



Werewolf in Rusted Armor (Werewolf Knights #3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Youngest werewolf shifter brother Quin is if not happy, content with his life. He runs a bar, and he rescues folks who are abused or downtrodden, and if he feels like a fifth wheel around his brothers and their mates, well, that's on him. He just needs to remember that he's not like his brothers Symon and Rian, and let it go at that.

When jaguar shifter Thiago follows a lost soul to Denver as part of his work as a PI, what he finds is the hottest werewolf he's ever seen, Quin. And since Quin is also working to rescue the same person he is, he has an excuse to hang around and make nice with Quin.

The two of them have to navigate a new relationship and a ring of human traffickers who threaten to tear them apart as well as taking people right off the streets. Can these two secure their mate bond while solving the mystery for good.

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Chapter

One

S ometimes having a finely tuned sense of justice was inconvenient.

Quin could have been having a great day. It wasn't too busy, but it wasn't slow. The beer was flowing. The bar was happy. The vibe was good. There's a slight chance he might get laid. And if he didn't, there was a good chance that he was going home with money in his pocket, an intact bar, and a relatively good mood.

Unfortunately, now that was all going to hell in a handbasket.

Well, maybe not the money part.

He grabbed the baseball bat from under the bar, keeping it low as he dialed one of the favorites on his phone.

"911. What's your emergency?"

"Hey, Janet, there's fixing to be someone that needs an ambulance down here."

"Oh, Quin, are you being a bad boy?"

"Unfortunately, no. I'm being good." He sighed, letting it be dramatic. "You know, life would be easier if people would just be decent."

“Tell me about it; I’ll send out a bus and a cruiser for you. Love you!”

“Love you more.”

It was a sad state of affairs when a wolf knew everybody at the switchboard.

Intimately.

Quin moved this way down the bar, one hand wiping down the scarred-up wooden bar top. He’d owned this bar for a long time, and he knew every single scar in the veneer.

He’d personally made ninety percent of them.

He made his way toward the—was that a hyena? Really? Were they gonna be a hyena bar now?

The twink who was being kind of muscled toward the corner where the shadows deepened was totally prey. Rabbit maybe? Possibly... Hrm, not a groundhog or a mouse. No, those whiskers were twitching and he was frozen with worry.

Totally rabbit.

“Hey, how you doing, everybody? Need anything else to drink?” Quin gave them all his very, very best smile.

Mr. I Smell Like the Inside of a Crocodile’s Mouth turned to him, bared his teeth. “We’re fine.”

“Are you? Are you sure you don’t want something on the house? How about you, Bunny?”

“Back off.”

“Oh, now. You’re making this easy. That’s not fair. If we’re going to have to have drama, it might as well be challenging, right, guys?”

The barflies around them lifted their glasses with a cheer.

“What did you say to me, puppy?”

Quin rolled his head on his shoulders, his lips quirking. “I said , if you’re going to have drama, it might as well be challenging—” Quin let his eyes drag up and down the guy’s body. He could have been hot if he wasn’t an asshole and didn’t smell like the underside of a New Orleans cop shoe on Mardi Gras. “—you predatory piece of trash.”

The bat was up and out and across the hyena’s head before he could so much as make a move. Rule number eight—don’t monologue.

His regulars looked over, grinned, and went back to their beer.

“Are you hooligans honestly gonna make me walk around the bar and drag him out? Someone just put him out the front door? The cops are here.”

A couple of the bigger guys chuckled softly and stood. “Not a problem. We got it for you, boss. We get a free beer?”

“I will totally pour.” He used his rag to wipe the blood off the bat. “So, Bunny, do you have a ride home? Do you have somewhere to go?”

The little one just sort of blinked at him.

“This is not the kind of bar for bunnies. You’re going to get yourself eaten and not that fun spanky way.”

“Okay. I don’t know. I don’t...” The little one teared up. He hated that.

“No problem. Let me call my brother. His mate has a thing; it’ll be fine. At least you can have a place to sleep tonight and figure out what to do. It’ll be better in the morning.” God, he hated this shit. He would be happy if he never had to be gentle and positive ever again.

It would be a glorious fucking thing.

But no. These lowlifes, instead of finding an omega or a lover or a whatever the normal way, which was just—Hell, he didn’t know. Flowers and blow jobs? They had to come in his bar and try to be assholes.

He clicked his number one favorite on his phone.

His lawyer.

“What do you want, brother?”

“Ten million dollars and a really cool Harley. Why?”

“Quin, you called me. What do you want? It’s late.”

“What do I ever want when I call you at this time of night? It’s not to chat.”

Rian sighed dramatically. “Put them in a cab and send them to the house at First and Vine. I’ll make sure the den mother there knows to welcome him. Are you going to end up being booked or was it a clean deal?”

“So far so good. It was a one-hit wonder.” Usually those tended not to get him thrown in jail, but he never knew. He thought he was sort of on the one in every eleven fights plan.

It was a revolving door sort of thing, but it did make the county some money, which was always nice. However, he did clean up his own messes, which the Sheriff’s Department did appreciate in the best way.

“Okay. Well, call me again if that changes. Seriously, why couldn’t you get a job that keeps regular hours?”

“Not all of us can be tech geniuses or lawyers,” Quin said, referring to his older brothers Symon and Rian. He adored them, but gods, Symon was stuffy, and Rian was wicked but very...wolf in a suit.

Quin was more the jeans and T-shirt kind, unless he was out riding. Then he was all leather.

Rian only wore leather armor when he had his Dom self on...

Ew. No, no thinking about Rian and Eyre playing spanky BDSM games. Nope. None.

Eyre was his brother’s mate, and a sweet omega who saved other sweet omegas from being eaten by the city and its less-than-honest denizens.

And there were quite a few out here in Denver. It was both the wild west and a major urban area...

“You’re sensitive tonight,” Rian snarked. “Just get the kid in a cab and watch your back, okay?”

“I will, though the predator didn’t seem to have a friend here tonight. It’s mostly regulars.”

“Still, get Colt to walk you to your bike.”

Colt was his best buddy at the bar, a bouncer who had muscle and brain at the same time. He would stay until Quin left, for sure. He did any night they had trouble.

“Thanks, bro,” he told Rian, and he meant it. For worrying about him, for making it safer for omega kids just entering the dating/bar scene. For bailing him out all the damn time.

“Come on, kiddo. Let’s get you a cab. Don’t get out of it at the address I give the cabbie until a guy named c meets you outside, okay?”

“Okay.” The barely old-enough-to-drink kid sniffled. So green.

He hung up with Rian, then walked the kid to the door. “Good luck, huh?”

“Thank you.”

He put the kid in the cab, then watched two police officers walk up to him. “Good restraint there, Quin. Just one blow.”

“I know. He wouldn’t let the kid go.”

“Well, he’s in no shape to ask to press charges, so we’ll leave it as a job well done.”

“Thanks, Officer Bone.” He grinned.

The cops both rolled their eyes, but they soon packed up their shit, as did the EMTs,

and they were all off. It was bad for business to have blue lights out front.

“You could have let me handle that,” Colt told him as he ducked back behind the bar.

“I could have, but I enjoy it so.” He winked, then moved to wash his hands. No grossness in someone’s drink or food.

Or food or drink.

He chuckled at himself.

“Hey, what can I get you?” Quin asked, laying a napkin down in front of a guy who had just settled at the bar.

He looked up, his heart skipping a beat when he gazed into a pair of golden-green eyes that caught his gaze and held it, keeping him standing there like a fool. The guy was solid, sleek with muscle that was hardly bulky. More like that body was designed to do exactly what it needed to do. The hair was golden and brown, like a leopard or jaguar...

Yeah. He breathed deep. Totally big cat shifter.

“Caipirinha?” the guy asked.

“Ooooh Brazil.”

“My mom.” The man looked him over slowly. “And what do you have for the munchies?”

“Mmm.” His cock stirred. “Onion rings. Chicken wings. Fried cheese.”

“Oh, fried cheese. And...mushrooms?”

“We can do that.” He pulled up a water while the guy waited for his drink, then turned away to pour, not wanting to stand there and stare anymore.

He put in the guy’s order, reminding himself that he was not a giant ball of hormones. Not notty not.

No thinking about knots.

He made the caipirinha, thankful that he’d had a group of capuchin bull riders in from Sao Paolo a while ago and he still had enough booze for one cocktail.

Hell, this was really a beer and Jack and Coke kind of place.

Still, the omegas could get fancy.

Not to mention his brothers. He wasn’t sure Rian or Symon knew how to drink beer. They tended toward the sazerac or a pisco sour, maybe a golden Cadillac if they were in a mood.

Not him. He was a straight tequila kind of man.

Quin garnished the glass with a twist of lime and handed the guy his drink. “I’m going to have to order another bottle of cachaca. You got the last shot.”

“I’m a lucky man.”

“Yeah.” He had to drag his gaze over the guy again. Really, he was sizzling hot. Like climb on and hump hot. Then Quin cleared his throat and went to check on the food order.

It was quiet enough of a night to hear the guy hum after his first sip. “Nice. Thank you.”

“Anytime.” Or honestly, anytime not tonight or tomorrow night because that was the soonest he could get any cachaca from his distributor.

So any time after Thursday was fine.

Then Mr. Pretty could have up to twelve drinks before he ordered more liquor. It was cheaper than ordering retail, and he liked how that helped inventory.

Maybe he should order two bottles.

That might be a good idea, really.

You never knew when a bunch of rainforest rodeo monkey shifters would come to a biker bar and desperately need a taste of home.

It could happen.

Maybe this could be a Brazilian capuchin bar.

Though this guy had to be a jaguar.

And no monkey shifter had ever revved his engine like this guy.

The food came up, and he served the guy fried mushrooms and fried cheese, pleased they had both, along with red sauce and ranch.

The ranch was house-made, and his cook was pretty proud of it.

“Thanks. Hey, can I ask you something?”

He raised an eyebrow. “You can ask.”

“Have you seen this kid?” The guy keyed up a pic on his phone and showed him a young man, maybe just old enough to drink, with a shock of white-blond hair hanging around his face and a pair of almost black eyes. Shit, was that a capuchin shifter? Speak of the damn devil.

“I see a lot of people.” And he wasn’t going to do a damn thing to out this kid. “Is he okay?”

“I hope so. His folks are looking for him, but I’m not here to drag him home. I just want to make sure he’s good. He stopped texting, and he was messaging his mom every morning like clockwork.”

“Huh.” It had been months—as in three or four, not five weeks—since they’d been in. “He’s a cute kid. What’s he do?”

“He’s been riding the rodeo. But he’s kind of a party guy, so his mom worries.” The guy pulled out a business card to hand him, then dug into another cheese stick. “If you see him again, will you call me?”

“If I see him, I’ll let you know.” Now he had a name. Excellent. “We did have bull riders in here, but it’s been months.”

And who the hell knew where they were? He guessed he could ask around. “Hey, can I take a picture of your photograph? I see a lot of people, and I can see if anyone has seen him at all.”

“I can text it to you...” One dark eyebrow, far darker than that shaggy hair, winged

up, the smile going wicked.

“Totally.” Oh, that was clever. He did like that about a man. Clever. Pretty. Sleek. Air of danger. He pulled out his phone, waggled it. “Want to put in your digits?”

“Hell, yes.” The guy, whose name was Thiago according to the card, grabbed his phone after he opened it, and typed his stuff into the contacts. Then he handed it back before giving over his own phone.

He put in his number. “Now you know me.”

“Quin...bartender? Now I know you're more than a bartender, aren't you? You've got the air of an owner.”

He didn't answer, but he winked. “I'm always here.”

In fact, his place was just upstairs.

“Mmm. That's good to know. I like to have a go-to bar...tender. I'd order more liquor if I were you. You'll see me again.”

“I'll be right here. Tending away.” He winked, then let Victor drag him away for another beer.

Damn, that was...a temptation.

When he looked back at the spot where Thiago had sat, he was gone, a couple of twenties tucked under his glass.

Well. At least the guy had his number.

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Chapter

Two

Thiago Baldwin hated when he got a bad text and had to give up his particular hunt of the moment.

Which had been the hottest bartender—probably wolf shifter—he'd ever seen.

Or smelled. God, his dick was still half hard even twenty minutes out.

Still, a PI's work was never done, and he was working on three, count 'em three disappearances in Denver. All young shifter men.

Everyone in the know said that was the bar to go to if someone needed help, if an omega was lost, was in trouble. There was some weird-assed underground situation with omegas being housed, fed, and given a chance for a real life.

He was hoping that the bartender was one of the good guys.

But right now, he'd gotten a tip about one of the young men on his radar, and he was heading to another location. Which meant his plans for seducing said bartender had to wait.

He headed across town, finding himself in a strangely nice, middle-class part of town. He never ended up in a place like this.

Never.

And if he did end up here, it was never good.

He knocked on the door of the address he'd been given and waited.

But no one came to the door. So he knocked again, then looked for a Ring or something.

Nada. He tried the doorknob, just in case, but no. So he circled around to the back.

As he got to the back door, a huge woman appeared, her body filling the doorway. "Can I help you?"

Her voice was low, soft, but so fucking stern.

"I hope so." He handed her a card, because his instincts told him she was no criminal mastermind. "I'm a private investigator, and I'm looking for Kalen Hanlon. His uncle is very worried about him."

"Is he?"

"Yes. And I'm just trying to help get them back together."

She pocketed his card and nodded. "I'm sorry. He's not here. He hasn't been here for a while. Last time I heard, he was doing good, though."

"I'm glad. I'll pass that along. If anyone else here hears from him, can you let him know his uncle just wants to hear from him?"

"I will." She grinned slightly. "Now stop skulking about my doors."

“Hey, I rang the doorbell!”

“You did. You need to get information to someone, you can tell Quin at the Hogg. He has a ton of contacts, and he’s a good man. Solid.”

Of course he was.

Motherfucker, he’d been right there.

“Thanks, lady,” he said, though he was clearly not going to get a name. So he just saluted and headed back to his rented SUV. He had a bike, but the Harley was conspicuous, and if he found one of the kids he was looking for, he needed the back seat.

Back to the bar.

He’d known there was something about that wolf. Something sparkling yet dark in those amazing eyes, and the pheromones were enough to make him want to purr.

Of course, watching the way that the wolf had taken down the asshole at the bar, defending the wee bunny... If Quin hadn’t gotten involved, he would have.

But it had been quick and brutal. One blow, one asshole down. He was fairly sure Quin had called the police before the fight.

And then he’d exchanged numbers with Thiago, that little unconscious wiggle and lip lick making him nuts. Uhn.

Definitely he ought to head back over, see what Quin knew about his new client.

There was no way it could be a coincidence that he’d been pointed to the bar twice in

one night.

No way. No way at all. In fact, he was pretty sure that this was a big, flashing, neon sign.

It read, “Pretty Wolf in Need of Fucking Here.”

He chuckled, because he was vain enough to head to the storage unit he’d rented to stay in and get the Harley. He wanted to impress hot and wolfy.

He knew how good he looked, straddling the bike, and he’d seen the bikes that were in the parking lot. This wasn’t some dive bar. This was upscale—leather and smoky drinks and deep kisses in the corners. But there were also clean bathrooms, no rips in the seats, and top-shelf tequila.

