

# KNIGHT OWL



C. DALLAS FLOYD

## KNIGHT OWL

Bennett Grey doesn't like to kill. He doesn't like keeping secrets. He doesn't like much at all. But when a handsome newcomer and his sons move to town, he can't keep his distance. And just when he thinks he's found a family of his own; he realizes everything he hates is everything worth doing. Falling in love can be hard. For Bennett Grey, falling in love can be bloody.

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## KNIGHT OWL

**By C. Dallas Floyd**

### Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

### What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

### Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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## Photo Description

A blond man holds the hand of a young boy and holds another child in his arms. They are standing atop a rocky ledge overlooking a river with grassy hills in the distance and an overcast sky above them.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*This was my first glimpse of him, the man that completes my life, and his two beautiful children. I knew, somehow, that meeting him, meeting them, would change my life forever... and I was not disappointed. It wasn't long before their demons came calling, and even I was surprised by my protective instincts, despite my violent past and desire for family. Little did I know just what a blessing being part of his family would become, and what it would mean for my future.*

*No non-con, BDSM, or super-kinky shenanigans. Looking for something that's sweet but with some heat, and would prefer at least one of the characters (likely the "observer") to be a shifter of some kind.*

*Sincerely,*

*Brett*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary, paranormal

**Tags:** family, sweet, alpha, humorous, hurt/comfort, shifters-wolf/non-wolf, suspense

**Content Warnings:** Very Strong Happy For Now

**Word Count:** 16,653

*Acknowledgements*

Thanks to Brett for creating this wonderfully sweet prompt. It's been so much fun bringing your guys to life.

This story is dedicated to...

My husband, Dustin. For your love and commitment. My Knight, I love you.

My sister, Courtney, at Hartness Photography— for creating this awesome cover.

NOLAStars, my favorite group of writers. You are all amazing.

Chris Cox, Winnie Duplessis Griggs, and Liz Talley—For awakening in me the spark to once again write. I haven't found greater friends.

**KNIGHT OWL**  
**By C. Dallas Floyd**



## Chapter One

Try not to judge me too harshly. All I really wanted was to see him. To feel him beside me. All I ever wanted was his arms around me. At night, in my bed, all alone—all I ever wanted was to feel the solace of his body. But, all I could do was watch.

So I watched him from the tree outside his window. I wasn't close enough to feel his skin or hear his breath. I wasn't close enough to see the brilliant shades of green in his eyes. I wasn't close enough to smell the day upon his skin. Yet, from the oak outside his window, and even in the darkness of night that fell over its branches, I recognized the same expression on his face that told me he, too, longed for the solace of a body. And I only wished it was mine.

Again, I ask you to not judge me. I'm not a creep. Not much of a beast. I am many things. I *have been* many things. Now, all I am is lonely. You're probably saying to yourself, "But you're a Shifter! You can be anything, anyone you want. You can fly to the highest mountain and swim to the deepest of oceans. You can morph your image to that of the most desirable man alive, or woman if you chose." And I'd tell you, sure. I could. All that is easy. Appearances. However, the heart that slowly beats in my chest never changes. It pumps the same cold blood. It pumps the same rage, fear, and sadness. The only time I don't feel alone is when I'm watching him, sometimes following him, wanting to learn all there is to him. I just want him to give me a chance. Like I'm asking you to.

His name is Trent and he's just turned his bedside lamp off. He's twenty-six and by now he's drifting away to a world of paradises. His body is hard with muscles, yet he rests so softly beneath the white sheets that drape him. He's more of a man than any I could shift into. Only a real man could raise two young boys alone and still be a worthy father.

Now you're probably saying to yourself, "He has kids? Where's his wife?" Well, simply put, there isn't one. He didn't choose the life he's living now. Then again, that's not keeping him from giving them the life they deserve. It's not keeping him from giving back to them what was so quickly torn away.

Yeah, he's a good man. The best kind. And though I've never spoken a hello to him; I find myself never wanting to say good-bye.

I let my owl wings stretch out and took to the night's gales. Soaring like there was no destination. Freedom only temporary. Soon, I had to return to the four walls I called home.

Home?

Those four walls felt like an empty cage. At times it was exactly that. A cage for my wrath and violent nature.

It's been months since my last break. I've been able to control the anger lurking beneath my calm veneer. Though, it's harder in my human form; when I'm Bennett. Bennett's weak like a child. But then I remember he—I never really got to be a child.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Two

### *Trent*

Trent's sister's final words resonated within him as he watched her sons—now his sons, fast asleep in their bunks. He closed his eyes, the memory more vivid that way. He could still feel her cold grip on his wrist. Her soft, spaced words like lyrics.

*“Take my boys, Trent. Make sure they're safe. Tell them I'm sorry.”*

Her eyes flickered shut, and one last breath abandoned her lungs.

“Earth to Uncle Trent!” A tug at Trent's khakis brought him back to reality. His vacant expression freshened when he saw the gleam in his young nephew's eyes staring up at him.

Trent squatted to eye level and gave Brody a good morning noogie.

“Hey Sprout, go wake your brother. Got some oatmeal in the kitchen.”

Brody's face twisted up like he'd bitten into a lemon. “Oatmeal? Guh-ross!”

“Hey, it'll make you strong.” Trent stood up proudly flexing his biceps. “And one day you'll be as big as me.”

Brody sneered and ran off, disregarding Trent's request. *Damn kid's too smart for his own good.* He got that from his mother. She was clever, always breaking the rules. There he went again—letting his mind wander back to his sister.

*Stop. She's gone.*

Trent convinced his legs to move toward the bundle of superhero blankets where his five-year-old nephew, Jules, slept. He peeled back the layers until a familiar tickled face appeared.

“Did you hear him, Uncle Trent?” Jules asked.

“Who, buddy?”

Jules rounded his lips, “Hooo Hooo.”

“Ahh, you mean that owl. Yeah, I heard him.” The damn thing was partly to blame for Trent's lack of sleep last night, too. “Come on, buddy. Today's a big day for you and your brother.”

"I don't wanna go."

"It won't be so bad. You'll make plenty of friends. Promise."

"I miss Mommy." Jules returned to his cocoon of supermen.

"I know. I do too. But hey, you have me now!"

"You won't leave me there, will you?"

His tiny words gave pause to Trent's heart. So long, that Jules rose up, waiting for an answer.

"I will never leave you or your brother. It's us now."

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart."

\*\*\*\*

Anderson Elementary reminded Trent of his days in grade school. He hoped things were different, maybe even better for today's generation. Jules took his big brother's hand. Trent watched on as they seemingly marched off to war. That's what school had felt like to Trent, a constant fight for acceptance. The Battle of Morals vs. Heart.

\*\*\*\*

When Trent moved himself and his nephews to Oklahoma, he was lucky to find a job creditable to his skills. Senior Wildlife Biologist sounded good enough to him, though Oklahoma Reserve was quite different than the terrain of Missouri that he was used to.

Trent wasn't one for offices or boxes, either. They reminded him of the cages he too often had to trap animals in. And like those animals, only the lucky were released. Trent was one of the lucky few. Today, so was the coyote in the back of his work truck.

Miles deep in a prairie blossoming with wildflowers, Trent killed the rumbling engine and looked to his rearview mirror. The coyote, still captive though rehabilitated, peered through the cage door and their stares met. A golden beam of sunlight passed across his wild eyes as Trent pressed the release button to the cargo door. The coyote raised his head and boasted one more howl in honor of his freedom. He looked back at Trent and appeared to nod in thanks before disappearing in the thickets. The corners of Trent's chapped lips rose to a smile. The feeling of giving back something that had

been taken away always made him feel like he meant something. Even in the smallest of ways, to the wildest of creatures, at least he meant something.

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## Chapter Three

### Bennett

*Mirrors. People love them. Perfect for the vain. How wonderful it must be to look into one and see yourself staring back. How great it must feel to be comfortable with and accept the image within one. I don't get this satisfaction. When I look into the fractured pane of this mirror, all I see is who and what I've been. I have no true identity. I am whoever I want to be, whatever my moods or emotions want me to be.*

*Wait, there he is, in a tiny sliver of mirror, I see him. I see the man the outside world knows me to be. Bennett Grey. Probably average by most standards. My Native American heritage gave me dark features. Skin, eyes, and hair all darkened, like my life.*

*Who needs mirrors?*

I plunged my fist into the deceiving shards of glass sending them flying. My hand shook, blood dripped from my knuckles but not for long. One benefit of the curse I'd inherited from my father was healing. I watched the wounds mend and the blood dry up and vanish. One thing remained, that one sliver of mirror, clinging to the wall. I didn't see myself this time. I saw him. Was he the part of me I could never see? Was he the absent piece that would complete me? It may have been the first time in years that a smile adorned my face. But it did and it was because of him. I needed to have him.

Something inside me twisted. Not a good feeling. Like all those shards of glass were whirling and cutting at my insides. I knew this feeling all too well. Another shifter was near and I could smell him right outside my door.

I thought I'd run far enough away he'd never find me. Should have known I couldn't hide for long. He was the only one that could sniff me out. I didn't want to believe it, but bursting through the door, proving his putrid existence, was my brother. Stronger, bigger than I remembered him. I found myself racing towards him ready for a fight. My blood turned hot, my fists curled.

“What are you doing here? How did you find me?”

“Oh, come on, brother. You didn't think you could hide from me did you?” He looked around the dismal room, at fist holes punctured in the walls, at the lone shredded mattress in the corner. “You've lowered your standards, I see.”

“Anything is better than what you’re calling home. I’d take this any day. Stop playing games. Why are you here, Guy?”

“You need to come back. Forget this place—this hellhole.”

“Not a fucking chance! Get. Out.”

“Calm yourself, little one. I have made no threats.” Guy slithered in closer and whispered, “I know your dirty little secret.”

