

Finding Home

A Forever Home book 3

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Whether he was only going to be in town for a day or if he decided to stay in one place for a year, Kyle knew he had to stop by the local werewolf alpha's home to introduce himself. It was a formality, but one they took seriously in the big cities. He was hours outside of any major city, which might have meant that he didn't need to bother with the custom, but he felt like it was probably safer just to go with it. Years of living in big packs had taught him how much werewolves liked their traditions.

He rolled down the window in the taxi he was riding in when they were still a few miles from town so that he could stick his nose out into the breeze and hopefully catch a whiff of the alpha. The trail of other werewolves in the area was so faint that Kyle thought most people probably just passed right on through the town without even realizing there was a werewolf in there at all. Kyle took that as a good sign. Maybe, since there weren't that many werewolves there, he could blend in easier. Maybe he could completely disappear altogether.

The town was small, having only a mainstreet, an apartment building that was a square made out of bricks where no one had balconies, and a few houses off to the side. There was an animal shelter, which seemed strange to him since it was such a small town, but he brushed that off. He hadn't been outside of the city much. Maybe small towns had animal shelters. It could have easily been a thing that he'd never heard of.

"You can drop me off anywhere along Main," Kyle said to the taxi driver.

"You sure?" the man asked.

Kyle nodded. "It's cool. I'm good anywhere."

The driver pulled over and Kyle handed him a few twenties. After a month of running, his cash level was getting low. Maybe the alpha could help him find a job to help fix that

problem too. He was careful as he gave the man the cash. Even though he always wore his gloves, he was afraid somehow they'd fail one day.

"Thanks," the driver said.

Kyle opened his door and slid out of the car. Mainstreet was probably a pretty busy place for the people who lived in town, but for him it seemed almost dead, and for once he wasn't looking over his shoulder and waiting for someone to come out and grab him, or some random stranger to bump into him. He breathed deeply and closed his eyes as he tried to find the alpha. He had to be somewhere, but the trail was incredibly faint.

He fixed his backpack over his shoulder and headed down the street. The trail grew stronger, but the direction was weird and he was worried that maybe his senses were getting confused when his nose brought him to the front of a small brick building with a sign that read A Forever Home out front. It was an animal shelter. Kyle didn't think he was in the right place but he went in anyway. The scent of the werewolf was even stronger in the shelter, and Kyle was sure that he wasn't just confusing the scent with that of the dogs anymore.

"Hey, can I help you?" There was a guy at the counter who smiled at him. He had on glasses and although he smelled like animals, he definitely wasn't a werewolf.

"I'm not sure," Kyle answered honestly. He wasn't even sure if he was in the right place or not yet.

"Are you looking to adopt a dog or cat?"

Kyle shook his head. "I'm looking for a werewolf."

The guy's eyes got big, but he didn't look afraid. "I know two of them. Why do you want them?"

"I have to announce myself." Kyle wasn't used to saying this to a human, which the man definitely was.

The guy looked confused, but Kyle didn't know how to help him. He didn't even know if he was allowed to be telling a human so much about them anyway. Werewolves were out to the

general public, but that didn't mean that they were anywhere close to walking hand in hand down the street with the humans as if they knew everything.

"Huh. I didn't know that. Do you want to talk to Jeremy or Marius?"

Neither of those names meant anything to Kyle. "Which of them is the alpha?"

"Neither, as far as I know. At least they've never mentioned that to me before. I'm Seth, by the way. I'm dating Jeremy."

Kyle frowned at him. "You're his mate? He mated to a human?" That didn't make any sense at all. His previous alpha would have never allowed that to happen. If Jeremy was the alpha, did that make Seth his alpha as well? Was that even possible?

"No, no, at least I hope not. I don't really think of us like that anyway. He's my boyfriend. Why would you have to announce yourself to an alpha?" As Kyle watched, Seth seemed to figure it out for himself, and he let out a little gasp. "You're a werewolf!"

Kyle wasn't used to people looking happy about that when they figured that out about him. "I am." He bobbed on the balls of his feet anxiously. "I need to talk to the alpha, whatever his name is."

Seth pulled out his phone and quickly starting typing. "I'm sending them both a text. I knew that there were other werewolves. Of course there were. There had to be. But we've never met any of them."

"We?" Kyle asked him once Seth had looked up from his phone.

"Jack and I. He's dating Marius. They live together in the house behind this shelter. Marius is the one that really runs this shelter."

Kyle just stared at him. Werewolves and humans openly living together. It wasn't allowed and it wasn't even particularly possible. "Does everyone else in town know that they're werewolves?"

Seth frowned. "Sort of. Marius is out. Jeremy is... working on it. I'm trying to convince him that it would be safe to come out, since his brother has and nothing really bad came out of that."

Kyle hated the idea of this human insisting that any of his kind come out into the world. While this town may very well have been different and accepting, that wasn't the case for the rest of the world. Kyle bared his teeth, and Seth had the good sense to take a step back from him.

The smell of an alpha werewolf hit him and Kyle instantly settled down. He lowered his gaze to the floor and moved away from Seth as well as two men came out of the dog area and started walking toward them. "Sir," Kyle greeted the closest of them. He hoped that he was talking to the alpha, but he couldn't tell their scents apart when they were so close together.

When the men didn't say anything to him, Kyle took a chance and glanced up at them. They were staring at him, both of them looking confused, which was not something Kyle had been expecting. What he was used to was an alpha holding him by the scruff of his neck and pushing him to the floor to further show his submission, not this stunned silence. "Um..."

"What's this?" the one with the blond hair asked.

Seth cleared his throat. "Jeremy, Marius, this is Kyle. He's a werewolf."

"Hey. I'm Marius." This man had shorter blond hair and he offered Kyle his hand, which he instantly retreated from. "If you're worried about if I can do something like some of us can, I can, but I'm able to control it, and even if I wasn't, it's not a bad thing."

That was nice for him and all, but that didn't make Kyle want to jump into his arms anytime soon either. "I can't, and mine isn't."

Marius's expression turned sympathetic. "I see. My brother, Jeremy, also didn't get a great gift."

The idea of anything they could do being a gift made Kyle snort. There was nothing good or wanted about what he could do. Most days he hated himself for it. Marius dropped his hand.

"Are you here to adopt a pet then?"