He’d have to be careful. He’d seen the muscle that was there at the bar, just sitting there casually drinking, as if they didn’t have a job. But it had taken one or two words from Quin, and they had been all over it.

It had been hot.

No, that wasn’t as hot as it was going to be, though. He could feel it. The energy is in between them. He wanted to bite just a little bit. More than a nibble, though. He wanted to leave a mark.

Funny, wasn’t it, how they used to say that cats were scared of dogs, but it would take an entire pack to take one of his kind down. They were territorial, solitary except for their mates, and they knew what they wanted.

Thiago knew what he wanted.

He rode down to the bar, finding the parking lot mostly empty. Not completely. The lights were still on.

So he parked his bike, and he went in like he owned the place, wanting Quin to see him.

To notice him.

To pay attention.

“Back already.” That wasn’t Quin. “Was it the ranch, mate? It’s damn addictive.”

“The ranch was good.” And he was curious, and a touch disappointed that the wolf wasn’t behind the bar. “Australian?”

“Ayuh. I grew up in the middle of nowhere. Went to work on Bondi Beach for a while, then hopped over to Hawaii. Then California. Now I’m just wandering.”

“And you ended up here?” This one wasn’t a wolf, but he was some sort of a canine. Pretty though. Golden where Quin was redheaded. Sharp features and smaller, leaner.

“I followed Quin. We met on the road. We had a moment.” That was a purely evil grin. “He said he had a bar, if I ever wanted to stop, if I wanted somewhere to be. Well, here I am. Tips are good. So are the hours. So is the hunting ground, so to speak. So...”

Huh. He tried not to growl. “Well, I’m Thiago, nice to meet you.”

“I’m Pete. What can I get you? You don’t read like a beer guy.” He sniffed. “Don’t smell like one, either.”

“Whiskey neat.” Okay, this one was really cute. Thiago could see himself tearing Pete up, except that Quin was right here. Close.

“No worries, mate.” Pete poured for him, then wandered off, paying attention. Not being too flirty. Just sort of letting him know there were eyes on him.

In a good and a bad way.

He stayed at the bar, sipping his whiskey and waiting. Quin knew he was here. He could wait. He was patient.

His puppy would be too curious not to come out and visit. He knew it.

Quin actually made it longer than he expected, taking almost an hour before he appeared from the back again. Slowly checking out his tables, the bar.

Then those pretty green eyes found him, glittering and curious. “Welcome back. Did you miss me?”

“I did. I had a surprise visit with someone whose family is missing him. The little lady of the house said you’re the man and in the know when it comes to loss and missing folks, and if I needed anything at all, I should come to you.” He let his gaze drag along that beautiful, tightly muscled body. “I think I need something.”

“Little lady, huh? Now I know Maria. She’s not little. She’s not a lady. She’ll eat your face. It’s a thing.” Quin shrugged one shoulder. “I don’t appreciate when alphas forget that their job is to protect their omegas and love them. It makes me grumpy. I guess that’s gotten around.”

“That you’re grumpy or that you protect omegas?”

“Both. Mostly the part about the grumpy. I’m not a man to be fucked with.”

“Fair enough.” Come play, puppy. Are you a man to be fucked?

Quin’s head tilted. “It depends.”

Oh, this was fun. “On?”

“How hot you are? How much I want it? How much you can give me? All that good stuff.”

“Well. I know I’m hot. It’s not fun if you don’t want it. And I can give you inch after inch of it.” He licked the whiskey off his upper lip, his tongue scratching. “And I guarantee you it’s all good stuff.”

“I can see it would be worth a try,” Quin said.

“I guarantee I take care of anyone who chooses to play with me, love.” He winked.

“You have to wait until I close up the bar.”

“I have my bike now. I can follow you wherever you want to go.”

“Yeah? What kind of bike?”

“1979 Sportster.”

“Nice. How many miles?”

He grinned, knowing this would be his ace in the hole. “Less than 20K.”

“Oh, man.” Quin waved at someone who called to him. “Be right back.”

He waved and nodded, turning to watch the room. When he looked back to the bar, there was a whiskey sitting on it for him, and since no one else was near him, or behind the bar, he grabbed it to drink. The place was really winding down now, and Quin was cleaning.

“Can I help?” Thiago finally asked after he tossed back the whiskey.

“Seriously?”

“The sooner we get done, the sooner I have you in the shower.”

Those pretty eyes went wide, and Quin’s smile made him laugh, it was so wicked.

“Now, see, that’s the best offer I’ve had all night.”

“I always start with hot water.”

“You got a room somewhere?” Quin asked.

He splayed a hand over his heart. “You wound me. You don’t just want to take me upstairs?”

“I don’t do that on the first date. And how did you know I live upstairs?”

“Stab in the dark. I like bartenders.”

“Oh, woe to the republic. And here I thought I was unique.” Now it was Quin’s turn to look wounded.

He studied Quin intently for a long moment. The music had been turned down, and

Quin was close enough for him to scent the man over the smell of stale beer and other more human odors.

“You are,” he finally said when Quin had started to squirm. “You’re fucking stunning, in fact. I rarely come back once I’ve left a bar.”

“Then I’m lucky.”

“I’m out, boss!” That was the last of the bar servers, which just left the two bouncers and them.

So Thiago reeled Quin in, pressing them together. “Let’s get this stuff done, huh? I do have a room. And it has that rainhead shower thing.”

“Does it have twenty-four-hour room service with carrot cake?”

“It does, in fact. And craft beer.”

“I’m in.” Quin tipped his head back, and the long line of that neck, exposed, made him hard as rock. Damn. And he was going to have to ride like this?

“And I want to ride on your bike.”

“Mmmmhmm.” He nibbled.

“You want us to lock up, boss?”

“I do.” Quin took his hand and led him out to the parking lot, and he waved at the guys at the door.

God, he couldn’t wait to get this one alone. Thiago led Quin to his Harley, straddling

it so he could let Quin climb on behind him and scoot up close enough to feel all the good things.

“Hold on, love. This should be a good ride.”

“It had better be,” Quin buzzed against the back of his neck.

So Thiago made sure it was.

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Chapter

Three

O h, he was in so much damn trouble.

Quin climbed off the back of Thiago's Harley, which was like a big cat in itself. Sexy machine for a sexy man.

They headed up the elevator in the fancy downtown hotel, and they ended up on the top floor. Oh, shit. Twenty-four-hour room service. Carrot cake. Rainhead shower. And a view and a pillowtop bed in a freaking penthouse?

He'd either hit the lottery or this was a really bad horror movie.

The door closed behind them, and Thiago stopped to smile at him. "Shower first?"

"Mmmm. Yeah." He stripped off his jacket and started on his T-shirt, heading toward the back of the suite. That would be where the big bath was. There was a powder room up front, which told him that Thiago was used to staying in style.

His brothers lived like this, but most of the guys he met in his bar? Not so much.

He could get used to a guy who liked his luxuries but looked that good in leather on a Harley.

Thiago followed, just close enough that Quin could feel the heat from his body.

He smelled like heat and cinnamon and sandalwood. God. So good.

“Who does your ink?”

Quin shrugged, letting his shoulders roll, muscles clenching and relaxing. “I’ve got a guy. He likes me. I go in and just let him get to work. As long as he stays mostly black and white, I’m happy, and I trust him.”

“I can see why.”

Was that a purr? He thought it might be a purr.

He understood why Thiago would like his ink, though.

He had a huge tree on his back with the hints of what looked like huge cats lounging on the limbs. Really all you could see were the eyes—little glints of green and gold. At the bottom of the tree, down toward the small of his back? That’s where the wolves lived, hiding in the deep grasses.

Everything on his body was hidden within foliage. It was hot, it was intense, but at the same time it was safe. No one had to know what he fantasized about deep in the night.

That was between him and a certain psychic little tattoo artist.

Thiago hummed softly. “I like it. It’s like a little puzzle. Something that you want to dig into and explore.”

“You going to put me together after you take me apart?”

“You have my word. Come take a shower with me.” Thiago put some space between

them, and he shivered. But he followed, just...ready for anything.

Thiago turned on the water to let it heat, then moved in close again, touching his belly, making his muscles quiver. Thiago stripped off the rest of both of their clothes, setting them and their boots aside. He had to laugh, because they had almost identical pairs of Fries.

“Come on, love. Let’s get wet.”

Quin nodded and took a deep breath. He could think of nothing he’d rather do than get wet with Thiago right now.

He was hard, aching, and his body was going to leave evidence of his need on his boxer-briefs if he wasn’t careful.

“I can smell you, you know. You smell like heaven on earth, and I bet you’re already wet for me.”

Thiago wouldn’t lose that bet, that was for sure. He arched an eyebrow, though, offering Thiago a grin. “You’ll have to see for yourself.”

“Fair enough.” Thiago muscled him into the bathroom, one hand coming around to cup his cock. His eyes rolled back in his head as one clever thumb found the thick ring embedded in the tip, and the groan he got proved that he wasn’t the only one affected by the touch. “Oh, damn. You’re something special, aren’t you?”

He liked to think so, but it hadn’t been proven yet. He was still just the fuck-up brother.

Thiago didn’t wait for him to answer, though. He just yanked Quin’s briefs, staring at his cock. “So pretty. Did your tattoo artist do this for you?”

“He’s a man of many talents.”

“Human? That’s unusual around these parts.”

He nodded. He knew, and Dash was incredible—rare, talented, a little odd, and wickedly sighted. “He’s something else.”

And he didn’t really want to worry about Dash at the moment. Right now, he wanted to fuck, good and hard. He wanted to remember this for days, and he was banking on Thiago to be able to do that for him.

Thiago nodded to him. “I’m going to make sure you get what you need. You have my word.”

He sure as shit hoped so. He checked the water, tickled to find that it immediately was hot, the rain pouring down. “Oh, this rocks.”

He hopped in, let his head fall back as his long hair went wet and heavy, his cock bobbing as he arched, showing off for Thiago. Look at me, pretty kitty. Look at me, tell me I’m fine.

“You’re the hottest fucking thing I’ve ever seen.”

He straightened up and crooked his finger at Mr. Golden and Studly, beckoning him in. His entire focus was taken up, and it was all he could do not to get down on his knees and beg.

Thiago came right to him, dragging their bodies together. “Do you kiss?”

Before he could answer, that feline face went close and their lips mashed together. Pure lightning flashed between them, and their gazes locked. For a second, Quin

swore time stopped short, and their heartbeats synced, leaving them both swaying and panting, breathing hard as they blinked.

What the hell was this, and how could he keep it going, forever?

His knees went weak, just like he was a corset-wearing swooner in a nineteenth-century romance novel, and he had to trust in Thiago's hand to keep him upright.

Fuck, this was hot as hell.

Don't stop.

I'm not going to.

One of Thiago's hands held him up while the other slipped down along his back, dragging against his wet skin, heading toward his ass.

He wanted that. Wanted fingers and stretching and that cock inside him. That knot would make him feel perfect. He knew it would. Assuming that Thiago's knot engaged...

"Oh, it will, love. I guarantee it. I've had plenty of sex where it didn't, but I intend to make love to you until neither one of us can see."

"Yes, please." He gasped it, his muscles rolling, trying to get more, closer, hotter.

"Fuck." Thiago bent to kiss his neck, those sharp teeth stinging him, and those fingers tugged at the ring in his cock. Just hard enough.

His ass clenched, and Thiago's low chuckle told him he knew exactly what Quin was feeling.

“Sweet baby. You need this so bad, don’t you? You keep trying to get it, but you can’t make yourself ask for what you need, and no one else can see past the tough exterior.” Thiago placed a sucking kiss on his nipple, pulling it between his teeth.

He moaned, trying to climb Thiago’s body.

“Mmmhmm. I want to give you everything, Quin. Everything. You can ask me for whatever you want.”

“I—Please.” He wanted so many things. Some he’d never managed to get anyone to do. But right now, he wanted to be fucked. “Inside me.”

“Turn around, baby boy.” The pet names made Quin pant, and he rocked his hips before he could make himself turn to face the shower wall. “Brace your hands.”

He got it, and he put his hands against the wall, then stuck out his ass.

“Perfect. Perfect boy.” Thiago squeezed his ass cheeks, tight, then spread them, and two fingers invaded him, pushing in hard and fast, making him yelp and push back to open himself more.

“You want this, huh? Want me in you, fucking you hard and good.”

“I do. I want you right now, Thiago. Just you.”

A low growl made goosebumps rise on his arms and his back. “Good. That’s good.”

“I sure hope so.” He felt Thiago open him, another finger stretching him to the point that teetered on pain. Just like when he sat for tattoos long enough that it started to become sexual, yet Zen.

“I’m coming into you now, baby boy.” The broad head of Thiago’s cock, burning like a brand, pushed at his entrance.

Panting, he waited, head hanging forward. “Yes. Now.”

Thiago thrust, and he cried out, that cock feeling huge and heated and better than anything he’d ever experienced before.

He was going to be ruined for life.

“That’s it. That’s so good.” Thiago pressed in all the way, then paused, letting him adjust for a few moments. But only a few. Then he was moving, thrusting good and deep in slow, devastating movements. “Fuck, you’re tight. You’re mine, Quin. I know it. You were made for me.”

“Uh-huh.” What was he even agreeing to? Just sex talk. That was all. He slammed back to meet every thrust, his body shuddering with each one.

“Good. My knot is swelling, Quin. Can you feel it?”

“I can. I can feel everything.” That knot was going to be huge, and he was going to explode with a sparkly joygasm. Christ, he wanted this. He wanted Thiago wedged in him so tightly that neither of them could move for hours save to stagger to the bed and collapse.

Then there would be cake.

“Are you seriously thinking about cake?”

“No. I’m thinking about your knot. And how after I come all over this shower, there will be cake.”

Thiago bit the back of his neck, then growled in his ear. “A much better progression.”

“See, I thought so too.”

“Fuck, baby boy.” Thiago slammed into him faster, making his cock jerk and his balls draw up. That knot was huge now, and he was going to come like crazy in just a few seconds.

Very few.

Thiago wrapped one hand around his dick. “Come on, baby. Come for me. Squeeze me. I want you to feel my knot. I want you to know what it’s like to have me lodged in you. To fill you like no one has.”

Quin was going to lose his fucking mind, and it was worth it. He’d been waiting to feel this good his entire fucking life.

He threw his head back and cried out, his eyes crossing as Thiago reached around and tugged the ring in his cock.

“Come for me, baby boy. Come on. Now.” The words were matched with another hard tug, and he was flying, gone over the edge.

Thiago began to grunt and he could feel that knot, swelling and locking them together, and then Thiago shot, filling him with heat, and his spent cock spurted again, his entire world spinning madly.

“Oh, fuck...” He was never going to be able to have another first time again, not after this. It had been perfect.

“Mmmhmm...perfect. You’re perfect.” Thiago stroked and petted, locked inside him.

The hot water pounded against him, the steam making everything otherworldly.

“It was. You are going to be bad for business, Mr. Kitty.” He let his eyes fall closed.
So deliciously bad.

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Chapter

Four

His phone buzzed, and Thiago tried to ignore it. He didn't want to wake up, because he had a feeling that Quin was gone, and that would just depress him.

