

Loose Id

# *Second Time Around*



BOBBY MICHAELS

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## Dedication

*This novel is dedicated to my caring and supportive editor, Crystal, and to everyone living, as I am, with HIV.*

## Chapter One

“How could I have been such a fool?” I said out loud to the room filled with boxes and furniture.

I was engaging in my most recent favorite activity -- berating myself. It had started over six months ago when I found out my lover of ten years -- wonderful years they had seemed to me but evidently not to him -- was having an affair with a kid who was six years younger than me and ten years younger than my lover. My now ex-lover had even set the twenty-two-year-old up in an apartment and bought him a car.

In fact, that's how I found out about the whole situation. The annual bill for auto insurance came in and there was a car and a driver listed on the bill that I had never heard of. I called the insurance company to tell them there had been some kind of mistake. It was then the agent informed me that there was no mistake. The additional driver and car had been added three months before by my partner.

When I confronted him with this information, he at first tried to lie his way out of it, claiming that the “boy” was nothing more than a distant relative that he was helping out to get settled in San Francisco. I would have bought it, too, except for the fact that I knew from his own mother he had no relatives that young, on either side of the family. It only took about an hour to get him to admit to his little “fling” on the side. It took until the next afternoon, when he was at work, for me to pack my bags and empty what was left of the joint checking account. Luckily, while we had been looking for a house to buy for about two years, none had ever materialized that both of us could agree on. I also closed the antique shop I had opened several years before and had a moving company pack it up and put everything into storage until I decided where it was I wanted to go.

Not wanting to remain in the same city with all the memories of our life together, I made the decision to move home to the small town of Star Harbor, on the coast of

Washington. I had been born there but had not gone back since the death of my parents. They had been caught in a squall off the coast in my father's sloop and had both drowned. I still owned the house I had grown up in but the memories of my mother and father had made going there something that was emotionally very difficult for me. But now, with the break-up of my relationship, I had come home to "lick my wounds." I guess that in times of deep emotional upheaval we are all drawn toward home.

Star Harbor is a town of about fourteen hundred on an island sitting off the shore of the Washington coast and connected to the mainland by a bridge and a ferry. The town's greatest asset and the source of its industry and tourism was the ocean. There was still a small fleet of fishing boats that plied the treacherous waters off the coast to eke out a meager living. Brave men who faced the dangers and loneliness of the sea, and hardly a year went by that one of them didn't lose his life to those waters.

I had been home for about two weeks but had been so busy renting and setting up my new antique shop on Front Street that I hadn't had a chance to really unpack and set up the house. I was grateful I had taken the time, after their deaths, to clean the house of my parents' clothes and things. All that was left was my own room, basically just the way I'd left it at eighteen when I moved to San Francisco, and a few "heirloom" pieces of furniture which included my mother's dining room set in East Lake style with a hutch filled with her china, crystal and some keepsakes. There was also a sideboard filled with tablecloths and napkins, many of them from my grandmother and great-grandmother, which were intricately embroidered by those two women of an earlier century. While they were not exactly my taste, I couldn't bring myself to part with them though who I was going to "hand them down" to was anybody's guess as I didn't plan on getting pregnant and I sure wasn't in the market to start sleeping with women -- even after the disastrous relationship I'd just gotten out of.

From my own stock of antiques, I had brought a number of pieces home to fill the house, among them a pair of Mission Oak glass door bookcases and an Art Nouveau secretary. The living room now also held my three prize possessions: a pair of Prairie style table lamps from the workshop at Taliesin, the fabled design studio of Frank Lloyd Wright, and a Handel palm-overlay desk lamp. Now, it was just a matter of getting all of my books, CDs and DVDs out of the cartons and onto the shelves and to hang the three Michel Delacroix prints that were my favorites.

I had to do this on Sunday because it was the only time my shop was closed. I had even considered opening today because of it being tourist season, the time when the sleepy little coastal town of Star Harbor's population nearly doubled. From what I'd heard in town at the Star Harbor Diner last night during a late dinner, there wasn't a room to be had for miles around. All of the motels and the bed-and-breakfast places were filled to capacity. But I couldn't stand the chaos of all the unpacked cartons another day.

I was also starting to become accustomed to living in Star Harbor again. After living in San Francisco, it was still a bit of an adjustment, even if I had grown up in Star Harbor. I still

knew a lot of people in town but the town had grown since I was a kid. More people had moved there either as retirees or to have weekend places. There was one resident of Star Harbor that I knew I wouldn't see and, to be honest, I was grateful.

His name's Josh. Josh Harrison. He was my best friend from the time I was about five and we met in kindergarten. He only lived a couple of minutes from my house, through a large wooded area that lay between, and we became inseparable. Two things happened as we grew up and went to high school, however, which were of tremendous difficulty for me and my friendship with Josh.

The first was my discovery that I was attracted to other boys. Finding out you're gay is a very traumatic occurrence, especially when you're only fourteen and don't understand that much about sex anyway. I had heard the words "queer," "fag" and "cocksucker" bandied about on the schoolyard most of my life and had always felt a vague discomfort at them, even though they weren't directed at me. When I finally understood what they actually meant and, worse, came to realize that they did refer to me, even if no one else knew it, I went into a tailspin emotionally. There was no one I could talk to, no one I could tell. Especially not Josh. Especially because of the second thing that happened.

Along with realizing that I was "queer," I discovered that I was "queer" for my best friend. Actually, that's not exactly accurate. I thought at first that I was merely sexually attracted to Josh. After all, he was a true "stud-hunk!" By the time we were in high school, Josh was already well on his way to the eventual six foot two inches tall that he grew to. He also had, thanks to playing every sport there was and a weight set that his dad bought for him, a beautiful, muscular body to go along with his "All-American-Boy-Next-Door" drop-dead good looks. So, at first, I thought it was just my adolescent gay hormones raging out of control where Josh was concerned. The second thing was, I discovered to my horror that I wasn't just sexually attracted to Josh; I was head-over-heels in love with him. My very first love and it had to be my "straight-as-an-arrow" best friend.

And that pretty well described Josh -- "straight-as-an-arrow." A boy who was a natural leader, who was filled with a strong sense of himself and a moral code that made him kind to everyone and a protector of the "bullied" on the playground and in the high school halls. Everyone looked up to Josh. The other guys on the football and wrestling teams and, of course, the cheerleaders -- most of whom became Josh's personal harem. That was the only "different" thing about Josh. He was the only attractive male in our high school who never "went steady," never had a long-term girlfriend. By the end of our senior year, most of the guys were just about walking down the aisle but Josh was just as single as he'd always been. I, of course, was as well. But, then again, I wasn't exactly a "jock" like Josh.

That's the strange thing, how we ever remained friends. We couldn't have been more different. Josh was tall and well built and a jock. I was short (I never made it past five foot seven), slender (barely one hundred thirty pounds soaking wet most of high school), and a nerd. Josh was popular and outgoing. I was painfully shy and ignored by everyone. I was so



shy, in fact, that I purposely blew an English final my senior year so that I wouldn't end up as valedictorian and have to make a speech in front of the whole school at graduation.

But remain friends we did. Josh always found time to spend with me. Even with all his jock friends and his dating, he always found time for me. Sometimes, he would even show up after a date, climbing up the column that supported the balcony outside my room and knocking at the French doors. We'd spend the rest of the night talking or playing video games and would end up sleeping in my bed together just like we did when we were little kids. Those were the best and worst nights of my life. Having Josh next to me, feeling his body close to mine, smelling the very masculine scent of him but knowing that I couldn't touch him the way I truly wanted to or feel him touch me, was an exercise in sweet frustration.

The friendship remained all through high school but when graduation came, Josh and I went our separate ways, me to the University of California at San Francisco and Josh, to the shock of everyone, to the Marine Corps. Josh, who'd been offered a number of athletic scholarships, blew them all off and signed up for the Corps. He didn't tell his parents, he didn't even tell me. Not until the night before he was to leave for boot camp. He tried to explain to me why he opted for military service rather than college, but I just couldn't understand. It seemed like such a waste to me but I loved him enough to keep my qualms to myself and, instead, gave him my verbal support for his decision -- something his parents hadn't done. In fact, had Josh not been eighteen, it was very clear, from what he said, that his parents would never have allowed him to go.

However, the friendship didn't survive after that. I have to admit that it was my fault. I was so busy in college, not just working my ass off but exploring the gay life that San Francisco had to offer at the same time, that I wasn't very good at answering the letters that Josh sent until they finally just stopped coming. I felt bad but I knew that I had to get over him. There was no chance of my dreams concerning Josh ever coming true and, at last, I was able to move on and that's when I met the man who was now my ex-lover.

So, yes, I was glad that Josh was in the Marine Corps and not in Star Harbor. That would be all I needed -- to see him again after being all but emotionally destroyed by my ex-lover. No, I hoped Josh was happy, maybe even happily married and far, far away.

As I put away the CDs and DVDs, I couldn't help but notice that the bulk of my collection of DVDs was musicals and romantic comedies. *How typical for a love-sick gay boy*, I thought to myself. And I guess that pretty well described my mood -- sick of love. Sick of males and sick of gay males, in particular. Sick of the fact that they couldn't keep their dicks in their pants and went chasing after every young, good-looking thing that came along. Oh, I wasn't claiming to be a saint but even during my early "exploratory" days in the gay life of San Francisco, I had been discriminating and somewhat tentative about the steps I took, engaging only in oral sex. After all, there were killer diseases out there and, to put it bluntly, I wasn't dying for a fuck.

More importantly, what I was looking for wasn't a "one-night stand." I wanted someone to love who would love me -- and only me. But it seemed that the man who was able to do that and keep that commitment hadn't arrived on the scene yet. Or, and this was my worst fear, he didn't actually exist. I knew that, given the opportunity, straight guys were no better, really, at staying faithful. Maybe it was just that sex wasn't as easy for them to get as it was for gay men. Maybe our over-sexed gay culture just offered too many alternatives? Well, it didn't for me.

Looking at things realistically, however, I realized that Star Harbor offered next to nothing in the way of eligible candidates and, for now, that was just fine with me. I wasn't ready to get involved with another guy. Certainly, I'd have a very hard time trusting one after the number my ex-lover did on me. No, I figured I was much better off not being anywhere near the temptation of falling in love again. Not for a long while. Unfortunately, a small part of my mind kept screaming "Bullshit!" to these thoughts.

The next morning, I went into the store early. I had decided that I wanted to have a grand opening reception and I needed to start working on the advertisements and the logistics of it. Had this been San Francisco, this would have been no problem at all. I would have simply called up my favorite caterer and the advertising company that I usually hired to do ads for the store and that would have been it. However, Star Harbor didn't have an advertising company of any kind and nobody in the town did the type of catering I needed done. In fact, the only place you could hold an affair in town was at the Star Harbor Inn, which did all their own catering. As far as I knew, they didn't do it for anyone else.

I decided, therefore, to keep things extremely simple. A few cases of good California wine, cheese and fruit. Nothing fancy but something that I could handle by myself. The wine was the easiest part. I simply went online to my favorite Napa Valley winery and ordered eight cases -- four of a nice Cabernet Sauvignon and four of a good Chablis. For the cheese and fruit platters, however, that was going to be a little bit harder. I decided to put off working on that and, instead, headed out for the office of the local newspaper. Of course, Star Harbor wasn't big enough to have a daily newspaper, but it did have a weekly called *The Star Harbor Gazette* or, usually, just *The Gazette*.

I remembered the paper well from when I was a kid because my very first job was delivering *The Gazette*. I made a whopping three cents for every paper I delivered, which worked out to be about three dollars per week. But, when you're nine years old, three dollars seems like a fortune. Walking into the office brought back memories to me of those days. The office didn't seem to have changed a bit except where there used to be big black typewriters now there were computers on the desks. A young woman about my age was standing at the counter.

"Can I help you?" she asked and then she looked at me curiously. "David? David Stone? Is that you?"

"Yes," I answered tentatively.

She obviously knew me but I couldn't place her at all. She was a few inches shorter than I was with dark curly hair, which fell down past her shoulders. She had what would be considered a good figure on a woman -- not that I was the least bit interested in that.

"You don't recognize me, do you?" She smiled. "I don't imagine you would. I'm Gretchen. Gretchen Childers. We went to school together. But now it's Gretchen Kelly."

I looked at her in shock.

"Gretchen?" I exclaimed. "My God! You've changed."

I remembered Gretchen as weighing a great deal more than she did now and with a terrible case of acne and braces. She had been one of the fattest and homeliest girls in the senior class.

"Yeah, I have." She laughed. "Lost the weight, lost the braces and my face cleared up. Now I'm married to a great guy who's a fireman. I work here part-time to help out Dad."

That's when I remembered; her father was the owner of *The Gazette*.

"I can't believe it. You look great," I said.

"Thank you, kind sir." She laughed but it was apparent she was pleased with my comment. "So, what can I do for you?"

"I want to take out an ad."

"Classified?"

"No. A full page. I want to announce the grand opening of my antique shop."

"Oh! So you're Stone Antiques. I saw the shop but I haven't had a chance to come in and browse yet."

"You're welcome anytime."

"I'm sorry, though, that I can't help you. I only do the classified ads. Dad does all the commercial ads. Especially a full page one. He'll be very pleased but he's not in yet. Why don't I have him drop by the shop and talk to you once he's in?"

"Sure. That will be fine. It will also be a first. He's never come to me before."

Gretchen looked at me oddly.

"You probably don't remember, but I used to deliver *The Gazette* when I was a kid," I explained.

"No, I never knew that. Well, now you'll be an advertiser instead."

"Yes, if I can just find someone to cater this affair."

"What kind of catering are you looking for?"

"Oh, just finger food. I already have wine so I just figured on cheese and fruit platters but I have no idea where I can get them around here."

"Well...you're not going to believe this but my husband, Tom, isn't just a fireman. He also does catering on the side."

"You're kidding. Could he handle my grand opening?"

"I don't see why not. Why don't I have him stop by as well, since he's not working today?"

"That would be great. You've solved all my problems in one fell swoop."

"Happy to be of help. Maybe you'll give me a discount?"

"Gladly. You can have twenty percent off anything in the shop."

"I'm going to take you up on that."

"It will be my pleasure."

A few minutes later, I took my leave of Gretchen and headed back up the street. Since it was still early, I decided to stop for some breakfast at the Star Harbor Diner. Because it was early, only the regulars seemed to be there and not many of them. The waitress, a fortyish, rather brassy blonde named Wanda brought me a cup of coffee.

"Fresh blueberry pancakes this morning," she said.

"Oh, I shouldn't but I can't resist." I smiled at her.

"Honey, as slender as you are, you can handle it. Now me, I gotta stay away from them or I ain't gonna be able to get into this uniform anymore." She laughed, pointing to the pink nylon uniform with a white apron -- the same uniforms I remembered from my childhood. "You look familiar. You lived around here long?"

"I grew up here but I've been living in San Francisco for the last ten years."

"I thought I recognized you. You're Marge and Harold Stone's boy, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said, sobering at the mention of my dead parents.

"Honey, I'm so sorry for your loss. Your folks were just about the nicest people this town ever had. We were all broken up over their loss."

"Thank you. I miss them a lot," I said quietly.

"I'm sure you do, honey," she said, putting a gentle hand on my shoulder. "Oh! Look at me, making your day sad and it's just starting."

"No. It's okay." I smiled up at her. "So! Bring on the blueberry pancakes."

"Comin' right up." She gave me a smile and headed off to the kitchen.

After breakfast I headed back to the shop to open it. I put on a pot of coffee and it wasn't long after I did that a tall, good-looking man about my age came in. It was apparent that he had a very muscular body, which showed in the tight, black T-shirt he was wearing and the tight jeans. Having been in the antique business for a few years, I pretty well knew antique buyers and I felt he didn't look like one so I wondered what it was that he wanted.

"Can I help you?"

"Are you David Stone?"

"Yes."

"I'm Tom Kelly. You talked to my wife this morning about needing catering?"

Now it made sense. The body was that of a guy who fought fires and rescued people for a living. The auburn hair and green eyes, not to mention the freckles across his nose, told me that he was as Irish as his last name.

"Yes, I do. Thank you for coming over so quickly. Listen, why don't we sit down and discuss this? Would you like some coffee?"

"Sure, if it's not too much trouble."

"No problem at all. I just made a pot, so it's fresh. Why don't we go in the back so we can be comfortable?"

I led the way back to the small kitchen/break room at the back of the store. We sat down at the small table and I poured each of us a mug of coffee.

"How do you take it?"

"Black's fine for me."

I got out the cream from the refrigerator and poured it along with several spoonfuls of sugar into my own cup.

"You like it white and sweet, I see."

*Like I like my men*, I thought to myself but didn't dare say it. Tom was certainly one good-looking stud but he was straight. Not only that, he was the husband of someone I knew from school. I guess I was just going to have to get used to dealing with nothing but straight guys again.

"Yeah. I grew up drinking it that way."

"So, what do you want to do for your grand opening?"

"Well...my first idea was to just do something simple like cheese and fruit since I thought I was going to have to do it myself."

"We can still do that, if you want to," Tom said, but his voice and the look he gave me conveyed that was WAY beneath him.

"No. Now that I've found an honest-to-God caterer, I want to do this right. What would you suggest?"

"Well, we can do canapés and hors d'oeuvres, both hot and cold. Are you going to have a bar?"

"No, I was going to serve red and white wine."

"All the better. How many do you expect?"

"That's just it. I don't know. If this were San Francisco I would, but I don't know how many people are liable to show up for something like this."

"While this isn't San Francisco by a long shot, you might be surprised at the number that turn up. After all, Star Harbor's social calendar isn't exactly overflowing with events."

God! I liked his smile. Open and honest. And I was beginning to like the big Irishman behind the smile as well.

"I figured I would open for about four hours, from about four in the afternoon until eight at night. I was thinking that I could do that on Friday night and that might attract customers to come back on Saturday."

"That sounds like a great idea. So when do you want to do this?"

"I figured in about three weeks. Does that give you enough time?"

"More than enough. It also gives me enough time to make sure I'm not at the firehouse that night. That's the only real problem I have with this business is making sure that I'm free for events."

"What are you going to do for servers?"

"Well, Gretchen usually helps out and I've got some high school boys that I usually hire to handle the food. Gretchen and I can handle the wine since they aren't allowed to."

"In that case, you seem to have everything well in hand. Now all we need to do is talk numbers and price."

We settled on planning for one hundred and Tom quoted me a price, which was way below what it would have cost me in San Francisco.

"Okay, just give me the contract to sign and I'll give you a check."

"Contract?" Tom asked, smiling. "We just made it."

"Oh," was all I could answer.

I'd forgotten that part of small town life. A man's word was his bond. There was no need for written contracts or estimates or things like that. I wrote Tom a check for the full amount.

Later that morning, Mr. Childers also came by the shop, just as Gretchen had promised. And, just as she had also promised, he was very pleased that I wanted to take out a full-page ad. He promised to have the proofs for my approval the early part of next week. We then sat and reminisced for a while about when I was a boy and used to deliver the paper until he said he had to get back to the newspaper office.

That night, as I sat drinking a cup of hot tea, I thought to myself that my grand opening was probably going to be the biggest thing that would happen for me in Star Harbor all year. Maybe all decade.

I couldn't have been more wrong.

## Chapter Two

The next three weeks flew by. Because it was tourist season, the shop was quite busy and I was getting home later and later every night. I was also having more and more of my meals in the diner because I just didn't have the energy to shop or cook. Every night I came home, intending to watch some television or maybe a DVD but ended up crawling into bed, too tired to do anything else.

I quickly decided that it just wasn't worth opening the store on Sundays. I could make more money, especially from the tourists, but I found I needed at least one day off to recharge my batteries and to get personal things done -- like laundry and shopping. The Sunday before my grand opening, I drove over to the larger town of Westport and went grocery shopping, stocking up on some nice, large, juicy steaks. My father, the year before the accident, had built a grill in the backyard and then converted it to propane so grilling outside was as easy as cooking on the stove.

By the time I had gotten the laundry done and had gotten around to finally turning on the grill outside, it was dusk -- almost dark, in fact. I was only wearing a tank top and a pair of old gym shorts in the warm evening air and I had just put one of the steaks I'd bought that day on the grill when I looked up to see a large, dark shape near the woods at the back of the yard. It looked like a very large dog. In fact, just about the largest dog I'd ever seen in my life. It was mostly black and silver and looked something like a German Shepherd but more wolf-like.

Thinking that the dog was obviously drawn by the scent of the cooking meat, I didn't think anything more of it. I just continued to stand at the grill, shaking some spices and pepper onto the steak as it cooked. I nearly screamed, therefore, when I felt something cold and wet touch my bare leg. I looked down to see the dog staring up at me. His mouth opened and his tongue lolled out in evident hunger at the smell of the cooking steak. His teeth were

visible in what looked, at least to me, like a grin as he stared at me as if to say, "You gonna share some of that?"

He really was enormous. Standing on his four legs, his shoulder was almost level with the top of my thighs and his head was well past my hip. I suppose I should have been afraid of something that big but he seemed so friendly and I just got this overwhelming feeling from him that he had no intention of hurting me.

"Not the least bit shy, are you? You must be really hungry."

The dog gave a rather high-pitched whine and then nodded his head. I swear! It was almost like he was agreeing with me. He again reached his nose forward, only this time he didn't so much as touch my leg with it as take a long, deep sniff of my skin. In fact, I could feel the air rushing across the skin of my leg and into his nose as he inhaled my scent. Then I could feel the moist warmth of his breath as he breathed out against my leg. His rough tongue then slowly licked my leg, just once, before he again looked up at me with that grin on his face.

"What's this? You deciding which would taste better? Me or the steak?"

Without even thinking twice about it, I reached down and scratched between his ears. He obviously enjoyed this because I could again hear his little whines of pleasure while I did it. As I continued to scratch and stroke him, I did notice two things. First of all, that his fur was thick and coarse, much coarser than any dog I'd ever petted before. I also noticed that he had no collar or identification. I wondered who was careless enough to just let a beautiful animal like this run loose. *Maybe*, I wondered to myself, *he doesn't have a home? Maybe he's a stray?* But he seemed too healthy and well cared for to be a stray.

The steak was done so I carried it over to the outdoor table and sat down. I had previously baked a potato in the microwave and had also roasted an ear of corn on the grill in foil. I started in on my meal and my furry friend sat down right next to me, his head high enough that it was above the top of the table. He kept looking at me in the way dogs have which tells you they are hoping that you will be good enough to share whatever it is you have with them.

I knew if I offered him food, I would more than likely end up with him visiting me on a rather regular basis but, since I was alone and, though I hated to admit it, somewhat lonely, the canine companionship did seem preferable. And all it was going to cost me was a little steak.

Did I say a little? Try about half! The more pieces of the rare meat I fed him, the more he seemed to want, always grinning at me with that mouthful of teeth. Unfortunately, I am a dog lover and I just couldn't bring myself to say no. I figured that from then on, I was going to have to buy larger steaks. Once the steak was devoured, I thought he'd probably leave but, instead, he just lay down beside my chair while I finished the ear of corn and the baked potato. Once I was finished, I picked up the dishes and utensils and headed for the house. I



wondered if he'd follow me but, instead, he leaped to his feet, gave me one last grin, and loped off back into the woods at the back of my property.

I really didn't think any more of it until very late that night when I was awoken by what sounded like a wolf howling in the woods. Of course, there were no wolves in Star Harbor. Oh, there had been, maybe a hundred or more years ago but all wolves had fairly well disappeared from the State of Washington. It was a haunting and mournful sound, however, deep in the dark night. I went back to sleep, figuring it must have been my large canine dinner companion.

The next morning, however, while having breakfast in the diner, I overheard two of the older male residents of the island. Wilbur Fontroy and Ted Newcombe had seemed ancient when I was a kid. I guessed that they both must be in their seventies or eighties by now. They were both avid outdoorsmen, hunting and fishing mostly. My ears perked up because they were discussing a wolf, which Wilbur claimed he had seen the previous night.

"I'm tellin' you it was a wolf!" Wilbur exclaimed.

"There ain't no wolves on the island. Ain't been since before my granddaddy was a boy," Ted derided.

"I don't give a damn what you say! I know what I saw. That was a wolf. I even heard it howling late last night in the woods," Wilbur insisted.

"And just exactly how the hell did a wolf end up in Star Harbor? Did he ride the damned ferry?" Ted asked, derisively.

"I don't know, but I do know what I saw and what I heard. There's a wolf on this island. You mark my words -- there's gonna be animals disappearing. People are gonna start missin' their dogs and cats soon," Wilbur predicted.

"It was probably just a big dog. Probably belongs to one of them damned tourists and got loose," Ted offered.

"I've been huntin' and fishin' all over the State of Washington all my life. I know the damned difference between a dog and a wolf," Wilbur growled.

I continued to listen closely for a few more minutes, hoping the Wilbur would inform Ted of what the difference between a dog and a wolf was but he never did. I was curious myself. Evidently, Wilbur and I had seen the same thing, but I had fed and petted it. Now, I really did want to know what in the hell I'd shared my dinner with last night.

I walked over to my store, went into my office and booted up my computer. I entered the word "wolves" into Google and quickly got back results. I clicked on a site called "Wild World of Wolves" and was shocked to see pictures and even films on the site of what turned out to be the two major types of wolves in North America -- the Grey Timber Wolf, *Canis Lupus*, and the Red Wolf, *Canis Rufus*. Shocked because the Grey Wolf looked identical to the "dog" I'd had dinner with the night before. However, I also discovered on the site, under a section called "Where Do Wolves Come From" that all domesticated dogs were part of the

“wolf family” of animals. So, in a sense, it was a “dog” that I had dinner with the night before. After all, the Latin name for “dog” is *Canis Lupus Familiaris*.

I couldn't believe, however, that a wild wolf could be as friendly and as tame as my furry dinner companion had been. What wild wolf would let you scratch behind his ears? And maybe that was the answer. Maybe it was a wolf, but a tame one. I'd heard of people raising wolf cubs from puppies and making them tame. Perhaps this was one of those tame wolves which was, like Wilbur and Ted had said, a pet of one of the tourists that had gotten loose.

At any rate, I decided to see what would happen if I cooked out again that night. Would the wolf appear again? This time, I decided to cook two steaks on the grill instead of one. After all, if this was a full-grown wolf, he certainly needed more food than just half of a steak meant for a human.

I had no more stepped out the door of the house and headed for the grill when my furry friend came loping out of the woods at the back of the yard. It almost seemed as if he had been waiting for me. He sat down next to me as I put the steaks on to cook and I reached down and, again, scratched behind his ears. He made those same type of whimpering pleasure noises and then licked my hand. If he was a wolf, he was the friendliest, gentlest wolf in the world. Then, as if to assure me of that assessment, he did something that completely shocked me.

Lying down, he rolled over and presented his belly for scratching, just as any friendly dog would. I must admit, up until that point, I had been thinking of him as a “him” but had no idea what sex he was. The position he assumed, however, gave me clear anatomical proof of my supposition. He was, indeed, male. Rather hugely male in comparison to any other dogs I had seen in my life (not that I had been cruising dogs or anything). He was also, quite obviously, not “fixed” as he had a large, fur covered scrotum to accompany his rather large, fur covered “endowment.” I leaned down and proceeded to scratch his belly, and he twisted and “yipped” like a puppy in delirious happiness at my actions.

I just couldn't believe that this was a wolf acting this way, but my research on the Internet had convinced me that, no matter how he acted, this was, without doubt, a wolf. A North American Grey Timber Wolf, to be exact. And he was wiggling around and grinning while I calmly scratched his belly. I wondered what Jack Hanna would think of that?