Kyle quickly shook his head. "I'm new in town. I need to introduce myself to the local alpha so that I can try to get his permission to stay in his territory and..." Kyle's words trailed off as Jeremy chuckled, almost sounding as if he was laughing at him. "What?" Kyle snapped defensively.

"We don't really do that here. Any of it. It's great to have another one of us in town, but probably most of what you're used to won't apply here. Any pack or alpha type of thing you were thinking, it won't be happening here," Jeremy said.

Kyle had no idea how that could be, but he was more than willing to listen to the older werewolf. "So..." He looked between Jeremy and Marius. "I'd like to stay here for a bit. I don't know how long, but normally when I enter a werewolf's territory I need to announce myself and get permission. If you have a set time of how long I can stay I won't go over that. I'm just--"

"Are you running from something? If you are, we can help you," Marius interrupted.

"Not really," Kyle hedged. He wasn't. He was just trying something new for a while.

"Have you ever lived on your own before?" Jeremy asked.

Kyle shook his head. Most people might have thought that Jeremy was only asking if he'd always lived with his parents, but that wouldn't have been a yes either. To a werewolf though, the answer Jeremy wanted was whether or not he'd ever been away from a pack before now. "The smallest pack I've ever lived in was ten adults. The largest was thirty."

Marius shared a look with his brother. "And you left them to strike out on your own because...?"

Kyle held up his gloved hand in explanation. Marius nodded, seeming to get what Kyle was saying. "Do you have a place to stay already?"

Kyle shook his head. "I was hoping to find a place after I got into town."

"I can ask Ryan if he's still looking for someone," Seth spoke up. Jeremy shot him a dark look and Kyle wondered what kind of a person would make a werewolf angry like that. "He's not that bad," Seth protested as he shared a look with Jeremy.

"Would I be safe there?" Kyle quietly asked. Whatever was going on that he didn't understand, it really didn't matter to him as long as he wouldn't be bothered there. He'd had far more than enough of that to last him a lifetime.

Seth turned his attention onto him and his expression softened. "Ryan was one of my best friends, but then he screwed up. That was almost a year ago. He's getting better and he understands what he did and why it was wrong, even though his heart was in the right place. You're a werewolf though, if you let him know that I'm sure he won't bug you. He doesn't mind you all, he's just not about to do anything to piss you off either."

Kyle smiled. He could live with that. "Can I get his number from you?"

"Seth..." Jeremy sounded upset.

Seth rolled his eyes. "He's better now, I promise. Besides, he's not stupid enough to try anything with a werewolf. I can promise you that. Not many people are."

"You'd be surprised." Marius sighed. "Kyle, Ryan isn't a bad guy. I've met him a few times. He's just young and stupid. You'd be fine there if you two hit it off and you wanted to stay there. You don't have to worry about him at all."

Kyle really wasn't all that worried. He could handle humans. It was werewolves he had to be careful around. "If he's still looking for a roommate, I think I'd like to go talk to him."

Seth grabbed a piece of paper and quickly wrote down a phone number before handing it to Kyle. "That's his cell. He lives in the big square brick apartment building. Really those are the only apartments in town. They're not awful but they're not great either. I used to live there, as did Jack, who also works here and he's with Marius. If you stick around you'll meet him too."

Kyle did want to meet him. He wanted to get to know the people that were important to these werewolves who were so different than any other werewolves he'd ever met before. But first he needed to find a place to sleep that night since bus stations and bathrooms seemed to be out of the question in a town of this size.

Ryan was just about to go for a run when his phone started ringing. He frowned down at the unfamiliar number and took his phone with him as he left his apartment. It wasn't what he usual did, but he figured that he could walk for a bit and talk to whoever was calling him before he started running. "Hello?"

"Hey, is this Ryan?"

He was already down a flight of stairs. "Yeah. Who are you?"

"My name's Kyle. Seth gave me your number."

Ryan stumbled on the stair. "Seth? How is he?"

"He seems to be okay, I guess. I really only just met him so I couldn't say for sure. Are you still looking for a roommate? I need a place to stay."

He was still looking, but he didn't want to share his apartment, however insanely expensive it was, with just anyone just because he was in a bind. "Uh. Can you tell me a bit about yourself first?"

Kyle's voice got soft. "I'm twenty-one and I'm a werewolf. You don't really need to know that much more about me than that since you're human and generally humans don't like my kind, or at least they don't tolerate us too well."

Ryan swallowed thickly. He knew a werewolf. Everyone in town did. And Marius was nice and all, but that didn't mean that every werewolf was going to be. "Uh..." Ryan really wasn't okay having a werewolf living with him, but he needed to share the rent with *someone* and in a small town that wasn't always easy to do. "I'd like to meet you and then decide. When's best for you?"

"Are you busy now? Literally I just got out of a taxi, did a few things in town, and I've got no where else to go. I'm okay with a trial basis or whatever you need. I've got cash."

Ryan walked down the few flights of stairs to the front of the building and then he went out onto the sidewalk where there was fresh air and plenty of sunshine. He'd met a few rash people before, but never any quite like Kyle was making himself out to be.

"Why here?" was all Ryan thought to ask him.

A guy came around the corner. He had short, spiky black hair that was obviously dyed since his brown roots were starting to show through. But his hair went with his black hoodie and the gloves he had on. He had a phone in his hand, which he put away, and Ryan heard his call end. "Because there are werewolves here that I don't know."

"Kyle?" Ryan asked.

He nodded. "Ryan?"

"Yeah. So... Hi." He offered Kyle his hand, but Kyle just shoved his hands into the front pocket of his hoodie instead of touching him. "Uh..."

"I can't touch people. Ever." Kyle scrunched up his face and Ryan was starting to think this guy was a bit crazy.

"How do you go through life without touching anyone?" Surely Kyle had to run into people on occasion. Ryan did it all the time.

Kyle shrugged. "I'm careful, I guess. Want to get something to drink and talk for a while? I promise I'm not a serial killer."

Ryan was still hesitant. "Then what are you? Why here? Did you get kicked out or something and decide a town in the middle of nowhere was a good place to crash for a while? Because that's not the smartest thing ever."

Kyle snorted and leaned back against the brick. Ryan stood beside him as he waited for answers that had better start making some sense if Kyle had any hope of living with him. "This isn't going to make much sense to a human--"

"Try me anyway."

