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NUTTER NERO

LYNN HAGEN

The
ManLove
Collection



BRAC PACK 12

Brac Pack 12

Nutter Nero

Electronics expert Nero Credence suffers from germ phobia with a touch of ADD. Add a sprinkle of OCD, and then send him to a house full of wolf shifters and watch him go.

Gunnar Sadena is the most laid-back wolf you could meet. He laughs a lot and hardly ever gets angry. But Gunnar is baffled when a five foot human shows up at the front door, telling him he's there to slay Ricky's dinosaurs. Who the hell is Ricky, and why would he have dinosaurs? Amused, Gunnar allows the nutter to enter his home.

Nero turns the pack upside down as his neurosis kicks in. At six foot five, the wolf has a hard time bowing down to this pint-size terror. Gunnar thinks the quirky man is nuts, but he's also his mate.

Note: Each book in Lynn Hagen's Brac Pack collection features a different romantic couple. Each title stands alone and can be read in any order. However, we recommend reading the series in sequential order.

Genre: Alternative (M/M or F/F), Paranormal, Vampires/Werewolves

Length: 25,046 words

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DEDICATION

To my little nutter, JuJu.

NUTTER NERO

Brac Pack 12

LYNN HAGEN

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Chapter One

“What the hell!” Cecil threw the controller down and then stomped over to the television. Looking behind it, he checked the game console, too. He hadn’t a clue what he was looking at.

“What happened?” Mark asked Cecil as he stormed by.

“No clue, but I need it fixed pronto.” Cecil ran down the hallway, slammed open his mate’s office door, and ran to the desk. The Alpha, Maverick, stood immediately to his six-nine height, his canines punching through and his eyes turning crimson.

“We got a problem,” Cecil panted out. “A huge problem.”

The other warriors who had been sitting in the office attending a meeting with the Alpha all stood, their defenses going up, all waiting to hear what was going on that brought the Alpha’s mate running in such a manner. Hawk, the commander of the Sentry wolves, ran from the room, immediately going to assess the danger to the mates.

“Dude, the television *and* game console died.” Cecil grabbed the front of his mate’s shirt, twisting his hands in the fabric. “We gotta do something, now.”

The warriors groaned, sitting back down. They should have known. Cecil was as unpredictable as a squirrel. “Calm down, baby.

We'll get it fixed." Maverick chuckled as he pulled Cecil's hands away, bringing his mate down onto his lap. "I'll buy a new one."

"No, I have all my games saved on that one. Can't we get, like...get a geek to come and take a look at it? There was this tech that came to the video store I used to work at, fixed any game that came in for repairs. Can I call him?"

"You can call him, but I would rather he not come here." The shifters guarded their secret closely. The only humans who knew were their mates and the owner of the diner.

"You want me to take it into town by myself? What about the television?" Cecil pleaded with his eyes. No gaming equaled a slow death. This couldn't be happening. He was already bored half the time. If he couldn't occupy his mind with his video games, he'd go nuts.

"As long as he's quick about it, call him and have him come see what the problem is." Feeling somewhat relieved, Cecil used the phone on the desk, calling his old job and chatting away with his former coworker, Chad.

"He'll be here in less than an hour. Thank you." Cecil hung up the phone and then straddled Maverick's hips, grinding his cock into him. God, even after all this time, he still loved the hell out of his wolf.

"Baby, my men are sitting right here." Maverick kissed his way down Cecil's neck.

"We'll be back in...twenty minutes?" Gunnar ushered the rest of the warriors out, closing the door behind him.

* * * *

Nero checked his printout again. This was the place. He frowned as he got out of his car. This wasn't right. He should have had to be buzzed in through a gate, asked to state his purpose here, and have guard dogs barking and growling to get at him.

No surveillance cameras were watching his every move. At least he didn't see any. A place like this should be extremely hard to get into. Why wasn't it? No guard dogs were barking, not even a whine, and that didn't seem right to him.

Nero turned his car off, looking around as he stepped out. He glanced back down at his printout then back up at the house. Shrugging, he made his way to the door, hearing the sound of gravel crunching under his shoes. Instead of knocking, he kicked it with his shoe. No sense in getting germs on his hands. No telling who had touched this door. He waited for someone to answer as he looked around. Anyone could get into this place. This wouldn't do. No, it wouldn't do at all.

"Hey, Nero."

Nero blinked up. Oh, he remembered this guy. What was his name again? Cycle, Caesar, Season? Never mind. It didn't matter. "You have problems?"

"Dude, follow me."

Nero followed—whatever his name was—into a gamers' paradise. Oh, yes, he could see the problem right away. "Too...too many cords. It's a spiderweb back there. Not good, no, not good at all."

Nero pulled out a pair of blue latex gloves from his front pocket and snapped them on before bending behind the entertainment stand, yanking cords out of a macramé of three-way extension cords. "Fire hazard. Big fire hazard."

"Hey, what are you doing?" Whatever his name was whined as Nero pulled the last plug out.

"You need a surge protector. It's shocking you haven't had a house fire." Nero stood up and looked down at the slew of cords lying on the floor, pleased that he had saved a house from burning down.

"House fire?"

Nero turned at the deep timbre voice asking the question, as he nodded. "Yeah, house fire. I'll have to bring in some surge protectors.

They'll accommodate all these plugs without the chances of a fire. Not good, no, not good."

"Maverick, he unplugged me."

"Cecil, if he says it's not good, then they stay unplugged until he fixes it. Do you want our home to burn to the ground?"

Cecil. That's right. Now he remembered. Nero pulled the console from the shelf, getting his kit out. He unrolled the cloth on the billiard table.

"Uh, little man, we were playing."

Nero looked up—more big guys. Playing what? He furrowed his brows, not understanding what they were talking about. One of them pointed to the pool balls. Oh, a game.

Nero ran his hand over his short hair, shrugging his shoulders. Oh, well, it didn't matter now. He needed to fix the game, so he pulled his screwdriver from its place in the pouch, tackling the many screws to get to the inside of the box.

He put all his concentration into what he was doing. Nero had been accused of losing track of time, so absorbed in his work that sometimes he forgot to eat, sleep, or shower for days on end. Others called him neurotic. They said he was quirky, nervous, or just plain weird. He didn't like those people. They didn't understand. Most people didn't.

"I can fix this." Nero said it aloud, but he was talking to himself, something he did a lot.

"You can? Thank God." Cecil hovered over his shoulder, "What's wrong with it?"

"Huh?" Nero blinked up at Cecil. What did he ask?

"I said what's wrong with it?" The man stared at him like *he* was the strange one. Nero sighed. Another person who didn't understand him.

"It's...complicated." He didn't like trying to explain things in layman's terms because he never got it right, so he always opted for

those two words instead. It kept people from asking any more questions.

He spoke to Cecil as if he were three years old. "You have to stop letting it overheat. There are little fans that attach to the game...keeps the motor cool." Nero whirled his hands around to imitate fan blades. "You should get one. There's nothing wrong with the game. Probably all those cords." Nero waved his hand toward the cords lying on the floor like a pit of snakes, the two-pronged heads glaring at him.

"Okay, anything else?" Cecil asked as he peered over Nero's shoulder.

Yeah, from the looks of it, the game was never shut off. *Get a life outside somewhere.*

Put the controller down and step away from the game.

Geez, people these days didn't go out and exercise any more. It was all about computers and video games. No wonder the entire population was obese. Well, Cecil wasn't, but he could be if he kept this up. Nero's mom preached to him all the time about how electronics were frying everyone's brains. At twenty-five, Nero had witnessed a lot of it.

"Lose weight," Nero blurted out.

Cecil tilted his head and stared at Nero. This made him uncomfortable. He didn't like people concentrating on him like that. They always had something negative to say to him. That Brad person at the video store with his nasal problems always had something snide to say to Nero. He was just plain mean.

"Dude, what does my weight have to do with the game?" Cecil didn't ask it negatively. Curiously was more like it, but, still. Nero just shrugged and screwed the console back together.

"Done. Don't plug anything back in until I bring those power strips. Nothing, absolutely nothing." Nero sat the game back on the shelf, the urge to straighten all the disarray in the room making his skin itch. The movies were out of order and mixed in with the games.

He bit his bottom lip, forcing himself to turn away. *It's not your house*, he reminded himself.

"He won't, I assure you." Ricky spoke to Nero.

"Can I talk to you about lack of security, Ricky?" Nero rolled his tools back up in his pouch, trying his best not to run over to the entertainment stand and cure his ills.

"Maverick, not Ricky." The man growled.

"Sure, sure. You need to consider cameras, fences, and dogs. Place is too big to be unprotected, Ricky." Nero fought not to cringe. Large men made him extremely nervous. At five feet tall, everyone was taller than him, but the men in this house seemed to have supersized themselves.

"We have plenty of protection. Thank you for your concern." Ricky smiled in placating politeness at him. Nero sighed, another one who didn't understand him.

"What about the television?" Cecil asked from behind him.

"Sorry, Cecil. Replace it." Nero waved over his shoulder as he picked up his pouch.

"Okay." Cecil scratched his head. "But you didn't even look at the thing. How could you know what's wrong with it?"

"I'll be right back. I have to go to the shop and get the surge protectors. Don't plug anything in. Fire hazard. Yeah, big fire hazard." Nero ignored Cecil as he made his way to the door.

Ricky showed him out, thanking him for helping his boyfriend. There were a half dozen of those strips in his little workshop behind his house. He would grab a few and bring them back, just in case they had the same problems with any other electronics in the house. Computers were another source of discombobulated cords. People just didn't take house fires seriously. He was glad Ricky did. The man may be large, but he wasn't taking chances. Good, very good.

Nero climbed back in his car and placed his tool pouch on the sterile paper that sat on the dry-cleaned seat cover. He had sprayed that cover with germ-killing cleaners. He removed his gloves and

pulled another pair out, sliding them on before pulling the sandwich baggie out and depositing the germ-covered gloves into them. He sealed it closed, and tossed it into the sanitized trash bag.

Once his ritual was complete, happy that everything was germfree in his car, Nero pulled from the drive and headed home.

Reaching his home, Nero clicked the button on his answering machine. Another call for help, something about a computer tower smoking. Shaking his head, Nero climbed back in his car, heading to the address the answering machine had spit out.

* * * *

Nero tossed his pouch onto his workbench that held a sterilized napkin. Why some people beat on their electronics had always baffled him. It's not like that solved the problem. It made it worse half the time.

He tossed the germ-covered gloves into the trash and scrubbed his hands with sanitizer as he set about making himself some lunch. After placing the two slices of bread neatly on a napkin, he centered it perfectly before laying two pieces of lunch meat squarely on them. Once completed, he trimmed the crusts, tossing them out of the kitchen window for the birds. He sat at his desk, nibbling on his sandwich as he straightened the keyboard so it sat perfectly to the monitor.

He noticed the blinking light on the machine from the corner of his eye. Great, another distress call. He wanted to ignore it, but he was unable. Nero leaned over and hit the button, continuing to eat.

"Hey, Nero. It's Cecil. Forget about me? Can you bring those power strips so I can play? Maverick has blocked the outlet and won't let me near it until you come back. Please get here." *Beep*.

Nero had totally forgotten about Cecil. Tossing his half eaten sandwich into the trash bin, he pulled another pair of gloves on and scooped up his pouch, heading back to the large house in the woods.

* * * *

“Why didn’t you come back yesterday?” Cecil asked as he brought the strips in. Nero just shrugged, plugging everything in then clicking the button to turn the strip on. He noticed a new television was already in place. Good, real good. His brows furrowed. “You didn’t get the fan for your game.”

“I had to order it. I can play until then, can’t I?”

“No, no, no, no. It isn’t safe. If it goes out again, it’s fried.” Nero shook his head. This wouldn’t do at all. People needed to stop taking shortcuts, blowing off the obvious problems and ignoring them. Cecil would ruin a perfectly good game console with his carelessness.

“What!” he cried. “That can’t be. Oh, hell, I’m going to go through withdrawal any moment now.”

“You heard him, mate. No gaming until the piece comes in.”

“Oh, hey, Ricky. Did you think about the cameras?” Nero stood, completing his task of putting the spiderweb back together, in a safer manner this time.

“No, but I was wondering if you could look at my computer. It runs extremely slow.”

Nero grabbed his tools, following the tall Ricky to an office.

He adjusted the chair, hiking it up from the floor level it was at so he could see what the issues were. He was only five feet tall, and the chair housed a giant.

Nero began to click away, checking Ricky’s computer for the source of the problem. “You got problems, Ricky. Who’s been surfing porn sites?”

The giant leaned over Nero’s shoulder, making him uncomfortable as he checked the computer. “It was by mistake, over a year and a half ago.” Ricky stood, moving away as if sensing Nero’s unease.

“Yeah, okay. Well, whoever it was let in some tricky viruses.” Nero picked up the mouse, turning it over. “Is this your grandmother’s mouse? Ancient, very ancient.”

Ricky smirked. “What’s a virus?”

Nero blinked up at him. “It’s...complicated.”

“What’s wrong with my mouse?” Ricky moved back around his desk, watching as Nero removed the ball from its hiding place within the mouse.

“See those wheels?” he pointed to the wheels inside.

Ricky nodded.

“See the grime attached to them? You should get a laser mouse, or a wireless one. Update your computer, too. It’s ancient, very ancient.” Nero pulled a disc from the left side of his pouch, inserting it into the CD-ROM drive. It was a program he had designed to destroy any unwanted bugs in anyone’s computer—spyware, spam, Trojans, etc. It would wipe them out clean.

Keeping a nice distance away, Ricky watched as the program began to do its thing. He took a step forward, watching as he asked, “Is it fixed now?”

“It is, Ricky, but you should consider a new computer. This one is outdated, an early 2000 model. It’s a dinosaur.”

“And what would you recommend?”

“There are a lot of choices. I could go over them with you, see what your specific needs are, and go from there.” Nero packed his pouch up again, waiting on Ricky’s answer as he scratched at his calf.

“If that’s what you recommend.” Ricky pulled out his checkbook from the desk drawer, writing Nero a check for the work he had already completed.

“When do you want to do this?” Nero tucked the check in his back pocket, praying he didn’t forget to take it out before he washed them. This is why he dealt strictly with PayPal. He would have to set up an account with Ricky for future services. As electronically illiterate as these people were, he knew he would be back.

“Whenever it’s convenient for you.” The giant showed Nero to the front door.

“Anytime, as long as I’m not on a service call.” Nero looked at Ricky’s extended hand. Was he supposed to shake it? Germs. People carried lots of germs. Ricky seemed nice, so he shouldn’t be offended if Nero didn’t take his hand. Ricky must have gotten the message because he pulled both hands behind his back and smiled at Nero instead. That was close. Nero didn’t have any friends, so he really didn’t want to offend the big guy. Ricky seemed nice, real nice.

“How about tomorrow? Do you want to look online?” Ricky opened the front door for him.

Nero craned his neck back as he stared up at Ricky. “Tomorrow is good. I’ll bring my laptop, though. It would take a gazillion years for yours to even boot up.” Nero chatted away. “Maybe you should consider a notebook or one of the new pads out. They’re really good and mobile, would get you out of your office. Really mobile.”

Ricky chuckled, looking as though he didn’t understand a word Nero was saying, and he probably didn’t. He would have to take Ricky through the process step-by-step.

“See you tomorrow, Nero.”

“Uh, okay. Bye, Ricky.” Nero headed toward his car.

Chapter Two

“Yeah?” Gunnar answered the door. It was six in the morning, for Christ’s sake. Who the hell visited someone that early? He scratched his chest as he yawned, trying to blink the sleep from his eyes.

“I’m here to see Ricky,” the short man said as if Gunnar knew who the hell he was talking about. He had to look way down to even see the shrimp.

“Sorry, there’s no Ricky here.” He began to close the door, wanting to get back to sleep. He had just gotten off of patrol, just dozed off. Why did he have to be the one to hear the door?

“Big guy, almost to the ceiling, long black hair, mean looking.” The short man jabbered away.

“Maverick?”

“Yeah, that’s what Cecil called him.”

Okay, so this man was a little nutter. Gunnar could handle that. “Come on in. I’ll go wake *Ricky*.” Gunnar chuckled. *Ricky*? That was hilarious.

The little nutter walked past him, and Gunnar damn near swallowed his tongue.

Mine!

“Who are you?” he asked in a complete daze. Gunnar took in his features more closely now. He noticed a pair of blue latex gloves adorning his hands.

“Nero.” His mate walked right into the den as if he had been here before. Gunnar watched Nero. He was stunning, with cropped black hair that spiked out all over the place, and almond shaped eyes. Asian somewhere in him? He was too damn thin in Gunnar’s opinion, and

he was short as hell, too. What was he, five feet? What was it with fate giving the warriors these short statured men? Was it some kind of cosmic joke?

At six five, Gunnar was going to need a chiropractor. Storm's words of wishing his mate to be four foot tall came rushing to the front of his mind. The swirly-eyed warrior was going to have a field day with this. Gunnar sighed. That's what he got for making fun of Storm's mate's size.

"Why do you need to see...Ricky?" Gunnar chuckled again. That was just too funny—Ricky. Oh, man.

"Computer."