When the steaks were done, though why I was cooking a steak for a wolf rather than serving it to him raw I couldn't tell you, I again sat down at the table. The wolf sat down beside me, just as he'd done the night before and let me feed him pieces of steak. I ended up feeding him the whole steak I'd cooked for him and half of my own. He again, once the steak was gone, lay down beside me while I finished eating the rest of my dinner. Then, before I had even gathered up the dishes, he rose and, looking at me with that grin of his, leaned forward and thoroughly washed my face with his tongue, giving me about five or six quick licks, before bounding off into the woods again.

I sat there for a few moments, shaking my head in wonder, before heading back into the house. That night, as I lay in bed, I again heard the mournful sound of his howling in the woods. This time I knew it was a wolf. Not only that, I knew it was “my” wolf. Since I didn’t figure that there could be any more wolves in Star Harbor, I vaguely wondered if he were lonely? As lonely as I was.

Oh, I was busy enough. I had the grand opening to get ready for and I was busy getting the shop and my stock prepared but I had spent ten years as part of a couple, ten years of sharing a bed and a life with someone. It was hard to go back to spending my time alone. It was especially hard to have no one there to touch and hold me -- especially at night. However, there didn’t seem much chance of there being anyone in my life any time soon -- if ever. *Maybe*, I thought as I lay there before going back to sleep, *I should get a dog?*

The next night, I again went to grill out but, this time, my wolf didn’t come. He didn’t show up at all that night or the next or the next. At first, I was afraid that perhaps someone like Wilbur or Ted had killed him but I listened carefully each morning to their conversation (that was easy to do, they were both so old that their hearing was going and they spoke by practically yelling at each other) and never again did they discuss the wolf Wilbur claimed he saw.

I actually missed him. I mean, it was only two nights running but I’d had someone “waiting” for me at home. I decided that, after the grand opening of my shop, I was definitely going to look into getting a dog. A big dog. One that looked like a wolf and would meet me at the door each night, glad for me to be home. A dog that would need me and be loyal to me. Something my own human lover had failed miserably at.

The morning of the grand opening dawned chilly and grey, as sometimes happens in Washington State, even in the summer. However, the weather report on KING-FM from Seattle, the classical station, said that the skies would clear and the temperature would warm by early afternoon. I set off for my store, stopping at the diner for breakfast as I did almost every morning. Wanda, the waitress who always waited on me in the mornings, brought me coffee with a pitcher of cream as soon as she saw me walk in.

“Oh, I’m so excited about your grand opening today,” Wanda greeted me.

“Are you coming?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world! Me and my girlfriend Sally will be there as soon as she gets off work.”

“Well, for once, you’ll get served rather than serving. I’m having the event catered.”

“Yes, I know. Tom Kelly’s doing it and I just love his food. So does everybody else in town. I’ve been to several weddings he’s done. In fact, I can’t think of a wedding in the last few years that he hasn’t done -- except for the ones at the hotel.”

Now, this was the Star Harbor I remembered. The place where everybody knew everybody and also what everybody else was doing -- whether you wanted them to know it or not. I could only laugh to myself. I was used to it, having grown up in the town. I’d just

forgotten what it was like, having lived so many years in San Francisco. So, yes, Wanda and almost everybody in town would know that Tom Kelly was catering my grand opening and, it seemed, this might just be the right kind of word of mouth advertising to get people to come since evidently his food was well liked by everyone.

Speaking of the devil, I'd no more than opened the shop that morning than Tom, himself, came through the door.

"Good morning," he called, a huge smile on his open, Irish face. "Just stopped in to see where you want us to set up this afternoon."

"Well, to be honest with you, I hadn't really thought about it. What would you suggest?"

"Well, since the idea of this is to showcase your merchandise, I'd suggest that we set up toward the back of the shop. That draws everyone through the shop to get to the food and it also allows us access to the back room where we can set up the steam tables and the ice coolers for the wine."

"That's an excellent idea," I told him, impressed. "I take it you've done a lot of these?"

"A few around town, though I have to admit, this will be the first really lavish one. Most of the time, the shopkeepers want to get away with the very least they can spend."

"Well, that doesn't work for my kind of business," I said. "I have a good many big ticket items. If you want to make money, you have to spend money. Nobody is going to spend five or six figures on merchandise if you're too chintzy to put out a good spread."

"Man! I wish more of the store owners around here thought like you do."

"Tom, I'll make a deal with you. If this goes well, what say we do this once a month for the rest of the summer and one in September, after Labor Day, just for the locals, after all the tourists have gone home? We can just call the rest 'Open Houses.'"

"You mean that?"

"I sure do."

"You've got yourself a deal. I'll even give you a discount for doing them all. How 'bout I stop by Monday and we'll plan out the dates?"

"That would be just fine."

Tom left soon after and I began the work of re-setting up the store to accommodate the tables that Tom said he'd bring in for the food. I'd been at it for about an hour when I had a second visitor, one that I hadn't expected, Mr. Childers from *The Gazette*.

"Tom just told me that you were thinking of doing some more shindigs like the one tonight," Mr. Childers said.

"Yes. I told Tom that if tonight goes well, I'd like to do one each month this summer and then one after Labor Day when all the tourists have gone home, just for the people who live here."

"Well, since only tonight is the grand opening, I figure you won't be wanting full page ads for the rest," he said, but I could tell he was hoping otherwise.

"What makes you think that? I figure I'll need a half page ad for each week of the summer and then a full page ad for the weeks when I hold the 'open houses.'"

"Well, that's just great."

I could tell that it was a case of the other storeowners being shortsighted where advertising was concerned as well.

"Why don't you come by on Monday and we can start working on the weekly ads?"

"I'll be here first thing Monday morning," he said, a grin splitting his face from ear to ear.

"You are coming tonight, aren't you?"

"Wouldn't miss it. Besides, the missus would have my head if I didn't bring her. She's talked about nothing else for two weeks."

"Good. I'll look forward to seeing both of you, then."

I went back to work, getting the store ready and, before I knew it, it was two o'clock and Tom was back with Gretchen and two teenaged boys in white Polo shirts and black pants. Tom was wearing the same outfit while Gretchen was wearing a simple black dress with a pearl choker and earrings. I had a sound system in the store with a CD changer which held fifty CDs. I had stocked it with classical, mostly string quartets, as background music. I turned this on while Tom and the boys, whom he introduced simply as Pete and Rich, set up.

I hadn't had a chance for lunch but was able to sample all of the rich canapés and hors d'oeuvres which Tom had made. By the time people started arriving a little after four in the afternoon, I was pleasantly full from my "sampling." Only a few people came at first and I was just starting to worry about the attendance when what seemed like a constant string of arrivals started. Within an hour, I could have sworn half the population of Star Harbor was jammed into the store. Many of them I knew from my growing up years and some offered their condolences on the loss of my parents.

Wanda came to me to say hello with her friend Sally, whom she introduced me to. Sally was slender, Wanda's age but with dark hair and evidently the quieter of the two. I could hardly hear her greeting over the sound of the crowded store. They both complimented me on my merchandise. I was just about to head to the back room to see how the wine was holding out when I saw someone approaching that I knew I had to say hello to.

Ada Harrison, the mother of my childhood friend, Josh. She looked older, as I should have expected, but it was more than that. I could see that the years had not been kind to her. She was dressed all in black, which should have been a clue to me but it wasn't, unfortunately.

"Mrs. Harrison! How nice to see you again," I said, taking her hand.

"Thank you, David. It's good to see you. I'd heard you'd moved back to your parents' house and I thought you'd stop by," she said, not at all in a condemning way but the message got through just the same.

"I'm really sorry. I meant to but I've been so busy setting up the store and getting ready for tonight. I promise I'll stop by next week."

"Well, of course you've got reason to now. What with Josh being home and all," she said, smiling at me.

I blanched white. Josh? Home? The last thing in the world I needed was to see Josh. Now that I had been through the emotional destruction of my former lover's betrayal, I didn't need my feelings for Josh being dragged up from where I had finally buried them. I don't know what I was about to say to Ada because it was at that moment that I saw a tall man in the dark blue uniform of a police officer, thick black belt and sidearm included, come to stand behind her. I looked up into the piercing; dark blue eyes of my first love and saw the broad, white grin and the dark thick hair that I had always wanted to run my fingers through.

"Hello, David," Josh said quietly. "Long time, no see."

"Josh! Yes. A long time. More than ten years, now, isn't it?" I babbled.

I don't even know how my tongue was working. Josh had been the most beautiful boy I had ever seen and the years had only improved on his looks. I felt myself flush and even felt tightness in my dark pants just from the sight of him.

"So, you're a policeman now?"

"Yes. I went into law enforcement after I got out of the Marine Corps. I've been working in Seattle but I've moved home to Star Harbor to take care of Mom now that Dad is gone."

I was stunned. Josh's dad? Gone?

"I'm sorry, Josh. Mrs. Harrison. I didn't know," I said lamely.

"Dad died of a heart attack a year ago," Josh said quietly and I could still hear the pain in his voice. Josh and his dad had been very close, closer than most fathers and sons. Certainly closer than I'd been to mine. I always wondered, however, just whose fault that was? I suspected somehow that it was mine, wanting to hide from him like I'd hidden from everybody, afraid they'd learn my dark, sexual secret.

I didn't know what to say at that point, so I fell back on what people always said to me.

"I'm very sorry for your loss. He was a good man."

"Yes, he was," Ada said, sadly.

I could see the sorrow in her and thought, not for the first time, that maybe I was better off not falling in love with someone. After all, it only seemed to lead to heartache, one way or the other. But, at the same time, there stood Josh and I could feel all the old feelings welling up inside of me. I knew at that moment that I had to get away from him.

“I’d love to talk more, but I’ve got to see to some things in the back.”

“I understand. We’ll have to get together and do some catching up,” Josh said and, again, smiled at me.

It was the same gentle smile that had always melted my insides whenever Josh bestowed it on me. I took my leave quickly and headed for my office to be alone for a few minutes and try to pull myself together. Coming out of my office, I ran into two customers, summer people, who were looking for me to ask about some Meissen figures I had for sale. When I finally finished with them, I looked around and Josh and his mother had gone.

The rest of the evening went well. In fact, I had quite a few large sales that more than twice over paid for the catering. All in all, it was a success. But as I closed the shop after Tom, Gretchen and their two-boy crew, the awful feeling of impending doom settled on me. What was I going to do about Josh? Instead of being safely off in the Marine Corps, he was again living right in town. Not only that, he was evidently now a part of the Star Harbor Police Department. As a local business owner, there was no way I was going to be able to avoid him. I truly didn’t know what to do.

I went home that night and slumped into bed, my eyes closing in sleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow. But my sleep was not restful. All night, I kept having dreams. Dreams of Josh. Josh holding me. Josh making love to me the way I’d always prayed that he would. I ended up waking up before dawn and finding my briefs wet with my own discharge. I hadn’t had a wet dream since I was thirteen years old and now all it took was five minutes in Josh’s presence to have one again.

I didn’t think this boded well for my future.

## Chapter Three

After my restless night, I awoke earlier than usual. Despite my exhaustion, I couldn't go back to sleep so I got up, showered, dressed and headed into town. Knowing that the diner opened very early, I went there to have breakfast with as many cups of their very strong coffee that I could down. Something was going to have to get me through and caffeine, hopefully, would do the trick. It was Saturday, usually the best day in the week for business because it drew both tourists and locals, so I needed to be at my best. However, no matter how much coffee I drank, I knew I was going to be far from "best."

Finished with breakfast, I went on to the store. I went to the little kitchen in the back to put on a pot of coffee without re-locking the front door. I would hear the bell over the door if anyone came in. I wasn't expecting anyone this early anyway since it wasn't even eight o'clock yet and I didn't usually open until ten. As I sat there drinking yet another cup of coffee, I was surprised to hear the bell ring and the sound of the door closing. I got up and looked out to see who it was. Standing there, all six foot two inches of him, was Josh. He was in his uniform, as he had been last night and he was the very last person I wanted to see this morning.

"Your door was open," he said by way of explanation.

"I didn't figure anyone would be coming by this early."

"I thought maybe we could talk?" he said and there was a kind of yearning in his voice that touched me.

"Sure. You want some coffee? I just made it. We can talk back here," I said as I walked back into the little kitchen.

Josh followed me and I poured him some coffee into a mug.

"How do you take it?"

"Black is fine."



I handed him the mug and motioned for him to sit down. I poured myself another mug and put cream and sugar in it before sitting down opposite him.

"I got the feeling last night that you were not at all glad to see me," Josh said quietly.

I hesitated. Did I tell him the truth or lie? Basically, I was too tired, both physically and emotionally, to play games anymore so I decided to just tell him the truth.

"No. I wasn't. I thought you were still in the Marine Corps. I figured it was safe to come back here."

"Safe? I don't understand. You act as if I hurt you somehow and I don't understand any of it," Josh said, sounding hurt.

"No. You didn't hurt me. I hurt myself. But being around you is very difficult for me."

"Why? David, we used to be friends. Best friends. Then I went off to the Corps and it was like you didn't want anything more to do with me. Why?"

"I didn't want anything more to do with you. I needed to be away from you, to try and get over you."

"Get over me?"

"Josh, why do you think I wanted to go to San Francisco?"

"To go to college."

"No. I could have gone to college anywhere. I wanted to go to San Francisco so I could finally be myself. I could finally be what I couldn't be here in Star Harbor."

"You mean gay." Josh definitely made it a statement, not a question.

"So you know."

"I've always known."

That rocked me. He'd always known? All those years? All those times he'd slept in my bed or me in his?

"Always?"

"Since we were...oh...I don't know, sixteen or so. It was real evident that you didn't have any interest in girls. You never dated, never even tried. It didn't take too much to figure it out. But what does that have to do with not wanting me around?"

"Evidently you didn't figure it all out," I said quietly. "You missed the part about me being in love with you."

He just sat there, staring at me, a stunned look on his face. No, I guess he hadn't figured that one out.

"Yeah. I guess I missed that one. So that's what you meant by 'getting over' me?"

"Yes."

"And did you?" He looked down into his mug of coffee, unable to look me in the eyes as he asked it.

“For a while. I had a lover for almost ten years, until I caught him cheating on me. That’s when I moved back here.”

“He must have been a real jerk to hurt someone as good as you are.”

That statement stunned me as well as the quiet vehemence with which it was said, but I let it pass. It was his next question that floored me.

“You said ‘for a while.’ Does that mean that you’re not over me?”

“I thought that I was.” I looked away, unable to look at him as I said this.

That alone was tearing me up. He was still so beautiful but, more than that, he was still Josh. He was still my first and deepest love. I realized that I had only been fooling myself. I’d never gotten over him. I doubted if I ever could.

“When did you realize you weren’t?” he asked.

I hesitated. Did I really want him to know what I was feeling? Did I really want to be that vulnerable? But this was Josh. I hadn’t lied. He’d never hurt me. I had hurt myself. I began to consider that maybe part of the way that I’d hurt myself was by not being honest with him from the beginning. Though how one fourteen-year-old boy was supposed to be honest with another about being in love with him, I had absolutely no idea.

“When I saw you last night,” I said simply and honestly.

It was then that Josh did the worst, or best (depending how you looked at it), thing he could have done. He gave me one of those gentle “Josh” smiles that always set my whole world on fire and melted everything inside of me, just as he’d done the night before.

But then, like a bucket of icy water thrown in my face, I suddenly thought to myself, *Why am I telling him this? He’s not in love with me. He’s fucking straight!*

“Though what the fuck do you care?” I asked, suddenly very angry.

“What do you mean?”

“What do I mean? I mean, why the fuck do you care how I feel about you? It isn’t going to change anything. You’re never going to fall in love with me so just do me a favor and fuck off! Just get the fuck out of here and leave me alone!” I stood up, screaming and pointing to the front door of the store.

“David, please. Listen to me.” He stood up, his hands making placating gestures.

“I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want to talk to you. I don’t want to see you. Not now! Not ever!” I continued screaming as tears poured down my cheeks. “Just go away and don’t come back!”

I guess Josh figured there was no reasoning with me. I’ll admit that I was hysterical. It was like all the difficulties of the last few months; my ex’s betrayal, the move from San Francisco, setting up the new business and the exhaustion from the grand opening and then no sleep from the shock of seeing Josh last night all combined to form like this huge

hurricane of emotions inside of me. Josh quietly left the store, closing the door behind him without looking back.

As soon I realized what I had done, I ran to the door but, when I got there, I couldn't bring myself to go running after Josh, which had been my first thought. Instead, I locked the door, hung up the "Closed" sign, went out the back door and walked home. I spent the day in bed, alternating crying with sleeping along with wishing I were dead and trying to decide if I was going to have to move to get away from Josh or could I stay in Star Harbor after today.

When the sun was going down, I finally managed to drag myself downstairs. I realized I was starving, having had nothing to eat since breakfast. The thought of food, for some reason, made me start thinking again about "my" wolf. I looked out of the kitchen window toward the woods and I could have sworn that I saw his dark outline against the trees. At first, I thought it was just wishful thinking on my part but, when I stepped outside, I saw him loping toward me.

He came up to me and I reached down to scratch between his ears. He moved his head and began licking my hand. I don't know why, but it got to me and I sat down on the deck, put my arms around his neck and began crying with my face buried in his fur. What was strange is that he didn't move. It was as if he understood how sad I was and was trying to comfort me.

After a while, I stopped crying and let go of him. He began washing my face with his tongue and whining, like he was trying to talk to me. I didn't know what else to do, so I stood up and headed toward the door to the kitchen.

"Just wait there," I said to the wolf.

I thought to myself, *I must be losing my mind*. I was basically saying to a wolf, "Stay!", like he was a dog. I pulled a steak from the refrigerator and went back out to the deck. And, whether or not he'd understood my request, the wolf was still there. I didn't bother cooking it; I just gave him the steak and sat down on the deck again next to him while he "wolfed" it down. I then understood where that phrase came from, watching him make a whole steak disappear in about two seconds. He licked his mouth and then licked me again, as if to express his gratitude. Then he sat down next to me. I put my arm around him and we sat there, together, on the deck and watched the sun go down.

As hard as it was to believe, I just seemed to accept that this wild creature -- a wolf, perhaps the wildest of creatures -- was content to just sit with me and allow me to affectionately stroke and scratch him. Certainly, he seemed to enjoy it, occasionally turning to give me one or two licks on the face from his long, raspy tongue to show his pleasure. I didn't know why he had singled me out for this "relationship" we seemed to have. *Maybe it isn't singular?* I thought to myself. *Maybe there are other people that he hangs around with?* But, to be honest, I doubted it. I doubted that few people would even try to be affectionate with a wolf.

I don't know how long we sat there but eventually, he stood up, gave me one last lick on the face and bounded off toward the woods again. I supposed that the steak I gave him was just an appetizer and he was off to hunt for food. That reminded me that I had started out to get myself something to eat so I went inside, made a sandwich and some soup and finally curled up on the couch, listening to a CD of Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons."

I kept going over in my mind what had happened that morning with Josh and beating myself up for being so nasty and cruel to him. I knew I was the one in the wrong. Josh had done nothing and I'd treated him like crap. I knew I needed to apologize to him, but I just didn't know how, not after some of the things I'd said. I knew I'd hurt him and he would be perfectly in his rights to never forgive me.

I also kept going over in my mind something that he'd said, that he'd known all along that I was gay. Well, at least since we'd been sixteen or so. That just didn't make any sense to me. I know I didn't date but I had been pretty much a nerd in those days. I hid behind studying so that nobody would notice me and that I wasn't involved in the great high school pastime -- dating. But evidently Josh had noticed. And he'd put two and two together and figured out my secret. What I couldn't figure out was why he hadn't figured out how I'd felt about him? He must have had some clue. I'm sure I wasn't all that good at hiding my feelings in those days.

It also confused me why, if he did know that I was gay, he continued to be my best friend and continued to sleep over at my house in my bed or allow me in his? Maybe he figured if I made a pass at him he could just beat the shit out of me, which was pretty much the truth but Josh didn't think that way.

The more I contemplated it, however, the more convinced I became how utterly clueless I was about how Josh thought about anything -- either when we were kids or now. Yes, he had been popular and had dated but never like the other guys. And even now, he was still unmarried. Surely after all these years he could have found the "right woman." Of course, I'd found what I had imagined was the "right man" and look what it had gotten me! But I, at least, had made an attempt at a relationship. Or had I?

Faced with the reality of Josh once again, I began to realize how shallow my feelings were for my ex-lover compared to the love I'd carried for Josh since childhood. How superficial my relationship with my ex-lover had truly been. Maybe that's the reason he went looking for someone else or maybe that's the type of relationship we had both been looking for?

One thing in my musings on my ex-lover I did find interesting was the fact that through all our years together, I never once told him about Josh. Never even mentioned him. And it wasn't like I never thought about Josh. I doubted if a day had gone by in the last ten years that I hadn't thought of Josh at least once.

And now, I had told the one man in the world I'd loved longer and deeper than anyone else to get the fuck out of my life and that I never wanted to see him again. I didn't know

how I was going to undo that one because the truth was, the very last thing I wanted was to never see Josh again or have him completely out of my life. I just didn't know how I wanted him "in" my life. Well...I knew how I wanted him, I just knew there was no way I could have him in my life the way I had always dreamed. Josh was never going to feel about me the way I felt about him.

On the one hand, it was probably best to really try and forget about him, to really have him gone from my life permanently. But two things made that next to impossible. First, Star Harbor was a very small town on a very small island. There was no chance that we were not going to run into each other, maybe even daily. The second was more pathetic, to my mind. I didn't want to forget about him. I didn't want him gone from my life. He'd been gone physically from it for ten years, time enough for me to get over any "adolescent crush" I might have had on him. Instead, I see him one time and I go completely to pieces.

No, I just had to face the truth. I was hopelessly in love with Josh Harrison and no matter how far I might run, no matter how long I stayed away, nothing was going to change that. There was nothing I could do about it. Loving Josh was as much a part of me as having blond hair and green eyes.

But I didn't even begin to know how I was going to deal with it. Certainly, I'd shown earlier that day that I wasn't dealing with it very well. *That can NEVER happen again!* I berated myself. I couldn't allow myself to take out my anger and frustration over this hopeless situation on Josh -- or anyone else for that matter. It wasn't fair. It wasn't right. Worse, it made me look like a real fool. I had to find some way to go on and act as if my feelings for Josh were not as strong as they were.

Of course, that was going to be extremely difficult now that I'd let Josh know "exactly" how I felt about him. That was the worse part. Maybe that alone would keep him away from me, but I sincerely doubted it. Among the myriad of things I couldn't understand about what had happened between us that morning was the fact that Josh didn't seem at all bothered by the fact that I was in love with him. In fact, he seemed rather pleased about that. I had taken it as some type of conceit on his part but, as I thought about it, that just didn't fit at all. There had never been a conceited bone in Josh's body and I doubted that he'd grown any in the last ten years. The truth be told, of the two of us, I was the conceited one but that conceit had always been about my intelligence. But from the way I had acted that day, I had nothing in the world to be conceited about. No, there was some other reason for Josh being pleased with my being in love with him but, for the life of me, I couldn't figure out what in the hell it was.

Whatever it was, I just prayed that it would help him to forgive me for the way I had acted and the things I said to him. I knew I had hurt him and, in the past, I would have rather cut my arm off than hurt him. Now, I didn't know what to do or say to make up for it. "I'm sorry" seemed so inadequate and yet I had no idea what else to say. If he'd let me, I'd tell Josh why I had so completely disgraced myself but that was the problem. Would he let me? Would he ever even speak to me again? I couldn't blame him one bit if he didn't.

I don't know how long I lay there on the couch filled with these thoughts and more that I couldn't even put into words. My emotional rampage of that morning, though, must have truly exhausted me because I fell asleep, listening to Vivaldi.

## Chapter Four

Waking up on the couch the next morning, I didn't know what to do with myself. It was Sunday, normally a day I kept the shop closed. I had things I could do around the house but none of them appealed to me. Instead, I showered, got dressed and walked into town to the diner for breakfast. I'd never been in the place on a Sunday morning, choosing usually to stay at home. Wanda wasn't there. Instead, there was a young girl, maybe seventeen or eighteen; slender with long, dark hair she wore in a long pony tail. The nametag on her uniform said "Diane."

"Good morning. Great party the other night," she said, handing me a menu. "You want coffee?"

"Yes, please," I answered. "You were there?"

"Yeah. My brother was working at the party."

"Oh? Which one, Pete or Rich?"

"Pete. Rich is his best friend. I guess you could say serving food kind of runs in the family but it's hard to find part-time jobs in Star Harbor. Pete and Rich are always looking for things to do. Pete is saving up to buy a car."

"Yes, I know how hard it is to find work here when you're young. I had a paper route when I was growing up here."

"Really? Pete did, too. But he stopped doing that when he got into high school."

"Are you in high school as well?"

"Yes, but this is my last year. Pete is a junior, so he still has one year to go. Oh! Let me get your coffee. Do you take cream in it?"

"Yes," I answered as she went over behind the counter and poured a cup and brought it along with a small pitcher of cream.

"I just loved your store. Pete tells me that you're going to do more open houses. I can't wait for the next one. By that time, I'll have some money saved up. I saw something I'd really love to have. I just hope somebody else doesn't buy it."

"What was that?"

"It was in one of the showcases. It's this really pretty, small figure of a woman made out of something green."

"That something green is jade. The figure you saw is a figure of Quan Yin. She is the Goddess of Mercy. In Eastern Religions she is somewhat equivalent to Mary in Christianity."

"Oh! I had no idea. Is it expensive?" she asked, somewhat tremulously.

I smiled at her. "Not for you. Come by the store tomorrow and we'll see what we can do."

"Oh! Thank you!" she gushed. "I guess I should take your order, huh?"

"Are there any blueberry pancakes this morning?"

"Yes, there are."

"Then that's what I'll have."

She brought me the stack of pancakes along with some blueberry syrup. While I was eating, her brother, Pete, and his friend, Rich, came in. They said hello to Diane and then saw me sitting there. They came over to my table.

"Hey there, Mr. Stone," Pete greeted me.

"Hi," Rich added.

"Hey, guys. How's it going?"

"Okay," Pete answered. "Thanks so much for the other night. It was really fun. Your store was so interesting it was almost like not working. It was also really good to have a job."

"Yeah," agreed Rich. "It had been a while since Mr. Kelly had a booking."

"I understand, guys. Your sister was just telling me, Pete, that you're saving up to buy a car?"

"Yeah. We've got a ways to go though. It's hard to find anything steady here in the way of a part-time job," Pete said.

"Most businesses don't hire part-time help so we don't have much saved toward it," Rich added.

"So you two are buying this car together?"

Suddenly they both looked embarrassed, turning somewhat red in the face. Pete finally answered.

"Uhh...yeah...see we figured that it would take less time to save up the money if we both were saving for it."



This seemed like a rather unusual situation to me that two boys would be saving for a car together. Not that there was anything wrong with it but it just seemed to speak of a much closer and deeper relationship between the two of them.

"Tell me something. What time do you get off from school?"

"We're out at two-thirty," Rich answered.

"I'll tell you what, you may not realize it but antiques take a lot of care. You have to dust and polish them constantly so that they make a nice presentation for customers. Now, I have to admit, that's one part of the antique business that I'm not particularly enamored of. In fact, I hate doing it. Also, I sometimes need help with rearranging the pieces or getting shipments of new pieces out on the sales floor. Would you two be interested in coming in...oh, say...after school and a few hours on Saturday and doing that for me? At the same time, I could teach you some about the business and you could even help wait on customers?"

Both of their faces lit up like roman candles on the Fourth of July.

"Would we!" Pete exclaimed.

"Yes!" Rich echoed his friend.

"What would you two think about five dollars an hour?"

"Each?" Pete asked, looking askance at me.

