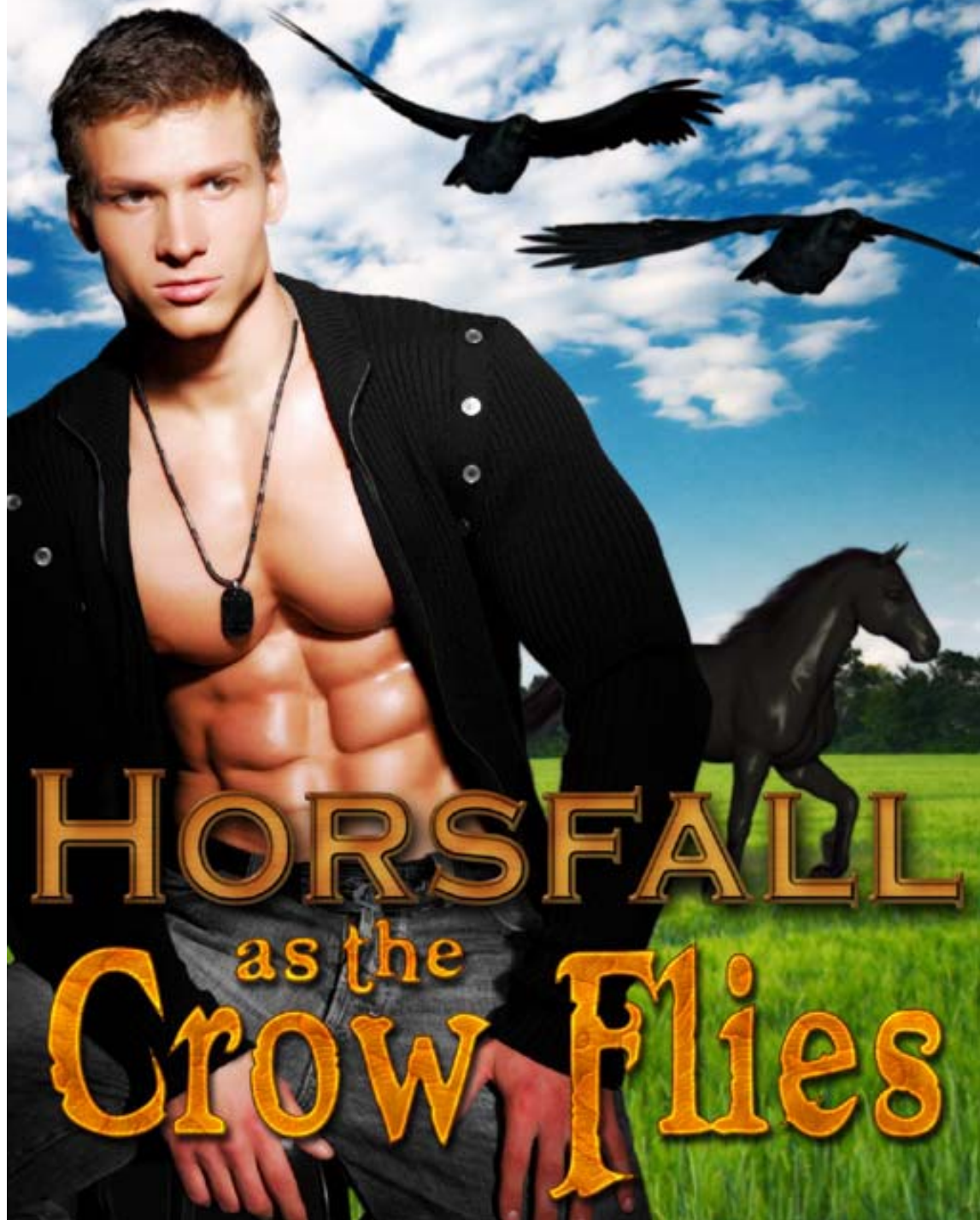


Changeling Press

Jade Buchanan



Horsfall: As the Crow Flies

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Horsfall: As the Crow Flies

Jade Buchanan

Shire horse shapeshifters Bayard and Marshall Stoddard have never been happier. They have a man they both love in safety consultant Oliver Philip, and the common enemy that brought the three together has finally left them alone. Or so they thought...

When Oliver travels to the mountains of Alberta to conduct a safety audit on a ski resort, he runs into a completely different animal than the twins he's in love with. The avalanche crew he spies upon his arrival isn't exactly human, and it seems they have a cautionary tale about a group of men who would destroy the Stoddards without a care. Oliver isn't sure what to believe until he gets a phone call from Marsh telling him Bay has gone missing. Oliver must find the strength inside himself to fight for the two men he can't live without.

Chapter One

Oliver jumped out of the truck, inhaling deeply. "Man, I love my job."

Jack grinned at him over the hood before turning to look around him. "This is definitely one of the perks. Think we can go skiing while we're up here?"

"As long as you don't mention anything until after the audit, you can do whatever you want. Would be a shame not to take advantage of this, though."

It certainly was beautiful. The sun was just coming up over the tallest peak of the mountains, glistening over acres of blindingly white snow. The evergreens provided splashes of color to interrupt the grey mountains in their pristine coats. The faint sound of music coming from the big speakers outside the ski lodge beside them didn't quite fit with all that natural beauty, but seeing as it was the reason he was here, he wasn't going to complain.

Reaching back into the passenger side of the truck for his notebook, Oliver gave a brief thought to changing his boots to the steel toes that were tucked in under his seat. The rubber froze when it got this cold, but since he'd be touring their facilities, he would need to wear them at some point.

"Steel toes?" Jack asked, mirroring his thoughts.

"Let's leave them and come back when we do the observation tour."

"Sounds good to me."

Oliver slipped his gloves on, rubbing his hands together. Man, it was cold enough to freeze a guy's nuts off. November in the mountains wasn't exactly ideal weather, although he wouldn't mind getting Bay and Marsh up here and sharing a hot tub with them. Just the thought of that was enough to warm him up a bit.

A raucous caw interrupted his musings. Turning to the side, Oliver nearly jumped out of his skin. "What the hell?"

Jack's head popped up on the other side of the truck. "What?"

"Biggest crows I have ever seen in my entire life. They're staring at me."

The birds were seriously the biggest crows he'd ever seen, no exaggeration. They had to come up to his knees. Okay, so he wasn't exactly the tallest person, but he'd never seen anything like it.

"Guess they grow them big in the mountains." Jack snickered. "Careful they don't attack you."

Oliver gave serious thought to firing the jackass, but figured his auditing skills made up for his awful sense of humor. Besides, he wouldn't be able to find another contractor to help him out at the last minute. Jack was lucky they were friends. Oliver bit the inside of his cheek, determined not to ruin the frown he aimed at Jack.

The other man wasn't fooled a bit. He continued to grin at Oliver, grabbing his own supplies from the truck before slamming the door shut. Jack opened his mouth.

The sound of Oliver's cell phone ringing interrupted whatever Jack was about to say. Oliver quickly answered it, recognizing the ring. "Hello?"

"Hey, baby. You get in all right?"

"Bay! How did you know we were here already?" He smiled as he always did whenever he heard one of his men. He still had moments where he wondered what they were doing with him, but the twins were slowly convincing him he was worth their love. He had to pinch himself some days to prove he was awake and this was really happening.

They'd been together for well over half a year now, and they were more in love with each other every day. He had to stop himself before he started getting all mushy, but life was pretty dang good right now. He was almost afraid, actually. Things were nearly too good. His inner cynic was currently waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"Well, I could say that I'm just a genius and know everything..."

Oliver shook his head. "Yeah, but then I wouldn't believe you."

"How 'bout I know how long it takes to drive up through the mountains to Crowfoot?"

"That, I'll believe. How're things? You and Marsh ready to go out and work the ranch this morning?"

"We've been up and working for a few hours now, lazy bones."

"Hey! I'm not lazy. I've been driving for hours, stuck with Jack in a truck."

"How's he doing? He coming to the office Christmas party? I'd love to meet him in person."

Yeah, Oliver still wasn't sure what to do about the Christmas party. He had one every year for his staff and contractors, but this would be the first time he'd actually bring a date. By now all his employees knew he was gay and dating a man, but they didn't know he was actually dating two men. He was grateful they seemed not to have a problem with his sexual orientation, but still... It was one thing to be open minded and another thing entirely to be *that* open-minded. Oliver had already bitten the bullet and asked both Marsh and Bay to come to the party.

He was planning on introducing just one of the men as his boyfriend, but he wasn't sure what to do about the other. They'd had this conversation before, and both men claimed they understood why he couldn't openly date both of them, but it made Oliver's chest ache to virtually deny one of his men.

Turning back to the conversation at hand, Oliver wrinkled his nose. "I asked him, and I think he's going to make it." Glancing over at an openly eavesdropping Jack, he grinned. "Although, I may have to rescind the invite. He's being just a bit too forward."

Predictably, Jack placed a hand over his chest. "You wound me, Boss Man, wound me."

Oliver was pleased to note he didn't look any different than before. Oliver was still self-conscious about doing something with his men in front of other people. Gay marriage might be completely legal in Calgary and the pride scene alive and well, but there were still a few individuals who weren't exactly supportive.

Laughing, Oliver turned to the side, trying to make their conversation just a bit more private. "I miss you already."

"Really? I miss you, too. I'm standing here thinking about you. Getting hard, actually. Just hear the sound of your voice, and I want to do all sorts of naughty things with you. I can't wait to get my hands on you again, bend you over and ream your ass like I'm dying to right now." Bay growled, the sound making Oliver's nerve endings stand up and pay attention.

Oh, they couldn't do this now. Could they? Oliver risked a quick glance at Jack, seeing the man looking off to the side. Obviously trying to give him some privacy now, but Oliver still couldn't have this conversation in front of him.

"Give me a second here, Jack."

Jack twisted, waving a hand. "No problem. I just want to breathe in this air. Take your time. We're a bit early anyway."

Oliver crawled back into the truck, closing the door with a snap. "You're an evil, evil man, Bayard."

Soft laughter was his only answer.

"You can't say things like that and not expect me to retaliate after all." Oliver smiled despite himself, turning his back to where Jack was standing outside.

"Is that so?"

"Mmm. Did you know when you say things like that, I get the most insatiable urge to find a nice quiet place and play with myself? Run my fingers up and down my dick, cup my balls. Soft. Gentle. Just waiting for a firmer touch to come and show me what I need."

"Baby..."

"No, no, you started this." Oliver grinned. "Now I'm sitting here with a hard-on that's dying for more. I wonder if Jack would mind if I just sit in here for a while and think of you and Marshall while I jerk off."

"Shit, Ollie," Bay moaned.

"You have no one to blame but yourself." Oliver hid his laughter. He knew exactly which buttons to push. "In fact... if Jack just happens to notice and wants to get a closer look --"

"He touches you and I crush him."

Now it was Oliver's turn to moan. God, he loved it when Bay got all dominant and his gentle giant turned into a raging bull. Okay, wrong animal, but still...

"I know," Oliver huffed. "I'm all yours."

"You better believe that. Careful, or Marsh and I might have to brand your ass."

Oh, that was mean. Bay had to know what that image would do to him. Oliver closed his eyes, reciting OHS legislation in his head. "Damn it, we have to stop now, or I really will be sitting in here needing to jerk off. I have to be inside the resort in, like, two minutes."

Bay chuckled, the sound rusty with his arousal. "The minute you get off work, you are calling me back and we will finish this, baby."

"Definitely, Bay. The minute I get to the hotel."

"Deal. Come back soon, Oliver. Love you."

"Love you too."

He hung up the phone, happier now that he'd spoken to one of his lovers. He opened the door and jumped down to the ground, definitely grateful for the cold air. Damn, Bay really knew how to get him going.

"You okay?" Jack smiled.

"Enough with you. Let's get to work." With one last glance at the crows that were all staring beady-eyed at him, Oliver slammed his door and started to make his way across the icy parking lot, heading for the ski lodge.

They hadn't even come close to the buildings when a tall man stepped out of the front door and waved them over. It was still quiet this early in the morning since most of the skiers wouldn't show up for another hour.

"Welcome to Crowfoot Resort and Ski Hill. Good to see you again, Oliver."

Oliver smiled, gripping the hand the man offered up. "Hi, Ted. It's always great to be back here. This is Jack MacGillivery. Jack, Ted Shintal, the OHS Coordinator at Crowfoot."

"You gentlemen have a good drive up?" Ted shook Jack's hand, grinning at them both.

"It wasn't too bad. Picturesque, for sure, and it's always nice to get out of the city."

"Sure is. I wouldn't leave this job for anything. I love living out here." Ted started inside, gesturing for them to follow.

Oliver glanced back out the door, spying the crows milling around the parking lot. A big charter bus pulled up to the side of the parking lot and let out a stream of college-aged kids. Shaking his head to pay attention, he looked around the inside of the lodge.

It was gorgeous. Huge wood beams led his gaze to the roof that must be at least thirty feet up. The entire place reminded him of a rustic lodge. Brown and green accented the pine walls, and pictures of the mountains that surrounded them were tacked up all over the place. The only thing that marred the ambiance of the lodge was the rows of cafeteria style tables that were over on the right hand side.

"This is our Crows' Nest, the main building here at Crowfoot. We have three separate restaurants, with some excellent chefs that you'll be meeting later. There's also a little cafeteria over to the right. They make a mean burger if you wanted something a bit lighter for lunch. They also have some deli sandwiches and the like. Let me know if you just want to grab something quick there, or if you want us to book you into one of the restaurants for lunch."

Oliver ignored the glance Jack sent him. He was pretty sure he knew what option Jack was pining for, but it wasn't going to happen. "Cafeteria is fine. That way we can get a few more interviews in, and we can head back to Calgary earlier to visit the head office there."

"Sounds good. We'll get you set up at your hotel later. The bookings have been made under your names. You shouldn't have any trouble. They have a nice pasta place that I like to eat at. Speaking of food... you guys want some coffee?"

"Please, you can never have enough in the morning." Oliver smiled.