Kyle glanced at him before continuing. Ryan was surprised at just how bright blue his eyes were, almost like he was looking at a blue topaz when he looked over at Kyle. "Werewolves live in family groups, like packs, and sometimes they become suffocating. When leaving one of these groups we're not really allowed to stay in the same area as we were before. So we have to leave and either join a new group or strike out on our own."

"Which is what you did. Right?"

Kyle nodded and Ryan thought about that for a moment. "Do you drink?" Ryan asked. Kyle quickly shook his head. "Do drugs?" Kyle just rolled his eyes. "Do you care that I'm gay?"

With a smirk, Kyle shook his head again. "I am too, not that it matters."

"Why not?"

Kyle shot him a look that made Ryan think that he must have been missing something. "I don't date or do anything that would even come close to dating."

That made Ryan think of Seth, and how Seth had first explained his being asexual to him. "Are you ace? I had a friend who was."

"No, I'm not. It's more complicated than that for me unfortunately."

Ryan quickly dropped it. "Do you want to know if I drink or do drugs or anything like that? You're not asking me any questions."

Kyle just shrugged and looked across the street from them. There weren't too many people out yet so Ryan figured he had to be looking at a man walking along with a couple kids, all under the age of five. When they went into the grocery store Kyle looked back at him again. "If you're dangerous, you won't be to me. I'm a werewolf. I'm faster and stronger than you. If you do drugs, smoke, or drink a lot that's on you. I don't but I'm not in the position to tell you not to do something. I'm not allergic to any kinds of pets and you don't smell like you have any so I figured that wasn't worth asking about. I can't have chocolate or caffeine but I don't care if you do. I don't shift much, I won't leave wolf hair all over the place, and I mostly just keep to myself."

I just really need a place to crash for a while. If you give me that then I'll mostly just stay out of your way."

Ryan grew quiet as he thought about what Kyle was saying. "There aren't a whole lot of places in town to rent."

"I figured that, given how small the town is and all. Are you willing to give me a chance?"

Ryan figured that he probably was. Kyle seemed decent enough anyway. "Month to month at four hundred with a security deposit that costs the same? Can you do that?"

Kyle took out his wallet and dug out a few hundreds while Ryan was watching. "I can." He offered the money to Ryan, who shook his head. Kyle put it away again.

"We need to get you on the lease first. That money doesn't go to me, it goes to the office. But they won't require a background check or anything."

"Even though I'm a wolf?" Kyle sounded uncertain.

Ryan wasn't really sure about that actually. "Can you maybe not tell the manager that? I honestly have no idea if it would matter or not, but I'd hate for it to be one just in case. And you said that you don't shift that much anyway so I doubt it would matter to begin with."

Kyle pursed his lips, but after a moment he nodded anyway. "Sure. It's not like it'll be the first time I've pretended to be human anyway."

"Great. Then let's go get you introduced to the manager."

Getting Kyle on the lease didn't take long, and neither did moving him in. Especially since Kyle didn't actually have anything to move in with him to begin with. Ryan had never seen anyone with so few things.

As soon as the lease was signed Ryan took him upstairs to the apartment. It wasn't too messy, but he was still a bit embarrassed by it and he really hadn't been expecting someone to move in with him when he woke up that morning. Seth was always much better at keeping their

place neat. He missed living with Seth, but that wasn't going to be happening ever again, mostly because Ryan had screwed up so badly, and he had to remember that.

"That's the kitchen, shared bathroom, living room, and your bedroom is on the left," Ryan said as he pointed.

Kyle barely looked at him. "Thanks." He went into his bedroom without another word and closed the door behind himself.

"Well, okay then." Ryan shrugged and figured that Kyle was shy or something. Whatever it was, Ryan wasn't too worried. He went to the kitchen and heated up a few frozen burritos in the microwave. Then, when he was in front of the TV with a warm plate of food on his lap, he decided to text Seth. *Hey. Thanks for sending Kyle over.* He and Seth were talking more, but he knew they would never be friends like they had been before. He was trying to get used to that.

He was nearly through his show when Kyle came out of the bedroom. He was still heavily dressed, including his gloves.

"Do you want to watch something?" Ryan asked.

Kyle looked at the screen, then at him. Then he sat down as far to the other end of the couch as he could possibly go.

Ryan held out the remote to him. "Here you go."

Kyle looked at it, then up at Ryan. "Can you put it on the cushion between us?"

That was pretty weird, but Ryan did it anyway. Once he had moved his hand away Kyle picked up the remote and he'd put on a movie for them to watch. Ryan hadn't seen the movie before and he wasn't sure how he felt about Kyle just putting on a movie without even asking him what he wanted to watch first. But that wasn't the biggest part of what was bugging him about his new roommate. "What's with you and touching?" he asked Kyle bluntly.

Kyle frowned and looked down at his hands. "How much do you know about werewolves?"

"Not much. The caffeine thing and the chocolate was pretty obvious really. But that's about it." Ryan shrugged.

"Some of us have...things. That we can do. Me not touching you is as much for my protection as it is for yours."

Ryan stared at him. "Uh...So you're dangerous. That's what you're saying?" He got up from the couch and moved across the room from him.

But Kyle shook his head. "Look, it's not like that. Some of us are, sure. But I'm not. What I do...it's..." He sighed and ran his hands roughly through his short hair.

"Why don't you tell me what it is that you're capable of? That might be a good place to start." And then Ryan would decide if he could handle living with Kyle or not, or if he had to go talk to the apartment manager about figuring out something else.

Kyle pulled his legs under him. "I know secrets, okay? Deep, dark stuff that you'd never tell anyone. The things you feel guiltiest for. I touch someone, even for a second, and suddenly I know that one horrible thing that they hate about themselves and I can't stop it. So I wear the gloves and I need you not to touch me, even on accident."

Ryan took a deep breath. Secrets. That wasn't so bad. "So...you're harmless unless I touch you? Right?"

Kyle gave him a quick nod. "Absolutely. And I'm always layered up like this so the chances of you actually touching me are pretty slim. I've had this my whole life and I've learned to deal with it. I'm not dangerous to be around at all. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before we signed the lease agreement. I'm still working out how to live with humans in general. This is all really new to me. If you're not comfortable though I can go."