My own strength surprised me when I threw him back. I felt big, strong... until he laughed.

“Now that tickled.” Guy cracked his neck. “Stop denying it, Bennett. We all know. Hey, it’s cool. We just want you back.”

“I don’t care what you or any of the others know. This is my home now. I’m not going back to that life. Guy, this is the last time I’ll tell you. Leave my house. Now.” My eyes felt as if they were soon going to burst into flames. A telltale sign I was on the verge of turning. Into what, I didn’t know. But I could feel the old me, the violent me creeping in.

“Bennett, oh, what’s that I smell?” He inhaled a deep breath from the air around me.

“Don’t.” I fumbled backward. Knowing he was trying to read me. Another pitfall of this forlorn curse. Blood knows blood. If he wanted, he could read my feelings and my memories. I lacked the strength, and Guy was older and more powerful than me on a bad day.

Too late, he already knew. “Ohhh, he’s a pretty one, too.” His laugh was dry and caustic. “And those kids, so vulnerable.”

In an instant, I had him by the neck. “I’ll kill you, goddamn it. I swear it, if you even go near them. I’ll know it and I’ll rip your heart out.”

“Oh brother. Your threats don’t worry me. I never said I’d hurt them. It’s not them I want. It’s you.” Guy escaped my grip and came face-to-face with me. “I’ll give you some time to think. I will be back, brother. And I won’t take no for an answer next time. You can get back to your little *fairy* tale now.”

Guy departed just as quickly as he’d appeared.

*Damn him!*

Who the fuck did he think he was coming here and threatening me? I couldn’t shake the worry of him hurting Trent or his boys. He said my words were threats but I don’t make threats. I finish them.

I had been in my preferred form as a Great Horned Owl, scouring for prey in the forest when I first saw them. And there they were, lakeside and happy. I watched them enjoying the nature, laughing and playing. Children being children. A man being a father. No lies. No secrets. Just love. Pure, true love. It was that day that I won't ever forget. Because that was the day I knew something inside me had changed. I wasn't violent Bennett anymore. I was new.

*Find him. Make sure he's okay.* It was Guy's nature to take things from me, including people. I flew until I found them. I was relieved to find Trent unscathed. The boys were safe too, piling into his car from a long day at school. If I could just be a part of their family I could always be there to protect them.

I followed them home and when I saw the dilapidated shed in Trent's back yard an idea sparked. I was taking a risk. And because I was never good with the formal "Hello my name is Bennett. Let's be friends" thing; this was my only shot. And a chance I was willing to take. *Come on, self. Don't let me down.*

Chest out, breath fresh, hair combed, ready. I eased up to the small Victorian. Potted flowers lined his front steps. A weathered porch swing rocked in the breeze. I exhaled, but I couldn't stop the color draining out of my face. The doorbell chimed with a press of my finger. The wind returned to tussle at my hair. And as I attempted to lay it down, the door swung opened.

He was even more handsome up close. His eyes were green like springtime. His smile was soft and subtle and brighter than the stubble around it. He was nothing short of perfect. He opened his mouth, his voice just as welcoming as his skin.

"Hello. Can I help you?" He stepped out onto the porch just inches from me. For a moment, I forgot exactly why I was there. His cologne was Aspen pine, reminiscent of my foresty haven.

"Hi. I—I noticed your shed in the back. Looks like it could use some work. And..." I stalled, like an idiot. I wasn't making any sense.

"Oh yeah. We just moved here and I haven't really given it much thought."

"I could, ya know, help out. I do carpentry part-time but I was looking for some work on the side. I wouldn't charge much." Hell, I'd do it *pro bono* for him. But I had to seem legit.

Trent's eyes tapered. "I don't know. I was actually thinking about tearing it down and opening up the yard some anyway. Thanks though."



Damn. I screwed it up. I knew my timidity would be my downfall.

“Oh, okay. Well, have a good one then. Nice meeting you.” I gave him a gracious nod and was halfway down the porch steps when he stopped me.

“Hey. On second thought, I could use the space to store some things. Might not be the only thing around here that needs some fixin’ up.”

“Well, I’m pretty damn handy and can fix just about anything.” Except my own life. That one seemed broken beyond repair.

“Why don’t you come back tomorrow ’round noon? I can show you around the place and we’ll put together a list of things. I’m Trent Moss, you are?”

“Oh, um, Bennett. Bennett Grey.” I offered my hand anxiously. He accepted it and shook it firmly. His palms were rough, a sign of a hard-working man. My kind of man.

“It’s nice to meet you, Bennett.”

“Yeah, you too. So, tomorrow, at noon, then?”

“Sounds good. See you then.”

I was sure I’d never had pep in my step. But walking down the sidewalk, I couldn’t help but feel accomplished. Trent was willing to let me into his life. Sure, it was just as a helping hand but *finally* something good. The delight was overwhelming. My heart rocketed. Everything around me seemed brighter. I wasn’t sure, but I detected an inkling of passion budding inside me.

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## Chapter Four

### *Trent*

Trent watched as the mysterious Bennett Grey neared his front door. When they had met, Trent saw something in him that made him want to know more. He was handsome, young, and strong. He was also willing to help around the place. No denying that it could use it. But mostly, Trent wanted to see Bennett sweat. Two years of being single did things to a person. So what if all Trent wanted to do now was gawk? No hurt in that. Right?

Trent opened the door to let Bennett in, along with a sticky gust of May air. Bennett wore a tight-fitting denim shirt and frayed cut-off denim shorts. His construction-worker boots and rusted tool box completed Trent's fantasy.

"Morning, Trent. Thanks again for the work."

"No problem. So, you ready to get started?" Trent motioned him to follow through the kitchen and out the patio door. "Well, here it is. Pretty sad isn't it?"

Bennett examined the shed carefully while Trent checked other things out. Like Bennett's legs for example, which were strong and defined by a thin layer of dark hair. His ass was firm and cozied nicely into the tight shorts. Trent imagined running his hands down and under the center seam of Bennett's shorts.

"Not so bad really." Bennett set his tool box down revealing just enough skin above his beltline. "Nothing a few screws can't fix."

Trent was sure he wasn't insinuating anything by the statement but that didn't keep him from thinking about it for a second or two. Trent had to be careful not to get aroused. His Wranglers wouldn't be one bit forgiving. Trent swallowed the thought. "So what can I do to help?"

"Nah man, you ain't gotta. You're doin' me a favor by letting me work for you anyway."

"But I really don't mind. Four hands are better than two. Plus, it'll get done quicker and we can move on to another project I had in mind." Trent had several jobs in mind for Bennett. But most of them were clothing optional.

"Well, I was going to start inside. I noticed some support beams need tightening. Got a ladder?"

Trent retrieved a ladder and returned to Bennett who was already inside the shed tossing out the remnants of junk the previous owners had left. Bennett took the ladder from him and set it up beneath a support beam running the length of the shed.

“Mind spottin’ me?”

Like he could say no. Trent wanted to spot every inch of him.

Trent couldn't keep focused on the job at hand. Not when Bennett's hard stomach kept peeping out every time he'd raise his muscled arms. Sweat rippled down his smooth, dark abdomen and soaked into the denim above his zipper.

“That should do the trick.” Bennett used the bottom of his shirt to wipe the perspiration from his brow. Trent could smell Bennett's dampness, making him thirsty.

“Well, I don't know about you but I've worked up quite a thirst. I'll be right back.”

Trent needed to take a time out. Bennett was unknowingly turning him on and Trent didn't want Bennett noticing the excitement growing in his jeans. This man was doing something to him. And Trent liked it.

Through the kitchen window, Trent watched Bennett remove the blue denim shirt he was wearing. He didn't blame him; the late-spring heat was dreadful. Bennett's arms and chest glistened with beads of sweat. He was everything Trent ever wanted in a man. He imagined Bennett in his bed, his arms coiled around him. Trent could almost feel Bennett's smooth chest against his cheek.

Trent splashed cool water on his face. He had to get back to work. Bennett was probably wondering where he had gone off to. Trent grabbed himself and Bennett a bottle of water and tried not to think of Bennett pouring it over his chest. But that's all he could think about.

“Thanks, man. This heat is somethin' isn't it?” Bennett damn near emptied the bottle in one gulp.

“How about we go in and take a break and get back out here later?”

Bennett agreed with a semi-nod of his head and followed Trent back inside.

From the corner of his eye, Trent watched Bennett's brown nipples harden as he entered the air-conditioned room. What Trent really wanted to do was turn around, grab Bennett by his hips, pull him in, and taste his mouth. He wondered how Bennett would react to that.

“So you said you’re new here.” Bennett asked swigging down the last bit of water.

“Been here about a month now. Finally got the boys enrolled in school.”

“Boys?”

“My neph—sons. They were my nephews but...” Trent’s words drifted, he didn’t want to talk about her. He opened the fridge in search of more water for Bennett, trying to buy a few seconds so the conversation could change.

“I’m sorry if I said something...”

“No, no. You didn’t.” Trent took his wallet from his back pocket and opened it up. He proudly displayed the picture in the centerfold.

“That’s Jules, he’s five. And that’s Brody, he’s seven going on thirty.” Trent’s pleased smile faded as his finger turned the picture over. On the backside was a picture of his sister. “And that’s Julia, my sister.”

“She’s very pretty.”

“Yeah. She was the prettiest girl I knew.” Trent closed his wallet and packed it away back in his pocket and forced a smile on his face.

“How long has she been gone?”

Trent didn’t take offense to Bennett’s bluntness. He understood death couldn’t be sugarcoated. “It’s been six months since her murder.”

Bennett’s eyes dropped to the floor. His tone fell soft. “I’m... so sorry.”

“I’ve had some time to get over it. I’m just angry. Angry they haven’t found him.”

“Him?” Bennett looked up, his brow scrunched in confusion.

