

## **A LOT TO BE THANKFUL FOR**

Juggling his phone, onto his shoulder, Rhys pulled into his driveway beside Sterling's black Jeep Wrangler and grinned. "Hey, what's Sterling doing here?"

"Hold on. Remi! What's Sterling doing at Rhys'?" Jake shouted in Rhys' ear.

Wincing, Rhys pulled the phone away. Jake had two volumes lately, an outside voice and...well, a stadium voice. Probably from yelling at all the football games. Or it could be from trying to talk over Sterling to get a word in edgewise, but Jake had been doing that the last several years, so it was likely the excitement of Sterling's high school football team heading for state this year. It was pretty neat this being Sterling's senior year and him being the star wide receiver. It seemed like everything anyone said lately ended in "woo go Spartans." Rhys turned off the ignition, removed his keys and got out of his car. "Hey, Jake."

"Hold on. Remi!"

"Jake."

"What?"

"Nevermind. I'll ask him myself." Rhys hit the button on the key fob, locking his door. He hadn't seen much of the kid lately. This was a nice surprise.

The porch light was on, so apparently Sterling anticipated Rhys being late, because it was only six o'clock and not quite dark yet. Who knew how long Sterling had been here. Knowing Sterling he'd already eaten half the sweets Rhys had picked up from the bakery yesterday for Thanksgiving tomorrow. Rhys' grin faltered into a groan. Oh god. Sterling on a sugar high. The years hadn't made a bit of difference. After a few deserts, Sterling was just as hyper now as he was at fifteen.

"You gonna feed him?" Jake asked munching on something. If Sterling was already digging into tomorrows food, apparently he wasn't the only one.

As Rhys stepped onto the front walk, Sterling opened the door with a huge grin on face. "Hi."

Unable to help himself, Rhys smiled and continued up the walk. Sterling was the one thing guaranteed to brighten his mood no matter what. Not that he was in a bad mood, but the day just got a whole lot better. “Yeah I’ll feed him. What time do you want him home?”

There was more crunching. “What the— Holy shit, pup! What are you wearing?”

What? “Jake?”

“Sorry, listen why don’t you just keep Sterling there with you. We’ll be there at what...noon tomorrow? Gotta go.” Jake hung up.

Yeah, easy for him to say, he didn’t have to keep his damned hands off his mate. Fuck. He was, from the sounds of it about to get laid. Asshole. Rhys flipped his phone shut and stuffed it in his pocket.

Grinning brighter, Sterling pushed the door further open and leaned against it, giving Rhys a better look at him. Sterling wore a tight black thermal t-shirt, showing off the nicely toned biceps he’d earned in football, and a pair of jeans with a rip in the right knee, that were so tight they should be illegal. His ever present black ostrich cowboy boots were still on, so he must have just gotten here. Normally, he kicked his boots off within minutes of arriving.

Sterling took a bite of what looked to be one of the chocolate chip cookies Rhys had bought and held it out to him as he stepped onto the porch. “Hey.” Sterling’s eyes raked down Rhys body and the smell of his interest fill the air between them, as if it wasn’t difficult enough for Rhys to keep his hands to himself without adding Sterling’s overactive hormones into the mix.

“Hey.” Rhys opened his mouth and let Sterling feed him, trying his best to ignore the intoxicating scent of his mate’s attention. He couldn’t afford to get hard. If Sterling caught even the smallest whiff of arousal, he’d start an all out seduction. And damn he could tempt a saint, which Rhys most certainly wasn’t.

“I ordered pizza.” Stepping back, Sterling allowed him to enter.

A hand grazed Rhys’ ass as he stepped through the threshold. It was so nice that Rhys nearly forgot to growl his disapproval. He hadn’t seen Sterling in a week. He’d actually missed the constant bombardment of carnal attention.

Sterling chuckled, but didn’t push.

Rhys sighed. Anyone else would have cowered in fear if he growled at them. Not Sterling.

The tv was on but turned down, Sterling's Macbook and homework cluttered the coffee table and Sugar Daddy by the Bellamy Brothers played on the stereo. Sterling had found and confiscated that CD as well as the Eagles Greatest Hits CD and a Lynard Skynard CD last weekend.

Grinning Rhys shook his head. That was Sterling for you, he had way too much energy to just do one thing. He got bored too easily. Hell, Rhys was actually impressed he wasn't playing video games, talking on the phone, cooking or cleaning too. Rhys had come home more than once to find his house cleaned, Sterling parked in front of the Xbox 360, homework spread all over the floor and dinner waiting in the oven on warm. "What are you doing here?"

Closing the door, Sterling shrugged. "Thought I'd get a head start on tomorrow. Football practice let out early. I called your mom and checked the flight info again. Remi and Jake are going to pick her up on their way over here tomorrow. So they should be here around noon."

"Ah. Thanks. You put the turkey out to thaw?" Rhys headed to his room to take his gun and shoes off.

"Yup." Sterling followed Rhys into his bedroom. "I had to look up how to cook a turkey on the net. Said I should let it thaw for a couple of hours, so I put it out and started on my calculus homework. And why does she call you Reese? Are you sure she won't care that I'm younger? What if she doesn't like Remi? I don't think I could take someone not liking Remi. That would be worse than her not liking me. Do you think she really likes me? She seems to like Jake. She asked about him and — What if she doesn't like the dinner? What if I burn it and.."