There had been knotting. Then a platter of fried things along with carrot cake.

Then another long, slow loving before they'd drifted off to sleep.

But at some point, he thought he'd felt Quin kiss him on the forehead, and then the bed had gotten colder.

Groaning, he turned over on his side to grab the phone, finding a text from his business partner, Graham.

Did you find the kid?

Which kid?

he fired back. After all, he'd been after at least two last night.

His phone rang, Graham's ringtone of Elvis's "Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear" making him grin. Graham was a grizzly shifter with a constant 'I just woke up from hibernation' attitude.

“You know full well which kids, you little fuck,” Graham growled.

“Hey, I went out on two—count them, two—missions last night. Do not start with me.”

“And did you find either one?”

Fascinating question. “Actually, I think, in a strange way, I might have found both. I met this guy?—”

“Of course you did.”

“Stop it. I met this guy, super cute wolf. He was totally hot.” Oh, he shouldn’t have said that. Though Graham was his bestie as well as his business partner.

“Uh-huh.”

“I’m serious.” No one ever believed him. “Anyway. Everybody seems to think that this guy knows something. That he’s like the guy in the know about these missing omegas.” Graham snorted, and he cleared his throat. “Really.”

“So let me get this straight. You went looking for lost omegas. You found yourself a hot little something and instead of doing your job, you had sex?”

“No, you weren’t listening. I went to two different places to find lost omegas. When I left the first place, it led to the second place, and the woman who was there informed me that if I needed to find information about omegas that had gotten help then I would go back to the first place. And so I did.”

“Thiago—”

“And the guy who helped the omegas was there and then we had sex.”

“Thiago!”

“It wasn’t just sex. It was amazing sex, like the best sex, and I wanted to do it again.”

“Yay.” Graham’s voice was dry as dust.

“I’m serious.” He didn’t understand why Graham wasn’t listening to him.

“I don’t give a flying fuckety fuck about how good the sex was. We get paid to do a job. That job is finding omegas and delivering information to the families that are worried now. You didn’t do that.”

“Are you sure?”

“What? Don’t make me come out there.” Like Graham ever left his den. Ever.

“I would bet you good money that, by the end of the day, both of those omegas will have contacted their families.” He didn’t know how he knew, but he knew that he did know that Quin was going to deal with this, and that Quin was the one who could get a hold of the omegas, who would tell them that their families were worried.

He also had faith that the omegas had proof that they were safe. He wasn’t sure how Quin would manage it, but it would happen, and Graham was just going to have to trust him, because he was the one who was the road guy; Graham was the office guy.

“I swear to God if you have hired someone to fake being an omega...”

Thiago rolled his eyes and stood up, stretching. Man, he was sore. “Oh please. I’m offended. If I was going to do that, I would just call myself. That would be easier and

cheaper.”

“I never should have sent you to Denver. I should have sent you to like bum fuck Idaho.”

“Do they have lost omegas in Bumblefuck, Idaho? If they do, send George.” And forward fold.

“George is a lemur. Do you think lemurs would fare well in Idaho?”

“My people are from Brazil. There’s no Boise in Brazil.”

“There’s not a lot of Denver in Brazil either, asshole.”

He put Graham on speaker and did Warrior I. “Yes, but Denver is a bustling little city, and it has the hot little guy that I fucked yesterday in it, and so I’m staying in Denver until?—”

“What, your balls fall off?”

“Yes, yes, exactly, until my balls fall off.”

“You are one sick motherfucker, my friend.” Graham sighed. “I’ll check in with the families tomorrow.”

“Want to make a bet?”

“You’re willing to bet?” Graham’s voice sharpened.

“Yep.”

“Shit.” Graham knew he never made a bet unless he was certain he could win. So there was that. “No bets.”

“Cool. Look, there seems to be a whole underground network for lost omegas here in town, so I’m going to check on a few more missings.”

“Yeah?” Finally, Graham sounded pleased. “I’ll send you a bunch from the Southwest and start there.”

“Good deal.” They had really focused on missing omegas, male and female, when they’d first gotten these two missing persons. It was a sad thing how many there were.

“Cool. Now, why did you call except to ride my ass?”

“That was it. I wanted a status update.”

He grinned and looked down at himself. “I think my cock is chafed.”

“You suck.” And Graham hung up on him.

He chuckled, heading for the shower. He’d had one last night with Quin, but then he’d gotten real dirty again.

By the time he’d eaten breakfast and a piece of leftover cake, he was ready to get to work, ready to go find more missing kids. So he grabbed his Mac and looked over all the stuff Graham had sent, then made a plan of attack. There was a coffee house that he’d heard some of the street kids hung out at because they could buy a coffee and get day-old pastry for free.

He would check in there first.

And tonight, he would go back to the Hogg, because if Quin thought he could just sneak away and never see him again?

That sweet ass had another think coming.

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Chapter

Five

Quin stretched, glad he'd had his little nap in his own bed.

Not that the bed he'd been in last night had been a bad thing. No. No, it had been fab, with a down-alternative pillowtop, fluffy pillows, soft sheets, and a hot-as-fire half-Brazilian jaguar shifter who had turned him inside out.

And fed him cake.

But for all that, there hadn't been much sleep to be had.

And he had to meet Symon, Adrian, Rian, and Eyre for lunch today.

His bi-weekly check-in was always a double-edged sword. Quin loved his brothers, and he adored their mates.

But he also felt like the fish out of water among them. The fifth wheel. The one with no manners and no class. So going to some fancy-ass restaurant and sitting while they discussed his many social, and legal, faux pas was kind of soul-destroying.

But he would do it for Symon and Rian, who had helped him out of many a scrape, and who always came when he needed anything.

He dressed with more care than usual in good dark jeans with a green henley shirt and

his clean leather jacket, not the one he wore as armor when he worked and which stank of stale beer and oil from his bike. Then he caught his hair back in a tie and stepped into his boots.

At least Eyre had picked the restaurant, and Fox and the Hen was a great brunch place with good fancy toast choices. He loved a weird French toast or a mushroom parmesan leek stuff on bread. They also had a patty melt that he felt pretty empowered about.

Eyre liked it because it had so many side dishes and he could cobble together a little of everything...

He was a weird little dude.

Quin hopped on his bike and headed over, his ass sore where it landed on the bike's saddle. It was so worth it.

Rian's car was already there when he pulled up, and he had no doubt that Symon's was, too. Symon and Adrian were notoriously early. Rian was punctual, unless there were billable hours involved, in which case he was early.

Quin, on the other hand, had to make sure that he was fashionably late—one, because he wanted everyone to notice when he walked in the door, and two, because it only seemed reasonable that one of them had to be able to break the rules.

The restaurant was nicely busy but not packed, filled with ladies who lunched, older couples out running errands, and the table of his family, and there was him. He was a little cloud of leather.

Eyre waved at him, smiling wide. "Quin! We're back here!"

Eyre looked happy to see him, and his spirits—which hadn't been too low—buoyed. He waved back and grinned at the hostess. "That's my party."

"They said they were waiting for somebody else. Go on back. There's a menu back there for you." She smiled at him, and suddenly, he could see the feline in her. "If I'd known you were so cute, I'd have put my number in the menu."

Man, was he gonna be like a kitty bar now or something? Had he rolled in catnip?

He could feel her eyes on him the entire walk back to their table.

It didn't suck.

He went back to his pack and found his seat. "Hey, guys."

"You're late," Rian growled.

"And you're observant." He sparkled over at his brother. "You're lucky I showed at all. It's only because of your mates. It sure isn't to see the two of you."

"Hey!" Symon looked hurt, pouting at him. "I haven't done anything yet."

"Oh, but you will. You will, brother."

Rian gave him a once-over. "You're in a good mood."

"Yep, got laid last night. It was fab. How about you?"

Eyre chuckled softly. "He totally got laid last night."

"Eyre!" Rian barked, and the little fox didn't even look the slightest bit ashamed. In

fact, he kind of wiggled a little bit, and Quin could see his whiskers twitch.

“Yes, mate?”

“That is not appropriate for the breakfast table.”

Adrian bumped shoulders with Quin. “Good thing it’s a brunch table, huh? I, on the other hand, did not get laid last night.”

“What’s wrong with you, man?” He stared at Symon. “Adrian’s cute.”

“I’m fully aware of that. We had a rollout last night, so we were both working. We’re going to go after breakfast, possibly get laid, and then sleep until the day after tomorrow.”

“Oh man, tell me you’ve got somebody driving for you.” He hated thinking of them driving so tired.

“Yeah. He’s having breakfast at another table.”

“Good deal.” He scanned the restaurant, and he picked out the driver in a heartbeat. He could double as a bodyguard, no doubt thanks to Symon’s security guy, Cyrus.

“So, tell us about the getting laid,” Adrian demanded.

“Huh?” He raised his eyebrows. “It was very nice. He had a fancy hotel room. There was carrot cake.”

Four moans sounded. They all agreed on carrot cake. It was like wolf and fox aphrodisiac.

“Hey, you.” The server handed him a menu. “What can I get you to drink?”

“Uh, milk today, I think.”

“You got it.”

Okay. Burrito? Fancy toast? Patty melt? He studied the menu, knowing his fam was staring at him.

“So do I want the patty melt?”

“What you want is to spill the beans about the hotel guy. Come on, we deserve to know.” Butter wouldn’t melt in Eyre’s mouth. “Was he a wolf?”

“Nope.” The guys loved this game.

Adrian tried next. “Bear.”

“Nope.” He never had bear dalliances. Never.

“Damn.”

“Your turn, Eyre.”

“You just don’t seem like the fox type,” Eyre admitted. “Umm. How about a porcupine?”

“Oh, lots of pricks. Really, really cute in shifter form. Not really my thing, although I have to admit, they are super cute.”

“Right? I have this friend—his name is Rich—he is absolutely adorable. He gets all

flustered and starts kind of running around and making this weird chattery noise. I love him.”

“You two know everybody,” Rian growled. “Now seriously. Do you know this person? Did you have safe sex? Did he clone anything off of your phone, or, I don’t know, did he steal an organ?”

“Well, I didn’t wake up bleeding in the bathtub with an ice pack on my stomach and a note to call 911, and I left first. Uh, I guarantee you he was asleep the whole time that I was. And, I did not clone his phone. I mean, he did not clone my phone. I would never clone someone’s phone because that is wrong.”

“Oh, you did clone his phone?” Adrian clapped. “Are you gonna send all the information to me so I can decrypt it? Because I would love to know everything about this new person.”

“If I need to.” He wasn’t sure he was going to need to. “And only if I need to, Adrian. I would rather learn about him the hard way if he sticks around.”

“So what does he do?”

Quin pondered that. “I think he must be a PI. He was looking for missing omegas.”

“No shit. And are they really missing?”

“Well, one was in my bar last night. I sent him to the house.”

“So another young guy on his way somewhere, not a kidnap or a runaway.”

“Yeah, but our friendly neighborhood den mother said he was out of money and had sold his phone, so he’d lost touch with his family.”

“That sucks,” Eyre said. He’d been down on his luck and felt for all the omegas they helped.

“It does. The other kid is probably there too. I think she recognized him, but didn’t tell Thiago for sure. Just in case.”

“Thiago. That’s what, Portuguese?”

Quin fought not to roll his eyes at Rian, who was always asking leading questions. Just like a lawyer. “His mom is Brazilian, apparently.”

“So what’s his last name?”

Quin made his eyes very wide. “How would I know?”

“Quin! Anyone who fucks you should have a last name.”

“I’m sure he does.” And it was Baldwin. He knew that. But like he was going to tell Rian so he could background check him.

This was his deal, not his brothers’.

“You—”

The server came back, cutting Rian off. They all ordered, and he decided on the patty melt with a side of pancakes. Late-night cake and snacks notwithstanding he’d worked hard all night, and he was starving.

“Okay, so back to?—”

“What new update did you roll out, Symon?”

“Some security stuff, and a new friendship level on the app. Just for people who want to hang out with other shifters. We found that the app had too much of a leaning toward...”

“Sex?” Quin asked.

“That.” Adrian grinned. “Isaac pointed it out. He wants more people to play video games with.”

“Wow. Pallas kitty for the win.” He liked Isaac and his naturally grumpy face but kinda sunny attitude.

If growling was sunny.

“Yeah. He’s a good guy.”

“Quin.”

“Rian, you are not my dad. I promise, Thiago is not a serial killer.”

“But how do you know?”

“Because I’m not dead.”

Rian growled, half-rising, but Eyre put a hand over Rian’s. “No, babe. It’s his life. I know you worry about him, but this is no bueno.”

“Thanks, Eyre.”

Eyre leveled a steady gaze on him. “And you stop taunting him.”

He chuckled. “But it’s so fun.” Symon stared at him, and he sighed. “Yes, mom.”

“Thanks.” Symon winked. “So, what else has been going on...”

His phone buzzed, and he pulled it out.

When is our next cake date?

was on the screen. And he had to smile.

“Who was that?” Symon asked.

“Cake delivery,” he said, tapping in a reply.

And now the ball was in Thiago’s court.

Then it was patty melts and pancakes.

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Chapter

Six

Thiago followed the trail of another omega he'd been sent to find by Graham, all the info coming in at the ass crack of dawn. The guy was a real bear—ha-ha—before he had his coffee and honeybuns, and he was really unhappy about Thiago getting laid, he thought.

Not because Graham had designs on his person. No, the guy was holding out for another bear, maybe. Or maybe a porcupine...

A little prick.

God, he cracked himself up.

But the trail led him to a coffee shop that apparently had a lost omega discount in the way of leftover pastry from the day before being given out for free.

Oh, how fucking charming was that? Seriously.

Thiago ordered himself a hazelnut latte with two extra shots of espresso along with a huge piece of lemon pound cake.

Then he went to sit. The place was one of those coffee shops that worked hard to prove itself a part of the community—a wall of books, another one with board games. There was even a little spot for children. He could see this being the center of a

bustling community.

He had to admit he was curious too. He wanted to see what kind of omegas came in, if they happened to need help. If they happened to be one of the omegas he was hoping to connect with here in Denver.

Thiago found a book to pretend to read, looking up every time the doorbell dinged.

But most everyone seemed to be your average everyday customer—a mom with her baby, a businessman getting coffees for the office, a teenager grabbing a coffee that she hoped made her seem cool and grown up.

These were normal people, living their lives, some staying to chat, some not. No one paid him any attention.

He'd finished his cake and was considering getting another latte with the doorbell rang again and someone came striding in.

Someone lean and redheaded, hair down this morning, loose and tousled, as if he'd just been fucked. Dark glasses on, dressed in T-shirt and leathers.

Quin made his mouth dry.

“Hey, honey, I need my regular. Anybody in the back that I need to talk to?”

“One churro latte with extra shots and a bear claw coming up. And no. No, there was somebody here early this morning. I gave him some day-old croissants and they hurried off. I think that they're feeding babies.”

“Dammit. I hate to hear that. I'll be back at closing, see if he comes back. No one should be worried about their cubs eating. No one.”

Thiago liked Quin more every single second. It was glorious.

He stood, silently as only one of his kind could, and moved to slide one arm around Quin's waist.