"Excellent. Let's get us all a cup of joe and then we'll get you set up in the room. How'd you want to do this?"

Minutes later, they were set up in Ted's office with coffee and bagels. The building they were in now wasn't quite as nice as the lodge, but it still had an amazing view. Oliver could see employees starting up the lifts, all ready for a day on the slopes.

"All right, Ted, you guys have been through this before so I'll be brief. This'll be a simple renewal audit. Jack and I will sit down together to review your documentation, and then we'll split up to do the interviews. We'll figure out how many employees you have right now and do a representative sample. I don't think they'll take any longer than 15 minutes each for employees, but I'll spend a bit longer with management. Your interview will be even longer since you're responsible for the implementation of the safety program. You did the two internal audits, right?"

Ted nodded.

"Okay, so this should be a piece of cake for you then. Jack and I will come back together after the interviews, and we'll do our observation tour. I don't need to go up on the hill, but we'll need to look in all the buildings down here, especially the maintenance areas. We both brought our steel toes for that portion of things. When we're finished on Thursday, we'll head back to Calgary and do a quick visit at the head office."

"Sounds good to me. There are only about 15 employees at the head office. We're sitting on around 320 here, full time and part time. About 30 are year round workers. I'll make sure you get a few of them in interviews so you can see what we do during the summer months. We'll be hiring a handful more kids through the season, of course."

"Turnover still bad?" Oliver nearly had to physically pull himself from the window. Damn, he just couldn't get over how beautiful the hill looked this early when no one was on it; fresh blanket of snow, frigid air, evergreens all over the place. It was breathtaking.

"Hell, you know what it's like. We can't keep half these kids. They come from all over the place. Most are just here for the winter but they end up leaving to go sight-

seeing. Our most reliable kids are the locals. They tend to stick around for the big bonus we give out at the end of season. We've got a bushel of Australians right now, and a lot of them are returns from last year, which we love to see."

"Excellent. Any still here from three years ago when I last audited you guys?"

"A handful. Gary's still the head chef over on the back mountain. He specifically asked to speak to you. I think he wants to brag about what they've put in place over there so I won't spoil the surprise. All right, if you don't need me right now, let me leave you guys to go through the paperwork, and I'll try and work on an interview schedule. It kept changing yesterday so I need to get a final copy written down for you. You need anything from me right now?"

"Not yet. I'll talk to you in a bit about the interviews."

"Sounds good. See you guys later."

Oliver nodded, watching Ted walk out of his office. Glancing over at a waiting Jack, he grinned. "Time to get to work."

Chapter Two

A low cough pulled Oliver's attention away from the window and the view outside. Glancing down at the sheet in front of him, he quickly spied the name of his next interview before he stood up, smiling at the man approaching; young, probably early twenties if Oliver guessed correctly. He had definitely come right off the mountain if his ski pants and parka were any indication. A pair of goggles were pushed down around his neck, highlighting the reverse raccoon tan the man already sported. Black windswept hair billowed around his head, obviously full of static from the toque clutched in one hand.

The man held out his free hand, accepting Oliver's handshake with a grin.

"Hi there. I'm Oliver. You must be Vasco, from the avalanche crew?"

"That's me. It's pronounced Bosco but no biggie."

Oliver winced, although that was a tough one. He just hated not getting someone's name right. "Sorry about that. Please, have a seat."

"No need to eat crow or nothing. It's an odd name." Vasco sprawled in the chair opposite Oliver, tapping his foot.

"Do you live close by?" Oliver smiled, glancing down to his watch to note the time. His last few interviews had gone by pretty quickly since the employees had been brand new, but he still wanted to make sure he didn't go over his fifteen minutes.

"About twenty minutes, as the crow flies. I share a place with my brothers."

"Have you been here long, then?"

"All my life. My brothers take great pride in crowing about us being locals and all that, but I don't mind the foreigners coming in here. They make things interesting, for sure."

Oliver hid his smile at the crow idioms Vasco was throwing out. He hadn't noticed when he was here before, but he wondered if it was because of the whole Crowfoot thing. He'd have to pay attention to see if anyone else did it. It did serve to make him think about the crows outside. They probably fed the damn things in order to make their promo pictures more interesting for the Crowfoot website. Okay, that was a touch cynical, but still, he couldn't figure out why the crows were hitting one of his buttons. There was something off about them. He couldn't put his finger on it.

Shaking his head, he figured he'd think about it later. He couldn't afford to be distracted right now.

The next ten minutes passed in a blur as Oliver quizzed Vasco about the safety program at Crowfoot. Being on the avalanche crew, Vasco was doing some of the most critical high hazard jobs at the ski hill, so he made sure he spent ample time covering the training he had to receive. Waving him off, Oliver stood up to stretch. He was always surprised at how exhausted he got just talking to people. It made the day go by incredibly fast -- hell, it was nearly quitting time already -- but he always wanted to just veg out and fall asleep when he was finished.

Part of it was because during an interview you weren't just chatting. You had to keep your mind on the subject, keep track of any extra bits of information they threw at you and have a running tally in the back of your mind to see if you'd gotten answers for everything you needed. Oliver hated writing things down during his time with someone because it tended to make people clam up faster than anything. He ended up jotting down important things and then writing more extensive notes during his breaks, but it meant his mind had to be on top of everything or he'd miss something.

"Hey there, Safety Man!"

Startled, Oliver watched his next interview come in. Man, he looked nearly identical to Vasco. Moving back to the table he was using, he glanced down at the list. Yep, another avalanche crew. Those two had to be related. Either that or he was getting old and all these kids were starting to look alike. Not that he was all that old, but still...

Every year he aged, he swore things changed even more drastically in the younger generation. It was insane. And now he was sounding like his father. Great.

"Hi there. You're Miller?"

"Yep, that's what they tell me." An infectious grin split his face. The same reverse raccoon tan highlighted his dark eyes, black hair just as windswept as Vasco's had been. A parka adorned with the crow logo of the Ski Resort was summarily tossed off on a free chair. Sprawling in front of Oliver's seat, he peeled off another layer of clothing, leaving himself in a pair of ski pants and tee shirt. Everything else he piled to the side.

That was one of the things he had noticed through the afternoon of interviews. He could tell immediately where someone worked just from the state of their clothing when they came in. If they sported regular dress, they were most likely from the retail/rental area. The chefs and kitchen staff were pretty easy to pick out too. Anyone that worked on the hill was distinguished by the clomping of their boots coming up the stairs, and depending on what their jackets looked like, he could tell if they were ski school or ski patrol. The avalanche crew was bundled up tight, and the mechanics were adorned in coveralls and the requisite steel toes unless they'd just come off the hill doing maintenance, in which case they were bundled up in parkas.

Getting back to the interview, Oliver started out with small talk, the way he'd done ten times before. He'd found a lot of people incredibly nervous to be interviewed during a safety audit, so it always helped to ease them into it.

"You from around here?" he asked, glancing quickly at his watch.

"Yep, twenty minutes, as the crow flies. My brothers and I share a little cabin in the mountains. Love it. If you've time before you leave, I'd love to take you out there."

Okay, that was a little weird. "Well, I definitely envy you being able to live out here. Must be nice, being out of the city."

"Well, you'd know about that, wouldn't you?"

Oliver frowned. "True. I love visiting here. Won't get much of a chance to ski. Heck, this is a tough job being able to come out here and chat with folks." He chuckled. "But someone has to do it."

"Guess so. Still, must be nice for you not living in the city, right?"

"What makes you say that?"

Miller smiled slowly, the corners of his lips tilting. "Something tells me you're a ranch boy."

"Really? I'm always told I look like city through and through." Was Miller flirting with him? What was that smile about? It didn't look like the type of smile you'd throw at a stranger, but what did Oliver know? He'd been told before that his internal radar was off where attractive flirty men were concerned. Frankly, he was pretty lucky Marshall and Bay were both determined to be with him because if it had been up to him he'd probably have gone on in ignorance, thinking they just wanted to be friends.

"Hmm... nah. You remind me of the country... horses, green fields. I like it."

Really? Man, Oliver didn't see that at all. His men sure looked country to him, but Oliver just couldn't get rid of his city roots if he tried. It was something Marsh teased him about. The man was bound and determined to make Oliver a country boy by the time Stampede rolled around next year so he could show up in boots, hat and wranglers and not look like a poser.

"So, you live on a ranch?" Miller leaned forward, folding his hands together.

"Actually, I do. Good guess."

"Working ranch?"

"Uh, we raise Shire horses."

"Nice. I have some... cousins... down that way that raise Shires. Maybe you know them? The Stoddards?" The last was said with an air of expectation. Miller leaned forward even more, studying Oliver's face.

Not knowing what to say, Oliver forced a chuckle. "You don't say. Small world." What the hell? His skin itched, not at all comfortable with how things were going. The last time he'd felt this off in an interview was when... Shit. When he'd accidentally

interviewed the man who had stolen Marshall when he was still in horse form. Crap, he needed to talk to his men.

“Indeed.”

Whatever Miller would have said next was interrupted by a loud caw outside the window. A big ass crow filled the view outside, wings outspread. Oliver jerked back.

“Get out of here, already. I’ll find you later, man.” Miller rapped on the glass, obviously startling the crow as the massive creature flew off to the left.

Twisting, Oliver tried to follow the flight of the bird, but he lost him. “Man, what do you feed those things? I’ve never seen crows so big.” He hoped the damn things were elsewhere when it was time to leave. He just couldn’t shake his discomfort where they were concerned. What was it about the crows that was freaking him out?

“Yeah, I think it must be the mountain air. We definitely breed big here.” Miller grinned, stretching his arms up and placing them behind his neck.

Okay, was that a flirtation? Damn, he’d need to talk to Marshall about... No, better not talk to Marshall about the pretty man who may have been flirting with him during an audit. All he needed was to have Marsh try and follow him the next time he went out of town, determined to protect his virtue or something. He knew Bay would be a bit more restrained but Marshall was his hothead. Passionate -- which was fantastic under most circumstances -- but the other man sometimes jumped to conclusions.

Glancing quickly at his watch, Oliver got them back on track, steering the conversation around to safety.

* * *

Jack and Oliver pulled up outside the hotel shortly after five. Oliver went inside and got their room keys, pausing briefly to breathe in the clean mountain air.

Luckily for him, the client was picking up the tab so he didn’t need to keep track of anything for invoicing later. It also meant he wouldn’t have to reimburse Jack for his expenses either. He always loved it when he didn’t have to pay out of pocket for something. Man, some of his clients took damn near forever to pay their bills.

Hopping back into the truck, Oliver directed Jack to drive around to their rooms. The hotel was split up into five separate motel-style buildings, all sharing the same parking lot. They found their building pretty quickly, parking and grabbing their overnight bags.

"This is the same place I stayed last time I was here," Oliver said. "It's a bit of a pain in the ass having to walk outside to get to the restaurant for meals, but there's nothing quite like stepping outside in the morning and just looking at the mountains that surround us on all sides."

He really did feel like he was in the middle of some Santa's workshop paradise, though. Tremendous, white-capped mountains surrounded them on all sides, caging them inside a narrow valley. The ski hill itself was easy to pick out, thin white veins cut out of the verdant trees on the face of the mountain where the runs were. Their hotel was typical of every building in this tiny village, completely surrounded by trees.

Actually, calling it a village was being incredibly kind. He figured there might be fifteen buildings all together. A few hotels, the dorm-style residence for the kids working at the ski hill, a general store and gas station combination and a handful of restaurants. The rest of the buildings were occupied by a few residents that lived here year round.

Jack glanced around, stopping in front of his door. "It seems nice. Won't take us long to get back up to the ski hill in the morning. I could definitely get used to this view."

"Wait until you see it in the morning. Incredible. Only thing better is the view from Horsfall."

"Not that you're biased or anything." Jack snickered.

"Right, not at all." He didn't even bother hiding his smile. "So, we're on for dinner. You want to just stay here and catch the pasta place back in the main lodge?"

"Good food?"

"What I remember of it, it was pretty good. Decent, anyway."

"Yeah, that sounds good to me. Working dinner?" Jack asked. "I'll bring my notes from the interviews today, we can compare."

"Sounds good." Oliver checked his watch. "In an hour? Or do you want longer?" They both needed an hour or two to just sit and relax.

"Let's do an hour and a half from now. I'm feeling the strain from today. Need to recharge before we start talking about the audit again."

"Okay, see you soon." Entering his room, Oliver tossed his bag onto the ground, immediately pulled his cell phone out and called the main ranch building. He figured if his boys were home, they were either logging hours at the office or out in the pastures, so he had a 50/50 shot at getting the right number.

"Hello, Horsfall Ranch, Bayard Stoddard speaking."

Oh, look at his man, sounding all professional. "Hey Bay." Oliver smiled, feeling better already. He tucked the phone into the crook of his neck, bending over to take his boots off.

"Babe, you sound exhausted." Bayard's voice was exactly what he needed.

"I am. It was a long day, but I feel better just hearing your voice."

Now that he'd gotten the important stuff out of the way, he looked around his room. Typical of every hotel room he'd stayed in, there was even the wonderful artwork that he swore must be bought at some hotel warehouse. Oliver was sure he'd seen the one painting last week when he was in Saskatoon.

The bathroom was to the right of the front door, a basic cream on cream that would do the job. Nothing special, but as long as there was plenty of hot water in the morning, Oliver didn't much care what the decor looked like.

Two beds dominated one wall of the main room, a tired armoire was pushed into a corner with a writing desk beside it and the all-important coffee maker was on a small table in the opposite corner, right beside a connecting door that led to Jack's room. That would most definitely stay locked tonight. Oliver wrinkled his nose, trying to figure out if sound would carry through the door. Figuring it was better to be safe than sorry, he walked to the other side of the room.

"You doing okay?" Bay asked. "I don't like hearing you like this, you know that."

"Yeah, but not much I can do about it. Hazard of the job. You guys deal with physical exhaustion and I get the mental exhaustion."

"True, but at least I can get your nimble fingers to massage away my aches. What can I do for you, baby?"