“The bastard that killed her.”

Unfortunately, that bastard had a name. Mitch. What an asshole name.

“But why?” Bennett asked.

“Why did he kill her? She tried to leave him. Wanted a better life for her and her boys. No kid deserves an abusive, drug-addicted father. So one night, while he was passed out drunk, she tried to leave. But he woke up.” Trent shut his eyes and smiled. “I could barely tell it was my sister lying in the hospital bed. That’s how bad he’d beat her.”

Bennett shook his head, disgusted. “That’s s...”

“Crazy. I know. No, what’s crazy is that he used Brody’s baseball bat. Bashed her face in. It’s a miracle she survived long enough for me to get to the hospital.” Trent rubbed his hands down his face. “But I guess that’s life.”

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## Chapter Five

### Bennett

I could sense something inside him break. Like the mirror my fist so easily shattered. Something inside him was not whole, and it was in that moment that I knew I could be the one to fix it. Silently, in my heart, I pledged to seek justice for his sister. For her murder, for him, for the love growing in me.

I know what you're thinking. This is crazy. They just met. No one falls in love that easily. Again, I would say you were right. In most cases—sure. But this certainly isn't most cases. Since the beginning, since I first saw him, I loved him. And yes, it is crazy.

“Do the cops have any leads on where he may have gone?” Maybe my interest wasn't too invasive.

“No, I don't think so. It's been long enough for them to stop caring. If they ever did.” Trent turned to the kitchen window and his voice wilted. “I never stopped caring.”

Instincts kicked in. Nurture him, they said. Protect him.

I drew closer to him. He didn't turn around or shift from my presence.

Deep breaths. Touch him. Just place your hand on his shoulder, see how he reacts. If he reacts. Just whisper something to him.

My hand nervously trembled as it rose to his shoulder. Though, when I placed it gently there, it ceased. Trent crooked his head baring a glint in his eye, a shimmer of comfort. His eyes spoke the words better than his voice could. They told me all the things he couldn't say. And I simply stared into them and listened.

“Are you really okay?” My hand left his shoulder after a quick squeeze.

His eyes thinned slowly as he smiled. “Yeah. I am.” Trent looked into my eyes. And then I watched his pupils traipse downward, examining my bare chest. I had almost forgotten I was standing there without my shirt.

“Oh. Sorry. I wasn't thinking. The heat... I'm sorry. I'll put it back on.”

“Don't. I mean. No. It's fine. If you're already comfortable, I mean.” Trent's cheek rouged, but his eyes once again took notice of my body. This

time he wasn't trying to hide it. Trent wanted me to notice him checking me out. And I'll admit that kind of turned me on. Okay, it really turned me on. So much so that I moved into him.

He clutched my sides and pulled me closer, pinning himself between my body and the counter. His fingertips felt like feathers rising up my ribs and I could feel a tautness building between our hips. He brought his mouth to mine. His cool breath drifted against my lips. But then he turned.

I thought I had done something wrong. Maybe we were moving too fast? He barely knew me. Hell, he didn't know me at all.

"Did I..."

"No." He stopped me. "I'm a mess, my life is a mess. I don't think I could..."

"You don't have to do anything. And you're the sexiest mess I've ever seen." The words were easy to say. Yet, deep down I knew my life was a mess too. My life was one he probably couldn't begin to imagine, believe in, or accept. Even I was just now learning how.

My arms secured him for a time I didn't count. I didn't want to count. I just held him. And he may not have known, but he was actually holding me. Holding me up, together.

When Trent reluctantly pulled away, aware there was still work to be done, he spoke ever so carefully. "I didn't see this happening."

"See what?"

"I didn't see you caring. I didn't see myself spilling my heart out to you. I don't normally do that to someone I just met."

"But you did. And I do, I care. You had to talk to someone. Bottling it up wouldn't do anything but hurt you. And I'm glad you told me."

"But we just met. You don't know me. I don't know..."

"It doesn't matter. Fact is, now you do. And I don't want to stop knowin' you."

"I don't want to stop knowing you, either."

A million thoughts raced through my head. *Know me?* I said it, but did I really know what I meant? *Know me? I don't even know me.* All I knew was I no longer felt lonely. Not now that he was here.

“There’s not much to know about me.” *Lie again why don’t you?*

“I doubt that.” His lips rose to a smile. “A handsome stranger lands on my porch step asking for work, yet there’s not much to know about him? Doubtful.”

He was right. Why deny it? “Nothing interesting. I’m just a single guy. No friends. No family.” None I wanted to mention.

“Well it looks like we’re in the same boat then. Family is sometimes overrated anyway. And sometimes all you need is someone showing up on your porch step.”

His sentiment was sweet and I needed sweet in my life right now.

“And don’t forget worn out sheds. Sometimes you need a good worn out shed too.”

I was happy to make him laugh a good genuine laugh. A pleasing, forget-about-the-world kind of laugh. A laugh that faded into a boyish grin. I wanted him now more than ever.

I acted without hesitation. The need to know if what my heart was telling me to do was okay drove me. *Kiss him. Do it. You know you want it. Kiss him already.* The hormonal forces within me compelled my lips forward. He didn’t shy away but this time I stopped short of his lips. I looked for a go sign. A look in his eyes that said “Yes, I want this too.” And there it was again, that shimmer of desire in his eyes. *Go.*

The taste of his lips reminded me of something. Something I had long since forgotten. Something I have long since craved. Home. Not the home I was used to, but a home that lived deep within me. A home I only knew as a boy. Before the shifter in me took over.

His lips were soft, his tongue sweet. He didn’t take a single breath as we kissed there in the orange glow of day that escaped through the kitchen window. Everything around us became more exciting, sharper as all of my senses intensified. The birds outside sang louder, the rain from the coming storm smelled damper. All the colors of the room more vibrant, deeper than before.

The kiss didn’t last long; in reality, it wasn’t any more than a minute. Cliché as it may sound, something about being entwined with him made it seem as though we had kissed for an eternity.



Trent rested his forehead on mine. "I wasn't expecting that either. I... I really needed that right now."

Never in my life had I kissed with such emotion. "Me, too."

"Since I took the boys in I haven't been able..." Trent stole a quick glance at the clock behind my shoulder. "I haven't had the time to get out to the clubs."

"I don't think the clubs are really the place where true love awaits."

Trent shrugged. "Probably not." Another look at the clock.

I was beginning to think maybe the kiss wasn't as magical for him as it was for me. "I can go if you have something you have to do."

"I've got to get the boys from school. Can you come back tomorrow?"

"Yeah. If I'll get another kiss like that." I tried to ease the tension with no avail to Trent's obvious sidetracked mind. I reached for my shirt which was a bit dryer. "I'll see you then."

Trent scratched his head. "Thanks for your help today."

"Yeah, no problem."

Trent grabbed his keys from the counter and walked me to the door.

"You're a really great kisser. I'm sorry I have to go."

"It's fine honestly. I'll be back tomorrow." I gave Trent a wink and headed out the door. The air was thick. I had to be quick getting back home. Home, yeah right. I felt more at home inside with Trent.

I was half a block away when the rain came. So much for my dry-ish shirt. And the hot air didn't make matters any better.

I could shift. *Ducks like rain, maybe I'll be a duck today.* I laughed to myself. That would be a first.

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## Chapter Six

### *Trent*

Trent waited a couple minutes before leaving. He had to catch his breath. He had to collect himself. He had to do so much. But right now the main priority was his nephews. Sure he'd sent Bennett on his way a little early but after that kiss he didn't know what to do to keep the conversation afloat. Most of the time a kiss led to sex and sex, too early on, always led to heartache. If there was one thing Trent did not need in his life, it was another heartache. Another failed relationship. But this wasn't a relationship. At least not yet. Trent could see himself with Bennett. Then again, Trent could see himself doing a lot with Bennett.

Trent only noticed the rain when he stepped off his covered porch. Damn, now he looked like a big ass, sending Bennett off in the rain. Maybe he'd still be close enough to catch him and offer him a ride. Trent jumped into his work truck, his best means of transportation. Plus he thought it made him look official.

The rain was fierce, beating down on Trent's windshield. He was probably going way too fast for the quiet neighborhood street but he needed to catch up with Bennett. And there he was. Trent let out a sigh of relief, and then a different kind of sigh when he saw that Bennett was once again shirtless. Trent contemplated how wet the seat would be after he dropped Bennett off but determined that it was a fair price if it meant he'd get to watch droplets of fresh rainwater trickle down Bennett's bronze skin.

Trent eased to the curb and honked his horn. He powered the window down.

"Come on, jump in. I'll give you a lift."

Bennett tossed his drenched shirt in the tail bed and shook the rain from his hair before climbing in next to Trent.

"Who saw this coming? One minute sun, next minute thunderstorm."

"Gotta love Mother Nature, right?" Trent shifted the truck into drive.

Bennett huffed, "Just like all the other women in the world. Never know what mood she's going to be in. That's exactly why I'm..." Bennett paused.

"You can say it, ya know. I mean after what just happened, it's sort of obvious. Most straight men don't kiss other guys. At least not all of them."

"I guess you're right. But it's all the same right? Love is love. Most people don't seem to care these days. Which is kind of nice."

"True. So you gonna tell me where I'm takin' ya? Where do you call home?"

Bennett looked uneasy, which gave Trent the impression he didn't want to know where Bennett lived.

"I uh... I live near Fern. You can just drop me off there. Corner of Fern and Birch."

Trent didn't know much about the new town in which he lived, but he had heard many things. And most of the crime took place near the Fern and Birch side of town.

"In this rain? Come on, at least let me get you to your door. After all, it's the least I can do. And I totally forgot—" Trent said, retrieving his wallet—"I never paid you."