"Hey, you come here often?" He purred the words, and he could smell the immediate and instinctive response to him.

"You're lucky I didn't cut you."

He chuffed softly. You wouldn't.

Quin tossed his hair, and it smelled so good that his entire body clenched. I can't believe I didn't see you.

You knew I was safe.

"Yes, but I'm glad I didn't go all ninja on you."

"Me too, baby boy. I need another latte, please."

Quin chuckled softly. "Put it on my tab."

"Oooh, in that case, I'll have a bear claw too." He winked, and Quin rolled his eyes.

"You're pushy."

"I am." Thiago wouldn't apologize for it. "I have a table. Come on." He took Quin to his little spot.

"What are you doing here?" Quin asked.

“Tracking another missing. You ever seen this kid?” He showed Quin the picture on his phone.

Quin pulled his glasses up and popped him on the top of his head, looking closely. “Yeah. She doesn’t look like that anymore.”

“She?”

Quin nodded. “Yep, her name is Teresa. She has a very nice husband. Panda bear, believe it or not.”

Huh. “No shit?”

“I shit you not. She comes into the club maybe once a month. It’s a little rough for her, but I see her husband all the time. He likes to come in, drink a couple of beers, kick somebody’s ass at pool, win some money, and leave.”

“He a biker?” Thiago was a little gobsmacked.

“No. No, he’s a helicopter mechanic. He works at the Air Force Base.”

“How did he end up at a dive bar?”

Quin arched one red eyebrow. “We have an excellent reputation.”

“You’re a biker bar.”

“With an excellent reputation.” Quin grinned at him. “There were a bunch of military guys that popped in one day for a beer. I think it was a dare. Honestly, I try not to allow too much trouble, and he happened to see Teresa. I’d hired her to wait tables. He fell in love at first sight. And that was that.”

“Has every single lost omega managed to find your bar?” he asked.

Quin stared at him. “Honestly, how am I supposed to quantify that? How would I know if every single lost omega in Denver came to my bar? Is there a statistic that says ‘here are how many lost omegas there are in Denver’?”

Thiago was in love. “I do like you; you’re smart.”

“Pretty too.”

He nodded. “Yeah, and great in bed.”

“So I’m like a win, win, win, win situation.”

He propped his chin on one hand. “Seriously. How did you get into the bar scene?”

“I’m not academic like my brothers. I needed something to do.”

That didn’t work for him at all. He knew how smart Quin was. Maybe Quin wasn’t good at following the rules—that he would buy, but not an academic? Not capable?

That he wasn’t going for. Not one bit.

“Why are you not academic?”

“I mean, I read.” He got a blinding, fake smile. “Look, I wake up most days and choose violence. That doesn’t go well with sitting in a class somewhere or attending class every day.”

“Mmmm. So hot.”

“Stop. You’ll give me a big head,” Quin deadpanned.

“And this is bad?”

“No.” Now the grin was real.

He texted Graham real quick to let him know to close the case. “Can you give Teresa the memo to get a hold of her folks? Or at least give me permission to tell them she’s alive and safe?”

“I can text her, sure.”

“Thanks. Now, what else can I do to help?” Thiago asked, not ready to let Quin go for today.

“Help with what?”

“The kid you’re looking for.”

“Hang out with me today? Come back with me to watch the back door because they don’t know you? If we can get them to trust that we can get them someplace safe...” Quin’s eyes flashed wolfy for a moment.

“I can do that, baby boy. I surely can.”

“Thanks. I hate it when little ones might be involved. Even more than usual.”

“Well, this is what I do. So whatever will we do until it’s time?” He waggled his eyebrows.

“Oh, I can think of a lot of things. But first, we get to watch each other eat bear

claws.”

He hooted. “My business partner will be so pleased. In fact, let me take a picture to send him. Grizzly.”

Quin laughed along with him, boot touching his under the table.

Oh, yeah. His day was really looking up.

Quin waited inside the coffee shop with a whole box of leftover pastry and a gallon of milk.

He’d left Thiago out in the alley, and it was great, because he could hear the guy in his head, so there was no shouting and there were no phones needed.

He wasn’t trying to ambush anyone or anything. He just wanted the two omegas he knew were involved in this to have a safe place. If they had kids...

Well, leftover pastry was no way to have healthy ones for long.

Neither was living rough in a shithole or in the park...

Instead of the usual set of safe houses, he had a lady that took in kids like this so they could stay with their children. Got them jobs and set them up pretty.

So he and Thiago just needed to hem them in until the talking was done and they calmed down enough to be helped.

Two kids with a toddler coming to you , Thiago said, clear as a bell in his head.

Cool. I’m on it. Excellent. He faded into the shadows as the door opened in back, and

one of the omegas slid in.

“Daisy? Are you okay? Can I take the trash out for you?”

“Come on in, Derry. I’ve got stuff for you,” Daisy called from where she was cleaning the equipment. She wanted these kids safe too.

The kid crept in, his mate and the toddler behind him. Thiago slipped in and closed the door silently, that jaguar stealth kicking in.

“Quin!” Derry jumped half a foot. “What are you?—”

“Derry. Kiddo. Here. Pastry.” He held out the box. “And I bought milk. Can we talk?”

“Milk?” That was the wee one.

Quin nodded. “You know it, sweetheart. I got milk. Would you like a glass?”

Derry shook his head and took the box of pastries, frowning at him. He put himself between the little one and Quin. “What do you want? Why are you here? Daisy’s closed. I’m just here to work. I don’t want any trouble.”

Poor sweet kid.

Derry’s mate stood there, drawn and skeletal, huge dark circles under her eyes, her pale hair in mats. “In trouble? We’re already in trouble, Derry.”

Derry shot her a panicked look. “Patty, hush.”

Goddamn it. Mate, don’t let them get away. “We’re not here to hurt you. I don’t want

anything. I know about a place where you can get some help, that's all."

The little coyote shifter shook his head. "We don't have any money, and my girl's not for sale either. None of us are."

"Of course you're not." Quin rolled his eyes. "Don't be ridiculous. I'm talking about a safe house. Somewhere where you all can stay together. Sleep in a clean bed, get a shower that's hot. Real food for a growing baby. It's just a place to go until you can get back on your feet."

Derry shook his head, but it was Patty who nodded, her eyes flashing gold. "We can't stay out there with Lindsey, Derry. We just can't. That man's gonna pick us up."

Quin frowned. "What man?"

She shrugged, shrinking down even smaller. "There's just a...it's a man. He's some kind of a bear. Big shock of white hair, big guy. Real insistent. He was following us. I think he wants Lindsey. You know, for..." She drew the little girl close. "You know."

Quin growled. He couldn't help it. "Derry. Patty. Let me help you."

Daisy spoke up. "Hey, I've known Quin for years. He's not here to hurt you. This is one of the things he and his brothers do. They help, okay? I can give you a job here at the coffee shop. All right, Derry, we can put you on the payroll, and that lets Patty and Lindsey heal and rest. Eat something that's not sugar."

The little one was still staring at the milk.

"Daisy, can I pour her a glass of milk from your stash so I don't have to open this gallon?" Quin asked.

“Absolutely. No problem.”

“You want to come with me? I’m just going right here. Your momma can still see you.” He wasn’t doing a thing that would make these guys run. Coyotes were always getting picked on and knocked down, and these two were down to their last straw.

Thiago came out of the shadows at the back door, hands up. “Hey, folks. I’m Quin’s mate, so I’m just going to have a glass of milk too. I love milk, huh?”

The coyotes stared nervously, but little Lindsey went to Thiago as soon as he sat down and crawled into his lap. She patted his cheeks. “Kitty.”

Quin bit back a smile. Clearly kids liked Thiago.

“Hey, poppet. You’re Lindsey. How old are you?”

“T’ree.” She held up her fingers.

“Oh wow, you’re a big girl.”

She nodded. “I big!”

Thiago winked at him. “We are good here, Quin, if you want to make sure that Patty and Derry get a bite to eat.”

“Good deal.” He went back to the kids. “Right. I can take you to a house. There’s a woman who lives there, and her job is to help out. You could have a bedroom with a little bed for Lindsey. Three squares a day. Hot water in the shower. Daisy says Derry can work here. Patty, you can help Maria with things like washing sheets, dusting, cooking, whatever it is you want to do, but you guys have got to get off the streets.”

Quin didn't want to be pushy so—oh, who the hell was he kidding? Quin really just wanted these kids to do what they were told. It was the right thing to do, but he was trying really hard to pretend like he wasn't pushing.

Derry shook his head, but it was Patty who nodded. “Yes. Yes. Derry, if you don't want to come, you don't have to, but I'm tired. If you don't care if I'm tired, then Lindsey deserves a chance. Lindsey and I will come.”

“Come on, man. Don't let your pride screw this up for you,” he muttered under his breath.

To his utter relief, Derry nodded and sighed, his shoulders dropped. “All right. Thank you, Quin. Thank you for the offer. We could use a break. This would give us a chance to figure our stuff out.”

“Good deal.” He met Thiago's gaze from across the coffee shop. Thank God.

Right? Thiago's eyes flashed . This little girl needs food. Real food. Like vegetables and milk and meat.

Yeah, and I don't like this idea of there being some rando out there hunting on the streets. Makes me damn uncomfortable.

Ditto. We need to find out who.

And we will. But first? We get these kids some good food and a place to stay, Quin said.

Thiago chuckled, winking at him. And I'm still liking you more and more all the time.

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Chapter

Seven

Thiago waited for Quin down in the bar, where the cook, Goldie, was making family breakfast rather than dinner. Bar workers could eat a ton before they went home to sleep.

The eggs, bacon, and pancakes smelled pretty amazing.

Lisa, one of the bartenders, who was a hot-as-hell bobcat shifter, grinned at him. “Quin making you wait?”

“Yeah, but that’s okay. He’s worth it, and I want to eat anyway.”

“What’s he up to?”

“Packing an overnight bag. We’re going out toward Vail Pass. I want to run with him.” He wanted to shift, to see Quin in his wolf form.

He needed to.

“Oh, cool, man. That’s fun.”

“I hope so. Could be cold as a witch’s tit in a brass bra.”

“Could be, especially for a rainforest guy. But you’ll be so damn impressed with the

boss.”

“For what?” Quin came down from upstairs, dropping his bag on a chair.

“Your wolf.”

“Don’t tease him, Lisa.”

“You really going to go this time of night?”

“Cats have good eyesight,” Thiago murmured. “So I’m driving. We want to see sunrise in our other forms.”

“Aw. Romance.”

“Come and get it so I can clean the damn kitchen,” Goldie bellowed.

“Yum.” Lisa abandoned them, and they all headed to the kitchen to grab heaped plates of amazing breakfast food. Goldie was really wasted on mozzarella sticks and onion rings.

They ate up, and he watched Quin lick syrup off his fork with a tight belly and a hard cock. God, Quin did it for him so bad already.

“You ready, man?” Quin was vibrating a little, and Thiago felt like it was excitement that had him jiggling his leg and pushing his plate away.

Thiago pulled Quin’s plate to him and polished off the pancakes he’d left on it. “Yep. Come on.”

They were taking the SUV instead of their bikes because that way they could sleep in

it if need be. He didn't mind roughing it, but he didn't love sleeping out in the cold in either of his forms...

They piled into the SUV, camping gear in the back, and hit the road.

"What kind of music?" Quin asked.

"Latin pop? Karaoke hits? Experimental jazz?"

Quin gave him a sideways grin. "How about eighties music?"

"Works for me. I love me some Pat Benatar." Thiago could sing like an opera girl on occasion...

They cranked it up and sang while the traffic was so damn bad getting out of Denver, but once they hit Golden and broke out of a lot of it, they were talking about anything and everything.

Favorite colors. Blue and green respectively. Favorite movies. Gladiator and The Shape of Water . Favorite foods? Feijoada and a simple omelet.

Thiago felt like Quin was a constant revelation.

"You think this is a good spot?" There was a tiny campground off a scenic overlook, and Thiago pulled into it, putting his five dollars into the parking spot number on the little box at the end of the lot opposite the entrance.

"I think it's perfect." Grinning wildly, Quin pushed his seat back and started flinging off clothes.

Laughing, Thiago joined him, opening front and back car doors and stepping out

between them to disrobe. He tucked the key into a little pouch that he hung around his neck on a leather cord that would fit Quin's neck.

"You shift first, and I'll put this on you after I lock up. Then I'll follow you, okay?"

"Smart. I usually just hide mine under a rock..."

Thiago snorted. "Nice. And no one has stolen your bike yet?"

"Yeah, no. I leave wolf scent all around it. Scares off shifters and humans alike."

"Ah. Not bad, baby boy. Not bad. Come on. Make with the shifting."

Quin winked, and suddenly a gorgeous red and gray wolf stood where Quin had. He closed the car doors, then locked it before stringing the pouch around Quin's neck.

"No biting my danglies, baby," he murmured.

A short chuff came from Quin. No? You sure?

You like them too much to damage them. Thiago backed off a step and let his jaguar take him, his body lowering, fur sprouting, his body feeling sleek and powerful and amazing. He stretched, bowing to his mate, his tail lashing a little, and Quin bowed back, nose to the ground before he turned and took off at a dead run.

Oh, that was mean. Thiago had to laugh internally, because Quin had to know he was like a mountain lion. Ambush predator given to short bursts of speed and energy, where a wolf could run for days.

He loped off after his mate, keeping it easy, not pushing it. He'd catch up.

And then they would play.

Quin loped along for a while, always keeping eyes and ears out for Thiago. He didn't want his lover to get lost. He wanted to blaze the trail, but in good time, he circled back around to Thiago, trying to act surprised when his new mate burst out of some underbrush to jump on him, no claws or teeth involved.

They rolled down a little embankment, and he had to admit, Thiago's cat balance and grace put him on top when they came to a stop. But they both jumped up to circle each other before diving in again, mock fighting to test each other's strengths and weaknesses, to find sensitive spots to nibble.

Thiago was a dark jaguar, a lot of deep red and black mixed under his more tawny spots, and he was simply the most amazing thing Quin had ever seen.

They rolled and teased, and he barked. Thiago's deep chuffs and light rumbles mixing in. Then he ran again, leading Thiago to a stream where they could get a drink.

Thiago's delicate little licks at the water made him want to roll with laughter, so he found a nice flat spot of ground and rubbed his cheek along the ground. Then he rolled until his feet were all in the air, paws swimming as he scratched his back in the dirt.

You are so going to need a bath, Thiago told him.

Be nice or I'll knock you in.

Ha! Thiago squinted those gorgeous jaguar eyes at him . Don't you dare. That is frigid.

My tropical kitty.

You know it. Thiago came to him then and started grooming him, and he lolled on the creek bed, luxuriating in the simple actions.

He batted at Thiago with his paw, and when he got a paw on the chest in return, he gave Thiago a wolf's kiss, grabbing it with exquisite gentleness with his teeth.

Want to skip sleeping in the car tonight and go to Idaho Springs for Beau Jo's? Quin asked.

Is it as good as the Beau Jo's in Arvada?

Better. It's the flagship store. Beau Jo's had the best pizza, and they gave everyone honey to dip the crust in.