"No. I'm okay. I'm just processing this I guess. Like holy shit you know things about people, random strangers, but eh it's not that bad because it's not like you're going around the government trying to spy on people. Right?"

"Yeah. None of that," Kyle said with a slight smile.

Ryan decided to sit back down next to him. "So it's really not that big of a deal. You don't touch me, I won't touch you, and you don't get to know about the things I feel guilty for."

"Thing," Kyle quietly corrected him. When Ryan looked over at him, Kyle explained. "Thing. Singular. I don't get a rush of guilty secrets, just the one thing that someone feels worst about. It's generally a big thing though, except for with children. Their secrets are usually safer to have. Like they took an extra cupcake when they weren't supposed to. But it's not just the act that hurts, it's how they felt about it. So a kid could think it's the worst thing in the world and I feel that pain and their fear and suffering just like if it was an adult with some horrible secret that I just accidentally found out about." Kyle looked back down at his hands.

"Damn that sucks."

Kyle nodded. "It really does."

They fell into silence, but it didn't really bother Ryan that Kyle got quiet. He just seemed to curl up in all of his clothes as he sat there next to him. As if he was used to being quiet and trying to stay out of the way.

"Where did you move here from?" Ryan asked him after a while.

Kyle didn't look over at him. "West of here."

That told him absolutely nothing. "West like California? Or west like eventually you'd hit Japan?"

"Not Japan," Kyle replied. Ryan caught his small smile.

"We're you born a werewolf or how does that work?" Ryan wasn't really trying to be nosy, but he was curious about Kyle. It would probably have helped his curiosity some if Kyle had been willing to open up a little more about himself. Sure, Ryan knew the big scary thing of why Kyle kept his gloves on and why he didn't touch anyone, but Ryan wanted to know about the little things in Kyle's life too. Ryan and Seth had been best friends and living with someone he was that close to had been great. He missed feeling connected to another person and now that he had a roommate again he wanted that kind of friendship back. Kyle wouldn't be replacing

Seth, that was pretty clear right from the start since Kyle seemed really secretive about everything, but he wanted some kind of a relationship with him at least.

Kyle switched positions on the couch so that he was facing Ryan, but he still had his knees between them. "I know werewolves coming out was supposed to normalize conversations like this, but it still feels weird to me to be talking about werewolf stuff, which is all stuff I swore never to tell a human about, with an actual human." He made a face and Ryan laughed.

"Hey, I'm just curious. I'd like to get to know you better?"

Kyle wrinkled his nose. "Why?"

"Because you're my roommate..." Ryan thought the answer would have been obvious. He shrugged. "I just want to know who I'm living with."

"That's fair." Kyle sighed and grew quiet again. After a few minutes he said, "We're born as werewolves. The whole biting thing doesn't really work. I could gnaw on your arm all I wanted and it wouldn't do anything. Shifting doesn't hurt either, if you were thinking about asking. And since I don't shift it's not really an issue for me."

"You don't like to?" If Ryan was able to turn into a wolf he knew that he'd be running around doing that like crazy. It had to be better than being human all the time. He wouldn't have to sit around in traffic or anything. He could just run wherever he wanted to go.

"When I'm a wolf I don't have any clothes on to protect myself," Kyle quietly explained. "I don't want to start mooching off of you already, but can I have a burrito too? I'll go to the store tomorrow. Or we can order something. I've got money."

Ryan didn't really care if Kyle ate his food, as long as he replaced it later. "You can eat whatever you want. Just buy another later."

Kyle got up from the couch and Ryan went back to watching the movie.

Kyle had spent very little time around humans, but Ryan wasn't so bad. He was sharing his food at least. And in the last few hours since Kyle had met him, Ryan hadn't tried to use what he could do for his own advantage. It wasn't much to ask for, but Kyle was still thankful for it all the same. It was nice for him to realize that humans weren't the impossible, hard to understand, idiots that his old pack had made them out to be. As long as Ryan left him alone and Kyle could keep to himself as much as possible things might not be so bad.

"What'd you do before you moved here?" Ryan called to him as Kyle waited for the burrito to heat up in the microwave.

"Not much. Odd jobs here and there." Kyle really didn't want to talk about his previous life in the pack more than that. "Mostly I just used what I could do to help the pack out. I got paid a bit for that." And he'd saved it all up. He hadn't been given a choice in that, but he did get to decide not to spend the money, which he hadn't, and now he didn't have to worry about work so much as long as he was careful with his finances from here on out.

"I work at a bookstore. I just started and the pay isn't good but it's only about ten minutes away and I get an employee discount if you ever want anything."

The microwave dinged and his burrito was done so Kyle brought it back to the couch to eat it with Ryan. A bookstore job sounded nice. He'd never worked retail but as long as someone liked dealing with people it probably wasn't too bad. "That's cool." He nibbled on his burrito and watched Ryan while he focused on the movie. Kyle didn't really care about the movie. He was more interested in the human he was currently sharing a space with.

"Why'd you leave home?" Ryan asked him after a bit.

Kyle just shrugged. "I needed a change." He'd needed to get away from people who were more focused on using him for what he could do and less on how it made him feel and the damage it was doing to him to know all those secrets all the time. "Are you close to your family?"

"Not really. We were never all that close though, so I'm not losing much. I had more time with babysitters and the TV than I ever did with my parents when I was growing up. When I was eighteen moving out seemed like the best thing for me. I think my parents liked the idea of having kids more than the actual experience."

"Sorry."

Ryan shrugged him off. "Don't worry about it. It's all good."

He didn't seem bothered by his family history at all so Kyle left it alone. Kyle was nearly done with his burrito when Ryan abruptly got up from the couch. "I'm about to go for a run. Do you want to come?"

"Like for fun?" Kyle didn't understand the need to run other than to get away from someone, or to chase them.

Ryan laughed and got his shoes on. "Yeah. So I take it that's a no?"

"Hard pass for sure." Kyle had absolutely no interest in going running at all for any reason right that moment.

"See you later then." Ryan took his keys and his phone and then he was gone, leaving Kyle alone in the apartment for the first time. He could have snooped, and he might have been curious enough to as well, but stretching out on the couch with his burrito was a lot more fun and it was nice to consider trusting someone for once. He hadn't really been able to do that much before.