Pete was evidently the "spokesperson" of the pair.

"Of course."

Pete looked at Rich, who nodded his head enthusiastically.

"Mr. Stone, you've got yourself two employees," Pete said, grinning at me.

"Well, good. There's just one thing, Pete."

"Yes, sir?"

"Please don't call me Mr. Stone. I keep thinking you're talking to my dad. Just call me David."

"Sure...uhh...David." And with this Pete grinned at me.

"Look, I know it's Sunday, but are you two busy right now?"

"Geez, no! We were just going to go down to the beach and go swimming. We only stopped in to tell Diane where we would be so she could tell our parents when they came in for breakfast." Pete again answered for both of them.

"Well, I was headed over to the store. Maybe you two would like to tag along and I could show you some of your new duties?"

"That would be great," Pete said enthusiastically, and Rich nodded his assent as well.

"By the way, have you two had breakfast yet? I know how guys your age eat and I don't want you working on empty stomachs." I had noted that they had both been eyeing my plate of half finished blueberry pancakes.

“Uhh...no, we haven’t...” Pete said.

“Diane!” I called over to her and she looked over at me from the counter.

“Why don’t you bring my two employees some breakfast before we head off to work at my store?”

She grinned as she walked over.

“Oh, Mr. Stone! That’s wonderful. Sure. What do you guys want?” Diane addressed her brother and his friend.

“We’ll have what our boss is having.” Pete grinned at his sister.

“I should have known. Two more orders of blueberry pancakes coming up. What do you want to drink?”

“Coffee,” Pete said.

“Me, too,” Rich said.

“Okay, be right back.”

She brought the boys coffee and refilled mine and then brought them the two orders of pancakes. Before I’d even finished what was left of my own, Pete and Rich had already downed them. It seemed I never realized that teenage boys and wolves seemed to have at least one thing in common. Finishing breakfast, I paid the bill and left Diane a generous tip and then I led the boys over to the store. On the way, I’m not sure exactly why, but I started telling them about “my” wolf.

“See, I told you!” Rich said, lightly socking Pete in the shoulder.

“Okay. Okay,” Pete grumbled.

“You’ve seen him, too?” I asked Rich.

“Yeah. I saw him about a week ago as I was cutting through the woods on the way to Pete’s house. Pete kept telling me it was just a big dog,” Rich answered, with a sound in his voice like he’d been vindicated.

“No. I checked it out on the Internet. He’s a North American Grey Timber Wolf. How he got on the island, I have no idea, but he’s very tame. I think he belonged to some tourists and got away.”

“He didn’t seem very tame to me,” Rich said. “He ran away as soon as he saw me.”

“Well, he seems pretty tame around me. He even eats out of my hand and lets me pet him and scratch behind his ears for him.”

“That’s really cool!” Rich exclaimed.

Arriving at the store, I showed the boys around. I told them what needed to be done, like sweeping and dusting all of the antique furniture. I told them the antique silver only needed to be polished once a month because it was in display cases. I let them get to work and I sat down at my computer in my office. I tried to work but all I could think about was Josh. I decided I couldn’t just put off apologizing to him. No matter how difficult or painful it

was going to be, I needed to see him that day. I decided, after a couple of hours of torturing myself, what I needed to do was find Josh and apologize to him. Since he was a policeman I didn't know if he'd be working on Sunday so I called the police station to see if he was on duty. The man who answered the phone told me that Josh had the day off. He asked me if there was any message for him and I just said no, that I would catch Josh at home and hung up before he could ask my name.

I went out into the store to see how Pete and Rich were doing. The store was spotless, the wood floor gleamed and all of the furniture looked dusted and shined as well. I spotted the boys toward the back corner of the store, staring at a display case and speaking in very low voices to each other. I froze when I saw them because I had completely forgotten about that item.

In that display case was my most prized possession as an antique dealer. While it was on display, it also had a card in the display case that clearly said it was not for sale because no amount of money could ever get me to part with it. I had acquired it from a professor of Ancient Greek culture at Oxford University in England who had moved to San Francisco to retire. He had been, before his death a couple of years before, first a customer and then a close friend. It was just prior to his death that he had given me the piece I had so admired in his home since the first time I'd seen it. It was a small, ancient Greek drinking bowl which had, painted around the outside of the bowl, friezes of males engaged in all manner and positions of gay male sex.

I walked over to the boys who didn't hear me approach.

"It is from the Golden Age of Ancient Greece, over four hundred years before the birth of Christ," I said quietly, coming up behind them.

They both jumped as if I'd poked them with a cattle prod.

"Uhh...it's beautiful," Pete said and Rich nodded in agreement.

"It is my most prized possession. No amount of money could get me to sell it," I told them. "It is a drinking bowl that was probably used for festivals of either of two gods: Eros, the god of sex, or Bacchus, the god of wine and revelry. Both of their festivals were celebrated with orgies of food and sexual pleasure."

"Guys did those kinds of things with each other way back then?" Pete asked quietly.

"Guys have been doing those kinds of things with each other since the beginning of time," I answered.

"Ohh," Rich said. "Didn't they think it was wrong?"

"To the ancient Greeks, there was nothing wrong with males having sex with each other or falling in love with each other, for that matter. In fact, the Greeks believed that love between two males was the highest form of human love. That was because they considered women inferior," I told them.

"God! That would piss my sister off but good." Pete grinned at me and nudged Rich at the same time.

"Yes, it probably would. It is ironic that today, when women are finally being accorded value as persons, society has decided that for two males to love each other is somehow wrong or shameful when nothing could be further from the truth. Love, no matter whether it is between two males, a male and a female, or even between two females, for that matter, is never wrong. There is nothing shameful about love. But, unfortunately, some people don't learn that until it is too late."

I saw a significant look pass between Pete and Rich along with a small smile and, like a lightning bolt it hit me. These two were in love. Or at least sexually involved with each other.

"So...uhh...you don't think it's wrong for two guys to be in love?" Rich asked, quietly.

"I would be quite a hypocrite if I did, considering I lived with another man I was in love with for ten years."

The two boys' eyes got the size of silver dollars.

"Really?" Pete exclaimed.

"Really," I said.

"What happened to him?" Rich asked.

"Uhh...well...he found another guy he wanted but didn't bother to tell me," I said, somewhat bitterly, even to my own ears.

"He cheated on you?" Pete's voice had a definite tone of derision in it.

"Yes. So I left him and moved back here where I grew up."

"God! That's terrible. You must be really hurt about it," Rich said.

"I was at the time. But, you see, I've come to realize that I didn't really love him. I've been in love with someone since I was younger than you -- my best friend who I grew up -- with but he's straight so nothing can ever come of it."

Pete and Rich looked at each other and I saw Rich slightly nod to Pete.

"Uhh...David...Rich and I grew up together," Pete said quietly, to which Rich nodded in agreement.

"So are you telling me is that you two are in love?" I asked as gently as I could.

"Uhh...yeah," Pete said, looking down in embarrassment.

"I am so very, very happy for the two of you."

At this, Pete's head snapped up and he looked at me. At first, I could see fear in his eyes over his admission but, as my words sank in, a huge grin spread across both their faces.

"Do I take it that I'm the first person that you two have ever told about this?" I asked.

"Yeah. We've had to hide it from everybody." The relief of having their feelings out in the open was clearly evident in Rich's voice as he said this.

"I know. I could never tell anyone how I felt about my friend. Not even him," I said, sadly.

"You never told him?" Pete was obviously aghast at my statement.

"No. How could I? He was dating girls. I was terrified that if he found out that I was gay and in love with him, I'd not only lose him but it would be all over school and I'd be dead."

Both boys nodded in complete understanding.

"Yeah! That's just what we were afraid of," Pete agreed.

"But, at least you told each other."

"Yeah." And with this, I saw Pete reach down and take Rich's hand in his.

I don't know why, perhaps it was the simple beauty of the act, but it was all I could do to keep from breaking down crying at the sight.

"Well, for now and always, you are totally safe here. Well, at least when there are no customers in the store. Other than that, I want you both to feel free to visit me at my house any time you want. I promise you can be yourselves there and, if you need or want some place private, we can arrange that as well." I smiled at the two lovers.

Their eyes lit up again and huge grins broke out on their faces.

"Do you mean that?" Pete sounded as if he couldn't believe his ears.

"Really?" Rich spoke at the same time as his lover.

"Yes, I mean it. Really."

"Oh, God! Thank you. You don't know what this means to us." I could see the gratitude in Pete's eyes as well as hear it in his voice.

"Believe me, I, more than anyone, know exactly what this means to you."

Pete looked at me a moment. "Yeah. I guess you do."

"Now. That's enough for today. I'm sure you'd like the rest of your Sunday to yourselves and I have an errand that I have to run," I said, remembering that I had to try to make amends to the boy I had been in love with at their age.

"Thank you, David. For everything," Pete said, smiling at me.

"Yes, thank you," Rich added giving me an equally radiant smile.

"And before you go," I said, walking over to the cash register and opening it, I pulled out two twenty dollar bills and gave them to the two boys, "Thank you for all your hard work today. I'll see you both tomorrow after school, right?"

"Yes, we'll be here," Pete said, taking the money and handing one of the bills to Rich.

With more good-byes, the two boys left and I stood there watching them walk down the street. All I could think of what I would have given for that to have been Josh and me all

those years ago. Instead, I now had to try and rebuild a bridge to him which I had fairly well destroyed yesterday.

I prayed that I could build them as well as I burned them.

## Chapter Five

Closing up the shop after Pete and Rich left, I headed toward Josh's mom's house, hoping that he was either living at home or Ada could tell me where he was living. That way I wouldn't have to spend a lot of time searching all over the island for him. To get there, I had to walk through the woods and, to be honest, I was hoping I might see "my" wolf while traversing what was evidently his territory. Among the things I had read about wolves was that they were very territorial. They were also monogamous. I found it funny that in days gone by, a man that dallied with a lot of women but without any intention of making a commitment to any of them was called a "wolf" and yet, wolves did not behave that way at all. At one point, I did think I saw him, but whatever it was that I saw, scampered away so fast I began to doubt it was the wolf I'd seen at all.

Arriving at Josh's house, I could see a grey Jeep Grand Cherokee with a badge for the Star Harbor Police Department painted on its doors and a "bubble gum machine" (as the flashing red and blue light display used by the police is called) on top so I figured that Josh was still living at home with his mom or at least visiting. As I walked up the front porch steps, I tried to figure out how many thousands of times I had done so over the years. Never, however, did they seem like the steps leading up to the gallows like they did now. I still didn't know what I was going to say to Josh. Just getting myself to come here at all was the most that my mind had the strength for.

I knocked at the door and, after a few moments Ada answered.

"Why, David. How good to see you. Won't you come in?" she asked, swinging open the screen door.

I immediately knew from her warm welcome that Josh had not informed her about my tantrum of the day before.

"Is Josh at here, Mrs. Harrison?"

“Yes, he’s upstairs. Let me call him.”

And turning to the stairs, she called Josh’s name. I could hear him answer and then she told him he had a visitor and he answered he would be right down.

“I’ll just leave you two boys alone,” she said, heading on down the passageway beside the stairs which I knew led to the kitchen.

I heard a sound and looked up to see Josh coming down the stairs. When he got about halfway down, he recognized that it was me and slowed his descent. He was looking at me and the look on his face was not a happy one. Well, what could I expect, after all?

“What are you doing here? I thought you made it pretty clear yesterday you didn’t want anything to do with me.”

“Josh, please! I came to apologize. I didn’t mean half the things I said yesterday. Please, is there someplace we can go and talk? There are a lot of things I need to explain to you if you’ll just hear me out,” I begged.

“Why should I? You seemed to have explained things rather clearly yesterday.”

He had reached the bottom of the stairs and his voice was angry but quiet and all the more frightening for being that way. He stood there fairly bristling at me. If he’d been a dog or a wolf his hackles would have been raised.

“Because we were friends at one time and I would hope that maybe you haven’t written me off completely, though I know that’s what I deserve for the way I treated you yesterday,” I said, praying that he could hear all the contrition I was feeling in my voice.

He stood there considering this for a few moments while I waited anxiously for his answer.

“Okay,” he finally relented. “But not here.”

Turning from me, he called down the hall to his mother.

“Mom! David and I are going for a walk.”

“You boys have a good time,” I could hear her call in reply.

I doubted sincerely if her wish would be granted.

Josh walked over to the door, yanked it open and walked through it, leaving me to follow and close it behind me. By the time I did so he was already at the bottom of the porch steps and striding purposefully toward the woods. I hurried to catch up but it was difficult for me. Josh, being over six feet tall, had a much longer stride than I did. I found myself practically running to catch up to him.

He didn’t say a word until we had gone quite a ways into the woods. He then slowed down but still didn’t look at me.

“Okay. What do you want to explain?” he growled at me.



“Josh, could we stop for a while? I’m sorry, I can’t do this and chase after you at the same time,” I begged.

He didn’t say a word but did stop at the trunk of a fallen tree and sat down on it. The tree had fallen years and years before. I remembered this place as one that Josh and I had often used to talk when we were boys. I wondered if he remembered it, too. I wondered if he had chosen it on purpose. I sat beside him on the log but not close. I sat several feet away. He continued to stare straight ahead, not looking at me. For my part, I looked down at the ground, not knowing where or how to start. There was silence, uncomfortable silence, between us for the first time in my memory.

“You said you wanted to talk,” he said gruffly. “So talk.”

“Josh, first of all, I want to say how sorry I am for what I said yesterday and how I treated you. I know I don’t have any right to ask you to forgive me but I truly do wish that you would.”

“I don’t know why I should. What you said really hurt, David. I’ve never hurt you. I never would hurt you -- and you know that,” he said, his voice still quietly angry.

“I do know that. And I swear to you, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I didn’t want to hurt you. It’s just that after everything I’ve been through in the last couple of months, I lost control of myself. I never expected to find you here. I didn’t know how to deal with seeing you again, not after what happened to me.”

“You mean this guy down in San Francisco?” He finally turned and looked at me.

“Yeah. It was like having my guts kicked out when I found out he’d been cheating on me. But I realize now that I was the one who’d been unfaithful first. That was the hardest thing for me to admit.”

“You mean you cheated on him?” Josh asked, disgust in his voice.

“You could say that. In a very basic way, I did,” I admitted quietly, looking down, not able to look at him.

“You either cheated on him or you didn’t,” Josh intoned, like a judge pronouncing sentence over a condemned prisoner.

“I never physically cheated on him,” I argued, defensively. “My ‘cheating,’ if you want to call it that, was being in love with someone else and never telling him.”

There was dead silence for a few moments and then I heard Josh’s voice, quieter and softer, without the anger this time. “Who were you in love with?”

“I told you that yesterday.”

“Tell me again,” he demanded quietly.

“You. I was in love with you. I’ve always been in love with you. Ever since we were little boys.”

“So why didn’t you ever tell me?”

I looked up at him. His face was still but unreadable.

"Because I was afraid. I knew you could never feel the same way and I didn't know how you'd react if I told you."

"I probably wouldn't have reacted very well. I wouldn't have known how to deal with it."

"And now?" I asked.

"When I went into the Marine Corps, it wasn't because I felt any patriotic duty, no matter what I said," Josh said quietly, looking down at the ground. "I went because I was looking for something."

"What?"

"My manhood. I was having all these feelings that I didn't know how to deal with and I thought the Corps would straighten me out."

"What kind of feelings?"

Josh looked up at me. "You know I did a lot of dating when we were in high school."

"Yes. I remember you dated just about every good-looking girl in the school. And some that weren't so good looking as well," I said ruefully.

Josh actually gave me a small smile at this.

"Yeah. There were some that were real dogs. The only reason I dated them was I knew they'd put out. I knew they'd be so grateful for dating somebody like me that they'd do anything I wanted. I'm not very proud of that."

I could see the shame written on his face. "You were young and horny. We all do things we aren't proud of when we're that way," I said.

"But the thing was, none of it ever felt right. None of it! It was like, 'Okay. So I got my nut. So what?' There were no feelings. I didn't even like half of them. They were nothing to me but somebody to fuck."

"I never knew you felt that way. You never said anything."

"Of course not! I could barely admit that to myself, much less to you of all people."

"What do you mean, to me 'of all people?'"

"The only time it ever felt right, the only time that I felt like somebody really cared about me and I really cared about them were all those nights with you," he admitted so quietly I could barely hear him.

"Josh...what are you saying?"

"You went to San Francisco to get over me and I went into the Corps to get over you."

I just sat there, my mouth open but I was totally, maybe for the first time in my life, speechless.

"Yeah, I was in love with you. And I couldn't deal with it either. All those nights, lying next to you and all I wanted was to take you in my arms and make love to you. But I couldn't do it."

We sat there in silence for a while. Me looking at him, Josh looking at the ground.

"So what happened?" I asked finally.

"I started meeting other guys in the Corps who opened my eyes. I found out that I wasn't the only guy that had those feelings. That there was nothing 'wrong' with me. There were plenty of other guys who felt just like I did. I discovered that sex with another guy was way the hell and gone better than with a girl. I discovered I didn't have anything to be ashamed of for wanting another guy. The only thing I was ashamed of was that it all came too late. I'd already lost you by that time. When I saw you again, it was like I'd been given a second chance. That's why it hurt me so much yesterday. I saw how badly I'd hurt you and how you'd carried it all those years. I hadn't felt that ashamed of myself in a very long time."

At this, he finally looked up at me and I could see tears streaming down his face.

"Josh, you were in love with me?" I asked, so afraid that I was hearing him wrong somehow.

"No, David. I'm saying that I'm still in love with you. I've always been in love with you. All those years I never stopped loving you," he said, his voice husky, but I wasn't sure if it was from his crying or desire.

Neither of us moved. Neither of us said a word. It was like we were still adolescents, locked in our fears of how the other was going to react. Finally I couldn't take anymore.

"So what do we do now?"

"The way I see it is that we've got two choices. Either you let me take you back to your house and make love to you the way I should have done years ago or you take my gun and shoot me because I don't want to go on living without you anymore."

I looked at him in shock but he smiled at me, letting me know, I hoped, that the "second choice" was just a joke.

"Well, I guess I'll have to let you make love to me because I don't know how to shoot a gun. I'd probably aim at your heart and blow your nuts off."

At that point, I realized that tears were now streaming down my face and I couldn't see Josh through the blur of them. Suddenly, strong arms were around me, the scent of Josh, a scent I'd known all my life from the closeness that we had shared, surrounded me and two lips were feverishly pressed to mine. My mouth opened to him and his tongue began to taste and explore me while I gently sucked at it. My arms went around him and somewhere in the back of my mind, it registered how hard and muscular his body was. Way more than even when we were boys.

The next thing I knew, those same arms were holding me suspended above the ground and Josh was literally carrying me through the woods toward my home. I clung to him,

feeling something that I'd never felt before -- safe, protected and truly loved. I had never felt this way with my ex-lover. Not even close. I was also amazed at Josh's strength. I mean, I knew with all those muscles he was strong, but he carried me as if I weighed next to nothing at all.

We made it back to my house in record time and I was grateful that in Star Harbor nobody ever locked their doors because I would have hated to have to try to get my keys out of my pocket. Josh opened the door and carried me upstairs and straight to my room. When I'd cleaned out the house after my parent's death, I hadn't done anything to my own room. When I moved home, I simply moved back into it. There was the same double bed Josh and I had slept in all the time we were growing up. The same bed I had lain next to him in, wanting so much to touch him, to have him hold me, just as he was doing now. The same bed I had cried myself to sleep in so many nights because of what I thought was the hopeless love I had for him.

Josh laid me gently on the bed and then looked down at me as he began to strip out of his clothes. I just lay there, watching as his incredible body was revealed. He pulled off his T-shirt and I saw his magnificent musculature. His arms, chest and rippling abs caused my breath to practically leave my body. I remembered what he looked like when we were adolescents but, since the Marine Corps, his body was now not only bigger and more defined but mature as well. This was not the body of a boy, but the body of a man.

As he kicked off his shoes, he began unbuckling his belt and popping open the top button of his jeans. Then he slowly began sliding down the zipper and I was making bets with myself on whether he still wore briefs like he did when we were young or had changed to boxers. I was wrong on both counts. It seems that he wore nothing at all because the first thing I saw was his massive tower of manhood rising from his dark pubic hair. While we had seen each other naked hundreds of times when we were little kids from bathing together or skinny-dipping in a pond on the back of his parents' property, once we reached puberty, those situations ended. I had been too shy to undress in front of him for fear that I would get an erection. Now I wondered if he had felt the same.

He started to slide his jeans down his legs as I stared at him. When he got them halfway down, he stopped.

"Hey! Aren't you going to get naked, too?"

"Uhh...yeah," I stuttered.

To tell the truth, I was still as embarrassed as I had been as a teenager to undress in front of him. The reason now was different, however. I didn't have anywhere near the endowment that he did and I was not only short but slender as well. I did have some definition to my body but not the type of bulging musculature that Josh had. My body did still look like a boy's body in contrast to Josh.

I got off the other side of the bed and started to undress. I pulled off my T-shirt and my gym shorts leaving only my small swimmer's jock, the pouch of which was bulging out with

my erection. Josh was completely naked now, standing across the bed from me watching as I undressed. I know I was blushing because I could see the red blotches across my chest. I closed my eyes and slid my jock down and off and then stood up and finally opened my eyes. Josh was staring at me with the type of intensity with which “my” wolf stared at one of the steaks I’d shared with him. As if to complete the analogy, I saw Josh’s lips pucker and heard the traditional “wolf-whistle.”

“Fuck, David! You are far more beautiful than I remembered,” he said, with a deep kind of growl in his voice.

I blushed all the harder, feeling my body heating up from it.

“Look who’s talking,” I said softly, looking down at the bed in embarrassment. “I didn’t think it was possible but you’re more incredible looking than you were when we were growing up.”

Josh didn’t say a word, but I heard the springs of the bed creaking as he got on it. He reached over and grabbed my hand, pulling me onto the bed with him and back into his arms.

“I’m glad you like how I look. Just please tell me that’s not the reason that you’re in love with me,” he said, seriously.

I looked at him and I could see concern written all over his face. I wondered at this.

“No! Of course not,” I exclaimed, somewhat hurt that he would even think that. “Contrary to popular opinion, not all gay males are that shallow.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve had guys tell me that they loved me when all they really loved was my body and my looks,” he said contritely.

“Hey! Remember me? David? The one who’s known you since you were, what? Five or six? Long before you ever looked like that. Though, as I remember, you were kind of a cute little boy.”

“So were you. That’s why I noticed you that first day in kindergarten. That’s why I set out to make you my friend.”

I reached out and slapped him on the arm, though I had to remember not to do that anymore. His muscles were so hard I hurt my hand.

“Now, look who’s the shallow one!” I exclaimed.

“Okay. I admit it. I was only attracted to your looks -- at first.”

“That’s okay. I loved the fact that you were bigger than I was. I wanted you as a friend because I sure didn’t want you as an enemy.”

“When did it change for you?”

“What? When did I like you as a friend?” I asked, completely confused by the question.

“No. When did you start loving me?”

"I don't remember exactly. I do remember I was about fourteen and you were sleeping over one night. I remember watching you sleep and this overwhelming feeling came over me. I wanted so badly to lean over and kiss you. I knew that the feeling wasn't sexual...well...not entirely. It was way beyond that."

"So did you?"

"No. I was too afraid. I just lay there for hours, trying to go to sleep and watching you the whole time."

"I remember exactly when it happened for me."

"When?"

"We were sixteen. It was the night of that horrible game against Cooley High. Remember? We were losing so bad, Coach put me in the fourth quarter, even though I was only the second string quarterback."

"Yeah, I remember. On your first play, two of their senior linebackers sacked you and you got hit so hard you didn't get up until Coach came out on the field."

"No shit! I wasn't going to get up at all. I figured if I did, they'd hit me again."

"But why that night?" I asked, not understanding.

"Don't you remember what we did afterwards?"

"Well...you were so bruised and banged up, you didn't feel like going out on your date with your cheerleader of the week."

"And...?" he urged me to continue.

"Oh, yeah...I brought you home because you didn't want your mom and dad to see how banged up you really were. You were afraid they'd never let you play football again."

"Yeah, and you spent all night massaging the parts of me that hurt and putting ice packs and heating pads on all the rest. You took care of me like I couldn't move." As he said this, his eyes got a gentleness to them that sent chills through me.

"Well, you really couldn't move all that much," I reminded him.

"No, I know I couldn't because if I could have, I would have grabbed you that night and made love to you. Really made love to you."

"But why? All I did was take care of your injuries."

"It was the way you did it. You were so tender and gentle but I could see how much you were hurting at seeing me hurt. It was then I finally realized how much I wanted and needed you. How important you were in my life. It hit me that all these feelings I had for you were love. Pure and simple, I loved you. It scared the crap out of me."

"You were scared? I was petrified that you'd notice that, while I was working on you, I had a hard-on the whole time, just from getting to touch you. I was totally disgusted with myself. Here you were all banged up and I was getting a hard-on over it."

"Was that all you were feeling that night?"

“No. I was all torn up seeing you hurt so badly. If it had been up to me, you’d never have played football again.”

“But you never even suggested that I quit.”

“Of course not. You loved football. It wasn’t my place to tell you what to do.”

“I knew how you felt though. I could see it in your eyes. The fact that you didn’t say anything was a big part of the reason I realized how much I loved you. You never judged me. Never told me I was wrong. Never made me feel guilty, not even the times when I was an asshole.”

“Those times were few and far between.”

“I don’t ever remember you being an asshole...well, except for yesterday.” With this he smiled so I knew he’d forgiven me.

“Okay. I said I was sorry. Besides, don’t I get one ‘freebie’ after all these years?”

“Why do you think I walked away from you? I’ve never let another guy talk to me that way in my life. I knew something was really wrong and I knew you’d come to your senses eventually.”

“Oh, you did, did you? And just how did you know that?”

“Because you’d already told me that you were still in love with me and that you weren’t able to get over it. I knew, in the end that would win out -- if you didn’t run away again. I just didn’t expect it to be so soon.”

“Is that why you were still angry with me when I showed up?”

“I was still hurting. Nobody has ever screamed at me that way before.”

“Maybe nobody ever loved you enough to scream at you that way,” I said softly.

“Okay. But, please, don’t do it again. Sometimes, if I become too angry, I can’t always control my reactions,” he said, and I could tell he was serious.

“Now that I know you love me, I have no reason to ever scream at you like that. What you heard was almost a whole lifetime of pain and frustration over loving someone I thought could never love me back.”

“Oh, I can love you back,” he said, growling deep in his throat again and rolling over so he was on top of me.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, looked up into his eyes and said, “Prove it.”

## Chapter Six

And he did. Starting with the top of my head down to the soles of my feet, there wasn't any place on my body that Josh's mouth, tongue or hands didn't kiss, lick or stroke. One thing he did, at first, shocked and embarrassed me. He got down between my spread legs and, pushing them back, almost to my chest, ordered me to hold them there. This left not only my cock and balls but also the cleft of my ass open to him. I had no idea what he was going to do until he pushed his face forward and I could hear him taking deep breaths.

"Oh, fuck! You smell so good," he growled.

Oh, my God! He was snorting the scent of my ass. And, not only that, but he was really loving it. But I didn't have time to think about that because suddenly, he did something that had me wanting to rise off the bed vertically. Without warning, I suddenly felt something wet and raspy slide through my butt-crack and across my sensitive hole.

"What the fuck are you doing to me?" I practically screamed.

He looked up from my ass, his tongue hanging out, grinning at me.

"I'm licking your ass. Hasn't anybody ever done that to you before?" he asked curiously, like it was the most common thing in the world.

"No! Never."

"Feel good?" he asked, grinning at me.