I'm in.

There's even a decent hotel there now. For the longest time, the hotels had been sketch in Idaho Springs, but now they had one kind of boutique place with a little luxury.

Let's go. Thiago scented him, rubbing that cheek along his, and they headed back to the car at a more sedate pace.

He'd had the best day.

And he had a feeling the night would be just as good.

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Chapter

Eight

Waiting three days until the next one that Quin was off at the bar was almost impossible.

Quin had taken some poor kid who was originally from like, Nebraska or something, home. He'd promised Thiago he'd be back soon, but he needed Thiago to keep an eye on the blond bear kidnapper situation.

But, on the good side, Thiago got a crap-ton of work done, got a kid in touch with her folks, and got a short-term house rental so he could stop expensing the hotel.

Graham had bitched at him about his choice there.

Now he was on his way to Quin's apartment above the bar, score that for date two, and he had beer, pizza, and a spice cake with cinnamon frosting from a local bakery. Quin didn't seem like red velvet or Devil's food, being a wolf and all.

Spice cake seemed good without having a repeat on cake and icing.

He hiked up the outdoor steps on the back of the building, then juggled all the shit in his hands to knock. Good thing he was a cat. If he fell down the damn stairs, he might land on his feet.

"Mmm...coming." The door opened and Quin stood there, wearing a pair of gauzy,

almost see-through pants and a loose blouse to match.

It ought to look like a costume, like a joke, but it didn't. It was intensely erotic, and Thiago's mouth went dry.

"Not yet, but give me a chance, and we will make it happen for you." Quin's apartment was surprising—it wasn't rough-hewn; it wasn't like a teenager's bedroom with heavy metal posters and a shitty neon sign. This was a warm and colorful spot with cushions and artwork.

Thiago was absolutely charmed.

"I brought cake and food."

"Bring it into the kitchen." That room was clean and sparkling, and Thiago set all his offerings down before turning to face Quin. "It's good to see you."

"It's wonderful to be seen." Quin stepped right up into his space, their chests bumping together before their lips met, crashing down together. That electricity hit him again, like a lightning bolt, and he grabbed his own personal puppy and dove right in.

God, he could find himself addicted to this man. He grabbed that tight, hot little ass, and he wanted to bite each muscled globe. He wanted to spank it.

Badly.

"Mmmm." Quin pulled away from him, and the evidence of his need lifted against the placket of those gauzy pants.

"Uh-huh." He wondered if Quin would have a little appetizer before they ate and then

the main event after.

“Come over to the nest.”

“The—”

“Den also works.” Quin’s smile was pure wolf, and he was led to a huge bean bag that was covered in blankets and pillows, just tall enough for Quin to sit on and reach for Thiago’s waistband.

Without a single thought, he sucked in, giving Quin room to work.

It didn’t take Quin any time at all to open his fly and pull out his cock, those pretty lips already open, wet, and hungry.

“Damn, baby boy. You make me dizzy.”

“Good. I’m going to make you fly.” Those lips crashed down over him, the soft tongue lashing at his shaft, the suction drawing his balls up and making him shiver.

He cried out, his head slamming back as he arched. His ass cheeks clenched, and he sucked in one desperate breath after another, trying to find a place to put his hands.

Quin sucked him, head bobbing, not teasing at all, but giving him everything he could need, all he wanted.

“Damn, Sam. I won’t last long, but this means that I can last a long time when I fuck you. When you ride my knot.”

Quin’s suction got stronger, as if he was trying to pull his bones right out of his body. Want you. So much. You taste so fucking good, Kitty.

The touch on his mind made his eyes roll back in his head, another deep cry filling his chest, ringing in his brain.

I can hear you!

Those gorgeous eyes flashed up at him, wide and hungry. What?

I can hear you. I need you, puppy. I'm so close . Maybe he'd heard Quin before, but this was deeper. Hotter.

Not a puppy.

Yes you are. He touched his hand to Quin's cheek. My puppy. Mine.

Quin moaned around him, licking and sucking and pulling. He panted, his hips rocking as he rose up on his toes to thrust, then moved back on his heels. Fuck. Fuck, he was gonna come. Like, now.

He shouted as he came, lights flashing behind his eyes. "Quin!"

Quin swallowed him down, sucking good and hard, keeping him spinning, the aftershocks rocking him.

Then he was left standing there. Quin cuddled back in his huge bright green bean bag, those beautiful eyes shining at him. "Welcome to my humble abode."

"Uh-huh. I like the way you do welcomes. A lot." He grinned. "What do you need, baby boy? You want me to make you come? You want me to tie up your pretty cock so you can hold off through supper? There's pizza."

Thiago felt like a million fucking bucks.

Quin hummed for him, the sound raw and rough. “I do love pizza...”

Thiago didn’t think the moan was for the pizza. In fact, he was sure of it. He crawled in next to Quin, loving how his bare cock rubbed against Quin’s soft clothes. “So tell me, pretty pup, what have you been up to? Have you been working hard?”

“Mmhmm. Working hard, making drinks, wiping down the bar. You know...”

“Uh-huh.” He smiled at Quin. “You rescue any omegas?”

One of Quin’s eyebrows shot up. “Pardon me?”

“Come on, pup. You and I know how much good work you do with omegas. You have safe houses all over the city.”

Quin sighed. “You are a PI, aren’t you?”

“I am, but I only use my powers for good.” He winked. “Seriously. I do missing persons. Mostly kids and lost omegas. Occasionally, I get an alpha who has enemies.”

“Well, my brother is Symon Garmin. He owns Shiftr Inc. Not long ago we had a?”

“A case of someone using the app to prey on young omegas...”

“Yeah.” Quin shrugged. “So I help.”

“I think so. It’s a wonderful thing, to have a place for omegas in need to go.” Thiago beamed at him, stroked his cheek.

“We do. There are many places—we just offer a few where they can move through to somewhere safe. No one is forced to be away from their family.”

“I know. Both my clients heard from their family members. Both of them. They’re over the moon. They were so scared, you know? That something terrible had happened.” Thiago wanted Quin.

“Sometimes it does, but we try to make it so that it’s rare. And I thought we were talking about pizza and bondage. How did we end up at work, exactly?”

“Who knows? But you’re absolutely right. We should be talking about touching each other.” He stroked Quin through his pants. “I love these trousers, by the way. Sexy as fuck.”

“Thank you. They were a gift from a fashion designer.”

“You were his lover?” he growled.

Quin whapped him. “I was his model.”

“Ah. I can see that.” He relaxed. The idea of his mate, his, sleeping with someone else. He knew it had to have happened, but he didn’t want to hear about it.

He had a feeling that Quin had a lot of “friends” who were just people who wanted him and his beauty in their lives. They took, but they didn’t seem to give much.

Thiago was going to give it his all.

He kissed Quin hard, leaving his lover blinking at him, then slid his hand into those pants to squeeze that hard cock. “Get something for me to bind you up, and we’ll eat supper, baby.”

Those gorgeous eyes widened. “You meant that?”

“I did. I do. I want to watch you eat pizza.”

Quin’s glinting little grin made him smile back, and Quin rolled away for a moment, then came back with a band of fabric. “Here.”

“Nice. Silk blend.”

“Yeah. Just enough other fabric so it doesn’t tighten down and cut off my nuts.”

“Very good, baby.” He wound the fabric around Quin’s cock and balls, then tied it off, just tight enough to keep him from shooting his load too soon. “Now we can have supper.”

“Cool.” Quin stretched long and lean, his belly showing. “What kind of pizza?”

“All the meat. And one supreme.”

“Damn. I could eat a whole one myself.”

“I bet you could, too. I could as well. And we have spice cake with cinnamon frosting.”

“Oh, damn.” Quin licked his lips. “I might start with that.”

“Yeah, but then I would eat all the pizza.”

“You would do that?” Quin spread a hand over his heart as if he were hurt.

“Do you know how much food it takes to keep a big cat going?”

“Uh...” Quin chuckled. “There’s an obvious gag there.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m proud that you didn’t take the low-hanging fruit.”

Quin groaned, slapping his thigh. “Okay, that’s even worse. Come on. Food.” He rose, heading to the kitchen.

Thiago followed, grinning when Quin sniffed each box, then took a couple of pieces from both and put them on a plate, handing them to him along with a paper towel.

Quin did the same for his own plate.

“Thanks, baby boy.”

“You want a beer?” Quin asked.

“Sounds great.”

Quin pulled them out some beers, and they went to sit. “I can’t believe it’s still hot.”

“Well, you know. I bought that warming bag it was in so I could impress you with that.”

“Wow.”

“I know. I’m not proud.”

“You bring your bike?” Quin asked.

“No, she’s in the storage shed I rented the other day. I have an SUV too.”

“Not as sexy, but handy when you need a place to have sex on the road.”

He chortled. “I can get some pillows.”

“Mmmm. But we have plenty right here and now.” Quin flopped down again.

“How did you get into the PI business?”

“I was in the military, met some guys. Discovered that working for myself was way more entertaining than being a soldier. So when I got out, I had skills and the willingness to work my own hours.” Thiago wagged his eyebrows. He liked to play Twenty Questions. “How did you get into the bar business?”

Quin nibbled on his pizza and shrugged. “I won it in a poker game. Periodically, I have the need to be able to access a bit of the seedy underbelly of the world, so I kept it.”

Thiago grinned, tickled shitless. Now that was a great story. “Was it always a biker bar?”

“Yeah. It used to be worse. I cleaned it up some. You know how you do—get rid of the cockroaches. Get rid of the rats. Accept the fact that there might be a few stray dogs and cats. Maybe a squirrel in the attic. It’s all a matter of degree.”

“I can see that. Get rid of the stuff that’s a disease.”

Quin nodded to him, smiling as he licked grease off his fingers. “Exactly. I can’t protect people if I don’t get to be down where they are.”

“How many people do you have working with you to protect folks?” Was Quin well enough protected? Did he have enough muscle to help keep him safe?

Quin shrugged, the action casual as hell. “Usually, it’s just me. Sometimes, my

brothers are involved, but I generally work alone. This is assuming, you know, I'm not in jail or something fun like that. The police and I have a—how should we call it? Fascinating relationship.”

“I understand that, believe it or not.” PIs weren't well-loved in the law enforcement community, and hell, neither were the big cats. His kind were notoriously territorial and private. “Still, I hate the idea of you being caged.”

“So does my lawyer, and the police absolutely dread dealing with Rian.” Quin's eyes gleamed, and the pure adoration that he saw there fascinated him.

“Rian?” No being jealous. It wasn't a good look for him.

“My brother. I have two—the software marketing dude and the lawyer.” Quin slowly licked his lips clean and picked a piece of sausage off the pizza, snapping it up. “They're mated, normal, tax-paying citizens with pretty omegas.”

“And what are you, Quin?” He had to ask; it was necessary.

“Oh honey, I'd think that was obvious.” Quin blinked at him, stretched out, all long and lean. “I'm trouble.”

He cracked up, because yeah, he believed that with his whole soul.

But this kind of trouble? Thiago was willing to just wallow in.

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Chapter

Nine

“Quin? Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Sure, Hiram. What’s up?”

“I’m worried about Randy.”

Finn was a regular at the bar, and his friend Randy worked as a bar back on busy nights. But Quin hadn’t seen him in days.

“Why? What happened?”

“I think maybe he got beat up after his last shift here, but he won’t let me into his room. You know, we board at that place down in Five Points by the ball field.”

“Uh-huh.” Quin grabbed his jacket. It was a damn slow night, and Colt and Wilder could watch the bar. “Come on. We’ll go have a look at him.”

“Thanks, man. I’m worried. I mean, I’m seriously worried.”

Hiram was a sweetheart, and he wasn’t sure if he and Randy were lovers or not, but they were absolutely friends. Shit, even if they’d been enemies. Quin wasn’t gonna let Randy swing in the wind. “Why didn’t he tell me he was hurt? You know that I would have helped.”

“Pride, I guess. I don’t know. I mean, nobody wants to admit that they got beat up.” Finn blinked at him, nose twitching, and he could see the badger in him for a second. Badgers fought, and they fought hard, but they had to be provoked.

Randy on the other hand was a little potato. Groundhogs weren’t fighters at the best of times.

“Well, we’ll go talk to him. I won’t take no for an answer, and if we have to get him help, we get him help. Not only that, but you know how that place is, I mean, that’s some rough trade around there.”

“We don’t have much money. It’s...it’s no big deal. We’re looking for jobs that are full-time, but it’s hard. We don’t have a lot of skills. There’s not much call for diggers around here.”

And that was what both badgers and groundhogs were good at. Digging, huh? “Well, we could probably find you something in construction that’s pretty useful. I’ve got some contacts. You kids have to talk to me though.”

“I’m not a kid.”

“You’re kid enough. Hey, I don’t suppose you know any porcupines?”

“Pardon me?”

“I’ve never met a porcupine shifter. I’ve seen videos, though, so I’m desperate to.”

“Yeah, sure. I know a whole family of them. They run a kabob joint.”

Quin hopped on his bike. “Hop on.”

“How are we going to get all three of us on if there’s something wrong?” Hiram asked.

“Nothing’s going to be wrong.” Dammit. “I’ll call my brother, though, and he can meet us. Are you serious about the kabob thing?”

“Yeah, they use their discarded quills. So that’s one less thing they have to buy. They run them through the dishwasher first. The kabobs are really, really yummy.”

Quin rolled his eyes. “Are they the stick through tomatoes and peppers kind of kabobs or form around with ground meat kind of kabobs?”

“They do all kinds. Most of them are vegetarian, but they’ll do meat specials, and some of them are wild. Crickets. Rabbit. Eel.”

“Wow. Okay, so we have to go there after we get Randy. That way we can feed him.”

“Okay, cool.” Hiram climbed on the bike behind him, hugging his waist after he put on the one helmet. He’d rather keep Hiram safe and worry about himself.

Hiram tucked into the vee of his back to avoid the wind, and they got to the boarding house about twenty minutes later. He texted Rian as soon as he got there.

Be on call. Possible beaten omega

Where?

Five points. Hiram’s boarding house

got it

He walked in with Hiram, who took him to the second floor. “That’s his room.”

“Stay behind me, okay? Just in case.”

“If something happens, I’ll go low.”

Quin chuckled. “Badger. I understand.” He knocked on the door, but there was no sound from inside. “Randy? Honey, it’s Quin. Can you let me in? I just want to talk to you.”

“I’m okay, Quin. You need to leave now.”

“Randy.” He leaned closer to the door. “I can help.”

“No.” Poor kid, his voice shook like a leaf. “Quin, I don’t want to cause you trouble. You have to—” The sound of flesh hitting flesh sounded, and he growled. Someone was in there with Randy, and they were hurting him.

“Whoever you are, I’m coming in.” He studied the door for a few moments, looking for the weak spot. Hinges or latch. On this one, it was the latch plate. It had been repaired several times.

“Quin! No! He’ll hurt you!”

He probably should have listened, but dammit, the idea that someone would pound on that sweet little groundhog made him see red, so he backed off and hit the door like a ton of bricks right at the touch plate.

It burst open, and he grunted, rolling across the floor because of his momentum.

Which meant the guy who swung a ham-sized fist at him missed. At least the first

time.