After a while he turned off the TV and headed into his bedroom. There was nothing there, not that he had expected there to be anything. He had some basics with him and he dug his thin sleeping bag out of his backpack. It wasn't much support, but it was something and it kept him warm as he lay there looking up at the ceiling. It wasn't that late but he was tired. Kyle had been on the move for days, largely walking but getting rides where he could, and when he couldn't and he was just too tired to walk anymore, he'd taken a taxi or two. He sighed and pulled off his gloves. He was alone, it would be safe to be exposed for a little while. His fingernails were dirty

from the last time he'd shifted and it had been a while since he'd been safe enough to get a shower.

With Ryan gone he thought that he might be able to get that done now. Kyle got up again and slipped into the bathroom. He didn't have a towel, but if he managed to get back to his sleeping bag to dry off before Ryan got back he didn't think that he would need one.

The water was warm and he realized that he needed to go to the store for more than just a shower as he started borrowing small amounts of Ryan's shampoo and body wash as well. It sucked that he was already starting out as a crappy roommate.

He didn't shower long, just enough to feel clean again, before he hurried back into his room and lay naked in his sleeping bag as he got dry again. After always being bundled up, being naked was a relief. Shifting was even better, and he quickly did that as well. He was best when he was alone and he hoped that Ryan wouldn't want to do a lot of roommate things with him that would get in the way of him being alone.

Ryan came back while Kyle was still getting dry.

"Kyle?" he called out.

He shifted so that he could talk again. It had felt good to be a wolf for a while, but now it was time to be a human again. "Hey. I'm in here. I'll be out soon." He didn't want to get dressed in all of his layers again, but he couldn't very well expect Ryan to stay way on the other side of the room from him either. He started pulling on some clean clothes. Well, cleaner clothes anyway. He needed to do laundry too.

"I got some donuts for free. They were just going to throw them out."

Some people might have turned their noses up at free donuts that were probably pretty old and stale, but Kyle definitely wouldn't. He finished pulling on his gloves as he came out of the bedroom. "Thanks." Ryan had the box open on the counter. There were six of them, two chocolate, and four regular. Kyle took one of the regular donuts with vanilla frosting and orange sprinkles.

He started eating as Ryan came over and took the two chocolate ones for himself. He hesitated though before he started eating. "You okay if I eat these?"

Kyle shrugged. "I can't eat chocolate so go for it."

"If you ate it, would you die like a dog might from eating chocolate?"

He might, if he had enough, but he'd never heard of a werewolf dying from chocolate overdose. Most of them were smart enough to avoid it altogether. "I'd probably just get really sick." He'd never tried chocolate and had no interest in doing so either. There were plenty of other sweets available if he had a craving.

The donuts actually weren't half bad and Ryan poured a glass of milk for each of them. Then he seemed to fumble. "Uh. Is milk okay?"

"Yeah. It's great actually." Kyle couldn't have coffee so he gladly dunked his donut into the milk after each bite. "Do you eat like this all the time? The burritos and the donuts?"

Ryan nodded. "I guess I do."

"Your metabolism must be pretty great." Either that or he ran constantly. One of the two.

Ryan blushed and turned away from him. "Something like that."

Kyle wanted his secret to staying that fit then. Being a wolf kept him in shape, for the most part at least. Shifting did take a lot of energy. But he still had to be careful when he decided to indulge in a ton of sweets or fried foods. He had it bad for mozzarella sticks.

When he was done eating, he followed Ryan back to the couch. He couldn't really call the space a living room since the whole apartment was so small and he'd grown up with the living room being a completely separate space, which this wasn't. At the same time though, it was nice to be with only one other person. He liked not having to share his space, his things, and his money with the rest of the pack. He was on his own for the first time in his life and while he'd been scared when he'd first left the pack, he was feeling much better now. Much more at peace with his decision to strike out on his own and do his own thing for once.

"Did you like living with your pack?" Ryan asked him. Kyle couldn't believe a human was this casual, this comfortable, when talking about werewolf matters. It was unnatural, but it didn't feel necessarily wrong anymore. People in this town, at least the few he'd talked to, really seemed to be okay with sharing their world with werewolves, and actually knowing about it too. When Ryan talked about it, he didn't sound afraid at all. He just seemed curious, or like he was just making conversation. Talking to be talking. That sort of thing. Kyle didn't think of him as being nosy at all, and part of him was glad to have someone to talk to about this after so long of not being able to share any of it.

"It was okay," Kyle replied. It was still hard for him to say anything negative about his life with the people who had raised him. Two months away from them and he was still looking over his shoulder, waiting for someone to come find him and drag him back to there. The distance was helping though. Like maybe they were starting to lose interest in him and give up entirely. He was starting to get some breathing room for once and that felt really good.

"The whole not touching thing, does that apply to all touching?"

Kyle wasn't sure where Ryan was going with this. "Yeah. Any touching. I can't do it."

Ryan scrunched up his face. "So kissing? Sex?"

Kyle nodded. That was part of touching.

For some reason Ryan looked stunned. "Wait, so you've never had sex?"

Kyle didn't understand why Ryan suddenly cared about his sex life. He finished off his donut in a hurry, then he downed his milk as well. "I said I don't like touching people, not that I've never had sex."

Ryan frowned. "They seem like they'd be mutually exclusive."

"Some guys can be persuasive." Kyle shrugged. He really didn't want to talk about this, but he figured Ryan probably liked sex. Most people did. And people who enjoyed sex often didn't seem to understand those people who didn't have any interest in it at all. He didn't care about it. Sex meant nothing to him. It meant even less than the donut he had eaten. At least the

donut was something he enjoyed eating, even if it was stale. Sex had always been this miserable thing for him where he just lay there wishing it was over as fast as possible so he could go back to pretending that it had never happened to begin with.

"I like sex and I'll make sure it never happens out here. Okay?"