So the nutter was vague. Well, let's get started with the twenty question game. "Computer?"

"Ricky has a dinosaur."

Alrighty then, that sure as shit explained it. "More?"

Nero looked at him as if he were daft. "More?" He blinked up at Gunnar.

"Yeah, can I get a full sentence from you? Tell me why Ricky has a dinosaur and why it's relevant to a computer?" Gunnar watched as Nero walked over to the game console, shaking his head.

"Cecil doesn't listen. Not good, not good at all."

Gunnar pinched himself. He had to still be sleeping or having some acid trip dream. Funny, he didn't remember ever doing drugs. It had to be a dream. No way was this scenario real. Besides, wolves were immune to human drugs and diseases, so there had to be another explanation. Maybe George's new recipe wasn't sitting well in his stomach, conjuring up vivid, psychotic dreams.

"Ricky wants me to get rid of his dinosaur, so here I am." Nero blinked up at him as he held his arms out.

Gunnar stood there motionless for a moment, staring into the depth of his mate's pretty ocean-blue eyes. Gunnar had to fight not to reach out and touch him. The pull was strong, demanding he claim the little nutter. He didn't want to scare his mate. He looked fidgety

already. Gunnar had to ignore the urge, focus on why his mate had come here. It wasn't easy. As a matter of fact, it was the hardest thing he'd ever had to do.

There was only one solution to get around the twenty questions and talk of dinosaurs. *Ricky* was about to be awakened, explanations given, and Gunnar was going to find out who and what his mate was. "Stay here."

"Okay." Nero hitched his messenger bag higher onto his shoulder as he reached down and scratched his leg.

Gunnar shook his head as he made his way to his Alpha's bedroom. This was bizarre as hell. Never in a million years would Gunnar have thought his mate would just show up at his door seven kinds of quirky. He banged on the bedroom door, a pissed wolf snarling as he answered it.

"What?"

"There's someone here to see you, *Ricky*." Gunnar snarled back.

"Shit, are you kidding me? What time is it?" Maverick blinked the sleep from his eyes.

"Six in the morning, *Ricky*."

"Stop calling me that, wolf." Maverick snarled again. He grabbed a robe and followed Gunnar to the den.

"Hey, *Ricky*. Ready to get started?" Nero stood in the middle of the room, pushing his gloved hands into his front pockets.

"It's...early."

Nero shrugged, hiking his black messenger bag onto his shoulder once again, and walked past the two, down the hall in the direction of Maverick's office. Gunnar could only stare for a moment. The bag looked bigger than his mate, as if it were going to knock him over any minute.

He scratched his disheveled hair and turned to his Alpha. "What the hell is up with him? He said something about dinosaurs and computers." Gunnar questioned Maverick.

“We are going to shop for a new computer for my office. He claims mine is a dinosaur. He’s the guy that fixed Cecil’s game.” Maverick rubbed his eyes as he yawned, turning to follow the quirky human to his office.

“He’s my mate,” Gunnar stated.

This stopped Maverick in his tracks. “No way.” He grinned.

“Yep, the little nutter is my mate. Is it me, or is he off the charts?”

Maverick laughed so hard he held his side as he leaned into Gunnar. “We get to keep him?”

“What do you mean *we*? He’s mine, not an adoption of yours like little Melonee.” Gunnar growled, but then he began to laugh as well. His nutter was strange, but cute. He was happy he got to keep him. Now all he had to do was convince Nero.

“Come on, Gunnar.” Maverick slapped him on the back. “Let’s go see what your mate is up to.” Maverick laughed the whole way to his office, looking over his shoulder at Gunnar and shaking his head.

“Coffee. Do you have it?” Nero asked as they entered Maverick’s office. The little human already had his laptop out, typing away without even looking up. He seemed engrossed in his search for Maverick’s perfect computer as his legs swung back and forth from Maverick’s office chair that had been hiked up to its full extension. Gunnar grinned at the sight. Fate had favored him with this quirky human.

“I’ll go get some. Go spend time with your mate.” Maverick chuckled as he left the two alone.

Now what?

“I’m Gunnar.” His mate looked at his outstretched hand quizzically before turning his attention back to the laptop. Okay, then, not a hand-shaker.

“Hey, Gunny, does Ricky have more than one computer in the house?” Nero asked as he typed away, his face scrunched up as he studied whatever it was he was doing.

“It’s Gunnar. There’s a few more here. Why?” Gunnar studied his mate. The man already seemed jittery. Should he even have coffee?

“Where’s his router?”

“His what?”

“It’s...complicated.” Nero shook his head as his attention went back to his laptop.

Gunnar wondered where his mate came from, who he had lived with, and why in the hell he wore blue latex gloves. He imagined himself throwing Nero onto the desk and making him wiggle around while crying out Gunnar’s name. The thought of biting into that soft-looking flesh had him hard as a rock.

He grinned when Nero’s eyes slowly rose to look at him then slowly lowered back down. The nutter did this at least two more times. He was simply gorgeous.

* * * *

Nero mentally rolled his eyes at the laymen. They never understood him. If Ricky had more than one computer, the giant was going to need a whole new setup, and what was with the dial-up service? This house was like being in the late nineties. Nero looked up when he felt eyes staring at him. Gunny was still in the room, watching him.

“I don’t need a babysitter, I swear.” Nero rubbed his hand over his hair, waiting for that uncomfortable feeling to creep up his spine as it always did when anyone paid too close attention to him. It didn’t come. He looked up again to see Gunny watching him closely, his green eyes locked on him, but no tension coiled his muscles from the look. Weird, very weird.

“Here’s your java fix, Nero.” Ricky handed the mug over.

“Thanks. What is the main purpose you use your computer for, Ricky?” Nero asked as he sighed into his first caffeine fix of the day.

There was just something about the first jolt. All his nerves settled into place, and he could think now.

“Mostly online shopping. I keep records of expenditures, although I fall behind with it. Interested in being my new assistant? I had problems with the last one. It’s...complicated.”

Nero just blinked at Ricky. A full-time job? He liked what he did, but it just didn’t cover his financial needs. The calls for his services weren’t as frequent as he would like. His rent was often late, though remembering to pay it was more of the problem than a lack of cash, and he couldn’t afford the electronic toys he was drooling to own. He kept printouts of a wish list he had of the various items he hoped to one day afford taped to his walls. “How much would this job pay?”

* * * *

“Room and board is included. You would live here, and I would open an expense account for the things you would need—and also for the things you would want.” *Dangle the carrot in front of him, Maverick.* The human probably made damn good money at what he did, so he would just have to up the offer, shine it up, and hand it over on a silver platter. Maverick wanted to keep the human, and he *was* Gunnar’s mate after all.

Maverick already had an accountant, but he wanted someone who would see to the everyday financial needs of running the household. Plus it would be a bonus if Nero could watch his accountant. He had never had a problem with the guy, but watching the man who watched your money never hurt. Besides, a mate could be trusted. Humans were a shot in the dark. They were greedy, calculating, and downright underhanded at times. Most humans, anyway. The mates weren’t.

“Sure, I’ll take it. On one condition.” Nero’s legs stilled as he sipped at his coffee.

“And that condition is?” Maverick couldn’t wait to hear it. If this quirky human held to his personality, it should be outlandish.

“Let me have complete control of the security needs you are lacking. A house this size shouldn’t be unprotected. Not good, not good at all.”

Maverick was going to enjoy this. Hawk was the commander of the wolves. If you had to put a human label on him, then he would be head of security. What would the wolf do when Maverick handed Nero over to him? He *had* to see this. “Done.”

“Okay, I have everything you need in the basket. Just need your credit card.”

Maverick pulled out his wallet and handed his credit card to Nero.

“You shouldn’t do that.”

Maverick drew his brows together. “Do what?”

“Trust people like that. You didn’t even look to see what I bought.”

“Wouldn’t know what I was looking at if I did. I trust you. You haven’t given me a reason not to.” Nero was a mate now, and mates could be trusted, right?

“Not good, not good at all.” Nero muttered as he took the offered card. He typed away then looked back up. “Done, it should be here in a few days. I opted out of the next day air, saved a few bucks.”

Maverick liked him already. “Why don’t you go with Gunnar to get something to eat, and we’ll go over the financial records later.”

* * * *

“Show me the way, Gunny.” Nero closed his laptop, wrapping the cords up then sliding them into his messenger bag. Next he took out what looked like a clean wipe and dusted across the top of it. He disposed of the napkin then slid his laptop into the bag as well. Pulling it over his shoulder, he strolled from the office.

“Goody, we get to keep him.” Maverick laughed.

“Mine,” Gunnar reminded his Alpha before following his mate.

Did he know where he was going? Apparently not, he was looking in every room he passed. “This way.” Gunnar placed his hand on his mate’s shoulder only to have the nutter move away. Not liking to be touched was going to hamper his attempt at claiming. Gunnar was a touchy-feely kind of person, and his mate was just going to have to get used to this.

Setting his messenger bag down, his mate took a seat at the table, entwining his fingers together in front of him. “What would you like to eat?” Gunnar asked as he walked to the fridge.

“Got anything for a sandwich?” Nero asked softly.

“Sure, what meat?” Gunnar rummaged around, looking for all the fixings a sandwich would need. He pulled out lettuce, tomatoes, mayo and mustard. There were pickles in the back as well. It seemed like an odd breakfast, but he wasn’t going to mention it.

“Ham?”

“Ham it is. What do you want on it?”

“Ham.”

Gunnar stopped what he was doing, and looked over his shoulder at his mate. “Just ham?”

“Yes, ham.”

“You got it.” Gunnar brought the meat over and laid two slices of bread on a plate, cracking open a new container of honey baked ham. George, Tank’s mate, made sure the kitchen stayed fully stocked. He cooked for the entire house, and he wanted everything at his fingertips.

Gunnar watched silently as his mate’s fingers crept onto the plate, and with the tips of them he straightened out the bread to make it sit perfectly aligned on the plate. When he added the ham, his mate pushed the pieces so they were symmetrical with the bread. Okay, so his mate had OCD as well.

“Ketchup.”

“Ew, ketchup?” Gunnar got out the bottle, ready to squeeze a dollop on, but his mate held up his hand. Handing the bottle over, he

watched as Nero made three perfect vertical lines down the slice of bread that was sitting untouched, carefully stacking it onto the other half. He peeled the crust off and threw it out of the kitchen door.

Gunnar filed the scene away in his mind. He wanted to remember for the next time how his mate liked his sandwiches. It was the cutest thing to watch him nibble it, but when he was only halfway through, Nero threw it away. What the hell? No wonder why he was so damn skinny. He could see the apprehension in Nero—the first real emotion the nutter showed—letting Gunnar know he was human and not a robot. He would leave the nutritional lecture for later.

Cleaning the mess up, he guided the quirky human upstairs. “I’ll show you where you will be sleeping.”

Nero just nodded, following along like a puppy. Gunnar opened the bedroom door.

“I think you have the wrong room, Gunny. Someone already sleeps in here.” Nero looked around.

“It’s my room. I thought maybe since you were in a house where you didn’t know anyone, you would be more comfortable sleeping in here.”

“Oh.”

That’s all his mate had to say? No arguing with him that they were complete strangers and how dare he make such assumptions? His mate, with his blue gloves on, just sat his messenger bag down on the dresser and began to clean.

“You don’t have to do that.” Gunnar pulled his dirty clothes from Nero’s hands. “I was sleeping when you knocked and haven’t had a chance to straighten up.”

Nero shoved his hands into the pockets of his jeans, twisting his lips, and looking around. It seemed his mate was lost when his hands were idle. If only Gunnar could make use of those small hands, he had a few ideas where Nero could put them. He wondered how experienced his mate was and how many boyfriends he had? The man was too heartbreakingly beautiful not to have them lined up around

the corner. This pissed Gunnar off. No one but him was going to touch Nero.

“So, anyone special in your life?” He would play it subtle and pick away at his mate until he knew everything about him.

“My mom.” Nero answered in a don’t-bother-me tone. It grated on Gunnar’s nerves, and then his mate started opening drawers and peering in. Next, he opened the closet and shoved clothes aside, looking into boxes. Nero started mumbling to himself as he made his way to the bathroom, checking the medicine cabinet and under the sink.

“Anything in particular you’re looking for?” His mate did that blinking thing again he did with his eyes, as if Gunnar were speaking another language.

“I like comic books,” Nero blurted out.

A subject he had in common finally. “I like Marvel, you?”

“Oh, I read mangas.”

“Can’t be too different. Keata has some. He’s a mate who lives here. Oliver, another mate bought them for him. Keata came from Japan, and he didn’t speak very good English, so Oliver bought the mangas that are written in Japanese.” Gunnar explained to him as he cleaned the mess in their room. If his mate had OCD, then his days of just throwing things around was over.

“Cool, maybe he’ll let me read his.” Nero walked back into the bedroom. Gunnar noticed his mate had a hard time staying stationary.

“You read Japanese?” He was impressed. Gunnar also wondered why Nero hadn’t said anything when he used the word mate. It seemed his mate thought on a different wavelength than everyone else.

“My grandmother was from Japan She taught me to read it, write it, and speak it. Do you have fruit?” Nero was a subject jumper, too. Gunnar was going to have a hell of a time keeping up with this small human.

“In the kitchen. Wanna go get some?” Gunnar watched as Nero walked out of the bedroom. Didn’t Storm mention something once about a human kid leash? He slid Nero’s bag into his closet, venturing downstairs to find his ADD mate.

* * * *

“Who are you?”

Nero looked up, uninterested, so he went back to peeling his orange.

“Hey, Drew. I see you’ve met Nero.” Gunny plucked an apple from the fruit basket on the counter, leaning back and watching.

“Is he your mate?”

“Yep.”

Nero glanced up at Gunny. He was hearing that word a lot, but he didn’t really understand the context they were using it in though. He wasn’t stupid. He knew it connected him to Gunny some sort of way. Shrugging his shoulders, he went back to peeling.

“Are you deaf? ’Cause if you are, I don’t know any sign language. We could draw pictures if you want.” Drew went to the drawer, rifling around for a pen and paper.

Nero smiled. If he were deaf, what Drew said wouldn’t have been heard. Just how many people lived in this house? Nero glanced up from under his lashes as another man walked into the kitchen. He hugged Drew, kissing him on his neck.

“Nero, this is my mate, Remi.” Drew turned to his mate. “That’s Nero, Gunnar’s mate. He’s deaf.”

There they went with that word *mate* again. Nero had been called a lot worse, so he decided to ignore the reference.

Remi leaned forward, making sure Nero could see him, and waved.

Gunny chuckled. “He’s not deaf, just...intense.”

“In that case, nice to meet you.” Remi extended his hand. What was it with these people in this house and touching? Didn’t they know germs were spread that way? They could get parasites, or worse, death.

“He’s not a hand-shaker,” Gunny informed Remi.

All three watched as Nero lined his orange slices up in a neat row, tossing the rinds out of the back door. The fruit was in perfect formation, perfectly lined up like little soldiers. He plucked one from the napkin, chewing on it. Once he swallowed, he plucked another then another, until the fruit had disappeared.

“Yeah, intense.” Remi tilted his head sideways, studying him. There went that funny tingle when people watched him. Nero became extremely uncomfortable.

“So, Nero, do you have a boyfriend?” Gunny inquired.

Nero saw Remi shoot his head sideways, looking at Gunny as if he had lost his ever-loving mind. Gunny just gave a slight shake of his head. Nero didn’t understand what was going on. Why did Gunny keep asking personal questions that he would rather not answer?

“Why would I have a boyfriend?” Nero touched his ear to his shoulder as his head tilted sideways to study Gunny, as the skin between his eyes crinkled up from his curious frown.

Gunny stood straight up, his jaw dropping to his chest. “You mean...you’re not gay?”

Chapter Three

Remi chuckled around the fruit he was chewing on. Oh, this was priceless. Gunnar had a straight mate. He would have paid big bucks to see that look on the Sentry's face, and just think, he got to see it for free. Even though Mark hadn't been gay when he mated the Sentry, Caden, this was way too funny when one had the chance to see it up close.

Nero shrugged as he washed the citrus from his hands. He pulled out a small bottle of hand sanitizer from his front pocket, pouring a large amount into his hands, lathering it up his arms and through his fingers. "Never thought about it. Sex doesn't interest me."

Remi choked on the apple in his mouth, and Drew slapped his back. Not interested in sex? What planet was he from? Poor Gunnar, he was going to have a case of the blue balls.

"I think we should take this conversation upstairs." Gunnar growled.

Nero shrugged again. "Sure. Nice meeting you, Crew, Demi."

Remi covered his mate's mouth when he started to correct Nero. No sense confusing the guy any further than he already was. He leaned down and whispered into Drew's ear. "Stay away from Gunnar. He's going to be one grumpy ass bastard."

Drew nodded, seeming just as confused about what just happened.

* * * *

"What do you mean he's not interested in sex?" Oliver asked.

Drew shrugged. "That's what he told Gunnar."

“Oh, man. That sucks. Or doesn’t, if you’re Nero.” Blair chuckled.

“I think it’s a good thing. Keeps his mind focused on the important things.” Kyoshi held a straight face all of two seconds before he burst out laughing, the other mates joining him.