Holy fuck, the guy was big. What was he? Polar bear shifter? Looked like it with his white-blond hair and black eyes, but that was just an impression as he bent to grab Quin off the floor, lifting him up high.

“Oof. Run, guys!” he howled, kicking with both legs, trying to hit something sensitive.

“Quin!”

“Go!” He made it as command-y as he could, mimicking his brothers, who were alphas, dammit. “Find Rian!”

They ran, Hiram grunting, his badger noises so frustrated. But this guy could really hurt them.

He tried to memorize every detail about this guy so if he needed to report him to the cops, he could. And he focused all his mental energy into calling his brothers.

So what came out, of course, was Mate!

One huge hand wrapped around his throat, squeezing the air out of him and cutting off the flow of blood to his brain.

Thiago’s mental voice blasted through him. Quin! What’s wrong?

He whacked at the guy with his hand, then realized he still held his phone. Whatever this guy wanted, he would never let Quin keep it, so as he kicked the guy in the nuts and then fell to the floor, he flung it under the bed.

Find my phone, Thiago! Find it! He knew Thiago should be able to track his phone with his PI magic, dammit. Between that and?—

The bear was back, and his hands came down, clenched together, on Quin's neck, and everything went dark.

Thiago ran right into a wasps' nest and he didn't care.

His mate needed him.

There were police and crime scene tape up, and he refused to let it get to him, to freeze him and make him less effective.

No.

No, Quin needed him, and he'd be damned if he didn't do his job.

Graham was in his earpiece, and Thiago could hear the tick-tacking of his keys. "Tell me what you see."

"Shitty apartment building. Cops. Evidence of drug users on site. No evidence of Quin."

"Why was he there? Any idea?"

"Assuming extraction?" He dug through his bag of tricks, coming up with a badge in a wallet. He didn't have time to mess with these beat cops, and he would just bite their heads off if they interfered with him.

"You have credentials? You need to get me data. Photos."

“I’m on it.” He pulled on a sportscoat that he kept in the back of his car and headed across the street. He flashed his badge at the cop who tried to stop him from slipping under the yellow tape, growled a little at the kid guarding the door, and suddenly he was in the bedroom where his mate had lost consciousness.

He knew Quin wasn’t dead. His mate was silent in his head, but he knew Quin was still kicking.

“I’m in.”

“Start taking pics. What do you see?”

The police were milling around the living area, not too terribly concerned about what had happened. This was obviously a tough part of town, and he heard snippets of conversations regarding the renters, neither of which could possibly be Quin.

“I have some cast-off. The place has been tossed. Smells like wolf, but that could be Quin. It’s confusing.”

He smelled Quin, but then there was something close to Quin, but not quite Quin. The scent of blood and fear was kind of sunk into the place, which didn’t help either.

“Keep talking.”

“I’ve got some white hair, here. Totally smells of...bear?”

“White hair? Bear? That’s not happy making.”

“No.” Polar bears could be fucking violent, and the bastards were huge. “Someone’s going to die, and it isn’t going to be me, Graham.”

It wasn't going to be Quin, either. Someone was going to die, but they were going to suffer first.

Something on the floor glinted, and he frowned, leaning down to look. The gold wolf's paw necklace that Quin wore was shining there, broken on the floor.

"I have his necklace." He scooped that up, rumbling softly. "Someone tore it off him."

"Focus," Graham snapped. "Just focus on the facts."

"So what the hell happened here?"

He heard those words from the tiny little front room, and he knew that he was going to have to get a move on. "We have detectives," he whispered.

"Get out of there."

He couldn't. Not yet.

"Looks like a fight. Neighbors say that there was a tussle, a commotion, then somebody roared out of here. But the door was off the hinges. There's couple of blood drops."

There was a soft chuckle, then, "They should just shut this place down, set it on fire or something."

"I mean it, Thiago. Move."

"Uh-huh." Thiago kept one ear open, but he started searching. Someone had been in here and had just torn this place to hell. But he didn't think it was the person who was

living here. The clothes and bedding smelled of soil and dust, weirdly enough.

The blood was fresh.

“Thiago!”

“I hear you, Graham.” He just didn’t listen. He bent down to check a piece of paper that had fluttered to the floor when he saw it underneath the bed—Quin’s leather jacket phone case. The cover was silly but adorable, and it made Quin laugh. Thiago recognized it immediately, and he pulled it out and pocketed it. That was what he needed right there. That was his clue. It was time to get the hell out of Dodge. “I have his phone.”

“Excellent. Move your ass, pussy cat. Now.”

“—the other detective’s in there already.”

“What other detective?”

“Uh-oh.” He slipped out the window about the time that the bedroom door opened.

“What did I tell you about lingering at crime scenes, Thiago?”

“That it’s a bad idea, and I’m too reckless?”

“Bingo.”

By the time the big bulldog-faced man stuck his head out the window, Thiago was lounging, or pretending to, on the other side of the crime scene tape.

He got into his car and pulled out Quin’s phone. All right, mate. You left this for me

for a reason. What is it you needed for me to know?

“I need to get into his phone.”

“Well, we can work on it, but it will be way faster if you just call it yourself and see if you can’t open it that way.”

“Right on...”

Of course, it started ringing before he could call it, and he damn near dropped it.

“Someone’s calling.” The face on the screen was very familiar to him, a little different—shorter hair, less attractive, a little bit more geek and less stud, but not everyone could be perfect. Best of all, the name that came up was Symon. “It’s one of his brothers.”

“Put it on speaker.”

He swiped and said hello.

“Who the fuck are you and what have you done with my brother?”

“I’m Thiago. I found his phone. I’m trying to find him. Do you know anything?”

“I don’t know you.”

“No, and I don’t know you, but we have to find Quin. Do you know what was going on? Why he was here?” There was this silence, and he could tell that he was being put on mute, so he just kept talking, both to Symon and Graham. “I’m serious. I’m just trying to find him. I just want him back. He called for me. I found his phone. You called, I answered. We’re running out of time here.”

“We are.” Symon sighed when he came back. “Okay, we need to meet. The kids that Rian pulled out of that boarding house said that they’d headed out toward the industrial area. We have some information, and my mate, Adrian, is following up on it electronically.”

“I’ll patch him through to my business partner, if I may. He’s good at the dark web stuff.”

“Adrian will be so pleased.” Symon’s voice was dry as dust. “You know where the dog food plant is?”

Didn’t everyone? The thing was huge and right off the highway.

“Yes.”

“Meet us there. North lot. We’ll be in an Escalade.”

“Got it.” He memorized Symon’s number, just in case he couldn’t keep the phone open. Then he went in to change the sleep settings to try to keep Quin’s phone usable.

“You get all that, Graham?” he asked.

“Yeah. Be careful. I mean, by all accounts, this Symon is an upstanding guy, but we still don’t know him.”

“He’s Quin’s brother, so I have to trust him.”

“Right now, at least.” He could hear Graham’s grin. “I’ll get the computer geek’s number for you.”

“Good deal. I’ll get with him.”

“Thanks, Graham. Keep a line open for me.”

“I will.” They disconnected, and he raced out to the interstate to find the dog food plant. He needed to get there and reconnoiter, and he had a feeling he was closer.

He was right.

The Escalade he was probably looking for pulled in about five minutes later, and he stepped out of his own vehicle, sunglasses still on. He needed to keep himself calm and keep any advantage he could.

“You’re Thiago?” The man from the phone, Symon, stepped up to shake his hand.

“I am.”

Another man, this one looking really expensive, shook too. “Rian. The other brother.”

“I would be pleased, but this is shitty timing.”

“Yeah. We’ll chat later.” Rian studied him. “Jaguar?”

“That’s me.” He grinned, more a baring of teeth. “We’re wasting time.”

Symon nodded. “The boys told Rian that whoever did this had targeted Randy deliberately, knowing Quin had been trying to get him to go to the safe house.”

“So it was a setup. What have you got on the guy?”

“The muscle was a polar bear shifter. Randy pretended to be unconscious after the fucker hit him, and he overheard a one-sided phone call and a few raised voices shout from the other end. Says the bear is named Larry.”

“So Larry comes to the boarding house. Beats up Randy. Lets one of the other kids escape to go get Quin.”

“Hiram,” Symon agreed.

“Then grabs Quin. Why?” Thiago took off his glasses then, so he could stare them in the eyes, one at a time.

“We broke up a ring of omega kidnappers not too long ago, and since then, Quin has been rainbow railroading the kids out of town. Cuts into profits for a lot of people.”

“Yeah, so I don’t suppose Larry had a name for his boss.”

“No, but the kids got a partial plate. My mate is working on it.”

“I need him to call my guy,” he growled. “Now.”

“He’s already on it. They’re already hooked up and doing whatever it is they do that I’m not knowing anything about because that’s probably not very legal.” Symon glanced at him, then his brother. “And I would hate to have to get into trouble.”

Rian arched one eyebrow, lips tight. “I’m assuming that they’re going to have a ransom note or a call, and I’m guessing that it’s going to either come to Quin’s to the bar. So I suggest we get to the Hogg.”

Thiago could already tell that he was going to like Rian. He seemed way more straightforward and a little less woo-woo. “Then let’s go.”

He wasn’t going to waste any more time on this nonsense.

He needed to get his damn mate back.

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Chapter

Ten

Quin had been knocked out enough times that he knew exactly what was happening when he started to swim back to consciousness. He braced himself mentally against the headache, and he just let his body stay loose. Whoever or whatever had hit him, he wasn't home, he wasn't in the hospital, and he wasn't at the bar.

Which meant he was in trouble.

And the longer that whoever hit him thought he was unconscious, the better this was gonna go for him.

"What are we going to do now?"

"We make up our list of demands, and we get them to the person who can fulfill them. His one brother's a lawyer."

"I don't like this. I don't like this at all. I think that we should get rid of him—just slit his throat, dump him off, and let's get out of here. This is a stupid damn idea."

Okay, so he had Big and Growly who was the asshole who'd hit him, the polar bear. The second voice was equally big and equally growly, but different. He didn't dare open his eyes to peek, but the 'let's slit his throat' guy had to be small and, well, weasily.

In fact, Quin would bet that it was a weasel.

Possibly a rat.

Maybe a really mean little squirrel.

It was inevitable that squirrels were mean, because who wouldn't be when it was just a terrible situation. It was sort of like a Chihuahua—all the ferocity in the world and absolutely no way to deal with it.

Could it be a raccoon?

Nah.

Raccoons, while they tended to be morally flexible, were rarely murderers.

"We can't kill him until we get the money, and I want a list of all the safe houses. I've had enough of this shit." Oh, big and growly kidnapper number two, you are destined for disappointment.

"Don't you watch TV? None of this stuff ever goes well. It never, ever goes well, and you should know that." He could almost hear the little critter's whiskers twitching. "Ask for something reasonable, couple of million dollars, then kill him, then get out. They're not going to give up the damn safe houses."

"How exactly did you get into human trafficking if you were going to be such a coward?"

There was a grunt, then a scuffle, and then the polar bear roared.

This time, he did peek, and yep.

Weasel.

And weirdly, he looked just exactly like the ones in Who Framed Roger Rabbit , if he'd had a zoot suit on. How cool would that be?

Oh man, he was queasy.

The polar bear was bleeding, though. Not like oh I've stabbed you to death and you're bleeding or oh I've slit your throat and now you're dripping, but there'd definitely been a cut made. There was blood on the high cheekbone.

Impressive.

"Watch yourself, Fuzzy. You are not the brains behind this operation."

"No, that would be me."

Dude. Was that like a were-big horn sheep? Look at those curly horns. That was fascinating and creepy.

It kind of offended him on a deep personal level, honestly, that an herbivore would be running this whole thing. It just seemed like vegetarianism should breed better morality.

It was probably a stupid idea. In fact, it was absolutely dumb, but it was the only thing that was going through his brain. and right now, he was a little cracked to be honest.

Mate? Quin! CAN YOU HEAR ME?

His eyes rolled up in the back of his head, the sound like a chisel to his brain. EASY!

The entire universe had to have heard that.

Sorry. Sorry. Where are you?

Don't know. Somewhere big, echoy. Maybe a warehouse. There are three of them. There should be a ransom call 'ere long.

We figured. We've got a partial plate, but if you hear names...

We being you and my brothers?

Yeah, the phone trick worked. He could hear Thiago's proud smile, and it made him want to grin, but he kept his face still, slack, as if sleeping the sleep of the whacked on the head. Good. Good, now get me out of here.

What's the code to open your phone, just in case? And we're on it. If you get anything tell me, but I'll shut up so they don't know you're awake.

Okay, love.

God, it was comforting to know that Thiago and his brothers knew what was going on. Now he just had to keep the weasel from slitting his throat.

But he also wanted to know why these fucks were looking for where all the safe houses lived. Did they really think they were going to snatch all these omegas? And where the hell were they selling them?

Hang on, mate. I'm coming.

I believe you. And he would wait as long as it took.

Or as long as he had, anyway.

“He’s awake. He says they’re going to send a ransom demand. He has no idea where he is, but he says they were talking about it.”

Thiago paced, and he was about to tear a hole in the floor of the bar with it. He needed to find his mate, dammit, and he hated this shit.

“Then we’re at the right place. Or, if they send it to one of us, Adrian or Eyre will call us right away. And we have your Graham and our head of security, Cyrus, on it too. They can work wonders sometimes.”

He snarled. “You two are far too calm.”

“What are we supposed to be doing?” Rian was sipping a Coke with a tiny bit of Jack in it. Not enough to even slow him down, but Thiago guessed it helped. He couldn’t do it. He needed all his faculties for when he knew where his mate was being held.

Rian’s phone rang, and they all jumped, then he and Symon stared.

“Hey, baby.” Rian sat up out of his slouch. “Did the cameras get anything? Are you okay? All right. And Forrest is still with you? Good. Okay. No, it’s good you called Cy first, but send me a picture of the note. Okay, baby. Thank you.” He hung up.

“They brought the letter to my house,” Rian told them. “Eyre has it. They caught it on camera because the assholes didn’t know we had a battery backup, even if they knocked out the power. They also had no idea that Adrian set up a closed system so no signal jammer could take it out.”

Thiago had to admire that shit. “That’s a damn good system.”

“We try. Anyway, one of Cy’s men is following the drop guy, and the other one stayed with my mate. He’ll take Eyre to Boulder now, Symon. We have the contact we need so that we’ll communicate by phone now. We need Adrian to patch in to track my calls before I dial it, though.”

Symon bared his teeth in a totally wolfy grin. “He’s already ready.” Symon pulled out his own phone, and his fingers flew as he texted someone. When there was an answering chime, Symon nodded. “Go for it.”

Rian pulled out his phone. “I’ll put it on speaker, but let me do the talking.”

Thiago growled again. He was used to being the one in charge.

“Down, kitty. We’ll let you lead the rescue mission, since Quin said you were ex-military. But this is my area of expertise. Talking and negotiating.”

Thiago just nodded, not sure he trusted himself not to shout. He drew in a deep breath and then let it out. He could do this.

Rian called the number, waiting for it to ring before putting it on speaker.

“What took you so long, asshole,” the man who answered said.