Kyle didn't much care either way. "You can do whatever you want. Seeing people have sex doesn't bother me. I don't care where you have it or how loud you are. As long as you never ask me to be involved it won't matter to me. Maybe I am asexual. I've never really given it much thought. Sex is just one of those things I don't enjoy being a part of." Kyle didn't really care about being physical with anyone really. He had no overwhelming urge to hug or kiss anyone. He did want to be close to people, but on an emotional level without any pressure to be physical with them. If there was a word for that, then that was probably what he was. Even if he could touch people without being intrusive into their lives, he really wasn't sure if he would or not. He wanted friends, not lovers, but so many people seemed to only value the physical side of relationships. It seemed to him that Ryan was the same way, which didn't bother him at all. After all, Ryan was his roommate, not a friend and definitely not a boyfriend.

It was getting late so Kyle got up from the couch. "I think I'll go to bed. Thanks for giving me a chance."

"Yeah. Night." Ryan gave him a wave and Kyle disappeared into his bedroom where he locked the door behind himself and then quietly stripped off his clothes and shifted so that he would be comfortable. The room was cool enough and Ryan was staying quiet in the living room. For once Kyle wasn't in a loud house with a dozen other werewolves. He had his own space and he was able to relax. Within half an hour of going to bed, he was able to fall asleep.

Ryan had to leave for work early the next day and since Kyle wasn't up when he left, he figured he wouldn't be seeing his new roommate again until sometime that night. He couldn't stop thinking about him though, or rather, how he couldn't touch anybody. It made him conscious about each and every time he casually touched another person. When they handed him money, when someone randomly brushed up against him. These were normal occurrences in his daily life. He expected to have physical contact with strangers. It was part of life.

But for Kyle it must have been hell. What he could do, what he had to go through everyday--Ryan didn't question any of it at all. There was no reason to. Not with how Kyle dressed, always keeping himself covered like that. Ryan kept his place hot but under all those layers Kyle must have been burning up.

As soon as he got home that afternoon he upped the air conditioning. Now that he had a roommate, he didn't need to skimp so much on stuff like getting warmer and colder when he wanted to be. He was fine right then, but he doubted that Kyle was.

"Hey, Kyle, you here?" Ryan called out after a bit. He hadn't heard him when he came in and he didn't hear him after nearly half an hour later. Kyle's bedroom door was closed but that didn't mean anything. Sometimes Ryan closed his bedroom door too, even when he was at home. It was easier than cleaning up all the time. Out of sight, out of mind. That sort of thing.

But it didn't seem like Kyle was there. Ryan ran the air conditioner until he was too cold to go around without wearing a hoodie for much longer. Maybe Kyle would be more comfortable though. Ryan put on a few more layers as he made some popcorn for dinner. He really needed to figure out how to make some real meals. If he was close to anyone they would probably have given him hell for how he ate sometimes.

But since there was no one there to tell him otherwise Ryan happily ate his popcorn. He was halfway through the bag when Kyle came back.

He paused inside the doorway, then looked right at Ryan. "You have the air on."

Ryan nodded. "I do. It feels nice. Right?"

"It does. You aren't too cold?"

"Nope." It wasn't a lie either. Once he'd put on some more clothes he'd gotten pretty comfortable in the tiny apartment. "Were you out having fun?" He didn't want to pry, but he was sure that Kyle didn't know anyone in town either.

Kyle shrugged and sat down beside him on the couch. "Not really. I wanted to get to know the town more, but it's really, ridiculously small. That's okay though. I don't plan to get to know a lot of people."

Ryan was surprised by that, but then he realized that his surprise was coming from his own background. He liked people. Maybe Kyle didn't. Not getting to touch anyone would definitely make him reconsider being around them. "Planning to get to know me?" he teased.

Kyle rolled his eyes, and smiled a little. "You're my roomie. I don't really have a choice." After a few minutes he took off his hoodie, but he still had on a long sleeve shirt under and no more of his skin was exposed than before. But Ryan did get a good look at the body he had been hiding underneath the oversized hoodie. Kyle was lean and toned. Ryan just wished he knew what kind of abs Kyle was hiding too.

"You can stop looking now, you're not getting into my pants."

Ryan quickly glanced away from him. "I know that. Obviously. Look, I'm sorry. You're attractive though. But I'm sure you know that."

He snorted, and then he started laughing. "It's fine. Seriously. I get it. You already said you like sex. And I know you're gay. So it's okay. I'm just a little overwhelmed right now. Have been for a while actually. So let's do this. You can look, but you can't touch. Don't even try."

Ryan got it. He really did, but he didn't think that was really fair to Kyle either. After screwing up so hard with Seth, he wanted to try harder with his newest roommate. "You're not some peep show. I can handle not treating you like one."

He just barely caught Kyle's small smile before it was gone again just as quickly as it had come. "Thanks for that. It's really decent of you."

"You're welcome. Though, just for the record, it would be nice to be able to touch you sometimes." He and Seth had enjoyed a relationship like that, even though Seth was asexual. Seth had enjoyed kissing, and Ryan did too.

"You're going to have to find someone else to suck you off." Kyle sounded so angry that it took Ryan by surprise, and that surprise cost him a few minutes while he tried to figure out just why Kyle had jumped to that conclusion about what he was saying.

"I meant holding your hand. Hugging. Things like that. Shit." Ryan shook his head and got off the couch. If that's what Kyle thought of him, then they had some serious things to discuss because that's not what Ryan wanted from him at all.

Kyle's gaze followed him around the room as he paced. "Really? You're going to start with that?"

Ryan didn't like Kyle's tone, or how defensive he was feeling about what Kyle was saying. "That's all I was saying. The end. Hugs and holding hands. Maybe some kisses. Look, I'm sorry that's not what you expected, or maybe I'm not. I don't know. The point is that I get that you can't touch people. All I was saying is that I wish you could. That's it. Seriously."

Kyle seemed to lose some of his stiffness as Ryan babbled. "You said that you liked to hook up with people."

Ryan shrugged. "Yeah. And?"

"Hooking up means sex." Kyle said it like he thought Ryan was stupid.

He rolled his eyes. "I know what it means, but that's not all I do. I..." God, he sounded so ridiculous saying this. "As much as I like sex, and I do, sometimes I miss just being close to someone. The last time I had a real conversation with someone I was dating was something like last year. The rest of it is some movies, meals, and plenty of sex. Nothing more. My old roommate, Seth, a lot of that I could do with him but I was a moron. I put too high a value on what I wasn't getting from him that I didn't see what I was. If I hadn't been so stupid I could be dating him right now instead of Jeremy being with him."