Oliver loved hearing the concern in Bay's voice. His big man was always putting Oliver and Marshall first, even when they tried to call him on it. It had caused them a bit of tension over the summer, but Oliver wouldn't change him for the world. It was who Bay was, and he loved him for it. Hell, he wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth. And there he went with the horse idioms. Which reminded him...

"Bay, you have any cousins that work up here at Crowfoot?"

"We don't have any family in these parts. Marsh and I are the only ones in the entire province. Why?"

Oliver frowned, flopping down on one of the beds so he could get horizontal. "Are you sure?" He was positive Miller had said the Stoddards. Not that it mattered since Bay and Marsh were the only ones in the area that raised Shires, but still. He was sure he'd said their name. He hadn't imagined it, no matter how tired he may have been at that point.

"Yeah. We have some family out east but they're not that close to us. Our parents are over in England, of course, but other than that it's pretty much just Marshall and me."

"Hmm... weird. I had this interview today with one of the avalanche crew. His name was Miller Maddoff. Has a brother named Vasco. Spelled V-A-S-C-O. Weird, huh? Anyway, Miller said I looked like a ranch boy and asked if I lived on one. I said yes and that we raised Shire horses, and he asked if I knew the Stoddards and that they -- you -- were his cousins."

"I love how you say we. Christ, I'm half hard already just hearing that."

"What?" Oliver rolled his eyes at the phone, knowing Bay couldn't see him but exasperated that the man couldn't keep to the topic at hand.

"You said we raised Shires. Makes me happy that you're including yourself as part of Marshall and me. It's how we feel too."

Oliver smiled shyly at the happiness in Bay's voice. "Well, that's cool. Now, back to the cousins."

"We definitely aren't related to them. I'll see if Marsh knows who they are. Kind of weird that they pegged you. Did they say anything else?"

"No. Well, it was really only the one guy who said anything in the first place. It felt a little weird. I'm not going to lie to you. Oh, they both used crow idioms like, continuously. It was a little funny, especially since the damned crows at the ski hill are the size of great danes."

"Really?"

"Well, not quite. But seriously, biggest crows ever. I'm not exaggerating. They creeped me out. I don't know why but I just had this feeling. I can't describe it. Just, my gut didn't feel right."

"I'll ask Marsh. I trust your gut." Bay was silent for a moment. "Better yet, I'll call Dad. He'll know."

"Thanks. I don't want to sound paranoid or anything, but it just seems odd that they'd mention you guys by name. Do you think they know you?"

"Could be. It might not be all that weird if he's a country boy. Maybe he has family in the ranching business. Marsh and I have made a bit of a name for ourselves because of our horses, so it's possible they know us through that. We'll figure it out. You could always ask them if you see them again."

"I guess."

"Babe? Talk to me."

Oliver shrugged, knowing Bay couldn't see the movement but not knowing how to express himself. "It just felt like when I interviewed Tim. You know how my internal alarms all went off at once and I freaked? It was like that, without me freaking out."

"Tim's not going to bother us again. Last I heard he'd moved on to other breeds. I think his days of trying to breed Shires are over."

"I guess. Just... Well, keep me posted. I want to know what your dad says."

"No worries."

"How's Marshall doing?" Oliver asked, changing the subject. Time for more pleasant topics.

He brought up a picture of his other lover in his mind. The two men were so similar, yet incredibly different. Bay was the eldest by minutes, but even before Oliver had discovered that fact, he'd have guessed it anyway. Calm, cool, controlled, that was his Bay. Short hair, wide shoulders, and a colossal chest that just begged to be touched. Long, hair-roughened legs and slim hips just added to his appeal. Hell, Oliver could practically wash clothes on the man's chiseled abs.

Marshall looked nearly identical, but there were enough differences that Oliver could tell them apart blindfolded -- a fact he'd discovered on a pleasant afternoon a few months ago.

The outward difference most everyone noticed right away was their hair. Marsh had grown his long and most often tied it back into a braid. The lustrous strands practically begged to be touched, brushed, or gathered up in handfuls while Oliver licked and kissed his way down Marshall's chest. Man, he loved Marsh's hair. That wasn't all he loved about the bear-sized man, but it definitely was icing on the cake.

"Marsh is good. He had to go into Calgary with Ed to pick up a few things. He'll be back later tonight."

"Ed doing okay? Isn't he supposed to head to Montana soon?" Ed O'Brien was the twins' foreman. Oliver had been afraid that Ed wouldn't like him when he first started dating both men. While they could hide their relationship from other people, it was a little hard to hide it from a man who lived next door and had access to every part of the ranch but the twin's bedrooms. Luckily, Ed had accepted Oliver into their family with no outward qualms, and Bay had assured Oliver that he wasn't silently disproving or anything like that.

Ed was away more often than not, though, going to horse shows and events and visiting other ranches while the twins usually stayed at home and dealt with the business end of a working ranch.

It was the twin's preference, and had absolutely nothing to do with Oliver. They'd been that way before he met them. Still, it made him happy to know that at least one of his men would be at home even when he was out of town like this. He frequently wished he could be home with them more. Since he couldn't help it, he just made do with phone calls that cost him a pretty penny at the end of the month, but he couldn't care less. He always called them when he was away, and it was a habit none of them wanted to break.

"Ed leaves tomorrow, bright and early. If I didn't know better, I'd say he had a honey down there, with how anxious he's been the past few days."

Oliver laughed, trying to picture the older man with some girl on his arm. He didn't think Ed even dated.

"So, when are you coming home?" Bay's voice was rough, his longing evident.

Oliver knew how he felt, and he wished he wasn't all the way out here but it was only for a few days. He never knew how long an audit was going to take until he arrived on site, found out how many employees were working and what work they had. He quite frequently had to call home to let his men know he was coming back either earlier or later than planned.

The long trips away sucked sometimes but it was a hazard of his job. If he wanted to work he had to go where the work was.

"It'll be a few days. It's a pretty straight forward audit, but they have quite a few employees for it being this early in the season. Even with Jack here there's a lot to go through. I should be home some time on Thursday afternoon. So you and Marsh better take the afternoon off so you can welcome me home like a returning Centurion." Oliver laughed, rolling over onto his stomach.

Bay growled, the sound nearly curling Oliver's toes. "Babe, don't make me get in my truck and drive up there to see you."

"Why? What would you do with me when you got here?" He licked his lips, closing his eyes.

"Oh, you know what I'd do. I wouldn't care where you were; out in the open, giving an interview, or holed up in your hotel room. Wouldn't matter to me at all. I'd grab you where you stand and slake myself on your very willing body."

"Mmm... How would you know if I was willing or not?"

"I'd know. You're always willing whenever you're around Marsh and me. Hell, I might even bring Marsh with me so he could hold you down while I fucked that gorgeous ass of yours. I bet you'd be just begging to suck his cock too. Might be a good idea since you can get a bit loud. You wouldn't be able to scream out that way." Bay growled again, the sound rumbling up from his chest.

Oh, yes, his man liked that idea. Oliver could picture it in his mind. Marsh holding him down, and Bay fucking him from behind. Marshall's thick, tasty cock just out of reach, toying with Oliver, making him shimmy to try to reach it. Mouth salivating just at the thought of sucking Marsh, hips wiggling and driving Bayard crazy.

Speaking of wiggling, Oliver squirmed on the bed, reaching down between himself and the comforter to slide his free hand into his pants, cupping his growing problem. Well, not a problem really, since he was very much alone... but that was pretty much what was wrong with this picture. Here he was getting hard and he didn't even have anyone to appreciate it. Damn it.

Oliver slid his fingers over his dick, touching the sensitive skin the way he wanted Bay to be doing. He listened to Bay's voice, losing himself without really paying attention to the words.

"Ollie, are you playing with yourself?" A lick of amusement colored the arousal apparent in Bay's voice.

"Maybe," he sighed.

"Are you on your back?"

"Stomach." He kept lightly stroking himself, just enough to keep little Oliver happy.

"Roll onto your back, Oliver." Bay's voice hardened.

Nearly whimpering, Oliver did as instructed. Damn, that was hot.

"Now, hands off."

"Bay..."

"Now, baby. Don't make me tell you twice."

Oliver removed his hand, flopping it out to the side, clutching at air. His dick throbbed in protest, straining against his jeans. Ask? Hell, Bay was pretty much telling him. There was no asking involved. Not that he was complaining, mind.

"Put the phone down, stand up and take your clothes off. Slowly. I want you to pay attention to how you feel. When you're naked, lay back down exactly as you are now and pick the phone up again."

Oliver wanted to rush the movement, but it was too ingrained in him to do what Bay was asking for. He didn't want to disappoint his man. He wished Bay was with him right now, but every movement he made reminded him that he was doing what his lover wanted. With that thought paramount in his mind, he couldn't help but shiver when he removed his jeans, sliding them and his boxer briefs down shaking legs. His dress shirt was next, followed by his socks. His dick was hard, bobbing in front of him, silently begging for relief. The pressures of the day were forgotten, only Bay filling his mind.

This was what he needed, why he called home. It didn't matter that he was hours away from Bay and Marsh, and it didn't matter that he'd be sleeping alone tonight. All that mattered was that he please Bay in this moment, that he slake his lust and lose himself in his love for the other man.

Lying on his back again, Oliver picked up the phone. He'd barely set it to his ear when Bay spoke again.

"Keep your hands away from your body. Just breathe. Slowly."

Oliver tried to calm his breath. He exhaled noisily, bringing in a lungful of air with a shaky inhale. Slowly his chest evened out, inhaling and exhaling more calmly.

His skin felt stretched, the brush of the comforter underneath inflaming him where it touched.

Outside his door he could still hear the transports and smaller vehicles as they drove past on the nearby highway, a soft shush of tires on asphalt. A bird cawed close by, and Bay's steady breathing came through the phone at his ear.

"Good boy."

Oliver blinked open his eyes, not even knowing when he'd closed them.

"I want you to run your free hand over your chest. Touch yourself lightly but leave your nipples alone. Feel your skin and sink into each touch."

Oliver did as instructed, nearly flinching at the first touch of his hand. The pads of his fingers ghosted over his skin, missing his nipples, circling around the erogenous zone. He squirmed, tilting his head back and opening his mouth on a gasp.

"Yeah, I think you like that."

"Mmm hmm."

"Touch your nipples, baby. Pinch them. I want to hear it in your voice."

Oliver gasped at the heat in Bay's voice, pinching his left nipple gratefully. The sensation rippled down into his stomach, his toes curling when Bay purred in response.

"God, Bay. Please."

"If you're a good boy, I might let you come."

"Oh!" Oliver arched off the bed, needy. Sometimes he hated how hot he became when Bay was like this. He wanted it to last longer, wanted to linger in the heat but he couldn't help himself. The man drove him crazy, out of his mind with lust.

"Please..."

"Grip your cock. Pump it once. That's it, babe. I want to hear it."

Oliver cried out, nearly losing his grip on the phone. His nerve endings were on fire, his mind blanking just at the pleasure of his own touch and the sound of Bay's voice.

"Cup your balls and roll them in your hand. Now, stroke yourself again. Squeeze your cock. Slick it up with all that tasty cream you're spilling. Are you nearly there,

babe? I can hear it in your voice. I can hear how much you want this. Come on, Oliver, I want to hear you come for me. Are you ready?"

Some other time he'd curse for how ridiculously easy it was for Bayard to tie him up in knots.

"That's it, Ollie. Come for me." Bayard growled, the sound loud in Oliver's ear.

He closed his eyes, balls drawn tight, the familiar tingle rushing down his spine. With an aching groan he spilled himself, seed pumping out of his dick and coating his belly.

"Yeah, just like that, baby. That's what I wanted to hear."

Slumping back to the bed, Oliver jerked his hand again, shuddering at the final splash of come onto his skin. Letting go of his overly sensitive shaft, he closed his eyes.

"Lick it up now. Wouldn't want any of that to go to waste just because Marsh and I aren't there."

Oliver wasted no time in lifting his hand, licking up the salty traces of his passion. It wasn't quite the same as being with his men, but it would do.

Chapter Three

Pulling open the door, Oliver stepped outside into a winter wonderland, stretching his arms up to the sky to work the final kinks out of his back. He hated to admit it but he'd definitely gotten spoiled living with his men. He used to love staying in hotels, getting to laze about in a nice, soft bed but now he missed the extra body heat and his furry mattresses. For some reason both Bay and Marsh liked to have him sprawl out on top of them during the night. Oliver wasn't complaining, but it definitely made it difficult to sleep when he was out on the road. He was seriously tempted to ask one of them to come with him next trip.

Which would be in about seven days.

Sighing, Oliver shook his head. Hell, it was November, which was smack dab in the middle of his busiest season and meant he was on the road every week. Visiting a different client every week kept things from getting boring, but man did it ever suck that he had to be away from his men. Oh well, nothing he could do about it. It just made the weekends all that much more fun. And the closer he got to Christmas, the closer he got to one of his lightest seasons starting in January, and that meant he'd get to spend nearly every day with the twins. Maybe he was due for an extended vacation. Helping them out around the ranch might be fun for a few weeks. Especially if it meant one or both of them could just bend him over a hay bale whenever they got to feeling frisky.

Stepping further out from under the overhang, Oliver started to amble toward Jack's truck. He knew the other man wouldn't be out yet, but he wanted to stretch his legs. After his little interlude with Bay last night he'd gone over to the main restaurant to have dinner with Jack, and they'd discussed the audit's progress so far. Oliver might be lead auditor, but he definitely relied on Jack's experience to get a feel for what the safety program was like at Crowfoot. Funny enough, Jack hadn't had any unusual

interviews the way Oliver had. Jack had thought it was a little unusual when Oliver mentioned what Miller had said about him looking like a country boy, but Jack pretty much brushed it off.

He'd wait and see what Bay came up with. It was just causing a funny feeling in Oliver's stomach. He wasn't sure if he should be worried or not, but he didn't like being on edge like this.

"Good morning, Oliver."

Startled out of his preoccupation, Oliver glanced up to see the object of his thoughts standing beside Jack's truck. He wasn't alone either. Vasco was beside Miller, and a handful of other men were spaced out behind them.