"Josh, are you...are you sure you should do that?"

"Oh, fuck yeah! I love eating butt -- especially one this hot and pretty."

That was all the conversation there was because he went back to eating my hole and I was only capable of lying there and groaning in ecstasy at the intense feelings it was causing. I could feel him pressing his tongue against my hole and sucking on the rim until my ring gave way and then I could feel his tongue slide into my butt. Josh had his tongue inside me,



fucking me like a small, wet cock and I was loving every second of it. In fact, had he done it any longer, I felt like I would come.

I nearly got off so many times, by the time he was once again lying on top of me, looking down into my eyes with an almost feral gleam in his, I was starting to feel pain at having to hold back. It was almost laughable; here I was, in my late twenties getting “blue balls” like a teenager. It was then he made his intentions very clear. He reached down and grabbed my legs, placing them around his hips. I felt the blunt, spongy head of his enormous cock pressing against the already wet opening to my ass, demanding entrance.

At first, I was frightened. The only male who had ever fucked me was my ex-lover and he wasn't anywhere nearly as well endowed as Josh. In fact, my ex-lover was barely bigger than me. I knew that Josh wouldn't intentionally hurt me but the staggering thought of something that big going through all that tender tissue up my ass gave me pause. I guess Josh could feel me stiffen at the thought.

“I'll be gentle. I know I'm not small but I promise, I won't hurt you. If you can't take me, I'll stop. I promise.”

“I think we're going to need lube. A lot of lube. It's been months since anyone has so much as touched me.”

“I understand. Do you have some?”

“Yeah. In the drawer of the nightstand, over there,” I said, pointing.

He moved swiftly so that he was gone from on top of me for only a moment. Then he got between my legs and began applying the lube to my ass himself. I don't know why, but this very tender act almost brought me to tears. To be honest, my ex-lover had never done this. He'd always left it to me to do it myself. This gentle act of caring on Josh's part told me, in an instant, the real difference between how Josh loved me and what had passed for love for ten years in my relationship. *How could I have been so blind all that time?* I thought to myself. The only reason I could come up with is that I wanted a relationship so badly, I wanted to forget about Josh and try to bury the love I had for him, that it seems I had imagined love and caring where maybe none had really existed at all. This brought a twinge of deep sadness to me for all of the wasted years. Josh must have somehow felt from my body that something was distressing me.

“What's wrong?” he asked, looking up from between my legs.

“Nothing now. Nothing at all.”

“You're sure?”

“I'm very sure. Have I told you lately how very much I love you?”

For a moment, he tilted his head in thought so that -- just for an instant -- he reminded me of “my” wolf -- before replying, “No. I don't think you have.”

“Then let me say it now. Josh, I love you very, very much. More than I can ever tell you.”

“Then don’t tell me. Show me,” he said gently.

He continued to lube me, pushing first one finger in me and working it in and out until it was moving without any resistance. Then he tried two. This hurt some and I winced in pain. Josh noticed and instantly stopped moving.

“Breathe slowly and deeply. Push down with your ass muscles. That will help to loosen you up.”

I did as he directed and soon his two fingers were moving deep inside me with no pain, only pleasurable feelings -- especially when he stroked my prostate, causing my cock to belch pre-cum onto my stomach.

“Yeah. There it is. Your ‘joy’ button.” He grinned at me. “Wait until my cock is stroking against that.”

“If you don’t stop stroking it with your fingers, I’m going to come and you’re not going to get to put your cock anywhere.”

He got the message, though he continued to work his fingers inside me until even his two, very large fingers didn’t feel like they were enough. He then added a third and continued to spread me open until I could take them easily as well.

“That’s it. That’s as much as I can open you up,” he said, and began re-lubing my ass and putting a lot of lube on his huge cock.

With this, he again laid on top of me and I wrapped my legs around his hips. I could feel him pressing against my now slick opening but, this time, there was no fear. Instead, I was eager to feel his cock sliding inside me. Eager for him to take me, to possess me, to make me his and his alone.

My body must have been in tune with my mind for when he pressed slowly forward, there was no resistance whatever. I could feel him sliding deep inside me but there was no pain, just the utter joy of being filled with him. When he could go no further because he had no more of himself to give, he looked down into my eyes.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his voice husky with desire.

“Better than okay.” I smiled up at him.

“No pain?”

“No pain.”

Then his mouth came down on mine in a passionate kiss as his hips began the ancient entry and withdrawal rhythm of love. He was slow and gentle at first, but I could tell he desperately wanted to be more aggressive but was afraid of hurting me. What he didn’t realize was I needed him to be more aggressive as well.

“Let go, Josh. You won’t hurt me. I need you to let go. Fuck me. Fuck me hard!”

“Are you sure?” he growled.

“Oh, yes. I’m sure. For God’s sake, pound my butt!”

And with this, he did let go. The sheer animal power of his body was overwhelming. His cock pounded me like a jackhammer. Each time I begged him to speed up and pound harder, he did. Never had I been made love to like this. Nothing prepared me for the passion or the joy of not only finally being made love to by someone I truly loved but by someone who truly knew how to make love. It seems that Josh had either a great deal more experience than I did, which wasn't hard to imagine considering how little I had, or he was a much more talented fucker than I ever thought someone could be. I came eventually to realize it was both but, right then, all I could do was respond to what was happening to me, I was so overwhelmed by it all.

What amazed me the most was that never in my life had I ever come from just being fucked. Even though I had read about it in books and in stories on the Internet, I never realized that it was actually possible. I thought it was some myth of "gay-lore" but, to my shock and surprise, I was soon right at the edge of coming and, except for the way he was driving his cock hard and fast and deep inside of me, neither Josh nor I had even touched my cock. Indeed, my arms were wrapped around his neck and his were on the bed supporting him above me the whole time.

"Josh!" I screamed out.

It was the only thing I was capable of articulating at that moment.

"Yes! That's it, babe. Get off. Come for me," Josh growled, grinding as hard and deeply inside me as he could.

And with that, I went over the edge and rushed headlong into my climax, covering us both with my long white ropes of cum while, at the same time, I could hear Josh screaming out my name and I could feel his cock pulsing within me, filling me with his hot load. I don't know how many times he shot, but there wasn't room inside me for all that cum and his huge cock so, by the time he stopped, cum was squishing out of my ass with each pulse of his orgasm.

Like a wave cresting and dying, Josh and I collapsed together, him on top of me, as we desperately tried to gather our breath. Never in my life had making love been like this. Never had I been so thoroughly drained by it. It was like Josh had taken me apart and put me back together but in a wholly different and particular way. A way that made me his and his alone -- forever.

"My God! Is it like that every time?" I asked.

I heard his deep chuckle next to my ear.

"I don't know, babe. It's never been like that before for me," he murmured, barely able to speak yet.

"Never?"

"Never. Because it was never you."

We lay there, gathering our strength, never uncoupling. Josh fucked me three more times that afternoon and each time was more explosive than the last. And each time he brought me off just by fucking me. I knew I would be very sore the next day but I didn't care. I was like a crack addict. I couldn't get enough. Eventually, from just sheer exhaustion, I physically couldn't become aroused again.

In between, we talked. Josh told me about the Marines and becoming a cop in Seattle, quickly rising to the rank of detective.

"So why come back here to be just a uniform cop again?" I asked, when he told me of the struggle to make his gold shield and take off the uniform.

"Things changed in my life. My dad died and mom was all alone here. Plus, I became very disenchanted with big city life. This is home to me, always has been, always will be."

"Yeah. I guess for me, too. I loved the freedom I had in San Francisco but I missed the slower pace of life here. I just thought that coming back here meant giving up on ever finding love."

"I didn't think that at all. I just somehow knew that someday you'd come back. I even thought of going down to San Francisco to find you. Imagine how surprised I was to find out from Mom that you'd already moved back."

"Imagine my shock when you walked into the store." I laughed.

"Yeah. I could tell," he said ruefully. "Oh, and I'm not just a beat cop. I didn't tell you what finally convinced me to come home."

"What?"

"The Chief is going to retire next year. He told me if I would come back and work under him for his last year, he'd recommend me to the Town Council to take his place as Chief of Police when he retires. So you're sleeping with the next 'top cop' of Star Harbor."

"Uhh...what about us?" I asked, quietly.

"What about us?" he asked, confused.

"How do you think the Town Council is going to feel about their Chief of Police being involved with one of the town's antique dealers?"

"They'll probably be as unconcerned about that as they were about hiring a new police officer who was gay."

"You mean, they know?" I asked in shock.

"It was one of the conditions that I made when I came here. I gave up hiding what I am when I got out of the Corps. I was hired on the Seattle force with their full knowledge. In fact, they were quietly recruiting gay officers because they had passed a gay rights ordinance that ended discrimination in all city hiring. I wasn't about to go back in the closet for anybody."

"You realize that everyone in town is going to know."

"I'm figuring that most of them already do. I've been getting some looks from some of the women in town that basically translate to 'what a shame!'"

"Including some of your old girlfriends?" I poked him in the side with my finger.

"Yeah!" he yelped. "But you don't have to worry about them."

"Well, there's one woman I do worry about."

"Who's that?"

"Your mother. What happens when she finds out?"

"Mom already knows. I told her several years ago. Dad knew, too."

I had to admit, that really shocked me. I never did come out to my own parents. I just figured they always knew, but we never discussed it.

"Does she...well...does she know about me?" I asked, hesitantly.

"She knows that I'm in love with you. She doesn't know anything about yesterday, though she might have her suspicions considering I didn't come home in a very good mood."

"No. I can imagine."

"But she knows we're together now and we've been gone a long time. I think Mom can put two and two together."

"Josh, I've got to ask one thing. Now that we're finally together, I can't bear the idea of being parted from you again. I want us to live together. I want to go to sleep in your arms and wake up the same way, just like I always dreamed about when we were young. How will she feel about that?"

"Mom and I already discussed that before I came home. She isn't the kind of mother who wants me to live with her. In fact, I think she's already starting to get tired of having me around all the time. Puts a cramp in her style. She likes getting together with all her girlfriends without having me traipsing in at all hours of the day and night because of my crazy schedule on the force. You might have some trouble with that, as well."

"Oh, no I won't. Just as long as I know that when you come home, you're coming home to me."

"I think what I need to do is call her and tell her to set another place for dinner. Then we can all discuss it together."

"Okay. If you think that's best," I said hesitantly.

"David, there's nothing to worry about. Mom loves you like you're her son, too. You know that. When I told her it was you I was in love with, all she said was it was about time that I'd figured it out."

"Really?"

"Really. Now let me go call her."

I watched as he rose from the bed, gloriously naked, and strode toward the door. He had the comfortable, proud walk of a healthy male animal that sent shivers through me at

the thought of making love to him again. I had to laugh at this, considering I was in no condition to do so and wouldn't be for at least several hours and yet it was all I could think about.

"It's all set," he said, coming back into the bedroom after a few minutes. "I think we ought to take a shower. What do you say?"

"Together?"

"Of course together. How else?" he asked, with a look on his face like I was crazy to even ask.

I got up off the bed and followed him into the bathroom. I didn't have a shower, but I had a bath-shower combination with sliding glass doors. Luckily, it was an old house and the tub was large, otherwise I don't think the two of us could have fit. He set the temperature and then stepped into the tub, taking my hand and pulling me in after him. He proceeded to take the soap and cover my body, running his hands all over me. I didn't think it was possible but after only about three minutes of this, I was once again erect. He looked at me and grinned.

"Doesn't that thing ever go down?" He chuckled.

"Not when you're touching me like that."

"Well, it's your turn. Let's see what you can do," he said, handing me the soap.

I proceeded to run my hands over every part of his body even though he had to bend down or squat for me to reach some of them. His cock was soon as erect as mine was. I wondered if he was going to try and make love to me in the shower but he had something else in mind. He put me under the shower and rinsed all the soap off me and then dropped to his knees. The next thing I knew, I was surrounded by the warm wetness of his mouth. I groaned in ecstasy. While I'd had blowjobs before, I'd never had one like this. Again, Josh proved himself far more expert than the few guys I'd ever experienced before I met my ex-lover, who also wasn't all that expert either. He took my cock all the way down to my pubic hair with each stroke. It was unbelievably intense and I realized I had never really known anything about sex at all. At the end, he jammed two of his fingers inside my ass and, finding my "joy button," proceeded to stroke it so that I had no choice but to come. I emptied myself into him, shooting volley after volley of cum down his throat -- even when I would have sworn I had none left in my body. He then had to hold me up since I almost collapsed over him from the intensity and the exertion of my orgasm.

Once I recovered, he stood up and kissed me. I could taste my cum in his mouth, pungent and salty, and I reached down and began stroking his erect cock which was pressed against me. I pulled away from him and pushed him under the water to rinse off. I then got on my knees and did what I could to return the pleasure. Of course, there was no way I could take all of him, having never learned to "deep-throat" but evidently what I could take was enough, along with my very active tongue, because I was soon tasting him as he held my head and shot more of his cum down my throat. His cum, however, was sweeter and less

salty than mine. If this was what it was like all the time, I was going to become very addicted to the taste of it.

We then rinsed off again and stepped from the tub. Josh grabbed a towel and proceeded to begin drying me. No one had done this for me since I was a small boy and either my mother or father had to give me a bath. It almost brought tears to my eyes remembering those days and knowing that they were gone. How much they had loved Josh. I only hoped that they were somewhere and could see Josh and I loving each other. I was sure that they would understand and approve.

Once Josh had me dry, I grabbed another towel and proceeded to dry him.

"Hey, you know this isn't fair," I said.

"What isn't?"

"There's a fuck of a lot more of you to dry." I laughed.

"Sorry, shorty. That's what you get for being small." He grinned impudently at me.

"Shorty!" I screamed.

This called for retaliation! I quickly wrapped the towel into a "rat-tail" and snapped his butt good with it.

"Oww!" he yelped.

He swiftly turned and, grabbing me around the waist, lifted me off the ground and threw me over his shoulder. I was so shocked, I didn't even resist. He carried me into the bedroom, sat down on the bed, pulled me naked over his lap and proceeded to swat my butt with the flat of his hand three times. He then let go of me and I leaped from his lap, rubbing my sore butt.

"Nobody's spanked me since I was six years old!" I exclaimed.

"Maybe somebody should have," he said, grinning at me.

"That hurt," I said, whining.

"Then come here. I'll kiss it and make it better."

"You will?" I asked, surprised.

He grabbed my hand, and pulling me to him, turned me around and bent me over. He then proceeded to gently lick the cheeks of my ass.

"Oh! You'd better stop or we'll never make it to your mother's for dinner."

"Okay. We can pick up where we left off later."

A thrill went through me at the thought of that.

I quickly pulled on jeans and a new T-shirt and then Josh and I walked back through the woods to his mother's house. As we left mine, Josh reached down and took my hand. Oh! How many times had I dreamed of that when I was growing up? Walking hand in hand with Josh, knowing that he was in love with me, and now all my adolescent fantasies were coming true.

While we walked back through the woods, I told Josh about “my” wolf. He didn’t disbelieve me at all. In fact, he told me he was well aware of the wolf that lived in these woods but that I had nothing to fear from him as wolves were not the fearsome creatures that myths and stories made them out to be. I told him I knew that, having done research on the Internet about them. I also told him about how loving this wolf had been to me.

“It’s like that with some creatures. There seem to be people they are drawn to, almost as if they loved them.”

I didn’t have time to think about that statement because we were at his mother’s house again. She was waiting for us and we all sat down to a wonderful dinner of fried chicken with all the trimmings and homemade apple pie for dessert. Because Washington State produces such wonderful apples, apple pie was almost the “State dessert.” I had always loved Ada’s apple pie.

As we sat at the table after dinner, his mom looked at the two of us.

“Well, I can see you two have resolved whatever problem it was you had.”

I blushed and looked down at the table.

“Yes, Mom. We have. And I have great news for you. You are about to get possession of your house back to yourself.”

“Oh, I am? And when do you plan on moving?”

“Well, David and I haven’t really had much chance to talk about it but I’d like to do it as soon as possible,” Josh said, looking at me.

“That’s just fine with me.”

“I’ve got tomorrow off. I figure I could do it then,” he said. “I can do it while you’re at the store and have it done before you come home.”

“You don’t need any help?”

His mom started laughing.

“Land’s sake! Him? Need help? He’s strong as an ox! Besides, he doesn’t have much in the way of stuff to begin with.”

“Marines travel light.”

“Well, that’s good because antique dealers don’t.”

“I noticed. Mom, you’ve got to see his place. He’s got as much stuff in the house as he does in the store.”

I hadn’t thought he’d noticed.

“There’s one difference,” I said.

“What’s that?” Josh asked.

“The stuff at the house is not for sale.”

“Oh, I already figured that. Besides, from what I could see, the stuff is so pretty, I’m glad you won’t sell it.”



“Why thank you. Maybe I can get you interested in the antique business. And you can teach me how to be a cop.”

“No. I think we’d all be better off if you let me handle the law enforcement and you handle the antiques. I’m like a bull in a china shop. You remember how I was when I was young.”

“Oh yes. Like the time you --”

“Uhh, we don’t have to bring up any examples,” Josh said, cutting me off while glancing at me and then at his mom.

I guess he hadn’t confessed to all his boyhood sins as yet.

“It’s all right, Josh. You were just a typical boy. I love you just the way you are. I never wanted you to change,” his mom said.

“And he hasn’t,” I said, smiling at Josh.

“Oh yes, one thing’s changed.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“He finally became honest with himself. Just as you did. And now you two can see what I saw all those years ago. You two were somehow meant for each other. I don’t know why or how that happens but it doesn’t matter. I’m just happy that you two have finally come to that realization because I can see how happy you both are. And that’s all I ever wanted for the both of you -- to be happy,” Ada said.

I was stunned. I hadn’t expected her to be so open about Josh and me, but he’d told me that she knew. I could do nothing but answer her honesty in kind.

“I have loved your son all of my life. What I didn’t know was that he loved me as well. That’s why I ran away from Star Harbor. I couldn’t live here without being constantly reminded of him. I didn’t want to ever come back but now I’m so glad that I did.”

“David, as your mother always said, ‘The Lord works in mysterious ways.’”

## Chapter Seven

That night, I got my wish. I slept in Josh's arms. Now all of my childhood and adolescent fantasies had finally been fulfilled. I only wish I wasn't too exhausted to enjoy the experience but Josh had remembered to pick up exactly where we had left off before we went to his mother's house for dinner. We had no more gotten back to the house than he picked me up and carried me, once again, back to the bedroom, lying me face down on the bed this time.

"Butt still sore from your spanking, is it?" He growled deep in his throat.

I was about to say that it didn't hurt a bit and then I realized how incredibly dense I was being.

"Yeah. It's still sore. Your kiss must have worn off," I said, turning my head and smiling back at him.

"Well, I just have to do better this time so it will last longer."

And that's what he proceeded to do. And, despite my doubts that it couldn't possibly be any better than it had been all the other times earlier, somehow it was. I thought I would be too sore for him to make love to me again, but I was very wrong. Oh, there was some soreness. Just the size of him almost guaranteed that. But I found that Josh was not only a very knowledgeable and skilled lover but also a very tender and gentle one as well. Far more gentle than you would think for a man his size. The soreness soon went away and was replaced by sheer ecstasy.

Which was inevitably followed by total exhaustion. I'd never made love that many times in one day in my life. But just as it seemed that I couldn't get enough of Josh, he seemed not to be able to get enough of me. But finally, I just couldn't hold my eyes open any longer. Josh could see that I was falling asleep and the last thing I remember was his pulling

me close in his arms, my head resting on his shoulder and his leaning down and kissing me gently on the forehead.

I didn't, however, get to wake up in Josh's arms. I woke up in bed alone. At first, I thought maybe it had been all a dream but I could see the pillow next to me still indented from Josh's head. Better still, I could still smell Josh's scent there. The minute I moved, I had further evidence that the previous day and night had been no dream. Muscles I had never used before cried out in soreness from some of the sexual gymnastics of the previous day.

It was then, however, that my nose was assailed by a most heavenly smell -- coffee. And within moments, coming through the bedroom door was my beautiful Josh, gloriously naked and carrying two steaming mugs that were giving off that heavenly aroma.

"Finally awake, huh? Thought you were going to sleep the day away." He grinned at me, handing me one of the mugs as I sat up in bed.

"Why? What time is it?"

"Almost eight," he answered as if he was talking about the middle of the afternoon.

"How long have you been up?" I asked, suspiciously.

"Since five-thirty." He climbed into the bed with his mug. "I've already run five miles."

"Oh, cops get up early, huh?"

"No. Marines do. I've been getting up at that time since boot camp."

"I take it the five-mile run was the Corps as well?"

"Yep. Keeps you really fit."

"And the muscles?"

"Wait 'til you see my weights."

"Are you going to make me run and work out?" I asked suspiciously.

"No, babe," he said, leaning over and kissing me gently. "I won't 'make' you do anything, but I will try to talk you into it. After all, I want you around a long time and I want you to be able to keep up with me in bed."

At this he waggled his eyebrows at me. I broke into a fit of laughter at his antics. I had forgotten this little "bit" of his. When we were growing up, the local television station had shown re-runs of *You Bet Your Life* with Groucho Marx and we used to watch and laugh. Josh had taken to doing an impression of Groucho that had eventually just pared itself down to the waggling of his eyebrows.

"What do you mean, keep up with you in bed?" I said, after finally getting myself back under control. "I thought I kept up with you pretty well."

"You did, until last night. I could have made love to you at least twice more but you were too exhausted."

"Oh, that's just mean," I growled at him. "What a sneaky way to get me to exercise."

“Like I said, babe,” Josh murmured as he put his arm around me, “I just want you around for a long time.”

He then kissed me gently. Well, the kiss started out gently but grew in passion. Then suddenly, he pulled away from me. He grabbed the mug of coffee out of my hand and put both his and mine on the bedside table before taking me back into his arms and continuing the passionate kiss. He pressed firmly his body against mine until I was once again lying back on the bed and he maneuvered his way on top of me. My legs just naturally wrapped themselves around his hips and his hardened maleness unerringly found where it wanted to go.

After all the times we'd made love the day before, I had no trouble accommodating him as he pressed slowly inside of me. I had expected this time to be fast and furious but, instead, Josh took a leisurely, almost lazy, pace, slowly entering and withdrawing until I found myself practically begging him to push harder and faster. At this, he shifted gears and I suddenly found myself hanging onto him for dear life as he furiously brought us both to a crashing climax that left me panting under him, a quivering mass of exhausted male.

Josh, on the other hand, barely broke a sweat and was breathing almost normally, looking down at me grinning. He didn't need to say anything. I got the point.

“I have to start out slowly. I can't start out running five miles,” I panted.

“Don't worry. Within a month, you'll be doing it with ease.” And with that, he grinned in triumph, knowing he'd won.

“You don't fight fair, do you?” I said, pouting.

“Not when it comes to someone I love.”

I reached up my hand and gently stroked his cheek.

“I guess I was right in kindergarten. You are a much better friend than enemy.”

He turned his head and kissed the palm of my hand.

“You know it.” He grinned down at me. “Now get your butt out of bed! I think you owe me breakfast for that.”

I laughed.

“Yes, I certainly do. At least breakfast.”

I grabbed my mug of coffee as I padded down to the kitchen with Josh following me. I pulled out a skillet and set to making eggs and sausages with toast and fried potatoes. Josh told me he would head over to his mother's house to pack and move his things as soon as I went to the shop.

“Any chance you can close up early?”

I thought for a moment.

“No. Not today I can't. But soon I will be able to. I have two new employees coming in this afternoon.”

"Two? How did that happen?"

I told him about Pete and Rich. About how they were in love and how I had not only given them jobs but had invited them to come here to the house if they needed someplace to be together.

"You know that's technically contributing to the delinquency of minors," Josh said.

I looked at him in shock.

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Babe, I'm just telling you what the law says."

"I don't give a fuck what the law says. Those two boys are in love with each other. I would think that you, of all people would understand that."

"Of course I understand it. I didn't say that I wouldn't have done the same thing. I'm just saying that we'll have to be careful about it. What if their parents find out?"

"Look, if they're anything like we were, they're probably sleeping over at each other's houses all the time. But I don't think they're wasting time like we did with just sleeping. I don't think they need to come here to have sex. I was hoping it would be someplace where they could really be themselves and not have to hide. Now that you and I are lovers, of course, it wouldn't be such a bad thing for them to get to see what life is like for two adult males who are in love. We could be good role models for them."

"Okay. I give up," he said, walking over and putting his arms round me. "I guess you could be right. I never thought of myself as a role model though."

"A boy could do a lot worse than having someone like you," I said softly.

He looked at me in shock.

"Do you really mean that?"

"Of course I mean it. Josh, I'm not just in love with you. I've always respected you. You were always the best person I ever knew."

I could tell he was touched by this because he became silent. Josh was like so many men, unable to articulate his feelings sometimes.

"Thank you," he finally said and there was a lot of meaning behind those two words.

"So I'll be home after work," I said, smiling up at him. "Now sit down and eat."

He let go of me and I served up breakfast for both of us. Finished eating, I just had enough time to get dressed and get to the store. I ran into the bathroom and got in the shower. I was just starting to wash my hair when I felt cold air and heard the glass door open. Josh climbed into the shower behind me.

"Here. Let me do that," he said.

"Josh, if we start playing I won't get to the store on time."

"No playing. I just want to wash your hair for you."

And that's all he did. But that was enough. By the time he was finished, I was ready to play even though it would make me late. But Josh kept his word. He did let me wash him but that was all.

"We'll continue this when you come home," he said, taking a towel and drying me off.

"You bet we will."

The rest of the day was a very busy one for me. There were so many customers that by the time three o'clock rolled around and Pete and Rich came into work, I was very glad to see them. They went right to work cleaning, and I had them, one at a time, wait on customers with me so that they could get the hang of it. Finally, around four, things calmed down and I had a few minutes to talk to them.

"There's something that I need to tell both of you. Yesterday, I told you that you were both welcome to come to my house when you needed someplace to get away to be alone or to just be yourselves with each other. That still holds but there has been a major change since yesterday."

"What?" Pete asked but both of them looked extremely concerned.

"It's a good change, trust me. If you come over, I may not be alone."

"Oh! You found somebody?" Pete asked in surprise.

"Well, no, not exactly. You remember I told you about my friend that I grew up with?"

"Yeah. The one that was straight, right?" Rich asked.

"Yeah, that's the one. Well...it seems he wasn't as straight as I thought he was. We had a long talk yesterday and I found out that he'd been in love with me the whole time and was just as afraid of telling me as I was of telling him. He's going to be living there now."

Both boys' eyes lit up at the news.

"That's great! Who is it? Is he someone in town?" Pete asked.

"Yes. You might already know him. Officer Josh Harrison."

The two boys looked at each other.

"The new cop in town! You mean he's...he's..." Rich sputtered.

"The word you're searching for is gay."

"Holy shit!" Pete exclaimed.

"Not only that, but the Chief is going to retire soon and then Josh will be the Chief of Police for Star Harbor."

"Oh, God! How are you going to keep anyone from knowing?" Rich asked.

"We're not. The Town Council already knows that Josh is gay. And with his police car parked out in front of my house from now on, it's going to be readily apparent to everyone that we're living together."

"Are you sure...well...that you still want to let us come over?" Rich asked.

"I've already talked to Josh about it. He's fine with it. However, if you two are uncomfortable about seeing two 'old guys' who are in love...I'll understand."

"No! I think it's really cool that you guys finally did get together," Pete said. "It just happened yesterday?"

"Yes. What you didn't know is that we had a terrible fight on Saturday. I said some pretty awful things to him."

"Why?" Rich asked. "I mean if you loved him?"

