he also didn't want to send Levi running off again. They were getting along so well. Maybe Mason should just ignore the elephant in the room for now. He'd been practicing what to say for over a week now and he still didn't know the words that would make everything right.

"Should I pick you up?" Mason said to get them back on track. The date. He wanted that date. "I would suggest that you pick me up but then I also think that might never happen. Same problem with meeting you at the restaurant. You could just not show up and there I would be all dressed up by my lonesome."

Levi growled. "I would never do that to anyone."

"Of course you wouldn't, Boo Bear," Mason assured. "You are a true gentleman. I just know it."

"You don't know anything about me," Levi corrected. He urged Mason over a dip in the ground.

Mason barely bit back the words that he knew more about Levi than Levi thought. "I think I do."

Levi didn't respond. Did he think about all those late-night conversations they'd had on the dating app? There hadn't been many heavy topics broached but they had

shared about their lives. Or at least Mason was pretty sure that everything Levi had told him was true.

His cabin came into view and Mason wanted to pout. It was too soon! Wait! “How’d you know where I lived?”

Levi walked him all the way to the steps leading up to the porch. Such a gentleman.

Levi turned to him. “You told me. This is the only ranger station on this side of the state park. Plus, we knew someone had moved in.”

That made sense. It also saddened Mason that Levi hadn’t been as obsessed as he was and hadn’t sought Mason out. “Oh.”

“You should get inside,” Levi told him. “It’s too cold out here for you.”

Mason lifted a brow. Levi seemed cold. Goosebumps covered his wonderfully delicious body. Damn, Mason wanted to trace all those tattoos with his tongue. “You could come inside and warm up,” he offered. Mason had a nice warm bed for Levi.

Levi’s eyes widened before releasing Mason’s hand.

Aww! Sad!

“That is not a good idea,” Levi said.

It was a wonderful idea. Mason walked up two steps before he turned to Levi, putting them on even eye level. “Levi.”

Levi’s gaze was darting around as if looking for an escape.

“Levi,” Mason repeated.

Finally, those intense gray eyes met his.

Mason swallowed hard. “I’m sorry.” He realized that he hadn’t said those words. Not to Levi who deserved him.

“Sorry for what?” Levi questioned. He wiped his palms against the legs of his sweatpants. Was he nervous? Mason was.

Here it went. “I’m sorry for the last message I sent you.”

Levi shook his head as he took another step back.

“Please,” Mason begged. “Please let me say this.”

Levi appeared torn. Halfway between running from Mason and the other half coming toward him. “Okay.” Levi stopped backing away.

“I am so fucking sorry for that message.” Mason forced himself to meet Levi’s eyes. “It’s no excuse but I had a very bad day. I was drunk and lonely. I was an asshole and I hope that you forgive me someday. Give me another chance.”

Levi took several steps closer.

Progress.

“You didn’t mean it?” Levi asked quietly.

“No!” Mason gripped Levi’s shoulders. “I didn’t mean it. When I woke up the next morning the first thing I did was open that stupid app. I was hoping for a message

from you. Instead, I saw what I wrote. I was devastated!” Please, he needed Levi to understand. “I tried to find your profile again. I even set up a different account in case you just blocked me. I couldn’t find your profile and I’d lost the only connection I had to you.”

Levi nodded. “I deleted the app.”

“I figured.” Mason tightened his grip. “I knew I fucked up and I am so sorry.”

Levi’s gaze ran over his face.

Did Levi believe him? Mason had never been so honest before.

“You didn’t want me to stop messaging you?” Levi asked.

“I didn’t,” Mason confirmed. “I really didn’t.”

Incredibly Levi smiled at him. Not the shy smile that Mason had seen a few times but a real, bright, happy smile. It changed Levi. It made him appear so open and inviting.

Mason leaned forward.

Levi’s gaze dropped to his mouth.

“I missed you,” he whispered before pressing his lips against Levi’s.

Levi’s entire body jerked but he didn’t pull away. Mason pressed in harder swiping his tongue over Levi’s lower lip.

Levi sighed but he kissed Mason back.

The kiss was tentative. A bare press of their lips. When Mason licked at the seam of Levi's lips again, Levi opened his mouth, allowing Mason access. With his fingers digging into Levi's shoulders for balance, Mason let himself sway closer.

Levi brushed his tongue and Mason moaned while chasing it. Levi wrapped his arms around Mason before pulling him closer. Right against that hard body. The gentle kiss changed in an instant. No longer holding back, Levi took control.

Holy fuck!

Levi kissed Mason like a man desperate and on the edge. He fucked into Mason's mouth and there was nothing Mason could do except hold on tight. It wasn't just his lips that moved. No, Levi kissed with his whole body. Hands moving, fingers drifting, and body swaying.

Mason was going to come! He was forced to pull back eventually but he wasn't too steady. His knees shook as he panted. Breathing was a thing he had to do!

"Come inside," he begged. He really, really, wanted Levi in his bed. And after that kiss...Levi would never leave it again.

Instantly he knew that he had said the wrong thing. Levi slowly blinked back into awareness before letting go of Mason and stepping away. Yeah, that had totally been the wrong thing to say.

Levi dropped his eyes, his shoulders rolling forward, while tucking in his chin.

Fuck! Mason walked down the steps before cupping Levi's face. "It's okay. You don't have to."

"I will if it's what you want," Levi said softly.

But it wasn't what Levi wanted. Or needed.

Popping up to his tiptoes, Mason pecked a kiss to Levi's mouth. "It's okay. Maybe next time."

Levi hugged him tight. "I don't want you to think I don't want—"

"I know," Mason soothed. He could feel how much Levi did want. "I'm not mad."

"If there is someone else—"

"No," Mason assured him quickly. He gripped Levi's chin, forcing those gray eyes to look at him. "I won't lie and say I've been a saint. I might have a reputation or something." Mason didn't know what Levi might have heard about him in town. "I like to fuck. I'm not ashamed about that. I'm not going to hide my past from you."

Levi nodded.

"But there's been no one else since you opened that door nearly naked and I couldn't get you off my mind."

"Before when we were chatting—"

Yeah. Fuck. "I was fucking other men."

Levi flinched.

"I'm sorry. You might decide you don't want me because of this but at least I'll know I was honest." Honest about this one thing. Mason didn't want any more secrets between them. "I was seeing other people from the app. After you disappeared, I had a week or two where I just about took anyone home that asked."

“Okay.”

“I don’t cheat,” Mason said firmly. “I was single and might have tried to hide my loneliness with strangers. I always use condoms. I’ve always played safely.”

“I’m not judging you,” Levi told him. “I need clarification. I can’t...I don’t want to share you.”

“I won’t share you,” Mason retorted right back. He needed that known. For there not to be any mistake. They hadn’t even gone on one date, but Mason was obsessed with making Levi his and having the bigger man claim him.

“There is no one else,” Levi promised.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Mason said. He kissed Levi again. Levi shivered and Mason was pretty sure it wasn’t from his kiss but the cold instead. “Now head home so you don’t freeze.”

Levi smiled and this time it was him that leaned to kiss Mason. It wasn’t a brief kiss either. Levi kissed Mason like the man was starving for him. Mason would not complain about that. Wow, Levi and kissing... Just wow. After Levi pulled away, Mason’s lips still tingled.

“You’d better call me,” Mason said. “And text me. A lot. I miss our chats.”

“Okay.” Levi backed up slowly.

Mason watched until he couldn’t see Levi any longer and then another five minutes before he was shivering and headed inside the cabin. Mason went directly to his bedroom where he’d left his phone.

He removed the cell phone from the charger before pulling up the message thread with his brother.

‘I need to talk to you.’

‘It’s important.’

‘I have a bad feeling.’

Jason would call as soon as he got Mason’s message and until then Mason needed to figure things out on his own. While he’d been looking for somewhere to settle down and wanted to live a quiet life, Jason had hit the road on a motorcycle with only what he could stow away. They might be twins but the two of them were so different.

Mason missed his brother but more than that, he wished Jason was there to help him figure things out.

Not only had Mason stumbled upon a man, a paranormal, that lit his entire body on fire but now something hinky was happening around him.

Mason needed help.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Levi

“Levi! Your friend is here!” Drake called from downstairs.

“Coming!” Levi left his suite and headed for the stairs that led to the kitchen. He knew he would find Tristan trying to talk Drake into some food. Tristan loved human food and Drake really was a master in the kitchen.

He entered the kitchen to find Tristan stuffing his face with leftover cherry pie as Drake and Lawson teased the demon.

Lawson brightened when he spotted Levi.

“Hey,” Levi greeted his friends.

“Someone got a surprise!” Lawson sang at him.

“Huh?” That didn’t make sense. Who got a surprise? Tristan?

Drake pointed to a basket sitting on the kitchen counter. “That was beside the back door this morning.”

Levi strolled over and peeked inside the wicker basket. There was a red envelope sitting on what appeared to be a light tan knit blanket. His name was on the front of the little envelope.

As he reached for the card, his fingers brushed the soft blanket. That would be perfect

for his rooftop oasis when he snuggled up with his plants surrounding him.

The envelope was still sealed.

“Did you read this?” he asked.

Lawson’s eyes widened before he flung a hand to his heart. “I would never!”

“I stopped the boys from being too nosy,” Drake told him.

“Spoilsport,” Lawson muttered.

Levi grinned. At least there were a few responsible adults in the house.

“Open it!” Lawson demanded dramatically.

“Is he opening it?” Bryce and Logan ran into the room.

“Maybe I should open this upstairs,” Levi teased. He actually considered it. This had to be something from his mate, right? Please be from Mason. Levi had been floating by the time he’d arrived back home the night before. He’d been heartbroken but there had been a small kernel of hope that had never died.

“Don’t you dare!” Gavin said while sauntering in the room. “The boys have been waiting all morning for you to come down.”

“The boys?” Levi questioned. “Shouldn’t you be at work?”

“I’m the boss,” Gavin pointed out. “I can go in when I want. First, we all want to know what that letter says. Unless you’d rather talk about how you came back from walking your mate home smelling like need and horniness.”

The boys snickered.

“Horniness!” Tristan perked up. “I did not hear about this.”

Levi ignored the demon. Really, he needed to ignore all his friends. Tristan had gone from being his stalker and trying to woo him to a good friend in a short couple of weeks. That didn’t mean that Tristan had stopped coming onto Levi. He did not need Tristan to be encouraged by any of this.

“Open it!” Lawson draped himself over the kitchen island.

“Fine.” Levi brought the envelope up to his nose for a brief moment. Mason. It smelled just like his mate. A mixture of sun, trees, dirt, and something manly.

“Aww,” Bryce and Logan cooed.

Levi narrowed his eyes to his friends. “Stop that.”

Bryce batted his eyes innocently. “Stop what?”

“Your Daddy spoils you too much,” Levi accused.

“Nah,” Bryce disagreed. “He spoils me just right.”

Shaking his head, Levi returned his attention to the envelope. He ran his finger carefully under the flap, making sure not to rip it. He’d never gotten something...anything...like this. The feeling of being special was foreign to him.

He pulled out the small white card.

Levi,

I saw this in town and thought about you. I don't want you shivering for any other reason than being with me. Call me! We have a date to plan.

Mason

"Aww!" echoed around the room.

Levi blushed as he stuffed the card back into the envelope.

"That's so sweet!" Bryce gushed.

"Levi has a boyfriend!" Lawson sang.

"Levi and Mason sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Logan joined in.

"I hate you all," Levi lied.

Gavin wrapped an arm around Levi's neck and pulled him back into his solid chest. "Proud of you. I know it's not easy putting your heart on the line."

Levi nodded. He was afraid. Even though Mason had explained, and Levi felt better about what happened with the dating app, Levi was scared. He had so much to confess to his mate. Mason was human and with all the odd incidents going on around their house, Levi worried for his mate. Levi couldn't bring Mason into his world without proper warning.

"Are we done being lovey dovey?" Tristan asked. "I was promised some hunting if I came up."

"Yeah." Levi had called Tristan for help tracking down the hunters or whoever from the night before. Bo and the Hellhound pack had tracked the scent of two humans to

the entrance of the state park before they'd left in some kind of vehicle. "I'll just take this upstairs."

He really wanted to add the blanket to his nest on the roof but that would have to wait. Levi needed to make sure his family was safe first. Levi raced up the stairs to stash the basket away and set the card in his top drawer before quickly returning to the kitchen. Someone must have told Tristan about the previous night as he leered at Levi when he reentered the kitchen.

"You are telling me all the details," Tristan said.

"Good luck," Gavin retorted. He patted Levi on the shoulder as he passed. "I'll have my phone on me if you two run into any trouble."

"Okay," Levi agreed. He motioned toward the back door. "Ready?"

"Sure." He handed Drake his empty plate. "Once again, vampire, best pie I've ever had. If you and your mate ever want a break from this boring human place, just let me know. I'd be happy to host you in the Hell realm."

Lawson snorted. "You do remember my brother is mated to the Reaper, right? We can go to the Hell realm whenever we want."

"No!" Tristan wailed. "I need someone to cook for me!"

Levi grabbed Tristan by the back of the neck before shoving him toward the back door. "Stop trying to entice my friends down to Hell."

"But I'm a demon!" Tristan protested. "It's what I do."

He kept pushing until they reached the door and Levi led the way across the back

deck. Tristan followed along like the friend he was. Except he kept talking.

“Seriously though,” Tristan said. “You are going to tell me what happened with your mate. Right? Right! Because two days ago you were hiding in the Hell realm with me, and you were super sad.”

“I wasn’t hiding,” Levi corrected. “I’m helping Mal train all of you stubborn demons.”

“But you were super sad while you were kicking our asses!” Tristan pointed out. “I can smell your emotions.”

“I...” Levi could only shake his head. He had been more than sad. Just days ago, he had been devastated. Knowing that Mason was so close but not his... Levi had been convinced he’d never have his mate. The one person who was meant for him.

The other matings had pretty much gone perfectly. Okay, maybe not perfectly. There had been a few bumps in the road but nothing compared to how Levi’s mating was going. He wanted to believe that now that Mason had admitted that he was still interested in Levi they could go forward but the unease in his gut still clenched.

“So what happened? Did you do it? You know...it?” Tristan asked nosily.

Levi was not answering that question.

“Was it good?” Tristan questioned.

“I didn’t sleep with him.” Damn it, he hadn’t meant to answer.

Tristan hummed. “But you wanted to.”

Of course, Levi wanted his mate. Mason was perfect. His soft trusting eyes. His strong muscular body. His sharp wit. Mason was his perfect match and damn it, Levi wanted him. He just didn't know how he was going to keep Mason's interest for long. As a human, Mason would feel a connection to him but it wouldn't be as strong as Levi's need to bond.

"You should have just fucked him and worried about everything else later," Tristan advised.

Levi ignored the demon as he headed straight toward the area that they'd found last night and that still reeked of gunpowder and metal. Levi had promised Axel he would follow up on the events of the night before.

There had been hunters in the past that had trespassed onto their land but something about last night felt weird. He had no idea why someone would put one bullet in a single tree. It bothered Levi and he couldn't explain why.

The problems around their territory had started after they'd begun to find their mates. Axel was right to be concerned. Their family had started an upheaval in the paranormal world as mates were once again being found and so many wanted that gift for themselves. They were determined to protect their mates while at the same time trying to figure out why mates had been so scarce for so long.

Levi didn't care about the details. He'd always felt in his heart that he had a mate out in the world somewhere. Axel meeting Bryce had been a miracle. The night that Levi's Alpha had brought Bryce home, Levi had sat up on his rooftop oasis and cried happy tears.

His mating was going a lot differently than the others in his chosen family and from what Levi had expected. Levi could admit that he was part of the problem.

Growing up, his parents had told him to forget about the dream of having a mate and be happy with the life he had. Levi couldn't be satisfied with that. He wanted someone to love. Getting to know Mason had been terrifying but Levi had been the happiest he'd ever been. Until everything had fallen apart.

"Are you even listening to me?" Tristan demanded.

Levi shook himself from his thoughts. "Sorry."

Tristan huffed at him. In his human glamour, the demon looked completely different than when they were in the Hell realm. Levi could admire Tristan's human look, but he was nothing compared to Levi's mate. Mason might not be conventionally attractive, but Levi found Mason to be sexy and sweet.

"This is the tree." Levi pointed ahead of him.

Tristan stalked forward to get a better look.

Adam had already been by to remove the bullet from the tree and start the healing process. As a dryad, Adam's connection to the forest was the strongest. Adam had been pissed and promised that he'd talk to Mal about adding more protection for the trees.

"Just a single bullet?" Tristan asked.

"Yes."

"Maybe a human out for target practice?" Tristan inquired.

"Why this close to the house?" Levi asked. "The state park goes miles in the other direction. And it was dark, no light or anything. We were out here within minutes and

didn't see anyone although Bo tracked the scents to a parking lot on the other side of the state park."

"I can see why you're worried," Tristan admitted. He took a deep breath before his eyes flashed red as he pulled from his demon abilities. Tristan had previously worked as a tracker before he'd come into his powers as one of the Hell realm's new warriors. "I can scent three humans. One scent is buried under the two newer ones from last night."

Levi nodded. He'd picked up the same. There was only one problem with that. "The older scent belongs to my mate."

Tristan turned to him. "Why would your mate's scent be concentrated here?"

Levi didn't have an answer for that. "He's a park ranger. His cabin is only about five miles away. He's been hiking, trying to learn the area."

Tristan's eyes flashed red again. "He spends a lot of time in this exact spot."

"He does?" Levi walked to the tree and turned. From this location the back of the house could be clearly seen. Why would Mason want—

"Your mate has some explaining to do," Tristan said.

Biting his lip, Levi's anxiety rose. Levi trusted Mason. Sure, their mating might not have gone smoothly but Mason and Levi were meant to be together. The fates put together two souls that were perfect for each other. "There must be a reason."

Tristan hummed but didn't argue. "The other humans went this way." Tristan pointed to the north.

“Bo tracked them to the parking lot.”

“Let’s walk their path,” Tristan suggested. “I want to see if I can learn anything else about them.”

“Appreciate it,” Levi said sincerely.

“Drake already promised me dinner before we head to the club.”

Levi groaned. He’d forgotten that he’d offered to take Tristan to the BDSM club that Craig owned to entice the demon to come help. Tristan wasn’t a fan of the human realm or having to wear glamour. He was one of the truest demon snobs that Levi had ever met. Tristan loved being a demon and other than the food saw no reason to even bother with humans.

There was a part of Levi that really wanted Tristan to find a human mate. It would serve the demon right for some of the things he’d said about humans. Levi’s mate was human. Some of the mates to his chosen brothers were human. Humans had hurt Levi way less than other paranormal had.

“You promised,” Tristan told him.

“I’ll take you to the club,” Levi said. It wasn’t that he never went. He enjoyed sitting in the little room and watching the boys play. Levi just wasn’t a fan of the open sex rooms or how often people touched him.

“Makes having to smell all these humans worth it.” Tristan rubbed his hands together like an evil villain in a movie.

Levi snorted. “You realize that at least half the patrons of the club will be human?”

“I won’t care what they smell like as I’m shoving my cock down their throat.”

Levi shook his head before stomping in the direction that the humans of the previous night had gone. “TMI, man. TMI.”

“I’m just saying!” Tristan hurried to catch up. “I’ve fucked humans before. I like when they are little subbie men. Women are fine too but I think I want a man tonight.”

“I’m sure you’ll have no problem finding a sub tonight.” Levi really didn’t want to talk about this. He wasn’t one of the men that enjoyed discussing their sex lives. And not only because he didn’t have a sex life.

Making the decision early in his life to save himself for his mate had seemed like a good plan. Levi had been sure that his mate would eventually be revealed. Now Levi didn’t know how he was going to broach the subject with Mason.

Mason’s words about his own experience showed that his mate was well versed in making love.

Levi had zero experience. None. Nada.

When Mason had invited Levi inside the prior night, Levi had nearly panicked. “Wait.” Tristan held up a hand.

Damn! Levi needed to get his head on his current job. He needed to figure out what was going on so that he could ensure his family and his mate’s safety.

“Someone’s coming,” Tristan told him.

Levi stiffened.

* * * * *

Mason

They had fixed the fucking tree. There wasn't even a nick where the bullet had been. He should have known, really. Mason would have done the same thing. It was all about hiding the secret they were keeping. Since Mason was quite an expert on how to keep things hidden, he did understand. Not that his understanding helped with his irritation.

Stomping through the forest, Mason alternated between being pissed off or amused.

He suspected that Axel had plans in place to cover the paranormal activity in the area. And Axel was definitely the one in charge. Alpha or whatever they wanted to call him. Mason didn't have enough information to pinpoint what kind of pack Levi was a part of. The dynamics of the group currently eluded him, but Mason knew that Levi served as some sort of guard.

Just little things that Mason had picked up on. Levi wasn't a leader but not everyone was built that way. Mason certainly wasn't. Watching the group was fun and interesting. The men, even the men bigger than Axel, appeared to follow his lead without question.

Mason had never spent much time wondering how the packs and families of the paranormal functioned. His father was a 'blitz attack and destroy' kind of man. Mason lived with a lot of regrets but at least he could say that he'd never killed. His brother, yeah. Jason still had nightmares of some of the things he'd done for their father.

Being called weak because Mason couldn't stomach violence had actually saved him. Mason's father Clint had labeled him a disappointment and changed tactics to

training Mason in tracking and hunting. Mason was supposed to track the paranormal down before alerting Jason for his brother to eliminate the threat.

They'd been meant to be a team.

Except on Mason's first solo assignment, he'd found something that changed everything in their world.

Mason shook his head and blinked in front of him. He couldn't get lost in memories now. It wasn't safe. Not with whoever had been out in his woods the night before.

Returning to the spot he'd been in the previous night, Mason had expected to follow some sort of trail. There wasn't much that he could find. Either the hunters were skilled or the paranormals in the area cleaned up any tracks as well.

He paused when he heard voices approaching.

Reaching behind his back, Mason made sure his weapon was in reach.

"I'm just saying! I've fucked humans before. I like when they are little subbie men. Women are fine too but I think I want a man tonight."

"I'm sure you'll have no problem finding a sub tonight."

Fuck! These men really needed to have more care about when and where they had conversations that could give away their secrets.

And who the hell was Levi talking to?

He took a step before he could stop himself. Who was with Levi? Mason didn't recognize the voice. He pushed down the spark of jealousy. He might not know Levi

well but there was no way that Mason's sweet gray-haired man was a cheater.

“Wait! Someone's coming.”

At least this new guy had something going for him. Mason hadn't even made that much noise. Mason worried that Levi and his family had grown too comfortable in the area. With Mason's background and past he knew how quick trouble could come.

Hell, something had happened the prior night. That was the reason they were all tramping around the woods.

Mason dropped his arm and tugged his shirt back over his gun before he strode forward, acting like he hadn't heard a word the two men had said.

Just before reaching where Levi and friend were standing, Mason acted like he stumbled.

Firm hands caught him by his elbows.

Mason looked up. “Levi?” Fuck! He should have been an actor. He sounded so innocent.

“Mason.” Levi said his name quietly. God, what would it be like to hear Levi calling out his name in the middle of the night while they were getting to know each other much better?

Their gaze met and Mason licked his lips. Damn, he wanted Levi even more than when he didn't know what the other man tasted like.

Someone cleared their throat. “Are you two going to start doing it? The sexual tension—”

Levi growled before he released Mason and stepped back. “Stop, Tristan!”

Who was Tristan? Mason hadn’t heard that name yet. He peered around Levi and nearly swallowed his tongue. Oh! Wow. That man—

Levi sighed. “Mason, this is a...friend of mine, Tristan. Tristan, this is Mason.”