Oliver risked a glance back at his room door, wishing Jack would come out a little early. The man was in the room next to Oliver's and just a shout away.

Squaring his shoulders, Oliver tried for a smile. "Morning. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"We need to talk." Miller motioned him closer.

"Okay. What's this about?"

"Do you know a man named Tim Zhelyazko?"

Oliver froze. That name was most definitely familiar. The last time Oliver had heard it was when Bay said he would take care of the man. Right after he'd kidnapped Marshall in his horse form and tied him up with iron shackles on his farm. It had been how Oliver had first met Marshall, actually. He'd been on his way home from visiting Horsfall Ranch for the first time. He had come up the road and spied a huge Shire horse over to the side in a pasture. Massive, black, over eighteen hands high with a fabulous white feather at the base of each tremendous hoof. He'd never forget it, never wanted to, even though it wasn't exactly the finest moment for either twin.

Weeks later, Oliver had personally run into Tim during one of his audits. The man had admitted right to his face that he was trying to start a breeding program with Shire horses. It was right after that that Oliver had finally admitted his feelings for Marshall as well as Bayard.

Oliver crossed his arms, not sure he liked the thought of these guys having anything to do with Tim. "I think you have some explaining to do."

Miller snorted, tilting his head to the side. "I figured you'd say that. Let's get a few things out in the open right now. I know you and the Stoddards had a run-in with Tim Z back in the spring. I bet he's left you alone since then, hasn't he?"

"How do you know him? Better yet, how do you know Bay and Marsh?"

"We're cousins, of a sort."

"That's a lie. They don't have any cousins out here. How do you really know them?"

"Trust me. We're closer than you or they think."

"Bullshit. You tell me how you know us, or I'll..." Crap, he didn't know what he'd do. Seriously, what was he supposed to do? Go to the police? Complain to Ted at Crowfoot? Shit. Shit, shit, shit. What should he do? He needed to talk to Bay and Marsh. Now.

"What? What will you do?" Vasco grinned.

Oliver took a step back, not liking that look or his tone. Crap, he was out alone with these guys.

Miller shook his head. "Vas, you're being an asshole. Quit it."

Vasco settled down, stepping back a pace to stand beside the others. Oliver glanced back and forth between them, unsure what to do now.

"I guess we should prove it to you. Vas, since you've apparently elected yourself, show Oliver who we are."

While Oliver stared confused, Vasco shot him one last grin and suddenly disappeared. His clothes floated to the ground, settling around a gargantuan crow. The bird opened his beak, letting out a rattling caw.

Oliver stumbled backward, eyes wide. "What the hell?"

"I told you we were related to your friends," Miller said.

A moment later, Oliver was staring at a very naked Vasco. Great, just what he wanted to see first thing in the morning. Actually, well, okay the man was nicely

formed. Great, he wasn't supposed to be noticing other men, right? Looking to the side, Oliver hoped to hell he wasn't blushing.

"You want to hear our story now?" Miller stepped in Oliver's line of vision. "Vas, put your clothes on and stop blinding everyone. No one wants to see your glowing cavefish ass this early in the morning."

Oliver tried not to laugh. He wasn't in the mood but still... They definitely had a dynamic going. He kept his gaze squarely on Miller, trying valiantly to ignore the reverse strip-tease Vasco was putting on in the background.

"You should be telling this to Bay and Marsh, not me."

"You're here now. Not them."

Oliver just knew he would be missing something that Bay and Marsh would ask, but he couldn't exactly call them up right now. Actually, maybe he should? Pulling out his cell phone, he kept one eye on the men. "I'm sorry, but I really should be telling my... them about this. It's not my secret to tell."

"Fair enough."

Dialing the familiar number he listened to the rings. Would they be at home right now? He figured at least one of them would be out in the barns, but hopefully someone was near a phone. The answering machine picked up and he hung up without leaving a message. Starting to pace, Oliver dialed the main ranch line instead, listening to that ring. Frustrated when the answering machine picked up, he hung up again. He tapped his phone against his leg, deciding to call Bay's cell phone. When the same thing happened again he called Marsh and got his answering machine. Finally, he figured he should leave a message.

"Marsh, it's Oliver. I really need to talk to you and Bay. It's important. Call me the minute you get this message and I'll answer, I promise."

"Well, you still want to talk?" Miller arched a brow.

He nodded, determined to find out something he could take back to his men. He wouldn't be lying to say he was confused as hell. It was easier to swallow now that he knew his men, but he didn't quite know what to do with the news that these men

weren't exactly human. What did it mean, that there were other animal shapeshifters out there? Did that mean things like werewolves were real? What the hell?

"How did you know who I was?" He figured he'd start at the most basic level.

"We have a brother that lives in and around Calgary. We've made it our business to keep an eye on Tim Z and his family so when he moved out to a ranch outside Calgary, we made sure Iain camped out nearby to watch what the man did. We were certainly shocked when he brought us tales of shapeshifting horses on the neighboring ranch, but it made sense there are others like us out there. He told us about you when you moved there full time this summer."

"So, are you all like they are? Why crows?"

"You tell us. Why do the Stoddards shift into horses?"

Oh no, they weren't going to play this game. "I asked you first."

Miller and Vasco exchanged glances. Miller finally nodded in acceptance. "Fair enough. We have an ancestor in our line that isn't exactly human, some kind of Fae, if the stories are true. He passed on part of his genes and since then every child born in the family has been able to shift shapes."

Okay, that certainly sounded familiar, eerily similar, to Bay and Marshall's history. Coincidence, or were they playing him? "Every child? Not just the men?"

Miller cocked his head. "Can only the Stoddard males shift?"

Oliver stayed silent.

"Come on, we're sharing. You have to share too. We're not fucking with you, I swear. This is important."

Heaving a sigh, praying his men would forgive him if this was supposed to be a secret, Oliver tried to figure out what would be safe to discuss. "Apparently, there haven't been any female births in the last while, so they aren't sure if women could shift in the beginning. They have a similar tale of their origin, though, about a Phooka that fell in love with their ancestor but couldn't be with her in the end. When she gave birth to twins, the boys were able to shift shape into great black horses, just like their father's preferred shape."

"Interesting." Miller and Vasco again exchanged glances. The men behind them stayed silent, just taking in what was going on. A little odd, but Oliver figured this entire conversation was ridiculous anyway. Man, his life had taken a turn the day he agreed to build a safety program for Horsfall Ranch. At this time last year he never would have guessed this could happen.

"So why are you telling me all this? Do you want to meet with them or something?" Oliver could certainly arrange a meeting if that's what they wanted, but he couldn't figure out why their brother hadn't tried to do that already. "What about your brother? You said he lived around Calgary and knows about Bay and Marsh. Couldn't he approach them?"

"Iain won't be approaching anyone. Not anymore." Vasco nearly spat the words. The others shuffled in place, tension building.

Oliver was sure he wasn't going to like this. "Why?"

Miller took up the tale again. "Tim Z and his family crippled him. Captured him in crow form and bound his legs with melted iron. They broke him and he can't shift back now. He'll forever be stuck in crow form."

Bound with iron. Christ. Just like Marshall. A cold chill worked its way down Oliver's spine. Was that why Tim had taken Marsh in the first place?

"How do they know? How does Tim know about you guys?"

"We aren't sure, but our Da thinks Tim's family might be Sidhe Seers. There are legends that go back as far as tales of Fae of humans born with the sight. They can see the true faces of the Fae, under the glamour that some wear. Tim and his family might be descended from such people. We don't know for sure. If we could find out, we'd tell you, but I'm not going to lie when I say none of my family are real eager to approach Tim Z right now. I will not have another brother end up like Iain."

"Where's Iain now?"

"Still outside Calgary. Tim Z let him go. That's how we found him, but he refused to come back here with us. We thought if we stayed this far out in the mountains we'd be safe. I'm not so sure though."

"Why would they do that? Why would they cripple someone? I mean, if they know he's human, how could they do that? And even if they don't know, who would bind an animal in iron?" He couldn't get thoughts of Marshall out of his mind. Tim had taken Marshall, had bound him in iron. Had he been attempting to cripple Marsh? Jesus, if Marsh had stayed there, if Oliver hadn't found him and snapped the chains with bolt cutters, he'd never have met the man -- would never have fallen in love with him. Marsh might even now be a horse permanently. It was enough to give him nightmares for eternity.

Hell, if he hadn't found Marsh, he probably wouldn't have fallen in love with Bay either. He wanted to puke, wanted to find his men right this minute and hug them until he wasn't afraid anymore. He wished they'd call him back. God, he needed to talk to them right this minute, needed to hear their voices.

"They do it because they can." Miller crossed his arms.

"What?"

"You can honestly be surprised that shit happens in the world? If there's one thing I've learned, it's that not everyone has complicated, well thought out reasons for being an asshole. Sometimes they just are. You can't sugarcoat it and talk about their bad childhood or some such shit. Sometimes people just do things because they can. End of story."

The sound of a door opening captured Oliver's attention before he could reply. Jerking around, he spied Jack coming out of his room. The other man waved at him, ambling across the parking lot. Oliver returned the gesture, swinging back around to look at the crows.

"We'll talk later," Miller said.

"We'd better. You need to talk to Bay or Marsh."

Nodding, the men walked away, heading toward a big truck parked at the end of the lot.

Jack stopped beside him. "Sleep well?"

Oliver dredged up a smile. "Like a baby."

“Me too.” He rubbed his hands together. “All right, let’s get day two rolling.” He reached for the driver’s side door, swinging himself into the truck.

Oliver glanced back at the avalanche crew, more confused than he’d started out. He wasn’t sure how worried he should be. He needed to talk to his men. Staring down at his still silent phone, he heaved a sigh. Damn it. What was he supposed to do?

Chapter Four

Oliver tapped his foot, barely paying attention to Jack's rambling morning talk. He wasn't cut out for this type of stuff. That was for sure. He desperately needed to talk to someone. Should he believe what the men said? If it was true, would Tim go after Marshall again? Man, he needed to talk to Marshall, needed to have Bay calm him down.

Crap, he needed to get his head back on track since he was about two minutes away from walking onto Crowfoot. He had a job to do.

"You with me?" Jack waved a hand in front of his face.

Jerking back, Oliver sighed. "Sorry. It's been a rough morning."

"The day isn't even started yet. Cheer up. It's bound to get better. We're here and I know for a fact they have great coffee inside."

"Yeah."

"What's wrong? You miss your man?"

Surprised Jack would ask about it, Oliver simply nodded. He didn't talk about the twins much at work, either of them, for obvious reasons. It still didn't stop him from wanting to unload on Jack. The only thing that stopped him was his ingrained professional streak. He couldn't unload on his contractor since they weren't really that close of friends, and Oliver just couldn't cross that line.

He stepped out of the truck, pausing a moment to study the hill in front of them. The sight that had captured him yesterday wasn't enough to grab his attention this morning. Oliver looked to the side, not surprised to see a handful of crows milling around the far side of the parking lot.

"You still creeped out about the crows?"

Oliver snorted. "You can say that."

"Hmm. I don't know but they look friendly."

Okay, seriously, he couldn't do this. "Let's get to work." Oliver glanced down at his silent cell phone, willing the thing to ring.

Calling himself ten kinds of fool, he decided to try Bay and Marsh again. Maybe they were busy and couldn't call him back, but there was a chance he might be able to reach them this time.

He tried Bay first. He was waiting for the answering machine, figuring he should probably leave a message this time, so was surprised when it was picked up. "Bay?"

No answer.

"Bay, can you hear me?"

Someone was breathing on the other end of the line. Oliver could hear them.

"Bay?"

A dial tone hummed in his ear. What the hell was that?

Calling Marsh, he received the answering machine he'd expected. "Marsh, what's up with Bay? I just called his phone and I could hear him breathing, but he didn't answer. I'm not sure if it's my reception that's all funky since I'm in the middle of the mountains, but can you call me back to let me know if you got this. I can borrow Jack's phone later if mine is acting up. Thanks."

Wondering what that was all about, he spied Ted walking toward them. Minutes later, Oliver was fully preoccupied with safety matters, his twins and the crows pushed to the back of his mind.

* * *

Oliver's phone rang at noon -- just as he and Jack sat down to eat in the cafeteria -- nearly shocking him out of his chair as he'd forgotten he'd set the ringer to vibrate. He'd wanted to be able to catch it the minute one of his boys called him back, but he wasn't so crass as to set it to ring out loud when he was being paid to work.

One look and he realized it was Marshall calling back. He waved to Jack, letting him know he was going outside. Winding through the skiers all coming inside, Oliver answered the phone. "Marsh?"

“Oliver...”

Heart happy just at the sound of his big man’s voice, he rushed forward with his story. “You won’t believe what happened to me this morning. I told Bay yesterday about a few of the avalanche crew here at Crowfoot... Man isn’t that a coincidence; the whole Crowfoot, Horsfall thing. Did you do that on purpose? It doesn’t matter. Anyway, this morning I get up and go outside and guess who’s waiting for me by Jack’s truck? The avalanche crew! They’re like you and Bay -- but crows. You know, *really* like you and Bay. They had this incredible story about their brother in Calgary, and how they knew who we were. I’m not sure what to believe, but I can’t not believe what they said, and --”

“Oliver. Bay’s missing. I need you to come home.”

Chapter Five

Oliver hung up the phone, frozen to the core. Bay was missing.

"Oliver? You okay?" Jack's voice came as if from a tunnel, muffled and far away.

When had Jack followed him out?

Squeezing his eyes shut, he tried to tell himself everything was okay. It would be okay. Marsh said Bay was missing but that didn't mean anything. It just meant he was missing. Maybe he went out for milk, or went for a walk. Maybe he just needed to stretch his legs and didn't want to tell Marsh for some reason. He could be doing a hundred things for a hundred different reasons. No cause for panic, right?

Just because Oliver had heard the crows talk this morning about crippling shapeshifters in their natural form and all that, it didn't mean that was what happened to Bay.

Oliver bent over, gasping for air. He couldn't breathe. Oh, God, he couldn't breathe.