“He’s gotta try it. Hawk does this thing where he—” The rest was muffled as Hawk covered Johnny’s mouth with his hand.

“No telling our private business, pretty baby.”

“He really said that?” Kota asked as he twisted off the lid of a juice bottle. With one of the mates, Lewis, being a recovering alcoholic, the bar was converted into a juice bar.

“Yep, damn near made Remi choke.” Drew giggled.

“Fuck, man, poor Gunnar.” Kota laughed as he drank his juice. Secrets never stayed secrets in this house. Everyone knew everyone’s business. Thank God no one was judgmental here. If they were, Kota would never have been able to bring his mate home. Blair used to be a rent boy before Kota claimed him. He had worked with his mate to get him past his shame. Blair held his head high now, and the warriors and mates had been a big part of his healing process.

Kota wondered what Nero’s story was, and there was a story. Every mate had one. Fate seemed to give the warriors men who were in need, fighting demons they couldn’t handle on their own. Just what was Nero’s demon?

“He also seems to have a problem remembering names. He called me Crew and Remi Demi.”

* * * *

“How do you know you’re not interested in it if you’ve never tried it?” Gunnar asked as he closed the door behind him.

“I just never looked at anyone and thought about sex. No big deal.” Nero shrugged his shoulders.

Gunnar could see the loneliness in Nero's eyes. His mate stole a few peeks at him as he looked around. He wanted to erase that look, to replace it with happiness. Gunnar could see the spark of interest, the hungry look that slowly began to appear in his nutter's eyes.

So Nero *was* interested. He just didn't know how to say it. Well, Gunnar could help with that.

"I could show you how good it can be. Will you let me do that?" Gunnar took a deep breath. He had to calm down. "Can we try it, and then you can decide if it doesn't interest you?" Gunnar crossed his fingers.

"Sure, why not." Nero shrugged again.

Gunnar was liking that shrug less and less. It made his mate seem indifferent, uninterested, but his eyes told a different story. A story that said Nero wanted to be touched, to be loved.

Fuck, if this wasn't awkward, he felt like he was taking a test instead of getting ready to have sex. The idea didn't help his libido any.

"Wait!" Nero threw his hands up to stop Gunnar. "We have to touch?"

"Kinda the idea."

"What about germs?" Nero asked in a panicked voice.

Gunnar wasn't sure if he should be offended or not. Wolves didn't have germs. "I can't give you germs, get them, or anything else."

"How? Everyone has them. My mom said if someone touched me that I would get a flesh-eating parasite, and my skin would virtually fall off." Nero pulled his sanitizer out again, dumping the bottle onto his arms, scrubbing the clear liquid into his skin.

"I'm a wolf-shifter. I can't give you human diseases or catch them." It was best that Gunnar got this part over with and deal with the fallout. He wanted his mate to know that it was safe for them to be together. His cock was so damn hard it was biting into his zipper. Gunnar took a deep breath. The need to claim was instinctual and driving him crazy.

“What about fleas or ticks?”

Gunnar was floored. Was that an insult? Wait, he didn’t ask about the shifting part? He didn’t call Gunnar a liar. He was worried about the parasite part? What the hell was wrong with him? “I’ve never had a flea or tick in my life.” Gunnar said through clenched teeth.

“How do I know? Shift. Let me check.” Nero blinked up at him, looking serious as hell.

His mate actually said that with a straight face. Gunnar was confused as fuck. Growling, he stripped his clothes off, standing there gloriously naked, and his mate didn’t even bat an eye.

Nero’s arms were crossed over his chest, his small foot tapping. The little shit was a blow to the male ego. Gunnar knew he was hung well, and the least his mate could do was ogle him. Frustrated, he shifted.

“Where’s my bag?”

Gunnar trotted over to the closet, butting his head against the door. Nero grabbed his bag, pulling out a pair of latex gloves. Gunnar growled.

“Don’t complain, you said I could. Now lie down.”

Gunnar went back to his original thought. He was dreaming, a nice, vivid, drug-filled slumber. That’s the only reason his mate hadn’t flipped out when he shifted. He was acting as though he had seen Gunnar a thousand times in his wolf form. The little human really was a nutter. A nutter with latex gloves on.

Nero knelt beside him, digging through his fur. This was humiliating. His mate was really checking him for parasites. He groaned when Nero grabbed his balls, lifting them for examination. Nero smoothed his hand down Gunnar’s tail, and then checked inside his ears. It was kind of nice to have the short man’s hands all over him. Maybe this wasn’t so bad.

* * * *

"Okay, I don't see anything." Nero was not going to freak out, no sir. The fact that this man was really a wolf was...unsettling. He patted himself on the back for his nerves of steel.

And *damn* if he wasn't hung like a horse.

Nero noticed. Who wouldn't have?

Of course he thought about sex. What man didn't? It scared him to death, so instead of acknowledging this, he feigned indifference. His world was narrow, and electronics were safe. They couldn't hurt you. Unless you crossed wires. Then, it shocked you.

This Gunny man made Nero feel things he never had before, and he craved a closeness that frightened him. He wasn't used to human contact. His mother had drilled it into him that touching was bad. Very, very bad.

"Glad to pass your inspection." Gunnar huffed as he stood after shifting right in front of him. Boy, that was strange, really, really strange.

Gunny was mad at him. Nero felt terrible, but he had to make sure. He tensed when Gunny reached out for him.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Nero. I promise." Gunny's voice was soft, gentle. Nero took a deep breath. He could do this.

"No one's ever touched me before." Nero confessed, cringing when it came out in a childlike voice.

"Come here, my little nutter."

Nero scooted closer, his hands clasped in front of him. He was nervous as hell. What would it be like? He flinched when Gunny wrapped his arms around him. "Sorry."

Gunny ignored his apology, kissing him down his neck instead. Oh, man, that felt good. Real good. The large man pecked him on the lips. "Open your mouth, sweetie."

Nero complied, Gunny's tongue plunging in. Nero's hands were everywhere-he didn't know what to do with them. He was happy Gunny didn't complain about the blue gloves still being on his hands. Baby steps. Yeah, baby steps.

“Place them on my shoulders,” Gunny whispered against his lips. Grateful for the guidance, Nero grabbed Gunny’s shoulders, his hands shaking. Soft lips glided across his, setting his heart to racing, and his cock, which usually lay dormant, rose in full force. Not sure what to do, he allowed Gunny to take the lead, to show him everything there was to know.

* * * *

Gunnar sucked, licked, and nipped his way down his mate’s body. Along the way he shoved the shirt over Nero’s head, unbuttoned his jeans, and slid them down as he descended. *Not interested in sex my ass.*

Carefully laying his mate on the bed, Gunnar licked the V on either side of Nero’s cock. And what a pretty cock it was. Short but thick. His girth was amazing. Gunnar swirled his tongue around that fat beauty, sucking Nero’s cock down his throat. His mate writhed below him, running his blue-covered hands through Gunnar’s hair.

“Gunny.” Nero moaned.

Gunnar smiled around his prick. He wanted to hear his mate scream his name. Pushing Nero’s legs back, Gunnar rimmed his tongue around that tight starburst. His mate tasted delicious, salty and innocent. He yanked Nero’s tennis shoes off, sliding his jeans down until they hit the floor. Gunnar tossed Nero’s socks over his shoulder then turned him over, dying to pull his cheeks apart and sip from his skin.

Gunnar gasped. Tiny white lines crisscrossed Nero’s back, some old, some not so old. Some were faded and almost transparent while others still held red welt marks. “Who did this?” Gunnar roared.

Nero scrambled from the bed, ran across the room, and hid in the closet. Gunnar didn’t stop him. He needed to compose himself. Raw rage unlike anything he felt before coursed through his veins.

The bastard who laid a hand on his mate was a walking, talking, breathing dead man. He crossed the room and took a deep breath, opening the door slowly, and knelt down in front of his mate. His heart shattered into a thousand tears when he heard Nero.

"Everything has to be perfect. Everything has to be aligned. Nothing out of place. Everything in its place." Nero chanted over and over again. "You'll get it right or you'll get it." He began to cry as he recited the next line from somewhere deep inside of him. A memory so painful, Gunnar's heart wrenched.

"Come to me, nutter. Come to Gunny." Gunnar held his arms out, his mate scrambling to get into them. Nero laid his head on Gunnar's shoulder, tears leaking down Gunnar's back. He held his mate tight against him, wishing the pain away. "Who hurt you, baby?"

"Daddy." He whimpered.

The son of a bitch was going to pay for this. Gunnar would make sure of it. Gunnar couldn't understand child abuse. He couldn't even imagine laying a hand on Melonee, the mate Tangee's five-year-old sister who lived here. There was *nothing* she could do that would warrant such violence.

"You're safe, baby. No one is ever going to hurt you again. Got that?"

Nero nodded against his shoulder.

Gunnar crawled into the bed, pulling Nero with him. He just lay there petting his mate's back, making soothing noises in his ear. Thoughts of vengeance were heavy on his mind. The man wouldn't get away with what he had done.

"Can we...?"

"What, nutter?" Gunnar pulled him closer, wanting his mate to feel safe and cocooned in his arms. He placed one hand on the back of Nero's head, the other on his back, burrowing his face in his nutter's neck. Gunnar wanted to weep for the torture his mate must have endured.

"Can we do that again?" Nero pulled away and asked hesitantly.

“What? This?” Gunnar lapped at his neck, nuzzling him as his hands skimmed all over his nutter’s body. Nero’s skin was as soft as satin.

“Yeah, that, that would be it. Yes, yes it would.” Nero wiggled next to him until he was facing Gunnar. Looking uncertain, his mate leaned his head back and began kissing him.

Gunnar broke the kiss, hating to have to do so, but the question needed to be asked. “Are you sure?” Gunnar panted. If his mate kept this up, it would be next to impossible to stop. He had to be sure.

“Please, Gunny.”

Oh, how his mate said his name. He could get anything he wanted asking that way. Grabbing the lube from the nightstand, Gunnar poured a generous amount into his hand, smashing Nero’s hand with his, sharing the lube with his mate. He tossed the bottle aside. “Wrap your hand around my cock.”

Nero did as told, and Gunnar grabbed Nero’s prick with his lubed fingers. “Just do what I do.” Gunnar began to pump his hand, giving his mate the best hand job he ever had. Well, actually his first hand job, which thrilled Gunnar.

Nero’s small fingers were driving him nuts, unsteady at first, jerking without rhythm. His mate caught on quick, taking Gunnar to the highest peaks. “That’s it, baby. Harder.”

His mate mewled, squeezing Gunnar’s cock harder, pumping faster. “Gonna blow. Close, real close. Really, really close.” His mate cried out as his semen erupted from deep inside, bathing Gunnar’s hand.

Gunnar roared. Nero’s hand was like magic, bringing him a release better than he ever produced himself. He wasn’t a virgin, not by a long shot, but being with your mate made it different. Special. Fuck, he sounded all Hallmark and shit.

“Gunny,” Nero moaned.

“I got you, nutter.” Gunnar pulled him close, holding his hand to Nero’s lips. “Lick it off.” Gunnar held his breath as Nero’s little pink

tongue darted out, licking his hand like a kitten licked cream. Fuck, that was hot. He chuckled when Nero held his hand up to Gunnar's mouth. He did the same, lapping at his mate's hand until it was clean.

"Gunny?"

"Yeah, babe?"

"I'm interested in sex." Nero sighed.

"I'm relieved to hear you say that."

* * * *

Maverick threw his head back laughing. His chair losing its balance as it toppled over. He pulled himself up from the floor until he was bending over his desk, chuckles bursting from his mouth. "He checked you for fleas?" Maverick fell back to the floor, lying there until the laughter finally ebbed. "I'm so glad we got to keep him."

"Mine." Gunnar growled. It wasn't that funny.

Commander Hawk was holding his stomach, leaning into Kota, as he, too, was suffering from the giggle fits. Kota, Maverick's Beta, held a hand over his mouth, trying his best to stop laughing.

"You fuckers done yet?" Gunnar snarled.

Maverick held a finger up, cracking up all over again. "Did he find any?" His face turned red as he laughed so hard he cried.

"Hardy har har." Gunnar rolled his eyes. He knew he shouldn't have said a damn word. He looked over his shoulder. Tank, Evan, and Remi, three Sentry wolves, were rolling around laughing.

"Can we get to the serious part now?" Gunnar yelled above the idiots.

Maverick attempted to stifle himself, which wasn't working out too well. "What? Checked you for ticks as well?"

"Well, yeah, but that's not it."

A whole new round of laughter burst from the peanut gallery. Gunnar growled. He needed to talk to a composed Maverick. "Will you guys shut the hell up? His dad abused him, left scars all over his

back! You gonna help me with that or continue to giggle like little schoolgirls?" Gunnar shouted. He was beyond pissed. He wasn't about to rest until daddy dearest paid the ultimate price.

Maverick stopped laughing, straightened his chair up, and snarled at Gunnar. "Where is that son of a bitch?"

The room fell silent. "I didn't press him about it. You should have seen his back. It looked like a whipping post. I'm so damn angry I want to tear the asshole's throat out." Gunnar paced the office, ready to chew nails. Nero was so small. How could anyone hurt such a defenseless man?

"You need to talk to your mate. Find out how he feels about his father. I don't think he'll be thanking you if he still loves the man." Maverick held up a hand to stop Gunnar from arguing, "A lot of children defend their abusers, seeing it as their fault, something they did wrong while still idolizing the aggressor. Find out where he stands with this before you go all Rambo. You know you have our full support."

Gunnar clenched his jaw. He knew his Alpha was right, but if Nero still held his *daddy* in high esteem, this would create a problem. He wanted that asshole to pay for what he did to his nutter.

* * * *

Nero sat on the couch in the den, strumming his fingers against his knee. This place was too untidy. Nothing was in its place. He scrubbed his palms against his jeans. They were itching to clean and put everything in its place.

He stood, walking over to the entertainment stand, straightening the games until they were perfectly aligned. Next, he centered the movies, putting them in alphabetical order, picking up the papers that were lying on the stand. He didn't have a clue what to do with them, so he opened the cabinet and shoved them in there. He bit his thumbnail, pacing around the billiard table, wiping lint from the green

felt, and then he raced back across the room, extracting the papers and throwing them away. When in doubt, throw it out. He stacked the coasters neatly on the coffee table. Eyeing the correct distance from end to end, he centered the coasters exactly in the middle.

Next, he tackled the juice bar, submerging the blender in the mini sink, scrubbing the little pieces of dried pulp from inside the plastic container. He lined the bottles up with their labels facing forward. The curtains were drawn back exactly two inches from the end on each side.

The card table had pieces of salt littering it, so Nero wiped it clean, placing his handful of litter into the trash bin. The chairs were placed symmetrically around the table, each twelve inches apart.

Nero pulled out the vacuum he found in the foyer closet, running it over the carpet in the den, first running it horizontally, and then vertically to ensure nothing was missed, then he extracted the hose, running it along the border.

He cleaned the pool sticks, removing any lingering chalk dust, and he lined the cubes at each end perfectly.

Nero breathed a sigh of relief. Now he could sit down and relax.

“Who are you?” A man with really long hair came in and plopped down on the couch, kicking his feet up on Nero’s perfectly clean coffee table and knocking the coasters to the side. Nero blanched, his fingers itching to put them back. He looked up at the guy, and then down to his sneakers, looked up at the guy, and then right back down to his sneakers.

* * * *

Blair pulled his feet down, feeling very self-conscious. Who was this short ass man? Was he Gunnar’s mate that Drew told them about? “Nero, right?” The short person nodded, looking at the coffee table longingly.

“I’m Blair.”

“Hi, Hair.”

“No, Blair.” Drew had warned them that Nero had a hard time with names but, damn, he just told him.

“Yeah, yeah. I heard you, heard you just fine.”

Blair watched as Nero leaned forward and flicked the coaster rack with his finger along the coffee table then sighed. Really? “You, uh, got a little OCD in your life?”

“No, I graduated.” Nero got up and left, leaving Blair to stare at his back in bewilderment.

Chapter Four

“You want to try something different tonight?” Gunnar asked as he crawled naked across the bed to his mate.

Nero shrugged as he pulled the blanket up to his chin, watching Gunnar closely. “Okay.”

“Just okay?” Gunnar stopped in his predatory crawl, a brow raised inquiringly. His heart melted when Nero smiled. His baby needed to do it more often. The smile was irresistibly devastating.

Tugging the cover from his mate’s grip, Gunnar pulled it off of Nero.

“Okay, Gunny.” He gave Gunnar a smile that sent his pulse racing.

“You ever have sex before?”

Nero shook his head. “Is that where you insert slot A into tab B?” His ocean-blue eyes sparkled mischievously at Gunnar.

Gunnar chuckled as he dropped the sheet to the floor. “You could call it that. I’m definitely going to insert something into your slot.” It had been two full weeks since his mate moved in. Gunnar had not pressured him for sex, giving his mate a chance to adjust, wanting Nero to become comfortable with him. He was just plain horny tonight.

“Wait.” Nero scooted off of the bed, raced to the closet, and reached in to extract a sixty-four-ounce bottle of sanitizer.

“I thought we discussed this, nutter?”