Kyle rolled his eyes. "Look, I don't know Seth, or Jeremy, but I'm pretty sure that if Seth never dated you, there was no chance no matter how you were, or how you are now. From what I know of people, they either want to be with you or they don't. But whatever you're thinking right now, I'm not the answer. I'm not Seth's replacement and while it's great that you realized that in the long run sex doesn't matter all that much, it doesn't change anything between us."

He got up and, without another word, headed into his bedroom, leaving Ryan alone to think about what he'd said.

It didn't take Ryan long to get up too, but instead of going to his own room, he went to stand in front of Kyle's door. "Kyle?" he called out.

Kyle didn't open the door. "Yeah?"

"I'm sorry." Ryan wasn't really sure what else to say. Clearly moving Kyle in was a mistake. Ryan couldn't continue to afford the apartment by himself but he wasn't fit to live with right now either. Not when he was still so full of guilt over what he'd done to Seth and how he'd ruined his friendship with his best friend so carelessly.

Kyle opened the door this time. He looked more frustrated than anything and he didn't seem angry, not at all like Ryan had expected him to be. "For what?"

"You're not Seth," Ryan began.

Kyle nodded. "I'm not even close. We're not even the same species."

Ryan really didn't think of werewolves as being all that different from humans, certainly not enough to call them a different species, but he figured that he and Kyle had done more than enough arguing right now that he wasn't going to start another argument up now. "Do you want to move out?"

Kyle didn't even look surprised by his question. Maybe he was used to bouncing around from place to place so much that not getting along with people was normal for him. Except, whatever had happened in Kyle's past, it wasn't his fault that they weren't getting along. Ryan knew he was solely to blame for that.

"Do you want me to go?" Kyle asked him instead.

Ryan shook his head. He didn't at all. He liked having a roommate. "I'd like you to stay. It's me that needs work here, not you. You're fine."

Kyle's unreadable expression softened a little. He even smiled. It wasn't much, but it was something. "I'll stay. And you're not the only one not good with living with people. Maybe you're like me, and not good about being with people in general. Personally, I suck at it. But maybe if you're not expecting anything from me more than money for the rent and utilities, then maybe we can make this work. It would be nice to be able to settle down in one place for a minute or two."

Ryan was pretty sure he could handle that. "Sure. Yeah. So, truce?" He offered Kyle his hand, then thought better of it. But to his surprise Kyle held out his hand as well. "I thought you couldn't touch anyone."

"I've got gloves on. Only touch me on them, and only lightly, and just for a few seconds, and I can shake your hand."

Ryan was careful as he did just that, making contact with Kyle only for an instant. It was nothing more than the brush of his fingers against the glove covering Kyle's hand, but it was something. "Thanks." He dropped his hand then stepped back.

Kyle's smile grew. "I didn't get anything from you. Thanks."

"Anything...?"

Kyle rolled his eyes, and he didn't lose his smile one bit. "Your guilty secrets. I didn't get any of them. It was nice. Thanks. I generally don't touch people because that usually leads to me getting flashes. For once it didn't happen. But I'm not willing to push my luck with that right now."

Ryan understood, and he wouldn't push Kyle either. "Thanks for shaking my hand."

Kyle's little smile turned into a smirk. "You're welcome." He looked around. "So... What now?"

"Want to go for a walk? I'll show you the town," Ryan offered. It seemed like as good a way as any to make peace between them.

Kyle shrugged. "Sure. What the hell. Maybe there's something interesting on the one street this town has."

"Yeah, probably not." Ryan snorted and got his things together. A few minutes later they were walking out the door together, with Ryan being very careful not to touch him.

"I saw the town earlier," Kyle said as they walked. "But I didn't have a tour necessarily. There's not much here though. A chocolate shop, the apartment building, the pet shelter. It's a tiny town."

Ryan wasn't sure if Kyle liked that or not. "Better or worse than what you're used to?"

Kyle shrugged. "Not really either. I've lived in a lot of places, and passed through a bunch of different packs. Some lived in small cities, some in towns like this, most though, most were in big cities. The biggest place I was in was Denver, but that wasn't for more than a week. The alpha there expected everyone under him to be literally under him. Whenever he wanted."

Ryan couldn't help the shudder that rushed through him. He glanced over at Kyle. He wanted to hug him, or at least tell him that nothing like that would be expected out of him ever again, but that wasn't something Ryan could promise. Because he didn't know what Kyle's life would bring, or even if he'd be around for more than a week. Kyle seemed to be ready to move on at any moment. For some reason Ryan couldn't name, he wanted Kyle around. The guy seemed like he needed a place to settle down, even if that wasn't for very long. But Ryan wanted Kyle to stay there. Kyle seemed like he needed some stability in his life and Ryan liked having him around. "I'm glad you're out of there at least."

"Thanks. You're not bad for a human. You're easy to talk to at least. I haven't known many humans and I didn't expect them to be like you." Kyle moved away from them as they walked, which didn't surprise Ryan at all. "I wish I could touch people though. It would be nice to have a normal life. A normal love life even."

"Yeah." Ryan couldn't imagine not being able to touch another person. He started thinking about it though. "So, is it just one secret for everyone? Like, if you touched me, and then knew my big secret, would it never change?"

Kyle shook his head. "Maybe, but probably not. People feel guilty about things all the time. It seems like, no matter where I went, alphas would always try to use me to make sure their pack was staying in line. That hurts though. I wish it didn't. I haven't figured out a way to become numb to it all though. Not yet at least. Sometimes I think, you know, if I had more practice I'd be better. But I've never found a safe way to do that where I wasn't getting hurt too."

Ryan's ridiculous idea was starting to form. "What if you practiced with me? My biggest, guiltiest secret isn't that bad."

Kyle stopped walking and Ryan turned to him on the sidewalk. "What do you think it is? This big dark thing you did?"

He was acting like it was probably nothing, like he'd heard it all before and Ryan's secret couldn't possibly measure up, and Ryan figured it probably couldn't. His secret wasn't big, not in the grand scheme of things, but it was horrible to him. "I drugged my best friend so that he could relax and tell a guy he liked about the fact that he's asexual." He felt like shit for saying it, and he hated that he'd done it, but that was the worst thing he'd ever done.