On and on it went but Rhys stopped listening. He'd heard all he needed to. Sterling constantly rambled but this was a different babble, a rushed type of chatter. It was a tell sign that something was bothering him. Sterling was always so self confident and sure of things. Actually, Rhys was pretty sure he was the only one who ever witnessed Sterling's infrequent insecurities. Rhys' chest tightened with pride at the realization that his mate trusted him so much, but it pained him to think of Sterling even slightly

uncomfortable. Stopping in the middle of taking his belt off and freeing his shoulder holster, Rhys turned.

Arms folded across his muscled chest, Sterling leaned against the doorframe. The stance was casual but the scent of lingering arousal was now laced with nervousness. He shrugged and gathered the fabric of his sleeve in his fist, making it pull tight across his biceps.

Damn, that was a nice shirt. The jeans weren't too bad either. At six foot one Sterling was still several inches shorter than Rhys, but damned if those tight jeans didn't show off his long legs. Sterling had grown in to one fine looking man.

Ignoring the flutter of excitement in his stomach, Rhys crooked his finger.

"What?" Sterling pushed away from the wall and ambled up to Rhys, his eyes cast downward.

"My name is actually pronounced Reese. My father was a wolf and thirteen years older than her, so she knows all about wolves and their mates. The age difference doesn't matter to her. She will like Remi. She adores Jake and—"

"Reese? Then why does everyone pronounce it Rice?" Sterling's brow furrowed.

"Because I got tired of correcting people way back in grade school and started pronouncing it Rice myself." He shrugged. "I like it better anyway." His mother was the only one who enunciated his name as Reese now days.

Sterling drew close, his eyes dropping again. "I like it better too." He pulled Rhys' gun out of the holster and tossed it on the bed.

Stepping closer, Rhys hooked his index finger under Sterling's chin and lifted, making Sterling meet his gaze. He ran his other index finger down the middle of Sterling's forehead smoothing the wrinkles. "She already likes you." How could she not? How could anyone not adore Sterling? But he knew Sterling and he understood the concern. Talking to someone on the phone over the years and meeting them in person were different.

"You think so?" The scent of nervousness eased and those big brown eyes widened slightly then lowered to Rhys' lips. Licking his own lips, Sterling tilted his head slightly. He moved closer until his warm breath fanned across Rhys' chin. The sharp tangy smell of arousal flavored the air. Sterling's eyes closed and his lips parted.

Oh damn. Rhys was so fucked. “I know so.” Just a small kiss. No harm. He’d kissed Sterling on the mouth before. A peck, no big deal. He could do so again, then get things back on track. Rhys touched his lips to his mate’s and all good intention fled.

Sterling half sighed half moaned against Rhys’ mouth. His tongue eased out and swiped across Rhys’s. “Please.” His voice sounded low and seductive as he pressed his hard body against Rhys and wound his hands around Rhys’ waist.

I am so very fucked. Gripping Sterling’s hips, Rhys tugged him closer until the hard ridge of Sterling’s erection rested against his thigh. Rhys deepened the kiss and his cock hardened almost instantly.

Sterling took immediate notice, practically purring and bucking against him.

Shit. He should stop this now. But Sterling tasted so good. Like chocolate and coffee. It was exactly how Rhys imagined Sterling would taste. Rich, earthy... refreshing.

Hands roaming down Rhys’ back, Sterling moaned and ground his hips against Rhys’ leg, making sure Rhys felt his hard cock. Sterling’s tongue slid through Rhys’ lips, exploring and his hand slid to Rhys’ ass.

He shouldn’t be doing this. He’d promised himself he’d wait until Sterling was in college. Sterling needed to concentrate on school not—Damn it, Sterling was just so fucking sweet and— Rhys gripped a handful of Sterling’s short dark hair and tipped his head farther back. Breaking the kiss, he trailed his lips down the smooth column of Sterling’s throat. The strong pulse flared against his tongue and his raked over the soft skin. His prick throbbed yearning for more. More that he couldn’t possibly have. Not now. But now he’d enjoy what he could have for just a few moments more.

Groaning, Sterling thrust against Rhys and his hand slid around, gripping Rhys’ prick through his jeans.

Holy shit. Rhys moved toward his hand. He should stop. He should pull away and make Sterling—

The doorbell rang.

It was like being hit by a welcomed bucket of ice water. Rhys stepped back, or tried to, Sterling had a death grip on him.

“Sterling...”

“No. Please, don’t stop.”

Rhys groaned. God he didn't want to but he'd promised himself and— "The pizza is here."

"Huh?" Blinking, Sterling let go of Rhys. The irises of his eyes stretched to the edges, blocking out the white. Wolf eyes.

Rhys' own eyes blurred and the mused dazed look made Rhys' cock jerk and his stomach tighten. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath trying to control himself.

Sterling's fingers tickled over Rhys' beard and down his throat.

Swallowing hard, Rhys' opened his eyes.

Sterling's gaze followed his fingers. The look on his face was one of pure lust. He stepped closer reaching for Rhys but Rhys stuck his hand out stopping him.

"Get the pizza, Sterling."

His head tilted and his nose twitched, sniffing. "Son of a bitch." Sterling blinked and his eyes shifted back to normal. It never ceased to impress Rhys how quickly Sterling could shift. Sterling frowned, his shoulders drooping a little. "I thought I was going to have a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving." Shaking his head, he growled and headed toward the livingroom.

Rhys didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He sat down on the edge of his bed and ran his hands down his face. There was a lot to be thankful for this year. Sterling, being chief among them. Rhys chuckled. Now he supposed he could add ill timed pizza men to the list.