Nero padded back across the room, setting the bottle onto the nightstand. “Doesn’t hurt to be cautious.” He pumped a large amount into his hand and began to rub Gunnar’s body down.

Nero bent down in front of him to sanitize his legs and feet, but Gunnar drew the line when his nutter tried to put that crap on his bits and pieces. Since when was sex sanitary? It was supposed to be dirty and raunchy, not disinfected.

“Now you can insert your tab into my slot.” Nero grinned up at him, that devilish sparkle lighting up his eyes once more. Gunnar filled with raw need at the sight. His mate could fill the tub with that shit if he smiled like that. He watched as Nero snapped the used gloves off then slid his small hands into a fresh pair.

“Get out of your clothes, nutter.” Gunnar pulled the side of his mouth up in a grin as his mate slowly, with trembling, gloved fingers, removed all articles of fabric.

Gunnar sat on the side of the bed, pulling his mate onto his lap so Nero was straddling him. Gunnar ran his tongue over Nero’s lips, kissing him as tender and as light as a summer breeze.

He ran his hand down Nero’s back then trailed a finger down his crease, tapping at the starburst hidden away. His cock jerked at the feeling of his fingertip touching such an intimate area of his mate’s body. It felt like needle pricks were radiating from his pores as the excitement built.

“Slot A needs loosening.” Gunnar reached over, grabbing the bottle of lube from the drawer. He would go gentle and slow to make sure Nero enjoyed this as much as he knew he would.

At the last second he realized the bottle was clear. Damn sanitizer. Tossing the container across the room, Gunnar grabbed the right bottle.

He snapped open the lid as he stared his nutter in his eyes, seeing the blue turned a shade darker. He applied some to his fingers, and the lube glided over Nero’s puckered hole as he ran his fingers around it until his mate relaxed, the muscle less resistant. Preparing his mate drove his anticipation to the edge, almost making his body erupt before he had a chance to indulge. The need pulsed through his cock. The feeling of his mate trustingly holding onto to him was euphoric.

There wasn't anything that could make Gunnar betray that trust. Nero was his little nutter, his left lung, now. Without him, Gunnar would no longer be able to breathe.

When his third finger joined the rest, Gunnar turned, laying them both down on the mattress. His mate reluctantly loosened his grip and let him go. Those blue-gloved hands fisted the blanket as Gunnar ran his hands over Nero's soft skin.

"Ready for my tab?" Gunnar smiled as Nero looked everywhere but at him. "Nero?"

"Sure, sure. Connect the dots." Nero bit his bottom lip and peeked over at Gunnar from his periphery. He knew his baby was nervous. Being his first time, it was to be expected. Gunnar hoped to make it as pleasurable as possible.

He turned his nutter to his hands and knees and climbed up behind him. Gunnar pressed the head of his cock to the tight opening, easing his way in as Nero panted and smacked the bed. Gunnar stopped and waited for Nero to relax. Gunnar ran his fingers over the scars, kissing each one, and then he dropped to his hands, placing them on either side of Nero's head. He felt like a lion over a kitten. His mate was so damn small.

"Very interested. Very, very." Nero groaned as he rocked back and forth on his hands and knees. A rhythm began. When Gunnar pushed forward, Nero pushed back.

His mate was intoxicating, welcoming Gunnar's body into his. Gunnar ran his lips over Nero's shoulder, and a shiver followed his touch.

"Are you okay, nutter?" Gunnar asked as he kissed his way down Nero's arm.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes." Nero began to whimper, his head shaking back and forth.

"I have you, nutter. Just let go. Gunny's got you." Gunnar kissed the nape of Nero's neck, kissed the side of his neck, and rubbed his

cheek over his mate's hair. He relished the feel and smell of his nutter underneath him.

His cock rocked in and out of Nero's tight hold, sending his senses soaring as the muscle gripped him and milked his body. Gunnar wrapped an arm around Nero's chest, as he fingers found his mate's nipple and began to run his thumb back and forth over it, feeling it grow to a tight peak under his finger.

Nero's legs spread further apart, his body moving as one with Gunnar's. There was no way he was going to last much longer, but Gunnar tried his best to make it last forever.

He ran a hand down Nero's hip and thigh, his nutter tossing his head as a mewling whine left his lips. "So good, Gunny, so, so good."

"That's it...enjoy what I'm doing to your body, enjoy it, baby." Gunnar's voice was rough against Nero's ear. "I knew you could take my cock."

Hunger and need consumed Gunnar to the point he thought he would go insane. His nutter's tight body sang to his senses, drove him closer to the edge of euphoria. It was as if Gunnar were experiencing it for the first time himself.

His mate brought him pleasure he had never known before, a deep satisfying hunger that only Nero seemed to be able to feed.

Desperation, so deep it came from Gunnar's core, took over as the urge to bind this man to him, to keep him at his side for the rest of his life made the question leave his lips.

"Do you accept me as your mate, Nero?"

"What does that mean, Gunny?" Nero asked as the palms of his hands dug into the mattress.

"It means I'll love you forever, nutter. I'll love you until I take my last breath. Say yes, be mine, baby."

"Your mate. Yes, Gunny. Your mate. Love me." Nero whimpered as sweat rolled down his nutter's back, making his skin glisten in the light of the room.

Gunnar bit into his shoulder, feeling the ribbons unwind then realign, twisting each other's souls around themselves, their hearts now beating as one.

Gunnar shouted his nutter's name as he came, and Nero began mewling as his whole body shook with his release, his hole clamping down on Gunnar's cock. Gunnar closed the wound and laid his forehead on the back of his mate's head, his heart racing as his mate's muscle relaxed. He could move now. "You're mine, nutter."

"Yours, yours, yours," Nero chanted. "I'm very interested in trying that again."

Gunnar chuckled. "I just bet you are."

As soon as he hid the sanitizer.

* * * *

Murdock walked into Maverick's office with a scowl on his face. Maverick had been seeing that look a lot lately and knew it had something to do with his new assistant. "I was turned down at the dealership. They said my finances weren't approved."

"Did you submit the forms to Nero for approval?" Maverick liked how Nero was running the place. He got the wolves' spending under control. Not that they had to worry about money, but stopping the frivolous spending never hurt.

Nero kept things in order with a paper trail he could follow and, with Maverick's consent, he had the banks notify him when a large purchase was trying to be made.

Only Nero's approval allowed the transaction to go through.

"What do you mean 'forms'?" Murdock stormed across the hall, straight into Nero's office. "What do you mean I can't have a truck?"

Maverick stood, walking across the hall, grabbing Murdock by his shoulder and yanking him out of the room and into the wall. His canines extended at the threat to the smallest mate. Any kind of abuse to any of them was not tolerated, even yelling. "You will not talk to

my assistant that way. If you have a problem with one of his decisions, you come to me. Am I understood?" The Alpha growled into the wolf's face.

"But it was a nice truck, Maverick," Murdock grumbled.

"No, no." Nero tapped his clipboard behind Maverick. He turned to his new assistant as Nero rushed the words. "Yours is only a few years old, nothing wrong with it. No, nothing wrong with it, nothing at all." Nero took a step sideways, half hiding behind Maverick. The Alpha's protective instincts made him snarl at the wolf against the wall.

"He says there's nothing wrong with what you have, Murdock." Maverick made sure the Sentry understood the little, quirky human, and he made sure Murdock understood his tone of voice as well.

* * * *

"Sorry, Murdock, can't approve it. Sorry, just can't. Wait five more years. Come see me then. Yeah, five." Nero walked out of his office and down the hall.

It seemed a lot of people lately were mad at him. That wasn't his intention when he took the job. He was hoping to make new friends, but it must not be in the cards for him. It only made him crawl further inside himself, allowing only Gunny in. Well, maybe Ricky. He seemed to like Nero.

Not good, not good at all. Nero veered off toward the steps, but he was too late at his attempts to escape. The man with the blonde curls, along with the Asian man, grabbed his arms, touching him.

"Come on, Nero, we need another player for pretzel poker." Johnny pulled at his arm, trying to direct Nero to the den.

"Need you." Keata pushed from the other side, and Nero could feel his skin crawl. He needed his sanitizer.

"I can't. Need to work. Don't want to, no. No, really don't."

"Just for a little while, please," Johnny pleaded.

Nero sat at the table, staring at the pile of pretzels in front of him. Another man named Mark was sitting with them, a toothpick between his lips. He had a bunch of things drawn all over his skin and looked out of place sitting with them. He was too big for that seat. Nero stared at the black leather bands around the man's wrists. If he let people draw on him, then he had lots of germs. Lots and lots.

"Okay, now, you have to get three of a kind or numbers in a row in the same suit," Johnny explained to him. This wasn't poker. It was beginning to sound like gin rummy.

Nero began to nibble at the pretzels in front of him. They tasted really good. Although he was terrified of germs, he was starving.

"Hey, you can't eat them. You have to bet with them." Johnny reached down into a bag next to his chair, tossing a few more of the salty treats onto the table in front of Nero. "Now, don't eat those."

"Leave him alone, Johnny. Let Nero eat them if he's hungry," Mark said as he took his turn.

Nero became lost in the bizarre rules they were trying to explain to him. He finally gave up, excusing himself and grabbing a handful of pretzels to eat as he clutched his clipboard and headed back to his office. Maybe Murdock would be gone by now. He should have filled out the forms.

Dousing his arms in sanitizer, Nero sat behind the desk Ricky had given him.

"What's this I hear about you having control of security?"

Nero mentally rolled his eyes. It seemed today was a day of complaints. Now Birdie was standing in the door, his hands on his hips and glaring at him. He could never remember the guy's name, so when in doubt, use word association.

"You need cameras, fences, and dogs. This place isn't safe."

"We've done just fine," Birdie snapped at him.

Nero looked around, needing Gunny to help him. This man was huge and intimidating. He didn't like feeling trapped. Looking frantically around his office, he realized only the bathroom would

provide a safe haven for him now. Nero stepped back while Birdie glared at him. Spinning on his heels, he ran across the room and slammed the bathroom door, locking it.

“Everything has to be perfect. Everything has to be aligned. Nothing out of place. Everything in its place.” Nero began to chant again. “You’ll get it right or you’ll get it.”

A soft knock sounded on the door. Nero whimpered and continued to chant.

“Nero, I’m sorry. Come out. We can talk about it,” Birdie called through the door.

Nero shook his head. It was a trick. Birdie would get the switch out and make him pay for stepping over the invisible boundary. He slammed his hands over his ears as he chanted louder, his mind playing scenes of years past when he didn’t get it right.

* * * *

Gunnar was surprised to find his Commander at Nero’s bathroom door, lightly knocking and pleading. Other than with Johnny, his Commander never used that tone. Walking a few more steps into the room, Gunnar paid attention to the words Hawk was saying.

“Nero, I didn’t mean to scare you. Come out. We can work out a security program that will suit us both.”

“Commander?”

Hawk looked over his shoulder at Gunnar, apology written all over his face. “I didn’t mean to, Gunnar. I didn’t know he would become afraid of me.”

Gunnar nodded. “Let me handle it.” Hawk stepped away, but stayed in the room. His Commander watched as Gunnar picked the lock, pulling his mate out of the bathroom and into his arms.

His mate was shaking like a leaf. Gunnar sat at Nero’s desk, rubbing his hands up and down his spine. “It’s okay, nutter. He can’t

get you. He's not here." Gunnar held him tightly to his chest as he made soothing sounds in his mate's ear.

"His father?" Hawk asked softly in surprise, when Gunnar gave him a nod to confirm the question. Hawk's face fell. "I reminded him of his father?"

What could Gunnar say to Hawk? He hadn't been there to see what went on. He didn't know what Hawk had done to send his mate running into the bathroom.

"But all I said was we did just fine. I was referring to security." Hawk looked pained. Taking a few steps closer to where Gunnar held the frightened man, he said, "I didn't mean any harm, Nero. I would never have touched you. I promise."

"I'll settle him down." Gunnar tilted his head toward the office door. Hawk turned. Neither had seen Maverick standing there.

"Of course, call me if he needs anything," Hawk said as he looked up at Maverick with sorrow in his eyes and then he moved past him.

"How is he?" Maverick asked.

"I'm not sure. Something happened to scare him into running." Gunnar looked down at his mate balled up on his lap. He had to fix this, make his mate comfortable once more in his home.

"I'll leave you two alone." Maverick reached out, grabbing the door handle and quietly closing it.

Not sure he was making the correct decision, only hoping it would work, Gunnar sat his mate on his feet. He knelt in front of his mate and then pulled Nero's jeans down to his knees.

Gunnar lifted his nutter, setting him on the edge of his desk. He growled when Nero's small but thick cock jutted out from between his legs.

"We can play the office boss—which is you—sexually harassing his employee, which is me." Gunnar smiled when Nero's eyes widened.

Leaning forward, Gunnar ran his tongue over Nero's half hard cock. "But, Mr. Credence, I really want that raise."

Nero squirmed around, his hands resting gently on Gunnar's shoulders. Gunnar grabbed Nero's hips, swallowing him deeper.

"O—only if you show me how good you are." Nero's head fell back onto his shoulders, a groan echoing throughout the room.

Gunnar pulled back, suckling at the head and then releasing his mate's delicious cock. "I can show you. Promise I'll get that raise?" Gunnar smiled up at his mate before engulfing his girth once again. Nero moaned, trying to push his hips up.

"N—no, I can't promise you that. Now just do it." Gunnar could tell Nero was having a hard time putting the proper authority in his tone.

Gunnar lowered Nero onto his desk, pulling his jeans off all the way. He pushed his mate's legs back, lifted his ass into the air, and swallowed him down.

Nero was keening and thrusting up, pulling at Gunnar's hair wildly.

"Gunny, Gunny, Gunny," Nero chanted as his balls drew up, Gunnar massaged his sac as he sucked tighter, drawing the cum from Nero's balls. "Gunny!"

Nero came down Gunnar's throat, hot spurts jetting past his tongue, swallowing rapidly to take it all. Once he cleaned his mate's cock with his tongue, he let it slip from between his lips and looked up.

"Do I get that raise?"

"No, try harder next time." Nero blushed.

"You little nutter." Gunnar began to tickle him. Peals of laughter left his mate's lips as he hiccupped. He seemed to feel better. It was the first time he had heard the musical sound of Nero's laughter. Gunnar was stunned at how beautiful it sounded and how it made his chest tighten. Nero was everything and more to him. His mate laid there on the desk looking like an angel that had fallen from Heaven and right into his heart. "So what happened, nutter?"

Gunnar could see Nero shutting down. He rubbed his hands over his mate's chest and belly, leaning forward to make soothing noises in his ear once again.

"H—he had the same look Daddy had when he got mad."

"You know Hawk would never hurt you, right? No one in this house would." Gunnar pulled his mate up from the desk, holding him close to his chest. The shakes were back, racking his mate's body as Gunnar held him close. He cursed Nero's abusive father. "Where is he, Nero? Where does your daddy live?"

Nero shook his head. "He doesn't. He's cold now."

"He passed away?"

His mate nodded. Gunnar inwardly cursed. There was no retribution to be had. There was only the job of picking up the pieces he left behind, putting back together his nutter's life.

"Come on, hot chocolate is in order." Gunnar helped his mate get dressed and change into a fresh pair of gloves. He opened the office door and led him down the hall to the kitchen.

"Hi, Oyster," Nero said as he took a seat at the table.

"Hello, Nero." Oliver smiled at Gunnar's mate.

"Gunny's making me hot chocolate. Want some?"

Oliver sat down across from Nero. Gunnar watched them as he went about making their drinks, assuring himself his nutter was okay. It was the first time Nero had invited one of the other mates to join him, so it seemed his nutter was slowly acclimating.

The kitchen remained quiet as Gunnar began heating the milk. He set three mugs onto the countertop and added chocolate powder to the cups. Once the milk was heated, he poured it into the mugs, adding a small amount of cold milk to cool them off some then topped them with miniature marshmallows. "Here you go, nutter, Oliver."

Nero sipped with a look of pure enjoyment crossing his face. "I really like chocolate, but I don't indulge in it too much. Nope, can't, have to keep my figure."

Gunnar chuckled as he picked up his mate, setting him on his lap as they both enjoyed the hot drink. Gunnar licked the chocolate mustache from Nero's upper lip, kissing him slowly. He tasted just like the chocolaty drink. Gunnar was never a huge fan of chocolate, but if he kept licking it off of his mate, he would soon become one.

"Nero, why do you use different names, like when you called me oyster?" Oliver asked as he drank his hot chocolate.

Nero shrugged as he turned toward the mate. "I have a hard time remembering names, especially in this house with so many. I use word association when I forget," his mate stated as he took another drink.

"I guess that makes sense. I'll leave you two alone. Thanks for the hot chocolate, Nero." Oliver rinsed his mug out then put it into the dishwasher.

They weren't alone ten minutes before George invaded their quiet moment. "Sorry, fellas, but I gotta get dinner ready."

"My employee has to get back to work anyway, puddin' pie." Nero smiled up at the mate.

George raised a brow. Gunnar wasn't sure if it was the comment about Gunnar being his employee or the puddin' pie reference. Gunnar chuckled as he rinsed their mugs out, setting them in the dishwasher as he walked out with his mate.