"Oliver!" Jack pushed his head lower, bracing his back. "Breathe. In and out. Slow and steady. That's it."

"I need... I need to go back to them. I don't. I... they..."

"They?"

Oliver froze, lifting his head to stare at Jack.

"Oliver, what's going on?"

"I need to get back to Calgary. I... Bay's missing. I..." He needed to stop before he told Jack everything. God, he'd think he was crazy.

"It's okay. You can tell me what's going on. Bay's the guy you're with?"

Oliver straightened, putting out a hand to hold himself upright against the wall beside him. They were standing just outside the main doors to the Crows' Nest lodge, out of the way of foot traffic but still close enough that anyone could overhear.

What did he do? He had to leave. But he couldn't leave. He was on a job. This was his life, his reputation. He couldn't just leave.

"Jack, I..."

"Just tell me what's going on. It's okay."

Oliver took a deep breath, trying to get enough air in that his brain started working again. He couldn't think straight, his mind was nearly a blank.

"That was Marshall. One of the... His... Bay seems to have up and disappeared, and Marshall is worried about him."

"You want to go home? Has he called the police? How long has he been missing?"

"It's complicated. I... When I first met them, Marsh had been... Crap, I can't... I'm sorry, Jack. I just need to go home."

Jack studied his face, frowning. Oliver figured Jack probably thought he was a crackpot. Hell, he was starting to think he was a crackpot. He didn't blame Jack if that's how he felt. Not that he was going to pretend to know what Jack was thinking.

Grabbing his arm, Jack pulled Oliver further to the side, away from the door and prying ears.

"Oliver, I think of you as a friend, not just my boss. You know that, right?"

Oliver shrugged, not sure what to say.

"You can tell me anything. I'm not going to share what you say. I promise it'll stay between us."

He wanted to tell him, wanted to confide in someone. Everything had changed when he met the twins, and while he loved them to pieces, sometimes Oliver still felt like he was living in a dream. Maybe telling Jack would make it real. Or it would make him look like a complete nut job. Jack could refuse to work with him anymore. He could

tell everyone in the industry that Oliver had cracked under the pressure and was telling incredibly stupid stories about fantastical creatures.

Right, that sounded like fun.

“Oliver! We need to talk.”

Great, just what he needed. Oliver twisted his neck to watch Vasco approach from the right.

“Not now,” Oliver gritted out.

Vasco waved his hand dismissively. “It’s important.”

“I have other things to deal with right now. I seriously can’t deal with one more revelation.”

“Tim’s gone. My brother can’t find him.”

Oliver closed his eyes. Great. “I thought your brother couldn’t exactly communicate with you.”

“Not Iain. Malcolm. He flew down when Iain was injured. Malcolm just called a few minutes ago. He said Tim Z went belly up and vacated his ranch early this morning, along with a very suspicious horse trailer. Malcolm tracked him through the city and got a peek inside the trailer when Tim Z stopped outside a warehouse, but he lost them when he drove east on the TransCanada.”

How many brothers did Vasco have? Lord. “What exactly do you want me to do about it?” Oliver wished Marshall was here. This was so far out of his experience that he felt he was drowning. He didn’t want to think about Tim. And yes, he wasn’t stupid. It seemed more than coincidental that both Bay and Tim disappeared at the same time.

Although he only had Vasco and Miller’s word on that. Were they telling the truth? Should he believe they were on his side? This would be a perfect time for one of his men to take over. He wasn’t a bad judge of character. In fact he was pretty damned good since it was something he needed when he was in interviews and needed to gauge whether someone was telling the truth or not. It wasn’t the same, though. This wasn’t exactly normal.

Oliver took a step back, trying to distance himself from Vasco without it being really obvious.

Jack aligned himself beside Oliver. "All right, I mean it this time. What's going on?"

"One of his lovers is missing, and the man responsible has just flown the coop."

"What?" Oliver's and Jack's voices melded together, sounding like one person.

"What are you --"

"What do you --"

"Doing? Are you on crack? What's --"

"Mean? Are you serious? What --"

"Wrong with you?" Oliver sputtered.

"Does that mean?" Jack finished.

Oliver stopped, swinging around to look at Jack.

"Uh..." he started, not sure how to continue.

"What the hell?" Jack crossed his arms, turning his shoulders slightly to place himself between Vasco and Oliver.

Behind his shoulder, Vasco licked his lips, eyeing Jack up and down. Oliver ignored him.

"He..." Oliver frowned, not sure how to say this. Story of his life. He seemed to be permanently confused these days.

"Is that true?"

"Well. Sort of." Oliver squared his shoulders. "Yes. Yes, it's true. I'm with both Bayard and Marshall Stoddard. I live with both of them. I'm in love with both of them. I'm sleeping with both of them. I don't care who knows about it. I'm not ashamed of my relationship with them."

With that said, he nodded emphatically, waiting for Jack's response.

"Uh, I actually meant, is it true you know who's responsible? But that's great about you and... Congratulations?"

Heat rose to Oliver's cheeks, no doubt blooming into a fabulous blush. Oops.

Vasco started to laugh, continuing to guffaw even when Oliver aimed a glare at his head.

Jack steamed ahead, thankfully ignoring the other man. "Look, Oliver. Take my truck. Drive back to Calgary and figure out what's going on. I'll stay here and finish the audit. I'll book another day at the hotel and that should give us enough time to finish everything by Friday. If it's not finished, we can come back next week and complete anything outstanding. Don't worry about coming back now. You just deal with what needs to be dealt with. I'll catch a bus back to Calgary when I'm done."

"No need. I'll drive you back." Vasco grinned.

"Uh, if it's not too much trouble. Sure. Thanks," Jack said, slowly.

Oliver knew he should be refusing, but he was too grateful that Jack would offer. "Really?"

"Don't make me force you into that truck. Go. I'll take care of things here. Just promise me one thing?"

"Anything."

"Keep me posted. Just promise you'll tell me what happens. It'll be okay."

* * *

Hours later, after a painfully long trip from the ski slopes, Oliver pulled into the lane that would take him home. He drove around a familiar curve, and the entire ranch opened up below him. Stopping the car before the big black gate, Oliver sat silently. He remembered the day this all started so vividly. His life had changed the first time he came around this curve, the first time he saw the ranch, met Bayard Stoddard. He loved both men, but there was no denying Bay was his first love. Sure, it was only because he saw Bay first, but if he hadn't met the man on that day, none of this would have happened.

The gate opened up slowly, and he made his way through. A small farmhouse sat to the left of the gate, with a big black dog lying on the front porch. He sleepily raised his head, watching Oliver drive past. Oliver chuckled, seriously tempted to stop the car and get out. He absolutely loved animals.

A second house sat back further from the road, a little bigger than the first. He wondered how many people actually lived here. Truth be told, he didn't know much about ranching life. He'd done a bit of research on the company before coming down here, like he always did before accepting a new job, but a website didn't give you much information about the day to day workings of a place. Besides, the Horsfall website talked more about their horses than anything else, and most of that information had gone right over his head.

Speaking of which, who knew there would be so many buildings? A large rectangular building stood in front of him, with several smaller ones set around. An empty paddock sat to the right, and he could make out an open barn with machinery just behind the main building. Several gas tanks stood beside the open barn. At least he knew what those were. He felt a little out of his element coming here.

A man stepped out of the large building in front of him. Spying the trucks parked to the right, Oliver pulled his little blue car between two dusty pickups. He opened the door, grabbing his briefcase from the passenger seat. The man had come around to meet him and was now standing at Oliver's back bumper.

Jesus, he'd like to have this man do more than just stand at his back bumper. He was tall, towering over Oliver by at least half a foot, tanned and devastatingly handsome. Oliver just about swallowed his tongue looking at him. This was what Oliver fantasized about late at night when he was all alone. Fuck, the man was fulfilling almost every one of his dreams physically.

He had a black cowboy hat slanted low on his forehead, and his muscular frame was encased in dusty blue jeans and a worn blue plaid shirt. For a minute Oliver was certain the big man was going to pop the seams on that shirt. It strained across a colossal chest that just begged to be explored.

The cowboy held out one tanned hand. "Mr. Philip, I'm Bayard Stoddard. We spoke on the phone. Thanks for coming out here."

His voice was deep and slow, causing shivers to run through Oliver. He had to be careful here, or he'd completely lose it. Obviously it'd been way too long since he broke up with his last boyfriend.

"Mr. Stoddard, pleased to meet you." He grasped the man's hand in his, almost purring at the feel of the callused palm. What would those hands feel like on his body?

Oliver gripped the steering wheel tightly, resting his forehead on his hands. A sob broke through his gritted teeth. Inhaling deeply, Oliver tried to will the tears away. Everything was going to be okay. They'd find Bay and all of this would just end up a bad memory, a single moment in their long journey together.

Lifting his head, Oliver rubbed his face, drying up any lingering tears. He opened his window, entered his key code and watched the gate open up. Pulling out, he headed toward that second farmhouse, and the man he could see standing in front of it, waiting for him.

Bay was fine. He had to be. Hell, Marshall had made it through, and he'd been missing for nearly two weeks before Oliver had stumbled upon him. If Marsh could pull through being chained up for two weeks, then Bay would be fine after only a day.

Right?

Chapter Six

Oliver had barely stepped outside Jack's truck when he was lifted up against a colossal chest and squeezed tight. He closed his eyes, clinging to Marshall.

Oliver had phoned home the minute he'd left Crowfoot, driving south on the highway. Marshall had sounded odd at the time, same as he had at lunch, but Oliver couldn't blame him for it.

Marshall now made a pained sound and squeezed him tighter. He rubbed his cheek along the top of Oliver's head, his stubble catching in Oliver's short strands.

"It's okay, Marsh. We'll find him."

Marshall lifted him up higher, melding their lips together roughly, causing their teeth to click.

Oliver winced at the pain, feeling his lip split. He didn't pull away, though. He knew Marshall needed him right now and honestly wanted to be held in return. He had a bone-deep need to cling to Marshall, to be held by at least one of his men. He couldn't imagine what Marsh was going through right now. The last time it had been him that was missing, and Bay that was doing the search. Now with the shoe on the other foot, he imagined Marsh was pretty close to going insane with frustration.

They should really move this inside, though. They were still standing in the gravel drive in front of Bay and Marshall's home. The front door wasn't more than ten feet away.

Suddenly, without warning, Marsh lowered him so his feet touched the ground, dropping even further until the man was kneeling at Oliver's feet. With shaking hands he reached up and stripped Oliver's belt off, snapped open his jeans and yanked them down to his knees along with his briefs.

Oliver gasped, reaching for his pants, but Marsh knocked his hands away.

“Marshall? What the hell?” Not that he wasn’t happy to oblige his men, but this really wasn’t the time.

Seconds later he wasn’t able to form two thoughts together to protest when his dick was enveloped in a warm, wet cavern. Strong hands grabbed his hips, fingers digging in. He was probably going to have a bruise in the morning but see if he cared.

Oliver figured they were alone on the ranch, otherwise Marsh wouldn’t have started anything, but it was jarring enough that it instantly sent him into atmospheric arousal. Oh, look at him with his hidden exhibitionist streak.

Who knew he’d get off on this?

Of course, it was most likely just the vigorous suction Marshall was applying along with ample saliva. Damn, his man could Hoover.

Knocking Marshall’s cowboy hat off, Oliver twisted both hands in the long locks that were revealed, thankful the man had left it loose. He pulled lightly, hands convulsing, knowing Marsh loved the pressure against his scalp.

Oliver’s knees buckled. He felt slightly embarrassed at how easily aroused he was, but now wasn’t the time to try and change his stripes, so to speak. He’d always had a bit of a hair-trigger where the men were concerned, but he had a feeling Marsh was going for down and dirty quick this time. The steady pressure along his shaft was a certain clue and *damn...* so was the sneaky hand that cupped his balls, kneading the sensitive skin.

Grabbing handfuls of hair, Oliver tipped his head back, mouth open on a heartfelt groan. Shit, he wasn’t going to last. Marshall did something with his tongue that really should be outlawed, and Oliver gave up the fight, coming in long pulses right down Marshall’s throat.

He panted, trying to get his breath back. Marsh lifted him off his feet, lowering him to his back on the gravel in one smooth move. The strength the movement took was enough to melt Oliver’s knees, so it was a good thing he was lying down, but he still winced as his bare ass rubbed over the rocks beneath him. Oliver opened his mouth to complain, but Marshall flipped him over, stealing his breath again.

The other man rucked up Oliver's shirt in the back, hard hands moved over his skin, tracing his spine and sending shivers through Oliver's body. Warm lips were pressed to the sensitive hollow of his lower back.

Marshall growled low in his throat, using his hands to part Oliver's ass cheeks, holding him open and exposing his hole.

His hands scrambled in the gravel, trying to find something to hold onto. Marsh pressed his face into Oliver's ass, licking his crease, stubble rasping his skin, tongue tracing over the quivering flesh. Oliver tightened involuntarily, causing Marshall to groan and press closer, mouth moving against his hole.

Marshall's tongue stabbed inside, licking the walls of his ass, sending rockets bursting inside Oliver's head. He closed his eyes, lost to the pleasure of Marshall's touch.

The hard presence behind him was suddenly gone. A metal clink and the accompanying zip alerted him to the fact that Marshall was undoing his pants. The man moaned loudly, cupping Oliver's hips with both hands. He lowered himself to rest against Oliver's back, his heavy dick bumping the delicate crease between Oliver's ass and thigh.

"Marshall! No lube!" He loved his man, but there was no way Marsh was getting his horse cock into Oliver without a little help. And saliva was most definitely not enough lube to accomplish what they both wanted. They'd found that one out through trial and error.

Marsh grunted, backing off to rub his dick along the crack of Oliver's ass. He was a solid weight on top of Oliver, comforting and damn arousing at the same time. Oliver reached above his head, fisting his hand in Marshall's hair, twisting the strands, loving the weight of it.

"Damn..." Marshall's voice was tight, almost there.

Knowing how close the other man was, Oliver crooned to him. "Come on, Marsh. Let me feel it. Give me your come. Please..."