"That's exactly why. I loved him for so long and I couldn't bear the reality of being around him again, knowing that he could never love me."

"Didn't he tell you the truth?" Pete asked.

"He tried to. I'm afraid that I never gave him the chance. After I was with you both yesterday, I went to him to apologize. That's when he finally told me."

"That is so cool! After all these years, you two are finally together," Rich said.

"Yes. It is cool. Hey, guys, do you think you could come over for dinner tomorrow night?"

Pete looked at Rich and I saw Rich nod.

"Yeah. We can do that," Pete said.

"Good, Let's say seven o'clock. Is that all right?"

"Sure," Rich said.

"Good. I'll see you both tomorrow afternoon, then."

"Uhh...is your...uhh...lover going to be there?" Rich asked.

"I don't know. I'm not sure what his schedule is. I know that if he can be, he will."

"Okay," Rich said.

"Well, that's enough for today. Let's close up. I've got someone waiting for me at home."

The two boys smiled and Pete gave me a thumbs-up sign.

When I got home, I couldn't find Josh. I went through the house and I could see evidence that he'd been there because I saw his stuff now moved in but I couldn't find him. Finally, I went into the kitchen and, through the window, saw him out on the deck, cooking at the grill. I walked out and he turned.

"I thought I'd make some steaks for us. They were in the freezer."

"Great. I didn't know you could cook." I smiled at him as I walked up and, slipping my arm around his waist, waited until he leaned down so I could kiss him.

"Well, I had to learn. I lived alone in Seattle and eating out all the time was too expensive."

"You're just full of surprises. Listen, there's something we need to talk about."

“Something serious?”

“Not really. I wondered if you were going to be here for dinner tomorrow night?”

“Yeah. I’m working dayshift tomorrow. Why?”

“I invited the boys to come to dinner. I hoped that you could meet them.”

“And they could see what a ‘normal’ gay couple looks like?”

“Well, it can’t hurt. After all, when or where are they ever going to see one?”

He smiled.

“Are you sure we’re ‘normal?’”

“Well, I guess we’re as ‘normal’ as it gets. After all, what is ‘normal’ anyway? What most people call ‘normal’ merely means ‘common.’”

“Well, you certainly can’t accuse us of being ‘common.’”

“Why not? What’s uncommon about two people who fell in love and nearly lost each other and then found each other again? That’s the standard Hollywood romance script.”

“Boy meets boy?”

“Okay. Maybe that’s a little different, but the rest of the script fits.”

“Look, I agree. I think that maybe seeing us will give them some idea of what a good gay relationship is like. I’m just uncomfortable with the responsibility of being a role model for them.”

“So don’t be a role model. Just be yourself. Trust me. That’s enough.”

“You aren’t practicing to have kids are you?”

I looked at him in shock.

“Kids? No!” I exclaimed.

“I just wanted to make sure.”

“Do you want kids?” I asked, shocked I was even asking the question.

“No. I just thought that maybe you were thinking about it.”

“Trust me, nothing could be further from my mind.”

“Well, a lot of gay couples are having them these days.”

“That’s just fine for them. I’ve never wanted children.”

“Okay. We agree on that one.”

He gave me a look of relief and then looked down at the grill, and turned one of the steaks.

“Dinner’s ready. You want to grab the baked potatoes in the microwave?”

I went into the kitchen and was about to pull the potatoes out of the oven when I noticed the red light blinking on my answering machine, which meant I had messages. I



looked at the counter on it and noticed there was only one. I guess Josh had been out or had been unsure about answering my phone. I pressed the button to listen to the message.

"David, please call me. It is urgent that I get in touch with you." The voice on the recording was one I immediately recognized. "Call anytime. You know the number."

It was the voice of my ex-lover. I had no idea what he considered urgent, perhaps his little boy-toy had left him for someone richer and he wanted me back? Whatever it was, it would be a cold day in hell before I considered calling him. That part of my life was over and there was nothing that I wanted to do with him. I'd let him hurt me once. That wasn't going to happen again. I quickly erased the message.

I got the potatoes out of the microwave and put them on plates. I got knives and forks out of the drawers. Putting it all on a tray I carried it to the table outside. I then took the plates over to Josh at the grill so he could put the steaks on them. I saw he had also grilled foil-wrapped ears of corn for us. I was amazed he had exactly the same idea for a meal as I usually cooked on the grill.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. There was a phone message for you. I didn't answer it because I knew it couldn't be the department calling. They would call me on my cell."

"Yes. I saw that. I listened to the message. It was nothing important. You should give the department this number, though, as an alternate."

"You don't mind me answering your phone?"

"Josh...we're...well...we're practically married now. I have no secrets from you. You should give your mom this number as well."

"Yeah. I guess I should. I know she doesn't like to call my cell. Says she always worries that I'll be talking to her and an emergency will happen and they won't be able to reach me."

"Doesn't she know about call-waiting?"

"Are you kidding? She still has a phone with a rotary dial on it. I tried to get her to at least change to a push-button one but she won't hear of it. She says the one she has is good enough."

"Will we get like that when we get older?"

"God, I hope not! But we probably will."

"I'll make a deal with you. If you catch me starting to act like that, tell me. And I'll tell you."

"Deal," he said. "Now let's eat. These steaks look so good."

"We are such carnivores, aren't we?"

Josh looked at me strangely for a moment but then grinned back.

"Yeah. But we're males. Males make the best carnivores."

## Chapter Eight

The following night, Pete and Rich came over for dinner. That afternoon at the store, I noticed they seemed apprehensive about it. I asked them if everything was all right. It took a while, but they finally admitted they were somewhat intimidated by the fact that Josh was a cop. I promised them he didn't wear his gun at home and that he wasn't going to arrest them for being in love. They laughed at that and I think I got them over their nervousness.

That is, until they showed up at the house and Josh answered the door. I had warned him already about how nervous the two were.

"I promise, I'll go easy on them," he swore.

"That sounds like you're going to interrogate them or something."

He grinned at me.

"Tell you what. I'll put the handcuffs away unless I really need them."

"Josh, I hope you're not going to say things like that when they're here. They were really worried about meeting you."

"Don't worry. It will be fine."

And actually it was. Oh, it was a little stiff at first but once we sat down to the large rump roast that I'd made, and the boys got some food in them, they calmed right down. In fact, they spent the rest of the evening bombarding Josh with questions about police work, especially in big cities like Seattle, and questions about the Marine Corps.

I just sat back and watched. Josh was magic with them. Josh may have been afraid of the responsibility of being a "role model" but it was very apparent that he quickly became one for Pete and Rich. While neither Josh nor I evidently wanted children, I don't think that either one of us could resist the pull to mentor kids. Especially kids like Pete and Rich, who were going through so many of the things both of us had gone through at that age. With the

huge difference being that Pete and Rich already had been honest enough to express their feelings for each other.

Again, I had those awful feelings of “if only.” If only Josh and I had found a way to be as honest about our love for one another as these boys had, how different our lives would have been. But, then again, perhaps it was for the best. We both did a lot of growing in those years after high school -- Josh in the Marines and on the police force in Seattle, me in San Francisco. If we’d had a relationship in high school, would it have lasted? Or would the pressures of growing up and making a life have been too much for us? Would we now be ex-lovers instead of lovers? There was no way I’d ever know.

After the boys went home, I could tell that Josh had truly enjoyed himself with them. In fact, it was Josh who pointedly invited them to “Come by anytime!” And this was the same guy who was worried that I was “contributing to the delinquency of minors.”

With the boys gone, Josh and I couldn’t keep our hands off each other. Josh, once again, ended up carrying me up to the bedroom and making love to me twice before we eventually went to sleep. Before sleep, I asked him about something that had been...well, not “bothering” me, but had me curious.

“Why are you always carrying me upstairs to make love to me? Are you concerned I can’t walk or afraid I’ll run away?” I asked, smiling up into his face as he lay on top of me after having made love to me for the second time.

“You promise you won’t laugh if I tell you?” he asked, sheepishly.

“I promise. Not that I would ever laugh at you,” I said, wondering what could be so embarrassing to him.

“Well...you’ve always been smaller than me.”

“Yeah? So?”

“When I was little, I always wished I had a younger brother. Somebody to play with. Somebody who would...well...” He faltered, closing his eyes.

I could tell this was really hard for him.

“Somebody who would look up to you?” I asked gently.

His eyes flew open and he looked startled.

“Uhh...yeah,” he finally admitted.

“Oh, and I was small so you thought of me like a little brother.”

“Yeah. You aren’t pissed are you?” he asked, and I could see fear in his eyes.

He must have been carrying this around since we were kids, it seemed such a difficult thing for him.

“No! Not at all. What you didn’t know is I always wanted a big brother. Somebody to protect me and teach me things. So there was you -- and you were so big.”

I think, from the look on his face, I shocked him more than when I had told him that I'd been in love with him since we were teenagers.

"Really?"

"Really. So you always wanted to pick me up and carry me in your arms when we were young?"

"Well, not all the time but, yeah. There were times I wanted to just pick you up in my arms and just hold you. Of course, I couldn't do it. Just the thought of it used to scare the crap out of me."

"Just like admitting that you were in love with me scared the crap out of you."

"Yeah. But that came later."

"Oh, I don't know. Kind of sounds like the same thing to me."

He didn't say anything for a while and I could see he was thinking about that one.

"Maybe you're right. I don't know. Look, I'll stop carrying you if it bothers you."

"Don't you dare! I didn't say it bothered me. In fact, I love it. I just didn't understand why you were doing it. Now that I do, I love it even more."

"You mean that?" he asked, tilting his head and looking at me in that dog/wolf kind of way he had that was somewhat disconcerting at times.

"Yes. I mean it. I think it's about the nicest thing you've ever said to me."

With that he leaned down and kissed me. But before he got any ideas of making a "Hat Trick," I pushed him over so that we were lying on our sides. I then turned over and backed up to him so that he was spooned behind me. His arms wrapped around me and he pulled me close to him and that's how I went to sleep.

I woke up alone in bed. This time I knew, however, that Josh wouldn't be coming naked through the door with coffee. He had to go into work early for a meeting with the Chief so I knew when I looked over at the clock and saw it was almost eight, he was already at the police station. I got up, got dressed and headed into town and stopped at the diner for breakfast. Wanda was there and waved me over to a table, bringing coffee with her, when I walked in.

"Where have you been? I thought you'd left town or something."

"Uhh...well, I've been eating breakfast at home."

"Not alone, I'll bet"

"Why would you say that?"

"Well, just the fact that one of the town's police cars has been parked out in front of your house for two days now."

*Oh, God! Small town life, I thought to myself. Everybody knows everybody else's business.*

I must have blushed red.

"Honey, there's no need to be embarrassed. Ada Harrison's a friend of mine. She told me about you and Josh, how you two grew up together and how Josh came back here hoping to find you again."

"Does everybody in town know?"

"Well, not everybody. I'm sure there are a few who haven't heard yet but, by the end of the week, there won't be many. But it don't matter. What does matter is, are you two happy?"

I looked up at her and smiled.

"Oh! You don't need to answer." She laughed. "I can see it written all over your face."

"I thought I'd lost him ten years ago. I never thought that we would ever get together. To be honest, I always thought that he went for girls."

"Well, honey, I could have told you that wasn't true. That night at your grand opening, I saw the way he looked at you, the way he watched you when you weren't looking. I would give anything in the world to have a man look at me that way."

"Really?"

"Oh, honey! I just knew he had it bad for you."

"I only wish I'd known it. I nearly lost him forever."

"You're kidding."

"No, I only wish I were."

"How?"

"The next morning he came to the shop and I ended up screaming at him to get out and never come near me again."

"Oh, honey! What brought that on?"

"A lot of things. Mostly it was not being able to deal with seeing him again and feeling all the old feelings that I'd had all the time we were growing up. Like I said, I still thought he couldn't ever love me."

"And he didn't tell you, did he? Typical male!" she snorted.

"I really didn't give him a chance to. Luckily, the next day, I went to him and apologized. That's when he finally did tell me."

"Well, then it was all worth it," she said, her voice having the finality of a judicial pronouncement.

"Yes, I guess it was, though I sure wouldn't ever want to go through it again."

"Well, the lucky thing is that you don't ever have to go through it again. So where is he this morning?"

"Oh, he had to be in early. He had a meeting with the Chief. So I figured that I'd come in and see if there were any blueberry pancakes."

“One order of blueberry pancakes coming right up!” she said and trotted off toward the kitchen.

Before I left, Wanda made me promise to bring Josh in for breakfast next time and I said I would try, depending on his schedule. It was still early but that was fine with me. I could get to the shop early and catch up on work I had been neglecting because of spending time daydreaming about Josh. Personally, I always liked going in very early before everyone was around. It was quiet and I could get some work done.

I went into the store and put on a CD of the Boston Pops playing Gershwin, my favorite American composer, and then made a pot of coffee. I was just sitting down at my desk having my first cup when the phone rang. I idly wondered who would be calling this early. I considered not answering it but my curiosity got the better of me. I wished later that I had followed my first impulse.

“David. Thank God I reached you. David, we have to talk,” the voice on the other end of the phone said.

I nearly hung up the phone. It was Vincent Mathers, my ex-lover.

“As far as I’m concerned, Vince, we have nothing to talk about,” I said as coldly as I could.

“Look, David, I understand that you feel that way and I don’t blame you, but this is very serious. If it wasn’t, I wouldn’t have called you.”

“What could be so serious that you needed to track me down here to tell me? How the fuck did you track me down, anyway?” I asked, very annoyed that Vince had found me.

“David, it wasn’t hard. I knew that little town you came from and how many David Stones could there be in it? And the store has the same name as the one you had in San Francisco.”

“Okay. So what the fuck do you want?”

“David, I’m sorry to tell you this, but I just found out that Jeremy is HIV positive. I’ve been infected and, I’m sorry to say this, but I’m afraid that I may have infected you.”

Vince was never one to beat around the bush or pull any punches.

“YOU WHAT?!” I screamed through the phone. “You and your fucking boy-toy infected me with AIDS!”

“David, I’m sorry. I can’t be sure. I just got the test results back three days ago. I’ve been trying to reach you since then. You need to be tested. That’s the only way you’ll know.”

“I HOPE YOU AND YOUR LITTLE SLUT DIE FROM IT!” I screamed and then slammed down the phone.

My mind was in total chaos. *What the fuck am I going to do? I’m infected with AIDS! I’m going to die! I’m too young to die! Oh, fuck! What am I going to tell Josh? Oh, my fucking God! Josh and I have never taken precautions! If I have the virus then I’ve infected him as well! My GOD! I’VE KILLED JOSH!*

All these thoughts tore through my mind as I sat there. I didn't know what to do, where to go, who to turn to, who to talk to. It took a few minutes for me to get myself under control before I realized that the first thing I needed to know was if I was infected or not. The one thing that bastard Vince was right about was that I needed to get tested. I needed to know for sure before I could make any decisions.

I immediately went to the website for the Washington State Department of Health. They had a whole website dedicated to AIDS and to testing sites. I discovered there were two ways you could be tested. Either "anonymously" or "confidentially." I knew immediately that I wanted to be tested anonymously. I didn't want anyone knowing about this. I especially didn't want my name and the fact that I had AIDS in some government database somewhere.

I also found out that there was something called "Ora-Quick," a twenty-minute test that could tell you if you were infected or not. I knew I didn't want to be tested anywhere near Star Harbor and so I looked on the website for testing sites in Seattle. I found one called "Gay City Health Project Wellness Center" which offered free rapid testing that was either anonymous or confidential. Their testing hours were from three-thirty in the afternoon until eight o'clock at night, Tuesday through Friday, which made it perfect. If I left now, I could easily make it to Seattle in time to be there when they opened for testing and still make it back before Josh made it home from work.

I started to lock up the store and put the closed sign up when I remember Pete and Rich. I had no way to reach them to let them know. Instead, I wrote a note and taped it to the window saying that I was closed because of an emergency and that all employees were to report tomorrow at the usual time. I would pay the boys for today as it wasn't their fault I wasn't there.

I got in the car and drove to Seattle. On the way, I tried to think what and how I was going to tell Josh. Better still, I tried to think of how he'd react. Would he leave me? God knows, given the fact that I may have infected him with a deadly virus, I wouldn't blame him if he did. Or would he, instead, just beat the shit out of me first? Or maybe even kill me? Again, I couldn't blame him for these actions.

All the way to Seattle, and I'm surprised I arrived in one piece considering I wasn't paying very good attention to my driving and was probably driving like an asshole the whole way, my mind spun on these questions and many more. *Was I going to die? How soon? Maybe I should just kill myself and get it over with? But I don't want to die!* I knew there had been advances in AIDS treatment and, from what I'd heard, people weren't dying like they did in the beginning of the epidemic. But what about the drugs? I'd heard they were horrible with terrible side-effects. And the way guys with AIDS looked, like refugees from a Nazi concentration camp. I didn't want to look like that.

Of course, I was instantly appalled at my shallowness for that last one. But I couldn't help it. In my mind's eye, I saw Josh, not myself, lying in a hospital bed, wasting away to nothing -- something I had done to him.

Somewhere along the way, I started to get angry. *This wasn't fair! I haven't done anything wrong. It was that bastard Vince who slept with that fucking little slut behind my back and then brought the slut's deadly virus home to me.* I'd had two men in my life that fucked me. Just two! I wasn't a slut. I wasn't promiscuous. Oh, not that I hadn't had chances. After all, I came out in San Francisco. There were plenty of beautiful guys and quite a number had "hit" on me. But no! I was holding out for love, for a relationship. I didn't want to be the typical promiscuous little cocksucker who went with any good-looking (or not so good-looking) guy who was available. And look what it had got me.

*Rather than killing myself,* I thought, *maybe it was Vince and that little slut of his I should kill?* I could probably get away with it, too, after what they'd done to me. But my mind kept going back to Josh. What I had done to him. How was I going to ever make up to him for that?

I finally reached Seattle and noticed it was only two o'clock. I evidently was driving far too fast if I made it in that time. I easily found the Gay City Health Project Wellness Center and parked down the street. Even though no one knew me here, I was still afraid to go inside. I kept thinking that everyone would know. Everyone would know why I was going in there. That I was another of those AIDS infected faggots. It was all I could do to get myself to walk in the door.

The first thing I saw was a man sitting at a desk. He was about my age with auburn hair and blue eyes. He was stunningly handsome and his smile of welcome shed light on the dark boiling mass that was my thoughts.

"Hi, can I help you?"

"I...I...came...to...to get tested," I mumbled, stuttering, barely able to get the words out.

I could feel my body trembling and my knees suddenly felt like they were going to give out. I guess he noticed it too because, in a flash, he was out from behind the desk and had his arm around me, helping me to a chair.

"Hey, it's okay, guy. I promise. Everything's going to be okay. What's your name?"

"David," I said, barely above a whisper.

"I'm Rusty, David. We don't actually start giving tests for at least another hour yet but I think you need to talk to somebody. Why don't we go back here and we can talk?"

"Okay. Yes. I'd like that," I said, looking up into his blue eyes and kind smile.

"Think you can make it on your own?"

I was embarrassed. I'd never been like this in my life.

"Yes. I think I can."

"Well, let me give you a hand up," he said, reaching down and putting a hand under my arm to help me up from the chair.



I still was feeling somewhat weak and Rusty must have noticed because he kept his hand under my arm to steady me as he slowly walked me back to a small office and sat me down in another chair.

"Can I get you anything? Coffee? Water?"

"No. Nothing. Thank you. I'm sorry. I'm not usually like this. It's just this has all come as such a shock."

"Why don't you tell me about it?"

And I did. I sat there, pouring out everything that had happened. I told him about Vince cheating on me, my finding out about it, going home and falling back in love with Josh, everything. I ended with the phone call this morning from Vince telling me I needed to be tested.

"Rusty, I don't want to die. I just finally found the man I've loved since I was five years old again."

"I understand, David, but HIV isn't the death sentence it once was. If you are infected, then we've caught it early and the chances of treatment are much better. The drugs are improving all the time. The side effects you've heard about are lessening for some patients. People with HIV are living longer than ever before."

"I'm afraid of everybody knowing that I have it."

"How would they know?"

"Well, I used to see guys who were like walking skeletons..."

"Oh! Wasting syndrome. That rarely happens in the early stages. Some people stay HIV positive for years and never go into what used to be called 'full-blown AIDS.' Some of them have ten or fifteen years and they still have a normal T-cell count. We look as healthy as anybody."

I gasped. I caught the word "we."

"You?" I asked, incredulously.

"Me. I'm HIV positive. Have been since 1994. My T-cell count is normal and my viral load is undetectable."

"I never would have guessed."

"And neither would anybody else."

"I've got to know. I've got to tell Josh. He may hate me, but he deserves to know."

"Just as you did. I know you think your ex-lover is a bastard but, at least he told you. He didn't have to," Rusty said, gently.

That really hit me. No, Vince didn't have to tell me. He could have just let me die or go on for years without ever knowing. I guess, in some way, he did still care about me. But I still hated him for what he did. But, I also figured that since he had gotten infected, he was paying his own price for his infidelity. I just wished I didn't have to pay it, too.

“Please, is the test going to hurt?”

“No. Not at all. This is Ora-Quick. It only takes about twenty minutes and it’s not a blood test. It’s just a swab. I swab it inside your cheeks and it picks up cells and then tells us if you’re positive,” Rusty said, showing me what looked like a simple Q-tip, but longer.

“You mean like those DNA tests I see on CSI?”

“Yes, just like that. Are you ready?”

“Yeah. I guess I am.”

Rusty swabbed out both of my cheeks and then inserted the swab into what looked like a long, plastic case. We sat there some more, talking. He asked me about Star Harbor and about my antique store. He said he and his lover might come out for a weekend as they liked to get away someplace near the water. I asked him if his lover was positive and was shocked to learn he wasn’t.

“Aren’t you afraid of giving him the virus?”

“No. We know how to keep him safe.”

“Were you positive when you met him?”

“Yes. Robert and I have only been together for six years. I wasn’t too sure about dating someone negative when we met but we fell in love. What more can I say?”

“God! I hope you have many, many years together.”

“We’re planning to.”

I reached into my pocket and pulled out one of my business cards and gave it to him.

“If you come to Star Harbor, call me. I’d love to show you both around.”

“I will. Thanks,” Rusty said, putting the card in his wallet.

Finally, the test was finished. Rusty pulled open the case and read the results.

“I’m sorry, David,” Rusty said, quietly, taking my hand in his. “You are positive.”

## Chapter Nine

Even though I thought I was prepared for this news, I guess you never are. Sitting there I began to cry silently. Rusty reached over and put his arms around me and held me while I did. I don't know how long we sat there, with me crying on Rusty's shoulder and him holding me but, eventually, I was all cried out. I knew that I had to go home. I had to go back to Star Harbor. I had to see Josh. I needed to tell him as soon as possible. He might hate me, but I had to tell him. He had a right to know.

"If he truly loves you, David, he won't hate you. This wasn't your fault," Rusty said to me.

"So why does it feel like it is?"

"Because you love him and you're feeling guilty. But, David, let me be frank here. Josh didn't stop and put on a condom, did he?"

"No. He didn't. But I didn't ask him to, either."

"David, each man is responsible for himself, ultimately. It isn't up to someone else to keep you safe. Each person holds that responsibility themselves. Now, it's unfortunate that this happened, but you are no more to blame than Josh is."

I knew he was telling me the truth. Certainly, what he was saying made sense. But I was just too lost and despondent to really hear him at that point. I was too busy beating myself up for doing this horrible thing to the man that I loved.

I thanked Rusty and asked what I owed for the test.

"Oh, there's no charge. If you want to make a donation to the Wellness Center, we'd be happy to accept it but we don't charge for this."

I reached into my wallet and pulled out a fifty dollar bill that I kept folded in one of the flaps for emergencies.

“Here. I hope this is enough.”

“That’s more than enough, David. Thank you.” And then he hugged me again. “Remember, if you need our help, just call.”

I left the Wellness Center and found my car. It noticed it was now four o’clock. I got back on the road and drove, hell-bent for leather, back to Star Harbor. I needed to see Josh. I knew I had horrible news to give him but, beyond that, I needed him. I needed him to hold me, if he would. And that thought scared me.

What if he wouldn’t? What if I lost him over this? Then I would kill myself because I would have nothing left to live for. I was scared, and yet that fear caused me to drive faster and faster to reach the island. I needed to find out. I needed to know, once and for all, if this was going to drive Josh away or not.

I didn’t get home until almost seven. Josh had dinner ready when I got there.

“Where were you, babe? I called the store but didn’t get an answer.”

“I was in Seattle.”

“Seattle? What for?” he asked, confused.

“Josh, please, sit down. We have to talk.”

It was then that Josh really looked at me. I guess he could see I’d been crying. He came over and put his arms around me.

“What is it, babe? What’s wrong?”

That was all it took. I started crying again. This time loudly and uncontrollably. Josh just stood there holding me and letting me cry it out. Finally, I got some control of myself and he walked me into the living room and sat down on the couch with me.

“David, what is it? What’s the matter?”

“I have something I have to tell you. You’re probably going to hate me for it, but I can’t keep this from you.”

“Tell me, babe. I’m not going to hate you. No matter what it is, we’ll work it out. I love you, David.”

“That phone call, the other night?”

“Yes?”

“It was Vince. My ex.”

“What did he want? Did he want you to come back?”

I stared at him in shock. I almost burst out laughing. If it was only that easy.

“No! He didn’t want me back. I would never go back. No, he finally reached me at the store today. Josh, the little slut that he was playing around with infected him with HIV. Vince was calling to tell me to go get tested. That’s what I was doing in Seattle.”

“And I take it that you’re positive?”

"Yes," I said, hanging my head in shame.

"Oh, David! Oh, my God! Babe," he said, pulling me back into his arms. "Why didn't you call me and tell me? Why did you go there alone? I would have gone with you."

"I was too ashamed. I knew that if I was, then I'd probably infected you. I didn't want to tell you until I was sure," I said, starting to cry again, my face pressed to his shirt.

"Babe, please, don't cry. It's going to be all right. I promise. It's going to be okay."

I pulled back and looked at him.

"Are you crazy?!" I practically screamed. "I have AIDS! It's not going to be okay! Nothing is going to be okay ever again! Worse, I've probably given it to you!"

"David, calm down. You haven't given it to me."

"How do you know? It's only been a few days. We won't know for at least six months. That's how long it sometimes takes for the virus to show up."

"No, David. You didn't give it to me. You can't give it to me," he said quietly, looking deep into my eyes.

"What?" I asked, totally confused.

Then it hit me.

"You already have it?" I asked quietly, deathly afraid that Josh had it and hadn't told me but made love to me without protection anyway.

"No! I don't have AIDS," he said. "I can't get it. I'm immune to it and to almost every other virus and bacteria."

"You're...you're...immune? How can that be?" I asked, totally confused.

"David, I'm sorry. There's something I've been trying to find a way to tell you. I didn't think it was going to be this soon. I'm not like other 'normal' guys."

"What do you mean? What are you, some kind of alien?" I asked, quite sure that either Josh or I had completely lost their minds -- maybe both of us.

"Well, there are a lot of people who would think so. No, I'm not an alien." He smiled.

"Then what?" I asked.

"David, you told me about your wolf. Remember how he would come to you and he would lick your face and sit with you and let you wrap your arms around him and cry against his neck?"

I looked at him in confusion.

"I never told you that. I never told anybody about that. How do you know that?"

"Because I was there," Josh said quietly.

"No you weren't! There was nobody there but me and the wolf."

"That's right. I was there."

"I don't understand. You're talking crazy!"

“David, I’m sorry to do it this way, but you need to watch something very carefully”

“What?” I asked, thoroughly and completely confused by this time.

Josh got up off the couch and walked over to the fireplace.