"The job's not over. Usually don't get paid 'til the job's done. Plus, we didn't really do much actual work today." Bennett tapped his finger on the armrest between them. "I live in a pretty shady place. I understand if you're uncomfortable going there."

"Hey, I like to think of myself as a pretty strong kinda guy. I think I can fend for myself. So where do you live?"

"You know FairWood Place?" Bennett turned his head. Shamed.

Trent could understand but wasn't one to judge. FairWood Place had a reputation for drugs and gang violence. Not an easy place to call home. Not even for the toughest kind.

"Yeah. I know where it is."

"It's okay. You really don't have to..."

Trent came to an abrupt halt at the curb. Rain drummed on the metal roof of his truck.

"I'll take you wherever you need to go. You don't have to worry about me judging you. Okay?"

FairWood Place was ten minutes away. Ten more minutes of nothing. Silence. Until Bennett spoke as they neared the complex.

"Thanks for the ride. I appreciate you going out of your way."

An emotion unfamiliar to Trent boiled over. “Are we going to pretend that what happened at my place didn’t really happen? I don’t know about you but I enjoyed every minute of it. And I like you Bennett. I could see myself *really* liking you.”

“You can?”

“Yes! I can. And I know you can, too. That kiss back there was more than just a kiss. Wasn’t it?”

“Yeah. It was. But that’s what scares me.” Bennett opened the door and stepped out, letting the rain fall over him as he peered with sad eyes through the window.

Trent looked deeply into his brown eyes. The red ring around his iris seemed to glow under the grey sky. Bennett spun around and ran off to the apartment complex. He was gone. And Trent hoped that he’d keep his word and be back in the morning.

Twelve minutes. That’s how long Trent had to race to Anderson Elementary before looking like the most irresponsible parent ever. Parent? Trent thought that one over. What is a parent? A parent doesn’t have to be the creator. A parent can be anyone, any positive influence. And Trent knew deep down that he was probably the closest thing those two kids had to a positive influence. Thankfully, they were young. Maybe too much of what happened wouldn’t be engrained in their memories. He worried for Brody. That poor kid witnessed it all and never spoke a single word of it to anyone. Not even the police. Trent always wondered if Brody knew something that might lead the investigators to finding that son of a bitch.

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Trent couldn’t sleep. If it wasn’t that damned owl carrying on outside, then it was the thought of Bennett standing outside his truck window. He thought of the rain and how it dripped down Bennett’s body like his sweat did. Only colder, sadder.

Can’t that owl find another person to bother? Trent stared at the clock. Two fifteen a.m.

And how would things go tomorrow if Bennett came back? After the way things went today, Trent wasn’t sure he’d even return. He only hoped he would. Trent needed a chance to prove to Bennett how badly he really wanted him.

If that owl hooted one more hoot, Trent was going to lose it. He went to the window and pulled back the hefty curtains. *There he is. Look at him perched*

*there just happy as can be.* Not tired one bit of keeping Trent awake. Trent envied the owl for some time. He didn't know why he envied it. Maybe because it didn't have to worry about being a human and all the troubles that came with it. Trent would admit the owl was beautiful. And big. Really big compared to the limb he was attaching himself to. And it was studying Trent just as hard with his big, saucer-shaped eyes.

*Wait a minute. Those eyes.* How strangely familiar they were. Trent thought how much they resembled Bennett's, which led to Trent thinking about Bennett sitting out on the tree limb instead of the damn owl. Creepy but kind of sexy. Would he be naked? Trent hoped so.

The owl stretched his massive wings and jumped from the barky perch. Trent watched him fly up to the moon. A postcard silhouette, beautiful. Maybe the owl wasn't so bad after all.

Trent dragged his feet back to bed and curled up under the down feather comforter. He left the window curtain open just in case the owl was curious about what he looked like while he slept. His last thought before finally drifting off to sleep was how much his sister Julia loved owls. Her house was overly decorated with them. Owl-shaped lamps, bookends, clocks. She even wore owl-shaped slippers around the house. *Okay, maybe the owl can stay.*

On any normal occasion, Trent couldn't remember his dreams. That was before Bennett. All night Trent dreamed of his body, his eyes, and that kiss. He dreamed of things he'd soon plan to do to Bennett. Flashes of Bennett's wet body dazzled Trent's dreams.

It wasn't the owl to wake Trent at seven the next morning. Not even little Jules jumping on his bed. Nor was it Brody running amuck down the rickety hardwood floors with a red towel wrapped around his neck pretending to be a super hero. Trent woke to a thunderous boom echoing from his back yard.

Trent raced downstairs, both Jules and Brody close behind him. He was shocked to see Bennett standing in the doorway of the shed tossing heavy scrap into the back of a rusted blue pickup. *Must be his truck,* Trent thought.

"Umm, Uncle Trent, who's that?" Brody asked.

"That's Bennett. He's a work friend and he's gonna help us get that shed fixed up."

"Oh. Okay. Well, he sure is loud." Jules agreed and both of them ran upstairs to continue meddling in whatever they were meddling in.

Trent gazed out the sliding glass door. *He came back.* Trent was relieved to know that he hadn't scared him off for good. Trent, too, ran back up stairs and quickly threw on some old clothes, ready to get to work. It was Saturday, the boys would be home and he was still on his long weekend, which meant he had more time with Bennett.

Trent checked his teeth in the mirror and made sure he'd chosen a shirt that would show off the definition in his chest. On the way out, Trent grabbed a small ice chest, filled it with all of the ice the refrigerator had to offer, and then dumped in an array of bottled beverages. He thought about how he'd say "Good morning" or "Hey there" or "You're here early" but decided to go with whatever his gut told him.

Trent carried the chest out in a way he knew would cause his pectorals to flex.

"Mornin' Sexy." Maybe not the best of salutations, but when Bennett smiled he knew he'd done okay.

Bennett jumped down from the tail bed and ran over to Trent.

"Let me help you with that." Bennett took the ice chest from Trent and set it down. He wiped his hands down his cargo pants and put them on Trent's arm. "How are ya this mornin'?"

"I'm good, really good. You seem to be hard at work."

"I was up so I figured I'd get an early start. Did I wake you with all my bangin' around?"

"Nope." It was a lie, but why make this sexy man feel bad about his generosity. "So what are your plans for today?"

"Well I got the inside completely gutted. The walls are in fine shape, but the floor is rotting. I ripped it up, as you can see."

Bennett's tail bed was weighed down with mushy particle board and plywood. He'd even loaded the rest of the junk that had been piled on the ground the day before.

"You've really been at it."

"This kind of work is second nature to me." Bennett opened the chest and popped the cap of a pineapple-flavored drink. Bennett didn't come off as a fruity person so his choice was strangely endearing to Trent.

The back door slid open and out came two tiny supermen. They ran circles around the yard, makeshift capes in tow. Trent looked to Bennett who seemed to be enjoying the show.

"Kids..." Trent said hoping he hadn't lost all chances of winning Bennett over.

"They seem like great kids. I think all little boys pretend they are Superman. I know I did." Bennett laughed at the thought. "To be a kid again, right?"

"I just wish I had a fraction of their energy. If it isn't Superman, it's cops and robbers, or cowboys and Indians. Dinosaurs even. Jules, the little one, swears he's a Velociraptor."

Brody and Jules rounded the yard and came to a halt at Bennett's feet. They stared up at him with wrinkled eyebrows. Jules used his hand to shade the sun so he could get a better look.

"Who the heck are you?" Brody asked.

Bennett stood tall and strong and let out a ferocious growl. "I'm The Big Bad Wolf! And I'm hungry." Bennett barked a very believable howl sending the boys screaming and running in all directions. Bennett chased after them beating his chest.

Trent was amused by Bennett's participation in their games. And they seemed to enjoy it, too. Bennett made a couple laps of chasing them before running out of breath and stopping at his pickup. Sweat gathered between Bennett's shoulder blades and between his pecs.

"Think fast!" Trent hurled a bottle of water to him.

"Haha, thanks." And then sexy Bennett did exactly what Trent had imagined him doing many times before. He poured the remainder of the refreshing water over his head and shook it out like a wet dog. Damn him for being so fine.

"I'm gonna haul this out to the lumber yard where I work and pick up some good wood to replace it."

"All right, how much will something like that cost?"

"Don't worry about it. I get a pretty good discount." Bennett's long, black lashes curled high above his eyelid in a wink.

Bennett slammed shut his driver's side door and rolled his window down. His elbow hung out while his hand gripped the shifter ready to drive when Brody ran up to his window.

“Where do you think you’re going, ya big bad wolf?”

“Yeah, where you think you goin’?” repeated Jules.

Bennett’s voice deepened, harsh and torn. “I must go before my hunger overtakes me and I eat both of you!” He bolted out one more snarling growl. Even Trent was taken aback by its authenticity. Bennett grinned, his sharp canines ricocheting sunlight, before hitting the gas.

Trent stood still but his nephews ran into the house. Bennett’s connection with his children made him that much more attractive. Trent had always wanted a family. Like the ones you see in picture frame stock photos. Happy, wide smiles, large, suburban home and a retriever playing ball. Trent had been seventeen when the actuality of what he’d end up with hit him. He was sure he’d be the single gay guy jumping from bar to bar looking for hookups, gaining nothing meaningful. Yet, after meeting Bennett, Trent was coming to a new actualization. Maybe he had found his family. Maybe he had found what he missed at night.

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## Chapter Seven

### Bennett

Harold's Lumber was quietly positioned deep off a back road not too far from FairWood Place. I stepped out and quickly observed my surroundings. I was alone. Good. Harold was a prick of a boss, but at least he paid well and gave weekends off. After all, who would hire a guy with no real papers to prove he actually existed? Better yet, who needed papers to prove they existed. Not me, that's for damn sure.