Letting out a yell between gritted teeth, Marshall squeezed Oliver. Oliver felt thick seed spurt up his back. Marsh kept jerking his hips, his cock rubbing along Oliver's ass, his release pumping out against Oliver's skin.

Collapsing, Marsh rolled to the side, keeping the bulk of his weight off Oliver. Oliver sighed, his body buzzing with the afterglow of a great orgasm.

A soft kiss was pressed to his shoulder, under the rucked up shirt.

"Christ, I'm sorry, baby." Remorse filled Marshall's voice.

Oliver turned over, helped along by Marsh. "It's okay. I'm always here for you, you know that. Whatever you need, I'll do it." He blushed. "Besides, I wasn't exactly rushing to get away."

"Yeah, but my timing sucked. Did I hurt you?"

"No, I'm okay."

"Liar. I just felt you wince," Marshall crooned, lifting his head to touch Oliver's cheek.

"I'll be okay. It's not the first time you guys have been a little exuberant with me. I just didn't expect to get gravel burn today. I need kneepads next time we do this. Either that or you're on the bottom." He nuzzled into Marshall's hold. "What was that all about?"

"I just... I don't know. I needed you."

"Marshall?"

"I'm sorry. I just feel so out of control. I'm not used to feeling this way. I wish Bay was here. He always knows what to say."

"You're doing fine. Talk to me, Marsh." Oliver reached up, brushing back a lock of Marshall's hair.

"I didn't mean to just attack you like that. I was going crazy here by myself. My skin was itchy, and all I wanted to do was shift and run away. When I saw you, I just... I had this thought... *Oh, there's my anchor*. Clear as day. I knew you would keep me grounded, but I was just so desperate to hold on. I'm still afraid that I'm going to take off if I stop to think."

Forehead wrinkling, his heart in his throat, Oliver cleared his throat. "Don't you worry about running away. I won't let you. I love you, and I'm here for you."

The corners of his mouth tilting up, Marshall nodded. "Love you too."

They leaned in at the same time, lips clinging in a tender kiss.

Oliver let go, chuckling as he realized where they were. "Well, I'm just glad Ed's not here. Good Lord, we're right out in the middle of the place."

Marshall stood up, pulling Oliver with him. They straightened their clothes, Oliver desperately trying not to blush again. Man, he was going to be feeling that for awhile. He really needed to change his shirt. He normally didn't mind being covered in come, but this wasn't really the best time for it.

Marsh sighed, his mind already wandering. Oliver nearly felt the snap as Marshall changed gears. He stared off at the white-capped mountains in the background. "I can't find him. I don't know what to do."

Oliver grabbed hold of Marsh, hugging him tightly. "Did you talk to the crows? They said their brother was looking for them. They went east, apparently. They can't be far. They just left this morning." Oliver couldn't release his bear hold on Marshall so his words were slightly muffled.

He understood what Marsh was going through, because it was the same helpless feeling Oliver had. Although he figured it was probably a lot worse than what he was going through. The brothers had been nearly inseparable their entire lives, and while they loved him, it was only natural that their bond was much different, deeper.

Bay was the protector in the family, the glue that held everything together. Bay was the one that dealt with all the crap that happened, and he always had a plan in place for what should be done.

Marsh leaned on his brother, relied on him, looked up to him. And now Bay was gone, taken by the same man who had held Marshall in the spring. Well... that is if the crows could be trusted.

"Do you think they're telling the truth? About watching Tim and knowing who you guys are?"

Marsh drew back, sliding a big hand along the top of Oliver's head. He sighed heavily. "I don't know what to believe. I'm not sure why they've never approached us before now. If they've been watching us this entire time, I'm not sure how I feel about that either. It feels off, but I'm not sure if that's just because I'm freaking because Bay is missing, or if it really is an off situation."

"What do we do?"

"I don't know. I went over to Zhelyazko's the minute I realized Bay wasn't just out in a far pasture, but the place is most definitely cleared out. It looks like he might have been planning this for awhile. We haven't been paying attention to Tim lately. I guess we both figured he was set to ignoring us after we let him off the hook without trying to charge him for horse theft. But if he knew who we were from the beginning, he probably knew we wouldn't take it to the law. He'd know it was too much of a risk for us."

"Did Bay talk to your Dad? He said he was going to."

"I don't know. I got home late, went right to bed since I was exhausted. Got up at the butt crack of dawn to feed the horses, and get things ready for Ed's departure. I didn't talk to Bay. He was supposed to meet with a supplier around lunchtime, though, and that's when I realized he wasn't here."

"What do we do?"

"I don't know. Fuck, I'm tired of saying that!" Marshall slapped his thigh, agitated.

"All right, let's go inside. I need to change and you need to sit down and just take things one at a time. We can figure this out. We'll find him, Marsh. I know it."

Chapter Seven

Everywhere Oliver looked there were crows, cawing at him and Marshall. He was currently safe inside their house -- he was still trying to come to terms with the idea that it was *his* house now -- and the crows were all outside at the moment, but they were multiplying every time he glanced away.

It was like a watched pot. If he looked, nothing happened, but if he puttered around the kitchen and just happened to glance out the window, there were suddenly more of the black birds.

Great, he always wanted to be in a Hitchcock movie.

Oliver wasn't sure what the birds wanted but they were creeping him out. What was it with him and crows this week? He tried to figure out if any of them were shapeshifters like the men up at Crowfoot, but he couldn't distinguish between any of the birds outside, and the ones at Crowfoot were definitely hard to miss. He figured any brother of Vasco and Miller had to be the same size as them.

A floorboard creaked, alerting him to his normally soft-footed man. Oliver glanced back, seeing Marsh framed in the doorway of the rustic kitchen. The man had changed his clothes -- just as Oliver had -- and was currently decked out in a forest green long-sleeved tee, jeans and bare feet. Oliver glanced down at himself. Substitute the forest green for midnight blue and they were dressed exactly alike.

They even matched the kitchen. The twins' home was done up in what Oliver thought of as rustic country. Rust brown leather furniture mingled with natural wood grains and antique accessories. Everything in the house looked well-used but cared for. He figured it was about polar opposite from how his condo had been decorated, but he loved living here. Couldn't believe it had taken him so long to come to that conclusion, but the past was the past and he couldn't change it.

He was happy now, though. Oliver rubbed a hand over his chest. Well... he was happy when he had both men with him. He wanted Bay back. Now. Oliver didn't even want to think about what could be happening to Bay. He definitely didn't want to think about what had happened to Vasco's brother. Christ.

Marshall came up behind him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. "Did you tell Bay about the crows? My mind is a mess, I can't remember."

Oliver turned in Marshall's hold to look up at the man. "I told him about what happened yesterday on site, about how the one guy kept using crow idioms and mentioned that you both were his cousins. It wasn't until this morning that I found out the avalanche crew were the crows I'd run into yesterday. Bay doesn't know any of that. At least, I don't think he does. Unless Vasco's brother has found a way to get to him or something."

"Do you have a way of contacting this brother?"

"I could call Jack and see if he can ask the crew. I highly doubt the guy is carrying a cell phone on him unless he's shifted back to his two-legged shape."

"Crows only have two legs anyway." Marsh snorted.

Finally! Oliver had been trying to think of a way to get Marsh to let go of some of his tension. Right now they needed to be clear-headed in order to plan. He'd had his panic moment earlier, and obviously Marsh had released a bit of tension not thirty minutes ago, but it was time to buck up and get to work. They could fall apart later, after they had Bay back in their arms. "Right. I knew that. How are you holding up?"

Marsh shrugged, letting go of Oliver. "I'm fine."

"Liar."

Running his hand over his braid, Marsh propped himself against the kitchen counter. "I don't know how Bay took it last spring when it was him sitting here wondering where I was. He's the one better able to deal with shit like this anyway. I've only ever been good at getting into trouble, not really getting someone else out of trouble."

"Marshall, enough with that crap. Bay wouldn't let you get away with putting yourself down and I'm not going to either. Yes, I know that shit has happened to you, and I know that you're most comfortable letting Bay act the big brother, but you're strong. You're smart. I wouldn't want to be sitting with anyone else right now trying to figure out what to do next. We just need to brainstorm."

Sheepish, Marsh lowered his chin. "I knew there was a reason I kept you around."

"Right, and it has absolutely nothing to do with my very fine ass." Oliver grinned.

"Well, that's a big part of it." Marsh frowned in thought. "Okay, what do we know? Tim has most definitely left his ranch. The place is damn near cleared out so he's been planning this for awhile. Or maybe I'm giving him too much credit. Maybe he didn't plan anything, but just took advantage of an opportunity that presented itself?"

Oliver paced over to the big rough-hewn kitchen table, sliding onto one of the benches that lined it on both sides. He accepted the pad of paper and pen Marsh handed him and began jotting down bullet points. He thought better when he could see things written down on paper.

Oliver tapped the pen. "Let's think about this for a second. Say he just took advantage of an opportunity... Would Bay have shifted somewhere on Horsfall where Tim might have seen him and taken him? I mean, he tranquilized you, right? Could he have gotten Bay the same way?"

"I don't see how else he could have taken Bay, but Bay's real careful about shapeshifting. He has rules. He wouldn't just willy nilly shift for the hell of it. Could he have tranquilized him in human form?"

"Would that force the shift?" Oliver paused. "Actually, you know, I don't think Vasco actually said they saw Bay in horse form. He said his brother saw a horse trailer, but what if Bay wasn't a horse? Hell... does that even make a difference? We still don't know where he went."

Marsh was silent.

"All right. Let me call Jack and see if he can get Vasco to call us back with any details. Maybe his brother has found Tim and Bay by now. He definitely has an advantage on us since he knows the general direction they were headed in. I'm half tempted to hop back in a car and just drive east, but I'm not stupid. I know exactly how much land is to the east of Calgary. They could have taken any rural road and be who knows where right now."

He glanced over at Marsh, slightly worried that the man wasn't saying anything. Picking up his phone, he started to input Jack's number.

"Wait."

Finger poised, Oliver lifted a brow in Marshall's direction. "Yeah?"

"If Tim left the ranch permanently, he'd have to change his information at his employers, right?"

"Well, assuming he's still employed. Yeah. He'd have to talk to HR. But if he quit, then he really doesn't have to let them know where he's going."

"Kiss."

"What?" Okay, really. He could excuse what happened earlier, but they couldn't be distracted right now.

"The kiss principle. Keep it simple, stupid. Let's just say that Tim left a forwarding address. How would we get it?"

"Oh!" Oliver wanted to slap himself. Erasing Jack's number from his cell phone, he immediately went to his contacts, finding the one he wanted right away. Dialing the phone, he grinned at Marshall. This had to work. It just had to. He wouldn't even contemplate the alternative.

"Herb McDonald." The tone was deep, friendly.

Oliver wanted to do a little dance that Herb was actually in the office today.

"Hi, Herb. It's Oliver Philip from O.M. Philip and Associates."

"Oliver, how are you?"

"Pretty good. You?"

"Not bad. Not bad. Weather's a touch cold, though. I swear my bones are aching something fierce. I think we're going to get a cold one this winter."

"No, don't say that or you'll jinx it." Oliver tried to figure out how to say this. "Hey, Herb. The reason I'm calling is because I'm looking for an employee of yours. Not sure if he still works there, but he was there in the spring when I did your audit."

"Okay, shoot. What's the name?"

"Tim Zhelyazko." Oliver spelled out the last name, hearing Herb rustling some papers on his end of the phone. He was hoping this would pan out. It had been Herb's company that he'd been conducting an audit on when he stumbled upon Tim.

"Hmm... let me see what I can find. Why're you looking for him?"

Oliver glanced at Marshall, mind a blank. "Uh, he'd promised me horseback riding lessons. We had chatted about his ranch down south of the city, and wouldn't you know it, I lost his contact information."

"Got it. Oh, good thing you called then. His employee file shows he just moved out by Strathmore. You want the details?"

"That would be great. Thank you." Oliver thanked his lucky stars that he had such good relationships with his clients. He felt a twinge of remorse that he was being less than professional at the moment, but obviously his reputation was good enough for Herb to pass the information on with barely any explanation.

"Strathmore," he mouthed to Marshall, seeing the elation that filled his lover's face. Strathmore was to the east of Calgary, roughly 45 minutes from the downtown core. He wrote down the instructions, thanking Herb and signing off.

He grinned at Marshall. "We found him."

Chapter Eight

"Okay, the crows are starting to creep me out."

Oliver jumped. "See! It's weird. Why are they following us?" Since leaving the ranch in Marshall's old, dusty pickup truck, they had been joined by black birds along the stretch of their journey so far.

They were currently driving east on 22X, heading toward Strathmore. Snowy fields filled with horses and cattle passed by in a blur. He was valiantly trying to temper his excitement. Just because they knew where Bay was, didn't mean everything was going to be okay. He needed his mind to be clear so he could think.

Marshall looked in the rearview mirror. "I'm guessing they know where we're going."

"Do you think the crows can control them? I mean the human crows. Can you guys do that with horses?"

Marsh shrugged. "Bay's better at it than I am. We can't control them, but they almost innately follow us. Bay's real good at calming horses down. I think they can sense the animal in us." Glancing at Oliver, Marsh rolled his eyes. "Must be some kind of herd mentality. Follow the lead stallion and all that. It's like they know we care about them and are determined to protect them above all else. I don't know. It sounds silly when I say it like that."

Oliver hid his smile. Marsh wasn't used to talking about his feelings so he tended to feel self-conscious. It came more naturally to Bay, but the little stolen moments where Oliver got to see the sensitivity hidden in Marsh made him fall in love even more. "Hmm... I knew it. I knew you guys were lead stallions."

"Later, when all this is over, I'm going to punish you for that little crack. Don't think I don't know what you're doing. Once I tell Bay, he'll side with me and you know he will. Then you won't be sitting down for a week because your ass will be so sore."

"Really, I keep telling you two. Stop threatening me with the sore ass thing because it's more a temptation than anything. I'm liable to do the opposite of what you want just to experience it."