"So you like role playing?" Gunnar asked as they walked back down the hall.

Nero nodded his head as he walked beside him. "It was fun."

"Good to know." Gunnar would think of more roles they could play out. He stopped midstride when Hawk came out of the den. Watching his mate for any signs of discomfort, Gunnar would let Nero dictate what happened next.

Hawk approached warily, getting on one knee in front of his mate. Nero stiffened but stayed where he was, close to Gunnar's side.

"I'm sorry for scaring you. Do you forgive me?"

This was so not like his Commander. It seemed his mate had this effect on everyone in the house. They were patient and tolerant, as all warriors were with the shorter men. But something about Nero brought out the soft spot everyone held inside of them.

“It’s okay, Birdie. My employee made it all better.” Nero’s hand slid into Gunnar’s as he smiled at Hawk.

Hawk chuckled. “We’re good?”

“Okay, Birdie.” Nero looked up at Gunnar then back down at the extended hand. Gunnar saw him gulp then unsteadily reach out and shook the warrior’s hand. He smiled down at his mate proudly as Nero quickly removed his hand and shoved it in his pocket. At least his mate was trying, even though he still had the blue gloves on. It was a start.

Chapter Five

“What’s manhunt?” Nero looked around at all the wolves’ boyfriends as they stood in the backyard. It was a little nippy out, but nothing a jacket wouldn’t cure.

“Easy,” Cecil explained. “I’m it, you men hide in the forest, and I come find you. If I touch you, then you’ll be it.”

Nero scratched his head, wasn’t that hide-and-seek? Seemed these people were a little confused when it came to their reindeer games.

Everyone scattered, Nero taking off in the opposite direction as the rest of the boyfriends. He didn’t want to be touched, so he got as far away from everyone else as he could. He ducked around brush, hopped over fallen logs, and found himself at the side of a small hill.

Finding an opening to a cave, Nero pushed the vines back, sneaking inside to hide.

There were four passageways to choose from, but Nero stayed in the main chamber, not wanting to get lost. The quietness was a little discerning, but Nero didn’t want to be *it*.

He took a seat on the dirt floor as he thought about his Gunny and the rest of the men who lived there. They were different from the people Nero was used to dealing with.

They didn’t make fun of him, call him neurotic, or any of the names he had grown used to over the years. It was real nice. He wasn’t too sure about Melonee though. She was little, messy. Kids always had germs.

Nero sighed. What would it be like to live a normal life? Everyone in the house seemed to be normal. They probably didn’t know what it was like to be an outcast. He wished he was like them. Nero hated the

fact that he feared germs and disorganization. Why did his parents have to instill this in him?

The killer part was that his parents had been slobs. They expected him, even at a young age, to make sure the house was spotless. Who did that to their child?

He knew his mom loved him, tried her best to protect him from his abusive father, but he still held some resentment in him toward her. She could have made life easier for the both of them if she had just left him.

He'd never understand her and stopped trying years ago. They had a friendship now, and that's what Nero focused on. She would never win mother of the year, but he did love her.

Nero brushed his bum off and began to look around. He wasn't sure how much time had passed. He was too busy trying to peek into the darkened caverns as his mind wandered to pay attention. He called out Gunny's name into the tunnels, smiling when the echo bounced back. This was fun. He did it a few more times, loving how Gunny's name sounded on his lips. Nero knew his mate's name was Gunnar, but using Gunny made him feel special, like he was the only one with that privilege.

When he heard twigs snapping outside, Nero ventured closer to the entrance, pushing the vines aside to peer out. A wolf was sniffing the ground, following the same path Nero had taken.

Nero watched as the wolf cocked his head, listened for a moment, and then turned toward him and stared right at him.

"Is that you, Gunny?" Nero stepped out, dropping to his knees as the wolf approached him. A wet tongue licked the side of his face. "Ew, Gunny. I'm going to need my big bottle of sanitizer now." Nero teased. His wolf was amazing. In the messed up life he lived with constantly being ridiculed by people who didn't understand him, Nero was quick to accept the love and attention his wolf gave him. So what if he could change into a creature on four legs. He loved Nero. In his book, that's all that mattered.

Gunny turned his head up, howling into the evening air. Nero watched as a few more wolves appeared, all surrounding him. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to reveal his hiding spot. He should have stayed in the cave.

Nero didn't know these wolves, just Gunny, and he knew for sure the first wolf was his mate. After all, he had examined the wolf from snout to tip.

The wolf padded in front of him, lowering his upper half, bowing to him. Nero got the message as he stared at the huge wolf. He climbed onto his back, grabbing the fur at his neck as the rest of the wolves followed, staying close to him and Gunny. They surrounded him, as if in protection.

Nero felt like he was riding a horse. He didn't know anything about wolves, but he was pretty sure they weren't supposed to be this big. His gloved hand ran through the fur at the nape, dying to take that latex off and feel it with his bare hands. But he couldn't, not only were they outside of their bedroom, he could fall, and then germs would be all over his body.

Once again, Nero hated his fears and wished he was brave enough to take the gloves off.

Grabbing the scruff of Gunny's neck, Nero held on as they made their way back to the house.

* * * *

Maverick watched as the wolves sent to find Nero emerged from the forest, Nero on Gunnar's back. He let out a relieved breath as Gunnar and the other wolves came to Maverick's side. Nero stayed on his mate.

"I don't have a problem with you mates hanging around in the backyard. I just need you to let the Sentries know so they can keep an eye on you. No more hide-and-seek unless you let someone know." Maverick looked each mate in his eyes.

“It wasn’t hide-and-seek, it was manhunt, and I didn’t expect Nero to get lost.” Cecil had the decency to look shamed.

“I wasn’t lost, just lost track of time. No, wasn’t lost, not lost at all.” The shortest of the mates sat up on Gunnar’s back, blinking up at Maverick.

Maverick’s face softened. “We still need to know, so we can protect you.”

“Cameras, fences, and dogs.” Nero recited.

Hawk knelt down by Nero. “How about cameras? Would that be good enough? As you can see, we don’t need dogs, and fences would hinder our patrol.”

Nero looked to be mulling it over. “Okay, Birdie. Good. Compromise is good.”

* * * *

Gunny turned, walking slowly toward the forest. Nero was lying on his back with his arms wrapped around Gunny’s neck. The forest was beautiful in the evening when the crickets and frogs sang. It seemed like another world to Nero and he liked it. Gunny walked carefully, probably afraid Nero would lose his hold and fall.

Gunny walked for a while, Nero hugging his neck as they enjoyed the lush greenery surrounding them. Gunny began a slow climb up the side of a bluff, and when they reached the top Gunny stopped about five feet away from the ledge. Nero sat up, looking down at the sleeping town nestled in the surrounding forest. He could see farms off in the distance and little shops that looked mostly closed, but some still had their lights on, probably close to closing for the night.

Nero slapped his hands over his ears when Gunny’s head fell back, giving a louder howl than when he had alerted the others that he was found. He stared over the bluff, wondering what Gunny was howling about. The shadows were too dark to see anything, and all looked well.

Nero turned as five wolves raced up the bluff., all coming to stand beside Gunny. They looked over the edge for a moment, and a few growled. Nero had no clue what was going on. The five wolves took off at a fast speed, leaving him and Gunny alone.

Gunny lay down, signaling for Nero to slide off. As soon as Nero's feet touched the dirt, Gunny shifted.

"I need to get you back to the house. Something's going on down there. The other wolves are going to need my help."

"Uh-huh." Nero nodded but was focused on the naked man standing in front of him. He licked his lips at Gunny's hardened cock. It looked too big to do what Gunny did earlier. He would try though. It felt good, and he wanted his mate to feel good.

"You're killing me, nutter. I wish we could stay and play around. Actually, I planned on it. I'm going to shift. Get back on me and hold on tight, okay?"

Nero nodded, still staring at the large length between Gunny's legs.

"Killing me," Gunny muttered before changing back to wolf form.

Nero climbed on when Gunny lowered himself, holding on tight as the wolf trotted instead of walked. They made it back to the house, Gunny walking them right up to their room before changing back.

Nero moaned, wanting to taste Gunny really, really bad.

"Promise me you'll stay in our room." Gunny quickly dressed, tying up his boots before kissing Nero on his lips. Nero was in a lust-filled daze. "Promise me, nutter."

"I promise."

"Good. I'll be back as soon as I can." Gunny kissed him once more before racing down the steps and out to his truck.

* * * *

Gunnar rammed the gear into park, leaping from his truck and shifting into his wolf form. Damn it, replacing his clothes was getting expensive.

Jumping onto a vampire's back, Gunnar sank his teeth into its neck, getting it off of Cody's wolf form, which was already fighting two of them as it was.

Chaos was all around them. Just what in the hell was going on here? It resembled an outbreak. Where did they all come from? Gunnar made quick work of the vamp, running to help Storm, who seemed to be having a hard time with three attacking him. The warrior was holding his own, but Gunnar knew soon Storm would tire. Not gonna happen while he was here.

Gunnar and Storm fought side by side, slowly and painfully defeating the three. Maverick showed up, evening out the odds. His massive form plowed through the battle, ripping throats out, tearing skin from bone. It was a grisly sight. The Alpha was a force to be reckoned with and didn't play around.

Three black cars with tinted windows pulled up. Prince Christian climbed out of the back, with other vampires joining him. "My coven has gold medallions around their necks. Do not harm them." Christian shouted before joining the fight. Maverick must have called him.

With all the added support, the rogues were soon defeated. Prince Christian and Alpha Maverick stood by one of the black cars talking quietly. With superior hearing, Gunnar was able to listen in.

"What the fuck is going on, Christian?"

"I have no clue. Something here has set them off. I've never seen this many rogues gathered in one place before."

"We need to find out what it is because I'm tired of the attacks on my town."

"We will. I promise you that."

The two nodded to one another before Maverick waved to his wolves to head home. Let Christian get rid of the bodies. It was his mess anyway. Gunnar shifted, getting into his truck naked as he drove

away. He glanced into his rearview mirror, watching the vamps toss dead carcasses into large trunks.

* * * *

Nero glanced over at the window. Ricky had ushered him, along with the other boyfriends, into the library, leaving Caden to watch them.

“Do you see anything?”

“No, buddy, nothing so far.” Caden shook his head.

Nero paced around the room. He was feeling claustrophobic, needed Gunny. “You, Mark?”

Mark shook his head. “Nothing out of this window either.”

They were not only watching for any signs of the warriors returning, they didn’t want to be attacked by rogue vampires. Puddin’ Pie already suffered because of his encounter.

He carried a water bottle around with him from the unrelenting thirst and ate his meat bloodier all because a vampire tried to kill him. They tore his body up and nearly drained him, Gunny had explained to him. Nero didn’t want any of those germy blood suckers near him.

Caden had suffered as well. When he took off to the city to find his mate, Mark, three vampires attacked him. Caden had thought Mark left him and was trying to find him to beg his return, but it was all for naught. Mark had only gone to the city to sell his business so he could move here to be with his wolf boyfriend. Gunny had told him a lot about the boyfriends and the wolves that lived here. It made Nero feel like less of a freak.

Nero paced, hating to stand in one spot. It made him jittery to do so. Maybe one of the taller boyfriends could walk him down to his office so he could get his laptop. That would give him something to do.

“Hey, Chewie, can you take me to my office to get my laptop?”

“Explain to me how you got Chewie from Lewis?”

Nero shrugged. "It's...complicated." He began to pace again. He couldn't help that he forgot names easily. Nero was just grateful the mate didn't sound angry by it.

"I get it." Drew laughed. "Lewis, Louie, Chewie."

Lewis, that's his name. Nero made a mental note to try harder to remember it.

Lewis rolled his eyes. "Let's make this quick."

"No." Mark held up his hand. "No one leaves this room."

Nero began to pace again. He was becoming agitated staying in one room for so long.

It wasn't like he was going all the way upstairs or even to the other side of the estate, just down the hall. What could happen? Lewis looked like he could kick some serious butt. What was the problem?

Nero began to rub his hands up and down his arms. "No good, not good at all." He muttered as the circle he paced in became tighter. Soon he was just going in circles.

"Dude, I think he's having a nervous breakdown," Kyoshi commented.

They were all watching him. Nero could feel their eyes on him. His spine tingled, telling him so. "Insert slot A into tab B. I have a new game for you to play. Will I get a raise? My nutter." Nero was babbling everything Gunny had ever said to him, making him feel closer to his wolf. "It's okay, let go, Gunny has you."

"Is he going to explode?" Johnny asked as Nero began to chant faster, walk quicker, and rub harder. "My employee. You're the boss. I want to love you forever." Nero closed his eyes on the last words. He wanted to love Gunny forever, too. Where was his wolf?

* * * *

"Okay, okay. Make it quick." Mark watched as Lewis led Nero out of the library. The man sure knew how to wind himself up. Mark thought he really would explode too. Nero's motions became faster,

more unstable. His mate, Caden, might act like an excited puppy but nothing close to what Nero went through. He was thankful he wasn't Gunnar. How did the warrior deal with it?

All heads turned when Lewis and Nero walked back in. Nero seemed to have calmed down, and he looked more relaxed. He went over to the desk, sat down, opened his laptop, and became oblivious to the world. One problem solved.

"How long do you think they'll be?" Kyoshi asked as he held his cousin Keata close.

"Don't know. Depends on how many there were." Mark scanned the backyard. This was a far cry from working in his tattoo parlor months ago. There were vampires in the city, but he was ignorant of the fact. Things seemed simpler back then—lonely but simpler. He looked over his shoulder at Caden. He wouldn't trade it for the world. For once, he was glad his son was at home with his mother. He wouldn't want Curtis involved in this. It was bad enough Caden was.

"I think they're back." Mark squinted into the night, barely able to see into the backyard. There was movement—that much he could decipher. "No one leave until Maverick tells us what's going on."

Mark and Caden had all of five seconds to run before the windows exploded. Glass shattered everywhere. The sound was deafening.

The mates screamed, and George grabbed Melonee as they took off from the library, heading to Maverick's office and the secret passageway.

The Alpha had warned them to only use it if necessary because of his mate's fear of it. Cecil had been kidnapped and lost in a catacomb of tunnels in pure darkness. He feared the dark now, which was understandable, but he also feared the passageway.

Mark swung Cecil up into his arms, holding him close to his chest as they descended down to the chamber. Lewis was the last person in, securing the lock the Sentries had installed for just a scenario as this one. Maverick would know where they were. He would know how to bypass the lock when it was safe to come out.

Everyone thanked heaven Oliver was snooping around when he first arrived here. He was the one to discover this hidey-hole. Not even Maverick had known it existed.

They had to walk single file since the passageway was narrow. Lewis chuckled at Keata, who skipped along as if all was right with the world and it was no more than an exploratory trip. The little man was resilient.

They all took a seat on the dirt floor, waiting until they received the all clear.

"Think whoever did that will find us?" Tangee broke the silence, his little sister fast asleep in his lap.

"Don't think so. I didn't see anyone following us." Lewis tried to reassure him. He drew little pictures in the dirt floor, passing the time away. Drew crawled over to him, drawing a tic-tac-toe game. They sat there and played what felt like a thousand games.

"I gotta tinkle," Johnny looked around.

"Me, too," Keata added.

"You'll have to go in a corner," Mark offered, pointing over to the dirt wall.

"Ew," Johnny and Keata said in unison.

"Only option, men." Mark shrugged as he turned Melonee around and away so she couldn't see.

Johnny sighed heavily as he and Keata walked away from them, using the wall closest to the exit. They began to laugh as they crossed streams and then tried to draw yellow artwork on the dirt wall.

"Gross." Nero rolled his eyes, looking at the two whizzing in the corner.

"I ran out," Johnny complained.

"Me, too." Keata zipped up, looking around.

"What's wrong, Johnny?" Mark asked as he let Melonee go.

"No sink."

"Sorry, you'll have to suffer it out."

The two joined the others, teasing the other mates with their unwashed hands. Johnny chased Cecil around, taking the guy's mind off of being down there. Cecil screamed, threatening to hide the controllers if Johnny didn't cut it out.

"Men are such pigs," Nero muttered. Mark chuckled at the mate.

"Hush." Caden held up a hand, and everyone stilled. "The door is opening."

The shorter mates huddled behind the larger ones, praying it was their warriors coming down.

* * * *

"Everyone all right?" Gunnar asked as he searched for Nero amongst all the men and little Melonee. He grabbed his mate, holding him tight to his chest as he breathed a sigh of relief. "You had me scared, nutter," he murmured into Nero's hair.

"Why? You knew we would be down here," Nero said as he wrapped his arms around Gunnar's neck.

"Everyone can come up now. Coast is clear," Gunnar called out and then waited until the last person walked to the exit before following, his arm under Nero's bottom, his mate's legs wrapped around his waist. It felt good to hold his nutter again.

When the warriors had arrived back at the house and entered the library to find the wreckage, they quickly ran to Maverick's office, and when they saw the lock engaged, they knew the mates were fine.

They all settled in Maverick's office. There was a new guy there, leaning against the far wall with a scowl on his face. Gunnar noticed Maverick didn't look happy either.