I threw the last bit of soggy wood onto the mountain of decaying furniture, tree trunks, and countless other forgotten pieces. Four or five sheets of decent plywood would be all I needed to get the job done, but I wasn't going to just half-ass it. I chose the best quality treated wood. Maybe I was trying too hard to impress Trent, but unless he was a lumber genius, he probably wouldn't notice how expensive this wood actually was.

I thought about the day before on my way back to Trent's. I hadn't been the best Bennett I could have been, but I was scared. The kiss was magnificent, yes. Better than that even. That's why I went back last night. To watch him. Perched outside his bedroom window wasn't good enough. Though thinking about it now, it did seem we had a connection even then. Like he'd known exactly who was inside the owl that beckoned him. How the hell could I ever tell him it was me? Think about it. Would you believe me? Maybe I'd never have to tell him.

His kids seemed to like me. Maybe I got some points in with them. God knows I tried like hell. And it was fun showing off my wild side.

Wild. The word always made me think of my life before I left the pack. We called ourselves "The Feral" because we were. We hunted for pleasure, killed for fun. For the blood. It started out with deer and other large game but it quickly progressed to bigger prey. Humans. People. Real-life innocent people. Human blood was unlike any other. It's like whiskey for wolves. After a little you just don't know when to stop. And then I remembered my brother's little threat. I knew he was surely bound to show his face again. Soon.

*I will not go back to that life. Not even if it kills me. Not even if it means I'll be Alpha.* In which case, I'd have to kill the current Alpha, my own brother. It wasn't like the thought hadn't crossed my mind before. He was worse than dead to me after what he did to that little girl and her mother. He was a monster; the kind of evil you didn't want to mess with.

I parked curbside in front of Trent's house. His neighborhood was pulled straight from a 1960's sitcom. Every yard's lawn was greener than the last. Children played hopscotch and jumped rope in the street. Wives kissed their husbands good-bye as they carried their leather briefcases off to work. It was exactly the kind of place I always wanted to live but never had the privilege.

Trent appeared at the front door just as I was heading around back.

"Hey, come on in. I was just getting lunch ready."

I couldn't deny the rumbling in my stomach. It had been empty for some time. Inside, the aroma of chili filled the air.

"I hope you like chili dogs and potato chips. It's damn near the only thing the boys will eat. And one of the few things you can't really screw up."

Brody greeted me like he was a host at a fine diner.

"Here you are, sir." He pulled a chair out from the table and bowed.

I graciously took my seat. "Thank you, sir," I said, returning the courtesy.

Trent returned to the table and took a seat facing me. For a moment, I felt like we were on a date and he was officially mine.

"Oh, by the way, the chili doesn't have beans."

"Beans make me fart," Jules brazenly admitted.

Trent hung his head, embarrassed. "We don't talk like that at the table, do we, Jules?"

"No, sir." Jules mischievously leaned over towards me and whispered, "But it's true."

"So how do you know Uncle Trent?" Brody bit into a messy chili dog while staring me down. I'll admit, for a second, I was intimidated. By the question and by his stare.

"I've already told you, Brody. Bennett is a work friend and he's helping repair the shed."

"You gonna be here for a long time?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but Trent answered. "Yes he will be. There's a lot of work around here that needs to be done."

Brody shoved a handful of chips in his mouth. "Good. I liked it when you growled just like a wolf. You made Jules pee his pants." Brody laughed, blowing pieces of chips all over his plate.

“Nuuu-uuhh! No I didn't.” Jules cheeks turned pink. He picked up his half-eaten hotdog and was just about to smash it in Brody's face when Trent intervened.

“Boys, boys. Chill out. You don't want Mr. Bennett thinking you were raised by wolves, do you?”

Instant flashback of my childhood. Of my teenage years, after puberty took my innocence away. The night I turned for the first time was excruciatingly painful. My bones bent and snapped as my body took on the form of a young grey wolf. I remember it so clearly, my brother stood over me, laughing. He was so proud of me for turning into the monster he'd soon raise me to be.

*Snap out of it.*

Trent refilled my glass of sweet tea. “Everything okay?” he asked.

I nodded. I didn't know. Was it?

When Trent sat down, I felt something crawling up my leg. Shielded by the tabletop, Trent began playing footsy with me. His toes found their way up my leg. Up, up, and even up some more. I tried not to flinch when he was no longer on my leg but somewhere between. He looked at me with squinted, sexy eyes. He was arousing me at the table. With his kids right there. I reached my hand under the table and inconspicuously tapped his foot away. He giggled and removed his foot from my stiffening crotch.

Trent was clearing the table when young Brody spoke again. “Do your growl, do your growl!”

Trent smiled at me from the kitchen sink.

“Yea, yea. Do it!” begged Jules.

I swallowed all the air my lungs could handle and burst out a monstrous growl. The glasses on the table vibrated. In front of me, Jules and Brody stood wide-eyed. Unmoving. Maybe, I had done too good of an impression. Trent carefully set the bowl in the sink, and gave me a where-the-hell-did-that-come-from look. Looks of fear turned to looks of amazement.

“Wooooow! Dad, can Mr. Bennett stay over for supper, too?”

Dad? I looked to Trent who had the same look on his face as I did. Obviously this was the first time Brody had called him dad. Up till now it was Uncle Trent. I felt proud for Trent. I could only imagine the sense of honor I would feel if I was called “Dad.”

Brody and Jules turned facing Trent with big, wondering eyes. Trent fumbled with his words but finally managed to answer.

“Would you like to stay over for supper, Mr. Bennett?” Trent’s upper lip shook into a grin.

“Depends. Whatcha cookin’?” I was too smug for my own good sometimes.

“I... ugh. What day is it? Saturday? Saturdays are normally Chinese.”

“Homemade stir-fry?”

“Ohh... no. Takeout, did I not say takeout? I meant takeout.”

Damn him. Even in his shyness Trent was fucking adorable. Had his boys not been standing there, I would have thrown him to the floor and sexed him right then.

“I like takeout.”

There was a knock at the door. I stayed seated as Trent went to the living room to answer it. I heard a woman’s voice, then Trent calling for Jules and Brody. I followed them, curious. It wasn’t my place to be nosey, I know. Sue me.

“Colby is having a birthday sleepover and Mrs. Talley, here, is inviting you two over. What do you say?”

“Heck yea!” Brody exclaimed running upstairs.

Jules, fast on his heels, mimicked, “Heck yea!”

Mrs. Talley fit the mold of Suburban Mommy to a T. Her long, dark curls and perky, red-lipsticked smile was PTA approved. She was bubbly and laughing away when she took notice of me standing idly by, near a bookcase filled with vintage World Books. Her spry lips straightened and her head crooked to the side as she looked to Trent and then back to me. She quickly erased the question from her face. She was young enough and smart enough to understand the situation without asking. That much was clear.

“Well, hello back there.” She waved a jolly wave.

Trent offered her in and she plowed straight past him right to me. “Hi! I’m Mrs. Talley from next door. But you can call me Sarah. My son is friends with Trent’s here. I don’t think I’ve seen you around before.” If Mrs. Talley smiled any harder, her lips were going to break off. Which would be a sad state of affairs for Trent’s crème-colored carpet.

“Sarah, this is Bennett Grey. Bennett, Sarah Talley.”

“Bennett. Ohhh, I like that. It fits you. A strong name for a strong man.” Mrs. Talley was a no-holds-barred kind of woman. She quickly took my bicep in her hand and squeezed. “Very strong,” she reiterated.

“Bennett’s helping get that old shed out back fixed up.” Trent’s uneasiness showed when he swiped his hands through his hair.

“Is that right? Well, when you get that taken care of I think I’ve got a few things that need a lookin’ at, over at my place.” This woman wasn’t the least bit discreet. Her pink tongue slid across her lip, not taking her eyes off of me.

Trent rolled his eyes behind her back and made gagging motions.

“So, Sarah, how is Langston... your husband.”

She sucked her tongue back in her mouth. “He’s just fine.”

The boys dashed down the wooden staircase and landed in front of Mrs. Talley. She patted each one of them on the head and told them to head on over.

“Well I better be on my way too. Thanks again for letting them stay over. And don’t worry, I’ll get them safely home tomorrow.”

“I appreciate that. Thank you.”

“It was really, really nice meeting you, Bennett Grey. I hope I’ll be seeing you around more often.” Mrs. Talley poked her buoyant breasts out and catwalked to the door. “Later guys!” Mrs. Talley was one fascinating neighbor to have. She left, but the smell of her sweetpea perfume lingered.

“Okaaaay.” Trent turned and fell back against the door. “Glad that’s over with.”

“Looks like it’ll be just me and you then.” I moved into him still keeping a bit of room between us.

Trent didn’t waste any time filling the space with his body. He took a handful of my shirt in either hand and planted a single kiss on my wanting lips.

“I’d prefer it that way,” Trent said, unbuttoning my shirt. His fingernails scraped at my chest and his teeth at my neck. “About yesterday.”

“You don’t have to explain anything to me, babe.”

“Babe?” Trent returned my bold statement with a bold glare.

“If you want to be. I want you to be.” I put my lips as close to his ear as possible and whispered softly, “I really want you to be.”

"I haven't been anyone's 'babe' in a really long time."

"Well, then now's a good time to start. Be mine?"

If I hadn't understood Trent's feelings, I would have been taken aback by the flash of uncertainty that came across his face. It didn't take him long to think it over. He burrowed his whiskered cheek into my neck. He held it there for just a moment before looking me in the eyes.

"And you'll be mine?" His voice was shaky. Clearly he had been hurt before.

"I'll be your everything, always." And I knew I would be.

"Your eyes. They are so familiar to me. I've seen them before."

"Well, I was here yesterday." Okay, sarcasm.

"No, somewhere else. Maybe in a dream."

"Oh, so you're dreaming about me now. This is progressing quickly."

"No, *this* would be progressing quickly." Trent moved his hands down my chest and stomach. His fingertips dipped behind my waistband. He drove his tongue from my earlobe all the way down my body.