Tristan grinned. “The Mason?” he asked with excitement.

“The only Mason I’m aware of,” Mason retorted. Had Levi been talking about him? That was a good sign.

Tristan rushed forward. Yeah, he was not human. He moved too smoothly. Was too attractive. There was something otherworldly about him.

Levi moved, subtly putting himself between Mason and Tristan.

Mason loved seeing the protective instincts that Levi exhibited without even realizing it. He gave so much about himself away. Mason was trained to read people and he was starting to figure Levi out. Levi had all the Daddy instincts that Mason was searching for while also being one of the sweetest beings to ever live. The perfect combination of man that Mason had to have.

“Hm,” Tristan hummed. “Aren’t you cute?”

“Cute,” Mason repeated. Sure, he might not be as big and muscular as the men around him, but Mason wasn’t some fragile human that needed to be watched over. He rolled his shoulders then lifted his chin in challenge.

“And spicy.” Tristan leered at him.

Levi stepped back until Mason's chest was against that strong back. A low growl escaped from Levi. Interesting. Mason knew Levi wasn't human and really wanted to know what type of paranormal he was.

"No wonder Levi wouldn't let me sex him up," Tristan said.

Cold fury overtook his senses until Mason could only see red. His temper had always been sharp and something that he struggled with. Mason took three long slow breaths, knowing he couldn't lose his shit in front of Levi. He slid his hand across the small of Levi's back while stepping up beside Levi to take Tristan's measure.

"Are you trying to make me jealous?" Mason asked coldly. "Or are you just an idiot?"

Levi stiffened beneath his hand, but Mason didn't...wouldn't...allow Tristan to screw up what Mason was working so hard to fix.

Tristan grinned. Even bright white teeth. They were too perfect. Some kind of glamour? "Maybe a little of both?"

Levi shook his head, but Mason leaned into his side.

"Well stop it. You're upsetting Levi, and I won't fall for it."

Tristan narrowed his eyes at him.

The hairs on the back of his neck stood. The natural reaction of his body telling him that he was in danger. He wanted to shake off the feeling but also knew he couldn't give anything away. Mason stared back at the stranger.

"Interesting," Tristan hummed.

Levi turned toward Mason, pulling Mason's attention to where it should be. Mason smiled up at his man but didn't relax his guard.

"What are you doing out here?" Levi asked.

Really? Were they going to play this game? Okay, if that was how Levi wanted it. "My job," Mason replied. "You remember the shooting last night?"

"You shouldn't—" Levi started.

"What shooting?" Tristan asked, butting into their conversation.

Mason huffed. "You both know what I'm talking about."

"Maybe..." Levi shifted from foot to foot. "We were wrong. I..."

Oh, Levi was trying so hard to cover his tracks. But not lie? Was that what was happening?

"Maybe we made a mistake," Levi finally finished.

"We didn't," Mason told him. It would be so much easier if Mason could just confess to what he already knew. "I heard the shot. You saw the bullet in the tree. It's not there now."

Levi's fingers shook as he rubbed at the back of his neck.

"Like Levi said. Must have been a mistake."

Mason shook his head. "I have been doing this a long time. I know what I heard and saw. Even if someone managed to cover their tracks, there is something going on."

Mason wasn't letting this go. He couldn't. There were too many people in the line of danger that could be hurt.

Levi furrowed his brows. "But—"

"What are you two doing out here?" Mason questioned. Even though Mason was certain that Levi and Tristan were doing the exact same thing he was. Searching for answers.

"Hiking!" Tristan said quickly. "I'm visiting for a few days and Levi is showing me around."

Mason peered into Levi's intense gray eyes. "It's not safe out here. You need to be careful and stay on the marked trails." Mason couldn't kick the feeling that somehow his father had tracked him down. One look at Levi and his friends and Mason's father would know they were different.

Levi didn't even blink. Just stared back at Mason like he could see through him. He frowned. "You are out here."

"Doing my job," Mason said.

"I know these woods like the back of my hand," Levi countered. "I'm safe enough. And I have a friend. You're out here all alone."

"A friend?" Mason repeated. "A friend that wants to have sex with you."

Levi blushed. How fucking cute was it that the big guy's cheeks turned a bright red and he squirmed? Mason couldn't help his jealousy. He still didn't know where Levi often disappeared to and Tristan was an attractive being. Tristan and Levi were obviously close friends.

“I told him no.” Levi’s words were soft but firm.

“He did. Multiple times,” Tristan agreed.

“Not helping,” Mason told Tristan.

Tristan shrugged. “You hu...people always take things so seriously. This is why I never come up here.”

“Where are you from?” Mason asked. Any information was helpful.

Tristan rocked back on his heels. “A land far, far away.”

Mason just bet.

“But that’s not important,” Tristan said. “Where are you from? What’s your last name? Family name? When did you arrive? Why’d you come here?”

Mason smiled. “I think you know just who I am.” Reaching out, Mason grasped Levi’s hip, then tugged him forward. “And what I’m doing here.” Was Mason staking his claim? Fuck yeah, he was.

Tristan sucked his bottom lip into his mouth before nodding. He walked closer with his dark eyes still on Mason. “Yeah, I think I do.”

As Tristan approached, Mason tried to keep from reacting in any outward way. He slipped his arm around Levi’s waist to hold him close. Tristan was the first to be suspicious of him. That Mason had noticed anyway. Levi was far too trusting. It made Mason nervous for Levi. Tristan was trying to be subtle, but he was scenting Mason. With a tilt of his head, Tristan stopped right in front of him.

“What are you doing?” Levi demanded. He turned his head but didn’t try to get out of Mason’s hold.

“Trying to put the pieces together,” Tristan answered.

“Well stop it,” Levi ordered. “You’re being weird.”

“Am I?” The question was directed to Mason.

“A little bit,” Mason agreed. He locked gazes with Tristan over Levi’s shoulder. He would not be intimidated no matter how much he wanted to run.

Tristan shrugged before looking away. “Are we doing this hike or not?”

“Yeah.” Levi gripped Mason’s shoulders as he peered down. “You need to be careful out here.”

“So do you,” Mason replied.

“We will,” Levi promised.

That would have to do. Mason couldn’t follow Levi around. Not with Tristan being by Levi’s side. There was something about Tristan that told Mason to be careful.

“Got plans tonight?” Tristan asked suddenly.

Mason lifted a brow. “I don’t do threesomes. And Levi already told you no.”

Tristan laughed. “I think we’re going to be friends, Mason.”

“Oh goody!” Mason glanced back at Levi.

Levi gave Tristan a look of fondness. “He’s...”

“I don’t care,” Mason said honestly. He lifted to his tiptoes. “I don’t share.” He kissed Levi hard.

Levi’s fingers tightened on Mason’s shoulders as Mason pushed Levi’s lower back to keep him close. Just like the night before, Mason had to work on getting Levi to open up and let him in. Mason teased his tongue over Levi’s lower lip before he nibbled.

The soft moan that Levi released spurred Mason on.

He dug his nails into Levi’s flesh then thrust his tongue inside Levi’s hot mouth.

“I’m getting turned on!” Tristan said in a tone a cross between warning and amusement.

Mason took his time ending the kiss.

He’d gotten himself worked up. Not that it mattered. He could feel Levi’s erection brushing against him as well.

“You need to come to the club with us.” Tristan was suddenly right there next to them.

Mason reluctantly let go of Levi. “What club?” He knew what club. The town wasn’t that big. Mason just wanted more information.

“You know!” Tristan wagged a finger at him. “I have a feeling you know a lot more than you’ve been letting on.”

Mason locked down his emotions and kept still. There was no way Tristan knew

anything. Mason was too well trained. Too good.

“I did promise to take Tristan out,” Levi told him. “Would... You could come if you wanted?”

Mason grinned. “Are you asking me out on a date? You do owe me a date, if you remember.”

Levi shook his head, but the corners of his mouth twitched like he was trying not to smile. “No...yes...maybe?”

“I’ll totally go on a date with you tonight.” He mentally thought about everything he had planned and calculated how long it would take. “What time?”

“Nine?” Levi suggested. “I know it’s pretty late, but the club doesn’t open until—”

“It’s fine. Text me the address and I’ll meet you there.”

“You will?”

“I will,” Mason agreed.

“Great!” Tristan clapped his hands. “Now can we get on with our...hike?”

Mason rolled his eyes. There was no hike and they all knew it. Not that Mason figured Levi or Tristan would have any better luck than him tracking down anything or anyone.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Levi

He was nervous. Stepping out of the little room where most of his family was gathered, Levi peered around the hall. Mason had texted before Levi had to turn in his phone that he was on the way. Levi's mate should be there any minute now.

Craig had helped Levi get Mason on the list for entry and Levi's mate would be inside a BDSM club.

To say he was uncomfortable was the greatest understatement ever. Levi was so different from most of the rest of his family. He didn't enjoy the attention of strangers. Wasn't experienced. Didn't even want to play with anyone at the club. He was also terrified that this would be the moment that Mason decided Levi was too boring for him.

At least Tristan had already found a partner for the night, so that was one less worry Levi had to deal with. While Levi considered Tristan a close friend, practically a brother, Tristan also hadn't lived in the human realm ever, and had come too close to revealing too much to Mason.

The entire family worked hard to keep what they were a secret from humans.

Tristan wasn't someone that Levi had any idea how to explain. There was so much between Levi and Mason at the moment and Levi was growing ever increasingly stressed with how to move forward in a relationship with his mate.

Levi wished that he could have avoided the club and the pressure this situation was

causing but maybe it was better that Mason would see the real him this soon. Levi's heart was already entangled fully regarding Mason. They were mates. Not that Levi had any idea how to explain that to Mason.

He did know that he didn't want Mason to find out the same way that Bryce had. No, Levi would avoid that mess if he could.

Before Levi could form any real kind of plan, Mason turned the corner from the main club and into the small hall where Levi stood.

Their eyes met and Levi couldn't ignore the way his body hummed just looking at Mason. This feeling he'd been chasing all his life. It was the reason that he'd left his birth family behind. The rightness between the two of them.

Mason smiled.

Levi pushed off the wall to make his way quickly to his mate. "Thanks for coming."

"Of course." Mason reached for him, catching a piece of the thin top Levi wore.

Levi enjoyed the fact that Mason always seemed to want to touch him. That had to be a good sign that their mating had a chance, right?

"It's our first date," Mason said. "Do I look okay?" Stepping back, Mason lifted his arms to his side then whirled around.

Levi nearly swallowed his tongue. Mason's jeans were so tight that Levi could see the outline of his cock. The barely there mesh shirt ended above his belly button, showing off smooth tan skin. He hummed.

"Is that a good sound?" Mason questioned while grinning at him.

“Sexy,” Levi growled out.

“Who me?” Mason winked. “Or you? Because let me tell you...you are looking lickable.” Stepping up, Mason did lick Levi. He licked Levi’s chin and up to his mouth.

Gripping Mason’s ass, Levi held his mate close as he kissed Mason. Levi didn’t feel like he was anything special. Not in his dark-washed jeans and a black tank. He knew he was attractive to most other people but for Levi there were so many more important aspects to someone than their appearances. Except he really loved that Mason was very happy at the moment.

Their cocks brushed and Levi tightened his grip on his mate as he drove his tongue inside Mason’s mouth.

Damn! His mate tasted like heaven. He’d recently had something sweet and Levi sucked on Mason’s tongue to steal all the flavor.

Mason rocked back on his heels as he pulled away. He brought his shaking fingers up to his mouth. “Wow.”

Levi was breathing hard. All he could do was nod.

“I don’t think that I’ll ever get tired of kissing you,” Mason told him. “Especially if you keep kissing me like that.”

Levi had to force himself to release his hold on Mason. He really wanted to pull his mate close again, but they were in the middle of a busy club. And as much as he ached, Levi wasn’t quite ready for more. He cleared his throat. “I...”

“It’s okay.” Mason patted Levi’s chest. “I just couldn’t help myself.”

“Me either,” Levi admitted.

Mason rewarded him with a quick kiss against his lips before he started to look around. “This club—”

Levi found his cheeks heating. “One of my friends, Craig, owns the place. I don’t come often but I like to hang out with my friends when I’m here.”

“So you don’t—” Mason motioned to the back rooms. “Play around?”

“No,” Levi answered quickly. “I don’t...do that.” Inside he cringed. That was a stupid thing to say. Why would Mason want him if Levi confessed his inexperience?

“This doesn’t seem like a place you would frequent,” Mason said.

Was that a bad thing? Levi just didn’t know, so he said nothing.

“I can tell from the look on your face that you’re thinking way too hard about this.” Mason laced their fingers together.

“I don’t want you to think that I can’t...won’t...that I’m not good at...”

“I don’t think that at all.” Once again Mason moved into Levi’s personal space. “This attraction between us is undeniable. We’re going to be just fine.”

Levi relaxed slightly at the reassurance from his mate.

Laughter and giggles escaped from the room that Levi had exited earlier. Mason perked up. “What’s going on in there?”

“My friends.” How should Levi explain this. “Have you heard of age regression?”

“Yes!” Mason bounced on his toes. “Is that the playroom?”

Levi nodded. “Bryce, Nate, and Lawson are playing. Their...partners are with them, watching.”

Mason smirked. “You can say their Daddies.”

Okay, maybe Levi did need to relax. Mason was a grown man. He had to know something about the club if he’d agreed to come.

“Bryce and Lawson have a Daddy. Nate has a Daddy and Papa Bear.”

“Cool. Can I meet them?”

Levi stared at his mate as he processed the question. “You want to meet my friends?”

“Sure.” Mason shrugged. “I’ve met a couple of them already, but I can tell you’re close to them. I’d like to meet the rest.”

“They’re more like family. I call them my family because I don’t see my parents or siblings.” Levi tried not to show the distress he always felt when thinking of his birth family.

“I’m sorry to hear that. The only family I still talk to is my twin.”

“You have a twin?” Levi hadn’t known that. Wow, there was another man out there like his mate?

Mason laughed. “We’re complete opposites. Jason is an adrenaline junkie. He’s currently traveling around the US on the back of his motorcycle just to see what kind of trouble he can find.”

“So not that different. You are a little troublemaker yourself,” Levi teased.

“Who me?” Mason batted his eyelashes.

The little brat. Levi grinned. “Yes, you.”

“But...” Mason lifted onto his tiptoes. “Maybe you’re looking for some trouble?”

Levi’s dick definitely was. “Maybe I am.” Levi wanted to steal Mason away just to get some more kisses. Before he did something he might regret later, he tilted his head toward the entrance of the playroom. “Want to meet my friends now?”

“I do,” Mason exclaimed.

Their fingers were still linked so Levi tugged his mate toward the doorway. He knew that his family had probably heard most of their conversation. At least the non-humans had. There wasn’t much he could hide from the others. Not that Levi liked keeping secrets. He’d tried to keep his mate a secret but that hadn’t worked out. Levi had ended up miserable and dealing with his strong emotions alone.

“Come on,” Levi said. “They’ve been dying to meet you.”

When Levi had shared that he was taking Tristan to the club, his family had already made other plans. That was of course until they learned that Mason planned to meet Levi there as well. Suddenly, everyone was suddenly free to hang out at the club.

Levi was relieved knowing he would have backup, but he was also a little embarrassed that he needed his family.

There were two strong halves inside of Levi that were constantly battling. The gargoyle part of him was protective and wanted to claim his mate. The other half of

Levi had been formed by being thrown out by his birth family and the feeling of failure. That was why Levi was taking his potential mating slowly. He wanted to get to know Mason before Levi introduced Mason to an entirely different existence, including other realms and non-human family.

* * * * *

Mason

Levi's friends, no family—they were his family—wanted to meet Mason? That wasn't too much pressure, was it? Nooooo, not too much pressure...okay even his mental sarcasm was a bit extreme.

Mason was just as interested in meeting the most important people in Levi's life. He was hiding a lot more. Even though this tight-knit group had their own secrets.

He'd been stalking the big house, so he had a good idea of the couples and throuples, and what kind of relationships they engaged in. Not that he could confess that knowledge. It was up to him to act like he had no idea what was going on. Mason wondered how long it would take for Levi to trust him enough to share about his paranormal side or if it would ever happen.

They entered the playroom and Mason found himself grinning. It was every little's dream. Not that Mason knew much about the lifestyle. He liked the aspect of a Daddy and boy relationship because he was sick and tired of having to make hard decisions. Of always being on his own. He wanted someone to finally put him first in their lives. His father had always had an agenda with him and Jason. His entire childhood had been about training. Having a Daddy of his own would release Mason to just live and be himself.

There were three large men on the couch. Two boys lying on their stomachs dressed

in cute onesie outfits and another young man in what Mason knew was puppy gear.

The pup had his head buried in the dark-haired man's lap as the man ran his fingers through his pup's hair.

There was no doubt about what the pup was doing.

"Uh..." Levi shifted nervously on his feet as his fingers tightened around Mason's.

The dark-haired man raised his gaze.

"That's Drake and Lawson," Levi said.

Drake lifted a brow. "Problem?"

Mason shook his head. "Not for me. I'll say hello to Lawson when he's not...busy."

Giggling sounded behind him, so Mason turned.

"Lawson really likes playing with his Daddy."

The young man who spoke had a sparkle in his eyes.

"Good for him," Mason replied honestly. He had no problem with the couple engaging in a blow job. Mason himself loved to have his mouth full.

"Watch it, Nate, or they'll be no playing for you at all," the biggest man in the room scolded. Mason had seen him in the woods the night of the shooting.

"Yes, Daddy." Nate smirked.

Levi shook his head. “You all promised to behave.”

“We’re sorry.”

That sweet voice came from the older gentleman dressed as a little. Not only was he older than the others in the room but he wouldn’t be what anyone called small. He also had the kindest look on his face as he smiled shyly at Mason.

“Aren’t you a cutie?” Mason told him. He meant the words with his whole heart. Mason could read people and this guy had a huge heart. Mason instantly wanted to be friends with him.

The little blushed adorably.

“That’s Bryce. Our...Axel’s partner,” Levi said.

Mason didn’t miss the slipup but did his best to ignore it. He greeted everyone as Levi finished introducing him to the group.

“Can I get you something to drink? Juice, water, soda?” Levi offered.

“Water, please,” Mason replied.

“Okay.” Levi looked around the room as if searching for something.

“If it’s okay, I’ll hang out with Bryce and Nate. I see dragons. Dragons are awesome.”

“Yay!” Bryce clapped.

Nate winked at him.

“Cool.” Levi brushed his lips against Mason’s temple before strolling toward the door.

Drake gave a low groan but Mason kept his eyes on his new little friends. He didn’t care about the sex happening, but he knew it made Levi uncomfortable. Mason was certain at this point that Levi had no experience. He might be asexual or demisexual, so they were going to need to talk soon. Not that it would change how Mason felt.

He dropped down on his butt between Bryce and Nate.

“Hi.” Nate beamed at him.

“Hi,” Mason repeated.

Bryce shoved a pacifier in his mouth before handing Mason two dragons. Nate had a handful of green army men in his hand.

“We’re having a battle,” Nate told him.

Bryce nodded.

Okay, so the two littles approached their regression differently. Nate was a little spicy just like Mason and Bryce was a sweetie pie. Mason could totally work with this group. Who knew, Mason might make friends for the first time in his life. He’d always had his twin and cousin, the other children raised in the group his father ran, but Mason hadn’t just met and played with friends of his own.

The pup, Lawson, came and joined them while gulping down a bottle of water.

“Are you finally ready to play?” Nate teased him.

Lawson glared. “You’re just mad I got a reward for being good while you almost got a spanking,” he responded.

“Maybe the spanking would have been my reward,” Nate said.

Mason laughed. These boys, they were going to be fun. He might not fit in right away—they were a close group—but Mason had hope for the future.

He’d taken a big chance to escape from his father and the group. For a while he and Jason had just hidden out but when they finally started to feel safe, they’d taken the chance to start their new lives.

It hurt more than he’d admit that Jason had chosen to stay with him. Mason wasn’t a leader. He didn’t like being in charge. Having Jason escape with him had been how Mason had survived being cold, in the dark, and hungry.

Now it was just him and Mason hated being alone.

He’d tried to fill the loneliness with anybody who showed him interest, but it hadn’t helped. Mason had been missing a connection. He’d now found that spark with Levi but there were so many things that they were both hiding. Would Mason get close to Levi and these other men and come to regret it?

That was a high possibility.

Unless Mason was right in his thinking of why he and Levi were so attuned to each other.

Could Mason be Levi’s mate?

Mason was unsure if he wanted an answer to that question.

If he was destined to be with Levi, did that change anything between them? How would his past affect his relationship with Levi or Levi's family? All those worries were too much to think about at that moment.

Bryce nudged his knee. "K?"

Mason nodded. "Totally." He tilted his head toward the castle in the middle of the playmat. "Let's fortify our defenses!"

"Fuck yeah!" Nate exclaimed.

"Language," Bo barked.

Mason would have immediately apologized, but Nate, that brat, winked at his Daddy. Mason liked being a little bratty, kind of a troublemaker, but deep down he also wanted to please his partner.

Levi returned to the room, carrying two bottles of water.

Mason accepted his as Levi sat on the floor behind him. Levi leaned against the couch, but his long legs bracketed Mason. Not only did Levi's position make Mason feel extremely safe but it also gave Mason an idea.

"Mountain!" he shouted, using Levi's leg as part of the castle's defenses.

He might not be a little, but this was a blast!

Was there something older than a middle that still liked to play but didn't want diapers or bottles? Maybe he could ask Levi sometime. Right then it was all about the fortress!

His new friends were on board with his plan to use Levi's body as part of their play. That totally worked for Mason since that meant he could do all the touching that his heart desired.

He might have even accidentally brushed against Levi's erection a few times. Mason could giggle and wink while Levi watched him with amusement.

The connection between them had been instant but this was all about creating a deeper bond. With the way the men acted around him, they'd already accepted Mason into their small group.

Any time someone would come to check in with Axel, Levi would introduce Mason. Levi's delight was obvious. He was proud that Mason was there with him. Mason was wanted. Craved.

Mason was on top of the world at that moment.

All the concerns and worries melted away as he gave his safety over to another man. It left Mason feeling protected and cared for.

As the night went on, the lack of sleep and early morning caught up with him and Mason ended up leaning against Levi's side with his head on Levi's shoulder as he played with his new friends.

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Levi

Mason tightened his arms around Levi's waist and Levi had to fight to keep his attention where it needed to be. He'd given Mason his leather jacket and riding in just a tank had been a stupid idea. Levi was freezing except where Mason held him.

With his mate taking a rideshare service to the club, Levi had insisted on taking him home. Of course, he hadn't thought about logistics, but Levi didn't regret the additional time he was getting with Mason.

The evening had been everything that Levi could have asked for. Instead of wanting to go into the private areas or watch some of the more intense scenes, Mason had sat with the other boys in the family and played.

Mason had played dragons, which had a special meaning for all of them, and seemed to be having a blast.

Levi didn't think that Mason identified as a little the way that Bryce and Nate did, but he might be a middle or something. With his experience with the club and boys, Levi knew that a person could pretty much decide on how regression worked for them. Levi liked being a so-called uncle for the boys, but this was the first time that he'd had a boy of his own to take care of.

He'd been a mountain for playtime. Letting the boys use his legs as part of their battle. Mason's naughty hands had wandered here and there but Levi had enjoyed the teasing touch.

Levi also made sure that Mason stayed hydrated and had even fed his mate snacks. Just like a real Daddy would do for his boy. Levi hadn't been looking for a little but he had wanted someone that he could care for.