“Watch, David,” he said again.

I watched and suddenly, where Josh was there was a swirling grey mist. At first I thought it was coming out of the fireplace but instead, it surrounded Josh. It swirled around him for maybe a minute or two and then began to dissipate. But, when it did, Josh was no longer there. And standing where Josh had been was just a pile of clothing and...MY WOLF!

I almost screamed. The wolf stood there and then padded over to me on the couch and began licking my face. I just sat there in utter confusion. I couldn’t be seeing what I was seeing. The shock of the diagnosis must have been too much for me and my mind must have snapped. That was the only explanation I had. I had AIDS and now I was crazy, too.

The wolf drew back, walked over to the fireplace and that same grey mist began to swirl around him. Within moments, the mist dissipated and there stood Josh again, only he was naked.

“Wha...what are you?” I asked, my voice filled with awe.

“The term is a very old one, babe. Werewolf.”

“But there are no such things! Werewolves are just legends!” I exclaimed.

“Do I look like a legend, babe?” he said as he stood there naked and smiling at me.

Now I was totally convinced that I had lost my mind. My lover thinks he’s a werewolf. And I thought I’d seen him change.

Josh came back to the couch and sat down next to me.

“I was bitten two years ago in Seattle and made into a werewolf. There are more of us than anyone knows. Many of us live in groups or “wolf-packs.” I was actually changed by the Pack Leader of the Seattle Pack. It was during a fight but he eventually decided that he wanted me to help lead the pack with him. He didn’t know, however, I was gay and not interested in mating with any of the females. Besides, I’d already been in the Marines. I wasn’t interested in joining any more organizations.”

“Oh, my God! You’re a...a...werewolf!” I groaned.

I’d come to the conclusion that, no matter how crazy it sounded, I wasn’t crazy. I’d actually watched Josh turn into a wolf and back again. And not just any wolf but “my” wolf.

“Yes. I’m a werewolf,” he said quietly.

“Oh, my God! The next thing you’re going to tell me is that there really are vampires.”

He looked at me strangely and was about to say something but I held up my hand to stop him.

“No! Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know,” I said, emphatically.

Josh chuckled.

"So I can't infect you with HIV? No way?" I asked.

"No way," he said. "We're not sure why. We tend to think that becoming a werewolf is perhaps caused by some kind of virus which science has never detected. Whatever it is, it gives us immunity from just about anything. It also gives us incredible strength and the power to heal very, very quickly -- except from one wound. We can be killed by silver. Silver reacts with whatever it is inside of us and can kill us. So the old story about 'silver bullets' is true."

"Well, at least you won't die of AIDS."

I was at least grateful that I hadn't brought death to the man...uhh...wolf...uhh...man that I loved, but that still meant that I was infected.

"And I don't think that you have to either," Josh said, softly.

"What do you mean?"

"Babe, if I bite you, if I bring you over and make you 'were' as well, then I think that it might destroy the HIV in your body and you won't be infected any longer. Just the same as it protects me from getting infected. I'm not sure, but it seems to make sense. At least, I think it does."

"If you WHAT?" I yelped.

"If I make you a werewolf, it could cure your HIV," Josh said, slowly and distinctly like he was talking to a five-year-old.

"You've got to be kidding!"

"No, babe. I've never been more serious in my life. I had always planned on offering this to you. But now, there's a very good reason for you to accept," he said seriously.

"You want me to let you bite me so that I can turn into a wolf and that will cure my HIV?" I asked, skeptically.

"That's right. I'm not completely sure, but I think it will. But not a wolf. A werewolf."

Werewolves are evidently quite precise about terminology.

"Oh, and then a vampire can bite my neck and I'll never die at all."

"Well...actually, no. A werewolf cannot be turned into a vampire -- or the other way around. You're either one or the other because werewolves are alive but vamps are dead. Oh, they seem like they're alive, but they aren't," Josh explained all this very calmly.

"I'm going to wake up any minute and this is going to be the craziest, most hellish nightmare I've ever had!"

"No, babe. Sorry. This isn't a dream. I really am. You want to see me change again?"

"No! Once is enough for now," I said, though for the life of me, I couldn't figure out why. After all, I did love that wolf.

"The only drawback to being a werewolf is that you have to change during a full moon. You can do it other times at will, but during the moon cycle, you have to. But, trust me. It's

fun. Running through the woods, hunting. It's a blast! And wait until you experience mating!"

"Wait a minute! Hunting? Like in killing things and eating them?"

"Uhh...yeah."

"Yecch!" I responded.

"Trust me, it doesn't seem that way while you're changed," he groused, seemingly somewhat offended by my reaction.

"And let me get this straight, you want to have sex while we're wolves? Isn't that bestiality, for God's sake?"

"Well...actually, no. If we had sex while I was a wolf and you weren't -- that would be bestiality. When we're both wolves, that's just...well...we call it 'wolfie-sex.'" He grinned rather leeringly at me. "Trust me, it's totally hot."

"Oh, God! This is just WAY too much information, Josh. I don't know how much more I can handle in one day."

He put his arms around me and drew me close to him.

"I'm sorry, babe. I guess this is a lot to handle all at once. It's just that I'm so happy that I can finally share this with you. You don't know how hard it's been not to tell you. I didn't want to lie to you but I didn't know if you could handle it."

"I still don't know if I can handle it."

"Do you not love me now that you know?" he asked, and I could hear hurt in his voice.

"Of course I love you! You still love me even though I'm infected with HIV, don't you?"

"I still love you. Babe, I could never stop loving you," he insisted.

"Does...does...your mother know you're a wolf?"

"Uhh...no. I didn't think that she really needed to know."

"No, bet me on that! She does NOT need to know."

Josh chuckled at this.

"So, what do you want to do now?" he asked quietly as he leaned down and gently licked my neck.

I groaned.

"Well...considering what you've told me, that if you make love to me I can't infect you..."

"My thoughts exactly."

"Uhh...you are going to do this as a guy, right? Not as a wolf?"

"Of course I'm going to do it as a guy." At this Josh laughed. "I won't have 'wolfie-sex' unless we're both in fur."



“Okay. Just remember that! I’m going to hold you to it.”

“So what do you think about becoming were?”

“I think we should go upstairs and fuck. I’ll think about growing fur later.”

And, with that, he picked me up in his arms and carried me up the stairs. He made love to me three times. I was actually less impressed by this knowing now where he got all that strength. However, he kept his promise and didn’t grow fur.

At least that was something.

## Chapter Ten

I woke up very early the next morning, and turned over in bed. My head hit Josh's pillow and I was suddenly breathing in his scent. I groaned at it. I loved the scent of my lover. It was like some incredible perfume to me, but more arousing than anything that ever came out of a perfume company.

I could have lain like that for hours, but then I remembered the events of yesterday. My mind was spinning. How was I going to deal with all of this? Being HIV positive? Having a lover who evidently could grow fur anytime he wanted to? And add to it that Josh wanted to "bite" me and make me a werewolf, too, claiming it might cure me of HIV.

It was at that moment my naked lover, luckily in skin and not fur, came through the bedroom door with a mug of steaming hot coffee in each hand. Something he did every morning when he was home and not on duty. Something else he did every morning after getting up at five-thirty and running five miles. Now I began to wonder if it was Josh the man who ran five miles or Josh the wolf who ran. It was just one of the new "curiosities" of my life.

"Good morning, babe," he said, leaning down to kiss me on the forehead and hand me a mug of coffee. "How are you feeling?"

"Like a horse that's been rode hard and put away wet. Uhh...there aren't people who turn into horses, are there?"

Not your typical question to your lover first thing in the morning but, then again, mine was evidently not your typical lover.

"No, babe." He chuckled. "Only wolves. I don't know why. Anyway, if there are, I've never heard of them."

"Too bad. I could turn into a thoroughbred and win the Kentucky Derby and we'd make a million dollars."

Josh laughed so hard at this, he almost spilled his coffee.

"I never know how you're going to take things or what you're going to say next. That's probably the thing I've always loved the most about you."

"You don't say? When it comes to not knowing what somebody is going to say next, you win the award for the entire millennium."

He looked at me sheepishly.

"I wanted to find a calmer, more gentle way to tell you but you didn't leave me much choice."

"No. I guess I didn't. So it is really true? I didn't just experience massive hallucinations yesterday?"

"No, babe. It's all true," he said and then asked hesitantly, "Are you unhappy about it?"

"I'm very unhappy about having HIV. But about you being a werewolf? Well, I had thought, at one time, about getting a dog. I guess that's out the window. At least you can feed and walk yourself."

"Oww! That was awful!" He laughed.

"Hey! Admit it! I've read about what wolves do. Tell me you don't go around pissing on bushes when you're all furry, marking your territory."

He looked at me in shock.

"You really have done your research," he said, somewhat chagrined.

I laughed. It felt good to laugh. To be honest, when Rusty had told me my diagnosis yesterday, I didn't think I'd ever laugh again. That thought, however, got me thinking again about being HIV and Josh's offer to turn me into a werewolf to cure it. That sobered me right up and I stopped laughing.

"Josh, will it hurt?"

"I can't lie to you, David. There is some pain. The bite is somewhat painful and the first time you change it can be very painful but that goes away the more often you do it."

"Uhh...I guess this is a stupid question but...when you bite me, do you do it as Josh or as the wolf?"

"I have to be changed. I've never heard of it being done any other way. Besides, you wouldn't want to be bitten by a human. Far more painful and a lot more dangerous."

"More painful? More dangerous? Why?"

"Well, first of all, it would be more painful because even though humans have what are called 'canine teeth', they aren't fangs so they're not very sharp. Secondly, a human bite is the most dangerous of all animal bites because the human mouth is so full of germs and bacteria that the bite from a human can cause some very nasty infections."

"Oh...is there...is there some kind of 'ritual?'"

He looked at me oddly and then got very serious.

“Well, yes. It has to take place the night before the full moon. Usually deep in the woods. You prepare by bathing in three different baths: one of plain water, one filled with milk, and one with red wine. Then there are the ritual chants that you’ll have to memorize.” His description was very precise and I listened closely, making mental notes. “Then, of course, comes the circle of twelve naked boys, all of them over eighteen but under twenty-one.”

I looked up in shock and then I saw the grin on his face. He had me. I hauled off and slugged him in the arm and just about broke my hand on his tight muscles.

“Oww! Cut that out! I’m trying to be serious here,” I growled, shaking my hand, trying to get it to stop hurting.

“I’m sorry. I couldn’t resist. You’re just too easy.” He laughed. “There’s no ritual. I just have to bite you and you’re infected with the ‘wolf-virus’ as we call it. That’s all there is to it.”

“So when do you plan to do it?”

“That’s up to you. Whenever you’re ready, we’ll do it. The next full moon is in about three weeks. I would suggest that we do it as early as we can. The longer the virus has to work in your body, the quicker and more complete the change will be the first time.”

“Uhh...where would you have to bite me? In the neck?”

“That’s vampires, babe. They usually use the neck because they need a major vein or artery. I can bite you anywhere. As long as my teeth break the skin and the ‘wolf-virus’ infects the wound, it’s done. I’d probably do it in the back of your calf. There’s plenty of ‘meat’ there to absorb the virus and it wouldn’t show. Not like if I bit your arm or something.”

“Look, I know I’m going to hate this, so could we just do it and get it over with?”

“Are you sure you don’t want more time to think about it?”

“No! The more time I have, the more chance I’ll chicken out.”

“I promise I’ll try not to hurt you too badly. In fact, I have something that might help.”

Josh got up off the bed and went into the bathroom. When he came back, he had a tube of something in his hand and also the first aid kit.

“What is that?” I asked, pointing at the tube.

“It’s a topical anesthetic. It will deaden the skin on the back of your calf so that you’ll feel the bite less,” he said, as he began smearing the ointment on me.

He was right, in a couple of minutes the skin on the back of my right calf was deadened. I couldn’t feel anything.

“Do you have any old towels?”

“Yes, on the bottom of the stack in the linen closet. What do you need them for?”

“So you won’t get blood all over the bed. It will bleed some. That can’t be helped.”

He went and got a couple of towels and had me lie on my stomach with my legs spread apart and put the towels under them.

"Now, it would be best if you just lie there and close your eyes. You don't need to see this happen."

"Uhh...would you...would you kiss me first?" I asked quietly, and I could hear my voice quaking somewhat in fear.

He leaned down and kissed me gently.

"I love you, babe. More than anything in the world. You just remember that."

He got off the bed and I laid there, my eyes closed, waiting for...well, waiting for God knows what. I didn't have the faintest idea of what was going to happen. Which, frankly, turned out to be a good thing. The next thing I knew, I felt something heavy leap onto the bed and then searing pain shot through my right leg as something -- well, Josh in wolf-form -- bit down on it.

"AHH!" I screamed.

I don't ever remember something hurting quite that badly. But it only lasted a moment and then the wolf let go and I could feel his weight leave the bed. I opened my eyes just in time to see the mist dissipating and Josh standing there naked and human again. The next thing I knew, Josh was bending over me and he was bandaging my leg with gauze pads and taping it up. I could see some blood on the towels but not very much of it. My leg, however, hurt like hell!

"Fuck! That hurts!"

"I know, babe. I'm sorry. I got mine in the heat of battle. I didn't feel it for a while because of the adrenaline but, once that wore off, it really fucking hurt."

"So they wanted you to run the wolf-pack in Seattle?" I asked, remembering his telling me the night before how he had been bitten by the Seattle "Pack Master" himself.

"Yeah. Too bad that a queer wolf can't be an Alpha," he said, bitterly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you said you read about wolves. Did you read anything about the structure of the pack?"

"Yeah. I read about how the Alpha male, who rules the males of the pack, mates with the Alpha female, who rules the females, and then, if there's enough food in the territory where they live, the Beta Male and the Beta Female mate. It's all based on the available food so the pack won't starve."

"Yes, that's right. Well, among werewolves, it's somewhat the same thing. The strongest males are the Alphas. They are the pack leaders. The next strongest are the Betas. They take over if something happens to the Alpha, kind of like the next in line. In the Seattle Pack, the rule is that the Alpha of the pack must breed and produce heirs. That means he must marry a female were and then produce a were child."

“Wait a minute. You mean werewolves can be ‘born?’”

“Yeah. If a male were and a female were mate and have a child, that child is oftentimes a were. They don’t have to be. They can have non-were children, too. But if a were mates with a normal human, no were can be born of that mating. It’s only when two weres mate that they can produce a were-child. There are some weres who believe that born weres are somehow stronger. That’s what the Seattle Pack is trying to do. They are trying to grow by making more born weres. I didn’t fit into their program because I wasn’t about to be a breeding stud for them,” he said, with disgust in his voice.

“I take it you are an Alpha male?”

He grinned sheepishly at me.

“That’s what I was told,” he said with embarrassment.

“I can see that. You were always a leader. You were always looked up to. So, how long is this going to hurt?”

“Probably for a couple of days. Oh, I should warn you, you might feel like you’re coming down with something over the next twenty-four hours. You might even run a low-grade fever. It’s just the virus working on your system. What it will be doing is killing all other viruses in your body, hopefully in this case including the HIV.”

“Well, I guess I can put up with a little discomfort and pain for that. So I’m ‘cured’ now?”

“Well, you should be in a couple of days if it has worked the way I think it will.”

I looked at him and tears started to roll down my face.

“Josh, I don’t know how to thank you. You saved my life,” I said, huskily.

He took me in his arms and held me against his naked chest.

“The way I look at it, babe, I just saved my own life. I couldn’t bear to lose you.”

“If this makes us immune to viruses and bacterial infection, does that mean that we have a longer life span?”

“Yes. I forgot to tell you about that problem.”

“How is long life a problem?” I asked.

“Well, to most people it wouldn’t be except that it can be an exceptionally long life. Weres are known to be quite active into their third century.”

“Their what? You mean they live more than two hundred years?”

“It is not uncommon. Depending on how old you were at the time of the change and how well you keep yourself. But those problems we won’t have to face for many years yet.”

“So that’s what all the running and weight-lifting is about.”

“Yes, that’s part of it. Of course, I’ve been doing some type of physical exercise all my life.”

“Yes, I remember, ‘Mr. Jock.’ You know, I thought you had a magnificent body when we were in high school,” I said as I trailed a finger down his well-muscled torso. “But that was nothing compared to now.”

He grinned at me but I could see a rather feral light in his eyes. I guess the idea that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach could be true, but the way to his libido is through his ego. I wasn’t the least bit surprised by what happened next. Despite my now injured leg, I was very rigorously “bred” by my now “pack-mate.” I began to wonder, in an intellectual way, just what “wolfie-sex” would be like with Josh. I also began to wonder just exactly what I would look like as a wolf when the time came and I changed for the first time.

“Josh, what will I look like?” I asked quietly as he lay on top of me, still in the afterglow of our lovemaking.

“I have no idea. You can’t tell that from someone’s human appearance. Well, except that you’ll be a smaller wolf than I am. Human body size does determine the size of your wolf body. Other than that, we’ll just have to wait and find out.”

“Will I still know you? Will I still love you?”

“Of course, babe. Remember those nights when I would sit with you and kiss you?”

“You mean lick my face with that big old sloppy tongue of yours?”

“Well, you could put it that way. Don’t forget, you’re going to have a ‘big old sloppy tongue’ soon.”

“Is it scary the first time?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be right there with you. I’ll see you through it. And then we’re going to run through the woods and have a glorious time! Trust me. I can’t wait. I’ve been so alone out there, wanting you with me.”

“Uhh...have you ever...well...been with another wolf?”

“No. There was only one other gay Were in the pack but we didn’t hit it off too well. He was an Alpha, too. Neither one of us would ever submit to the other.”

“Hmm. I guess that could be a problem.”

“But he was going with another guy, anyway, who was not a were. Last I knew, they were pretty happy together. That’s at least what he told me. I never met his lover.”

I looked over at the clock and saw that it was almost eight.

“Aren’t you going to work?”

“Nope. I’m on the afternoon shift today.”

“Well, then I think you and I should go into town and have breakfast at the diner. Wanda asked me to bring you in next time.”

“Oh, God! You didn’t tell Wanda about us, did you? She’s just about the biggest gossip in town.”

“Second biggest. Your mom is the first. She’s the one who told Wanda and Wanda told me.”

“I might have known.” Josh groaned. “Now you know why I never told her I was a were.”

We did go to the diner for breakfast and Wanda was thrilled to see us together. It seemed strange to me that someone who isn’t gay would be supportive of our relationship but, perhaps, I’d lived too long in the “gay ghetto” of San Francisco. Maybe there had been more changes in the rest of the country than I realized. Or maybe, there had always been people who saw love as something to support, no matter who it was. I wondered if that boded well for younger gay couples like Pete and Rich. Already they were light-years ahead of where Josh and I were when we were their age. I certainly prayed it did. Who knew? Maybe Pete and Rich would actually be able to get legally married some day and have their relationship recognized by society-at-large. I just hoped that most people in Star Harbor could accept Josh and me. Especially since Josh was supposed to take over as the Chief of Police.

After breakfast, I headed over to the shop and Josh went back home. He had things he wanted to do before he was due at work. I was busy in the store all day, especially considering that I was closed the day before. A lot of people, thankfully, came back who had seen the sign on the door. They all asked if I was okay. It was funny. I used the “bite” on my leg as my excuse, saying I had hurt myself and that I’d gone to my “doctor” in Seattle. A lot of residents on the island have specialists in Seattle they see so this wasn’t an outlandish notion.

When the boys came in, Pete and Rich were very worried about me. I explained that I had injured myself but that I was going to be just fine. They were especially grateful to learn that I was paying them for the lost day since it wasn’t their fault.

Toward the end of the day, however, I did start to feel unwell. I had the very symptoms that Josh had warned me about. I felt feverish and achy and vowed that I was to go home, make some hot tea, and curl up on the couch with a blanket and a good book.

That’s precisely where and how Josh found me when he got home after his shift. For once, I really appreciated his carrying me up to bed. He didn’t even try to make love to me, knowing exactly what I was feeling like. He did change the bandages on my leg and showed me how quickly the “puncture” wounds were healing. He told me this was a sure sign that the effect was taking place. He told me that once I was fully were, I would heal from wounds like that in a matter of minutes, not hours or days.

I curled up in Josh’s arms, warm, content and feeling loved and cared for in a way that I’d never felt in my life, except for when I was very little and my parents were still alive. If this was what life was going to be like with Josh, then I was more than ready to spend the next possibly two hundred plus years of my life with him.



## Chapter Eleven

I'm not sure when it was, sometime in the middle of the night, when I woke up feeling sicker than I ever could remember feeling in my life. I threw off the covers because I was so hot, I felt like I could burst into flames at any moment. The only thing was, the minute I did that, I suddenly got so chilled I began shivering so hard my teeth were chattering and I couldn't stop.

Josh, who was asleep next to me, was awakened by my movements of throwing off the covers and then pulling them back over me again. He had been sleeping turned on his side away from me but now he turned over and rose up.

"What's the matter, babe?" he asked with concern in his voice.

"I don't know. One minute I'm hot and the next I'm freezing."

Josh reached over and felt my cheek with the back of his hand.

"Holy shit! You're burning up!" he exclaimed, quickly turning on the bedside lamp and getting up from the bed.

He went into the bathroom and returned with a small, battery-powered thermometer which he stuck in my mouth. Within a minute, the device softly began beeping. Josh pulled it out of my mouth and looked at it.

"One hundred and three point four degrees," he said, shaking his head. "This is not good."

"What is it? What's wrong with me?" I asked in trepidation, beginning to become really scared.

"I don't know. I've seen some strong reactions to the change, but this is worse than I've ever seen it. I think we need to get some help."

"Are you going to take me to the hospital?"

“Uhh...I can’t very well do that, babe. What would I say? How would I explain this? I’m a werewolf and I bit my lover to make him one too and the change is causing this? Yeah. I can see that. They’d lock me up in a padded room.”

“So what are we going to do?” I moaned.

With each minute I was feeling worse and worse. Suddenly, I threw off the covers and tried to get out of bed. I was going to be sick, violently sick and I was trying to make it to the bathroom. However, I was so weak by this point, that as soon as I tried to stand up, I collapsed to the floor. Josh rushed around the bed and picked me up in his strong, muscular arms.

“I’m going to be sick...” was all that I was able to get out.

Josh bounded into the bathroom in two long steps with me in his arms and got me over the sink just in time for me to empty the contents of my stomach into it. It had been hours since I ate anything so there was precious little in my stomach. With one hand, Josh turned on the cold water and wet a washcloth, wiping my face with the cooling dampness. I was slumped against the vanity with Josh’s other arm holding me up, seemingly as if I weighed nothing. I was very grateful for his “werewolf” strength that allowed him to do this.

When I was done being sick, Josh carried me back to the bed and put me under the covers. He then went to the phone and I could hear him dialing. From all the buttons he was pushing, I knew it was long-distance but I didn’t know who or where he was calling at that time of night.

“Hello? ... Is this Dr. Samuels? ... This is Josh Harrison. I used to be a member of the Seattle Pack. I live in Star Harbor now.” I heard Josh as he went on to explain what had happened, what he had tried to do by changing me.

He and the doctor talked for several minutes. I wasn’t really aware of all of the conversation because I seemed to be drifting in and out, not being able to fully concentrate on anything. I did hear Josh explaining about me being HIV positive and then heard him giving this Dr. Samuels directions of how to get to the house. I heard Josh leave the bedroom and, when he returned, he went into the bathroom before coming over and sitting down on the bed next to me.

“Here, babe. You need to sit up. You need to take these.”

I opened my eyes and struggled up into a sitting position. Josh handed me several white pills and a glass of water.

“What are they?”

“Ibuprofen. We need to try and get your fever down.”

With some difficulty, I managed to get the pills down me. Then Josh went back into the bathroom and brought back a plastic bottle of what appeared to be some type of clear liquid. He pulled the covers off my naked body, poured some of the liquid into his hands and started rubbing it all over me. I could tell immediately from the smell that it was rubbing

alcohol, something I kept around because my mother had it in the medicine cabinet but never really knew what it was for. Wherever Josh rubbed it on my feverish body, however, I immediately cooled down. I lay there, letting him run his hands all over my body, adding more and more of the rubbing alcohol to my skin. Under normal circumstances, I would have had an erection within moments of his doing this, but I was so sick at that point that the thought of sex never even entered my head. I did enjoy the feeling of his hands running over my body but the feeling of coolness left by the evaporating alcohol felt the best of all to my very overheated body.

"Who was that you called?" I managed to croak out, noticing that my throat had become raw and painful all of a sudden.

"He's a medical doctor who also happens to be a werewolf. Not only that, he also happens to be a veterinarian, as well. While weres almost never get sick, they can be injured or killed by silver. He's an expert on treating silver injuries. He also specializes in helping other weres make it through the change for the first time. He's on his way here now. He should be here in a couple of hours. In the meantime, he's told me what to do to help you."

"Josh," I asked hesitantly, "am I going to be all right?"

"Of course, babe. Dr. Samuels will fix you right up." While I'm sure Josh meant this to be reassuring, I could hear some doubt and fear in his voice.

For the next couple of hours, I was in agony. My body ached all over. My throat was sore so that it made swallowing very difficult, especially the pills that Josh kept giving me trying to get the fever down. The only thing that really felt good and seemed to give me any relief was the almost constant rubdowns Josh was giving me with the alcohol.

Finally the doctor arrived. He was wearing a dark suit with a white shirt but no tie. He was a large man, taller even than Josh, with broad shoulders and a large chest. He had dark, reddish hair with a full moustache and beard. His eyes were a sparkling green, almost as deep as emeralds. He appeared to be about forty to forty-five but with werewolves living beyond two hundred years, it was hard to tell how old he really was. He approached the bed and sat down next to me. I noticed he had one of those old-fashioned black leather doctor's bag which he sat down on the floor next to the bed.

"I'm Dr. Samuels. How are you doing, David?" he asked in a deep, rumbling voice.

"Not too well," I managed to rasp out.

"I understand, son. We're going to do something about that."

Saying this, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a tube from which he extracted an old-fashioned glass thermometer, shook it down and had me open my mouth, putting it under my tongue. He opened his doctor's bag and withdrew a stethoscope that he used to listen to my chest. Next he put a blood-pressure cuff around my arm, pumping it until it tightened around my arm while he put the stethoscope to the inside of my elbow and listened. He went back into his bag and pulled out a small packet, tore it open and pulled out an alcohol swab. He pulled the thermometer from my mouth and held it up, reading it. He

wiped it with the alcohol swab before placing it back into its tube and then into his pocket. He pulled out a tongue depressor and small flashlight and had me open my mouth. He looked into my throat and then began feeling my neck with his hands, pressing up under my jaw.

Back, once again, into the bag at his feet as he pulled out several vials along with a hypodermic syringe and another alcohol swab. He filled the syringe with liquids from the vials, each one a different color. He pulled out a long rubber strip which he wrapped tightly around my upper arm as a tourniquet and told me to make a fist with my hand. He tore open the alcohol swab with his teeth, then swabbed my arm before inserting the needle of the syringe in my vein. There was a slight sting as the needle slid home. Dr. Samuels depressed the plunger on the syringe and the medicines flowed into my vein while he unsnapped the rubber tourniquet. He pulled the syringe from my arm, putting it back into his bag along with the tourniquet and the vials.

"You rest now, son," Dr. Samuels said and then turned to Josh. "Let's leave him alone to get some rest."

"Okay, Doctor. Would you like some coffee?" Josh asked.

"Yes, don't mind if I do."

As they left the bedroom, I felt the drugs rushing through my system and making me very sleepy. I don't think they'd been gone for more than a minute or two when I felt myself drifting off.