Oliver fell silent, tapping his fingers on his thigh. He glanced at Marsh, seeing the muscles jumping in his jaw. Sinking into the silence, he sat back in the seat, anxiety starting to fill him up.

A half hour later they passed through Strathmore. Oliver glanced down at the sheet in his hand, reading off the directions to Marsh. They had pored over a map before leaving the house, wanting to make sure they knew exactly where they were going. It would take the wind out of their sails if they had to stop for directions.

He finally decided to bring up something that had been bothering him during the quiet drive. "So, what's our plan of attack?"

Marsh clenched his jaw again. If he wasn't careful he was going to need to visit the dentist to have his teeth fixed. By this point he'd probably ground down his molars.

"I don't have one."

"Well... Okay, that should work." Man, they really hadn't thought this out very far.

Letting out a gust of expelled air, Marsh shrugged. "I hadn't quite thought that far in advance. I was planning on just driving up. Figured if I confronted him in person, he would back down."

"What if he doesn't?"

"Oliver, I need to believe this will work."

"Okay. Then it will." He would just sit over here worrying about backup plans. Oliver kind of wished they had someone else with them. He had a bad feeling in his gut. It could just be the butterflies doing the samba in his belly, but he didn't feel right.

"So, we'll just pull up and look for Bay?" he asked, not sure why he kept poking at Marsh.

The other man just nodded. Oliver got the feeling he thought their genius plan was a little light on details too. It was too late, though. They were coming up on their turn off now.

"Turn right up ahead, on to Range Road 243. It should be about two or three minutes down the road. I don't see it now, but the map showed a lake along the right side of the road." He crumpled the paper in his hand before smoothing it out again.

"I see it."

"Okay, Herb said the ranch is called The Double Z. Do you see a sign anywhere? Would they even put up a sign? I don't know which side of the road it'll be on."

"We'll find it if we have to pull into every farm we go past."

Apparently the gods were on their side today, because they actually found it fairly easily.

"Looks like they do have a sign already." Marsh slowed down to turn into a long, gravel driveway.

Up ahead, Oliver could see a few buildings and a corral with a handful of horses inside. It wasn't anything fancy, definitely nothing in the same range as Horsfall, but it apparently was enough for horse thieves. It really was too bad they didn't draw and quarter people anymore. He'd like to get his hands on Tim.

He wouldn't know what to do with the man when he had him -- probably give him a stern lecture or something equally as terrifying -- but he had faith in Marsh. His lover was big enough that he could scare the crap out of anyone if he came at them.

As they got closer to the buildings, Oliver studied the horses in the corral. He didn't see his Shire horse, but that didn't mean Bay wasn't here somewhere. It was pretty quiet, though, which was giving him a serious case of the willies.

Man, he needed to grow a pair. Why was he so freaked out? "I'm coming with you, whatever you do."

Marsh didn't even glance at him. "Of course you are. I wouldn't have brought you otherwise."

Good, because Oliver was ready to kick some ass.

Marsh must have figured it was easier not to find a spot to park because he suddenly came to a stop. He reached over, touching Oliver's forearm lightly.

Oliver nodded. There was no need for words.

They both got out of the truck, looking around for signs that Bay might be here.

Suddenly, Marshall dropped like a sack of potatoes. Oliver gasped, rounding the truck to see Marsh face down on the gravel with a small clear tube -- like a syringe with an orange end -- sticking out of his shoulder.

Oliver was afraid to touch the dart, but he quickly placed his fingers against Marshall's neck, finding a pulse. Okay, this scenario he had not anticipated. Shit. Shit, shit, shit. Not good. Not good at all.

"He's still alive."

Oliver jerked at the voice coming from his left. He kept his hand on Marshall's neck, anchoring himself while he watched Tim come closer. Damn, he'd never forget that face, wished he'd never see it again, but now he was even more pissed. First the man took Marshall and tied him up with iron shackles so tight they rubbed his skin raw. Then he took Bay and did who knows what with him. And now he'd tranqed Marsh again? Oh, hell no.

Tim was holding a rifle of some sort in his arms. Did they still call them rifles if they shot tranquilizer darts? *Focus, Oliver*. He really couldn't afford to be distracted right now.

"It's easier to work with them this way. In a minute or two, he'll shift shapes. No worries." This was all said in a calm voice, as if the man had not a care in the world.

Tim was a freaking lunatic. Anger filled Oliver, growing to encompass his entire being. He had had enough of this bullshit.

"What's wrong with you? You can't just steal people! You can't just tranq them either! That's seriously fucked up! I mean... were you dropped on your head as a child? Seriously!"

"No, see, that's where you're wrong. They aren't people. Can't you see them? They're horses. That's what they are; who they are. It's only right that they stay in their true form. The form they were born to be in. It's like a folly of Mother Nature that they were born human. That's not what they're meant to be. I'm doing them a favor, righting a wrong."

Oliver was pretty sure his eyes were as big as dinner plates by now. His eyebrows had probably met his hairline, too. What the hell? Was this guy on crack? True form? Doing them a favor? He actually saw red. He'd always thought people made it up when they said that but it was like a film covered his eyes, blinding him to everything.

"You assho --"

A loud, rattling caw interrupted him. Savagely grateful now for his escort from the ranch, he glanced up to spy crows virtually everywhere. On the roof of the ranch buildings, perched on the telephone wire, in the trees, even sitting on the top of the wooden rail of the corral. But what really made him grin was the huge, mammoth crow that had situated himself right behind Tim. Oh, that had to be a shapeshifter.

While he watched, a twin to the big crow flew over, settling beside his brother. He would bet money that was Iain and Malcolm -- Vasco and Miller's brothers -- come to have a little discussion with Tim.

"Shoo! Get out of here. I'm not afraid of you," Tim cried out, waving his gun around.

Hell, Oliver wasn't technically afraid of them either, but he had to admit it was a bit of a terrifying sight.

A loud rustling moved through the crows, the sound of them all lifting and flapping their wings overly loud. Oliver ducked, throwing his body over Marshall's when the first bird cawed and took off. He covered his head, wishing he could block his

ear drums from the frightened screeches coming out of Tim and the terrified whinnies of the nearby horses. He didn't want to know what the crows were doing. Definitely didn't want to know.

Eventually the sounds stopped. Tim went silent and the flapping sound that would fill his nightmares tonight faded away. The occasional snort and neigh still came from the corral so he figured the horses were okay.

"You can look up again." The voice was strange, coming from close by.

Oliver glanced up, resolutely *not* looking in Tim's direction. "Is he?"

"He's still alive. He'll wish he wasn't, but we aren't killers. He just pissed himself and passed out."

The man was completely naked -- Oliver blushed -- and unashamed of his state if his casual air was anything to go by. Of course, if Oliver looked like that he might be more willing to stand there naked. Luckily, his men made him feel like a million bucks whenever they were around so that did overcome any body shyness Oliver still had.

"My brothers and I talked about it and figured we could get him on animal cruelty charges for what he did to Iain, and that way we don't have to reveal any secrets. If the authorities won't do anything to keep him in line, you better believe we will."

Oliver smoothed back Marshall's hair, wishing the man would wake up. "Why didn't you do anything before?"

The crow shifter sighed. "We've always tried to keep ourselves separate. No excuse but we didn't realize how bad things had gotten until Iain went missing and came back crippled in his crow form. I'm Malcolm Maddoff, by the way. In case you hadn't figured that out yet. I believe you've met my brothers. Vasco told me you were pretty much caught up to date the last time I talked to him."

Oliver shakily got to his knees, keeping one hand on Marshall. The big man was still out cold. "Oliver Philip. This is Marshall Stoddard. You haven't seen anyone that looks exactly like him, have you? We're looking for his twin, Bayard."

“Not like him, but I did happen to catch a glimpse of a Shire horse cobbled in that there barn, if you wanted to know.”

Oliver stood up quickly, turning to start toward the barn. Shit, he couldn't just leave Marsh here. Stopping, he spun back around to face Malcolm.

“I'll watch this one. You go get your mate.”

Taking off at a run, Oliver skidded around the corner of the barn, rushing into the dimly lit interior. He sneezed at the hay particles, squinting his eyes to see into the stalls as he went past.

Up ahead a mammoth black horse poked his head over the top of his stall, letting out one hell of a whinny. Oliver stopped dead in the middle of the barn, his heart pounding. “Oh, God. Bay!”

The horse snorted loudly, rearing back and hitting the stall door with a bang.

Starting forward again, Oliver threw his arms around the horse's neck, clinging to his man.

“I've got you now. You're okay,” he whispered, burying his face against Bay's damp neck.

Chapter Nine

Oliver couldn't stop touching Bay. He'd found a pair of bolt cutters in the barn and immediately took care of Bay's little iron cuff problem. Within seconds he was back in Bayard's arms, this time getting hugged in return. Bay picked him up, groaning loudly as he just about squeezed the breath out of Oliver. He wasn't complaining, though. He wasn't letting go either.

"Oh, Bay. We were so freaking worried."

"What are you doing here? I thought you were in the mountains."

"Long story. Marshall called me. I came home. I'll fill you in on the rest on our drive back to Horsfall."

"Where is Marshall?" At that, Bay pulled back, still holding Oliver off the floor, but at least he could see his face now.

"Oh, shit. Marshall! Quick, we need to get outside. We also need to get you some clothes, but dayum... nice ass."

Bay snorted, sounding just like a horse. Oh, right. There was a reason for that similarity. "What happened to Marsh?"

Oliver figured it would be easier to show him than tell him. He grabbed Bay's hand, starting out the barn door.

As soon as Bay saw the downed figure by the truck, he took off like a shot. Thank God he'd let go of Oliver's hand, or he would have been dragged through the dirt. Oliver jogged behind him, catching up just as Bay turned Marshall over onto his back and placed his palm on his brother's cheek. Malcolm must have removed the dart, because it was sitting beside them on the gravel driveway.

The man in question was standing over to the side, silently watching their reunion. Oliver wondered where his brother had gone. It must be hard to watch Bay

and Marsh reunite when he and his own brother would never be able to do the same. Heck, he didn't even know how to deal with that, and he had just met the crows.

"He'll be okay. Feels like he's about to come out of it," Bay said.

"How can you tell?" Oliver crouched beside them, touching Marshall's shoulder softly.

"His heartbeat is picking up."

Marshall's eyelids flickered and he twitched in place. Without warning, he arched up off the ground, throwing Bay down and pinning him in place. He snarled, cocking his hand back before he realized who he was holding.

"Shit, Bay?" All the tension drained out of Marsh, and he collapsed on top of his brother.

Oliver had to blink back tears at the way Bay clung to his twin, the two silently communicating with each other. He didn't mind being left out in this moment. He didn't even pretend to know what they had gone through being separated again like that and not knowing what would happen.

Marshall finally pulled away, getting to his feet and holding a hand out to help Bay stand up. They hugged again, Bay fisting his hands behind Marshall's back, and Marshall cupping the back of Bay's head with one hand.

"It's okay," Bay crooned. "I'm fine."

"Fuck, I thought..."

Oliver could hear the tears clogging Marshall's throat and had to wipe away his own at that point. Bay released one hand, holding it out to Oliver. He gladly stepped forward, inserting himself into the small space they made for him between them. Inhaling, he brought in the scents of his lovers, grasping Bay tightly, Marshall against his back.

Malcolm cleared his throat, and Oliver remembered himself. Blushing, he pulled away, introducing his men to the crow. Bay was still in the dark about it all so they kept things short, saying they would touch base as soon as they had time to calm down. Oliver waved the other man off, watching as he shifted shapes and flew to the west. He

definitely wanted to learn more about the crows, but right now he didn't want to think about anything but his men.

Bay held him in his lap the entire drive home, silent while Oliver brought him up to speed on everything that had happened. It surprisingly took him the whole time, but that might have been because of Marshall's interruptions and Oliver's distraction at sitting on so much lovely nakedness.

Luckily, they weren't stopped by the RCMP on the way -- since Oliver was most definitely not obeying the seat belt laws -- and they safely drove past the Horsfall gate without incident.

He beamed when Bay opened the door and hauled them out. The time it took to get from the truck to Bay's bedroom passed in a blur. Oliver pressed his mouth to the nearest piece of skin, scraping his teeth over Bayard's flesh. Bay growled, stepping into the bathroom and setting Oliver down on the counter beside the sink. He backed away, opening the shower door and twisting the faucet on.

Hot water poured down from the showerhead, instantly steaming up the small enclosure. Oliver happily remained still while Bay undressed him, kissing each exposed area as it was uncovered.

"Bay..."

"I know, baby. I'm right here."

Bay moved them into the shower stall, closing the glass door behind them. Oliver swayed when his feet touched the ground, snuggling into Bay's body. He glanced through the glass, seeing Marsh leaning against the doorway smiling at them. Seemed his other man wanted a show.

Oliver grinned, reaching up for the soap. Almost reverently, he moved around Bay, soaping him up, touching his skin. Bay tilted his head back, letting it rest against the wall behind him, water streaming down his face and muscular torso.

Going to his knees, Oliver soaped up Bayard's legs, ignoring the thick shaft bobbing in front of his face. Ah, the hell with it. He went right to the main course, reaching up with one soapy hand to squeeze Bay's shaft, letting the water wash the

suds away. Dropping the soap, he reached around, cupping Bay's ass in both hands and taking the head of Bay's cock between his lips.

He was rewarded with a growling moan, a hard hand behind his head directing his movements. Letting go, he hummed, tasting Bay, backing off to lick water droplets off his belly, before moving lower to suck Bay's sac. He continued to knead Bay's ass, running one finger down his crack to rub over Bay's sensitive hole.

Bay cried out.

Oliver switched back to Bay's dick just in time to drink down the salty come. Man, he loved how Bay tasted. He'd never get enough of that.

"Enough. Ollie."

Oliver pulled back at the insistent tug on his hair, looking up at Bay with a mischievous grin. "You want something?"

"Your ass. Get outside and let Marsh towel you off. You're going to want to be comfortable because I have a feeling we're going to ride you all night long."