He had just used his teeth to unfasten the button on my jeans when, without a single knock, in barged Mrs. Talley. Her painted lips fell, her eyes popped open as she dropped the slice of chocolate cake she was carrying. Thankfully, it only landed on the tiled threshold.

Trent and I scurried to put ourselves back together, but it was too late. Mrs. Talley had gotten an eyeful. But her smiling face and lip biting didn't say she was upset about it.

"I... I am sorry I didn't knock. I'll be going now."

"It's fine, Sarah." What more could be done? "Did you forget something?"

She pointed down to the flattened cake. "I didn't want you two feeling left out. I was bringing you some cake." She bent down and scraped the fudgy mess into her hands. "I should have knocked. I am so sorry. I'm so damn clumsy."

"It's fine really. I'm sorry you saw..."

"I'm not! It was hot! But I wouldn't have pegged you for a gay. Well, maybe you, Trent. Not you, Bennett." Mrs. Talley eyeballed me as goeey filling fell through her fingers.

“As they say—looks can be deceiving.”

“Yes. You're right. They sure can.”

“Sarah.” Trent said. “Can we just keep this between us?”

Trent's need for secrecy didn't bother me. I didn't say it, but I too wished for my own sense of privacy.

“Oh sure. No, absolutely.” Mrs. Talley pretended to zip her mouth shut and throw away the key.

“Thanks for the cake anyway.”

She looked depressingly at the disaster and promised to send some home with the boys tomorrow. She licked her thumb clean and waved goodbye.

Trent, laughing and shaking his head, swiped a morsel of the cake onto his finger. He ran to me and smeared it across my mouth and kissed me.

“I love kissing you.”

“Why? 'Cause it tastes like chocolate cake?”

“No. Because it tastes like you. You taste so good.”

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The sun sank quickly on the flat Oklahoma horizon, turning the evening sky and all things under it orange. Trent and I sat on the steps of his porch talking about life. About all the things we ever wanted and all the things we dreamed of doing before we grew old. *How did I get so lucky to have found a man with dreams so much like my own?*

When the sun gave its final twinkling, I knew it was time to go.

“Can I see you tomorrow?”

“Why don't you stay?”

Stay? No one had ever asked me to stay with them. It was a concept I wasn't familiar with.

“Really?”

“Yeah, seriously. Stay with me.”

I gave Trent the I-ain't-easy look. Though I kind of was.

“It's not like I'm askin' you to assume the position. I just want you to stay. I want you in my bed. We don't have to do anything.”

I thought about my bed back home. Torn. Cold. And compared it with Trent's. Warm with a body to cling to.

“I think I'd like that, a lot.”

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## Chapter Eight

### *Trent*

The stars cast just enough light into Trent's room to cut the darkness. Just enough light that he could make out the shape of Bennett's body lying beside him. After hours of lying in bed talking and laughing and of course kissing, it didn't take long for Bennett to fall asleep. He had complimented how soft Trent's bed was more than once and how warm his blankets were. Trent had never seen the inside of where Bennett called home but was sure he didn't need to. All he knew was that he didn't want Bennett to leave.

With the curtains pulled back, Trent noticed a difference in tonight. Something was missing. That owl. That damn owl, where was he? He had grown to really like that owl. But Trent had Bennett now. What more did he need?

And the best part of it all, they didn't have sex. Not a single bit of it. A huge change for Trent, who had always felt the need to consummate even the tiniest of attractions. But not Bennett, he didn't expect that. Either Bennett was scared or he wanted more out of their relationship. And Trent was sure Bennett definitely wasn't scared of anything. All Bennett wanted was company. And Trent had plenty of that to give.

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The alarm clock sounded, seven o'clock, too damn early to wake up. Especially since Trent had the pleasure of lying beside the most beautiful man he'd ever known. He wanted to wake up to his face every morning.

Trent snuck out of bed and showered. He let the warm water freshen his skin. The steam awakened his lungs. But it was Bennett lying in his bed that made him feel as if he could take on the day.

He dressed in his usual attire, khaki slacks, forest green button up and brown tie. Trent even decided he'd wear his badge, proudly displaying his position for Bennett to see. Trent didn't need to fix his hair, a quick tussle with his fingers was all it took to style his dirty-blond locks.

Trent tiptoed through his room, hunting for his Dockers. Bennett woke at the sound of a creaking floor under Trent's feet.

"Mornin'." Bennett's voice was morning fresh. Coarse but still sexy. He stretched out his body, flexing, waking his muscles.

“How did you sleep?” Trent sat down beside him and pulled on his boots. He wasn't expecting Bennett to reach over and wrap his arms around his waist. Bennett rested his head on Trent's back.

“Best night's sleep I've had in a really long time.”

“I want you to make yourself at home today. My house is your house.”

“And the neighbors?”

“The only one you'd need to worry about is Sarah.” Trent turned to Bennett and rested his hand on his cheek. “Last night meant so much to me.”

“But we didn't do anything.”

“Exactly. That's the reason. I felt comfortable to just lie beside you and hold you and only that. Not that I don't want to, ya know. Do that.”

“It will happen. When it's time.”

“When it's right.”

“Exactly.” Bennett threw the blanket off himself. He stood up and walked around to face Trent. It was clear *every* part of Bennett was awake. His happy trail enticed Trent. How badly he wanted to run his tongue down it. He wanted to rip the blue satin boxers off of Bennett's brown body and do dirty things with him.

Bennett pushed Trent onto his back and crawled on top of him. He wrapped the blanket over them and let the warmth soak in. “I hope every morning starts like this,” he said into Trent's ear.

“Me too.” Trent raised Bennett up so he could get a good look at his strapping body. Trent's khakis were not holding up to the swelling taking place inside them.

Bennett took notice of Trent's excitement and began to rock his hips back and forth, grinding his rear against Trent's lap. He moved in a rhythm that matched Trent's heavy breathing.

“This uniform of yours is really turning me on.”

“What about the badge?”

“So sexy!”

Trent raised up and held Bennett still. “I really don't want to go, but if I don't head out soon, I'm going to be late for work.”

“Can I come back tonight?”

“You don't have to leave at all, ya know. I want you to stay.”

“Stay?”

“As in, don't go. Ever.”

“I won't.”

“But I do have to go. Make yourself at home.”

Bennett nodded and gave a boyish smile. “I've never been asked to stay. No longer than a night. Or a couple hours.”

Trent kissed Bennett's cheek and the new couple made their way downstairs. He opened the front door to leave, climbed into his truck, and cranked the engine when Bennett appeared, tapping on his window.

“You forgot this.” He said.

“Forgot what?”

“This.” Bennett put his lips on Trent's and kissed him. “Have a good day at work, my Prince.”

“If I'm your Prince then you're my Knight.”

Trent tipped his head and backed out of the driveway. Bennett disappeared from his rearview mirror. He licked his chapped lips to taste the kiss once more. For the first time, Trent felt the same joy he'd always dreamed of having.

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Kim, Trent's colleague, greeted him when he walked in. Her expression was one of concern and disbelief.

“Everything okay, Kim?” Trent inserted fifty cents into the vending machine and retrieved his granola bar.

“Wolves.” Kim said.

“Okay, wolves.”

“Wolves.” Her inflection greater this time. “In Oklahoma.”

“Nope. Bullshit. There haven't been wolves in Oklahoma in decades.”

“Oh yeah?” Kim handed him a file with a small evidence baggy of fur.

“What's this?” Trent examined the file.

“This would be the file of an attack on a young woman that took place over the weekend. And that’s wolf fur. Wolf. Fur.”

“And the woman?”

“ICU. She told the paramedics it was the biggest coyote she’d ever seen. We already ran tests, definitely not any coyote. Most definitely wolf.”

“And now we have to what? Find this mysterious wolf and kill it? Where did this happen?”

“Right outside town. Too close for comfort. I’ve heard some of the locals saying they would kill it if they found it. We can’t let that happen, Trent. You know that.”

“Yeah, I know. But if this animal killed someone, and the locals find it, chances are they *will* kill it. And if the authorities find it, they will still kill it.”

Kim threw her hands up in the air. “Wolves. Wolves in goddamned Oklahoma.”

“I’ll be in my office making some calls.”

Trent sat down at his desk. His degrees in Animal Science hung behind him, and in front of him sat a picture of his sister. He kissed his finger and touched her face.

He read the file over and over. And when he thought he’d learned enough, he read it again. Trent knew very little about wolves, but what he did know was that there were definitely no wolves in Oklahoma and there hadn’t been any attacks on humans in North America almost ever. Coyotes, yes. But wolves? Trent examined the file again. He read the statement taken from the woman. She described the “creature” as monstrous, black with red-ringed eyes. She mentioned the eyes twice, black with a red ring. Almost like that owl’s eyes, Trent thought. Like... Bennett’s. That’s where he’d seen Bennett’s eyes before. That owl. Trent thought of the chances of their eyes being so similar. And now the woman describing this wolf’s eyes almost exactly the same. Trent decided he’d have to see this woman. He rang Kim on the intercom.

“Yes? You rang?”

“I’m going to talk to her.”

Trent’s office door flung open. “Her, who?” Kim questioned.

“This Pierce woman. I want to talk to her. Get some more details about the animal.”

“Wolf.”

“Wolf, whatever. Do you want to ride with me?”

“Can’t. Leaving early today. It’s my husband’s birthday. Which means I’ll be forced to do my wifely duties. Cook, clean, sex, clean.” Kim twirled her finger in an annoyed circle. “Never-ending cycle.”

“Your poor husband.”

“What? I’m a good wife. When I wanna be. Which reminds me. Oh wait, never mind.”

“What? Tell me.”

“I promised I wouldn’t. Damn my big mouth.”

“You better tell me.”