Being a Daddy to a boy of his own meant something special to Levi. He'd had to leave behind everyone he had ever loved, leaving him needing a bond that couldn't be broken.

If Mason was comfortable, Levi would love to have him over to the house to see the setup for the boys. Already Levi could see Mason as part of the group. Dinners, movie nights, fun activities. Levi needed that to happen.

He slowed as he reached the turnoff for Mason's cabin.

They were almost at their destination. Levi would extend the ride longer if it wasn't so damn cold. Next time. He'd offer to take Mason for another ride soon. As soon as Mason had found out that Levi had a bike and was willing to take him home, Mason had been so excited.

A nice long ride, maybe a picnic somewhere private, and time for Levi to spend with his mate. They would eventually come to the time when Levi was going to have to reveal his secret to Mason. He wasn't ready for that, but Levi didn't know how long he could hold off. Would it be fair to start something serious with Mason when Mason didn't know what Levi truly was? He didn't think so.

The small dirt road up to the cabin sandwiched between the forest on either side. It was a gorgeous area to ride through.

Levi carefully maneuvered his bike in front of the cabin then shut it down. The loud rumble of the engine dulled to nothing but silence. Literally. There was no sound in or around the cabin.

That must be utterly peaceful.

Mason hugged Levi's waist before he started to climb from behind Levi.

Levi made sure to catch Mason's arm to assist his mate. Often after getting off the back of a bike, it took a few minutes to get the blood flowing back to the legs. Once Mason was safely standing beside him, Levi threw his leg over the engine and rose. Carefully he removed the helmet that he'd borrowed from Bo and had insisted that Mason wore.

His mate was human and until they completed the mating acts, Mason was vulnerable. Levi would do everything in his power to keep his mate safe.

Mason grin was huge, and his brown eyes shone. "That was awesome."

Levi smiled back. "I'm glad you enjoyed the ride." He turned to place the helmet on the seat. Returning his attention to Mason, he noticed the other man had moved closer.

"I really did," Mason assured him. Mason's hand went to Levi's chest. Always touching.

"I was thinking that you might like to go on a longer ride during the day. When it's warmer. We could even stop and have a picnic. I know a few great spots I could show you."

"Yes," Mason agreed quickly. "I would love that."

Peering into his mate's eyes, Levi could see his future standing in front of him. So close but there was so much between them as well. "There are probably things we need to discuss before we take things any further."

Mason nodded. "I know."

His mate had no idea how much his human life was going to change. Levi would feel bad about the change to Mason's entire world if it didn't mean that Mason would be with him for all of eternity. Levi was a paranormal species that was immortal, and he would share that gift with his mate.

"I'll plan something for us," Levi promised.

"So this means that I'll hear from you? You'll message me? Call me?" Mason pressed.

"I will," Levi vowed. He wrapped his arms around Mason's back and tugged him closer. "I'm glad you sat with me at the diner. That you knew who I was."

"Would you have ever told me?" Mason said quietly.

"No." Levi didn't lie. He just wasn't good at it, and he didn't want to start his mating being dishonest. At least more dishonest than the secret he was keeping.

"I didn't think so." Mason closed his eyes before he took a deep breath. When he reopened his eyes and looked up at Levi, Levi could see the emotions were strong. "I'll never be able to make up for that message. For hurting you."

Levi shook his head. "No. That's in the past. We never have to bring it up again. It was a misunderstanding. All I want to do is move past it. I want to see what the future will bring."

"Me too. This connection..."

"It's real," Levi told him. "It might seem weird, but you can trust what you feel for

me.”

Something—a look of wariness—passed over Mason’s features before it was gone. “I want to believe that.”

“Believe me,” Levi said. “That should be enough for now. We’ll talk. Maybe when I explain some things, it will help you understand.”

“Okay.”

Leaning forward, Levi allowed Mason enough time to pull away if he didn’t want Levi’s kiss. Instead of pulling away, Mason pushed up on his tiptoes before Mason was kissing him. Their lips met and Levi was controlling the kiss and swiping his tongue inside Mason’s mouth.

Closing his eyes, Levi lost himself in the kiss. In the feel of his mate’s body against his. At the rightness of being with Mason. This feeling...this...was what Levi had been chasing for his entire adult life. He’d known...somehow, he’d known that when he met his mate, all the waiting would be worth it.

Mason kissed him with the perfect amount of passion. He ran his hands over Levi but never moved anywhere Levi was uncomfortable with.

Not that Levi didn’t want his mate. He did. He really did.

Forcing himself to draw back, he caught the flash of disappointment on Mason’s face.

“I...” He had to clear his throat. “I should go.”

“I know.” Mason didn’t release him.

For that matter, Levi hadn't eased his own hold on his mate. "It's not that I don't want to stay—"

"You're not ready," Mason finished for him. "And you were right. We should talk. If we're going to make something out of how we feel for each other, we both need to be honest."

"Yeah," Levi agreed.

"I'll let you go," Mason said. "Because once I do have you in my bed, you'll never leave it again."

Damn! Why did that sound so hot?

"But you did have fun tonight, right?" Levi wanted to double-check before he left.

"I had a great time. I like your friends. I hope we can play again."

"Can I..." Levi rubbed the back of his neck. He knew what he needed so it was up to Mason how dominant Levi could be with him. The gargoyle side of him wanted to be everything to Mason. "Can I ask if you're..."

"Little? Kinky? Looking for a Daddy?" Mason supplied.

"Yeah. That. All that."

Mason took a step back, but his hands remained on Levi's chest as he peered up at Levi. "I'm not a little. I loved playing and would like to do it again. Is there like a bigger little? Bryce and Nate were adorable, but I don't need diapers, pacifiers, or anything like that." He shook his head. "Not that it matters. If the other boys won't mind me around, I'd like to play again."

“They’ll want you to play all the time,” Levi assured him. “And you might be a middle? It’s something we can explore together if you’d like.”

Mason beamed. “Cool. I do know that I like a more dominant partner. I liked to be taken care of. I need someone who’ll take charge but still make me feel safe.”

“A Daddy, maybe?” Levi hoped he hid some of his excitement.

Mason lifted a brow. “Is that what you want? For me to call you my Daddy?”

Levi shuddered hard. He wasn’t sure if it was from the word my or Daddy. Both sounded like heaven to him.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Mason teased. “Daddy Levi. I like the sound of that. My Daddy is even better though.”

That surprised a laugh out of Levi. “I knew you would be trouble the first time I saw you.” It hadn’t been on the app like his mate thought. No, Levi had only been on that dating service to get close to Mason. He hoped when he confessed about the paranormal world and them being mates, Mason didn’t ask too many questions about the app. That would be embarrassing.

“You say that, but you like my brand of trouble,” Mason retorted.

“I do.” He hoped Mason would remain fun-loving and sassy even after learning of Levi’s secret. Being involved in Levi’s world could be stressful.

Mason slipped off Levi’s leather jacket. He wanted to tell Mason to keep it. To have something of his but Levi knew that Mason would insist. It would be a cold ride back without it. At this point it would take Levi hours to warm up.

Levi gripped the soft leather with his fingers as Mason passed the jacket over.

He couldn't help himself. With his free hand, he gripped Mason's wrist and yanked his mate forward. Mason gasped in surprise, but Levi was already kissing him. He kissed Mason for all that he was worth.

Just as fast as he'd taken control of his mate, Levi released him. "I'll call you. I swear."

"You better. I know where you live now."

Levi chuckled as he swung on his jacket while strolling toward his bike. He threw his leg over. "Now get inside. You'll catch a cold out here."

Mason grinned at him. "Yes, Daddy."

Damn, his mate, his boy, was going to keep him on his toes.

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Mason

He was sort of listening. Mason climbed the steps to his cabin pausing on the porch. There was no chance in hell that Mason was not going to watch Levi ride away.

Mason had never been on a motorcycle, even though that was his twin's choice of transportation. Mason had always considered bikes to be a dangerously expensive hobby. That was of course until he was behind Levi, rumbling down the road, his hard cock rubbing Levi's lower back and Mason's arms tight around his man. That had been incredible, and he might have to apologize to Jason for how much shit Mason had given him.

Levi lifted and hand and waved.

Mason blew him a kiss.

Cheesy? Yes. Mason wasn't one bit ashamed. Levi had pretty much confirmed they were mates even if he didn't know that Mason was fully aware of the paranormal world. It was the right thing to do to wait to be together until they talked. Mason hated that he agreed. His cock really hated the fact that Mason wasn't getting thoroughly pummeled now.

Patience. It would take quite a bit of patience to wait for Levi, but Mason would get his man. That was if Levi could forgive him once Mason made his own confession.

The sound of Levi's bike faded in the distance and Mason sighed.

He already missed the other man.

And that was stupid.

Mason was going to have to get used to being alone. It wasn't like he could move Levi into his small cabin after one date. That would just be crazy. Maybe he was crazy because Mason had meant it when he'd said that once he had Levi in his bed, he would never let Levi out.

His cock throbbing reminded him that having Levi in his bed sooner rather than later would be optimal. Mason might have to take care of his pressing needs that night but soon it would be Levi. He was certain of it.

Behind him a rustle of clothing caught his attention. Mason lurched forward but he was too slow. An arm came around his throat and Mason was yanked back.

Years of training drilled into him took over.

Mason forcefully threw his head back and connected with his assailant's nose. The arm around his neck loosened. He dropped his shoulders before rolling them and spun from the enemy's hold then he swept out his leg. Mason hit his opponent behind his knees and the man fell.

"Fucker!" Mason spat.

Jason rolled from his side onto his back grinning up at him. "Hello, brother."

Mason nearly kicked his twin in the ribs but resisted. Barely. Good news—he was no longer aching hard.

"Great reflexes. Whatever you've been doing with your Daddy seems to have kept

you sharp.”

Oh shit! Jason had heard that? Which meant he’d probably heard the entire conversation. Why? Out of all the times for his brother to show up without warning it had to be when Mason was allowing himself to live his own life. He might have called his twin, but Mason had expected a return phone call, not a visit. Jason must have already been close.

“Although I didn’t even know there was a Daddy. I thought I was going to have to kick some muscle head out of your bed. Instead, I got here, and you were nowhere to be found. Then all of a sudden you show up on the back of your Daddy’s bike. You refused to ride with me.”

Mason offered his brother a hand to help him up. “If you called instead of just showing up, I would have known to be home. And it’s because you’re a horrible driver and I trust Levi.”

“Surprising you is so much better,” Jason responded. He brushed off the ass of his jeans.

Mason took his brother’s appearance in. Other than looking a bit dirty and disheveled, Jason seemed good. “I don’t want to hear any shit from you.” He pulled Jason into a hard brotherly hug. “Missed you, man.”

Jason returned the embrace just as hard. “Missed your ugly mug too.”

They were identical twins.

Mason pushed Jason away. “Asshole.”

Jason smirked. “So, tell me all about this Daddy. He was hot!”

It took everything inside him not to explode. He did not want Jason checking out his man. Although Mason did need his brother's advice and help. "He's also paranormal," Mason informed him.

Jason froze in the act of lighting a cigarette.

Mason nodded. Jason had heard him.

"He's more than a one-night fuck?"

"I haven't even fucked him yet."

Jason whistled then placed the cigarette against his lips.

"You said you'd quit."

"I will."

It was an argument that Mason still hoped he would win someday. Their father had smoked like a chimney. Mason couldn't stand the smell. Too many bad memories associated with that scent. He took a step back.

Jason sighed before tossing the unlit cigarette over the railing. "Sorry. I know you hate the smell."

"I also don't want you to die from cancer."

"I'm too much of an asshole to die," Jason told him.

Mason bit his lip. He would not laugh. That would just encourage his brother.

Jason threw an arm over his shoulder. “You better have beer.”

“Yeah.” They were going to need it.

His front door was open. Damn it, Mason glared at his brother. “I just fixed the lock.”

“I didn’t break in. The window was open.”

Mason stopped walking, forcing Jason to stumble. “Open?” He never left his windows open. They should have stayed locked tight.

“Yes?”

“My windows were open or unlocked? Don’t fuck with me, Jason.”

Jason lifted his hands. “I’m not. Your back window was open.”

Cursing under his breath, Mason rushed inside. He needed to get a security system, but money was tight with him trying to remodel the cabin. He peered around the living room but other than the dirty duffel bag on his couch, nothing looked out of place.

Room by room, Mason searched his entire cabin, Jason at his back.

Nothing.

Someone had to have been there though. There was no other reason for his window to be open. Stupid mistake to make leaving it open though. Was it a warning?

“You think he found you?”

He turned slowly. His brother looked as scared as Mason felt. Mason leaned against the bedroom wall. Instead of handling things on his own, Mason had predictably called in his twin. He was so stupid.

“I shouldn’t have called you,” Mason said quietly. “You can still get away. If you leave now, they might not know that you were ever here.”

Mason knew better! Jason was his weakness. He would do anything for his brother. Their father knew that Mason would call Jason if anything went wrong.

“Come with me,” Jason demanded. “We can leave right now. I’ve found a few places that will work for a hideout. Out-of-the-way towns no one would ever look for us in.”

Mason was already shaking his head.

“Look, I know you don’t want to spend your life on the run or hiding but if he found you already—”

“I can’t leave.” Mason forced the words past his tight throat.

“Mas, please.”

Fuck! It wasn’t about him any longer. Mason would run at the first sign of trouble time and again, but he couldn’t outrun his past any longer. There was an entire loving family five miles from his cabin. There was no guarantee that his father would follow if Mason left. Not if he thought there was anything weird going on around there. And there was a fuck ton of weirdness going on around there.

No way in hell could Mason leave Levi. Or Bryce and Nate. Lawson. Axel, Drake, Bo and Craig. Even Tristan.

Mason would not allow others to be hurt because he was too much of a coward to fight back.

He jolted as Jason grabbed his shoulders.

“We’ll run. Stay one step ahead of him. We’ve done it before.”

Mason met his brother’s worried gaze. “I can’t leave my mate.”

“Your mate?” Jason screeched.

“Or you can call him my Daddy.”

“Fuck!” Jason spat. “I’m going to need that beer so we can plan.”

Mason really loved his twin.

* * * * *

Levi

He hated leaving his mate behind. If he hurried, Levi could get up to his rooftop and hopefully watch as Mason settled in for the night. At least that way he knew Mason was safe and sound.

Parking in the shed that had been converted for the bikes, Levi was nearly desperate to get up to his room. The vibration of the bike against his aching balls and hard dick had almost brought him to orgasm several times on the short ride home. Levi cupped his jean-covered erection and gave himself a squeeze. It was harder than he’d imagined leaving Mason alone. Levi’s entire body craved his sweet mate, but Levi knew he’d made the right decision.

Slowly climbing off his bike, Levi's mind was on his mate and his hard shaft. Until the door slammed closed.

Levi jumped and spun. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting on you."

He didn't have time for this. Being fully aroused, Levi didn't want to see anyone but his mate. "Not now, Tristan."

"We need to talk."

No! He hid his red face. Levi was so fucking horny. "It can't wait?"

"I did some digging on your mate," Tristan told him.

Levi growled. Through the fog of arousal, he heard a threat to his mate. His claws broke through his fingertips as his body began to heat from the inside.

"I need you to listen to me."

Levi knew he wasn't thinking straight but all rational thought had fled. "No one asked you to." Mason was his! His to love. His to protect. Levi could barely hold the gargoyle's instinct back.

"I could tell there was something he was hiding," Tristan said. The demon stood with his legs shoulder-width apart and his weight on the balls of his feet. Was he preparing for Levi to attack? They sparred often and Levi and Tristan were pretty evenly matched. "He's not who he says he is."

Every protective instinct he had exploded as all he could see was red.

Levi launched himself forward. He slashed at Tristan's face but the demon was quick. Levi blocked a blow to his side, but Tristan managed to kick him back. Levi nearly knocked the bikes down but caught himself.

"You're too lovesick to see that he's dangerous."

"My mate is perfect!" Levi roared. He attacked with all his fury.

He and Tristan exchanged blows. Blood flew. Tools were knocked over. Levi couldn't stop himself. He couldn't get control. Not when someone was a threat to his mate!

With a powerful left hook, he sent Tristan to the ground. He tried to follow Tristan down, to finish off the demon, when he was caught around the waist.

He went nuts. Kicking, scratching, punching, until three men held him down.

"Enough!" Gavin yelled in his face.

Levi blinked. What was Gavin doing in the shed? He grunted. Well Gavin, Shawn, and Trevor. And why were they all on top of him? They were heavy fuckers! "Let me up," Levi growled. His fangs were still extended and cutting into his bottom lip.

"Not until you calm down," Gavin told him.

"I'm calm," Levi lied.

Gavin snorted.

Damn it! Levi lay his head back on the cold concrete of the shed. Closing his eyes, Levi breathed deeply as he counted back from ten. He'd been working on his

emotions although for a much different reason than this. He just couldn't believe that Tristan would betray him. They were friends! At least Levi thought they were.

"He needs to listen to me!"

Levi tensed at hearing Tristan's voice.

"Let Axel handle it," Gavin told him.

Levi opened his eyes to see his friend peering down at him with concern. "Mason—"

"Whatever it is, I've got your back."

He knew that Gavin would always have his back. Any of the men in his family would. Even little Nate, who spent more time in diapers than out, was a force to reckon with. Levi nodded.

"Better?" Gavin asked.

"Yeah." This time he wasn't lying.

"Thank fuck!" Shawn said before he rolled off him. "I didn't know you were so scrappy." He grinned at Levi.

Levi shook his head. He'd always been very controlled in showing his strength. Being a gargoyle meant that he was pretty much indestructible. The damage he could inflict on others would be massive, so Levi didn't lose control. Ever.

"Family meeting," Axel barked.

Levi winced. He hated to hear the anger coming from his Alpha. Levi might not be a

shifter, but he still saw Axel as his leader.

“Go ahead,” Gavin said to Shawn and Trevor. “I’ll get Levi cleaned up and we’ll be right in.”

They waited until the others left the shed. Gavin rose and offered his hand helping Levi to his feet. His body already beginning to ache although it wouldn’t be for long. He did heal quickly. Damn, Tristan could fight.

Gavin walked over to the sink in the corner they used when working on the bikes. Levi followed his friend over. Gavin turned on the water before motioning for Levi to get closer.

Levi washed his hands first as Gavin pulled down the first aid kit from the cabinet.

“What was that about?” Gavin asked.

“I’m...not sure.”

Gavin lifted a brow.

“I don’t know. Not really. Tristan started talking about how I couldn’t trust Mason. That he was hiding something. I just lost it.”

“Okay.” Gavin handed him a clean rag. “Wipe that blood off. The boys will freak if they see it. Then we’ll figure it out.”

Levi took the rag. “He’s my mate.”

“Meaning?”

“I don’t care who he is. He is mine,” Levi stated.

“If he’s yours, then that makes him ours. He’s family.”

Levi hadn’t realized he’d needed the reassurance. “No matter what?”

“No matter what,” Gavin agreed.

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Mason

“You could be putting him more in danger by staying,” Jason pointed out.

Mason glared at his twin.

“I’m just saying.” Jason tilted the beer bottle at him. “You need to consider all your options.”

“There are no other options. I won’t leave him,” Mason stated.

“You’ve known him...what...a few days?”

“It’s been longer than that,” Mason said. “I told you about the app.”

“I’ve been thinking about that. What are the chances you connected there first?”

“You know how the fates work,” Mason reminded him. “We know about mates. It’s why... It’s what changed everything.”

“Have you spoken to Cassie?” Jason questioned.

“No. She has her mate, and I don’t want to pull her back into our trouble.”

“We’re really going to do this? Take on Dad or whoever he sent and protect your man and his family?”

“We?” Mason repeated.

Jason drained the rest of his beer. “Like I’ll let you have all the fun.”

“Fun.” Mason snorted.

“We should have taken him out instead of running,” Jason told him.

This was an argument they’d had many times. Yes, Mason hated his father. That didn’t mean that Mason could kill him. He’d never hurt anyone.

“You’ll have to tell him. The sooner the better.”

Mason knew that. Setting his beer aside—he hadn’t even wanted the stupid drink, but it had felt nice to have something to hold on to. All he could think about was how Levi was going to react to what Mason really was.

“We’ll figure it out,” Jason said.

While he appreciated his brother’s support, Mason was still worried. Levi could want nothing to do with him. Even having a mate wasn’t a guarantee of a happily ever after. When his cousin had realized that she’d found a mate, it had been quite easy for her to be accepted within the family of raptor shifters. Mason didn’t foresee his transition coming so smoothly. The love the men had for one another was obvious. The powerful paranormal beings would not take any threat to their mates easily.

Levi was part of a very interesting group of paranormals. It was obvious to Mason, from his experience, that they were not all of one species. Mason couldn’t tell what species. Somehow, he was able to feel when he was in the presence of someone powerful. There were many powerful beings around Levi.

Powerful paranormals were going to do everything to protect their mates.

It was very likely that Axel, Bo, and many of the other men would see Mason as a threat. He wasn't! Mason didn't want to harm anyone. He wanted to be a part of the group. Levi should be his.

"I'm going to take a shower and get some sleep," Jason told him.

"The couch will work?"

"Doesn't it always?" Jason quipped. "You really should have found a bigger place."

"It was free," Mason reminded him. "And better than a different motel room every night."

"That's a matter of opinion."

"Go shower. You stink," Mason teased. Jason didn't really.

Jason rose and patted Mason's shoulder as he passed.

He needed to give Jason his space, so Mason grabbed his beer before he went out front. Closing the door quietly behind him, Mason headed to the chair he'd set in the corner.

Mason collapsed down, peering around his small little bit of peace.

He didn't need much. Wasn't looking for adventure or anything like that. All he really wanted for his life was a place that he belonged. Instead of a place to belong, Mason had been gifted with a person.

The possibility of Levi not trusting him was high.

Settling into his chair, Mason reminded himself to take deep breaths and just appreciate what he had. This small piece of land was his. The cabin might not be much now, but Mason had plans for his home.

Chittering from a nearby tree drew his attention.

In the city, he'd never get to witness three small racoons racing up and down the trunk of a tree. They were cute as they played, and Mason wondered what the racoons' parents were up to. Finding food? The forest did provide for all those who called it home. The raccoons were safe there and Mason wanted that feeling as well.

This was pretty much how Mason wanted his life to go. It would be better to be curled up in Levi's arms as they sat on the porch watching the wildlife, but Mason was determined to have that moment with Levi in the future.

He'd do what he had to do to protect Levi and his family.

* * * * *

Levi

Levi sat between Gavin and Trevor on the couch as everyone gave their attention to Tristan.

"I'm sorry, Levi. I didn't mean to upset you," Tristan said.

Levi was shaking his head before Tristan even finished his sentence. "No. I'm sorry. I overreacted. I don't know what happened." He'd lost control but Levi was a better man than that. Attacking Tristan had him feeling horrible.

“You are protective of your mate,” Axel said. “We all understand that.”

“I should have approached you differently with my concerns,” Tristan said. “You know me. I received the information and popped up here. I didn’t stop to think.”

“We’re all calm now,” Axel told him. “What is going on?”

“Mason Benard doesn’t exist,” Tristan said. “At least no one with that name or around Mason’s age match up. His paperwork is all fake. Very well done but fake.”

Levi stiffened and Gavin immediately placed a hand on his knee. Levi realized he was growling.

“How’d you find this out?” Axel asked.

Levi was thankful for his Alpha. He knew he should be asking questions but all he wanted to do was defend his mate.

“When I met Mason, I could see his internal struggles. I went back to my realm after the club and asked Ari to pull all the information he could find for any Benard clans in the human realm.”