Shivering, Oliver nearly broke a leg with how fast he got out of the shower. Marsh grabbed him, melding their lips together in a heated kiss. Pressing up against the big man, Oliver moaned when Bay came up behind and sandwiched him in between the two men.

Marsh backed away, pulling out a towel and enfolding Oliver within. Glancing over to see Bay wiping down himself, Oliver shimmied deeper into Marshall's hold. "You two have something special planned?" he whispered.

"Hope you took your vitamins." Marsh smirked, pulling away and smacking Oliver on the ass.

With an indignant yelp, Oliver pressed past and moved into the bedroom. They always ended up in this room, for some reason, whenever the three of them decided to play together. It didn't happen as often as one would think considering Oliver was intimately involved with both men, but he loved spending time with them individually as well. It made this kind of thing a little more special.

Besides, with the way Marsh and Bay could channel their animal selves, Oliver could barely walk after a night of intense attention from both of them.

"Marsh, we have enough lube, right?" Bay paced after Oliver, cornering him beside the bed. Oliver crawled up onto the big surface, not sure he liked the leer on Bay's face. Yep, his big man was definitely primed.

"Probably. I figure we can get baby nice and loose, though. No need to worry."

Oliver knelt facing both men. "Okay, seriously. You guys freak me out when you say things like that. I'm starting to wonder if I need a safe word or something. I will be able to feel my legs after this, right?"

Bay growled deep in his throat, crawling up onto the bed after him. He didn't stop when he reached Oliver, continuing to press him back.

Falling to his back, Oliver urged Bay to come over on top of him. Their lips met in a frantic kiss, tongues dueling. Panting, Oliver held tight to Bay's shoulders, sliding his legs out from under the big man until he could wrap them around Bay's waist. Their cocks rubbed, hard flesh dragging against each other.

Bay cupped Oliver's head, holding him in place and grinding against him.

"This what you want, Bay?" A thump sounded close to Oliver's ear before a second set of hands were suddenly touching his body. Smoothing over his feet, ghosting up his calves, the phantom touches added one more dimension to everything.

Bay hummed into Oliver's mouth before he pulled away slightly. Oliver followed his line of sight to see a bottle of lube resting beside them. Grinning, Bayard uncapped the bottle and drizzled the liquid into the palm of his hand. He moved back, coming up onto his knees. Oliver was shifted until he was comfortably lying on his back, his ass raised and legs draped over Bay's thighs. Bay grabbed Oliver's right hand, holding him in place while his other hand smoothed down Oliver's ass.

Whimpering, Oliver closed his eyes, his dick brushing his stomach with every shift and shimmy Bay was making. Shit, he wasn't going to last long enough for Bay to fuck him at this rate.

Marshall came around Bay and knelt beside Oliver's head. "You want something to distract you?"

Grateful, even though he knew exactly why Marsh was asking, Oliver opened his mouth and accepted the head of Marshall's cock. He concaved his cheeks, tongue sliding along Marshall's soft skin. Blinking, he eyed the familiar shaft. Reaching up with his free hand, Oliver grasped Marsh tightly, holding his dick in place while sucking just on the head.

Bay's wicked fingers found their way to Oliver's hole and circled gently before sliding one inside. Oliver tensed, letting Bay feel the squeeze on his digit.

"Shit, you can't be doing that. I need my head, baby."

Grinning carefully around Marshall's dick, Oliver didn't even bother responding to that. All's fair in love and war, after all. If his men were allowed to drive him mad, he could at least try to do the same to them. He clenched his ass again, tightening around Bay's finger.

"Fuck..." Bay moaned. "That's it."

The snick of the bottle cap was overly loud in the room, competing with the soft grunts and groans all three men were making. Bay thrust two fingers into Oliver's ass, pumping them in and out. Oliver waited, knowing what was coming.

Fingers were removed and a hard cock inserted in one smooth movement. Whimpering, Oliver tossed his head, needing to breathe. Crap, that felt amazing. He kept his hand on Marshall's dick, trying to pump his hand to the same rhythm Bay was pounding into his ass. The slap of skin on skin was such a fucking beautiful sound, he was about to explode just hearing it.

He had his two men, right here with him. Oliver would never get tired of this, would never take it for granted.

Marsh disappeared behind Oliver's head, leaving Oliver groping air. The snick of the bottle cap sounded again. Glancing wildly, Oliver tried to see what the man was doing. Bay leaned down over him, pressing Oliver's knees to his chest, capturing his

attention again. Full, so damn full. Oliver clenched his ass, smiling when Bay's hips stuttered, his movement jarred.

"My turn," Marsh said with a growl in his voice.

Oliver was suddenly pulled upward until he was sitting in Bay's lap, Bay's cock sinking further into his ass. Tossing his head, Oliver reached for his own dick. He was desperate to come, and this new position was going to drive him completely nuts. Marsh slapped his hand away before grasping Oliver around the waist.

Oliver twisted his head enough so he could see Marshall kneeling behind them, resting his butt on his feet in a mirror image of how Bay was sitting.

In one motion, Bay lifted Oliver off his cock and Marsh pulled him backward. Oliver kicked his legs, barely missing Bay. His hand was kept in Bay's grip, keeping him steady.

A hard presence touched his ass before he was sinking down onto Marshall's dick. He screamed, his own cock so hard it hurt. Pleasure and pain blurred until he was nearly incoherent.

Bay and Marsh murmured to him, words that served to spur him on.

Marshall fucked him with a rolling motion, his hips controlled and firm under Oliver. Each move kept him so deep that Oliver could only hold on to Bay's hand, his head lolling back against Marshall's shoulder.

"My turn again," Bay rumbled.

The men shifted him again, moving him up and closer to Bay. Marshall supported his back, while Bay controlled his hips. Within seconds he was being fucked again, this time by Bay. Oliver keened, not wanting this to end but so tied up in knots that he needed to come.

"Please... please, please, please..." His voice was broken, every nerve in his body lit on fire.

"Hold on, baby. Just a little longer. You can do it," Marshall murmured.

Bay leaned forward, mouth melding to Oliver's. "We've got you," he whispered against Oliver's lips, the words nearly lost beneath the sound of Oliver's cries.

Throwing his free hand back, Oliver reached for Marshall, needing to connect to the other man the same way he was connected to Bayard. Marsh reciprocated by grasping Oliver's sensitive cock loosely, creating a tunnel for Oliver to fuck as Bay pounded into his ass.

Oh, he was close... close...

Keening, Oliver tensed his entire body. He arched back against Marshall, glad for the support of his lover. Ass clenching around Bay's cock, he saw stars as he fell into his orgasm. Bay lost his struggle, sounding more like a bear than a horse when he buried his head against Oliver's neck and roared out his own release.

Hot cream splattered along Oliver's back, Marshall tucking his face on the opposite side of Oliver's neck. His mouth moved against Oliver's skin, making wordless cries.

The three men froze in that position, coming down slowly. Panting for air, Marsh finally shifted away from Oliver, lifting him off of Bay and lowering him to his back.

Oliver collapsed to the bed, every bone in his body liquefied. He grumbled when firm hands moved him over, settling him in between two big bodies that came down on either side of him. Closing his eyes, he drifted off to sleep contentedly.

* * *

Later, Oliver stirred. He was held between Marsh and Bay, both men touching him lightly. Little brushes against his sides, in his hair, down his arms. He shivered, snuggling in closer. He wasn't sure how long he'd been out, but it didn't really matter. He had a tiny bit more energy anyway.

"Oh, I completely forgot to tell you. Well, I couldn't quite tell Bay, but it slipped my mind after the little... umm... out in the front yard with Marsh so I forgot to tell you."

"Babe, you're not making sense. Stop, breathe, and start again," Bay nearly snickered.

Balling a fist and hitting Bay's shoulder, Oliver rolled his eyes. The hit wasn't quite effective considering Oliver didn't even try to move off the man. "After Marsh told me you were missing, I kind of freaked out a bit."

"I'd imagine so."

"Bay, no interrupting," he groaned out. "Anyway, Vasco -- one of the crows, remember? -- let slip that it was one of my lovers who had been taken."

"What?" Marshall sat up, a fierce frown on his face.

Oliver petted the leg closest to him. "No, it's okay. I told Jack I was with both of you."

"And?" Now it was Bay who was sitting up in bed. Both men were bracketing him, leaning down to watch his facial expressions carefully. Probably checking if he was freaking out about this or not.

"And he was cool with it."

"Really? You sure about that?" Marsh asked.

"Pretty sure. I know Jack, and if he'd been freaked at all, he would have said something. Not rude or anything, but I would have known for sure."

The brothers looked at each other, sharing some secret twin thing, before smiling down at Oliver.

"I'm happy for you. I know how much you were worried about it," Bay said. "So does this mean you're bringing us both as your dates to the Christmas party?"

"Whoa, hold on now. I told Jack. Not anyone else. One step at a --"

"Hey, we should go to the movies this weekend. All hold hands and eat out of the same popcorn bucket. Bay and I can take turns kissing our man in the back row." Marshall started to laugh, obviously not scared of the death glare Oliver aimed at him.

"Not funny, Marsh. Not funny!" He ruined his pronouncement when he started to laugh. He could actually picture that scene.

Both Marsh and Bay leaned down to kiss Oliver, trying to do it at the same time. Oliver laughed again when they brushed against each other, pushing to get in first.

He pressed his hands to the colossal chests in front of him, halting their progress. "Enough, I'm going to grab something to drink. You guys want a water or pop?"

"I'm fine," Bay said.

"Nah. Thanks," Marsh drawled.

Oliver propped himself up, kissing first Bay and then Marsh. He practically had to crawl over Bay to get out of the bed, but his man very helpfully assisted him. By the time he'd made it out they were both moaning, and Marsh was shaking his head at them.

Oliver skipped over to the door, incredibly content at the moment. He turned when he reached the hallway, looking back at his twins lying in bed side by side. They both smiled at him with nearly identical expressions of satisfaction. He beamed at them, turned and went to get his midnight snack.

* * *

The next morning, Oliver practically crept down the stairs, clad in a pair of pajama bottoms. He wanted to hide from his boys until he could at least get a few cups of coffee in him. Maybe by the time he'd fully woken up his brain cells, Marsh would be down here to make bacon and eggs. They'd certainly worked up an appetite. Heck, Oliver had barely gotten any sleep the entire night. He felt a bit like a deck of cards that kept getting passed from one brother to the next.

Not that he was complaining.

Spying his jacket where he'd left it yesterday, he reached into the inner pocket and pulled out his cell. Having decided now would be a real good time to catch up with Jack, he dialed the man, listening to the rings.

"Jack speaking."

"Hey, Jack. It's Oliver."

"Oliver! How's everything?"

Oliver grinned. "Really good. Bay's back home. We actually have Vasco's brothers to thank for that."

"Really? Huh. So... what do you think of Vasco? And the others?"

Pacing in the hallway, Oliver shook his head. He knew what that tone of voice signaled. "I like them. Vasco's cute."

"I'm not... uh... nothing... shit."

Laughing, Oliver covered his mouth. He didn't want Jack to think he was making fun of him, but man that was cute. "How's the audit?"

"Good. Great, actually. Don't even suggest coming back up here. I've got everything handled."

"Thanks, Jack. This really meant a lot to me." He didn't know how to possibly convey his gratitude. Nothing seemed quite big enough. "I mean it. I can't tell you what --"

"Hey, no worries. Just means I'll have a bigger invoice to you this month." Jack snickered.

"Shit. I forgot about that." It was worth it. Didn't matter how much it cost him; it was most definitely worth every penny.

"Talk to you later, Boss Man."

"Bye, Jack." Oliver hung up, staring down at the phone in his hand. Well, besides getting Bay back, it looked like one or two other good things might have come out of this. He was closer to Jack, and it sounded like there might be a reason Jack was okay with Oliver being gay. Huh. Didn't see that coming.

Entering the kitchen, he lazily scratched his belly, heading for the coffeemaker. He filled it up, set it to brew and wandered over to the window. Staring outside, he was startled to see a single crow sitting on their back porch.

"Okay. Weird. Should I go out?"

Exhaling loudly, Oliver paced to the back door, opening it quietly so he didn't scare off the bird. The crow stared at him, opening his beak to utter a loud caw.

Strange. It almost felt as if the bird was saying good morning. He felt ten kinds of fool, but he had a feeling this wasn't just a crow. He glanced down, spying a glint of metal. Shit. "Good morning, Iain. I think it's going to be a nice day."

The crow cawed back at him, nodding his beak up and down.

"Thank you for what you did back there."

Tilting his head, the crow shuffled to the side to look at something behind Oliver.

Oliver turned around and spied his men framed in the kitchen window. He waved to them, letting them know it was okay.

"Well, don't be a stranger." He wasn't sure what else to say.

"Our home is always open to you and your family," Bay said, coming outside to stand beside Oliver. "If you have need of us, just let us know."

Marsh came up on Oliver's other side. "We need to stick together, all of us."

The crow cawed loudly, flapping his wings. With a final head nod, he took off, flying away from them.

Oliver reached out to both sides, his hands grasped in his lover's strong grips. "I think we're going to be okay."

"We're definitely going to be okay. We make a pretty good team, the three of us." Bay nuzzled in to his side.

"Yeah, what he said." Marsh chuckled, reaching back and swatting Oliver on his tender ass. "Now, who wants bacon?"

Oliver yelped, mock-glaring up at Marsh. Hell, he couldn't keep it up. The man was making him bacon. With a shake of his head, he turned around and led his men into their home. His home. He looked forward to many more years in this home, sharing it with two men who completed him in ways he never imagined possible. He was a lucky man, no doubt about it.

Jade Buchanan

Jade Buchanan is currently trying to find balance between work, writing and grad school, which makes for some interesting conversations over the dinner table. Her writing is as eclectic as her reading tastes, with over twenty-five gay, lesbian and bisexual novellas currently published, and she has been known to accept writing challenges from friends and family just to see their reactions. She's a firm believer that love and romance are universal concepts, no matter a person's gender identity or sexual orientation.

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Jade loves to hear from readers! Visit her at www.jadebuchananbooks.com.