“Okay, but you can’t say I told you.”

Trent gave Kim a tell-me-right-the-hell-now look.

“Okay, okay. Well I saw Sarah Talley in the grocery store yesterday. And you know her husband and mine are friends. So I stopped to say hi, even though I really don’t care for that woman. She has better tits than me. Mine sag some.”

“Get to the point, Kim.” Though Trent already knew what was coming next.

“Anyway, she told me she saw you...” Her tone fell to a whisper, “with another man.”

“What are you getting at, Kim?”

“I just wanna know.”

“Know what? If I’m gay? If I’m dating a guy? Yes. Yes I am.”

Kim bounced up and down, squealing like she’d won a prize. “Ohhh, that makes me so happy! I’ve always wanted a gay best friend!”

“Really, Kim? What are we, thirteen?”

“Seriously, we can go shopping and you can tell me if I look fat in dresses and I won’t get sad or cry ’cause you’re gay! And we can swap sex stories, too!”

“Um, no. I don’t think so.”

Kim’s expression dropped. “You don’t want to be my gay best friend?”

"I don't want to swap sex stories. And I don't like shopping for dresses. Sorry. We can be friends but right now I have to go. Time's a wastin'."

"Hmph. Well let me know what she says."

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Anderson Medical Center was just like the rest of the town. Small and unkempt. Though, the doctors inside were some of the best.

"Room 164," the frumpy receptionist said as she chowed down on a candy bar.

The door was open, but Trent still knocked just to announce his presence. An elderly woman's voice told him to come in.

There she was wrapped up with bandages covering nearly half of her body. The elderly woman to her side gently patted the victim's hand.

"Hello, ma'am. My name is Trent Moss and I'm with Oklahoma Forestry."

"Talk to her, I don't know nothin'."

Okay, not all old people are sweet apparently.

Ms. Pierce turned her long, blond curly head and spoke carefully. "I've already told the police everything."

"Yes ma'am, but my team and I may can find the animal that did this to you..."

"Werewolf. Not animal." Ms. Pierce turned her attention back to the open window.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Pierce, did you say *Werewolf*?"

"It's fine. Go ahead and laugh, just like the police did when I told them."

"Ms. Pierce, I'm not here to laugh at you. Please tell me what you told them. I'll believe you."

"Jenny, call me Jenny."

"Okay Jenny. What did the creature look like?"

"Werewolf. Not creature. And it was huge. Bigger than any wolf, or coyote I've ever seen. Bigger than a Grizzly, even."

Trent took a notepad from his pocket and began scribbling notes, "Okay. Tell me everything you remember." Trent thought to himself how he'd make a damn good investigator.

“Well, it was Saturday, noon. I went for my usual jog around the lake near my house. About twenty miles outside of here. I had my headphones on so I couldn't hear anything. But near the water's edge I saw this...” Jenny looked to the elderly woman who was twiddling her thumbs and listening attentively.

“Continue. What did you see?”

“A naked man.”

The old woman chuckled then quickly returned to her concerned demeanor.

“Did you see his face?”

“No, He was hunched over. Like he was vomiting. I was so caught off guard 'cause he was naked. I turned my head for two seconds because I didn't want him to think I was watching him... like that. And when I looked back up, there it was.”

“The werewolf?”

“Yes. And the man was gone. Then the monster swiped me with its massive paw. Knocked the breath out of me. I couldn't move. And then he attacked me. I lost consciousness. But when I opened my eyes. I couldn't even believe what I saw.”

“What did you see?”

“It turned back into that man.”

“What do you mean turned? Like morphed?”

“Yes, exactly! It morphed. It was the strangest thing I have ever seen. The doctors said I hallucinated it because my body was in shock. But I wasn't in shock. And I know what I saw.”

All the while, the little old woman shook her head in agreement.

“Where did he go afterward?”

“I'm not sure. I passed out. And then I woke up here.”

“In your statement, you mentioned his eyes?”

“Oh yes. I'll never forget them. Before he attacked me, he stood over me. Foaming mouth and growling. And all I could focus on was his eyes. They were black but had this red ring...”

“Around its iris?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“Lucky guess. Is there anything I can do for you now?”

“There’s one thing. If you find that thing. Kill it.”

“I’ll do my best. I promise you that. Thank you so much for your time. Have a good day ladies. And again, I’m sorry this happened to you.”

“Me too.”

Trent closed the door behind him and went down to the gift shop where he bought flowers and chocolates and inside the note he wrote. “*The animal kingdom still loves you.*” He thought it would be a sweet gesture and maybe just maybe Jenny wouldn’t lose faith in Mother Nature.

But, werewolves? Trent didn’t even know where to begin with Jenny’s statement. Clearly there was no such thing as werewolves. But she did seem so adamant and very believable. The doctors were probably right, the body does crazy things when it’s in shock.

“So, what did she say?” Kim asked over the phone.

“She said it was a werewolf.”

“A werewolf? Boy, she is nuts, huh.”

“Not nuts. She was in shock. Her insides were ripped out. But she did have an interesting story to tell. Almost believable. She said she was running and saw a naked man by the lake.”

“Oh, did she say if he was cute? Or ya know, hung. I bet he was.”

“Really, Kim? Anyway. She saw him then she looked away and he was gone but this massive beast, or werewolf as she put it, attacked her. She remembered its eyes. Black with a reddish ring around the iris.”

“Is that all she said? Nothing else about the naked guy?”

“You’re impossible. Go have sex with your husband.”

“Ew. Gross. No. Bye.” Kim disconnected.

Trent knew that would get her off the phone. Okay, Trent would just have to sleep on this for a while. He said he’d find this animal, and he would. He decided he’d go back out to where it happened. Cops aren’t the most reliable source when it comes to animal attacks. It takes a professional. Someone who knows animals, their habits. And Trent spent years studying these kinds of things. Plus, he wanted justice for Jenny Pierce.



Lake Osage was beautiful with crystal clear water, gorgeous islands, and all the wildlife to go with it. It was just another paradise. But not for Jenny Pierce. From the information given by Jenny, it wasn't at all hard to find the scene. Blood still stained the bright green grass. *So much blood.* Trent wondered how she was even still alive. He bent down in search of tracks. It wasn't until he was near the muddy bank that he found them. Human footprints, large barefoot prints. Definitely a man's, size twelve.

Wait. What's that? Trent took out his cell and turned the camera on. He snapped a picture of what appeared to be a *wolf's* track. But bigger, much, much bigger. How odd was it that they faded right into the human's footprint? Shivers pricked down Trent's spine. An odd feeling came over him. Like he was being watched. A twig somewhere behind him snapped. Trent spun around to nothing. He saw nothing but a group of birds hopping about one another. Trent laughed at his own overactive mind. Trent snapped a few more pictures of the prints and the surrounding scenery before heading back to his truck.

Something else caught Trent's eye. In the tail bed of his truck was Bennett's shirt. The one he'd taken off that day in the rain. Trent picked it up and held it close to his face. He breathed it in, trying to smell the man who had worn it. The man he was falling for. He missed Bennett. Trent read his watch; only an hour and he'd be home, with him.

It was the slowest hour in the history of hours and when Trent arrived home, Bennett wasn't there. His heart damn near stopped beating. Of course the worst came to mind, that Bennett didn't want him. Or he was hurt. But then Trent found a note on his pillow.

*Gone home to get some things. Will be back soon. – B*

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## Chapter Nine

### Bennett

I don't think I've ever flown so fast. Through trees, over lakes, and under bridges I soared. One quick flight before I needed to get back to being Bennett. This time I didn't mind being Bennett. Every day I was with Trent was one more day I was okay with being myself.

My happy state of being was quickly curdled into anger upon entering my apartment. It was demolished, even more so than it normally was. Guy had been here, I could still smell him. That violent, stale-blood scent all over everything I owned.

He had been here. In my goddamned home. And he left proof all around. Every dish I owned was broken, strewn on the dirty kitchen floor. All of my furniture toppled over, their contents littering the piss-stained carpets. He had pissed on my possessions, another one of his Alpha ploys of getting me to succumb to him.

Not happening. Not in this lifetime. Not ever.

And then it hit me. Like two trains colliding head on, it hit me in my heart. My mother's necklace. The one thing I owned that meant more to me than anything else in this decrepit place.

I bolted to my room and threw open the closet door. Sorrow lurched up from my gut and choked me. It was gone. The box lay open on the floor, empty. Wait... not empty. A note, blood-spattered and written in my brother's hand, sat at the bottom of the blue velveteen-lined box.

*Come back, The Feral misses you.*

I could have, would have ripped his head off if he'd been standing in front of me, but I opted for the wall instead. I stabbed both of my fists through the paneled wall. The pain felt good shooting up my arms. I went to my knees, chin to chest and wept. No tears.

After I regained my strength, healed, and locked away the sadness, I gathered what little bit of clothing and other personal belongings I could fit in my truck. And I still had room for another person. Trent. That's all I needed right now. Just Trent.

I made sure I showed no sign of distress when I pulled into his driveway. Our driveway? Jules and Brody were next door splashing in the infamous Mrs. Talley's in-ground pool. Looked like fun, even in my current state.

My hand was turning the door knob when I remembered I'd forgotten my manners. So I knocked. He never appeared at the door. I knocked louder. Still nothing. I went against my instinct and opened the door.

"Hello, Trent?" Still no answer, but the shower was running upstairs and I could hear him singing. I followed his voice until I was right outside the bathroom door. The steam escaping from his shower moved across my face. I put my hand on the door and leaned my ear in closer. His singing voice was not like his spoken voice. It was gentle and saccharine. Then the water shut off and the music stopped.

Oh shit. Here I was, standing in his room. Uninvited, unannounced.

I stood back in the doorway of his bedroom when the bathroom door opened. A cloud of hot steam billowed out. From the steam came my man. Towel wrapped around his waist, water rolling down his chest. Instant arousal.