“That—” Levi shook his head. He couldn’t help but feel betrayed by Tristan.

“I just wanted to make sure he...that he...”

“He’s my mate,” Levi said quietly. He was no longer angry. Sad maybe. But not angry. “It doesn’t matter to me. If he’s hiding something, then he must have a reason. He’s a good man. I know that in my heart. That’s what matters to me.”

Tristan nodded. “Okay. I get that.”

“You understand?” Levi questioned.

“Of course. I’m a demon. Not many species even want to be in the same realm with us. If I had a mate, I wouldn’t care where he came from or what name he was using. He would be mine.”

“Then you do get it,” Levi replied. “He is already mine.”

“We do need to know if he’s in some sort of trouble,” Axel stated.

Levi jerked back. But Mason was his! Was Levi going to have to choose between his mate and his found family? Levi didn’t think he’d survive being kicked out of another family. Even with Mason by his side.

“If he needs help, then we’ll set up a guard rotation. Mason is vulnerable until you complete the mating. It will be up to the family to protect him. He’s yours, which makes him mine.” Axel met Levi’s gaze with his intense eyes practically glowing. The dragon making a small appearance. All Alpha.

“Thanks.” Levi instantly relaxed.

“You need to talk to him,” Axel said. “He’s your mate and it won’t be an easy conversation. Trust me. I know. But you need to tell him sooner rather than later.”

“I know.” Levi had hoped that he’d have more time with his mate before he had to reveal what he was. There was no telling if Mason would even believe him. Sure, he could show Mason the truth, but Levi had hoped he’d at least have time to build a stronger connection with his mate.

“Let’s get to bed. It’s late and I don’t want the boys waking up and hearing this,” Axel declared. “You know they’ll want to help, and I think this is something you

should handle.”

Axel was one hundred percent correct. The boys would want to help. This was Levi’s mate though and his responsibility. “Good night. I’ll talk to Mason soon,” Levi told them.

Axel, Trevor, and Gavin left the living room, leaving Levi and Tristan. Levi looked at his newest friend, but Tristan wasn’t meeting his gaze.

“Tristan?”

The demon looked up.

“Are we okay?” Levi hadn’t gotten violent with any of the guys before and felt terrible.

“He’s dangerous,” Tristan said. “For me that isn’t a big deal, but you are already in love with him.”

“I...”

Tristan shook his head. “That doesn’t have to be a bad thing. I think he’s more capable than anyone realizes. Just because he is human doesn’t make him weak.”

“I don’t think he’s weak,” Levi defended.

“But you don’t think he can take care of himself,” Tristan pointed out. “Do you know anything about his past?”

“Not really,” Levi admitted. He just hadn’t had the time. When they’d messaged through the app, they’d been flirty but hadn’t discussed anything serious. They’d only

been talking in person for a few days.

“Don’t underestimate him,” Tristan said. “From what I see, and you have to remember I came in looking as an outsider, every mate has fit into the family perfectly.”

“They have.”

“Which will mean the same for your mate,” Tristan said.

“That’s true.” All of this gave Levi a lot to think about. “Are you staying here tonight?”

“Am I still welcome?” Tristan asked.

Levi hated the look of hesitation on Tristan’s face. He rose before pulling Tristan into a strong hug. “You are always welcome here. I’m so sorry.”

“I don’t want you to be sorry.”

Levi pulled back slightly.

Tristan blushed. “I don’t have many friends. You’re probably one of my best.”

Ah, Tristan was so sweet. “I love you, man.”

“Oh-uh.”

Levi chuckled. He remembered how hard it had been for him to accept the love and affection of the family. Levi now embraced all his brothers. Tristan would come around. He just needed to spend more time with them. “You know you love me too.”

Tristan laughed before pushing him away. “I’ll stay in the guest room.”

“I’ll see you in the morning.”

Levi walked Tristan to one of the guest suites then headed to his rooftop. He needed some time in his other form to refresh and get his thoughts in order.

Using the hatch on the third floor, Levi escaped to his oasis. Axel had been instrumental in providing Levi with the space he needed. Standing in the middle of his special rooftop, Levi peered around. Being a gargoyle Levi could see for miles.

Mason’s small cabin wasn’t too far away.

Eventually Levi hoped to have Mason with him at the big house. Levi loved the constant chaos in the house. Bryce and Nate both age regressed often and sometimes for days at a time. Lawson made the cutest pup and even Levi spent time with the boy curled up at his feet. River and Anton both spent a lot of time in the human realm and Levi considered both of them close friends. Sam and Ansley were both busy with the bookstore in town but always took time to seek Levi out. He missed Seb and Adam when they were in the hell realm, but Levi spent quite a bit of time there himself. Even Tristan had become family. Levi wanted Mason to be a part of it all.

He moved to the edge of the roof and undressed. From one of his secret compartments under one of shelving units, Levi pulled out a loincloth. It was one of the very few items he’d brought from his birth parents. His mom made all the children’s loincloths and having several nosy family members in the big house, Levi liked to be covered up.

Levi locked his eyes onto Mason’s cabin before he began to morph. Peace filled him and all his worries melted away as he assumed his natural form. He had a mate. Levi’s life was changing. Dreams were coming true. He smiled as stone replaced his

flesh, freezing his happy expression in place.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Mason

‘Good morning sweetheart.’Mason sent the text and waited.

‘Good morning. I woke up thinking about you.’

Mason smiled. It was easy to talk to Levi through messages and the cowardly part of him wished he could have the upcoming conversation with Levi over the phone. That wasn’t fair to Levi though. When Mason came clean, he needed to see how Levi reacted.

‘I’m glad. Can I see you?’Mason’s stomach was in knots. He wanted Levi to agree but a part of him hoped Levi would have other plans.

‘Yes. When?’

Mason had to think of everything he needed to do. ‘Two hours?’ Mason requested.

‘Perfect. Should I meet you at your cabin?’

Oh hell no! Not with Jason hanging around.

‘How about the tree that no longer has a bullet hole in it?’Mason teased. They both knew damn well that tree had been shot.

‘LOL! I will meet you there in two hours.’

Mason slid his phone into his back pocket. He needed to get to town. He had supplies that needed to be picked up from the hardware store he'd been waiting on. He could also grab more groceries for him and Jason and maybe something to make a picnic for Levi and him. If he hurried, he'd be back on time.

"Was that your Daddy?"

Mason jumped. Turning slowly, he made certain Jason could see his glare.

"What? You want him to Daddy you so hard," Jason taunted.

Why had Mason thought his brother would be helpful? He should have known better. Jason loved to give him shit.

"Fine." Jason sighed. "What are your plans for today?"

"I need to go to town and grab a few things then I'm meeting with Levi," Mason said.

"I'll head to town with you. I want to get a look around anyway."

Mason hesitated.

"What?"

"This is where I'm making my home," he explained.

"I'm aware of that. That is why I'm here. To make sure your new home is safe, and you can stay here."

"No getting arrested? Bar fights? Orgies in the town square?"

“Is there a town square?” Jason asked.

“No.”

“Then that’s one less worry for you,” Jason stated.

“You know what I mean,” Mason responded.

“I won’t get arrested or start an orgy in the middle of town,” Jason promised.

Mason lifted a brow.

“I can’t make promises about the bar fight. I might get bored if you’re gone too long.”

He groaned before going back into his cabin and grabbing his keys.

Jason was climbing into the passenger side of the truck by the time Mason made it outside. He locked the door. Now that he’d already had the issue with a window being left open, Mason knew he needed to be vigilant about his place. Nothing had been missing but Mason didn’t like the idea that someone might have been inside his home.

The cabin might not look like much, but it was the first place that he’d ever found safety. It could be nothing but with Mason’s nerves and the shooting, he needed to be cautious.

Mason quite enjoyed the drive to town. Being out in the middle of nowhere had many benefits. The view was gorgeous and quiet. It took less than twenty minutes to get to the town proper.

The main street really had it all. The restaurants and diner, shops and stores, and Levi's tattoo parlor. He couldn't help but smile thinking about the man Mason was sure was his mate. Would Levi tell him soon? Maybe after Mason made his own confession and let Levi know that he was already aware of the paranormal world? Or would Levi send him on his way once Levi learned what Mason's family had done for decades?

His stomach gave another twist of pain.

How was he already so invested in Levi?

Mason knew the answer to his own question though. He'd felt the connection when Levi was Stone. Now that he suspected they were probably mates, Mason was aware of what that could mean for him.

"This is a cute little town."

He side-eyed his brother but Jason had a thoughtful look on his face and didn't appear to be teasing. His twin had refused to settle down, stating that it was better to be one step in front of their father. Jason was always looking for the next thrill.

Mason didn't blame his brother. Not with the fucked-up way that they'd been raised but he still hoped Jason would want to stay close some day. Maybe they could live in the same town.

"The people are nice," Mason said. "They mind their own business but also look out for one another."

"You talking about your man and his family?"

There was teasing in that question. Mason laughed. "Well, they do pretty much own

every successful business in town.”

“How long have they been here?”

“I don’t actually know.”

“You really need to learn more about your man.” Jason’s tone held disappointment. They’d been trained better but, in his defense, Mason hadn’t expected to be surrounded by the paranormal world he’d been trying to escape from.

“I’m hoping that after we talk today, I can ask the important questions.” That was if Levi even wanted him around.

“When do I get to meet this guy?” Jason inquired.

“Let me see if he even wants to talk to me after I tell him everything.” Mason pulled into the parking lot behind the bakery. He wanted to surprise Levi with something sweet and delicious.

“Hey.” Jason grabbed Mason’s shoulder.

Mason turned his attention to his brother.

“If Levi is your mate, then we can pretty much guarantee that he’ll at least listen to you. I can’t see anyone meant for you not having that kind of respect.”

“Levi is a sweetheart. I won’t lie and say I’m not scared of what he’ll say. I’m also worried about the other paranormals. They’re powerful. I can feel it when I’m around them. If they don’t want Levi to be with me—”

“Then fuck them!” Jason exclaimed.

“You haven’t seen Levi around his family. He looks up to the others. They mean so much to him. From what I’ve noticed, Levi was devastated when he left his birth family.”

Jason shook his head. “I wish I could give you better advice. This is so new to us. For our entire life we thought all these paranormals were monsters. That they were trying to exterminate all humans. Levi needs to understand that. We got away on our own but that doesn’t mean it’ll be easy for you to suddenly not react to what your body will tell you is a danger to your survival.”

“How do I tell him that I was born and raised to end his existence?”

“Carefully.” Jason squeezed his shoulder. “And don’t let him get away until he understands why you left that life.”

Mason nodded.

“At least you never killed anyone,” Jason said quietly.

“Jas—”

Jason shook his head. “I know what I did. Even if Father was there forcing my hand, I did bad things. It’s something that I must live with.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, dork. Now go get what you need for your man. I’ll find my own way back to your cabin later.”

“Call if you need anything,” Mason told him.

Jason snorted. “Worry about your Daddy, not me.”

Mason rolled his eyes at his brother’s typical response.

* * * * *

Levi

“Hey man. I’m glad you’re still here.” Levi closed the back door before he crossed the deck where Tristan was drinking a cup of coffee. He’d noticed that Tristan had been spending more time in the human realm even though the demon bitched about coming up. Levi believed that Tristan found comfort within the family. It wasn’t just the food that was bringing the demon around, no matter what Tristan claimed.

“Hey, yeah, like I could leave without enjoying some of Drake’s special coffee.”

“Does Drake know you’re drinking his special coffee?” Levi asked.

Tristan smirked before taking a long drink and finishing off the liquid in the mug.

Levi could only shake his head. Tristan was feeling much more comfortable there if he’d turned to stealing Drake’s coffee like the other guys. It was an ongoing joke with all of them. Somehow Drake never ran out of his blend, so Levi suspected Drake was well aware of what they were all up to.

“What are you up to?” Tristan set the empty mug aside.

Levi knew he was blushing.

Tristan laughed. “I take it you are off to see your mate?”

“Yeah, he texted me this morning and wants to see me,” Levi supplied.

“Hmm, and did you shower and wash all the important bits thoroughly?” Tristan teased.

Levi looked away. He might have spent triple the time in the shower that morning. Not that he expected anything to happen between them but maybe he wanted more? Levi wasn't certain.

“Hey.” Tristan grabbed his wrist and yanked Levi down beside him.

Levi nearly landed on his friend.

“You okay about our talk last night?” Tristan asked.

“Yes,” he quickly assured his friend. “I have everyone's support. Whatever Mason's dealing with, we'll help him through. We're a powerful bunch.”

“This family is extremely powerful.”

“I know.”

Tristan nudged his shoulder. “Then...”

“I...I'm not...” Levi huffed. “I'm not as experienced as my mate.”

“You're a virgin,” Tristan stated.

“You don't have to say it out loud,” Levi complained. He was too easy to read.

“I thought you were saving yourself for your mate.” Tristan seemed confused.

Damn it. “I am. I was.”

“Levi.” Tristan shook him. “What is the problem?”

“My mate, he, I’ve seen, he likes sex.”

Tristan barked out a laugh. “I should hope so. Sex is great.”

“I mean—”

“I know what you mean,” Tristan told him. “But it doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“What are you talking about?” Levi was not feeling better with this conversation. How was this helpful? Did Tristan think he was helpful?

“Now I don’t know this for myself since I don’t yet have a mate.” Tristan raised a brow and smirked. “But I’ve heard things.”

He really didn’t know if Tristan was messing with him or not. Did he really want to know what kind of things Tristan had heard? No way! Damn it, he actually did. Maybe. “What things have you heard?” he finally asked.

“No matter how much experience a person has, everything is different, better, with your mate. That everything changes when you are intimate with your mate. I think you are worrying for no reason.”

Levi smiled as he leaned against Tristan. Okay, maybe the talk was helping. He’d heard the same. Just watching the other couples in the house proved how having a mate changed everything. Shawn used to sleep around with a different boy every night but when he’d found Sam, he’d had found exactly what he needed, even though he hadn’t been looking for a mate.

“Besides, if you really need some help, I’m always up for a threesome. I call top!”

Levi groaned, pushing Tristan away. He rose and knew that he and Tristan were going to be okay. Luckily Tristan didn’t seem to hold Levi’s behavior the night before against him. Levi still couldn’t believe he’d attacked his friend.

“Are you hanging around?” Levi asked.

“Shawn is going to give me a lift to town when he goes to see his boy. I want to get some things from the bakery before I head back to my realm. Ansley is also supposed to be getting his author copies in for his latest book and promised me one.”

“No wonder Bryce and Lawson wanted to go to work with Sam this morning. They just wanted to be there when the books came in.”

“Of course they did. It was all they could talk about this morning. I want some sweet treats while I’m reading in bed. At least until I can talk Drake and Lawson down to hell to cook for me all the time.”

Levi shook his head. “Not going to happen. You know you’re always welcome here though.”

“I do.” Tristan grinned at him.

It also threw Levi off when anyone from another realm used their human glamour in his presence. Whether from the fae or hell realm, they often had a human face when they visited. Levi wished his friends could remain in their natural forms but he understood that was too big of a risk.

Plus, how would he explain Tristan’s demon appearance before Levi confessed to Mason about the paranormal world? “I’ll talk to you later then.” Levi headed to meet

his mate.

“Should I tell Atom you won’t be making training tomorrow? That you’ll be doing all your training in bed tonight?”

“That...” He flushed. “Might be a good idea.”

Tristan beamed. “Go get you some!”

Levi flipped his friend the middle finger as he continued to head away from the house. He didn’t want to be late and he could spend hours arguing with Tristan. Plus, he was embarrassed about what he confessed.

Everyone was aware of Levi’s lack of experience and had been supportive even if they liked to tease him. Levi couldn’t help but worry though. He wanted to be everything for Mason, and he doubted his own abilities. Stepping under the canopy of the trees, Levi glanced up. This was his home. His sanctuary. And he had found his mate. Life was really turning out how Levi had always dreamed about. He just needed to trust in the fates.

He heard Mason as he approached. Mason was mumbling about something, but the muffled words didn’t matter. Levi forced himself to relax. His mate was coming to him. They would talk. Levi would explain. It would all work out. Levi had to trust their fated future.

Levi reopened his eyes and smiled as Mason came into view.

“Hi.” Mason stopped walking to stare at him.

“Hi,” Levi repeated. He had to swallow hard. His mate looked gorgeous. It wasn’t just attraction that Levi felt for him. He knew, no matter what Mason was hiding, that

his mate was a good man.

Mason dropped his pack and an insulated bag before moving forward. Levi opened his arms and was greeted with a soft press of lips against his.

Levi held Mason tight against his chest as they kissed.

All the tension he'd been carrying instantly evaporated. His mate brought him peace and comfort. Drawing away slowly from the kiss, Levi peered down at his mate. There were dark circles under Mason's eyes that hadn't been there before. Brushing his thumbs over the puffy skin, Levi ran his gaze up and down Mason's face.

"What's the matter?" Levi asked.

"Nothing," Mason said quickly. Too quickly.

Levi hummed. His friends were right. Something was going on with his mate. "Let's sit." He would take his time coaxing Mason's words.

"I brought a blanket," Mason told him.

Levi smiled. Of course. It hadn't escaped Levi's attention that Mason took care of all the little details. Mason began to lay out the worn plaid blanket as Levi gathered the other bags that Mason had brought. He set the bags on the side of the blanket before pulling Mason down with him.

With his back to the thick trunk of the tree, Levi settled Mason between his legs.

"I know that we haven't known each other in person long but I also remember all of those late-night conversations through the app."

Mason turned to peer up at him. “I loved those nights. I wish—”

Levi quickly shook his head. “We’ve already moved past what happened. I’ve forgiven and forgotten.”

“I will never deserve you, but I want you in my life.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Levi vowed.

“You can’t promise that,” Mason said. “You need all of the information before you can make any kind of decision about us.”

“Mason.” Levi cupped his face. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Mason sighed.

“Why don’t we slow down,” Levi advised. “Let’s eat and we’ll talk. Feel free to tell me what you are comfortable with.” They both had confessions to make but Levi also wanted to enjoy their private time together.

Mason smiled. “I brought sandwiches from the diner. And Dean, the owner of the bakery, might have provided something special for dessert.”

“Sounds perfect. Mainly because it will be you I’m sharing it with.”

Mason

Okay, this might be the most romantic perfect moment of his entire life. Leaning against Levi, they shared lunch, water, and finally the chocolate-covered strawberries that Dean had given him.

Levi fed Mason the final bite of dessert. Mason sucked the chocolate off Levi's finger, watching as Levi's gray eyes melted in arousal. Mason swallowed before Levi swooped down and took his mouth in a passionate kiss.

This magical feeling filled him and for the first time that day, Mason really did think that everything might work out. If they were mates like Mason suspected, then wouldn't Levi be able to forgive him? He allowed all the stress and uncertainty to flow out of him. Levi was taking all his attention.

Mason squirmed. His cock was hard, and he panted against Levi's mouth when Levi broke the kiss.

"You gave me one of the most beautiful afternoons I've ever had. Thank you," Levi said.

This man. This absolute sweetheart. Mason wrapped an arm around the back of Levi's neck. "I..." He stopped. Had he been about to confess something that neither of them was ready for?

Levi dropped a hand over Mason's erection. "I'd like to touch you. Can I?"

“Please,” Mason begged.

Levi swallowed hard then slowly unbuttoned and unzipped Mason’s jeans.

Mason shuddered. Was this actually happening?

Nuzzling Mason’s cheek, Levi slipped his hand between Mason’s jeans and underwear, pulling Mason’s cock out into the open. Levi groaned as he peered down at Mason.

“I’ve dreamt of touching you,” Levi confessed softly.

“Levi,” Mason murmured.

Levi gave Mason’s cock one long hard stroke.

It was all Mason could do not to thrust up. This was bordering on torture he wanted Levi’s touch so much.

Levi chuckled while lowering his head and kissing Mason again.

Straining to lift his head, Mason kissed Levi back, pushing all his want and need against Levi’s mouth.

Levi tightened his grip before he began to jerk Mason’s cock thoroughly. Closing his eyes, Mason allowed himself to just feel.

“Such a good boy for me,” Levi praised.

Mason shuddered.

“With such a pretty cock,” Levi continued. He captured the precum from the tip of Mason’s cock using the fluid to ease his stroke.

This was... Mason didn’t even have words.

“Are you going to come for me, baby?” Levi whispered. “Come on, give it up for Daddy.”

Mason groaned as he came hard.

“Good boy.”

Opening his eyes, Mason gasped while watching Levi lick the cum from his fingers.

Mason whined. Why was that so fucking sexy?

Levi grinned at him. “Just as sweet as I thought you’d be.”

Lurching up, Mason grabbed the back of Levi’s head kissing him hard. Thrusting his tongue inside Levi’s mouth, Mason could taste himself. Mason pressed himself up against Levi before he straddled Levi’s lap.

As Levi’s hard cock dug into Mason’s ass, Mason ripped his mouth away. “I want—”

The sound of footsteps interrupted what Mason was going to say.

Levi quickly lifted Mason and set him aside then he rose. “That’s not someone I recognize.”

Mason scrambled onto his knees while trying to get his jeans back up. He stumbled around but Levi was standing stone-still.

“Three maybe four strangers,” Levi stated.

Fuck! If Levi didn’t recognize whoever was headed in their direction, this could only mean trouble.

“Hunters?” Mason asked in a whisper. Even if he wanted to believe it was hunters, Mason knew his past had finally caught up with him.

“Mason, I need you to run back to the house and get Axel.”

Hello no! Mason was not leaving Levi alone in the woods. He dove for his pack still leaning against the tree. Digging deep, Mason frantically searched for his gun. He hadn’t wanted to carry when meeting Levi, but he couldn’t leave the weapon behind either.

He just hadn’t been expecting to be ambushed. With his pants down!

“Mason!” Levi reached for him. “Run! I smell metal and gunpowder and—”

Levi broke off as a shot rang out. Then he was falling. Mason caught Levi as he slumped. Blood coated Levi’s front, the tree, and Mason’s face.

“No!” Mason wailed.

That was when the monster of his nightmares stepped into view.

“Hurry,” his father barked. “Grab them both. Others are coming.”

Mason let go of Levi as he tried to bring his weapon up.

A sharp pain exploded in the back of his head before everything went dark. The last

thing he saw was the hole in Levi's throat.

* * * * *

Mason

He woke slowly, already knowing that something was terribly wrong. His head pounded, his wrists ached, and he could smell blood. Blinking open his eyes, Mason found himself hanging from his wrists in a damp cramped room.

Moving his head nearly made his vision whiten with pain but Mason forced himself to look at the man hanging beside him. Tears filled his eyes. Levi.

They'd hung Levi's lifeless body beside him.

Both of them were hanging from an exposed beam in the ceiling of some place that Mason couldn't even imagine where they were being held. His father had found him. Worse, his father had killed who Mason was certain was his mate.

They'd never had the talk that Mason had been planning on.

Levi hadn't known that Mason had been prepared to accept him as a mate. They would have had an entire lifetime together. Now all that Mason had were a few stolen moments to look back on before he died. And he had no doubt that he was going to die. He'd taken a chance escaping from his father but now it was time to pay the price.

He hoped Jason got away. Not seeing his brother there gave Mason a small bit of relief. Mason shouldn't have called his brother to him so now all he could do was pray that no one else was entangled in this mess.

Not knowing how long ago he'd been taken, Mason could only wait until his father showed his face.

Luckily, Mason knew how his father worked. Even though Mason couldn't see much in the small, cramped room, it didn't mean his father wasn't watching. His father had always watched his prey. It was part of the rules he'd tried to beat into Mason and Jason.