"Everyone, this is Montana. He is Caden's replacement and the wolf that blew out my damn library windows." Maverick growled.

The man smirked, staring down at Maverick. "Caden will be back to Sentry status as soon as he feels he is able. It is his call." Maverick

smiled at Caden, who was sitting close to Mark. Caden nodded at the Alpha, thanks written all over his face.

“How’d you get him?” Storm asked as he cuddled Kyoshi in his arms, nodding at Montana.

“Well, it wasn’t as if I could call all the Timber wolf packs and ask if they had a gay warrior they could send me.”

“So?” Gunnar rubbed Nero’s back, smiling at the evil grin on Maverick’s face. “What’d you do?”

Maverick chuckled. “I called all the Timber wolf packs and asked if they had a gay warrior they could send me.”

Everyone laughed. Gunnar knew Maverick didn’t play with a full deck of cards. If he called all the packs, then he probably upset quite a few Alphas along the way. He knew Maverick didn’t care, and that’s what made it so funny.

“No way.” Cecil giggled as he drew in closer to his mate.

“Got me one, didn’t it? Although his entrance could have been a little less dramatic.” Maverick twisted his lips as he looked up at their new addition.

Montana shrugged his shoulders. “Killed those two blood suckers, didn’t I?”

“Canines work just as well as rocket launchers,” Maverick stated.

“But not as much fun.” Montana chuckled.

“Guess not.” Maverick mumbled, pulling at his soul patch. He turned his attention back to the room. “Seems we have something that is drawing the rogue vampires here. Prince Christian doesn’t know what it is, but we need to figure it out before we have another battle on our hands.”

The warriors took their mates to bed. The night had been exciting enough. They’d figure out the problem tomorrow.

Chapter Six

Nero looked around the forest, clutched the basket closer to his chest, and then began skipping. He came up short when a wolf came from behind a tree.

“What do you have under your cape, red?” The warrior crept forward, his canines exposed. He was sniffing the air and staring at Nero with desire.

“It’s supposed to be ‘basket.’” Nero whispered the correction to Gunny.

Gunny shook his head as he gave a low chuckle. “But I want to eat what’s under the cape, not what’s in your basket.”

“I’m on my way to Grandma’s house.” Nero batted his eyes as he pulled the red cape around his body.

“Don’t care. I’m a wolf, I eat meat, and I smell a sausage.” Gunny took a step toward Nero. His upper lip pulled back, exposing his canines further, and his fingernails grew some. Nero stared in fascination for a moment before clearing his throat.

“I don’t have sausages, just goodies.”

“Sounds the same to me, red.”

Nero reached in his basket and tossed a biscuit at Gunny. “Just goodies.”

“Come here and let me see your sausage.” Gunny leapt.

Nero turned and ran, the cape flying out behind him, choking at his neck. His arms flew out when his foot caught on a root jutting out from the ground. Strong arms circled around him and pulled him close to a warm chest.

“Gunny’s got you,” his wolf whispered in his ear. The big, bad wolf sat Nero on his feet as he took off again, minus the dropped basket this time. His feet skidded to a stop when the wolf appeared in front of him again from around a tree, not even panting like Nero was.

“My, what big teeth you have.”

“The better to nibble your cock with.” Gunny chuckled.

Nero’s jaw dropped at Gunny’s response. He was turned on big time. That’s not how the story went, but Nero could ad-lib just as well.

“And what a big tongue you have,” Nero said as he backed away.

“The better to lick your seed with.”

Nero fought back the giggles. “My, what a big cock you have.”

Gunny burst out laughing and had to clear his throat to answer Nero. “The better to fuck you with, red.”

Nero tried to turn and run, but Gunny grabbed him and lifted him from his feet. “Let’s see what red has under his cape.”

Nero squirmed around, Gunny running his hands all over Nero’s body, making his cock hard. “Hmm, I knew you were holding out, red. Look at that beautiful sausage.”

Nero’s head rolled back as Gunny lifted him higher and lapped at his erection. He felt devilish earlier when he was getting ready and left his clothes in their bedroom. Wrapping the cape tightly around his body, Nero managed to get out of the house unseen.

Gunny sat on a downed tree and draped Nero over his lap, belly down. He could feel a wet finger pushing inside of him. Nero moaned at the sensation in his bottom. He pushed his erection into Gunny’s jeans, trying his best to use the friction to his advantage.

“Fuck my leg, baby.” Gunny groaned as he wiggled his fingers inside Nero’s hole. He could feel Gunny’s other hand smoothing over his back. Although he was ashamed of his scars, Gunny never made him feel that way. His wolf always kissed them.

“Come for me, nutter.”

Nero ground his cock into Gunny's leg harder, the finger inside of him rushing in and out of his hole. "Gunny, Gunny, Gunny." Nero began his ritual chant. It started off slowly then built up higher until he was crying out his wolf's name.

"That's it, nutter. Come for me."

Nero shuddered as his body was racked with pleasure. He pushed his shaft into Gunny's leg harder as Gunny pushed his finger into Nero at the same strength. His damn brain was melting.

He was too boneless to move as Gunny turned him over and held him close. "I love you, nutter."

A tear slid down Nero's face. Not even his own parents had ever said that to him. He grabbed Gunny around his neck, burying his face in the corded strength of his mate's neck. If he ever lost Gunny, Nero wouldn't be far behind.

* * * *

Nero rubbed his eyes, looking around the room. It was still dark outside, so why was he awake? Gunny had made love to him again and then tucked Nero in to go on patrol. His wolf wouldn't be back until morning.

Nero waited for his eyes to adjust as he sat up in bed. Maybe his wolf got back early? Nero tossed the blanket aside and slid from bed. There were voices outside his bedroom door. Moving closer, he could tell one of them was Ricky's. Nero jumped when the window above the window seat flew open. He raced to the bedroom door and flung it wide, not caring that he only had his underwear on.

He screamed as he was grabbed around the waist.

This couldn't be happening.

Someone besides his Gunny was touching him. Nero's skin crawled at the uninvited encounter.

"Calm down, buddy. It's just Blair."

Nero held on as Blair ran down the hall with him in his arms. He looked back the way they came to see Ricky shifting. Nero wasn't sure what was going on, and he wasn't waiting around to find out either. His fingers dug into Blair as he smashed his eyes closed. Not good. Not good at all.

"I'm sorry, Nero. I know you don't like to be touched, but I have no choice, buddy." Blair held him more firmly as he ran with Nero down the winding staircase.

Nero looked up in time to see Gunny charging down the hallway. He squirmed around in Blair's arms. "Gunny," he yelled. Blair finally released him, enabling him to run to his wolf. Nero wrapped his arms around the fury neck.

"I'm scared. What's going on?"

Gunny nudged him back. "But I don't want to go with Blair. I want to stay with you." Nero cried.

His wolf whined and nudged him again. Nero hugged him once more before letting him go. Blair grabbed his hand and pulled him away from his wolf. Nero watched behind him as Gunny ran upstairs, running farther and farther away from him.

"Come on, Nero. We have to get to Maverick's office." He pulled Nero into Ricky's office and slammed the door.

"Gunny! I want Gunny." Nero wrapped his arms around his waist. He knew he had to be brave, but being separated from his mate at a time like this was frightening to him.

"He'll be back for you." Blair tried to soothe his worries, but it wasn't working. Nero could feel himself getting worked up just like he did when they were all shoved into the library.

He couldn't process this.

His brain was scrambling, and there was nothing Nero could do about it. Gunny. He had to be brave for Gunny. That's what he kept telling his brain.

"I need, I need..." Nero wasn't sure what he needed. Things were happening too fast. He wanted Gunny.

Just then the door flew open, and Nero ran behind the desk with Blair following him. He was ready to crawl under there when he saw his mate, in human form, standing in the doorway. “Gunny!” Nero raced across the room and jumped into his arms. His mate was fully clothed and a sight for his worried eyes. Things must be safe if his mate had time to dress. Nero inhaled Gunny’s strong, masculine scent, happy his wolf wasn’t harmed.

* * * *

Gunnar pulled his nutter tightly to him. When he saw that damn vamp scaling the house right outside his bedroom window, he thought he’d lose his mind. All he could think about was getting to his mate.

“Are you okay, nutter? Did he hurt you?”

“No, I woke up and heard him. I did. I ran.” Nero was clawing Gunnar’s back, hanging onto him for dear life. He ran his hands over his mate’s hair and back as he looked over to Blair.

“Thank you.”

“Where’s Dakota?” Blair asked apprehensively. Gunnar could see the worry in his eyes.

“He’s fine. The warriors are securing the house.” Gunnar carried his mate from the Alpha’s office as Blair followed behind them. “He’s in the den if you...” Gunnar didn’t even get to finish before Blair took off in that direction.

“Come on, nutter. Let’s get you back to bed.” Gunnar heaved his precious bundle closer in his arms as he carried his mate upstairs.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t braver. I tried to be, but my brain wouldn’t let me.” His mate tangled his blue-gloved hands in Gunnar’s shirt.

“That’s what I’m here for, baby.”

Gunnar straightened the covers out, placing his mate in their bed, “Here you go.” Shedding his clothes, Gunnar climbed in. He pulled his mate over his chest and covered them both, just holding close what fate deemed as his very own.

* * * *

Gunny tossed Nero against the wall. The palms of Nero's gloved hands slammed the wall on either side of his head. The wolf kicked his short legs apart, making him assume the position.

"You'll tell me where you hid the jewels." Gunny patted Nero down.

"Never, copper. You won't take me alive." Nero squirmed around, his cock becoming hard as a brick as Gunny's hands wandered over his body.

"I think I found them." Gunny squeezed Nero's cock through the denim. Nero had to bite back a moan.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I want my lawyer." Nero squealed when Gunny cuffed him with the handcuffs he had borrowed from Lewis. "Police brutality," Nero cried out as he fought against the hold Gunny had on him.

"You don't have to worry about that. I'm not taking you to the station." Gunny hauled him to the bed, gently lifting him up and placing him on his shoulders and knees.

"I don't have them, I swear, Officer." Nero tried to crawl to the other side of the bed, scooting his upper body along as his knees tried to quickly move him along. Gunny grabbed his ankles and pulled him back.

"I don't think so. You want me to add attempted escape to your charges?" He pulled Nero's shoes off, and then unsnapped his jeans, fishing inside his pants until he pulled Nero's cock free. "Found the jewels."

"They're my family jewels. I swear they're mine." Nero fidgeted until he could look over his shoulder. "I'll suck you off if you let me go, copper."

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't. You'll still suck me off though." Gunny hooked his hands under Nero's arms, pulling him to the edge

of the bed. Freeing his own erection, he tapped Nero's lips with his shaft, demanding entrance. "If you do a good enough job, I may drop the charges."

"Promise?"

"Nope. Now suck." Gunny's cock was weeping rivers of pre-cum. This would be Nero's first attempt at this.

His wolf was just so large it almost intimidated him into changing his mind. Gunny grabbed the base, Nero opened, and Gunny slid the head in.

Nero was afraid he wouldn't do this right. It would help if his hands weren't cuffed behind his back. It made him off balance, but Gunny was holding him up with his free hand. He tried to remember everything Gunny had done to him and repeat the process.

"Relax. You can't mess this up, nutter," Gunny softly reassured him.

Nero relaxed a degree. If Gunny said he would do well, then he would. He sucked the spongy head like a favored treat, his cheeks caving in, his tongue swirling around, darting into the little hole at the top.

Gunny hissed. "Shit, baby. That's it."

Nero leaned forward a little more, taking an inch more into his mouth. Nero soon realized that his tongue moving around made his Gunny moan. He flattened his tongue, rubbing it up and down Gunny's cock. He heard hissing and groaning as he played with the large vein underneath. Pulling back some, he rubbed the head, sucking more pre-cum out.

"Gonna make me come." Gunny pulled back then turned Nero around. His wolf lubed his hole, preparing him for the invasion.

"Gonna uncuff me, copper?"

"Not on your life. The image is just too damn erotic." Nero could feel his cheeks being pulled apart. He heard a low growl coming from Gunny as he was entered. "Fuck, Nero. Just...fuck."

Nero's fingers clenched then unclenched as Gunny pulled out then pushed back in. He spread his knees further apart, wanting deeper penetration. "Slam that tab into my slot."

Gunny's hand caressed the skin of his back, moving down to his hips and then his thighs, sending shivers of electricity through Nero.

He could feel his skin stretching, Gunny's cock skimming over nerves that made Nero's fingers curl and his eyes close.

His eyes flew open as his vision blurred, his body coiling for the orgasm that was about to carry him away.

"Gunny, Gunny, Gunny," Nero cried out as his seed spilled onto the bed. Crap, his cock wasn't even touched and it went off. Yeah, he was real interested in sex now, real interested. Gunny made the whole experience as exciting and pleasurable as one human being could only imagine it should be.

His mate slammed his pelvis into Nero's ass a few more times before he called out his name and started kissing his scars. Nero would never tire of that.

Pulling free, Gunny grabbed the key and released the cuffs. "You're free to go. Don't let me catch you around here again."

Nero laughed, falling face first onto the bed.

* * * *

Gunnar walked his mate into the diner. They took a seat at the counter. "Hey, Frank."

"How's it going, Gunnar?" The human owner smiled at the two. "I see I finally get to meet Nero. That's his name, correct?"

Frank was the only human who knew they were were-creatures. Mark's son came to visit, but no one had told the teenager their secret. They felt he was too young to know.

"Yeah, it's Nero." Gunnar watched as Nero eyed the seat and then looked up at him, hesitation in his eyes. "Do you have anything to sanitize the seat down with?" Gunnar asked Frank.

“I heard about him.” Frank chuckled as he reached under the counter and produced a bottle of disinfectant. “Is this good enough?”

“Yes, very good. Thank you, very good.” Nero grabbed the bottle and sprayed the seat down, wiped it clean with a paper towel Frank handed him, and then repeated the process one more time before doing the same to the counter in front of him.

Gunnar and Frank watched his nutter until Nero smiled and handed the bottle and used towels to Frank. “Thank you.” He took a seat and smiled up at Gunnar.

“Are you square now, everything good?” Gunnar ran a knuckle down Nero’s cheek.

“Yes, Gunny. I’m good.” Nero blushed as he turned around and picked up the menu with his gloved hands.

“So what are you men into today?” Frank asked as he poured a cup of coffee for Gunnar, handing him a few small cups of creamer.

Gunnar picked up his spoon, adding a small amount of sugar and two cups of cream to his coffee before stirring it together. He set the spoon down, taking a sip.

“Do you want some coffee?” Frank asked Nero. His mate nodded but then held a hand up when Frank offered the cream.

“We’re just hanging out, enjoying time together outside of the Den.”

Frank set the carafe down as he leaned his hip into the counter. “I hear Murphy’s having a book sale. It might be worth checking out.”

“Thanks. Maybe we will.” Gunnar stretched his right leg over, entwining it with Nero’s as he winked at his mate.

Nero smiled at the menu, his face flushing nicely. “I’ll have a sandwich. Ham.” Nero turned his cup until it sat with the handle facing away from him. “Wait! Ketchup please.”

Frank chuckled as he yelled the order to George. “What about you, Gunnar?”

I’ll have a meatloaf sandwich, ketchup please.” He smiled at Nero.

They ate their lunch and then headed outside. He really wasn't in the mood for books. Gunnar took a look around their small town. There weren't too many businesses. There were plenty of people on the street, but the town could use an expansion.

Gunnar walked his mate across the street to the park, walking Nero up the steps of the gazebo. A nice afternoon spent in the park would be refreshing.

Chapter Seven

“Hey, Birdie.” Nero looked up from his laptop, watching the large man enter his office.

“Did you find someone to install the cameras?” Birdie leaned a hip against the desk, staring down at him with a kind smile on his face.

Nero smiled up at him. “I’ve narrowed it down to three companies. I’m just waiting for their bids. Just waiting. That’s all, yeah. Just waiting.”

“Sounds professional. Let me know which one you decide on, and I’ll make sure they check out before we allow them near the house.”

Nero knew Birdie was trying to be nice, felt bad that he had scared him when Birdie first approached him about security. Nero liked how easy they were around each other now. “Do you want to see their credentials?”

The wolf came around the desk, pulling up the spare chair from the corner. He scanned all three websites. “They sound competent and professional.”

“That’s what I thought, too. I was thinking, with cameras around, we can see who’s at the front door or in the backyard without going out there. We should put motion sensors on the windows too.”

“I never thought of that. See how much extra the winning contractor will charge to install the sensors. Lord knows we have, like, a thousand windows in this place. They are our vulnerable spots, as that vampire proved last night.”

“Okay.”

“Where are those expense forms? Johnny needs new jeans, seems he had a little growth spurt in his early twenties, go figure. I’ll never understand humans and their constant growing well past their prepubescent age. It’s only a half inch, but his jeans are at his ankles now.”

Nero pointed to a tray sitting on his credenza right inside his office. “Make sure you give me the receipt, too.”

“I’ll remember.”

Nero smiled. The warriors were getting the hang of using the forms. Even though they could use their credit cards, it was still nice to know they cleared it with him first.

He only asked they filled out expense forms if they were going to spend over three hundred dollars and to make sure he got all receipts no matter what it was for.