"Hey there." My greeting alarmed him. He stumbled back then realized who had intruded.

"Hey, baby! Didn't see you there."

"I tried knocking so I just came in."

"Uh yeah. This is your home now. No knocking. How are you? You seem shaken up."

I couldn't respond. All I was capable of doing, at the moment, was admiring. His body, his crooked smile, and the towel I so badly wanted to unravel from his body.

Trent caught me staring, though I wasn't making any effort to hide the fact. He flicked the bedroom light off, allowing only the light peeking through the thick curtains to illuminate his body. Trent dropped his towel. He stood, baring his all to me. My breath stuck in my lungs. I couldn't believe the perfection standing in front of me. He came towards me and placed his hands on my face.

"I want you. I'm ready." His hands stroked my cheeks. "Take your shirt off."

I tried speaking, but he put his finger to my lips. "Just. Let me." He whispered.

I gave in and let him have control. It was the first time I let anyone have control over me. I'd given him access to my heart, why not my body?

Trent pulled my belt from its loops, allowing my ripped jeans to hang loose. He kissed me while working at my fly, unzipping and lowering my jeans. He led me to the bed and sat me down, kissed me from my hips down to my ankles. He slipped my boots off and stared up at me with his radiant green eyes.

"Lean back. Close your eyes."

I did as I was so sweetly told. With my eyes closed, his kisses were magnified. Each one sent sparks through my body like electricity through a gray cloud before a storm. My body trembled with nerves. How long had it been since I was laid out, exposed, vulnerable?

"Are you okay, my love?"

I didn't speak, only nodded.

Trent crawled on top of me and rested his warm body on mine. The trembling stopped. If ever there was a moment where I felt a bit of heaven, it was then.

*More. Give me more.*

"Keep your eyes closed, my Knight." Trent blew a cool breath all the way down to my navel. He kissed me there tenderly. I felt his mouth take me in. My back arched and toes spread. I dug my fingers in the mattress as he took me to the edge. A pressure built in my groin. I was so close, so close, when he stopped.

Trent came back up to face me. Eyes still shut. "Open 'em."

His stare lanced my eyes, serious about what he was about to say.

"Do you want me?"

"Yes."

"All of me?"

"More than anything."

Trent brandished a quick smile. "Close your eyes."

He positioned himself above my waist and slowly, so very carefully, he let me inside him. I opened my eyes when he gasped. A perfect fit. He felt so good around me. I finally felt the blaze inside him that I fell for. He moved his body

up and down. Slow at first then quicker, harder. His breaths were firm and rigid like the rest of him. And though I could have climaxed right then as I placed my hands on his moistened chest; I didn't. I couldn't. Never end. I wanted this to never end.

"I'm getting..." I wanted to say close but, no.

Trent whispered one last thing in my ear, still rocking his hips. "Inside me. Stay inside me."

It was the heat of his skin, his soft chest hair scratching against my sensitive skin; it was the blooming yellow light cast from the afternoon sun, and the sounds of our love that sent me over. I rose up and latched my arms around him, pulled him down deeper, as I gave him all that I had.

It wasn't just sex. It wasn't just a damn good fuck. It was romance, lovemaking, and sensual. And it was the best I'd ever had. And all I'd ever needed.

We held still, embracing each other with me still inside him. I laid him down on his back and kissed him again. I could taste myself lingering on his lips. But I wanted to taste him. I went down and licked the soft hair growing below his belly button. My tongue explored ever lower.

"You taste so good," I told him.

He gave a shy grin. But he had no reason to be. He was bigger than me, bigger than any guy I'd seen.

Trent shuddered and let out a satisfied moan. It was sweet like the nectar of honeysuckle. I savored him. Every last bit of him.

We curled together under the sheets and didn't speak a word. We didn't need to. We knew what the other was thinking. How we wanted this to last forever. I thought about destiny, and if I had one. And I did. He was my destiny.

"I want you to live here. With me. With us. Be a part of our family."

All my dreams were coming true, and in one day. "I'd love that. I've always wanted a family."

"Then that's that. Let's go get your things. Why wait?"

"No point, babe. Everything I own is in my truck. Nothing else matters."

Trent kissed my forehead. "I'll get you everything you need and more. Anything you want, just ask. It's yours."

“And I’ll be yours. Forever.”

“And always.”

Trent patted me on the butt and hopped out of bed. He pulled on a pair of loose gym shorts and a tank. I followed behind him and dressed.

“I’ll clear out some space in the closet for your clothes. Is there anything you need, babe?”

“Just you.” I pecked a kiss on his cheek and ran down to my truck.

Family. I finally had one. And though it was new, it was already worth more than anything I’d lost in the past. Was this my happily ever after?

And Trent, that boy was damn good in bed. Yes sir, I could get used to this. I could get used to being his.

I was gathering my things when Trent stepped onto the porch and called out for the boys to come home.

“I’m getting dinner ready. And I’ve made room for your stuff right next to mine.”

Brody ran up to me with a curious look. “Whatcha got all your clothes for?”

How could I answer? He was a kid. He wouldn’t understand. Hell he’d only seen me twice.

“Bennett is going to be living here, with us, from now on.”

“Awesome! You can teach us how to howl like you now!” Brody ran off inside. Jules behind him. But Jules stopped and hugged Trent’s legs, “I love you, Dad.” He scurried off in search of Brody.

“Dad?” Trent asked me, laughing. His smile was wide and exuberant.

“Hey, I’d roll with it. Those boys really love you, babe.”

“Yeah. I guess they do.”

Later that evening, the boys and I sat at the kitchen table. I taught them how to roar and growl and snort. Jules especially loved that the moon in the sky was full, perfect for howling at. He was down on all fours like a wolf, howling through the window when Trent announced dinner was ready.

“Okay, boys wash up.”

The two of them ran to the kitchen sink and fought over who got to go first. Brody being the biggest, won the battle. They howled while washing up and I

couldn't stop from thinking about my own childhood. When I first learned to howl.

Trent set the table, plates, napkins, silverware and... wine glasses?

"What are those for?" I asked.

"This is a special occasion. Our first family dinner. Red or white?"

"Red, definitely."

Trent's cell rang. He didn't answer after reading the caller ID.

"Not gonna answer?"

"It's just my partner at work, Kim. Probably just calling to tell me how she loves the fact she has a new gay best friend."

"Oh, she's one of those?"

Then the phone rang again. Persistent.

"She doesn't normally call back. I should probably take this."

I heard only Trent's side of the conversation.

"She's gone? What do you mean gone? Where could she have gone? Claw marks? You have got to be shitting me. Alright, first thing tomorrow." And then he hung up. He stared at his phone in awe and shock.

"Is everything alright?"

"This woman I spoke to today. She was attacked by what she said was a 'werewolf.' If you can believe that. She damn near died, had her intestines ripped from her body. And now, she's disappeared! From the hospital!"

The blood drained from my face. Guy. It had to be him. His favorite prey was young women. And I knew he couldn't leave this town without leaving his mark.

"Apparently her hospital bed had been torn to pieces along with her clothes." Trent sat down at the table and started passing around the food.

I tried not to look nervous but something inside me told me that Guy had found himself a new protégé. A trophy. He'd had several.

The twisting in my stomach returned, this time only worse. I clinched the tablecloth feeling like I was going to lose it.

He was here. And he'd brought another shifter with him. I wrenched in pain.

Trent stood up. "Are you okay, baby?"

I pushed back my seat and fell over. Razors tore through me. He was doing this to me. Calling me out.

The moon shone brightly through the dining room window calling me to take notice. And there I saw it. A glimmer of metal caught the moon's glow. My mother's necklace. Around the neck of a woman I didn't know, but could smell. It was *her*. And beside her, stood Guy. Smiling.

A fire was burning inside me, I was on the verge of turning and I couldn't stop it. My bones began to crack and shift. My skin ripped open. I hollered in agony.

"Boys, go to your rooms. *Now!*" Trent demanded, "Baby. What's happening to you? Do I need to call 911?"

"*No!*" I said, my voice had already turned deep and horrific. I grabbed him by the arm. "Please. Don't. Leave. Me."

"I won't baby. I'm here. I'll always be here." Trent fell to his knees and wrapped his arms around me. "No matter what. We'll do this together."

As Trent held my shattering body I could feel Guy's grip loosen. And then it disappeared completely. He was gone, only toying with me.

My bones pulled back together. My skin stitched itself. The fire inside me burned out. But the look in Trent's eyes told me he was scared. Of me.

"Wh-what are you?"

"Things won't be the same if I tell you. You'll hate me. You'll leave me." I hid my face and cried. I cried for everything I was about to lose.

Trent wiped away my tears and looked me in my eyes. His fear turned to sympathy, "No! I won't! You are my everything. I love you, Bennett. It's okay." He took my hand and placed it on his heart. "Whatever this is. Whatever you are. You are still my Knight."

I looked him in his forgiving eyes. "And you're still my Prince."

Then. Right then. In that moment, I knew he'd understand. Accept me. Not judge me or turn me away like I was so afraid he would. And though Guy was out there, waiting, I knew in my heart I had someone to fight this battle with. A hero.

**To be continued...**



## **Author Bio**

*Up-and-coming author C. Dallas Floyd takes you on a compelling journey with his words. His romances send you on a pursuit for love, truth, and unconditional acceptance. Born and blossoming in the South, C. Dallas Floyd dreams of being an award-winning author and coffeehouse owner. He and his husband spend quiet afternoons on their balcony enjoying the Louisiana sunset and a good book. C. Dallas Floyd is a member of NOLAStars, The North Louisiana Story Tellers and Authors of Romance, and also RWA, Romance Writers of America.*

*Be on the lookout for book two of The Knight Time Chronicles, Morning, Noon, and Knight.*

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