All he could do was hang around and wait. Literally. His wrists and shoulders ached but that didn't compare to the pain in his head. What the fuck had they hit him with?

Closing his eyes, Mason pulled on every memory he had of Levi. The talks they had on that stupid app. The first time that he'd seen Levi standing in the doorway of the big house with sweat dripping down his chest. The last private moment that they'd shared before Levi was taken from him.

Grief threatened to overwhelm him, but Mason wouldn't give in to that feeling. He might not make it to tomorrow, but he was going to make sure that he fought his father and made the other man regret coming after him. Mason had a few tricks up his sleeve. He wouldn't just die quietly.

He had no idea how long he waited until the door opened, letting in the first wave of fresh air in hours.

Mason lifted his head to glare at the older man that walked up in front of him.

Mason looked just like his father.

It was hard to look into the coldness of his father's eyes. "Hey, Dad, what's up?"

His father Clint sneered. "Always so disrespectful. I should have killed you and your

worthless twin when you were still in your mother's stomach."

It wasn't the first time that Mason had heard those words from his father. He laughed. "But you didn't."

Clint turned to where Levi hung. "I thought this one would be harder to kill." He pushed Levi's shoulder, making Levi's body swing.

Son of a bitch! "Don't touch him!"

His father smirked. "I expected your brother to lower himself to possibly be with one of these monsters, but I had thought better of you."

"You're the only monster in this room," Mason spat back.

Clint shrugged. "At least this one was easy to take out. Now tell me everything you know about him and his pack."

Mason laughed. "I'm not telling you shit."

"I already have people out there looking around this town. All it took was flashing your picture around a few places to track you down. How hard do you think it will be to figure out who this man was?"

As soon as anyone asked about Levi, then Axel would find out. There was no doubt in Mason's mind. Mason smiled at his father, showing all his teeth.

Rearing back, Clint punched Mason in the face, snapping his head to the side. Fuck! That hurt! It was still worth it to see his father's fury.

"Fuck you!" Mason said before spitting the blood in his mouth at him.

His father stepped to the side. “We’ll see how long you can hold out. I’ve always had ways of making you tell me everything I wanted to know.”

That might be true in the past, but Mason wasn’t the same traumatized kid he used to be. He might have been the reason that Levi had been killed but Mason would protect Levi’s family until his last breath.

He knew Levi would do the same if their positions were reversed. All Mason could do now was ensure that Levi’s family didn’t fall into the hands of his evil father. He had only met them once, but Levi loved them and that was enough for Mason.

The door opened and another familiar man walked in.

Old fear and memories tried to make bile rise. Evan Jones. One of his father’s favorite followers and a man that Mason knew from personal experience got off on being cruel.

“It’s been a long time.” Evan grinned as he stopped in front of Mason. “I’ve missed you.”

He couldn’t help the absolute terror that filled him. Mason must have given away some kind of reaction—Evan and his father laughed as Evan leaned closer. Mason gagged at the scent of cigarettes, old sweat, and rot. Evan had always stunk. Proper hygiene had never been high on his list of priorities.

“We’re going to have so much fun together.” Evan licked Mason’s cheek.

Knowing it would hurt, Mason took his one shot. He slammed his forehead as hard as he could into the other man’s. Pain exploded behind his eyes but it was so worth it to see the blood flowing from Evan’s nose.

“Fucker!” Evan cried as he cupped his face.

Mason’s father immediately retaliated. He started to beat Mason along his ribs. Mason grunted and tried to fight through the pain, but it wasn’t long before Mason just couldn’t hold on. He was thankful when his vision began to darken, and succumbed to it.

* * * * *

Levi

Stuck healing, Levi couldn’t do anything to help his mate and that had his fury growing to an uncomfortable level. As soon as his body was whole, he was going to tear apart everyone who had the nerve to touch his boy. Mason had been going in and out of consciousness through every beating.

The entire time Mason had been beaten, he’d never stopped his smartass remarks or laughing when threatened.

Levi had never been prouder of anyone.

Mason was truly his perfect match. As soon as Levi could get them out, he and Mason were going to make an awesome team. Levi was a little surprised that his family hadn’t found him yet and it concerned him. He knew that Axel and the others would have realized something was wrong by now. So where were they? Had they been attacked as well?

His throat burned as the final muscles stitched themselves back together.

He and Mason were alone in the room together for the first time since Levi had woken. Wherever they were wasn’t any place that Levi recognized. Some kind of old

cabin or building. The place was currently quiet and still.

Forcing his eyes open, Levi couldn't hold back a groan. It hurt to shove the remainder of what needed to be healed down. He was patched up enough to try to get him and Mason out of this situation.

Mason gasped beside him. "Levi?"

Finally, Levi's body was starting to respond. He grunted when he tried to talk.

"Levi?" Mason said quietly before sobbing out. "Are...are you not...dead?"

He shook his head.

"Oh, thank Christ!" Mason said. "How are you not dead? You were shot! In the throat!"

Some of the conversations he'd overheard made Levi believe that Mason and his father knew more about the paranormal world than Levi would have suspected. Some other paranormals wouldn't have survived but Levi's species was pretty unkillable. Not that Mason would know that.

"I'm so sorry, Levi. I'm so fucking sorry."

Mason sounded wrecked and that bothered Levi. He kicked his legs before yanking down hard on his chains. The bolts holding his chains broke and Levi dropped. The hard landing made his already painfilled body ache, but Levi ignored it. On shaky legs, he stepped over to Mason.

Cupping Mason's battered face made Levi's heart ache. Both of Mason's eyes were swollen and bruised. His boy should never look like this. Levi was so angry but he

needed to take care of his mate first.

“I’m so sorry,” Mason said as tears fell from his eyes.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Levi rumbled. Okay, his throat was not completely healed.

“This is all my fault,” Mason told him. “My father—”

“Is a monster,” Levi said. “That’s not your fault.” They had a lot to talk about. How Mason knew of the paranormal world. Did he know they were mates? All of Levi’s questions could wait though. He needed Mason safe and then he’d get his revenge.

“I...I was going to tell you. Today. I swear I was.”

Levi believed him. “I was going to tell you my secret today too.”

Mason gave him a small smile. “What...how are you still alive?”

“I’m immortal, baby. A bullet can’t kill me. Your father can’t kill me.”

Mason nodded. “Thank God! I thought...I thought you’d died because of me.”

“Even if I had, it wouldn’t have been your fault.” Levi reached for Mason’s chains. “Let’s get you down.” Mason’s body had been so abused, cut, blood everywhere Levi didn’t know where he could touch him.

“No! Don’t...”

Levi paused. Had he hurt his mate? “I’ll be as careful as I can.”

Mason shook his head while grimacing. “Just go. Before my father gets back.”

Levi jerked back. “What?”

“You can get away,” Mason said. “Leave me.”

“I will never leave you,” Levi vowed.

“I don’t deserve...I don’t deserve you.”

Fuck this. Levi kissed Mason hard, ignoring the split lips and cuts. He tasted his mate’s blood, which helped fuel his need for revenge. Mason kissed him back. While his mate was distracted, Levi yanked on the chains, catching Mason as he fell.

Levi caught his mate before easing him up and into his arms.

Mason broke the kiss as he groaned.

“I’m sorry you’re hurt,” Levi said sincerely.

“Don’t...don’t apologize to me,” Mason responded. “I...this is all my fault.”

After carrying his mate to the corner, Levi crouched and sat with Mason on his lap. Levi needed to find a way out of the room or at the very least prepare for when Mason’s father and that horrid other man returned.

“Nothing that happened today is your fault.” How did Levi make Mason understand?

“You didn’t do this.”

“I didn’t warn you though. I suspected my father had found me. It was why I called Jason down here. I needed his help to keep you and your family safe.”

Levi had to think about Mason's words. Instead of dismissing Mason's concerns, it was time for Levi to listen.

"Why was your father looking for you?"

Mason sighed. His wrists were bruised as Mason curled his fingers into Levi's blood-stained shirt. "I was born and raised to be a monster just like my father. My entire life I've been told that my sole purpose was to rid the world of people like you. I knew it was wrong. I knew the real monster was my father and his group."

"It must have been horrible growing up that way," Levi said. He couldn't even imagine it. His birth parents weren't exactly loving but they had taken great care of Levi and his siblings.

"It was awful," Mason confessed. "Jason and I...we had each other at least."

"I can't wait to meet your brother," Levi shared.

Mason shook his head. "He's an asshole. But he's also my best friend." Mason's eyes darted around. "I don't know if my father realized Jason's in town. If he's in another room or something."

"No," Levi assured. "The house or wherever we are is empty except for the two of us."

Mason relaxed. "We need to get away. If my father realized that you're not dead, he'll... There are worse things than being killed."

"I'll take care of your father," Levi vowed.

Mason tightened his fingers in Levi's shirt. "No! What if he hurts—"

Lowering his head, Levi nuzzled Mason's cheek gently. "I promise it's all going to be fine." He pulled away to meet Mason's eyes. "I can't leave them out here where they could come across Axel or anyone in my family. The boys...I can't let them get hurt."

"I understand that," Mason said. "I don't want them involved either. And Jason went into town. If my father—"

"I'll make sure that you and Jason are safe as well," Levi vowed.

"I should help you." Mason attempted to sit up.

"No!" Levi tightened his arms, making Mason wince. "Sorry! But you're too injured. I need to get you back to the big house. You'll be protected there."

"It's... I should have killed him instead of running," Mason said. "Jason said we wouldn't be safe but—"

"What is it?" Levi asked gently. He didn't want to push his mate but Levi needed to know what Mason was thinking. Levi couldn't, wouldn't, allow Mason's father to live. He was too much of a threat.

"I know I was supposed to kill but...I can't. I just can't. I can't kill. My father always called me weak because—"

"No, baby." That fucker. Levi was going to take his time with Mason's father.

"I could track," Mason said quietly. "My father didn't push too much after I got older and had me track...others like you."

Levi's heart broke for his mate. Mason was such a loving and kind person. Levi

wasn't wrong about his mate. He'd known that Mason's heart had been pure. "It's okay."

"I did bad stuff, Levi," Mason confessed. "If you can't, won't, forgive me, I understand. If you don't want to mate..."

He couldn't help but tighten his arms again and Mason cried out.

"Sorry," Levi mumbled. "But you know about mates?"

Mason gave him a small smile, making his split lip begin to drip blood. "I was hoping that was why we are so drawn together."

"It is," Levi confirmed.

Mason nodded. "I wanted to be your mate so bad. I was going to tell you everything today. I wanted you to know before...before we went any further."

"It wouldn't have changed anything. Not for me," Levi assured his mate.

"Maybe not for you," Mason said. "But what about your family? What will they think when they find out about my past?"

That was a good question. Levi couldn't say for sure, but he did know one thing. "The only thing that matters is getting you out of here safe. Everything else we will work out later."

Mason hummed.

Levi would have to think about how to reassure his mate later. First, Levi was taking Mason home. To his home. Mason would be lucky if Levi ever let his mate out of his

sight again.

Levi

He kicked his way out of the room before carrying his mate toward the front door. They were at some sort of old rundown cabin, but Levi didn't recognize the place. He had no idea where it could be. Levi just hoped they weren't too far from civilization.

It appeared the windows had all been boarded up from the outside with only small amounts of light filtering through the cracks. He couldn't hear anything concerning so he hoped wherever Mason's father and the other man had gone, they planned to stay away for a while. Levi needed to get Mason safe before he came back to take care of business.

The wood floor under his feet groaned loud enough that Levi was worried it wouldn't hold his weight.

Rushing forward, Levi was glad for his enhanced strength. He had a feeling that he would be carrying his mate far. Mason wasn't looking good. He'd grown pale and every movement seemed to make him wince.

"I'm sorry, Mason. I'll get you help," Levi vowed.

"Just get us out of here," Mason said between clenched teeth. "Before they come back."

The door wasn't locked. Levi pulled it opened before stepping onto the porch and out into the fresh air. He breathed in deeply while looking around, trying to get some idea of where he was.

“I don’t know where we are,” Levi confessed.

Mason lifted his head. “I do. We’re on the very south side of the state park. About as far from your land as possible.”

“How—”

“It’s gonna be impossible to get me out of here,” Mason said quietly. “We’re at the bottom of a canyon.”

Levi smiled. “I probably should have explained more about the man that is going to be your mate.”

Mason snorted then groaned with pain. “Don’t make me laugh.”

“Make sure that you hold on tight,” Levi said.

“Okay?”

Levi strolled from the house, heading in the direction of the thick patch of trees. He used his supernatural powers to move fast. The wind whipped at them until Levi felt they were far enough away from the house and the danger.

Coming to a small clearing, Levi stopped.

Mason’s swollen eyes still showed his unease with how they darted wildly around.

“Are you okay?” Levi asked.

“You...you’re fast,” Mason stated.

“You haven’t seen anything yet.” Levi laid Mason against the fallen trunk of a tree. Whipping off his shirt, Levi watched his mate. He tucked his T-shirt into the back of his pants.

Mason shook his head. “Ah, not that I’m complaining about you not wearing a shirt. Trust me, I’ve wanted to see that again. But uh…”

“I’m not stripping for you,” Levi told him.

Mason waved his hand.

“Watch,” Levi ordered. He pulled from his other form and allowed the wings on his back to snap open.

“Holy. Hot. Daddy!”

Levi laughed at Mason’s reaction. Being in his most primal form, it wasn’t just his wings that appeared. His skin changed from his human flesh to the granite of his solid gargoyle form. His nails grew into claws as his fangs dropped.

“Gargoyle?” Mason said. “You’re a fucking gargoyle? That is awesome!”

“I’m glad you approve,” Levi said sincerely.

“Wait? You have fangs? Gargoyles have fangs?”

Levi closed his lips, becoming self-conscious.

“No! Don’t hide them!” Mason shouted.

Oh! Was Mason not afraid?

“Mister Bitey McBite me!” Mason exclaimed.

Levi really should have known better than thinking that Mason would have been concerned about his fangs. He strolled over and picked Mason back up. “Remember when I said to hold on tight? I wasn’t talking about when I was running.”

“Fly?” Mason asked in a squeaky voice.

“I’m going to get us out of here,” Levi promised.

“Ok...okay.” Mason tightened the arms he had around Levi’s neck. “Just don’t drop me, please.”

“I would never.” Levi bent his knees then launched himself up and into the air. He wouldn’t be able to remain flying for long. Unlike some of the flyers in his family, Levi’s wings weren’t meant for traveling long distances.

He flew straight up until he cleared the top of the trees. He started in the direction of his home when a small figure darted in front of them and blue glittery dust fell over Mason.

“What?” Mason looked around. “What is that?”

“Pixie,” Levi said. “Anton’s best friend from the fae realm. If he’s here—”

A loud roar sounded before a slim light blue dragon hovered over them.

“Dragon!” Mason screeched. “Dragons are real?”

Levi chuckled. “We have two of them.” Fabian landed on Levi’s shoulder chittering away, and Levi used the cover of Anton’s larger body to find the way home.

“Dragons. Gargoyles. Holy fuck,” Mason said quietly. “My father is so fucking screwed.”

Yeah, he was. Levi could barely hear Mason so he knew his mate wouldn’t be able to hear him over the rushing wind. He nodded though.

It didn’t take long before Levi could see the clearing inside the land. Several of the furry four-legged shifters were circling around as the humans sat holding hands. The shifters were guarding the vulnerable humans, but why were they out in the open?

Anton landed and shifted back into his human form as Levi dropped down beside him. River ran up and handed Anton some clothes before peering down at Mason.

“Is he okay?” River asked. “What can we do?”

“Why are you all out here?” Levi demanded. “You should be inside, where it’s safe.”

Fabian left his shoulder to sprinkle River with his pixie dust before flying over to Anton. The little pixie chattered and chattered the entire time.

“I know they’re fine,” Anton told his little friend. “Levi doesn’t know anything yet. He just escaped.”

Levi huffed but didn’t say anything as Fabian returned to him and landed on his arm. Close to Mason. It appeared the little pixie was feeling a bit defensive. Of what, Levi didn’t know.

“It’s fine,” Lawson told him.

“It’s not,” Mason said. He struggled against Levi’s hold. “My father—”

“Axel and Gavin have him and four other men. Jason helped us track them down.”

“Jason? My brother?” Mason asked, still wiggling. “Can you put me down?”

“No,” Levi responded. “What is happening?”

“Come on.” Bryce waved them forward. “We’ve been waiting on you. Daddy will explain. The others should be back soon.”

“Who’s still out there?” Levi asked.

“Trevor and Shawn. They shifted and headed to where you two were being held. Anton and Fabian took to the air. Everyone else is waiting for you two to get here.”

Levi followed behind the others.

“I really can walk,” Mason whispered to him.

“You are hurt,” Levi pointed out.

“Nothing I haven’t dealt with before,” Mason replied. “I’ll be fine.”

It broke Levi’s heart that his mate was used to being hurt by his father. It would never happen again. Levi would make sure of that.

“I’ll still carry you,” Levi said.

“You tell him.”

“No,” Bryce mumbled. “You saw it, so you tell him.”

“I don’t want to,” Nate whined. He walked between Bryce and Lawson while carrying his sniper rifle.

“It really should be you,” Lawson agreed.

“Is there something I should know?” Levi asked the boys.

They stopped and turned.

“Uh.” Bryce shifted uncomfortably.

“Not you,” Lawson said.

Levi smiled. “Boys.”

“Shit,” Nate said. “Sorry, Mason. This might be a little oversharing.”

“Okay?” Mason sounded as confused as Levi felt.

“So, after we figured out something happened, we went to your cabin, hoping that we would find the two of you there,” Nate explained.

“What...what did you find at my cabin?”

Nate looked away. Bryce covered his face. Lawson was smirking.

River huffed. “Tristan was fucking Mason’s brother against the porch rail.”

Levi nearly dropped his mate. “What?”

Mason’s nails dug into the flesh of his shoulders and Levi retightened his hold.

“It gets better.” Lawson jumped up and down while clapping. “They’re mates!”

“Mates?” Levi and Mason said at the same time.

“Yep,” River replied. “And they’ve already completed the bonding.”

Mason started to laugh.

Levi glanced down at his mate.

“Of course he did. Leave it to my brother to meet his mate and do the deed within minutes.” He rolled his eyes at Levi.

“Uh, baby, there might be a problem.” Shit, he didn’t want to be the one that explained this.

“What?”

“Tristan...”

“I can totally see Tristan and my brother being perfect together. They’re just alike really. Hey! What’s Tristan? I’m not even going to try to guess. Gargoyles and dragons. This is more than I ever thought possible.”

“Yeah,” Bryce agreed. “Not really a fair contest.”

Lawson nudged Bryce’s shoulder. “You were the one that wanted to guess.”

“That is so cool!” Mason said. “Have you guessed everyone?”

Bryce smiled. “All but Gavin. I haven’t figured out his species yet.”

“You guessed gargoyle?” Mason asked.

“Well no,” Bryce admitted. “I sort of stumbled on him in one of his other forms. Up of the roof.”

“Roof?” Mason glanced at you.

“I’ll show you soon,” Levi promised.

“So, Tristan?”

Levi sighed. He didn’t know how to explain this. “Just remember that not everything you have heard about a species or place is actually true.”

“This doesn’t sound good.”

“I’ve been friends with Tristan for months now. He’s...a decent guy.”

“Is he?” Mason didn’t sound like he believed him.

“He’s a dick,” River said. “But he’s not a bad guy.”

“Maybe just tell me?” Mason requested.

“Tristan is a demon,” Levi blurted out. He swallowed. Shit! “I mean—”

“Demon?” Mason repeated.

Levi nodded.

“A demon?” Mason said.

“A demon,” River said.

“A demon?” Mason asked again.

“A demon,” Bryce, Lawson, and River all said together.

“A fucking demon!” Mason yelled.

“A nice demon,” Levi offered. “That was fucking your brother.”

“If it helps,” Nate said, “I’m mated to the Alpha of the hellhounds and my other brother is mated to a Reaper. Plus, one of our best friends is mated to the master of punishment in the hell realm. And from what I’ve seen, Tristan is following your brother around like a puppy. He’s already enamored with Jason.”

“I have so much to learn.” Mason appeared overwhelmed.

“I’ll help you!” Bryce raised his hand.

“And Seb, my twin, has spreadsheets,” River offered.

“We’ll all help,” Levi said. “You’re not the first or only human in the family.”

“Family.” Mason swallowed.

“Yes, family. That’s what you’re now part of. It’s all going to be okay,” Levi told his mate. “You have us now.”

“And your brother is mated to a demon!” Lawson teased.

“I’m telling your Daddy,” Mason responded. “You have a sassy mouth, and it needs

to be filled.”

Lawson laughed. “Please do.”

“We need to go,” River said. He pointed ahead where a wolf and a black panther were heading in their direction.

“Yeah,” Mason said sadly. “I guess it’s time to deal with my father.”

Mason would not be dealing with his father. Not for one moment.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Mason

“Levi. Please.” Mason peered up from his prone position on the bed. Levi’s bed. Mason had dreamt of being in that exact place but not with Levi leaving him behind.

“Stay and rest,” Levi responded. “Please.”

“We got this, Mas,” Jason said.

“I should be there,” Mason argued. It was his fault that his father was there in the first place. He was the one that put everyone in danger and now they wanted to keep him out of it?

“I’m going to stay with you,” Bryce promised. “We’ll watch movies and eat pizza. Drake even said we can have soda! That the sugar will be good for you!”

Mason grinned at Bryce. He really was a big sweetheart.

“Shawn and Trevor will be watching out for you all. Just let them know if you boys need anything,” Levi said. He turned toward the door.

Mason caught his wrist. Levi had already healed while Mason had terrible red marks that showed where he’d been chained up.

“Give us a minute, guys,” Levi requested.

“I’ll go get the drinks!” Bryce said while bouncing up. “Soda!”

Mason waited until he was alone with Levi.

“What’s wrong, baby?” Levi sat on the mattress beside his hip.

“I can’t let you and your family do what I was too weak to do,” Mason said. “It’s not fair to all of you.”

“You are my family. Our family. We would do this just for that reason. However, your father is a threat to all of us.”

“Are you sure?” Did it make Mason weak that he was grateful Levi insisted he stay out of this? Mason really didn’t want to see what happened to his father.

“I want to do this for you. Make your nightmare go away. I’ll work with the others and we will make sure that we’ll all stay safe. I trust Axel and he won’t lead us astray.”

It did help that Levi had Axel and the others. “If you’re sure. I don’t want to see him again.”

“I am positive,” Levi said. He grasped Mason’s hand. “I won’t lie. I would like to stay here, give you a nice soothing bath, make sure all your wounds are treated. Maybe spend the next few days in this bed.”

“I would like that,” Mason said. “I would really like that.”

“Except I won’t be able to rest and look after you properly until I know you’re safe.”

“I get that.” Mason hated that he understood.

“But I will be much more at ease when he is taken care of.” Levi brought Mason’s

hand to his mouth. “And I’ll be able to check every inch of you.” He waggled his brows. “Every inch.”

Did that mean what Mason hoped it meant? “You mean—”

“I want to share everything with you,” Levi said. “I want to make you my mate. I want to experience everything that I’ve been waiting on with you.”

“I don’t want you to rush things,” Mason said. “We can still wait.”

“Thank you for saying that.” Levi kissed Mason’s palm several times.

“I mean it,” Mason assured Levi.

“I’ve waited a lifetime, several lifetimes for you, Mason. For you.”

“I’m so not worth all that.” Mason had to be honest.

“You are,” Levi insisted.