“Interesting conversation starter,” Rian drawled. “I was not at home. My mate had to send me the note via text. You say you want to make your demands. What are they?”

“We want two million. We want you to stop messing in our business. And we want all the safe house locations in the Denver area with a twenty-four-hour head start.”

“That all seems highly unlikely, I mean, I can arrange the money all right, no problem.” Rian’s expression was pure wolf, the tone cold and crisp. “I’m not sure

what your business is, so it's difficult to say that we'll stop messing in it, and what was the other part? The safes and houses? Quin lives above the bar."

"Safe houses, asshole."

"What exactly is it that you think you want? I'm not following," Ryan said, stalling beautifully.

"Don't. I don't wanna play with you, and you definitely won't wanna play with me. We know your brother has safe houses. We want the locations."

Thiago didn't like this. Not even a little bit. They all knew no one was going to give up the safe houses, even if it meant Quin's death. And didn't that thought just horrify him? No. He would die first to bring Quin home.

"—what, is he running drugs now or something? Is this a thing?"

"Quit playing dumb!" someone who was not the original voice screeched.

"Shut up!"

"Look, I'm not my brother's keeper. I'm not even one hundred percent sure that I'm much more than my brother's lawyer who gets him out of jail periodically."

"Do you want us to cut his balls off? Because we will. We castrate his ass and then see if you would don't want to negotiate a little bit more."

Thiago was going to lose his mind. Just absolutely lose it, but Rian held one hand up and shook his head.

"If you're going to do all that, why don't you just ask him where the houses are?"

Wow. You've really pissed them off, Quin told him.

Yeah? Rian seems to be extremely handy at that.

You have no idea. It's literally his superpower.

Thiago rolled his eyes. Quin must be feeling better. Can you give me a sitrep?

There's a weasel, a bighorn sheep, and the polar bear. Weasel is knife happy and a little insane. Polar bear is the muscle. Believe it or not, the big horn is the goddamn boss.

Your prejudices are showing. He'd known plenty of herbivores who were willing and capable of doing violence, just like he'd met apex predators who were kind and gentle, generous to a fault. It wasn't all that uncommon even.

Right? The mental snort almost made him smile. The big news is I've just managed to get my hands free. Tell Rian to keep them talking. I'm gonna try to get at least out of range. The little one's knife looks sharp, and I like my balls attached.

He did too. In fact, he had recently adored said balls with his tongue. Good deal. Be careful.

If not, don't get caught, right?

Fuck him. He hurried over to where Rian was still talking in that dry, icy tone.

He grabbed an order pad and scribbled out a note.

Q is loose. Keep them talking.

“Look, you unctuous motherfucker. We want our money. Meet all of our demands by eight a.m. tomorrow, or we start carving him up.”

Rian’s eyes were like chunks of coal, just burning with rage. But he kept his tone light, amused. “Goodness, I would never have said you knew a word like unctuous, let alone how to use it in a sentence. Eight a.m. might be a bit much, considering the banks are now closed and they don’t open until eight. One can tell you’re not much for strategy.”

“Eight a.m., or you’re going to get your brother’s balls in a box by eight fifteen. Do you understand the words that are coming of my mouth?” The man slammed the phone down, and Symon swiped the phone before Rian could grab it.

“No throwing.”

“Dammit.” Rian growled. “I’m gonna kill that son of a bitch.”

“So if they can get the balls to you by eight fifteen, that means they’re not far from...whose house?” It made a difference, because that changed the radius.

“I think that means the bar,” Symon said.

Ha! Symon said. He loved that.

I’m heading up to the upper floors. I’ll let you know.

Relief flooded him. “He’s free and moving around so I don’t think it’s going to be eight. I think he’s going to be out of there soon. We just need to figure out where there is.”

Symon nodded. “Let me see if anybody figured anything out about the phones. These

guys aren't that bright."

"I don't guess you have to be when your job is to steal and ship."

Rian frowned at him. "Steal and ship? Really? Tacky."

"Sorry. Not a high-class type of guy." He wasn't ashamed of it, either.

"Bah, that just means you and Quin are well-suited. He likes to slum." Rian waved one hand. "What did you mean about steal and ship?"

That seemed obvious to Thiago. "You don't hear a lot about omega sex slaves here in the States, do you? They've got to ship them somewhere. I would think overseas is the best way to do it."

"The important part is getting Quin out of there," Symon pointed out. "And finding out where there is, so they don't just torch the place and burn Quin inside it."

He wanted to roar with that, but he kept it in. "Exactly."

I can see stuff from the upstairs window.

His heart started racing even faster. Good. What do you see?

The civic center. And it's totally where I would see it from the edge of the Capitol Hill area. So I'm close to Rian's house, not the bar.

"Morons!" Thiago snapped. "He says he's near your house, Rian. Not here."

"Then we need to get there. What did he see?"

“The civic center.”

“So Capitol Hill for sure,” Rian agreed.

“Isn’t that kind of a dangerous area?” Thiago asked.

“Oh, I live in a pocket of tree-lined streets with old mansions. And I’m a wolf. Who bought up the three properties surrounding me.” Rian winked.

“Nice.” Thiago had to admire that. Create the life you want had always been his motto too. “Can we go get my mate now?”

“Yes. Symon will ride with you to get you to my house, and we’ll work out from there.”

“Got it.” They all hopped in a vehicle, and as they took off, Symon’s phone rang. “Cy. You’re on speaker. He can see Civic Center Park from the Capitol Hills side.”

“That confirms what I thought. Now we just have to narrow it down. I’ve been canvassing that area.”

“We’re on our way. We’ll start at Rian’s. We might be able to pick something up, and by then he might be able to tell us more.”

“Got it, boss. I’m on the job.”

“I know. Thank you, Cy.” They hung up, and Symon slapped the dashboard. “Goddamn it, I want him out of there.”

“You think I’m not losing my shit?” He glared sideways at Symon, his hands clenching on the wheel as he drove. He was going to start shouting any minute. He

needed to see his mate. To hold him.

“I’m sure, but no offense, he’s been our brother for a long time.”

Now Thiago growled. “Would you allow anyone to say that to you about your damn mate?”

“Symon’s eyes flashed gold. “I would not.”

“Well, there you go.” He could follow Rian, as the hour was getting late, so he and Symon went without too much more chatter. They pulled into Rian’s house after what seemed like an age, though, and he kept asking where his mate was.

So far, Quin hadn’t gotten caught. But how much longer did he have.

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Chapter

Eleven

Quin crept along the bank of windows in the old office building, trying to find one he could get out of. Most of them were crusted shut, and even though he was on the second floor, he would hate to try without a fire escape. But when he finally came upon that window, not easy when Thiago was nattering at him, he heard the ruckus downstairs.

There was shitload of yelling. Which meant they knew he wasn't there anymore.

Shit.

They know, babe, he told Thiago. I got to scoot.

So break a window and make with the running.

I think that's a damn good idea. Where are you?

In an abandoned business park just across from Civic Center Park.

Fuck a doodle. Look for me. I think we're in the same place.

He gave up trying to raise the window and broke it, which set off an alarm. Maybe his mate and brothers would hear it.

Quin stepped out onto a damn shaky fire escape and ran, sliding down the ladder by holding the sides, and racing toward the parking lot he could see at the back of the complex.

“There he is! Get him!”

“Just shoot him!” Weasel voice screamed.

Shit. He began dodging and weaving, just in case. He didn’t want to get shot, but then, these guys didn’t seem like gun types, except for maybe the ram.

He saw the Escalade parked in the lot just about the time someone did shoot at him, and the hot air as the bullet went by was way too close.

Thiago! I see the SUV. Get everyone back to it. They’re shooting at me!

I see you, Thiago growled, just as another gunshot sounded. Covering you.

I sure as shit hope so. He got low, and he ran. That was really all he could do—trust in Thiago and run like hell.

That and hope his brother had enough insurance on the Escalade to cover any bullet hole repair. Of course, it was Symon. He had a bulletproof Escalade.

Quin had a headache, and he’d pretty much decided he didn’t want to do this anymore.

Just get in the fucking car, brother! I’ll buy you a cup of coffee and a bottle of Excedrin.

So. Fucking. Bossy.

He slipped into the Escalade, barking as a bullet tore through his jeans and scraped a hot line across his thigh. “Dammit! I like these jeans.”

“Not funny,” Thiago snarled.

“Sure it is.” He stuck his tongue out at his mate. “A little funny and also very true. I do like these jeans.”

“Shut up. All of you.” That was Cyrus, who was behind the wheel, and he tore out of there like their ass end was on fire, the wheels squealing on the pavement.

The man really could drive.

Thiago grabbed him, kissing him silly before pushing him down to wrap a piece of gauze from the first aid kit around his thigh to stop any bleeding. Symon was such a boy scout. His vehicle had everything.

“I’ll treat it better when we get to?—”

“My house,” Symon said. “We’ll stop and get Eyre, but I want us all safe somewhere remote.”

“No.” They all looked at him, but he shook his head. “They’re going to keep making trouble. We need to end this bullshit once and for all instead of just cutting off tentacles.”

“What exactly does that mean? Do you want to just go back?” Thiago stared at him, his eyes a little wild around the edges.

“What choice do we have? There are four of us. There’s three of them. Odds are in our favor.” Quin kissed Thiago again. “Let’s get the name of the boss.”

Cyrus gave him a huge, bright grin from the rearview mirror, then slipped him a Glock, the heavy piece perfect in his hand. “I love the way you think, man.”

“Do not encourage him. I will fire your ass,” Symon snapped. “I’ve already called the police. Let’s go.”

Quin rolled his eyes. Faboo. That would just confuse the hell out of everyone and slow everything down to a crawl. “What’s that supposed to accomplish? If we don’t catch the guy in charge, he’s gonna hire another bunch of assholes, and they’re gonna keep coming.” Quin shook his head. “No, I’m done playing with these pricks.”

Then Quin met Thiago’s eyes. I’m not being reckless. You know that if we don’t make our town unpalatable for them, they’ll just keep coming back. If they have to work for it, they’ll leave.

I still don’t like this.

I know. It didn’t matter, but Quin knew.

“Turn the car around. You said it was the Big Horn in charge?” Thiago asked Quin, even as Symon groaned.

“I’m surrounded by idiots. Adrian, we’re going back. Did you get access to the vehicle yet?”

“Not yet.”

Quin nodded toward Thiago. “Yeah. Very Colorado of them, having the local boss be horny.”

“We can pick him up, and then let the cops take the other two.”

“We don’t have to pick him up at all.” That was, in fact, not the plan. “I just need the other two taken out, and for everyone to follow my lead.”

“What does that even mean?”

“It means Mr. Puppy here is going to go crazy batshit wolf. We’re going to get to watch the hottest thing ever.” Cyrus grinned at him. “I love this game.”

Quin wanted to grin back at Cyrus, because the man understood him on a deep, personal level, but he didn’t want to get himself in trouble with his brother or his mate. “Just trust me. That’s all I need from you. I need a little trust and five minutes. It’s not too much to ask, right?”

Thiago nodded and sighed. “Five minutes. That’s it. I don’t like this.”

“I know, but it’s going to be okay. I’ve done this before.”

In fact, he was sort of an expert.

Thiago didn’t like this. To be honest, he didn’t like any little bit of it. He did have to admit that Quin was sure about it though.

Quin looked a little bit like he was burning up from the inside. Hair down and wild. Eyes flashing. There were bruises around his neck. Blood on his jeans.

It would have been hot if it wasn’t so discomfiting.

“Okay, we’re going to go in—I’m assuming they’re gonna to be hunting us, so Cyrus, ram the hell out of them. We’ll all brace ourselves, then Cyrus, you have the bear, Thiago gets the weasel.”

“Wait a minute,” Thiago growled, and Quin shook his head.

“I get the sheep.”

“I’m taking out the bear,” Thiago snapped. The bear had bruised his mate, kidnapped him. Shit was about to hit the proverbial fan. “He hurt you.”

“Okay.” Oh, that’s actually dear.

I’ll show you dear. He bared his teeth.

“But I wanted to hear the kitty grovel before you gave him the bear!” Cyrus could whine.

“I’m in, love! I’m in.” That came from Adrian.

Symon snapped. “Stop the car.”

To Cyrus’s credit, that Escalade stopped on a dime, throwing them across the back seat. “What?”

“Adrian’s in the GPS system. We can basically send them damn near anywhere, and? We have all their last knowns.”

“Excellent.” Quin growled, clearly ready for the fight. “Are they on the move?”

“They are, but we’re not far behind.” Symon was coordinating with Adrian, and Cyrus was getting a heading. These guys were a seamless team.

“Adrian says your guy Graham is good, by the way,” Symon snapped.

“Nice.” He rolled his head on his neck, preparing himself to take on a bear. A fucking polar bear. The good thing was the guy didn’t look to be in too great of shape. And Thiago was in peak condition.

He glanced at Rian as Cyrus pulled up on a big SUV, and he got a wild grin. He had a moment of panic, thinking Cyrus was going to pull a pit maneuver, but he didn’t have to do that or ram the assholes.

Their driver hit the curb and a tire blew, which sent their vehicle careening over into a parking lot, the brakes squealing as the fuckwads came to a stop.

The assholes piled out of the SUV and immediately started shooting at them, but the Escalade just pinged the bullets right off. Or caught them in the armor.

“Hang on!” Cy gunned it up over the curb, then made to mow the fuckers down. Thiago did approve of that.

They stopped shooting and scattered, the bear barely leaping out of the way. Thiago was out and after him before Cyrus fully braked, and he shifted, taking the guy down before he could blink, rolling him and starting to smother him with a bite, which was his MO.

The guy grunted and batted at him, eyes wide, then drooping as he started to lose consciousness. He needed this over so he could help the wolf with the wolf in big horn clothing.

Cyrus and Rian and Symon had the weasel locked up tight. No stress.

He held the bear down and didn’t let him shift, until he collapsed, passing out. Not dead.

Just snoozing.

Someone tie him up , he broadcasted as loud as he could, and he saw Rian flinch, but he was fighting tooth and nail with a horny sheep. Of the kind who could knock the shit out of him.

He moved in behind the ram to trip him up, and the guy bleated in surprise as he saw a jaguar. That was clearly unexpected.

Rian growled, the sound incredibly nice even in human form, as he hadn't shifted.

"Face it, dickwad," Quin spat. "You're outnumbered."

The guy shifted back to human and slumped to the ground, and Symon tossed Quin a blanket. "For god's sake, cover that up."

Quin bared his teeth and did just that while Cyrus came to truss the guy's hands. The weasel was out cold too.

"Put him in the back of the SUV," Quin said. "I have questions."

Symon lifted the sheep and put him in the back of the broken SUV, not theirs. Then Thiago stood guard and listened in while Quin started to question the guy.

It was awesome.

"Who's your boss?"

"Fuck you, man. You think I'm going to tell you dick?"

Quin grinned, baring his teeth. "Oh, I think you will." Quin leaned in, really close,

eyes beginning to glow. “But you know what, sweetheart? It doesn’t matter.”

Quin stroked the man’s cheek, the touch oddly gentle, before the touch sank all the way down the hard belly and almost to the man’s crotch—which Thiago admitted made him a little unhappy—before it slid over to the side, pulling out a phone and tossing it to Symon. “Because we’ll crack your phone, we’ll get everything we need, and then I just get to play with you.”