"Let's go back up and talk about this. If I do end up seeing your secret, and that's a really big if, it's not going to be while we're out here. I'm weakened afterwards."

Ryan was pretty sure that would be a good idea too. He followed Kyle back upstairs.

Kyle's hands were shaking as he walked across their living room carpet. It was crazy to think that he could take this man's secret. He was a stranger. And he was a human. But he'd never had a human's secret before. Maybe they were easier. Maybe that would be the secret. He

was desperate to be able to have a normal life, to be able to touch and feel what other people did so easily. Trying just this one time with Ryan, maybe that would be the answer to this. And if it didn't work, like it most likely wouldn't, then he could go back to avoid any contact with people in general.

He took a deep breath and took off just one glove. Just his right one. That would be more than enough. "Just one touch. That's it. Don't grab my hand, don't hang onto me. If I pull away that's it. I'll need to pull away and you can't hold me. It's been tried and I've lashed out. A werewolf can sustain that kind of defensive attack, but a human definitely can't."

"I get that." Ryan came forward and offered him his hand.

Kyle didn't know about this at all. But he was feeling desperate. He wanted to be normal so badly. He wanted to be human most of all, but being able to touch another person would be the second best option.

He offered Ryan his hand and their fingers touched, but only for an instant. Then Kyle pulled away again. The brief touch was more than enough though. He went to his knees, then slid onto his butt, as the memories turned from initial sparks into bright bursts inside his mind.

"Kyle?" Ryan took a step forward but Kyle held up his hand, warning him away. There was nothing that Ryan could do to help him with this at all. He just had to get through it on his own. As always. Ryan's secret didn't hurt as much as many of the others he'd experienced. He knew Ryan's guilt, and how much he hated himself for drugging Seth. He felt Ryan's pain when he'd realized how badly he had screwed up not only that night, but with his friendship as well. He'd lost his best friend and he regretted it immensely.

While there was plenty of regret though, there was no real, lasting pain that came with knowing Ryan's secret. After a few minutes Kyle was able to breathe normally again. He turned to look up at Ryan. He hadn't moved, and he looked worried. Kyle thought about telling Ryan how stupid he'd been, but he knew that wouldn't change anything. Ryan knew he'd been an idiot and that he'd made a mistake. There was no good reason to tell him what he already knew except

to make him feel even worse about what he'd done than he already did. Kyle took a deep breath and sat back against the wall. "I'm okay."

"You don't look like it. Can I get you anything?"

Kyle shook his head. He put his gloves back on and he relaxed there for a moment. Maybe Ryan's secret hadn't hurt him that much because Ryan was human. He'd never considered the possibility of a werewolf secret being worse than a human one for him, but it made sense in a way. They were different and there was no reason why there wouldn't be differences in how he internalized their guilty secrets as well.

"What'd you see?" Ryan sat down near him.

Kyle shrugged. "Just what you told me. You hate what you did and you wish you could talk to Seth again and have things like they were. You don't know how to get him to forgive you but you wish he would."

Ryan looked pretty miserable as he pulled his knees up and circled his arms around them. "I'd love to get he and I past that. I know I screwed up though."

"Majorly," Kyle agreed. He wasn't good with friendships, or people in general, but he hoped that Ryan and Seth could get close again. "Have you tried apologizing to him?"

"Yeah. Not that it's done any real good. He still hates me. Of course."

Kyle couldn't really blame Seth for still being mad at Ryan and he definitely didn't have all the answers. "Sorry."

He got up and started heading into his room. After taking in Ryan's secret he was tired. But Ryan held his hand up, offering it to him. "You said it's just one secret, right? And I can't feel guilty for something new so soon. So if you wanted to touch me, there wouldn't be any harm, right?"

Kyle stared down at him and felt his stomach twisting. Ryan was right. He could touch him without there being an issue. He could touch Ryan all he wanted right now. He'd never had that option, or that invitation, before. "Would you mind?"

Ryan smirked. "I'd like it a lot actually. We could hold hands, hug, watch a movie together--"

"Kiss?" Kyle interrupted him hopefully.

"Yeah. We could do that too." Ryan was blushing as Kyle went back to sitting in front of him.

Kyle had kissed plenty of people, but never by his choice. Now he'd found some wolves who didn't treat him like a submissive member of their pack, expecting him to do whatever they said to, when they said it. And he found a human friend as well. It was a big change for him, but one he hoped he could rely on and come to accept. The idea of settling down, of being safe in a place where he could simply exist without being hounded constantly by an alpha who wanted to use him in every way possible, that was extremely tempting.

He leaned in and kissed Ryan carefully, just in case his guilt overwhelmed him again. Only, this time, there was no overwhelming guilt. He felt and saw the same scene, he felt what Ryan had in that moment, but it was no more intense than the first time he'd felt it, and it didn't bother him any more this time around.

Kyle sat back and smiled. Things really would be okay if he could make his life work in this small town. "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Do you think I should call Seth?"

Kyle really had no idea. "Maybe? Do you want to?"

"I think so." He got up and Kyle watched him head over to the couch where he picked up his phone. While Kyle relaxed, and recovered from another round of Ryan's guilt ridden memories, Ryan made a call.

"Hey, Seth? I know I've said it before, but I am sorry for what I did to you. I was an asshole. I really want us to be friends again. I know we'll never be friends like we were again, but I miss having you in my life."

Kyle was glad that he was calling. He hoped that things could be better between the two of them.

"Yeah, I would like to go out sometime. With Jeremy too. And Kyle could come if you wanted. Okay, sure."

Kyle wasn't happy about being brought along to something, but he was trying to not to be so quick to have his hackles up anymore. He wanted this new life to work so badly, and with that he knew he needed to relax some and not instantly think everyone would be out to either hurt him or use him.

"You forgive me? Really?" Ryan laughed and that made Kyle happy. He'd never been able to help someone before. It felt nice. "Thanks. We'll see you soon."

Ryan hung up the phone and Kyle looked up at him. "What are *we* doing?"

"Going out together? As boyfriends? If you're interested, I mean."

Kyle nodded. He was interested, and he definitely wanted that. "All right then." Ryan shot him a grin and Kyle got up to join him on the couch for a bit. He left his gloves off. It was good to have one person in the world that he could relax with and find peace with. He hadn't expected to find that in the tiny town, but he was glad that he had.

The End