My rest was not peaceful, however. I kept drifting in and out of dreams. Horrible nightmares, actually. Dreams in which I knew I was dying and Josh was trying to get to me but couldn't. He kept reaching out to me but he kept getting farther and farther away. Between the dreams, I could swear that I could hear Josh and Dr. Samuels talking.

"He is going to make it, isn't he?" I could hear Josh's anxious voice saying.

"Josh, I'm sorry. I just don't know. No one has ever tried to do this before as far as I know. While we know that the HIV virus cannot infect an already changed werewolf's body, we don't know if the HIV virus can overcome the change of becoming a werewolf. It would appear that is what's happening now. The HIV virus in your mate's body is trying to fight off the change. There's a war going on in his body and I have no idea whether he's strong enough to survive it."

I didn't hear any more because I drifted off again. This time, I dreamed that I was in the middle of a battlefield hunkered down in a trench surrounded by young soldiers who wore uniforms and helmets that looked like World War I doughboys, many of whom were injured. One of the young soldiers, with the chevrons of a sergeant on his sleeve approached me.

"Our outlooks say that it appears that the Germans are going to try to attack again, sir. What are your orders, Captain?" he begged.

I looked down and saw that I was wearing an officer's uniform. I had no idea what to do, how to handle an attack. I was filled with panic and looked at the young sergeant.

"Can we evacuate the men?"

"No, sir. There's nowhere to go and there are too many wounded for the uninjured men to carry."

"Can we repel an attack, Sergeant? Do we have enough men?"

"Sir, more than half the men are wounded from the last attack and at least half of those are totally unable to mount any kind of defense. I don't see how we can."

At that moment, I heard a loud bugle call from the battlefield and then a huge cry of voices from the enemy. I peeked over the edge of the trench to see what looked like hundreds of German soldiers headed for us.

"Sir! What are your orders? Sir! What are your orders?" the sergeant demanded.

"I don't know! I don't know!" I cried out.

At that point, I felt strong arms around me and something stinging in my arm. I wondered why the sergeant was holding me but the dream ended and I had no more awareness for a while.

Later, I again thought I heard Josh and the doctor talking.

"What are these drugs?" I heard Josh ask.

"I've developed them over the last thirty or forty years. They are combinations of herbs, antibiotics and minerals which have shown to have some effect on our bodies. Some of them are for counteracting the poisoning of silver. Others are helpful in getting a stronger and quicker change to take place in our bodies. I've only used them, however, on born weres who are experiencing the change for the first time at puberty. I don't know if they'll work on an adult, especially one with HIV."

"So...uhh...how is David doing?" I could hear Josh asking hesitantly.

"I'm not sure. There's some indication that the drugs are working. His fever is down slightly but I can't really tell yet."

I wanted so badly to cry out to Josh, to have him come and hold me but I couldn't move or make a sound no matter how hard I tried and, after a while, lapsed into nothingness again.

I don't remember any more dreams after that. I didn't remember anything until I felt a sting in my arm again and slowly opened my eyes to see the doctor sitting on the side of the bed, drawing blood from my arm with Josh standing behind him. They were so intent on the blood draw that, at first, they didn't notice that I was awake until the doctor looked up and saw my eyes were open.

"Well, my boy, it seems you're back with us again," he said, smiling.

Josh, whose face broke out into one of his full-dimpled, killer “Josh smiles,” climbed onto the bed and, kneeling over me, took my face in his hands and kissed me gently on the lips. He then pulled back and looked into my eyes. I looked up at my lover and noticed deep, dark circles under his eyes and, for the first time I’d ever seen it, several days’ growth of beard speckling his face. This was the first inkling I had of how long I’d been sick.

“How are you feeling?” Josh asked.

“Thirsty,” I croaked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Josh reached over onto the bedside table and, helping me to sit up, held a glass of water to my mouth, gently feeding me like I was baby. I didn’t mind. Surely, I felt as weak as I’d ever felt in my life. I did look over and saw the doctor putting a small pellet of something shiny into the vial of blood he’d drawn from my arm. I was shocked when I saw the red blood start to foam and steam coming from the top of the vial.

“What is that?” I asked.

“That, my boy, is proof that the werewolf change has successfully taken over. What you’re seeing is the effect of silver on werewolf blood. Welcome, son, to the were world,” he said, smiling at me.

“I’m a werewolf now?” I asked Josh, looking up into his smiling face.

“You will be, babe, the first full moon.”

“Uhh...how long have I been sick?” I asked.

Before answering, Josh looked at Dr. Samuels who gave him a slight nod.

“It’s been about four days,” Josh said.

“I thought so. I could tell from your beard.”

I reached up and brushed my fingers against Josh’s stubbly cheek. Josh smiled and took my fingers in his hand, kissing each one.

“I was really sick, wasn’t I?”

Josh gave me a very distressed look and then glanced over at Dr. Samuels.

“I won’t lie to you, David. You were a very sick young man. However, now that the change has really taken hold of your body, you should get better very rapidly. Of course, you’re still going to need to rest for a couple of days but I think you will find yourself not only regaining your strength very quickly but you might be surprised at how much strength you gain,” Dr. Samuels said to me.

“Are you hungry, babe?” Josh asked.

Until Josh mentioned food, I didn’t even think about it but, once he did, I could feel my empty stomach demanding food.

“Oh, yes. Very!” I assured my mate.

Both Josh and Dr. Samuels laughed at my exclamation.

"Mom brought some soup over. Let me go get you a bowl," Josh said, hopping off the bed and heading out to the kitchen leaving Dr. Samuels and me alone.

"I nearly died, didn't I?" I said to him.

He looked at me in shock.

"I could hear you and Josh talking," I said as explanation.

"I had heard that people who are in a coma can hear what is said in the room where they are. I never thought, however, that it was true. Yes, we nearly lost you at one point."

"I take it from the look of him, that Josh hasn't had any sleep for as long as I've been sick?"

"Your mate is very committed to you, son. You're a very lucky boy to have someone that much in love with you."

"I know that. Believe me, I love him just as much. You see, we've loved each other since we were children."

"Then I would say that you are truly well mated." He smiled at me.

"I don't know how to say thank you for saving my life, Doctor."

"No thanks are necessary, son. Actually, I should thank you."

"Why?"

"You've shown me that my drugs seem to work on adults, at least those with a strong will to live. It is also possible that the change to being were could be effective in eliminating HIV infection."

"Am I cured of HIV now?"

"That I can't tell you for sure. I would expect that you are; however, I would wait a while and then be re-tested. Give the change in your body a real chance to work first."

"Okay. I will."

"Well, I think I can safely leave you now in your mate's very capable hands. I've left some of the medication and syringes for you. I would suggest one shot per day for the next three days, just to be on the safe side," he said, standing and stretching to his full height.

"Can I ask you something, Doctor?"

"Of course."

"I know it's none of my business but were you made a werewolf or born one?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I'm guessing that you're part of the Seattle Pack and I know how the Alpha there is so into creating more born werewolves."

"Well, it seems that Josh has told you a lot about the pack. What he didn't tell you is that I am not a member of the pack. I lived in Seattle before the pack moved there. I didn't join and I have no intentions of doing so. I don't like the Alpha there any more than Josh

does. He would like nothing more than to get me into the pack but he doesn't have the power to do that. In actuality, because I was there before them, I could demand to be Alpha of the pack if I wanted to. That, and the fact that, yes, I was born a werewolf. You might be interested to know, the current Alpha of the Seattle Pack wasn't."

"Really? So is that why you can accept Josh and me as mates. I wondered about that."

"Yes, my young wolf. I can see the love you two have for each other and I have no problem with that love, even though I'm not gay myself which, I'm willing to bet, was your next question." With this, he grinned at me.

I looked at him sheepishly.

"I'm sorry. I'm still trying to accept the fact that straight people don't just automatically find our relationship distasteful or perverted."

"I understand. However, love is never distasteful or perverted. Only small minds who cannot accept it are."

"I'm going to have to remember that. Thank you."

"Well, at any rate, I think it's time I left. It's a long drive home and my own mate is sometimes less than forgiving about my absences."

"I'm sure she must love you very much."

"It's a good thing she does. We're stuck with each other for life. But she only has herself to blame. She wasn't born were. She let me change her." Then I heard him chuckle.

With that, Dr. Samuels took his leave and I heard him talking to Josh in the hall outside the bedroom. Then Josh came in with a tray and the most delicious smelling soup that I thought I had ever smelled. Whether it was because the soup was good, or the fact that I hadn't had anything to eat in four days, really didn't matter.



## Chapter Twelve

It took more than a week, even with the medication, for me to get completely over the side effects of the “bite.” The puncture wounds eventually healed and you could hardly even see the tiny scars from them. Once the other symptoms were gone, I found myself feeling stronger and more energetic than I ever remembered feeling in my life. I actually let Josh talk me into getting up and running with him several mornings later. I thought I couldn’t make it even one mile and yet, to my complete shock, I made the entire five miles. Of course, Josh had to slow his pace tremendously for me to keep up that first time, but I did it and, within two days, I was not only doing it every day but keeping up with Josh’s regular pace.

He also got me to start working out with his weights. I didn’t think I’d do too well at those, however. I remembered in high school trying to bench press one hundred pounds once and not even being able to lift the bar out of the holders. But when Josh set the bar up for me, he started with one hundred and fifty pounds.

“Josh, there’s no way I can lift that. That’s more than I weigh. Besides, I couldn’t even lift one hundred pounds in high school and I was a lot younger then and I hadn’t been sick.”

“Just try it. If you can’t handle it, we’ll take some of the weight off. I’ll spot you.”

Oh, the joy of being “spotted!” Especially when your lover is wearing nothing but a well-worn jock. As I lay down on the bench and Josh took up his “spotter’s” position, I only had to look straight up and I was staring directly at his well-filled pouch.

“Hey! Pay attention to the bar, not my balls.” He chuckled.

“How can I not? You’ve practically got them hanging right in my face.”

“Never mind. Just grab the bar and try to lift it. Take in a deep breath and push it out as you push the bar up,” he instructed me in a voice I knew he must have learned in the Marine Corps.

*What a great place to train Alpha males*, I thought to myself.

I knew this was an exercise in futility, but I wasn't about to argue with my "Alpha." I took a deep breath and pushed up on the bar with all my might. To my complete shock, it rose easily out of the holders and, before I knew it, I'd ripped off ten reps without even trying hard. This werewolf shit was incredible!

"See, I told you that you could do it," Josh said grinning down at me.

I ended that session by actually doing three reps with two hundred pounds, and Josh only had to help me on the end of the last one. I couldn't believe the strength I had suddenly developed. If I needed any "proof" the bite Josh had given me had its desired effect, I had it in spades.

But there was one thing I still wondered about. I found out on the Internet there were "home versions" of the test that Rusty had given me at the Wellness Center. Kind of like the home pregnancy tests. One evening, when Josh was working, I drove over to a drugstore in a town about fifty miles from Star Harbor and bought one. I raced home and followed the instructions for the test, swabbing out my cheeks and waiting the twenty minutes that it took for the results. Those were about the longest twenty minutes of my life! But when I opened the container, the test read "Negative." I was cured! I was no longer HIV positive! Everything that Josh had figured was true.

Then, I began to feel guilty. What about the rest of the HIV population? Better yet, what about Rusty? Why couldn't someone offer this to him and save his life? How could I keep this to myself? How could the rest of the werewolves keep this hidden from the world? When Josh walked in the door, he found me sitting at the kitchen table pondering these questions.

"Hi, babe," he said, and then he saw the look on my face. "What's the matter?"

"I bought one of those twenty-minute HIV tests tonight and did it."

"And?" he asked, concerned.

"I'm cured. The test said I was 'negative.'"

"So that's great -- isn't it?" he asked, unsure of what was going on with me.

"Yeah. It's great for me, but what about the rest of the world? What about other people who are infected? People like that guy Rusty I told you about who was so kind to me at the Wellness Center? What about him?"

"I know, babe. It's a really awful dilemma. Believe me, I asked the same kind of questions when I was first changed. But the other weres made me see that if we 'came out,' there would be worldwide panic over it. Remember your reaction when you first found out about me? Now multiply that by about six billion people. And remember, there would be people who would never accept us. We'd be putting the lives of a lot of our own people in jeopardy. No, unfortunately, this has to stay secret, David, or none of us would be able to live."

“But we have a great gift to give the world.”

“One that the world isn’t really ready for. Look at what they’ve done to real wolves. Hunted them almost to extinction. That’s what would happen to us. Remember, the human animal is the only one on earth that murders its own kind. Think about how humans deal with anyone whom they see as ‘different.’ Can you see how they’d deal with something as frightening as weres?”

Unfortunately, he made an awful lot of sense. Humans were incredibly cruel and bloodthirsty. Especially to anyone that they perceived as “different” from themselves. No matter what benefit that werewolves could bring the world, it became clear to me that none of us might live long enough to offer it. It just made me so sad, however. I guess it’s what’s known as “survivor guilt.”

At the end of that week, I was sitting in the shop doing some paperwork. I knew that the following Wednesday was the full moon and I had decided to close the store on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. I had told Pete and Rich that Josh and I were going to go away for that time and that they’d be paid for the days. As I worked, the phone rang and I answered it.

“Hey, David. It’s Rusty. How are you doing?”

“Good, Rusty. How are you?” I said, trying not to sound too enthusiastic, hoping to let him think I was still dealing with some of the residual depression of my diagnosis.

“I’m great. Listen, Robert and I have decided to spend the weekend in Star Harbor. Could you recommend someplace for us to stay?”

“Sure. There’s a really lovely bed-and-breakfast called the Island Inn. Let me give you their phone number.”

I gave him the number and he repeated it back to me.

“Are you and your lover doing anything this weekend?”

“No, not really. Of course, I only close the store on Sunday and Josh is working day-shift on Friday and Saturday but he’s off at five and he’s off on Sunday as well.”

“Great. Then we can get together, maybe go out to dinner? I definitely want to come by and see your store.”

“No problem. I’ll let Josh know. When are you getting in?”

“We’ll be there Friday night.”

“Good, you’ve got the store number and my home. I’ll wait to hear from you.”

That night, when Josh got home, I told him about Rusty and his lover coming to Star Harbor.

“That’s great. However, I hope you aren’t thinking about offering Rusty a little ‘nip,’ are you?”

"No. I've thought about everything you said and, as much as it hurts me, I have to agree with you. We can't make decisions for the entire werewolf population of the world."

"Good. Besides, I have news for you. Until you change for the first time, you can't turn anyone were anyway."

"How about we have them over to dinner on Saturday night? Neither of us has to work the next day."

"That's fine with me. Who's going to cook?"

"How about we both do. I'll make a roast and you make the veggies and the dessert."

"Well, I'll make the veggies, but I'll get Mom to make the dessert. I think our guests deserve to taste the best apple pie in all of Washington State."

"She won't mind?"

"Mind? My God, I've turned down three in the last month already. Mom keeps thinking that we don't eat enough."

Late Friday afternoon, just as I was about to close up the store, Rusty called to tell me that they had arrived. I told them that they were invited to our house for dinner the next night.

"That's great but how about joining us for dinner tonight?"

"Sure. I think Josh will be up for that."

"Since you know this town and we don't, where would you suggest?"

"Do you like seafood?"

"Of course. We both love it."

"Well, you're not going to believe this, but the best place in town for seafood is the Star Harbor Diner. Everything is fresh, right off the docks. And it doesn't cost an arm and a leg, either. It's not fancy, but it's good."

I gave him the simple directions from where they would be staying.

"You've sold me. How about we meet you there, say eight o'clock? Will that give you guys enough time?"

"That's fine. We'll see you then."

"I can't wait to meet Josh."

"And I can't wait to meet Robert. Though I really can't wait to see you again."

"Me, too. I'm really looking forward to seeing you as well."

When I got home, Josh was waiting for me.

"Do you want to cook dinner or should I?"

"Neither. We're going out to the Diner. Rusty called and he and Robert are here. They want us to join them for dinner tonight."

"Did you tell them about tomorrow night?"

“Yes, and they’re looking forward to it.”

Josh and I got dressed and headed for the diner. We walked in and I immediately saw Rusty. You couldn’t miss that beautiful head of auburn hair. Then I noticed the guy sitting next to him. He was a big guy. I figured when he stood up he’d be at least as tall as Josh. He had coal-black hair and moustache that was thick on his upper lip. I could feel, however, Josh stiffen beside me. We walked over to the table and they both stood up to greet us.

“Hey, guys. Rusty, I want you to meet Josh,” I said.

“And this is Robert,” Rusty said to us.

Then Robert and Josh looked at each other and, I don’t know why, but I somehow knew that they knew each other. This was immediately confirmed.

“Hello, Josh. Long time, no see,” Robert said, reaching out his hand.

“Yeah, Robert. It has been a while,” Josh said, in a tone that said he was not entirely comfortable with this situation and I couldn’t understand why.

“You two know each other?” I asked.

“We met when I lived in Seattle,” Josh said to me.

“Yeah. We used to belong to the same pool league,” Robert said but I could tell, somehow, that this was a very facile lie.

A waitress, not one I knew, came over and took our drink orders as we sat down.

“So, Rusty tells me that you two met at the Wellness Center,” Robert said and I wondered how much about me he knew.

“Yes, I was telling Robert that you had stopped in to pick up some pamphlets to put in your store,” Rusty said, letting me know he had not discussed my true reason for being at the Wellness Center.

“Yes. I have two teenage employees and I wanted to get them information on HIV prevention. I don’t think the schools do a really adequate job of giving kids the real facts,” I lied.

Dinner progressed and both Rusty and Robert agreed that the food was delicious. When dinner was over, we all claimed to be tired, they from the drive and Josh and I from our workweek. We parted with Rusty and Robert promising to come in the store the next day and also to our house for dinner the next night.

The short drive home was a quiet one. Josh didn’t say a word the whole way and neither did I. Until we got in the house.

“He’s a werewolf, isn’t he?” I said to Josh.

He looked at me, startled.

“How did you know?”

"Because he's not your type sexually and yet you two were acting like two male dogs with each other. I almost expected you to smell each other's butts and piss for each other. He's the other gay Alpha you met in Seattle, right?"

"Yes, he is. I told you I'd never met his lover. Didn't even know his name so when you talked about 'Rusty,' it didn't ring any bells with me," he said and I could see he was troubled by something.

"Something is bothering you about this. What is it?"

"Robert never said his lover had AIDS. I'm wondering why, if he does love him, he hasn't offered to cure him?"

"I don't know. Maybe he has."

"No, I don't think so. I got the distinct impression that Rusty has no idea that Robert is were."

"Maybe Robert is afraid to tell him, just like you were afraid to tell me."

"But I wasn't afraid to tell you. I wanted to tell you. I was just hoping to find a better time to do it than when it came up. I always intended to tell you. I wanted you to join me, even without the HIV."

"Well, I don't get it then. If I were in Robert's place, I surely would offer it to Rusty."

"So would I. There must be something holding him back, but I can't imagine what it is."

"Maybe you'll have a chance to talk to him alone tomorrow night and ask him."

"I don't know. That's kind of sticking my nose in where it doesn't belong."

"Josh, I have to tell you, I really care about Rusty. He was there for me that day in a very intimate and loving way. If there's a way that his life can be saved, I want to see that happen. Now, either you talk to Robert or I will."

"Now who's acting like an Alpha?" Josh said, but at least he was smiling. "Okay. I'll try and talk to him about it. But I'm not so sure I'll get anywhere."

Robert and Rusty came by the store the next afternoon and got to meet Pete and Rich. I'd told Rusty that the two were lovers and the two boys picked up on the fact that Rusty and Robert were right away. Rusty fell in love with a piece of Arts and Crafts pottery, a beautiful green vase with prowling panthers carved into the hand thrown piece. He wanted to buy it but, instead, I gave it to him as a gift. He understood why. I decided that I would let Robert know that I knew what was up.

"I hope you both are 'carnivores,'" I said, looking Robert right in the eyes as I said it. "I've got a standing rib roast cooking at home."

Robert looked uncomfortable at my statement but Rusty laughed.

"Boy! You picked the right thing. Robert loves nothing better than meat, meat and more meat."

"Yeah," Robert said, looking right at me. "I love meat. Especially rare and bloody."

"I tend toward that myself," I said and Robert raised one eyebrow in response.

I wasn't sure how I was going to get Robert and Josh alone so they could talk but it turned out to be much easier than I thought. Rusty dearly loved antiques and so I promised him that after dinner I would take him on a tour of the house and show him all my "private" stuff. That gave Josh just the opening he needed.

"I didn't know you were into antiques," he said to Robert.

"I'm not. That's more Rusty's thing," Robert replied.

"Well, it's not really mine either. How about we take a stroll outside and let these two indulge their love of really old things," Josh suggested.

"Good idea," Robert said.

So they went outside while I showed Rusty all over the house. This gave Josh plenty of time to talk to Robert. In fact, they were talking outside for almost two hours while I kept Rusty busy with my collection. When they finally left for their bed and breakfast, Josh filled me in on what was going on with them.

"Well, it seems the Pack Master of Seattle strikes again," Josh told me.

"What do you mean?"

"When you belong to a pack, you have to have the permission of the Pack Master to do a lot of things. You have to have his permission to marry, even to tell someone that you're were. You especially have to have his permission to make someone else were. I had always figured that he was homophobic, now I'm sure of it. He'd denied Robert permission to tell Rusty that he's were or to offer him the change. He can't deny them being lovers since it isn't considered a 'marriage' within the pack."

"That's a bunch of crap!" I fumed.

"I think so, too. And so does Robert. He's been trying to get out of the pack but it's not easy once you're in. It seems that the reason that they came this weekend was to scout out Star Harbor as a possible place to live. This would put them outside the Seattle Pack's territory and the restrictions of the Pack Master."

"So are they going to do it? Are they going to move here?"

"They want to. I had noticed that Robert seemed afraid of me and I couldn't understand why. Now I know. He was afraid I saw this as my territory and would demand that he bow to me as Pack Master here. I told him I wanted nothing to do with all that pack bullshit. He was greatly relieved. In fact, so relieved, he's going to approach Rusty with the idea of moving here tonight."

"Oh, Josh! That's great. We'll actually have a couple our own age for friends, not to mention the fact that they'll be were, too."

“Well, at least one of them will be. We don’t know if Rusty will accept the change or not.”

“Just let me alone with him for half an hour and he will!”

“No, David, you can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Okay. There aren’t a lot of ‘rules’ in the werewolf world that I go along with but there is one that I completely and utterly agree with. You cannot badger somebody into making the change. They have to freely want it. In some packs, you have to ask for it three times and be turned down before you’re allowed to go through it.”

“But the Pack Master in Seattle did it to you without you asking for it.”

“We were engaged in a fight. That’s a whole different circumstance. If it happens in ‘combat’ or ‘battle,’ it is not the same thing. That bite was not meant to turn me were, it was meant to kill me.”

“Kill you!” I exclaimed.

“That’s right. It was a bar fight and I was trying to break it up. The Pack Master was in what’s known as a ‘killing fog’ where the were side of his nature kind of takes over. Remember how I begged you not to get me too angry, that I might not be able to control myself? Well, what I was talking about was that if a were becomes too angry, they change into their wolf. That’s what happened in that fight. I got bit and became were because of it. That’s not the case with Rusty. It has to be his choice and his choice alone. Just like it was for you. Besides, it’s really between Rusty and Robert. You should not be sticking your nose in their business that way.”

“Oh. Okay. I understand.” But I wasn’t happy about it.

Josh put his arms around me and drew me to him.

“Robert loves Rusty as much as I love you. I’m sure he can be very persuasive all on his own. Besides, there is the one, telling argument for becoming were that Rusty is going to have a hard time fighting,” Josh said, gently.

“Yeah. Getting to live.”



## Chapter Thirteen

Wednesday dawned clear, not always the case in the Pacific Northwest. The weather report called for it to remain clear for two days. According to Josh this was excellent news. It seems that the clearer the night and the brighter the full moon, the stronger the effect on werewolves. He told me this would make the change happen easier and quicker.

Since a full moon is not a singular event really, I had been feeling the effects ever since Sunday night. It had begun as a vague restlessness, an uneasiness that I couldn't put my finger on. When Josh noticed how jumpy I seemed, he sat me down and started to talk seriously to me about what was going to happen.

"You're already feeling the effects. That's the nervousness you feel. You'll get used to it. In fact, as you change more, you'll hardly notice the effect at all until the night of the full moon. Then the desire to change will well up in you until it becomes undeniable."

"You said it's painful. How painful and in what way?"

"Well, it's really hard to describe. It's kind of like your whole body tries to turn itself inside out. Your bones and muscles take on new configurations and that's where the pain is involved. The faster this happens, the quicker the pain goes away. It's like a very deep, very intense muscle pain. Like you've sprained your back, your arms and your legs all at once."

"Does it still cause you pain?"

"No. But I change quite often. You see, I love being in my wolf skin. I love the freedom and the exhilaration of it. It was also incredibly helpful in my work as a detective in Seattle."

"It was? How?"

"Well, the first thing you're going to notice when you change are the smells. Everything has a scent. Scents that cannot be detected with a human nose, it's just not sensitive enough. But a wolf lives and dies by scents. A wolf knows the world through his nose the same way an eagle knows it through his eyes. I could know, hours and hours

afterward, who had been at a crime scene. I could literally sniff out the guilty parties. That, by the way, is how we will know each other, through our scent.”

“Oh, I already know your scent. It is something that I love about you. There are mornings, when you aren’t there when I wake up, that I roll over and bury my nose in your pillow just to smell you near me.”

Josh smiled at this.

“I do the same thing to yours,” he said, softly. “But the scent we carry as wolves will be slightly different. They will be more intense, for one thing. They will also carry a difference because we are wolves, not humans at the time. I can’t explain it adequately, but you’ll understand.”

“So that’s how you knew it was me when you came to me as a wolf?”

“Oh, yes. I knew you by sight, of course, but long before I could see you, I could smell your scent and I was drawn to it. And, of course, I could taste you,” he said grinning at me.

“I was right then,” I crowed. “You were ‘tasting’ me that first time.”

“Oh, yes! That was something that I always wanted to do when we were growing up. I wanted to taste your skin, to know you intimately, but I didn’t have the guts then. Actually, I’m glad it happened the first time when I was a wolf. The flavor is so much more intense. You do taste so good, babe.”

That night, the night of the full moon, Josh told me that we would go outside for moonrise so I would get the full effect of the moon for the change. I told him that I wanted to do something. I wanted to take the full-length mirror behind the closet door in our bedroom and put it outside on the deck, against the wall of the house so that once the change happened, I could see what I looked like as a wolf. He thought this odd for a moment but then I saw him get a curious look on his face.

“You know, I have no idea what I look like as a wolf. I’ve never seen myself.”

“Hasn’t anyone ever told you? None of the pack in Seattle?”

“No. It’s not something that ever came up, but now that you’ve mentioned it, I’m curious myself.”

“Well, I can tell you one thing.”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“You are a very big wolf! If you hadn’t been so friendly, I would have probably passed out from fright.”

“Really?”

“You’re almost all black but you have the most beautiful golden eyes. Maybe that translates somehow because you have incredibly beautiful blue eyes as yourself.”

He blushed at this. Josh never was one who could take compliments. They usually embarrassed him. He liked to think of himself as “nothing special.” In my experience, there

are far too many good-looking men in the world who are all too well aware of how good-looking they are and are insufferable egomaniacs because of it. Josh was the exact opposite. He had absolutely no idea how beautiful he was. That even included when he was a wolf.

As the day wore on and it got closer and closer to sundown, my feelings of nervousness, restlessness and anxiety grew. Josh stayed with me the whole time, talking calmly to me, assuring me that everything would be fine. My change would come uncontrollably. It would just happen. Josh assured me that, because he was so much more experienced, he could delay his change until mine had taken place so I would not be alone when it happened.