Some really strange requests ended up in his in box. Like Kota ordering cock cages and some very sexual and expensive toys.

Nero didn’t want to know.

He approved new saddles for George and Tank’s horses, the vet bill, and stuff to feed the animals with. Now, those expenses made sense.

Nero also checked into Ricky’s accountant. The man seemed to be on the up and up. Nothing looked out of place. Numbers matched up, although his eyes had bugged out when he saw Ricky’s net worth was in the billions. He felt kind of foolish tracking these small expenses, but stepping over a dollar to pick up a penny didn’t sit right with Nero.

They had a very long time to live, and someone needed to make sure they had the money to do it.

He wasn’t much into will reading, but he had gone over Ricky’s. He named all of his warriors and their mates as his beneficiaries.

It seemed he wanted his pack to live comfortably when he and Cecil were gone. That would be no time soon, but it gave him a peace of mind knowing they wouldn’t want for anything. That’s why he

stayed on everyone about their expenses. A thousand years was a long time to be broke.

Opening his drawer, Nero scanned over his wish list. It seemed pretty silly in the grand scheme of things, but still Nero clicked away, ordering the toys he had only dreamed of owning. With that done, he went in search of Gunny.

“Hey, Jason, seen Gunny?”

Jason finished making his plate, cleaned up his mess, and stored the containers carrying the leftovers in them. “Sorry, man, haven’t seen him.”

Nero looked in the den then up in their room. Gunny was digging through the dresser drawers. “Hey, my little nutter.”

Nero sat on the bed, enjoying watching his mate just busy himself around their room.

“Ready for a walk?”

It had gotten a little colder out, so Nero went into their closet and pulled his coat out. “Ready.”

Gunnar walked with Nero to the kitchen, out the back door, and onto the path before stripping his clothes off.

Nero stood there once again transfixed at the large penis between Gunny’s legs. He knew he wasn’t well endowed, not like Gunny, but his wolf didn’t seem to mind.

Gunny licked all over him all the time. It was nice to know his mate wasn’t hung up on size or he would be in trouble. Yeah, big trouble.

He shifted, and Nero climbed onto his back, holding tight to Gunny’s fur as they made their way to the bluff. It had become their little piece of paradise, a place they called their own when they wanted to get away.

“It’s still beautiful up here, Gunny.” Nero sat up, watching the little, sleepy town below them. He could see Mark and Caden moving around the garage.

Cody and Keata were entering the diner, and Ricky and Cecil were going into the Café. He even saw Remi and Drew down by the pier.

“I could stay out here all day with you, Gunny.”

His wolf whined, lowering himself so Nero could climb off. After shifting, Gunny pulled Nero into his arms. “I love you, nutter.”

“I love you, too, Mr. Naked Man.”

Gunny moaned as Nero palmed his large cock, dropped to his knees, and ran his tongue around his balls. His wolf ran a hand over his head as intense pleasure surged through him. “I want to try something.” Gunny pulled away from him.

“Okay.” Nero stood, not sure what his Gunny had in mind.

“Will you be too cold if you take your pants off?” Gunny was already unsnapping them.

Nero held his hands out as Gunny unzipped him. “I guess we’ll know when my balls fall off.”

Gunny’s hands stilled as he stared down at Nero. Shaking his head, he helped him out of his jeans. Gunny lay on his back, positioning Nero above him. He sucked Nero’s cock as Nero did the same to him.

Nero’s legs fell to the sides as Gunny placed a wet thumb into his hole, twirling his tongue around Nero’s cock. Nero began to move his hips up and down, fucking deeply into Gunny’s mouth. Wiggling his thumb, Gunny pushed deep, and Nero emptied down his throat as he cried around Gunny’s cock.

Nero pushed forward, taking as much of Gunny as he could, his free hand rubbing Gunny’s thighs as he held onto the base so he wouldn’t choke.

Sucking harder, he moved his tongue around, knowing Gunny liked that. The cock in his hand throbbed as he squeezed it tight. Gunny shouted his name as seed erupted from his cock and down Nero’s throat.

Nero tried his best to swallow it, but it was too much and some of it ran down his face. Before he could wipe it away, Gunny pulled him up, spinning him around.

“Look at you, wearing my seed.” Gunny leaned forward and licked Nero’s face clean.

“Ew, stop licking my face.” Nero batted at him.

“You know you like it.” Gunny nipped his bottom lip before helping Nero pull his clothes back on.

* * * *

“I picked one.” Nero tugged on Birdie’s sleeve.

“Let’s go see your choice.” Birdie followed Nero, Johnny walking beside his mate.

Nero handed the Commander the printout, watching Birdie study his choice.

Nero was far from an idiot. He knew Birdie was in charge of security and only placating him. But that was okay. Nero would sleep better knowing there were cameras and alarms.

“I’ll see who they’re going to send and have Lewis do a background check.”

“Can we get a camera in our room?” Johnny asked as he played with something that twirled on Nero’s desk.

“We’re monitoring the house, not making a porno.” Birdie chuckled, running his fingers down his mate’s cheek. “Thanks, Nero.” Birdie grabbed Johnny’s hand as they left.

“Strange people,” Nero muttered as he straightened the toy on his desk.

Making sure no one was looking he pulled out sanitary wipes and wiped the toy down. He didn’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings so he had waited until they left before doing it.

Nero pulled the paperwork out of his inbox and rolled his eyes at another of Cecil’s requests. Last time he requested twelve reindeer.

This time it was for seven dwarfs, leaving a side note to tell Snow White to stay home because she wasn't needed.

Nero set aside the request. He was going to have to talk to Ricky about getting Cecil a hobby.

The next form requested kitty litter, tuna fish, and catnip. Nero wondered what Remi would need with these?

The items were under three hundred dollars, so he could go out and buy it himself, but for what? He set the form aside, reminding himself to ask the wolf.

Grabbing the requests, Nero found Remi in the den. "You don't have to fill out a form for kitty litter and catnip. Those are just receipt items." Nero stepped back when the wolves Storm and Cody started growling, the little Asian men with their hands on their hips, glaring at Remi.

"They're tigers, not fucking house cats, dumb ass." Cody growled at Remi.

Drew jumped in front of Remi with his hands stretched out. Shaking his head, Nero handed Remi the form and left them to their strange behavior.

"Ricky, can you get Cecil a hobby?" Nero handed the request to the wolf. Ricky scanned it over, his expression filled with hidden merriment.

"I'll handle this one."

Nero nodded, leaving the request with Ricky.

* * * *

Nero sat on the top step of the winding staircase. Gunny was out on patrol and all of his work was caught up, which left Nero bored, something he didn't like. It was late, and most of the boyfriends and their wolves were in their rooms.

"Hi."

Nero turned to see Kyoshi walk over to him and sit down. Nero scooted over, not wanting to be touched.

“I know you don’t like people touching you. I respect that. I promise I won’t.”

“Thanks, Kyoshi.” Nero nodded then looked back down the stairs at the foyer. He wanted Gunny. He felt lonely without him.

“Do you know why Remi asked for that cat stuff?”

Nero shrugged. It wasn’t any of his business. He was starting to get used to the strange requests in his inbox. Except for Cecil’s—Nero knew those were pranks.

“Something about tigers.”

“Can I show you?” Kyoshi asked him.

Fine, he would play along. He had nothing else to do right now.

“Why did Remi ask for cat stuff for you and Keata?”

Kyoshi stepped back. “Watch.”

Nero became extremely uncomfortable when Kyoshi began to take off his clothes. His eyes darted away.

This wasn’t right.

Kyoshi shouldn’t be doing this. Nero ran his hands over his head, becoming agitated.

“I’m sorry I’ve made you uncomfortable. We shorter mates don’t look at each other like that. I’ll remember next time. You have to look though, please.” Kyoshi spoke so softly that Nero forced his eyes to look over at him.

Right before his eyes, Kyoshi shifted into a tiger. Nero sat there numbly for a moment, unsure how to react.

It wasn’t a large tiger. He looked more like a cub, but, still, he had sharp teeth and claws. “That— that—that was pretty cool. Yeah, cool.”

The tiger lay next to him, licking its paws, but it didn’t touch Nero.

And he thought he was different? It seemed he fit in here more than he thought.

He was always being made fun of or totally ignored. People called him weird or strange, and many not so nice names had made Nero shy away from them.

But here it seemed he wasn't the odd man out, not by far. "Wait right here."

The tiger actually nodded. Nero shot to his room and was back in less than a minute. He snapped the latex gloves on then scratched Kyoshi behind his ears. The tiger purred, licking his gloved hands.

"My mate bothering you?"

"No, no bother. No bother at all." Nero smiled when Kyoshi batted his tiger eyes at his mate.

"Be nice, dragonfly." The wolf warned the tiger but rubbed its belly when Kyoshi rolled over. "Did he scare you?"

"No, no. He was real nice about showing me." If indecent exposure was nice. Nero played with his gloves, not sure if he should leave the two alone.

"He's a tiger shifter from Japan like his brother, Keata. I know, they call themselves cousins, but it's a long story." The wolf with swirly eyes offered an explanation that confused Nero even more.

Yeah, definitely not the odd man out here. Nero reached back out, running his hands over Kyoshi's tail.

"He's pretty." Nero hadn't realized he said that out loud until Storm thanked him.

His head snapped up when he heard loud footsteps on the stairs, Gunny running up them. He smiled, Gunny lifting him up, sitting down, then placing Nero in his lap.

"Hey, Kyoshi." Gunny rubbed the scruff of the tiger. He turned to his mate. "He didn't scare you, did he?"

"No, no, no. He got naked in front of me and shifted."

Both Gunny and Storm laughed. "Shifters tend to ruin a lot of clothes if they don't." Gunny hugged him close. Nero liked that, and he balled himself up in his wolf's lap. Gunny always made him feel so safe.

“Gloves?”

“I wanted to pet him.” Nero blushed. He knew it was a neurotic move, but if these people could shift and buy strange sex toys, then he could wear his gloves.

“I need to make sure you stock up on them then.” Gunny stood, carrying Nero to their room.

* * * *

Nero watched as Birdie assigned each worker a wolf. Of course, the humans didn’t know they were working around shifters.

Birdie said he didn’t want the humans by themselves for one second. Nero walked into one of the downstairs bedrooms that had been converted into a monitor room. Birdie made a roster of what each wolf would be monitoring. He wanted surveillance twenty-four hours a day.

There was a little refrigerator set up in the room, but that was about it. The Commander said he didn’t want any of the Sentries distracted. Birdie had threatened them if they didn’t take the job seriously.

Nero just scratched his head. He listened as the humans explained how to use the monitors, how to zoom in, and how to make the cameras move to follow someone.

Nero took notes so he would remember. He even made small labels to attach to certain controls so the others would know what they were for until they got the hang of things.

It took a full week to get all the sensors installed. At least now they didn’t have to worry about someone sneaking in, especially another vampire.

A light on a panel next to the screens would indicate which room it was if a sensor went off. Nero felt better now that the Den had a little more protection besides the wolves.

Even Ricky praised him for such a great idea.

Nero sat with Gunny when it was his turn to man the monitors. Gunny chuckled when Nero covered his eyes when the Sentries began stripping down to shift in the backyard. "Come sit on my lap."

"No, no, no. You have to watch the monitors," Nero protested.

He could see sitting here with his wolf wasn't such a good idea. Nero wouldn't be able to tell Gunny no for long. His wolf would start touching him and Nero would lose his mind. It happened every time. "I'll be back."

"Spoilsport." Gunny laughed as Nero left him to do his job.

Nero grabbed a pair of his gloves. Gunny had boxes of them under the cabinet in their bathroom and another haul of them in his office.

His wolf knew that was the only way he interacted with everyone else. It seemed only Gunny could touch him without him running to grab his sanitizer.

Keata's bedroom door was open, so Nero took one step in as he knocked.

"Hey, buddy." Cody smiled at him.

"Hi, uh, I hear Keata has mangas." Nero played with his gloved hands.

It was hard for him to make himself vulnerable like this. He had always made a conscious effort to stay away from people, and now he was trying to interact.

It was a huge step for him.

"Sure does." Cody laughed as Keata jumped up, ran to his dresser, grabbed a handful of books, and then ran over to Nero with excitement in his eyes.

Keata placed the books in his hands without touching him. Nero liked Keata.

"These are my mangas." Keata smiled proudly. Nero wondered why the man was so proud of comic books.

"He's learning to speak English in whole sentences, and he gets excited when he gets it right," Cody explained to him.

Nero nodded. He walked to the center of the room, sat down, and crossed his legs, Keata mimicking him. Nero opened the back of the first book, starting to read aloud. Keata's eyes grew wide as Nero suppressed the urge to run.

He wasn't used to speaking this way, and he always tried to stay out of the limelight. But if Keata had difficulty communicating, he would suffer through it.

"You speak Japanese?" Cody asked in surprise.

"My-my grandmother was from Japan, and she taught me." The larger men of the house made Nero nervous and made him trip over his words.

They still reminded him of his daddy. That was something Gunny had been trying to help him work on, and he was always assuring him no one in this house would hurt him. Nero was starting to relax more around them, but he just wasn't to that point yet. Maybe he never would.

"Well, I'm sure Keata would appreciate someone to talk to besides Kyoshi."

Nero hadn't thought of that. Keata would probably stay glued to his side now. Nero groaned inwardly. Taking a deep breath, he began to read again, Keata hanging onto his every word.

"I'll leave you two alone." Cody left the room as Nero felt Keata scoot closer. He still didn't touch him though.

It was a little difficult to turn the pages with his gloves, but he managed.

"Hey, nutter, can you and Keata follow Gunny?"

Nero looked up to see his wolf standing in the doorway. He didn't like the look in his eyes. Something was going on, especially since Gunny spoke softly to him.

Clutching the book to his chest, Nero reached out with his gloved hand and pulled Keata along with him. They ended up in Ricky's office. The other boyfriends were sitting there quietly, obviously nervous and jittery.

Ricky was sitting behind his desk with Cecil in his lap, smiling kindly at Nero. "I won't be long." Gunny kissed him then ran his knuckles down Nero face. "Just stay here, okay?"

Nero nodded as he watched Gunny close the door, leaving him behind.

Guiding Keata over to the leather sofa, Nero sat them on the carpet. He reached deep down for his courage then opened the book back up and started reading where he had left off. Kyoshi was sitting across the room, quietly interpreting for the others what Nero was reading.

Chapter Eight

Gunnar cut to the right, effectively blocking in the rogue wolf. It snapped and snarled as its muzzle pulled back. Gunnar's ears lay flat, and he growled menacingly.

The grey wolf was no match for him, and it knew it.

Loco and Tank had another wolf cornered, and Ludo and Murdock had killed the one closest to the house.

The rogue lunged, trying to fight his way out of the corner he was in, and the hairs along Gunnar's spine rose.

There would be no handing this one over to the Alpha of the grey wolves.

The rogue would force Gunnar to kill him.

Thoughts of keeping Nero safe drove Gunnar forward, snapping at the grey wolf to submit. No neck or belly was exposed. The grey wolf wasn't giving up.

Gunnar pulled to the left just as the grey wolf's jaw clamped down on air that, seconds ago, had been his shoulder.

Without any other choice, Gunnar snapped his jaws down on the grey wolf's throat, applying pressure until he heard the snap. The mates' safety came before anything else. Killing was the last item on Gunnar's least favorite thing to do list but the wolf left him no other option.

Dropping the carcass, Gunnar turned and was shocked. With his superior hearing, he knew more wolves had entered the backyard, but he had been so preoccupied that he hadn't registered that rogue vampires had shown up.

What the hell was going on here?

The Sentries had been warned that something was drawing them here. No one had figured out yet what it was. Racing across the backyard, Gunnar leapt onto a vampire, taking him down. Gunnar winced when another vampire's fangs bit into his flank, but he wouldn't give up the one he had his jaws locked on.

Grateful another Sentry got the ass-biting vamp off of him, Gunnar ripped into the undead's throat, killing the thing.

He worried for a moment. He saw that every wolf was out here, and he worried about the mates, but he knew the Alpha would kill anything that came near them. They were in good hands.

Were the rogue wolves and vampires working together? How had they managed that, and what were they after?

* * * *

After what felt like a lifetime, the Sentries had managed to secure the Den, and cleanup was next.

Ludo had been hurt, but it was nothing he couldn't heal from. It was in the wee hours of the morning before Gunnar could finally walk through the house and make his way upstairs to his mate.

Nero was asleep, curled up into a ball in the middle of their bed, still wearing his blue latex gloves.

Gunnar smiled at his little nutter before getting into the shower. It had been a long and draining night. All he wanted was to wrap himself around his mate and sleep like the dead.

Wrapping a towel around his waist, Gunnar walked quietly into their room, careful not to wake his sleeping beauty.

Maverick had told him how Nero had calmed the other mates by reading to them. He was proud of his little nutter, coming out of his shell to help the others when they were frightened. His little, blue-gloved hero.

Grabbing Nero's hands gently, Gunnar tugged the gloves off. His mate's hands were sweaty. He pulled his towel off, patting the moisture from Nero's small hands.

"Gunny?"