“I’m really not.” Mason could feel the tears start to pool from the corner of his eyes. “Levi—”

“Please don’t misunderstand me,” Levi said. “The choices that I made were because I knew—okay I didn’t know, but I felt—that I had a mate out there somewhere. I chose to wait for you. That’s on me.”

“I didn’t wait.” Mason had never been ashamed of his past before. He liked sex. Mason had found solace in others while he was living in a hell of his father’s making.

“And that’s more than okay.” Levi winked. “At least one of us has practical

experience.”

Levi was too sweet. “You swear? You’re not...disappointed?”

“I’m not. I swear.”

Mason smiled. His lips hurt but he couldn’t help it with how happy Levi made him.

“You need to go.”

“I do.” Leaning forward, Levi cupped his face gently. “I will be back.”

“I’ll be waiting on you.” Mason accepted Levi’s sweet kiss even as his lips ached from the contact.

“Sorry.” Levi ran his thumb over Mason’s lower lip. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. I never want to hurt you.”

“I will never be sorry for you kissing me.”

“Stay here and stay safe. The guys have everyone we think is here in town, but Jason has told them that there might be others. Please don’t leave the house.”

Mason scoffed. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“I’ll be back.” Levi kissed him one more time before he rose.

Mason waited until he was alone before he pushed down the blanket that Levi had covered him with. Other than his wrists and face, most of Mason’s injuries were hidden under his clothes. The ache in his ribs was manageable so at least those weren’t broken. Although Mason knew from experience that he was going to be sore for a long time. Which pissed him the hell off. He did not want to be too sore for

everything he wanted to do with and to Levi.

A soft knock on the door served as a warning and Mason yanked the comforter back up.

“Come in,” he called.

The door opened before Bryce stuck his head around the frame. “Can we come in?”

“Please do.”

“Yay!” Bryce pushed the door open and entered the room. Then more people followed him. A lot of people.

“Hey,” Lawson said. “I don’t think you met Anton in his human form. And this is Sam and Ansley.”

“Hi, guys,” Mason greeted while struggling to sit up.

“Let me help you,” the cutie with floppy brown hair, adorable dimples, and wearing a bowtie said. He hurried over to slip an arm around Mason’s waist. “I’m Sam.”

“Thanks, Sam,” Mason said. His sides hurt but he didn’t want to lie flat on his back with everyone else in the room.

“I brought my notes!” Bryce held up a spiral notebook.

“I have pizza,” Ansley said.

“And Cokes,” Lawson added.

“Thanks, guys. I really appreciate you all spending time with me.”

“It’s our pleasure.” Sam sat next to Mason, leaning against the headboard. “We’re so happy to meet you. Levi has waited so long for you. I knew you would be cute.”

“Plus, we can help explain things while the other guys are busy,” Ansley said. “It can get pretty overwhelming.”

“Yeah?” Should he tell them? “But—”

“But what?” Anton leaned forward. “It’s okay to ask questions. I had to learn that myself, but we don’t judge here.”

“I don’t know how much you all know about my family?”

“Not much.” Bryce shrugged. “Axel and the others probably know more.”

“We’re...we’re not a good family,” Mason confessed.

River snorted. Mason liked the spunky guy. He didn’t seem to hold much back. “Being from a family made up of assholes is not your fault.”

“My family is full of very bad people.”

“That’s why everyone is so worried,” Bryce said.

“Yeah. He came here to kill me. And maybe my brother,” Mason said.

“That’s not going to happen,” River said.

“I believe that now,” Mason said. “Thanks to all of you and your mates.”

“That’s what family does for each other,” Bryce said fiercely.

“He’s the Alpha mate. All protective and shit,” River teased, nudging Bryce.

“Can you tell me who all is mated to who?” Mason asked. He’d take this time to learn more about the people that Levi loved.

“We’ll go in order of how the mates were discovered,” Lawson said. “First was Bryce and Axel.”

“And Axel is what kind of paranormal?”

“He and Anton are dragons,” Bryce said.

“Awesome. So Anton was the magnificent blue dragon from earlier?”

“That was me,” Anton said, blushing prettily. River tugged Anton into his lap and kissed the back of his neck.

“And the blue pixie? Fairy?”

“Pixie. Fabian. He’s...my friend.”

“That’s so cool,” Mason told him.

Anton dipped his head. “Thanks.” He didn’t seem to like the attention on him. He picked up River’s hand. “I understand about coming from a bad family. I did too. Axel left when he could, but I stayed. I let my father control me. I did bad things to good people.” He took River’s thumb and stuck it in his own mouth.

Another little. Mason grinned. He might have more in common with these guys than

he'd expected.

They started to pass around the drinks with the pizzas in the middle of the bed. Lawson opened the top box and offered Mason a paper plate.

Mason chose a slice of pepperoni. It was still hot, greasy, with lots of melting cheese. It was just what Mason needed.

"Nate was second," Lawson said. "He's a bobcat shifter. He's mated to Bo, the Alpha of the hellhounds, and Craig, who is a bear shifter."

"Wow." Mason peered around. "Where is he?"

"Up in his tree," Bryce said.

Mason frowned.

"He was a sniper in the military. He suffers from PTSD and being little helps him. Nate still protects us though and has a sniper nest in one of the trees," Bryce explained.

"I'll have to thank him," Mason commented.

"I was next and my wonderful man is a vampire," Lawson said. "You've met Drake of course. He's a chef and own the restaurant Crimson in town."

"But you're human?" Mason asked.

"I am. Although after I mated with Drake, I did go through some changes. I have amazing eyesight."

“Cool!” Mason said. He chomped down on his pizza, polishing off his first slice before Bryce set a second on his plate. Mason smiled in thanks.

Bryce nodded. He was watching Mason carefully. With concern. Mason expected Bryce was an amazing Alpha mate.

“Then me, Anton, and Rainier,” River said.

“I don’t think I’ve seen Rainier,” Mason said. At least he hadn’t met the man. There was a good chance Mason had seen him coming out of the woods.

“Probably not,” River agreed. “He’s kind of a big deal in the fae realm.”

Anton snorted.

“Okay,” Mason said. There was a story there.

“Shawn and I met and Ansley and Trevor met through us. We were next,” Sam said. “Shawn was the wolf and Trevor is the black panther. We’re both human too.”

Mason nodded. So many humans in the family. That helped him feel more at ease.

“Then we get to the weird ones,” Lawson said with a grin.

“Be nice.” Bryce shoved Lawson.

“I am!” Lawson exclaimed. He winked at Mason.

Mason took a bite of his pizza. He was riveted by the stories.

“Seb is River’s twin, and he was visiting Nate, Craig, and Bo in the hell realm where

they live part-time, and that's where he met Ash, who's a Reaper."

"The hell realm," Mason said. "That was mentioned before."

"There are many realms," Bryce said. "Our family is unusual in that we're made up by many different species of paranormal."

"Okay so Seb lives in the hell realm now? That's why he's not here?"

"Yes. Ash is always very busy so he's probably working and Seb loves being in his home. He doesn't really like to...people."

"What's a Reaper?"

"Ash guides souls once they pass. Good and bad—it doesn't matter to him. He's there to make sure they don't get lost. Sometimes Seb goes with him but mostly Seb stays in the Hell realm where he's most comfortable."

"Understandable," Mason said. He nibbled on the rest of his pizza.

"Although you'll probably spend a lot of time in the Hell realm as well. Levi helps train the demons and Tristan is a demon so maybe your brother will live there," Lawson said. "Or they can choose to live here. We can put them up in a suite."

"Oh, I hadn't thought about that." Not that Mason thought that his twin would have any issues being in the Hell realm. Jason did like adventure. "I hope that hell has good insurance. My brother can be a bit of a menace."

"He'll fit in just fine," Lawson assured him.

"And last but most certainly not least is Adam and Mal," Bryce said. "Adam is

awesome. He's a dryad and so much fun to play with. He's mated to Mal, who is the master of punishment."

"I don't know what that is either," Mason confessed. He'd only thought about shifters and maybe a vampire or something. Dragons, fae, hell—wow, just wow.

"Basically he's the demon in charge of hell," Lawson explained. "He makes sure that the souls that did bad have a really bad afterlife. Adam collects demons and makes them all family so he's a bit busy right now as well."

"And now you!" Bryce cheered. "You are going to be mated to our gargoyle and your brother to a demon!"

"I am!" Mason grinned. "So how about the single members of the family?"

"We've almost all found our mates," Lawson said. "The only single ones are Logan and Gavin."

"I thought." Mason could feel himself frowning. "I thought mates are rare. Like really rare."

"They were," Bryce said. "More are being found but we don't know why. Seb's on a mission to find out though."

"You don't know why?" Mason questioned. That didn't sound right. "About the curse?"

"Curse?" Lawson sat up quickly. "What curse?"

Oh shit! Mason grabbed Lawson's wrist. "You have to make sure that they don't kill my father yet. He knows!"

“Knows what?” Bryce looked scared.

“About the curse to stop the paranormal from finding mates and reproducing!” Mason shouted.

“I’ll go.” River jumped off the bed.

“I’m coming with you!” Anton said.

“Sam! Help me up!” Mason ordered. “Hurry, River. I’ll be right there.”

“I don’t know about this, you guys.” Bryce stood in the corner, wringing his hands.
“We were told to stay in the house.”

“He has answers!” Mason reminded him. “Go, River!”

River and Anton ran out of the room.

“Please help me get up,” Mason asked.

Sam looked over at Bryce.

“Bryce?” Mason said.

“Okay, but we stay together. And if I get put in the corner, I’m gonna be super-duper mad!”

“Thanks.” Mason grunted as he was helped out of bed.

Levi

Arriving in Bo's shop, Levi raged with a deep sense of revenge. Vibrating with the power of his gargoyle needing to protect his mate. Gargoyles were always highly protective of the people that they loved and considered family.

There were so many stories that Levi didn't know and only time would heal Mason's inner wounds. They would spend eternity getting to know each other, to grow together and love every day. They would not have the monster that was Mason's father hanging over their heads.

He was surprised to only find Axel, Gavin, Tristan, and a man who looked so much like his mate it was strange. There were noticeable difference between Mason and his twin—hair style, and Jason was more tan and leaner, but also similar. The sweet look in Mason's eyes wasn't visible in Jason's. Jason appeared harder, less trusting.

"Where is everyone else?" Levi asked.

Axel strode toward him. "Shawn and Trevor are watching over the boys."

Levi nodded. He knew that.

"Drake and Rainier are in town, making sure there are no other strangers hanging around or asking questions. Bo and Logan are watching the perimeter from the woods. Nate's in his nest." Axel tugged Levi into a hug. "How are you doing?"

Levi allowed his Alpha to comfort him. "I'm so angry. I had to hang there absolutely

helpless as two men beat on my mate. Stuck trying to heal. And I couldn't help Mason."

"You can help him now," Axel told him. He pulled back, allowing Gavin to grab Levi and embrace him hard.

"Thanks for being here," Levi told his friend. Gavin was the one who had experience in dealing with real evil and battling for survival. Even more than Axel and the men who'd served in the military. Gavin's story was heartbreaking and sad, but it was his to tell. He was older than Axel and the things that he'd seen made Levi shudder.

"I'll always be by your side." Gavin pounded on his back. "And your father-in-law is a dick."

Levi snorted a laugh. "He did shoot me in the throat."

Gavin pulled back to run his fingers over Levi's healing flesh. "Are you okay?"

"I'll heal," Levi answered truthfully. The wound was something that Levi would easily forget. The feeling of helplessness? That might take a little longer.

"Can we get started now?" Tristam piped up. "I've been waiting, very patiently, I might add, to get my hands on my mate's tormenter."

Levi turned to the demon who had become a brother to him. He grinned at Tristan and the tight hold he had around Jason's waist. "You just had to pick my mate's twin," he teased. "I should have known."

Tristan laughed. "My mate is the most perfect soul in the entire universe. He punched me in the face as a hello."

Jason snorted. “You grabbed my ass in the middle of the bakery.”

“It was what I wanted to taste!” Tristan argued.

Striding forward, Levi tugged Tristan into a quick hug before turning to Mason’s twin. “Nice to meet you.” He held out his hand.

Jason reached over to hug him. “Welcome to the family. You totally got the short end of the stick.”

Breaking away, Levi shook his head. “Your brother is everything I’ve ever wanted in a mate.”

Jason pressed his lips together. “I want to threaten you that if you ever hurt my brother, I’d do something terrible.”

Levi lifted a brow.

“But there’s the whole paranormal thing so that probably won’t work,” Jason said. He perked up. “Oh! I have a demon! Don’t make me sic my demon on you!”

Levi smirked.

Tristan groaned.

“Uh, hon,” Tristan whispered to his mate, “that’s probably not a good threat either.”

Jason whirled. “Demon.” He waved his hands in front of Tristan’s tall body. “Now, sure, I haven’t worked out what Levi is yet but...” He waved his hands again. “Demon!”

“I’m a gargoyle,” Levi said.

Jason’s eyes widened. “Okay, admittedly that’s pretty fucking neat, but demon!”

“Levi is one of the trainers in my realm. He can kick my ass,” Tristan told his mate quietly. “And does on an almost daily occurrence.

“Oh!” Jason responded. “Cool. So he’s badass and will keep my brother safe. I likey!” Rubbing his hands together, he smirked. “My father?”

“This way.” Axel waved toward the back of the shop.

Bo’s shop had been a gift from his mates to house the custom furniture he built but the back of the building was where he did the manual work. The tools the hellhound Alpha used were impressive and were also probably pretty intimidating to the humans. Not that they needed to use any tools. They were some of the most powerful paranormals in the world.

Tied up were five men and thankfully they had gags in their mouths. Levi didn’t want to ever hear another word from Mason’s father and the other man that had hurt Levi’s mate.

“What are we going to do with them?” Levi questioned.

“The hounds will take them down where Mal has a special place he is preparing for them. From what Jason had told us, this group is responsible for numerous deaths and the extinction of a couple species of paranormals,” Axel said.

“That many?” Levi asked.

“This goes back many generations,” Gavin said. “It wasn’t until Jason and your mate

broke away that anyone began to question what they were doing.”

“From what we’ve gotten out of them, there are only twelve remaining members of this group. All men. All over the age of fifty. What they called the true hunters,” Tristan said.

Levi shook his head. “How did we not know this was happening?”

“We knew about hunters,” Axel said. “Mostly, the practice of hunting our kind has died out. People just don’t believe any more.”

“Which is a good thing,” Gavin said. “The old days...they were filled with complete societies wiped out because of fear. Even innocent humans were slaughtered.”

This was all interesting, but Levi still wanted to face Mason’s father. Levi turned to Jason. “Why did you and your brother walk away? I haven’t had the chance to talk to him yet.”

Jason sighed. “Other than the lifetime of torture and abuse we suffered?”

That would have been enough for him. Levi nodded.

“It was Mason,” Jason said. “He’d been tracking a pack of shifters. Mas, he didn’t... He’s not violent.”

“I know. And he told me that,” Levi responded.

“His job was to track down and verify that the people were really monsters.” Jason winced. “Sorry, that was what we were raised to believe.”

“It’s fine.” Axel waved his hand. “What happened?”

“Mason did his job,” Jason said.

“What do you mean?” Tristan asked.

Jason smiled at his new mate. “Well, hot stuff, Mason tracked down the pack just as he’d been trained to do. Except he didn’t call in for an extermination like he was supposed to. Instead, he watched.”

“Watched?” Tristan asked. The ridiculous demon was preening for his mate.

“He watched,” Jason repeated. “He saw men and women, children, so-called monsters being...well, being people. They didn’t hurt anyone. They didn’t spend their nights hunting humans down and eating them. They just lived their lives.”

“As most of us do,” Gavin said.

“Exactly,” Jason replied. “Mason saw that the so-called monsters weren’t evil at all.”

“Wow.” Levi was impressed. His mate had managed to stop a generational hunter group by just watching a pack? By using his mind and listening to his heart? Mason amazed Levi.

“What happened next?” Axel questioned.

“When Mason didn’t show back up or call, I got worried. I was headed out to find him when our cousin Cassie realized I was going after him. She insisted on coming along.”

“And?” Levi pressed.

“We found him right where I knew he would be. He explained what he saw. Cassie

wasn't as involved in the group as we were." Jason snorted. "Being a woman and all. My father has very strong opinions of women, well, of women having opinions. There were only three females in the group and they were there to cook and clean."

Tristan sneered at Jason's father where he was still tied up. "What a bastard. I know females that would wipe the floor with your ass." He kicked Jason's father's foot.

Jason laughed. "My father isn't anything but a bully and an asshole. He beat me and Mas because he's weak. Always has been. It just took getting away from his daily torture teachings to realize that."

Jason's father mumbled behind his gag.

"Shut it." Tristan kicked him harder.

"Anyway, Cassie went into the town. Acting like a tourist. She was welcomed and helped. They were very nice to her."

"Something else happened," Gavin said.

"Cassie found her mate," Jason said with a smile.

"Mate?" Levi questioned.

"We didn't believe it either," Jason said. "We figured the pack knew who we were and playing games. Cassie refused to listen to us. She felt just as strong a connection to her mate as he felt for her."

"That's—" Levi shook his head. Unbelievable. Seb would probably know more about this pack. Maybe Levi could help Mason connect with his cousin again.

“Crazy,” Jason said. “I know. We helped Cassie run from the family and she joined her mate. We secretly kept in touch. I also started to pay attention to what my family said and did, especially my father. They didn’t even have a good reason for who they attacked. I don’t think they went after rumors. It was the younger generation’s job to find evidence, but I can’t say that it didn’t happen.”

“It would be hard to always know,” Levi agreed.

“It became too much for us. The constant abuse. Sending us after people who hadn’t ever done anything to us or other people. We waited, listened carefully, prepared. When we were ready, we ran. We stayed hidden for years. Moved around constantly. Mason got tired of that life and eventually wanted to settle down. He came here.”

The twins were brave. So very brave. Levi was impressed. His mate had been through so much in his young life, and he had still reached out to Levi. Mason must have been so scared at times and still he was strong enough to make a life for himself.

Levi stared at the man that had tormented and hurt his mate. He could see the old human for what he was. Nothing. These men didn’t even deserve their time. They were nothing. Levi should be with his mate.

“Is there anything you need here?” Axel asked Levi. “Jason and Tristan both had some...interesting ideas on what to do to these men but agreed to allow the hounds to take them.”

“To Mal,” Levi said.

“Yes.”

Did Levi need to get his hands on Mason’s father? He wanted to, but in the end would it matter? The hell that awaited these men, especially Mason’s father, would

be everything they deserve. Plus, really, Levi had enough connections that he could check on these men and their afterlife whenever he wanted.

Levi studied the humans before he turned away.

There was nothing he needed to do. Why was he in this shop when all he really wanted to be doing was holding his mate? This was a waste of time. The evil in these people was their undoing. It wasn't up to Levi to play judge and executioner.

"I don't need anything here," Levi said softly. "I want to be with my mate."

"I'm proud of you." Gavin pulled him into a hug. "It's not easy letting go of the need for revenge. Even harder when the revenge is for another person. They will get everything that they deserve."

And Levi could let this go because he knew that to be true.

The door of the building slammed open. Levi and Gavin both spun and took defensive positions. Axel straightened.

"What?" Jason started.

"Stop!" River called. "Don't kill them yet!"

Gavin snorted. "It's just River and Anton."

Levi placed a hand over his frantic heart. "Shit!"

"What's going on?" Axel demanded.

River panted.

It was Anton that spoke. “Mason is on his way here.”

“Why?” Levi stepped forward.

“He needs—” River walked closer and waved at the bound men. “Something.” He was still trying to catch his breath.

Levi pushed past River and Anton, racing out of the building. He stopped in the middle of the yard when he spotted the back of a human holding a rifle.

* * * * *

Mason

Climbing down the back steps had seemed almost daunting but Mason clenched his teeth the entire way through them. Sam had an arm around his waist as Ansley held his hand, allowing Mason to squeeze tight.

Bryce and Lawson were in front of them as they slowly made their way across the yard. Lawson pulled Bryce to an abrupt stop, causing Mason to nearly run into him. Mason groaned at the suddenness.

“Who are you?” Lawson demanded of the man standing in the middle of the yard. Right there out in the open. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m just looking for someone.”

Mason shuddered hearing that familiar, accented voice. “No,” he whispered.

“Who are you looking for?” Lawson asked. “We don’t know you and this is private property.”

“Oh, I think someone knows me,” Mason’s Uncle Chad replied. He stepped to the side so Mason could see him clearly. And the rifle in his hands.

“Shit,” Mason spat. This was not good. His Uncle Chad was Mason’s father’s right-hand man. Just as evil and stubborn.

“Come here, boy,” Chad demanded. “And we won’t hurt your new friends.”

“We?”

“Yes, we.”

Mason slammed into Lawson’s back from a hard shove behind him.

Sam and Ansley whirled around but Mason didn’t need to know that the rest of his father’s group had found him. And they were all out in the open and vulnerable because Mason had insisted on coming out here.

His new friends, Levi’s family, were in danger all because of Mason.

He would not allow them to get hurt though. Mason stepped away from his new friends. “I’ll go with you quietly, but you have to promise not to hurt them.” He hoped that Levi would find him quickly.

“Walk over here slowly,” Chad ordered. “You’re going to take me to your father.”

“Sure, no problem.” Mason stepped forward.

“No!” Lawson grabbed his arm. “You can’t.”

“I have to,” Mason insisted softly.

“No.”

A long loud howl echoed in the night.

Sam laughed. “You’re in trouble now!”

Chad lifted the rifle then pointed it at Mason. “Get over here now.”

“Sure.”

“Mason,” Bryce called.

He shuffled forward. Mason wanted to keep his friend safe, but he had faith in the rest of the family. That’s what they were. Family. Mason had forgotten that. That these men were used to danger. They fought for one another. Mason didn’t have to sacrifice himself. He didn’t need to be a martyr.

“It’s going to be okay,” Mason promised.

Six steps. He’d only taken six steps when he spotted his man. His sweet and protective mate burst into view. The moment that Levi spotted Mason’s uncle, his body began to change. The way it had when Levi had first transformed for him. His gorgeous tan skin went gray, nearly marble, as his wings spread behind him.

A roar sounded behind Levi as Axel ran and passed Levi. Launching himself into the air.

More sounds, another howl, a growl, an angry shout. Everything happened at once. It was absolute chaos and Mason didn’t have to do a thing. He just stood there as his new friends—no, his new family—took care of the men that had threatened them.

It was violent and nauseating, but Mason kept his eyes on his mate. Levi yanked the rifle from his uncle and hit him with it before tossing the weapon away. Levi then ripped Chad into shreds. Those sharp claws deadly.

Once Chad stopped screaming, Levi rose off his body.

Levi stepped toward Mason before he stopped and looked down at his bloody hands. Levi's eyes widened while looking around frantically. Mason didn't know what to do other than go to his mate.

Mason ran the best he could with his battered body. "Levi!"

"Mason." Levi shook his head. "I...I need to—"

He didn't care what Levi needed to do. Mason rushed straight into his arms. He held Levi around the waist. "Levi."

"It's okay," Levi soothed. "Are you injured? Did they hurt you?"

"No," Mason said. "I'm fine. I was just scared."

"You don't have to ever be scared again," Levi told him. "I'll always protect you."

Mason kept his face buried in Levi's shirt. "It's all just happened so fast. I spent my entire life in this sort of fight for survival. On constant guard. As soon as I saw my uncle again, I was ready to sacrifice myself to save everyone else. Even with the other boys telling me not to. Then I heard the yowl. I think it was Shawn. Sam sort of laughed and I knew. I remembered."

Levi cupped his face, forcing Mason to lift his head. "Remembered what?"