We sat out on the deck as darkness fell. We were both naked; since we knew that the change was coming, there was no point in leaving two piles of clothing that we didn't need on the deck. When the change began for me, I remember it started in my muscles as Josh had warned me it would. It was like, all of a sudden, I got a "Charlie-horse" in every muscle in my body. The muscles began to spasm and my body began to move on its own without any control. Suddenly, I found myself pitched forward onto my hands and knees and, except for the pain, that's really all I remember.

I don't know how long it took. I only know that suddenly I was on the deck, looking up at Josh who seemed a great deal taller than I'd ever seen him. But, more than that, I was suddenly assaulted with an incredible "rush" of sensory perceptions, most of them smells. Scents I had never smelled before. There seemed to be thousands of them and it was hard to distinguish them, one from another. I stretched my neck forward toward Josh, who was now kneeling on the deck in front of me and I could smell his scent. It was stronger, however, than I had ever smelled it before.

It was an odd sensation. I couldn't really "think" the way that I normally did. My mind was not using language in thought but sensory impressions instead. Josh was not really "Josh" but a sensory impression and a memory. I knew that this was a being I was intensely attracted to and emotionally attached to but that was all.

I happened to glance to my right and I spotted a wolf...well, actually, another wolf. Or at least what I thought was another wolf but this wolf had no scent. It was a small wolf with dark red fur streaked with black. It was no wolf I was familiar with. I walked over to it but it wasn't really there. Just something smooth and cold that I pressed my nose against. Somehow, in the back of my wolf-brain, however, I understood that this was the mirror I had placed there and this dark red wolf was me. Suddenly, beside me there appeared a very large wolf, almost completely black in color with an intense scent, which registered with me as a wolf that I knew and was intensely attracted to. It was, of course, Josh.

He looked at me and I knew, though I don't know how I knew it, that he was telling me it was time to run and hunt in the woods. He moved off and I eagerly followed him. Looking back now, I would have thought that I would have trouble running on all fours but it just seemed the most natural thing to do, not requiring any thought at all. I chased after

Josh and we ended up playing a kind of wolf tag in the woods. He would run at me and butt me with his head and then turn off, daring me to chase him. I would and, when I would catch up to him, I would butt him with my head and then veer off in another direction and have Josh chase me. It was just tremendous, exhilarating fun.

Though we were hunting for food, I didn't feel especially hungry but Josh evidently was. He seemed much more intent on finding food. We finally caught the scent of a rabbit. How I knew that's what a rabbit smelled like, I didn't know. I just smelled the scent and it was like a picture of a rabbit appeared in my wolf brain. We followed the scent but never did find the rabbit. It probably went down into a hole, as rabbits are known to do.

We, however, ended up in a meadow in the middle of the wood, a place where no trees grew or had burned down once long ago. There was grass and wild flowers and Josh stopped in the middle of the meadow and I walked over to him. His scent had changed slightly. It was hotter, muskier and I knew that Josh was rutting, wanting to mate with me. I walked up to him and our noses touched. It was as if an electric spark went through me and I was instantly in a state of rut myself. Josh walked around me while I stood there. I could feel him smelling me all over. He was especially smelling my swelling erection and the rear of me. Without even thinking, I moved my large, bushy tail to the side and he sniffed under it. Then I felt his long, raspy tongue licking there. I whimpered, not able to make any other sounds.

That's all it took and the next thing I knew, Josh had mounted me. His front legs were wrapped around me, his teeth had hold of the fur around the back of my neck to secure me and he was sliding himself inside of me. At first it hurt tremendously and I yelped in pain. After all, even as a wolf, Josh was quite large and my wolf body was not used to being mounted, this being the first time I had ever changed. However, when Josh tried to tie with me, I was too small for his knot to go inside me, no matter how hard he tried to ram it in. Finally, I think that Josh realized that he would do nothing but hurt me if he tried to put his knot inside me and he stopped. Josh continued to mate with me and eventually the pain went away and I actually began to enjoy what was happening to me. Finally, I felt Josh's seed spurt into me, pulse after pulse, for the longest time.

Josh was eventually done and leaped off me. I stood there, not knowing what was going to happen next. Josh came to me and touched his nose to mine and then moved off at a run. I didn't feel like running right then so I just lay down and waited. I could smell the night air, could smell the trees and the raw earth in ways that I had never smelled them before. I somehow remembered that Josh had told me that, as a wolf, my whole world would be smells and sounds. I certainly was experiencing the smells. Perking up my ears, I began to listen more closely. I suddenly realized that I could hear Josh running through the woods. I don't know how I knew it was him but I did. I could also hear that he was going very fast, as if he were chasing something. Listening more closely, I could hear something else running as well, evidently what Josh was chasing.

I wasn't sure what was going on but I stayed where I was, waiting, hoping that Josh would come back. Before very long, he did. Only he didn't come back by himself. He was carrying something in his mouth. All I could see was that it was an animal of some kind because I could see fur and blood. Josh laid it down in front of me and I could smell it was a rabbit. It was freshly killed, I could tell by the smell but I didn't know how I knew that. Josh walked a little ways away and lay down looking at me and the rabbit. He seemed to be grinning at me. I suddenly realized that the rabbit was a gift from him. It was like his way of taking care of me, hunting for me and providing food. I knew somehow, but again not how, that accepting this gift would make me his mate. I had never eaten raw meat in my life but for some reason the rabbit smelled so delicious that I quickly gobbled it down. Well, not all of it. I left some of it and then got up and carried what was left over to Josh and put it down in front of him and waited. Josh gobbled up what was left and stood up. He touched noses with me and took off at a run.

This time I followed him and for hours we ran all over the woods. It was great fun, glorious fun. Looking back, that was the point at which I truly came to understand what it was about being a wolf that Josh enjoyed so much.

It was nearly dawn when Josh finally led me back to our house. I stood there as I watched Josh change back into a beautiful, naked, human male. He sat down on the deck and I came over and lay down by him. He began to speak to me and, while I could hear him, it was very difficult to understand his words. It was like he was speaking a language I'd never heard before. All I could understand was the tone of his voice. He was talking to me very gently, almost as if he were trying to reassure me of something but I couldn't understand what.

We sat there as the sun began to rise. As the sun touched the deck and washed over me, I felt tremendous pain and suddenly found myself lying on the deck, naked and back to myself once again. Josh was there, reaching out and holding me and I found myself crying in his arms.

"I know, babe. The pain will go away. I promise," he said softly to me.

I looked up into his face and smiled through my tears.

"You loved it, didn't you." He was not asking a question but stating a fact.

I nodded my head vigorously, still unable to speak. Yes, I did love it. I loved it tremendously. I had felt alive in a way I'd never felt before in my life. Now I truly understood what it meant to be were and I was so grateful to Josh for giving me not only the gift of life, but the gift of a new kind of life.

Josh picked me up in his arms and carried me upstairs. He took me into the bathtub and turned on the shower. He washed me carefully and gently and then he washed himself while I rested against the wall. I was totally exhausted. He helped me out and dried me; then, again, picked me up and carried me to our bed. He closed all the drapes so the bedroom was

darkened and then joined me in bed, drawing me into his arms and pulling the covers over us. The last thing I remember was his kissing me gently and putting my head on his chest.

When I finally woke up, it was to the smell of food. I slowly got out of bed because, when I moved, my body was still aching. I went to the bathroom and then went downstairs. Josh was in the kitchen, at the stove, still naked. He was standing with his back to me and it was quite a back. Muscular, with broad shoulders and a deep “V” down to what had to be the most incredible butt I had ever seen. This was a view of my lover that I didn’t get to see often.

“What are you making? It smells like chili.”

My voice sounded really rough to me but at least I was able to talk. Josh turned around and smiled at me.

“Yeah, it is. Good protein. How are you feeling?” he asked, walking over and kissing me gently on the cheek.

I reached up and put my arms around his neck and pulled his mouth to mine, kissing him deeply.

“Protein? I’ve already had rabbit.”

“Yes, and it was very tasty, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. I have to admit it was. Though it still seems a little yucky eating it raw like that but it tasted so good at the time,” I said, giving him a rueful smile.

“I told you so.”

“Can I ask you something?”

“Sure. You can ask me anything, babe.”

“When you brought me the rabbit, I had this really strange thought that somehow that made me your mate. Where did that come from?”

“When you change, you have the instincts of a wolf. What you were thinking is quite true. When an Alpha male wants to make an Alpha female his mate, he brings her gifts. Most often fresh kills of food, especially very delectable food. Rabbit is greatly beloved by wolves.”

“But I’m not a female,” I said, somewhat miffed. “And I don’t think I’m an Alpha.”

Josh laughed at this.

“No! Of course you’re not a female but I’m not attracted to females, babe. Not as a man or as a wolf. You’re my lover and, as a wolf, you’re my mate. That’s why I brought you the rabbit. Remember, we’d just mated.”

“Oh, yeah, about that. It really hurt at first,” I said, reaching around and rubbing my still sore ass.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think about that. I imagine it would since you’re not used to my mating with you as a wolf. Are you okay?” he asked, sounding very concerned.

“Yeah. I’m fine. Actually, it started feeling good toward the end.”

"So, you're not sorry?" he asked quietly.

"About your mating with me?"

"No. About your first experience as a wolf."

"You've got to be kidding! I loved it. I felt so alive. So full of life! It was incredible. I now understand why you love it so much," I said, moving back into his arms. "And I'm so happy I can share it with you now."

"Oh, babe, you have no idea how badly I wanted to share this with you. I knew it would be good, but I had no idea how good."

"Can the chili simmer a while?" I asked, and then winked at him.

"Oh, shit, yeah!" he said, running over to the stove, turning it off and then grabbing me up in his arms and carrying me back upstairs.

I opened the store again on Friday. It was the middle of the morning when I got a visitor I wasn't expecting. Rusty walked into the store, looking for me.

"Well, hello! What are you doing here?" I asked, hugging him.

"I came to talk to you," Rusty said, and I could see something was bothering him.

"Sure. No problem. Let me lock the door and put up the closed sign so that we won't be disturbed."

I took Rusty into the little kitchen and fixed coffee for us.

"Okay, what is it you want to talk about?"

"You know that Robert wants us to move here?"

"Yes. Josh told me about it. I can't tell you how happy I am. Don't you want to?"

"Yes. I think I do. It's something else that Robert told me. The reason why."

"Oh, and what was that?" I asked, not letting him know that I knew already.

"Robert said that...well, that you and Josh would understand," he said, staring at me. Evidently, Robert had told Rusty about what he really was and about Josh as well.

"Yes. I think I do," I said carefully.

"I didn't believe him and then...well, then he 'changed' in front of me."

"I know. Josh had to show me as well."

"Robert is offering to change me. He says it will destroy the HIV in my body."

"And that's a good thing."

"Well, yeah. It is. But I don't know if I can do it," Rusty said, quietly.

"But why?"

"Because I don't feel it's right. Why should I be spared when other people are going to die?"

"I said almost the same exact words to Josh, except I used your name," I said to him and he looked at me in shock.

"Me? Why?"

"Because I was so impressed with what you were doing at the Center, how wonderful you were to me. I didn't want to be spared when you weren't."

He just sat there, evidently speechless. He finally put his head down and his voice was so low, I could barely hear him.

"I don't think I can go through with it. I feel so guilty," he moaned.

"Yes. I know. I did, too. But Josh told me, and I've come to agree with him, that the world isn't ready to know the truth about us. I figured out for myself that I didn't have the right to make a decision that would affect every were in the world."

"That's what Robert said as well."

"When I found out that Robert was were, I was furious at him for not telling you and offering you the change. Josh had to explain to me that he wasn't allowed to by the Pack Master in Seattle. I think that is very wrong. Robert loves you. He has every right to tell you and to offer you the chance to save yourself. That's why he wants to move here, to save you. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

"Yes, when you put it that way, it does. So, did you let Josh change you?"

"Yes. I just went through my first full moon Wednesday night."

"And, are you 'cured?'"

"Yes, I found out last week," I informed him.

He looked at me in shock.

"You mean it happens even before you turn into a wolf? Robert didn't say that."

"Maybe he doesn't realize how it works. It is very dangerous, however. I nearly died before the change happened. If Josh hadn't called a were he knew in Seattle who is a doctor who knew how to treat someone going through the change, I would have died. He has medicines that he's developed to lessen or prevent the problems that someone might have. He said that my difficulty was caused by my not getting them early enough. Josh can tell Robert his name and Robert can get him to treat you early enough so you won't have the same problems that I did."

"So, what was it like, being a wolf?"

"It was incredible!" I said, grinning at him. "I felt alive in a way I'd never felt before. Now Josh and I are 'mates' in every possible way."

"I'm scared," Rusty admitted quietly.

"I was, too. But you love Robert, don't you?"

"More than anything in the world."

"And don't you want to spend a long life with him?"



“Yes. I do.”

“Then, really, what other choice do you have? Out of all the men in the world, Robert has chosen you for a mate. And wolves mate for life, you know.”

“Really? I didn’t know that.”

“It’s true. In the pack, the wolves who mate, usually Alphas, mate for life. So, you see, Robert is asking for this for himself as well. He doesn’t want to lose you. He wants to love you for a very long time. Isn’t that worth it? Isn’t that even worth a little guilt and fear?”

Rusty looked at me for a moment.

“I knew that talking to you would help.” And then, he finally smiled. “I guess you just got a new pair of neighbors.”

## Chapter Fourteen

“Babe! Come on! We’re going to be late,” Josh hollered to me as he walked into the bedroom. He stopped and looked at me, his hands on his hips. “You’re not even dressed yet!”

“I’m sorry. I just can’t decide which suit to wear.” I said as I sat on the bed with a white shirt, tie, underwear and socks surrounded by half a dozen suits.

I didn’t wear the damned things in Star Harbor -- ever. In San Francisco I’d worn them every day. They were like the “uniform” for antique dealers there. Here I wore jeans and, if I felt like really dressing up, I wore a Polo shirt rather than one of my two or three dozen colored T-shirts.

“I thought that we already went through this last night. Here,” he said, reaching down and handing me a one of the filled clothes hangers. “Wear this. It’s very nice and it looked good on you.”

“But it’s a blazer. That’s not formal enough,” I whined.

“It’s formal enough for Star Harbor. Besides, I hate to remind you of this but everyone is going to be looking at me, not you.”

“Oh yeah? That’s what you think! Everyone knows that I’m your lover. They always look at the ‘wife!’” I exclaimed.

“And you would look incredible no matter what you wore -- even naked,” he said, leaning down to kiss me. Then in a deep growl he said, “In fact, I’d love it more if you were naked.”

“That’s going to have to wait until after the swearing in. And the reception.”

“If we ever make it there,” he growled, his patience evidently wearing thin.

I hurriedly put on the grey flannel pants and the dark blue blazer while I slipped my feet into a pair of cordovan loafers. I looked at Josh and noticed that his tie was askew. I walked over and reached up and straightened it for him. He smiled down at me.

"You are going to make the most handsome Chief of Police in the entire state of Washington. Maybe in the whole country."

"Enough! Are you ready now?"

"As ready as I'll ever be." I followed him as he went downstairs. "To bad we can't just go 'wolfie.' Then we wouldn't have to dress at all."

"I'm sure that would go over well with the Town Council."

"Fuck 'em! We'll just bite them all and we can all run around the woods together."

"No, with Robert and Rusty, the woods are quite full enough, thank you. These woods aren't all that big to begin with."

"They do seem really happy here, don't they?"

Robert and Rusty had become so close to us they were like family. In fact, they were in the process of building their first house right next door to Josh and me.

"I always thought that Robert was somewhat of a stuck-up asshole. Now I realize it was the stress he was under in the Pack in Seattle. I've never seen anybody loosen up the way he has since they moved here. Not to mention that I now see why you were so upset about Rusty not being allowed to become were. Next to you, he's the best person I think I've ever met."

High praise, indeed, from Josh who, because of his law enforcement background still tended to be somewhat judgmental about people.

"You did remember to call Tom and remind him that we expected Gretchen and him at the swearing in? If things have to wait for them and the boys to make it back to the reception afterwards well, it's just too bad," I said, ticking off my mental checklist.

"Yes. I called. And I called my mother. And I called Rusty and Robert. I don't know how the Town Hall is going to hold all the people you invited." Josh was showing just a little exasperation.

We arrived at the Town Hall in Josh's police vehicle, a three-year-old Jeep Grand Cherokee which, after today, was being replaced with a brand new SUV to note his new status as Chief of Police. After having worked for nearly a year and a half under the old Chief who then retired, the Town Council had finally gotten around to voting Josh the job. It wasn't all that big a job, actually. There wasn't a lot of crime in Star Harbor but Josh had some plans and programs for upgrading the emergency services for the island. Strangely enough, in the civic structure in Star Harbor the fire department was a volunteer fire department, which meant that only a few of the firemen, like Tom Kelly, were actually paid staff. Because of that, the Fire Chief and all emergency services were under Josh.

Josh was right. The town hall was packed with people. Looking over the crowd I spotted Robert and Rusty, who smiled, and I also saw Pete and Rich, who waved at me. I finally spotted Ada, Josh's mother, and steered my way over to her. She hugged me.

"Well, I'll bet you're really proud of your son today."

"And I'll bet you're equally proud. My only regret is that his dad isn't here to see this."

"I have this weird feeling that somewhere, he and my parents are watching this together."

"You know? I think you're right."

The chair of the Town Council finally gaveled the meeting to order.

"Friends, we all know why we're here today. Your Town Council has sought far and wide across these whole United States to find the best possible replacement for our beloved Chief of Police. Of course, we found the best candidate right here in Star Harbor." He laughed and so did the whole room. "Josh, come on up here so we can swear you in."

Josh rose to thunderous applause and walked to the front of the room. The chair of the Town Council met him and held a Bible in his hand. I nudged Ada, who was sitting next to me, because she was supposed to hold the Bible for Josh to swear on. But she looked at me and pointed to where Josh was standing.

"It's not my place. It's yours. You get up there and help swear him in," she said, quietly.

I looked at her in shock. Me? Get up in front of all these people? Not only that, but just about publicly announce that Josh and I were "married" because only a mother or a wife was usually given the honor of holding the Bible for a swearing in ceremony. I looked helplessly at Josh, who motioned for me to come to him. It was then I realized that this was something he and his mother had worked out between them without telling me. I wanted to kill him -- or kiss him, I didn't know which.

I walked to the front of the room and the chair of the Town Council handed me the Bible. Josh smiled at me as he placed his left hand on it and raised his right hand. I looked up at him and almost burst into tears in pride.

"I, Joshua Daniel Harrison, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office to which I have been appointed and will, to the best of my ability, defend and protect the citizens of Star Harbor. So help me God." Josh's voice rang out, deep and strong.

"Congratulations, Mr. Chief of Police!" the chair of the Town Council said over the cheers of the assembled citizens and friends.

There was a crush of people who all wanted to shake Josh's hand as I handed the town clerk the Bible and slipped back to stand next to Rusty and Robert.

"Perfect job for an Alpha," Robert said quietly, smiling at me.

"I never thought of it that way, but I guess you're right."

"Yeah. Give it a couple of years and I bet this one runs for the chair of the Town Council." Rusty laughed, pointing at Robert.

Robert looked a little crestfallen at Rusty's laughter.

"You weren't supposed to tell anyone that," Robert growled quietly.

"We don't keep secrets from 'family,' remember?" Rusty said, nudging his mate.

"Don't worry, Robert. I'll sure as hell vote for you," I said.

"You'd better because you're going to be running my campaign."

"Me?"

"You. I can't think of anyone more qualified or who I have more trust in, except Rusty, and he's already told me in no uncertain terms that he refuses to become involved in politics," Robert said.

"Just so long as I don't have to make any speeches," I said, resigned to my fate.

When your "pack-mates" call on you, you don't say "no." Josh had drummed that one into my head.

The crush of people finally died down as more and more of them headed over to the VFW hall for the reception. I wasn't sure if all these people came because they loved Josh or because Tom Kelly was catering the reception and everybody loved Tom's food. Actually, it didn't matter. Practically the whole town had turned out to see the first openly gay Chief of Police of Star Harbor sworn in.

We didn't know it at the time, but found out a few days later when it hit the national news, that Josh was the first openly gay Chief of Police appointed anywhere in the United States. He ended up having to appear on all the morning shows including *Good Morning America* where he was interviewed by Diane Sawyer. Luckily, or unluckily, a serial killer grabbed all the headlines a day later and Josh and I could go back to the quiet life we'd always had up until then. He did get several offers of support from some national gay organizations to run for state or national office but turned them down flat, saying that he was as high as he ever wanted to be.

The clerk of the Town Council was just handing Josh the keys to his new car when I finally was able to make it over to stand beside him. He took the keys and then steered me toward the exit pulling me into an empty office on the way. He locked the door and turned to me, taking me in his arms and kissing me passionately.

"What's that all about?" I asked, coming up for air.

"Just that I love you and I wanted to be alone with you for a few minutes to savor this."

"Have I told you how proud I am of you today?" I asked, echoing something I had said to him the day that we finally told each other how much we loved each other and had, all our lives.

He tilted his head, looking very “wolf-like” and said, “No. I don’t think you have,” just the way he’d done that day. Then he gave me a huge smile.

“I am very proud of you, my incredible Alpha mate.”

“And I am very, very proud of you, though I thought you were going to hit me with the Bible rather than hold it for me.”

“I thought about it but it didn’t have enough weight to hurt you,” I growled. “Who cooked that up, you or your mother?”

“It was all Mother’s idea. I told her you’d hate it but she insisted that you’d be grateful afterwards. Are you?” he asked, somewhat in trepidation.

“Yeah. Actually, I am. I guess your mother knows us better than we’d like to admit,” I said, ruefully. “Oh, speaking of Alphas, Rusty let the cat out of the bag about Robert running for chair of the Town Council. Did you know anything about that?”

“Uhm...he might have mentioned something about it.” By the way that Josh answered I could see he was uncomfortable.

“And did you know he’s demanding that I be his campaign manager?” I asked suspiciously.

“I told him to ask you, not demand it. Damned Alphas!” Josh growled.

I threw back my head and laughed.

“You aren’t pissed?” Josh asked, tentatively.

“No. I’m not pissed. However, if Rusty really thinks he’s getting out of this, he’s got a surprise coming. He’s helping me with this come hell or high water.”

“I don’t want to be there when you two go head to head over that one!”

“Don’t worry. I know how to handle Rusty. I just appeal to his innate sense of social justice.” And with this, I smiled craftily.

“Oh, you’re going to use ‘guilt.’”

“Of course,” I said, “As if there was any other way?”

At this, Josh took me in his arms and kissed me.

“You know what this promotion means, don’t you?”

“No, what? More money?”

“Better. More regular hours so we can have more runs in the woods.”

His mouth captured mine in what quickly became a deeply hungry kiss. I was ready to rip off his clothes and mess up whoever’s office we were in but Josh grabbed my hand and led me outside and to the new, white SUV with “Chief of Police” in gold letters above the town seal of Star Harbor on the doors. We drove over to the VFW hall and, when we walked in, there was a huge ovation. Josh spent the next hour or so “pressing the flesh,” for all intents and purposes, looking like a candidate for public office. I found a nice quiet corner where Rusty found me.

"Hey? Why aren't you out on the floor, schmoozing like our mates?" Rusty asked.

"Because I'm not running for any kind of public office, I don't work for the citizens of Star Harbor and, basically, because all I really want to do is go home, get naked and have Josh fuck me until I can't walk."

"Exactly what I want, except I prefer it be Robert fucking me senseless."

Just then, Pete and Rich came up. They were working the reception along with Pete's sister Diane and a couple of teenage boys that I didn't know.

"Have you had anything to eat?" Pete asked me.

"No. We've just been sitting here talking."

"I've had something already," Rusty said to Pete and then turned to me grinning conspiratorially. "But you need to eat. Especially if your 'plans' come about. You'll need your strength."

"You just sit here. We'll bring you something," Rich said and off he and Pete went.

"They're always right by each other's side," Rusty said, smiling.

"Yep. Those two are definitely mated for life. Just like Josh and me, they've known each other since they were little kids and grew up together practically joined at the hip. The only difference was they had the courage to tell each other how they felt. They haven't wasted all the years that Josh and I wasted."

"Now, they weren't a waste. We all have to travel our own road to get where we belong. Everything turns out the way it was meant to, eventually. I mean, look at Robert and me. I had two lovers before him and thought that I would never find my perfect mate. Then, one day, I'm coming out of a grocery store, my arms full of bags and this big, dumb, beautiful oaf slams into me and my groceries go everywhere. He is apologetic that he begs me to let him take me out to dinner to make up for it. The rest, as they say, is history."

"You must be right. By all rights, Josh and I shouldn't be together. I nearly lost him twice. Thank God neither of us could ever get over loving each other."

I smiled to myself at my memory of our first night together. Unfortunately, this made my grey slacks start to tighten and I figured that I'd better put a lid on that kind of thinking because a wet spot would show on them. At that point, however, Pete and Rich came back with a nice plate of food and a cup of coffee for me, with cream and sugar -- just how I liked it.

"Thanks, guys. You take such good care of me," I said.

"Hey! We gotta take care of the boss," Pete said. "Otherwise, no more parts for the car."

"How is the car, anyway?" I asked.

The two of them had bought a 1973 Camaro Z28 together and were restoring it to mint condition. I had no idea, but it turned out that the two of them knew just about everything there was to know about engines and such.

“Great! We’re gonna install a set of headers this weekend that ought to bring the revs up to --” Pete started but Rich interrupted him.

“Enough! David has no idea what headers are and he was just being polite. Tell him the car is great and that’s it,” Rich said to Pete.

“Oh...” Pete said, disappointed. There was nothing Pete loved more than talking cars, except Rich, evidently. “The car’s great.”

“Remember, you promised me a ride in it,” I said, hoping this would somewhat hearten Pete.

“We remember. You just say when.” Pete grinned at that, happy that I appreciated his pride and joy on some level.

The boys went back to their duties and Rusty stayed with me while I finished the food. I finally decided I’d had enough of the reception and went to find Josh. Before I did, however, I invited Rusty to bring Robert over to the house tonight and we would all take a run in the woods together. We did this quite often. It was great fun for all four “wolves” to get together and act like a pack. We often had group “howls” which were emotionally bonding for us and very satisfying.

I found Josh engaged in a conversation with some of the town’s busybodies and deftly extricated him, telling them his mother wanted to talk to him.

“Thanks, babe. I wanted to bite them except they’d probably make boring wolves, too.”

“Why don’t we sneak out of here? I’m bored. I thought we could go home and I could get fucked all afternoon by the new Chief of Police?”

“No problem. Let’s go,” he growled, grabbing hold of me and dragging me toward the back door.

On the way home, I told him about Robert and Rusty coming over later for a run in the woods.

“Just what I need. That and fucking you for the rest of the afternoon.”

It was fully dark, around ten o’clock, when Robert and Rusty showed up. We usually did these little gatherings when it was late at night so there was less chance of any of the good residents of Star Harbor finding out that there were actually four “wolves” on the island, not one or two as some of them surmised.

We all stripped naked on the deck and then changed, running into the woods and having a grand and glorious time for several hours. I doubt that we would have had such a good time had we known that just downwind of us when we changed, two teenage boys were coming around the corner of the house, having knocked at the front door and gotten no



answer. They had witnessed four naked, adult males suddenly turn into four full-grown wolves from out of a dark, grey cloud.

 THE END 

## **Bobby Michaels**

Bobby Michaels has been writing since he was 14 years old. A Gay male with a lot of romantic and erotic experience from his own life to draw on, he is a well known writer of Gay male erotica under another pen-name with a fan group of more than 3,000 members from around the world.

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