"Sorry, babe. I didn't mean to wake you." Gunnar slid into bed, tossing the towel on the floor with a reminder to himself to pick it up as soon as he woke.

Nero curled into his arms, falling back to sleep. Gunnar held him, thankful to have his mate safe with him.

* * * *

Nero wiggled around as the tiny cloth Gunny called shorts rode up his ass. His nuts were squished and his nipples were hard from the air on his exposed chest.

Picking up the serving tray, Nero walked across the bedroom Gunny had set up with a table that he now sat at. The stilettos were going to end up breaking his dang neck. "Here's your drink, sir."

Gunny slapped his ass, the sting making Nero's cock hard, which wasn't too comfortable in the confined space.

"Come sit on my face, doll." Gunny licked his lips, palmed his own cock and winked at Nero.

"Sorry, but that's against club policy." Nero turned to walk away, but Gunny grabbed his ass, pulling him backward until he fell on his lap. His hips jutted up, Gunny's hard cock driving into Nero's skimpy shorts.

"Do I need to call the manager?" Nero protested.

"Only if you want him to watch," Gunny breathed in his ear, his tongue licking Nero's neck.

Nero wiggled free, slamming the tray down on the table. "Next it will be your head if you paw me again."

“Come on, sugar, don’t be that way.” Gunny ran his fingers up the inside of Nero’s bare legs. He shuddered, remembering that he wasn’t supposed to like it.

“Hands off.” Nero smacked Gunny across the face. His wolf growled, grabbing Nero’s wrists in a light hold.

“You’ll pay for that. Do you know who I am?” Gunny threatened.

“A scumbag?” Nero spat out.

“I’m the Don. I can have any man I want, and I choose you. Now stop playing hard to get and strip for me.” Gunny released him and sat back with a smug smile on his face.

“Over my dead body.” Nero spun around, sashaying across the room. His ankle kicked out a little, but he managed to stay upright in the damn deathtraps Gunny called high heels. The body glitter was starting to itch, but he suppressed the urge to scratch.

“Not so fast.” Gunny grabbed him around the waist, pulling him tight to his body. “No one walks away from the Don.”

Nero pushed him away, slapping his hands onto his hips and giving Gunny a haughty laugh. “I just did.” Walking around Gunny, he sashayed back over to the table. Gunny had asked him to strut his stuff a lot, but he hadn’t told Nero the shoes were out to kill him. Nero found his niche with his wolf—role playing. They both seemed to love it, and it turned them the hell on.

“I could have you whacked for talking to me that way.” Gunny threatened him again. “You wanna sleep with the fish?”

“It would be better than sleeping with you,” Nero retorted.

“Why, I oughta...” Gunny raised his hand as if to slap Nero, but he knew it was pretend. Gunny would never hurt him. It shocked him that Gunny had begged Nero to slap him. He said he wanted it authentic.

“Go ahead, I dare you.” Nero lazily looked over his pink as pearl nail polish, as if Gunny were a mere irritation. Gunny’s cock had gotten hard watching Nero paint his fingernails and toenails earlier.

“You’ll take it up the ass and like it.” Gunny wiggled his finger at Nero.

“Hardly. Probably wouldn’t even feel it.”

“You that loose?”

“No, you’re that small. They say guys who buy big...”

“Shut the hell up.” Gunny yanked Nero up and tossed him onto the bed.

* * * *

Gunnar fought not to shoot his load. This role playing was turning him on so much that there was no blood in his body. It had all drained to his cock, making him hard as a brick.

He ran his hands over Nero’s legs with a feathery touch. The stilettos had taken his lust to a higher level. “I’ll have you begging for my cock when I’m through with you.”

“Begging for you to grow some more.”

Gunnar pulled at Nero’s tiny shorts, but only the tip of his index finger managed to fit into those tight things. “You’re a hot little slut. Come on, don’t be like that. Suck the Don’s cock.”

“Will it get you away from me?” Nero batted his eyelashes, driving Gunnar insane.

“No, I make you no promises.” Gunnar ran his knuckle down the bulge in Nero’s shorts. It took both hands to pry the snap loose.

Damn, how tight did he buy these?

The head of his mate’s cock peeked out, and Gunnar’s mouth watered for a taste. Instead, he ran his finger over it, Nero’s breath catching as he smeared the clear liquid around.

“The only promise I make is that you will feel good.” Gunnar pressed the palm of his hand into his own erection. He wouldn’t be able to hold out much longer.

Nero flipped over, his scantily covered ass wiggling as he tried to climb across the bed. The stilettos made the vision erotic as hell.

Pushing his finger into the crotch of Nero's shorts, Gunnar ran his finger into Nero's crack, poking at his tight star. Nero stumbled, his shoulders hitting the mattress as his ass pushed back.

Guess his nutter couldn't hold out either. Gunnar pulled his mate back to him, careful not to pinch his nuts as he pulled at the crotch of the shorts. His hands glided over the leather cover, the mounds tempting him.

"N-no, Don, you can't...oh hell, take it." Nero spread his knees apart as Gunnar pushed his finger into Nero's puckered hole.

His mate moaned, but Gunnar knew he had to grab the slick so he wouldn't hurt him.

Reaching into the nightstand with his free hand, Gunnar threw the bottle of sanitizer across the room as he grabbed the lube.

He freed his finger, poured some on, then slid in between the shorts until his finger sank back in. "Fuck, nutter, so tight." Gunnar moaned as he began to push and pull his finger. Reaching to unsnap his own jeans, Gunnar pulled his erection free and started to slowly stroke it.

Another finger joined the first. He knew the shorts would have to go in a moment. They were too tight to fuck him in, but he wanted the vision to last just a bit longer.

Nero pulled forward, and Gunnar waited until his mate turned onto his back. "Give me your seed." Nero opened his mouth to catch it, and Gunnar went nuts.

He shucked his jeans off and grabbed a stiletto in his left hand as he leaned forward and jacked his dick off with his right, shouting as his seed spurted, hitting Nero in the face. Only a small portion actually made it into his mouth.

"Fuck, baby. Shit." Gunnar gasped, his cock still rock hard in his hand. "Shorts. Off. Now," he panted.

Nero pushed at the waistband, fighting to free himself. Gunnar let go of the heel as helped his mate get out of them. Too wound up, Gunnar threw Nero's legs back, the heels adding to the fucking

devilish sight in front of him. His nutter naked, spiked heels on and wearing pretty pink polish as his skin sparkled with body glitter, his cum still splattered across Nero's face. Show Gunnar a more erotic sight and he would call them a liar.

"Can't hold back," Gunnar warned Nero as he pulled him to the edge of the bed and plunged in. Nero cried out, but Gunnar knew how to differentiate his mate's sounds. This one was pure pleasure.

"Fuck me, Gunny," Nero begged.

"You got that right." Gunnar pounded into him as Nero held his legs back. Reaching down, Gunnar grabbed that fat little cock in his hand, thrusting it up and down as sweat poured from him. "Come for me, nutter."

Nero shouted, his seed erupting as Gunnar threw his head back, shouting to the ceiling as he emptied his nuts.

Gunnar shuddered as mini orgasms racked his body. "God, I love those shoes."

* * * *

Gunnar ran his hands through his hair as he stared at his watery-eyed mate.

This couldn't have gone more wrong.

"Why, Gunny? Why would you do that to me?" Nero cried. "I trusted you. Yeah, trusted you."

"It's not what it looks like, nutter. Please, let me explain." Gunnar held a hand out, but Nero turned away from him. It was tearing his heart in half to see his mate so distraught. Gunnar stared at Nero as his pained look turned to anger.

"I trusted you!" Nero shot out of their room. Gunnar cursed and went after him. All he had tried to do was help out another Sentry. Murdock came to him with splinters in his side, something he couldn't get out himself from patrolling in the forest.

He could only imagine how it looked for his mate to walk in and see Gunnar sitting on the bed, a naked wolf standing right in front of him. If his mate had taken the time, he would have seen the antiseptic spray and tweezers.

“No,” Nero cried as Gunnar caught up to him and pulled him into his arms. Nero fought to get free, but Gunnar held him tight as he took him back upstairs. Murdock was still standing there looking uncomfortable. The warrior had the decency to put a towel around his waist.

Gunnar sat down on the bed with his combating mate. “Nero, stop.” Gunnar grabbed his wrists to stop them from being hurt. Although his chest was the one being pounded on, his mate’s hands were small and soft and would bruise easily.

“I’ll leave you two alone.” Murdock backed away.

“No, come over here.” Gunnar could feel his nutter shaking in his arms. He gestured for Murdock to come over to their bed. “Show my mate what I was doing.”

Nero hid his face in his blue gloves, shaking his head back and forth as if that could make everything go away.

“He wasn’t doing anything sexual, Nero.” Murdock assured his small mate. “My dumb ass jumped over a pile of logs in the back and wiped out. I couldn’t get the splinters out myself, I swear. That’s all.”

Nero peeked up at Murdock and then his eyes slowly lowered to the reddened area. His hand reached out and poked at the skin Gunnar had been working on. “See?”

Nero buried his face again, and Gunnar knew this time it was from embarrassment. He chuckled as he rocked his nutter in his arms. “Thanks, Murdock.”

The warrior nodded and left.

“Look at me, mate.” Nero gradually lowered his hands. “Do you think I would ever, in a million gazillion years, ever think of cheating on you?”

“It looked....” The tears started again. Gunnar brushed them away with his thumbs.

“I know what it looked like. We shifters are used to seeing other shifters naked. We grew up that way. Murdock standing there nude did nothing for me. But this...” Gunnar unsnapped his mate’s jeans and slid his hand in until he could squeeze Nero’s cock. “Now, this does everything and more for me.” He pushed Nero’s ass down against his own erection to prove his point.

“I’m sorry, Gunny. I should have trusted you.”

“Hell, I would have flipped out, too, if I walked in and saw the same thing.” Gunnar rubbed his mate’s back. “Are we okay now?”

Nero nodded, and Gunnar pulled his hand free. He held his mate tighter in his arms and deeply inhaled his scent. His chest exploded with his little nutter’s aroma. Nothing in the world would ever smell this good. “Never think that I desire anyone but you, nutter.”

“No. No one but me. No one,” Nero answered, but Gunnar could see his mate’s eyes close and his head roll around Gunnar’s arm. If only they could fool around. He kissed his mate before setting him on his feet.

“Sorry, baby. I have to go see our Alpha.” Nero gave him a dazed nod, almost running into the wall on his way out of their room.

Gunnar grabbed his shoulders and guided him into the hallway then thought better of it. He picked his mate up and carried him down the steps, taking no chance his mate would fall in his sexual daze.

“Are you going to be all right?” Gunnar smiled when his nutter gave him a big, goofy grin and nodded, turning to enter his office.

“Wildcat.” Gunnar chuckled as he entered Maverick’s office.

* * * *

Nero took a deep breath and walked toward the den. This was his family now.

Sooner or later, he would have to get used to them. He still didn't want to be touched though.

That hadn't changed.

When it was ingrained in you for twenty five years, you didn't just stop being that way overnight.

He stood outside the archway for a moment just watching everyone else. Some were playing that strange pretzel game again while others jumped around playing video games. Some big men were playing pool. He could do this. Yeah, he could.

"Hey, Nero, come over here," Blair called to him. Nero nodded and crossed the room. The music was deafening, but it didn't bother him. Without a word, Blair handed him a controller. Although Nero was an expert with electronics, he never played these games. He wasn't even sure he would know how.

Nero's eyes followed the graphics. He tried his best to figure the toggles out, but they seemed to be conspiring against him. Deciding this wasn't for him, he handed it back to Blair and instead walked over to watch the big men play pool.

"Hey, buddy. Do you want to play?"

"I don't know how. Never played. No, never."

"It's not hard, Nero." The wolf explained the rules to him in the simplest terms. Nero didn't know if he should be offended. He wasn't stupid.

"We haven't been formally introduced. I'm Loco." Word must have gotten around because the wolf didn't try to shake his hand. That was good.

"I know who you are, Train." Nero stepped back as the man laughed boisterously.

"I heard about your knack for renaming everyone. Train, I like that." Nero stood there twisting his hands together. It wasn't a knack to him. It was a malfunction of the brain. He used word association for everything, but when it came time to remember, he used the associated word instead of the original. His mind just worked that

way. It wasn't as if he did it on purpose. It was quite embarrassing actually. He was happy no one paid attention to his misfiring cells.

"Okay, you ready to play?"

Nero nodded as he walked around the table, trying to figure out the game. He took a shot, but nothing went into any pockets. A step stool would help him immensely, but he wasn't going to suggest it. What dignified man would?

"You'll get the hang of it," Train promised as he knocked at least four balls in. Yeah, he would never get it.

"It is harder to play than when you explained it. Yeah, harder." Nero scratched a blue hand over his temple. He wasn't too sure he liked this game either.

Maybe he wouldn't like any of them, and the boyfriends and wolves wouldn't want to be bothered with him.

The thought upset him. He really was trying. At least he had role playing. He knew he was good at that. They had fun with it.

"Your shot, buddy." Train leaned back as Nero snapped out of his thoughts. "Remember, you have solids."

Nero nodded, looking over the billiard table to see where all of his balls were. There seemed to be an easy one he could take. If he missed this, he needed to put the stick down and step away from the table.

A small crowd had formed around the table, making Nero extremely nervous. It was one thing to know he played badly, but it was another for everyone to watch. "You can do it, nutter."

Nero twisted his neck around to see his Gunny standing behind him. Gunny readjusted Nero's arm and pushed his hips slightly to the right.

"Hey, no cheating, Gunnar."

Gunny flipped him off. "Are you afraid my mate will beat you, Loco?"

The wolf grunted. "Even I will admit you're good, so no helping shorty out."

Gunny ignored Train as he helped Nero place the stick on his fingers. "Now tap it lightly, no need to use a lot of strength." Gunny kissed his head and stepped back.

Talk about pressure. Nero felt like he was going to implode. Not only was everyone watching, but now his mate was standing behind him waiting for Nero to make that expert shot. What if he missed? Would Gunny be disappointed in him?

Taking a deep breath, Nero pulled his arm back and let the stick go. It tapped the white ball then the solid one he was aiming for. Heck, he was happy it even touched the ball he wanted.

"That's my nutter." Gunny shouted as the ball went in. Nero's cheeks hurt from the wide grin that spread across his face. He did it!

Gunny set him up for his next shot. After a moment, he forgot what they were doing and only his wolf was his focus. The masculine scent was driving him nuts. Gunny smelled so dang good, so manly. Yeah, very manly.

He wanted his mate to wrap those arms around him and toss him up onto the table while screwing his brains out. Gunny must have felt the same way because he scooted closer to Nero's back and his erection pressed into his butt.

"I can feel what you're feeling, you little horny devil." Gunny softly laughed with that sexy sound of his and nipped the top of Nero's ear. Nero blushed, looking around to see if anyone else saw or heard them. Only Train was grinning at him. That was one too many in his opinion.

He tried to get his brain to refocus on the game but it was kind of hard with his wolf standing right behind him. "Just relax, nutter."

Nero nodded at his mate's words as he took his next shot. Score!

"Yeah, Nero," Keata and Johnny cheered. Nero couldn't stop the grin if he wanted to.

"I see I'm going to have to step up my game," Train teased him.

“Yeah, step it up, partner. Yeah, step.” Nero surprised himself with the taunting. Only had Gunny made him feel so relaxed he allowed a part of himself to come out.

“Keep talking smack. You’re going down,” Train challenged.

Nero wasn’t sure if he made the man angry or not. He wasn’t serious, only joking. Did Train think he was?

Nero looked up at Gunny, wondering if his mate was mad as well. Gunny winked at him. “Kick his rear end, nutter.”

Okay, as long as his wolf wasn’t mad, he could do this. Nero stretched up on his tiptoes and let the stick go. The solid ball bumped around the table but missed. Nero looked behind him again. Gunny didn’t look mad.

“Stop worrying. It’s just a game, baby.” Gunny reassured him as if reading his mind. His wolf patted his butt before stepping back again.

He ended up losing, but it had been fun playing. He wasn’t sure he wanted to play again, but with Gunny there helping him it was enjoyable.

They both walked out of the den, Nero feeling good about the game.

“Now you owe me for the lost game.” Gunny pulled Nero around by his upper arm.

“I don’t have the money, Frankie fingers.” Nero tried to pull his arm away, but Gunny—oops, wrong name—*Frankie* had a tight grip.

“I should cut off your fingers for this, punk. Better yet, I think I’ll take it out in skin.” Gunny wiggled his eyebrows.

Nero giggled and turned, racing up the stairs to their bedroom with a horny wolf close behind. He looked over his shoulder and squealed when he saw Gunny gaining on him.

He shot across the room and tried to make it to the bathroom door, but he was captured before he could close the door.

“Think you can outrun me, punk?” Gunnar asked as he hauled Nero from the bathroom.

“That’s exactly what I thought.” Gunny growled.
Nero giggled louder as Gunny dropped him on the bed.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn Hagen loves writing about the somewhat flawed, but lovable. She also loves a hero who can see past all the rough edges to find the shining diamond of a beautiful heart.

You can find her on any given day curled up with her laptop and a cup of hot java, letting the next set of characters tell their story.

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