Quin’s bite was quick, the wolf flashing out so fast that Thiago wasn’t completely sure he’d ever even seen it.

But when Quin pulled back, the sheep’s lip was torn from the corner all the way down to the chin.

Just sliced wide open.

Quin licked his lips clean from the blood. “Oh, I do love the taste of a little mutton. And guess what, lamb chop? You’ll wear my mark forever. And if you don’t start talking soon? Well, I’ll just take you home with me and keep you in a pen. Then we could play like this. Forever.”

Thiago couldn’t decide whether or not he was going to cream his jeans or just die.

Just boom, right there, because—although he was sure that it was incredibly intimidating to Mr. Mean and Horny—for him it was luscious. Public foreplay.

Quin was the hottest motherfucker he’d ever seen.

So fast.

It was delicious.

Stop distracting me, love.

Me? You're making me hard in front of your brother. He shuddered . That's scary.

Do you like it when I'm a bad boy? Quin's face never so much as twitched.

I'll show you bad boy. When we get done with all this, first I'll pamper the hell out of you. Then I'm going to put you over my knee and beat your ass until you scream.

I like how you think.

You should. We mated for a reason.

Lamb chop looked out at the rest of them, his voice rising. "Are you going to just let him do this?"

"Yep." Rian beamed. "He's a little deranged and a lot pissed off. Better he take it out on you than us."

Symon simply walked back to their vehicle with the phone, smiling a little.

Thiago yawned. Deeply. Letting his teeth and claws show as he stretched. Fucker needed to be scared, dammit.

"You're fucking insane!"

"Lamb chop. You had me kidnapped. You tied me up. You were going to cut off my balls." Quin batted his eyelashes. "Are you sure I'm the one who's insane?"

The fluttering is a little over the top, mate.

I let you work. You let me work.

You know you're a little scary when you're like this.

Pussycat, I count on it. Quin focused on the big horn, his lips parted as he panted just the slightest bit. "Do you think when they talk about Rocky Mountain oysters that you would qualify? I mean you're a big guy. I bet they'd be really crunchy. Especially if we soaked them in milk."

"Get this motherfucker away from me!" Oh, that was a bleat. That was totally a bleat. The guy was cracking.

Time for him to shift back to human. He did, and pulled on the clothes Rian handed him.

"I'd start talking if I were you. He's got a taste for blood now. He's not a dog, you know." Thiago let his head kind of fall to one shoulder, as if he were contemplating something. "You do know that you're their natural prey, don't you? I mean, you're the reason they got rid of wolves in Colorado. Because of the sheep. Baa."

"He'll kill me if I talk."

"I'm going to kill you if you don't. Either way you're fucked." Quin shrugged, as if it didn't matter one bit. "At least if you talk, we'll get rid of him and let you go—with the assumption, of course, that you leave us alone, and if we see you again, we'll make you cry."

"You don't honestly believe you have a chance to stop all this?"

"I stopped you, didn't I? How many of your marks have I stolen away from you at this point? How mad is your boss about how much money you've lost? Pretty pissed,

I think, and then you got me and you couldn't even keep me." Quin clicked his teeth. "It's not a good look for you, and now he's gonna see the evidence right on your face of how badly it went. Want to rethink your position? You have until the count of ten." Quin chuckled. "One."

"I can't just talk to you. I don't know that much. I'm serious."

"Two."

The sheep looked to Thiago. "You've got to call him off. I don't know anything. And I mean it. I don't know anything!"

"Yeah, but is your phone gonna say that?" Thiago asked, singsong.

"Three."

Personally, Thiago thought Quin was actually having fun with all of this. Of course, he had been shot and strangled, so maybe he couldn't blame his wolf.

"Four."

By seven, the sheep was sobbing. By nine, Rian was counting, Thiago had his pants back open, and Quin was in wolf form, jaws snapping.

It was nice to work together toward a goal.

"Okay! Look, I'll tell you who my contacts are and where we send the omegas!" The sheep was wiggling away from Quin, just bawling.

Thiago grinned at his mate. "Now we're getting somewhere."

And then Rian pulled out his phone to record shit, and the sheep was talking. A lot.

About everything.

That was a good day's work.

Chapter

Twelve

By the time they got to Rian's house, Quin was drooping. Hard. He'd been beaten. Tied up. He'd shifted. And he'd gotten a good, solid lead on a human trafficking ring that went way deeper than the fuckers who had used Symon's Shiftr Inc. app to lure in omegas or than the sheep and his crew who had stolen omegas right out of Quin's bar...

They were all sitting in Rian's kitchen with his mate Eyre, who had ordered late-night Italian food. Symon's mate Adrian and their friend Isaac had come in from Boulder, too, and were munching on garlic bread and meatballs.

God, the Pallas kitty was adorable. He wondered if Thiago thought so too.

He knew Cyrus did. The big mountain lion had a thing. Isaac hadn't admitted they had a relationship yet, though.

"So do you really think the feds will deal with it?" Quin asked. Rian had called in a few personal friends among them, and it was a legitimate case with across state line kidnappings.

"Yeah. Not only is Grange a good guy, but I explained that they didn't want us dealing with this. Not even a little. So he's going to take over the case." Rian chuckled. "And I will ride herd on him."

“Good deal,” Thiago murmured, then took a long pull on his beer. “It should be easier with the information you got out of him, baby. The ram, I mean.”

“I sure hope so.” Quin scowled. “I am sick of this shit. I want the Front Range safe for omegas.”

“And everywhere else,” Thiago pointed out.

They all nodded soberly. Or not so soberly.

“I think it’s time for me to take my alpha to bed,” Adrian said, rising. “He looks grumpy.”

Symon snorted, then drained his beer. “That’s because I have to sleep at Rian’s house tonight.” He stood. “Come on, baby.”

They wandered off, hand in hand, and Eyre suddenly flushed. “Um. I think that sounds great. Babe?”

Rian beamed. “I agree. Come on. Night all. Turn the lights off when you’re done?”

Cy got up. “I’ll pack up the food.”

That was his cue. “Mate, I want a shower. Now.”

Thiago leaped to his feet, his cat’s reflexes not at all dimmed. “Of course, love. Come on.”

Quin knew it was babyish, but he held up his arms.

Thiago hoisted him right up, then carried him upstairs, pausing at the landing.

“Which way?”

“Since I got beat up, I called the guest suite with the biggest rainbath crosshead shower. So left and all the way to the end on the right.”

“Done.” Thiago paced to the end of the hall, then let him open the door.

“Oh, nice.” Thiago carried him to the en suite, then sat him down on the sink counter to start the water.

“Oh, the steam is already helping.”

“Do I need to clean any wounds for you?”

“No, babe. Let’s just get wet and soapy.” He rolled his head on his neck, the tendons popping.

“Oh, baby boy. You are having a time of it.” Thiago closed the shower door, came to strip him down, kneeling to take off his socks and pants last, then worked his way back up, massaging Quin’s sore muscles.

“Ohhhhh.” He moaned, his whole body clenching up and then releasing. So good. Those hands.

He could write odes to those hands.

Then it occurred to him. What if those hands were done in Denver? And Thiago had to move on to the next assignment.

He peered at Thiago, who was smiling a little, totally absorbed in what he was doing.

“So are you done here? I mean. What happens now?” Quin wasn’t sure he wanted to know, but he thought he’d better so he could prepare himself for the idea of Thiago leaving him and moving on.

He hadn’t asked for a mate. He hadn’t wanted one.

But he had one, dammit, so he intended to keep the fine son of a bitch.

“Now, I clean you up. Then, I’m going to take you to bed. There’s a very good chance that I’m going to make love to you. Then I’m going to hold you all night long. In the morning, I’m going to feed you again.”

He arched an eyebrow. “That’s not exactly what I meant.”

“I know.” Thiago kept petting and loving on him, relaxing him down on a cellular level.

He floated, and when Thiago washed his hair, massaging his scalp, Quin knew he was not just mated, he was in love.

In seconds, or maybe it was hours, he was rinsed and wrapped in huge towels, taken to the giant bed that, while not his, was amazing.

“Oh, this is lovely,” Thiago purred. “Your brother’s home is stunning.”

“It’s ostentatious and classy, but I’m always welcome here. Same with Symon.”

“You’re closer to Rian, I think.” Thiago got him settled in the blankets, scooting right in to cuddle with him.

Of course he was. Symon was...different than them. “He’s my lawyer. Naturally

we're close. He's the one that bails me out of jail on the regular."

Thiago snorted. "Happens often, does it?"

"It's an occupational hazard." He snuggled in with a sigh, stroking the long, lean planes of his mate. "Sometimes you have to keep your own peace." He met Thiago's gaze, putting his will into it. "I don't want you to leave, mate. Not now that I know how good it is with you."

Two alpha males, they'd say, anyone who looked at them. Little did they know.

There was something deeply, deeply satisfying about that.

Thiago refocused him with a long, slow kiss that started a fire in the pit of his belly, and then he rubbed their noses together. "I'll have to talk to Graham, of course. He's in California. We built this business together, you know? I can't wait to introduce you to him, but I don't see any reason I can't base myself out of Denver. It's a big city, and there's always work."

When Thiago grinned at him, seeming to be waiting for his response, he just blinked.

So Thiago forged on. "Let's be honest, my business partner? The bear? He hibernates, and I'm not huge on stakeouts outside in the winter. So we tend to do six months on, six months off."

Quin blinked at him, his mind spinning. "So what does that mean? I mean, six months on, six months off. Do you? I mean—" Quin wasn't used to being so confused. "Do you have a house? Where is it?"

How did he not know this stuff? They were mates, but this was all so new. "How can I know nothing about you?"

“Because, mate, we spent days fucking like needy bunnies, and then you got yourself kidnapped.”

“What? I did?—”

Thiago winked at him, playing hard. “I have a storage building. I have a really good chair. It’s a double recliner with buttery soft leather and this pillow I picked up in Morocco.” Thiago thumped him with his head, scenting him. “It would go really well in the loft.”

Oh. All right, that felt better, knowing that Thiago wanted to bring his chair. His shit from storage. That actually felt lovely.

“I like chairs.”

“I like you.” Thiago purred. “So... I don’t have to worry about renting a little house anymore?”

He shook his head, fingers tangling in Thiago’s hair and tugging, just enough for his mate to feel. “No, that would be a waste of money because you’ll be with me.” Quin swallowed, even though his throat hurt a little bit. “However, I have to warn you; I do own a biker bar. I don’t suppose that’s going to be a problem.”

“Only if you don’t start stocking cachaca. That could really be an issue for me.”

“Cachaca and limes. Got it. I’ll get a bottle just for you.” He would get two—one for the bar and one for the loft—and put Thiago’s name on them.

Thiago pushed over top of him, licking a long line along his jaw, heavy cock sliding along his thigh and making him shiver. “You’re good to me.”

“I’m better for you.”

Quin wasn’t sure how he’d managed all this, but he was fairly sure he didn’t care. He’d fought the good fight for years. It was about time that someone fought alongside him. And that he took something for himself. Something that was his and not his and his brothers’.

“Focus, baby boy.” Thiago nipped his jaw, the sting enough to make his eyes cross. “We’ll plot tomorrow. Tonight is ours.”

“It is.” He wrapped arms and legs around Thiago. “And I want you to knot me so hard I can’t see.”

“Your wish is my command, baby.” Thiago grinned down at him, and he hummed, laughing when Thiago bit him just hard enough to sting. Tonight was going to be amazing.

Tonight and every night after this. They’d earned it.

They deserved each other.

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Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 7:31 am

The bar was rocking.

Quin was in the zone, slinging beer alongside two bartenders and a bar back, making cocktails and delivering food.

They were having a special tonight on Brazilian cheese bread and feijoada with rice.

A lot of the bikers had never even heard of it, but they just called it black bean stew and ate bowl after bowl of it. Quin approved, because it had all been cooked ahead of time except for the rice, and Thiago had shown his cook the most amazing microwave rice cooker that could do a huge batch of rice to perfection in about twenty minutes...

His mate sat at the corner of the bar where it met the back wall, watching everyone and everything. He was nursing one caipirinha, just cruising along like he did most nights that he wasn't on a missing persons case around the city.

There was, unfortunately, still a lot of work for Thiago to do, and thanks to Rian, he was developing a good relationship with the LEOs and the local office of the Feds.

A ripple ran through the bar as the front door opened, and two very slinky, pretty omegas walked in, followed by a chonk of a Pallas kitty with a scowl on his face.

Oh, Eyre and Adrian looked amazing. Eyre wore a torn-up T-shirt with the Star Wars rebellion flag on the front, leather jeans, boots, and lots of eyeliner. Adrian wore dark jeans and a green henley, but he looked so damn happy that he glowed, drawing attention from all corners.

And Isaac...well, he always looked grumpy.

His brothers and Cyrus followed, looking utterly out of place in their pressed and creased jeans, Rian in a big sweater of some stupidly expensive Aran knit, Symon in a silk shirt and sports jacket. Only Cy blended in, his jeans, boots, leather jacket, and T-shirt hitting just the right notes.

“This going to be some weird corporate bar now?” Lazy Jack asked him, banging his beer on the bar.

“Watch it, man. That’s my family.”

Jack gaped, and he wiped his hands before ducking under the bar bridge and going out to give hugs and grin at Eyre and Adrian. “Sexy. Isaac, try to smile.”

Isaac bared his teeth. “I need a beer. I was on a roll, about to beat the game, and Cy made me come out tonight.”

“Quelle horreur.” He winked. “You guys want a table? I assume you’re here for Brazilian night?”

“Of course.” Rian winked. “Thiago made the feijoada, right?”

“Last night. Yeah. And there’s cheese bread and rice.”

Cy moaned. “I am so in.”

Thiago came to join them, kissing all three omega’s cheeks and shaking hands with his brothers and Cy. “Let’s clear off that big round table in the back, guys, and we’ll join you for a bit.”

God, his mate was hot. Those golden green eyes and that hair that defied description

with its jaguar markings was just... And the way Thiago moved was like the hottest sex song on earth.

He got a glinting grin, a little brush of their bodies together, Thiago clearly hearing his thoughts.

They moved a couple of snoozers from the back table, and after he got drinks and put in the food order, Quin went to join his family, proud of them for just coming to see him and not being weird.

“So, it’s odd to come to your bar and not be looking for bad guys,” Rian told him.

“I know!” Adrian’s fingers skated over the table, his own jeans, Symon’s legs. A hacker’s hands were never still. “But it’s cool just to come have a drink, right, Eyre?”

“Super cool. You need a dance floor.”

Quin snorted. “Then most of my clientele would leave.”

“Yeah, we don’t want that,” Cy teased.

“Bite me,” he told the big cougar.

“I don’t think so,” Thiago growled.

They all laughed at that, but it was Symon who raised his glass, toasting them all. “To us. A family. Weird as we are.”

“To us,” they all echoed, and he shared a special glance with Thiago.

A family. And for the first time in a long time, Quin felt as if he actually belonged.

Their mates had changed their lives.

And he couldn't wait to see what happened next.

End