“That I wasn’t alone,” Mason said. “Not that I’ve ever been alone with Jason. But it was always us against the world. It’s not true anymore though.”

“It’s not.” Levi smiled. His fangs glistened in the moonlight, but Mason wasn’t afraid. He would never be afraid of his mate.

“That howl. It was like it echoed all around me. Hugged me. Told me that it would all be okay. I just needed to be brave one more time. That you would come.”

“Yes,” Levi said. “I will always come.” Lowering his head, Levi kissed him, fangs and all.

Mason ignored the ache in his body and pushed closer. He opened for Levi and accepted the deep kiss.

“What were you boys doing out here? I told you to stay in the house,” Axel rumbled.

Shit! Mason pulled back. “I need to see my father.”

“Your father?” Levi questioned. “Why?”

“I need something from him. Is he still alive?”

“He is,” Levi told him. “We’re not killing him.”

Mason looked around the yard.

“Ugh.” Levi winced. “They were threatening you all. Your father and the other men are tied up. They’ll be taken to hell by the hounds.”

“Oh.” That...that was perfect. His father having to face a fiery judgment and getting

what he deserved? It was what Mason had always wanted.

“Is that...” Levi frowned. “I can kill him—”

“No, sweetheart.” Mason patted Levi’s chest. “It’s... Thank you for offering. I never wanted to have to kill my father. I just wanted him to stop. To go away. To leave us alone. Him going to hell? Perfect.”

“Good.”

“But I need to talk to him first,” Mason said.

“If that’s what you want,” Levi replied then motioned Axel over.

“Everything okay?” Axel asked.

“Mason wants to talk to his father,” Levi said.

“No.” Jason joined them while dragging Tristan along. “You don’t need to ever see him again.”

“I have questions for him,” Mason argued.

“This is up to you,” Axel said. “Whatever you want.”

Mason nodded. “First.” He turned to Axel. “Thank you.”

“For what?” Axel asked.

“Accepting me and my brother into your family. Protecting us.”

“That’s what family does,” Axel told him.

“Not in our experience,” Mason said.

Axel shook his head. “I understand that. I’ve also struggled with my family bonds. My found family has helped me move past that and we offer the same place for peace that I’ve found.”

“I want to help you,” Mason said. “All of you. Please take me to my father.”

“I’m going with you,” Jason demanded. “Tris?”

“By your side, my mate,” Tristan stated clearly. “Always.”

“Everyone back in the house,” Axel ordered. “No one leaves this time.”

Bryce shot Mason a brief smile before grabbing Lawson’s arm.

“I’ll stay inside with them,” Shawn called. He was naked and Sam clung to his neck. They were a cute couple together. Mason couldn’t wait to get to know them better.

“Bo. Gavin. Come with us please.” Axel looked around. “Someone get this mess cleaned up.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

They headed in the direction of the building farther from the main house. Mason holding Levi’s hand. Jason beside him clutching tight to his mate. Axel in the front and Bo and Gavin bringing up the rear.

His first steps in the building, Mason found himself in awe. It was a huge building

filled with the most beautiful wood furniture that he'd ever seen. Mason stopped in the middle to just look around.

"Gorgeous. Isn't it?" Levi said. "This is Bo's workshop. He builds all this custom furniture."

"Wow." Mason was amazed.

"I would be more than happy to make you something special as a mating gift," Bo said.

Mason turned.

The tall broad man smiled at him.

"It would be an honor really. Levi has never asked for anything."

"I don't want to be a bother," Levi said.

Bo nodded. "I know."

"I think we'll take you up on that offer." Mason grinned. "After we work out a few things." Like where they were going to live.

"We'll talk."

"What about us?" Tristan said. "What if we need a bed or two?"

"Why's it got to be a bed?" Jason asked.

"Because I plan on breaking a few with you." Tristan leered at his mate.

Mason groaned. “TMI, demon!”

Tristan waved him off. “Remember when we first met in the woods? I knew there was something about you.” He winked at Mason.

“I remember you trying to talk me into a threesome with you and Levi,” Mason retorted.

“You did what?” Jason spun on his mate.

“I—” Tristan rubbed the back of his head.

“You propositioned my brother?” Jason demanded.

“He did.” Mason threw fuel on the fire.

“I—”

“When we’re alone, I’m going to grab you by the horns and—”

“Horns?” Mason gasped. “You... Are you glamourous?”

“Of course. I didn’t want to send all the little humans fleeing in terror,” Tristan responded.

“Oh.” Mason didn’t know what to think about that.

“Several members of our family use glamour unless they are in their home realm,” Axel explained.

“That’s sad.” Mason hated that anyone had to hide who they truly are.

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Tristan said. “Most of us that have to glamour don’t live here.”

“I…” Mason needed to think more. It didn’t seem right to him. “Where’s my father?” He needed to get back to his mission. He knew that Levi’s family didn’t blame him or Jason for what their father did but they’d made mistakes too. They weren’t completely innocent.

“Here in the back.” Axel strode forward.

Mason followed behind until he came to the men tied up. Or mostly bound. It was obvious that they’d been working on the restraints. Axel growled before he rushed forward, throwing the men back against the wall.

“Do you need all of them here?” Bo questioned.

“Just my father,” Mason replied. He looked at the other men. Men that had helped his father. Had abused him his entire life. They didn’t hold any power over him. Not any longer.

“I can call my pack and have them come get the others,” Bo offered.

Tristan clapped. “Yes! Release the hounds!” He swung an arm over Jason’s shoulders. “You’ll love the puppies. They are so cute. Seb even got a little one all his own. She’s adorable.”

“They are not puppies. They are ferocious beasts from hell,” Bo corrected with a scowl.

“Puppies!” Tristan whispered to Jason. Mason still heard so he was certain Bo had as well.

“Mason?” Levi tugged him into a gentle embrace.

“That’s fine.” Mason wasn’t going to ruin everyone’s fun even if he was beginning to get overwhelmed again. This...all of this was so much more than he ever imagined. This wasn’t a simple pack of shifters. He didn’t see how he would ever fit in.

Bo smiled before closing his eyes and when he opened them again, they burned red. Howls filled the building as something opened...something black, and five large...dogs walked out.

The black dogs with flames covering their fur looked to Bo.

“Take them to the Master,” Bo ordered. “All except that one.” He pointed to Mason’s father.

The hounds howled once again before they each grabbed a man by the neck.

There was screaming but the men were no match for the huge beasts.

As fast as they came, the hounds went back through the portal, taking the men with them. The portal? Whatever it was closed.

“Now.” Bo knelt in front of Mason’s father. “Your son would like to ask you some questions.”

Mason stepped forward. “Can you remove the gag?”

“Sure.”

Bo stepped back after he pulled the cloth from Mason’s father’s mouth, who started to scream.

Mason

Clint's screams filled the building. The older man was crying as snot dripped from his nose. He was terrified and Mason didn't blame him. His father's fate was not going to be pretty, and Clint had just gotten a peek at how that would go.

"Shut up, old man." Jason kicked his father in the ribs.

"Jas," Mason hissed.

Jason shook his head. "You know he would be kicking the shit out of us if that was one of us on the floor. He did always like to kick us while we were down."

That was true. Mason didn't want to get any closer, but he had to get answers.

Mason stood shoulder to shoulder with his brother.

"Help me, son," his father pleaded. "Can't you see that they're all monsters? Didn't you see what they just summoned?"

"Help you?" Jason repeated. "Why would we do that?"

"The monsters have corrupted you!" his father yelled. "I can save you."

"Where's the book?" Mason demanded.

His father's eyes widened.

“Yeah, that book,” Mason said.

His father shook his head.

“What book?” Jason asked.

“Remember the book of Grandpa’s that Dad kept with him all the time? The one where he wrote what kind and where monsters were killed?” Mason asked.

“The journal?” Jason questioned.

“I read it once,” Mason said. “Dad found me and locked me in the closet for a week for that. After he beat me, but it was worth it.”

Levi growled as he stepped forward.

Mason grabbed his waist. “It’s okay. It was worth the punishment.”

Levi’s fangs were showing.

“Where’s the book?” Mason asked again.

“I won’t tell you anything!” his father yelled.

Levi nuzzled Mason’s cheek then stepped forward. He crouched in front of Mason’s father and grabbed his chin. “You might as well tell us,” he said quietly. “You already know what your future holds. It’s up to you if you leave here in one piece or not.”

The low growl of Levi’s voice was so fucking sexy. Especially when he was threatening Mason’s father.

Mason pressed against Levi's shoulder. "We'll find it one way or another. I'm giving you the chance to do something right for the first time in your life. Give us the book."

His father snorted. "No."

"Why not?" Mason asked. "It's not going to do you any good where you're going."

His father turned his head away.

Levi growled. "You came into my territory and threatened my mate. You caused harm to my family. Tell us what we want to know or what the hounds do to you won't even compare to what I do." He flicked out his hand, showing off his claws.

"Mates," his father spat. "I know that's a lie. It's a trick you monsters play on unsuspecting humans."

Now they were getting somewhere.

"We are mates," Mason said. "It's not a lie."

His father just shook his head.

"We'll find the book whether you help us or not," Mason said.

Mason nearly cringed when his father turned those familiar hate-filled dark eyes on him. He didn't. Mason stood straight and met that gaze. "You shouldn't have come after me."

"We weren't even looking for you!" his father sneered. "It was just our bad luck that one of the guys spotted you in town."

That shocked him. “What were you doing here?”

His father didn’t answer.

Levi struck out with his claws, cutting his father’s face.

His father yelled and threw himself back, but Levi was quicker and grabbed the front of his shirt. Levi shook Mason’s father hard. “I’m not even trying to hurt you yet. I will though. What were you doing in town?”

There was finally real fear in his father’s face.

Levi picked his father up and threw him against the wall. Hard. Mason’s father’s head cracked.

“Stop!” his father wailed.

“What were you doing here?” Levi demanded.

“A favor!” his father shouted. “Paying back a favor!”

“What. Were. You. Doing. Here.” Levi flashed his fangs.

“Looking for a mage that ran from his coven. They tracked his magic and knew he was around here somewhere. I didn’t even know my son was around. It’s not like I bothered to look for him. Not after he betrayed everything he was taught and sided with you monsters.”

It shouldn’t hurt. To hear that his father hadn’t cared that Mason and his brother had left. They’d always been more of a burden and their father never let them forget that fact.

“A mage?” Levi asked.

“Yes,” his father hissed. “We owed the coven a favor. The favor was to return this guy to them.”

“Why?” Axel questioned as he stepped forward.

“I didn’t ask. I don’t care. We had to do it because—”

“Because?” Axel demanded.

Instead of responding, his father pressed his lips together tight.

Levi lifted his father off the ground before shoving his back into the wall with enough force that the building shook.

“He was paying back the coven that performed the sacrifices,” Mason said.

Levi turned to him. “Sacrifices?”

Mason nodded. “While I was talking to the other boys upstairs, they brought up mates and about what Seb is trying to figure out.”

“Why mates hadn’t been found for—”

“Since my great-great-great something, a coven, and many others made sacrifices to some God or divinity to stop the paranormal community from finding mates. It was after something called the great hunt. The plan had been that the paranormals who’d lived through the hunt and gone into hiding would eventually become extinct without finding their mates.”

Behind him someone gasped.

Mason turned quickly.

Gavin had gone completely pale.

Levi must have noticed as well. He tossed Mason's father to Axel before rushing over to Gavin. "Gavin, you okay, man?"

"I..." Gavin shook his head. "I...can't..."

"Okay." Levi wrapped an arm around his shoulder. "We have this. Go up to the house."

Gavin seemed shocked and Mason wanted to offer the other man comfort. He didn't know Gavin, at all, but the look on his face said something was wrong. "That book..."

"We'll get it," Levi said.

"Okay." Gavin stumbled away and Levi turned toward Mason.

"Levi?" Mason said quietly.

Pulling him into his arms, Levi sighed deeply. "Gavin was alive during the great hunt. His entire family, species, was wiped out. One...one of the human mates betrayed them."

"No!" Mason replied in shock.

"It's...You know what that book looks like?" Levi asked.

“Yeah,” Mason said. “My father always had it with him. I saw it that one time, but I read about the coven and what they did. This was before my father was even alive.”

“It was a long time ago,” Levi said.

“There’s a mage in town? Did you know that?” Mason asked.

“Yes, we know. He contacted Axel when he chose to settle here.”

“We need to talk to him too. If my father was after him...” Mason didn’t know what to say about that. The man was obviously in some sort of trouble.

“Axel will take care of it.”

Mason looked over his shoulder where Axel was currently beating the hell out of his father to get answers. Mason leaned heavily against Levi. It had been a long fucking day. His body ached. He was tired. Mason just wanted everything over and done with.

“You can go inside as well,” Levi offered.

Mason turned his face into Levi’s shoulder. “I want to stay with you.” He might sound needy but fuck it, he was feeling needy. After all the events of the last twenty-four hours, the only person that Mason wanted to see or talk to was Levi.

How had everything changed so drastically?

“Okay.” Levi cupped the back of Mason’s head, pressing him closer. “I got you.”

Mason allowed himself to drift a little. Not sleep. Just let his mind wander while ignoring the sounds coming from the back corner. Why had his father been hunting

this mage? Just to return him to the coven, or was there something else worse going on? Was there a chance the coven was up to something as evil and sick as before? If the coven was in contact with his father, it worried Mason.

He'd just found Levi. They weren't even mated yet. Hell, they hadn't even had sex. There was so much that Mason was looking forward to. This world that he'd been born into was dangerous. Mason knew that better than anyone. He was also getting a good look at what a healthy and happy family actually was.

Mason wanted more time with his mate, new friends, family.

After all the pain in his life, it was nice to have a brighter future to strive for. He'd hoped, secretly, when he'd run from his father that he'd find a mate like his cousin had. He'd seen how Cassie had been welcomed lovingly into her pack. Mason had wanted that.

The men in this particular family might not make up a typical pack but they were people that Mason would happily get to know. He liked the boys, respected them all.

The sudden quietness of the building jarred him from his thoughts.

Lifting his head, Mason peered up at his mate and smiled. Levi looked back at him with so much love in his eyes.

Axel, Bo, Jason, and Tristan joined their little circle.

"Is he still alive?" Mason asked.

Axel nodded while wiping his hands with a blue towel. "He might wish he wasn't, but he is. Bo will call the hounds for him in a minute."

“The book?” Mason questioned.

“At the old lake house,” Jason said. He looked at his mate. “How about a road trip, hot stuff?”

Tristan grinned. “With you? I think I can handle that.”

“I’ll go with the hounds and fill Mal in on what we found out tonight.”

Axel sighed. “I’ll need to talk to Dean as soon as possible.”

“Dean?” Jason asked.

“The mage,” Axel said. “We need to find out what he knows about—” Axel huffed. “Could it really have been a coven that...that took mates away? Why would they even help the hunters?”

Mason didn’t have the answers. “I’m sorry.”

“No, baby,” Levi said gently. “We wouldn’t even know this much without you. We’ve been trying for so long to find answers, and this is really the first time that we have any real leads.”

“I just don’t know how it’s even possible,” Bo stated.

“They sacrificed the most powerful beings they could capture,” Mason said. “The journal goes into very specific details.”

“We need that book,” Axel said.

“Let’s get some sleep and we’ll leave first thing in the morning,” Jason said.

“Are you sure?” Mason asked his brother. “I can—”

“No,” Tristan said. “I’ll go with my mate. We’ll get the book and return quickly. In the meantime, find out what Dean knows.”

“We also need to make sure that everyone from Dad’s group is really gone,” Jason said.

“Get all the journals,” Mason ordered. “He wrote down everything. There should be more information on other factions of hunters.”

“If it’s too much to bring back, call me. I’ll portal to you,” Bo offered.

“That would be great,” Jason replied. He grabbed Mason’s arm. “Is there anything you want? We never went to the lake house after we left.”

Mason thought about what he’d left behind. They never had much. Their father didn’t believe in giving them much and what they did get, he took away as punishment. “I don’t think so.”

“I’ll look around,” Jason told him.

“Just be careful.”

Jason smirked. “I’m always careful.”

Mason rolled his eyes.

“Don’t worry, my new brother from another mother,” Tristan said. “I’ll keep him in line.”

“Oh God!” Mason groaned. “Don’t ever say that to me again!”

“I’m going to take Mason up to my room,” Levi said. “I’d like to make sure he didn’t injure himself further.”

“I’m sure you do,” Jason teased. “Make sure you check over every inch of him.”

Fuck! His brother was so embarrassing.

“I plan to,” Levi responded with a smirk.

Shit! His man was so hot!

“Go.” Axel waved them off. “We’ll take it from here.”

Finally. Mason practically slumped with relief. He was just so fucking tired.

“Thanks,” Levi said. “Let’s go, baby.” He turned Mason with an arm around Mason’s waist.

“Mason?” Axel called his name softly.

He and Levi turned back toward the Alpha. Mason now had no doubt that Axel was an Alpha. A true Alpha. One that cared about his family.

Axel strode forward before cupping Mason’s face.

Mason froze.

“Thank you. You have no idea what you gave us tonight. A real chance of figuring out what happened and how to avoid it in the future. You gave those that haven’t

been as blessed with a mate hope.”

“I’m just happy that we were talking about mates, and I remembered the book,” he replied honestly.

Axel nodded as he smiled. “Welcome to the family.” Leaning forward, Axel kissed Mason’s forehead. “Now let your mate take care of you.”

“I’ll do that.” Mason was nearly giddy with his exhaustion. The pain that he’d felt since his father had first captured him throbbed through his entire body.

“Go.” Axel released him but Mason didn’t have time to even blink before Levi swung him up into his arms.

With an arm around Levi’s neck, Mason smiled. “I can walk.”

“I can also carry you,” Levi said. “Unless you insist on walking.”

Why would he? It felt way too good to be in his mate’s arms. “Not going to complain.”

“Good. Let me take care of you, boy. I need to do this.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Mason closed his eyes as they exited the building. He was leaving his past behind and all he wanted to do was be with his man.

Levi

The property was quiet. Levi could feel the members of his family both inside and out. His protective instincts were still on high alert, and he hadn't transformed back completely to his human form. Not that it seemed to bother his mate.

The back door opened as Levi reached the deck steps.

Drake peered out from the door and smiled. "He okay?"

Mason popped his eyes open before lifting his head. "I'm fine."

"He's fine," Levi agreed. Although Mason sounded so tired. "I'm going to take him up to my suite. Could you...can you make sure we're left alone for the night? He needs to rest."

"No problem," Drake replied. "The boys are having a movie marathon in the playroom, so I'll keep them busy."

"Did Gavin come back in?"

Drake shook his head. "No, he took off. I tried to talk to him but he wasn't in the mood to listen."

Levi sighed. He was more than a little worried about his friend. The great hunt. It was a time before Levi had been alive and every story he'd heard had spoken of the absolute horror of those that lived through it. Gavin had been born at the end of it.

Losing his family before he was even six months old. “Axel will explain.” Levi just didn’t have it in him.

Above them thunder rocked the night and flashes of lightning streaked across the dark sky.

“Bring your boy inside. We’ll keep an eye out for Gavin. Is everything else okay?”

“Yeah. A lot has happened. I—” He shrugged, his arms straining as he held his mate.

“Go. Get him cleaned up and take care of him.”

Levi was glad for the escape. He bypassed the playroom, taking the stairs outside the kitchen.

“You’re worried about Gavin,” Mason said as Levi carried him up the steps.

“He doesn’t talk about it often, the times during the great hunt, but he’s told me more than most. This will be hard for him.”

“If there is anything I can do to help, just let me know,” Mason said. “If you need to be with him, I understand.”

Levi smiled down at his mate. “Thanks. Right now, he needs to be alone. When he’s ready, we’ll help him through this.” They were a team now. “First I need to check you over and then I was thinking about a shower.”

“A shower together?” Mason questioned while wagging his brows.

“What kind of Daddy would I be if I didn’t personally make sure my boy was all clean?” Levi teased.

“I just got so hard,” Mason told him.

“I’ll have to check that out as well,” Levi said. “Make sure everything is working properly.”

Mason whined. “Daddy!”

He chuckled. It was fun to tease his mate. The small taste of intimacy earlier had Levi craving more of Mason. “Here we are.” He pushed his door open since it wasn’t latched closed. Bypassing the main room and kitchenette, Levi headed straight to the master suite and ensuite bathroom.

The bed still had pizza boxes piled in the middle so at least he knew his boy had gotten something to eat. “Do you need a drink? Are you hungry?”

“Honestly, I really want that shower with you and to go to bed. I’m exhausted.”

“I know, baby.” He set Mason down on the long marble vanity across from the frosted glass shower.

“This is pretty,” Mason mused. He was peering around the bathroom.

Levi looked around in pride in his bathroom. The soft mint with gold accents brightened up the large space. They all decorated their suites to their own liking and his private rooms were his second favorite part of the main house. The rooftop oasis was his very special place. He’d take Mason up there soon.

“I’m glad you like it.” Levi wanted to ask if Mason would move in there with him, but he didn’t want to start that conversation when they were both wrecked from the long day.

Levi left Mason long enough to get the shower started before he returned.

“Can I check your injuries?”

“I really am fine,” Mason said. “But sure.”

Mason lifted his arms as Levi started to push the T-shirt Mason wore up his chest. The bruises down his ribs had rage flashing sharp and quick through his body. Levi had to bite down on his bottom lip to keep from snarling.

“It looks worse than it feels,” Mason said quietly.

“I hate that I couldn’t protect you.”

Mason shook his head. “You were shot in the throat. I thought you were dead. I would go through all of it again just to make sure that you were okay.”

“I’ve already healed.” Mostly. Levi ran his palms down Mason’s arms. “It will take longer for you.”

“I know.” Mason sniffled. “But when...when I thought my father had killed you—”

“It’s okay.” Levi kissed his boy gently. He did understand. Hearing his mate being beaten. That was traumatic but he’d been sure that they’d make it out of there. Mason hadn’t known that. He drew back.

“More.” Mason tried to follow his lips.

“Patience,” Levi teased.

Mason huffed. “You promised me naked skin!”

“Did I?”

“Yes?” Mason stuck out his bottom lip.

“Funny, I don’t remember that.”

“You said we’d share a shower,” Mason pointed out. “Did you plan on showering with your clothes on?”

He smirked before yanking his shirt over his head. “Better?”

“God yes.” Lifting his right hand, Mason traced his fingers across the scars over his heart. “How’d you get this?”

This was not a story that Levi had wanted to get into. “My father.”

Mason’s eyes widened.

“Why I decided to leave my clutch. my parents and siblings, my father marked me for betraying them. They believed we should live in our stone forms away from humans and other paranormals.”

“Forever?”

“Yes. I wanted to find my mate. I didn’t think that would ever happen with my clutch.”

“Why wouldn’t your parents want you to find your mate?”

“They didn’t believe it would happen,” Levi shared. “They wanted all of their children to stay safe with them.”

“I’m sorry this happened.” Mason leaned forward to press his lips against Levi’s scar. Just inches above his nipple.

Levi groaned. He’d only been half erect when he’d carried his mate into the bathroom. Too many worries circling in his head. The first touch of his mate’s mouth on him...yeah, he was fucking turned on now.

“You like that?” Mason taunted then traced the scar with his tongue again.

Gripping the back of Mason’s head gently, he guided Mason’s mouth to his nipple. “Suck,” he ordered.

“Yes, Daddy,” Mason said before following through.

Levi loved playing with his own nipples when he jerked off. It made him so hot. Mason’s mouth, that was amazing, and Levi’s cock pulsed behind his jeans. He allowed his head to fall back as he scooted closer. Between Mason’s spread thighs.

His erection brushed against the hardness of his mate’s shaft.

“I want you,” Mason whispered against his moist skin.

“I want you too.” He forced himself to back away.

“Then where are you going?” Mason whined.

“I thought you wanted us naked,” Levi pointed out.

“Oh.”

Levi’s hands were shaking but there was no way to hide that. Not that he wanted to

hide anything from his mate. He removed Mason's boots and socks and tossed them over his shoulder.

"Now yours," Mason told him.

He toed off his shoes before bending to remove his socks.

"Now my pants," Mason ordered.

"Who is in charge here?" Levi questioned with a wink.

"Oh, you're in charge, Daddy. I'm just moving things along."

"Sassy boy." Grabbing Mason's hips, Levi yanked him forward. "Trouble is your middle name."

"You can call me anything you want as long as you keep touching me," Mason told him. He strained up as Levi dropped his hands to Mason's zipper.

"I'll keep touching you," Levi promised. He never wanted to stop.

Helping Mason slide off the vanity, Levi rid him of the rest of his clothing. Quickly following with dropping him to the floor. The steam coming from the shower began to cloud the room.

Levi guided Mason toward the shower before pulling the door open. Mason stepped inside and moaned. The large shower had three powerful heads that sprayed water over the entire stall.

"This is amazing." Mason dropped his head back where the water cascaded down his long neck and lower.

Levi dropped his gaze to follow the droplets of water. He had to push away the anger from the bruises over his mate. Part of him wanted to return and finish Mason's father off but a bigger part never wanted to leave his mate again.

He closed the shower door then scooted up and pulled Mason against his own body. The bruises did look bad, but Levi had to admit that they would heal and wouldn't leave any lingering marks.

Leaning forward, Mason latched onto Levi's nipple.

Levi gripped the back of Mason's head. "Yes," he hissed.

Mason tongued the pert nub then sucked hard.

It was almost as if his nipple was connected directly with his cock. Levi ran his hands down Mason's back until he could cup his ass and pull him up. Thank fuck for his paranormal strength.

Wrapping his legs around Levi's waist, Mason humped while sucking.

A few steps forward had Mason's back against the tile of the shower. The shower gel dispenser right next to them. Levi pumped a handful of green gel into his palm.

"That smells like you," Mason said, lifting his head. "Like the trees and forest."

Levi nodded. "It's natural. I buy it from a farmer's market about an hour from here."

"I want to smell like you," Mason told him.

Levi smiled. Mason had no idea that when they completed their mating, he'd smell like Levi on the inside and out. Already Levi's scent was running off on his mate.

“You already do.”

He ran one hand across Mason’s cock. “But if you want me to keep touching you, then you better start sucking again.”

Mason’s eyes widened, his hips bucked, and his trapped cock twitched against Levi’s stomach.

“Suck, boy,” Levi rumbled.

Mason whined. “You’re going to make me come!”

“I am.” Levi wrapped his hand around the base of Mason’s cock. “But not until I say.” He squeezed firmly.

Mason grunted.

Levi gave Mason’s shaft a slow stroke.

Diving for Levi’s nipple, Mason sucked hard as he rode Levi’s hand.

The gel soothed his grip as Levi stroked Mason quickly before slowing down. He teased with unpredictable moves. He didn’t want Mason to get lost in his touches quite yet. Levi wasn’t nearly done touching his mate.

“Lean back,” Levi ordered.

Mason popped off Levi’s nipple, leaving the nub red and swollen. It would be sensitive. Perfect.

Once Mason was braced, Levi used his own hips to keep him up against the wall. He

added more gel, spreading it between both hands this time. He caught Mason's lips with his while sliding one hand behind his balls.

He nudged Mason's balls before using the slick to ease his way between Mason's cheeks. He pressed one finger against Mason's hole.

Mason groaned before throwing his head back.

"Careful," Levi warned. "No more injuries for you."

"Levi! Daddy!" Mason squirmed.

"Stay where I put you, boy." Levi slid his finger deep inside his boy's body.

Mason began to tremble for him.

Levi's own cock throbbed, and he needed. This wasn't about him though. He wanted to show Mason pleasure. To share passion. There would be time enough for Levi to get himself off.

He sawed his finger in and out before using his other hand to jerk Mason's cock again.

Mason shouted, digging his nails into the back of Levi's neck.

"Open your eyes and look at me," Levi ordered.

It appeared that Mason struggled but finally complied. His pupils blown wide as he peered up at Levi.

"You are mine," Levi declared. "My mate. My boy. My person."

“I am.” Mason held tight as he rode Levi’s finger and fist.

“I will never let you go,” Levi told him. “I will never leave you alone. I won’t abandon you. We’ll be together forever.”

“Please!” Mason cried.

“Come for me,” Levi ordered. “Come for your Daddy. For your mate.”

Mason’s shouts echoed around the bathroom as his seed covered Levi’s hand. Levi stroked Mason through his orgasm before gently easing Mason down onto his feet.

“I’m going to love you until I draw my last breath,” Levi said quietly. He kissed his mate hard. Thrusting his tongue inside and claiming his prize. Levi had waited his entire life for Mason. He wouldn’t have asked for anyone else.

Mason pulled back. “Me too.”

Levi smiled.

Mason dropped his hand to Levi’s aching cock. “Can I touch you too, Daddy? I want you to come.”

“Yes, baby. I would like that too.” Levi pulled Mason closer. He kissed him again urging Mason’s hands down to his cock.

Mason started to stroke him with both palms. Levi reached for some gel before slicking his shaft.

“Hard and fast, baby. Show me how much you want my seed,” Levi ordered.

Mason was a natural at stroking him off. Levi braced his hands on the shower wall above Mason's shoulders. He pumped his hips and closed his eyes as he rode the wave of ecstasy. He chased his release, loving the way that his mate's hands felt on him.

"Just like that," Levi said. "Good boy. Such a good boy for Daddy."

"How about this?" Mason asked before his lips circled around Levi's nipple and he sucked.

Levi shouted as he plunged his cock into Mason's tight hold. He came hard, frantically pumping, until he was spent.

Mason hummed around his nipple before kissing the scar over Levi's heart one last time.

Levi could see that this activity had sapped the remainder of Mason's energy. He guided Mason back under the direct spray and started to wash his mate's body. He couldn't help but smile as he finally felt truly fulfilled for the first time in his life.

They might not be technically mated quite yet, but Levi had never felt as connected to another living soul.

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Mason

From the first time that Levi had reached out through the dating app, Mason had thought he was the sweetest man to ever exist. After an entire morning of being pampered, including being handfed breakfast in bed, Mason was now following Levi to his private oasis.

The big house, as Levi called it, was where most of the family lived. They'd talked all morning and Mason had learned even more about the couples and two single men that made up the family. They didn't call themselves a pack since not every member was a shifter.

Even though Mason had thought he'd had a good grasp on the paranormal world, it turned out he hadn't known even half of how the paranormal truly lived. There was so much that he had to learn but this time he would be on the right side.

On the third floor of the house there was a small cubby with a ledge that led to a cover in the ceiling.

"We're going up there?" Mason asked.

"We are." Levi turned and smiled at him. "I could have flown you up there, but this is usually how I get to the roof."

"This is cool," Mason said. He didn't quite understand why this was so special to Levi, but Mason loved how cute he was. He was acting like an excited kid. Mason didn't expect more than a couple of lawn chairs or something similar on the roof but

if Levi wanted to share this with him, Mason would be supportive.

Levi climbed up on the shelf, having to crouch before he pushed the cover up and over. He offered Mason his hand.

Mason allowed Levi to help him up then used Levi's thigh to reach and climb up and out of the hole. He crawled out of the way so Levi could follow him up. Gaining to his knees, Mason gasped at the sight.

An oasis, Levi had called the rooftop paradise, and the word didn't do the space justice. Gorgeous live plants covered the entire roof. Along the edges of the roof. In the middle. Brown wicker furniture was also artfully arranged, including couches, chairs, and tables.

"Levi," Mason breathed. "This is amazing."

Levi stood and offered Mason his hand again. Mason intertwined their fingers as Levi helped him to his feet.

"Over here." Levi drew him across the rooftop.

They stopped at the edge of the house. "I saw you in town when you were going into the diner, and I knew that you were meant to be mine."

Mason squeezed his fingers.

"I followed you around." Levi's cheeks turned pink. "I wanted to know everything about you but since you were human, I was worried about how to approach you."

"I understand that." Now that he knew Levi better, Mason could imagine he must have been more than a little scared about finally finding his mate.

“When you were at the diner, I saw the dating app on your phone.” Levi chuckled. “I didn’t really know anything about that, so Lawson helped me set up a profile. I had it for three days before I finally worked up the nerve to send that first message.”

“Oh, Levi.”

Levi shook his head. “I would come out here and message you while I watched. It was almost like we were having a real conversation.”

Wait. Mason squinted. “Can you see my cabin from here?”

Levi ducked his head. “Yeah.”

The horror of what Levi must have seen hit him. “No!”

“Yeah, I’m sorry. I invaded your privacy.”

“Not that,” Mason rushed to assure him. “You saw me bring other men—” He couldn’t even say the words.

“I didn’t watch!” Levi nearly shouted. “I swear!”

Mason turned. “I believe you.” He cupped Levi’s face, making his man meet his gaze. “I’m just sorry that you saw any of that. I hate to say that they didn’t mean anything but it’s the truth. They were decent men, but I didn’t have a connection to any of them.”

“You don’t have to explain,” Levi said.

“I know. It’s just...I was lonely. I wanted to feel something,” Mason tried to explain.

“I’m not upset, mad, or anything else.”

Mason felt like shit. “But you knew we were mates—”

“Exactly. I knew I had a mate. Then I knew you were my mate. The choices I made in my life were because of what I am. You had no idea,” Levi explained.

That was true. And now he sort of had his own confession. “About stalking...”

Levi stiffened. “I wouldn’t call it stalking.”

“I’m not talking about your stalking. I’m talking about mine.”

“Yours?”

“After I saw you that first time. When you slammed the door in my face. Rude, by the way! But uh, I might have camped out in your woods, watching the house for you.”

Levi barked out a laugh. “You staked out my house.”

“Well yeah!” Mason grinned. “You were really hot with all that sweat sliding down your chest. I really like your chest. Have I told you that already?”

“I think you’re really hot too,” Levi told him.

“But your chest!” Mason said.

Levi rolled his eyes. “I can’t believe you were stalking me.”

“You did start it,” Mason teased back. “I never saw you though. Like I waited and waited. Saw everyone else but not you.”

“I was in the hell realm,” Levi told him.

“You were hiding from me,” Mason said. He’d hurt Levi and hadn’t really known it. It might take a lifetime, but Mason would make everything up to his sweet mate. He had a long time to show Levi how cherished he really was.

“I was. I won’t ever hide again.”

“And you’ll take me to the hell realm with you next time?” Mason asked.

“You’ll want to go?” Levi appeared surprised.

“Of course. I want to share everything with you. Plus, my twin is mated to a demon.”

“True.” Levi grasped both of Mason’s hands. “I want to mate with you. To finalize our bond.”

“Yes!” Mason didn’t even hesitate.

“Come here.” Levi drew him back toward one of the couches under a wood canopy.

Mason already loved this little private space that Levi had created. He could see them spending their nights out here, cuddled together under the stars. And now that he knew how much Levi loved plants and flowers, Mason knew what he would be spoiling his mate with. His job had him trekking all over the state park and he knew where all the prettiest plants could be found.

Folded on the end of a long chaise couch was the blanket that Mason had gifted Levi with. He grinned seeing that.

Levi turned Mason then kissed him deeply.

Mason clung to his man. He tangled his tongue with Levi's as he pushed himself against Levi's stronger body. He loved that he could feel Levi's strength but knew that Levi would always be gentle with him.

As they made out, Levi began to pull at Mason's clothes. Mason was glad he'd only grabbed a pair of Levi's sweats and T-shirt. It didn't take long until they were both naked and their bare bodies were pressed together.

With a hand on the back of Mason's head, Levi guided Mason to lie down. Levi settled between Mason's thighs. Mason had to take a moment to breathe. To let himself enjoy the fact that after this he'd be bound forever with Levi.

Levi smiled. He cupped the side of Mason's neck. "Are you sure, Mason? After I bite you and we complete our mating, there will be changes."

"What kind of changes?"

"Your life span will change to match mine. You'll still be human, but you will heal faster than other humans. You could see an improvement in your eyesight. Things like that."

"None of that sounds bad," Mason replied. "All I care about is being with you though."

"Eternity is a long time, baby," Levi told him.

"Wait! How long do you live?"

"I'm immortal and you would be too as long as I was still alive."

"Immortal?"

“I can be killed but it’s very hard.”

“Like surviving a bullet to the throat.”

“Exactly.” Levi chuckled. “Like surviving that.”

Mason wasn’t certain he wanted to know what could kill Levi if that couldn’t.
“Okay.”

“We can choose to leave this life and find our final resting place if we wish,” Levi said. “This doesn’t mean I won’t die but I won’t go with you. Our souls will be entwined.”

“So, you meant it when you said that we’d be together forever? That you wouldn’t leave me?” Mason questioned.

“I meant it with all my heart.”

“Mate with me, Levi. Claim me.”

Levi’s smile revealed his fangs just before he kissed Mason. Mason kissed Levi back while running his hands down Levi’s naked back. Levi’s cock pressed against his own.

Levi sat back before Mason could lose himself in the kiss.

Levi reached for a bottle of lube hidden under the pillow as Mason grew even more excited. Mason spread his legs wider as Levi coated his fingers.

“I can’t wait to be inside you,” Levi told him quietly. “I have dreamt about this since the first time that I saw you. I pictured us in this exact position, of this moment, when

I would make you mine.”

“I’m already yours in mind and body. Now I want to give you my soul.”

Levi shuddered hard at Mason’s words. He trailed his slick-covered digits across Mason’s cock then behind his balls. The tip of Levi’s finger pressed against his opening.

Mason met Levi’s bright gaze. Those gray eyes watching him intently. Mason pushed down until Levi’s finger breached him. He didn’t bother trying to hold in the moan as his hole was filled.

Levi lurched down and kissed him as that magical finger rubbed over his prostate. Mason had to rip his mouth away as he panted. It seemed like he’d been waiting forever to really have Levi.

Throwing all his energy into taking Levi’s finger, he tried to show Levi how ready he was.

Levi added a second finger just as Mason had needed more. He rode both the digits, his body welcoming Levi’s fingers, and thankfully another, a third finger, was added quickly.

“Please! Daddy! Levi! Mate!” Mason humped up and down.

“I got you, baby.” Levi withdrew his fingers gently.

Mason whined. But Levi was using the lube to coat his cock. To slick himself up. Better. Much better. Levi’s cock was a thing of beauty. Long, thick, and hard for Mason. Mason needed Levi inside him.

Levi hooked the backs of Mason's knees with his elbows as he positioned the head of his cock at Mason's entrance.

Those intense gray eyes were on his face. Mason smiled up at Levi.

"I'm ready," Mason told him.

Levi pushed inside him in one slow, smooth motion. His cock breaching and stretching Mason in the most incredible way. Mason clutched at Levi's forearms. Levi finally entered him all the way and paused while leaning over him.

The completeness of the moment. The rightness. This was what Mason had been missing with every other encounter he'd had. He cried out as Levi gently pulled back until just the tip remained inside Mason's body.

Levi flashed Mason his fangs with a smirk before he drove forward hard.

"Fuck!" Mason shouted. That was exactly what he needed.

"I am," Levi taunted. He began to fuck Mason with hard, fast thrusts. All Mason could do was brace his hands against the couch pillows surrounding him. With every frantic plunge of Levi's dick, Mason pushed back. Their bodies slamming together.

"Good boy," Levi praised, his voice hoarse. "Taking your mate's cock so good. You like it like this, don't you, boy?"

"Yes, Daddy! I love it!"

The couch rocked under them. Mason wondered if the furniture would be strong enough to hold them in the end.

“I knew you would.” Levi slammed hard. “You need Daddy to own your body. Only I can give you this.”

“Yes!” Levi really was owning every inch of him. Mason had expected their lovemaking to be just as sweet as his mate was. This hard nearly animalistic fucking was making Mason lose his damn mind.

“I’m going to bite you, boy,” Levi warned. “Do you want that?”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Mason chanted.

Levi moved fast. His fangs flashed in front of Mason’s eyes and then he was biting down in that space between Mason’s neck and shoulder. The sharp pain was there and gone in an instant.

There was a pull from the bite as Mason’s body lit on fire. He screamed as his cock exploded without even being touched. Mason came hard enough that his vision went white.

As Mason’s cock twitched, releasing even more cum, Levi licked the wound in his neck, then lifted his face and yelled as hot cum filled Mason’s hole. He collapsed on top of Mason, causing Mason to grunt. He wrapped his arms around Levi’s sweaty back.

Mate.

His mate nuzzled Mason’s neck, making the wound throb pleasantly.

“Forever,” Levi mumbled against Mason’s skin.

“Yes, sweetheart,” Mason agreed. “Forever.” There might be more trouble in their

future. Danger could be right around the corner. It didn't matter as long as Mason belonged to Levi and Levi was all his.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:46 pm

Sneak Peek: Cupcake

Cupcake: Unlocked Mates Book 9

Logan

He was drawn to the colorful artistically painted front window of the bakery in town. Every morning Logan passed the bakery, and it was getting harder and harder to resist going inside again. Not only did the smells coming from the establishment lure him closer but so did the man that worked behind the counter.

Logan's father used to say that he wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. His mama had told him nearly every day of his childhood that it was a good thing he was pretty and would give her beautiful grandbabies because he was dumber than a box of rocks. So, Logan might not be smart, but he knew that he needed to stay far away from the intriguing man that owned and ran the bakery. But it was so hard.

And they had cupcakes again.

The big pretty cupcakes with bright pink icing and sprinkles.

His mouth watered and he had to swallow. How embarrassing would it be if he started drooling? Logan was pretty sure that had already happened a time or two.

Logan ached on the inside. He wanted that cupcake. He wanted to hear the deep voice from the small man that welcomed customers inside. It confused him. Now that mates were being found within his family, Logan hoped that he'd find his own soon. The

draw to the bakery had Logan rushing inside the first time he felt it. He thought...yeah, stupidly he'd thought that he'd been blessed, and his mate had been inside.

The only employee back then was the man that owned and operated the business and while Logan thought Dean was gorgeous, he didn't feel the pull described by the others when they'd scented his mate.

As much as Logan was interested in Dean, he knew it was better to stay far away. It would be just his luck to get into a relationship and then find his mate. Logan couldn't imagine ever hurting someone like that, so he stayed away from Dean. And the sweet-smelling treats.

But the cupcakes were so so sparkly!

At that moment Dean's head snapped up and he smiled at Logan where he was peering through the large front window. Logan quickly looked away from the man but his gaze fell to the cupcake on the big display case.

Logan licked his lips.

He was lucky that the bakery had quickly become one of the places that the others in the group had become obsessed with. The other boys loved their cookies and pastries. Sam and Ansley's bookstore was only a few blocks over and they often brought home special treats for the family.

No one had brought home one of the pretty cupcakes though.

"Hey, Logan."

He jumped at the soft, inviting voice. Looking to the side, he saw Dean standing at the open door, smiling at him. Logan had to swallow again. Oh no! He quickly

stepped back.

“Sorry! I was just looking!” Logan blurted out.

“I noticed. Was there something that caught your eye?”

Well duh. Two somethings and one of those things was looking at Logan with amusement in his eyes. Was he silently laughing at Logan? Probably. He no doubt thought Logan was weird and dumb. Just like his birth pride had.

Logan quickly shook his head as he took several more steps back.

“Why don’t you come inside?” Dean invited. “I’ll give you your choice of anything in the display case. Free of charge.”

Oh! Dean had never offered that before. In fact, he hadn’t ever come outside and talked to him. Normally Logan was smart enough to run away if Dean started toward the door.

“I…” Logan shifted uneasily on his feet. The urge to run throbbing through his body.

“Come on,” Dean urged. “I promise I don’t bite.”

Bite? Why would Dean bite him? Logan frowned as Dean smiled with perfect white teeth. He didn’t even have sharp teeth. Logan had overheard Axel talking about Dean and how he was a mage. Didn’t that make him nearly human? Just with a little magic.

“I…” Logan didn’t know what to do.

Dean strode forward. He was several inches shorter than Logan, slimmer, but he seemed to radiate power and confidence. Logan wasn’t confident at all.

“There has to be something you’re craving,” Dean said. “I noticed you like to look at the displays.”

He nodded. It would be dumb to deny that. Not as often as he was busted staring inside the bakery.

“Come.” Dean wrapped a hand around Logan’s upper arm.

Logan moaned. The firm fingers wrapped around his flesh sent sparks of arousal down his spine. What would it be like to have Dean touch him all over? Logan shook the thought away. He couldn’t think that way.

Why were his feet moving as Dean urged him inside?

Oh! He was inside the bakery.

It smelled even better the closer Dean led Logan toward the treats. He’d been a good boy for so long. He hadn’t stalked the other man even though his lion was just as interested. Logan had tried to stay away.

“Do you have any allergies?” Dean’s voice was deep, alluring, exciting.

“No...no,” Logan mumbled.

“I know what your friends like but what is your favorite dessert? I made chocolate croissants this morning. They’ve been selling fast but I still have a few left.”

He should just take the offered treat and run far away. They were now right in front of the middle case. Logan tried not to look at the cupcake. The pretty pretty cupcake.

“Donuts? Cookies?” Dean asked.

Logan was shaking his head before he even thought to answer.

Dean stepped closer. He released the hold on Logan's arm, which Logan regretted immediately, but then Dean's shoulder pressed against Logan's back. He shouldn't push back. He really really shouldn't... Logan pressed back.

Electricity ignited every nerve in Logan's body.

"Cupcake?"

Logan whimpered.

"I got you," Dean whispered. Then he was walking away.

Logan wanted to call him back. Missed the slight touch already. It had been like taking a long nap under his favorite tree with the sun shining down and warming his fur.

On the other side of the display case, Dean slid the door open. With long, slender fingers he reached for the prettiest cupcake at the front of the tray. Logan vibrated happily. That was the exact treat he'd been drooling over.

Dean pulled out the cupcake before sliding it into the small rectangular pink box. Even the box was pretty. Logan shuffled closer.

"This is my treat for you," Dean told him as he closed the top of the box.

Oh! He should pay. "I have money!" Logan made good money with his landscaping business. He had several crews that he managed and they did amazing work.

"I know," Dean said with a smile. "But this is from me." He held the box out to Logan.

Logan's fingers shook as he accepted the gift. He looked down and smiled. This pretty cupcake was all his. He didn't have to just stare at it from outside. It was his now. And—

“Your phone is ringing.”

Dean's voice pulled him away from his thoughts.

“Oh.” Logan dug his cell from his back pocket. Why was the Alpha calling him? “Axel?” he asked as he answered.

“We need you home,” his Alpha said. “Something happened to Levi.”

“On my way!” Logan quickly waved to Dean before tucking his treat against his chest and racing from the bakery. “What's going on?” he asked once he was outside and running to his truck.

“We don't know. He went to meet his mate and we think there was an attack of some kind. We found some blood. Hurry. I have to call the others.”

Logan's stomach dropped as Axel disconnected the call. Not his sweet friend. Why would anyone attack Levi? Inside, his lion stretched and fought to come to the surface.

“Not yet,” Logan mumbled to himself. “We have to get home.” Then he'd let his animal out. His lion was fierce when he needed to be. Strong. Smart. Logan wished he was like his lion half. They needed to get home with his family and make sure Levi was alright.