



Of Cocoa and Men

By Vic Winter

At First Sight

Dayton slunk into The Silver Kitchen Diner and took a booth at the far end, his back to the wall. It was late, or rather very early -- not quite four a.m., and the only other patrons in the place were the deputy on duty sitting at the counter and flirting with Betsy as he drank his coffee, and the old guy with the crazy gray whiskers who sat in one of the booths most nights, drinking cup after cup of the high octane mix they called coffee here, complaining of insomnia.

Betsy left her post behind the counter with a flirty smile for the deputy, her coffee pot in hand. Like the diner itself, Betsy never changed. Her brown uniform with the odd green piping fit exactly the same over her too thin frame as it had the first day he'd come in. That had been the day he'd turned eighteen and he'd left the pack land like his feet were on fire. He was a little older now, but he still was a lone wolf, separate from the pack.

"Coffee?" She hefted the pot toward the thick, ceramic mug in front of Dayton and he shook his head, turned the cup over so she couldn't fill it; he knew from experience that just saying, "no" wasn't enough -- the woman had mad skills with her coffee pot. She raised an eyebrow at him, her question clear.

"Hot chocolate, with whipped cream on top." Like it was ever anything else when it wasn't coffee.

Her other eyebrow went up to join the first. "You sure?"

He growled at her, letting his teeth show. What he did or did not eat -- drink, whatever -- was none of her

business. Of course, try telling that to anyone in a small town and they'd keep on sticking their nose in regardless. It was why he did his man-trolling outside the town limits. Way outside. "I asked for it, didn't I?"

She shrugged, clearly unimpressed with his attitude. "You did. You want a slice of chocolate pie with that, too, or how about some chocolate pudding? Maybe a brownie with chocolate ice cream and fudge sauce?"

He shook his head. "Just the drink." He was jonesing for the sweet, cocoa-y stuff, but that didn't mean he was going to gorge on it. Of course, even just the drink was more than he should have. Canines and chocolate just didn't mix. He loved the stuff, though; he was addicted to it. Besides, it hadn't killed him yet. Most times it barely even gave him a stomachache anymore, and he had a healthy stock of Tums in his pocket, even more in the saddle bag on his Hog.

"You sure now?" Betsy was clearly bored if she was messing with him instead of clearing off to get him his hot chocolate. Of course it was old Deputy Benjamin on duty tonight and not the young buck Sheriff Bingham had somehow conned into joining his force a year or so ago. Betsy wasn't so quick with the coffee pot or the butting her nose in when Deputy Steve was on duty.

Dayton stared her down. He was a werewolf -- he had a hell of a stare. It didn't hurt that they were coming up to the full moon, too, making the beast very close to the surface.

Betsy finally backed down. Sort of. "How about some marshmallows?"

He made a face and replied curtly. "No." Marshmallows were disgusting bits of pure sugar. Overly sweet and stale, they did nothing but dilute his hot chocolate. Whipping cream, on the other hand, added to the richness of it.

"Whatever." She headed back to the counter via Insomnia Guy, pouring the last of the sludge from her pot into his coffee cup.

The old dude giggled as he thanked her, the sound more than half crazy. The guy needed a new hobby, Dayton figured as he picked at the chipped Formica in front of him. Of course, so did he.

If he didn't want the chocolate so badly, he wouldn't stay. But he did.

Dayton had two weaknesses, and neither of them were things that a wolf should want. Chocolate and men. Human men. Tonight he'd tried indulging in the latter, only to be shot down by a pretty little cock-tease who'd gotten him all riled up and then walked out the door with a girl of all things. Now, Dayton didn't have a problem with females -- he liked them well enough. She-wolves were fierce, proud and beautiful, and human women were generally far easier to get along with than the men -- not to mention often also beautiful and he could appreciate that esthetically like he would a painting, if he was into art, which he wasn't -- but he wasn't interested in mating with them. He wasn't even interested in having sex without strings with them.

Sex without strings with men, on the other hand, was something Dayton could get into. A lot. Oh sure, his kind mated for life, but there was no rule that said you couldn't have a lot of really hot sex while you were looking for said mate.

The pack didn't like it, though. They didn't like that he had a lot of sex with a bunch of different partners. They didn't like that those partners were men. They didn't like him having sex with human men. As he'd explained to them, though, Dayton knew that his mate was not only a male, but a human male at that, so if he was going to find the man, he needed to look among

human men. He was pretty sure they disapproved of that more than any of the rest of it.

It didn't bother him, though -- it wasn't like he spent a lot of time with the rest of his pack. He was far too much of the lone wolf type to enjoy spending a lot of time with a bunch of other wolves, all jostling for the best position next to Donald, their Alpha, who, quite frankly, Dayton didn't like. The guy was too... beta wolfy.

And if he had to endure one more lecture about finding a nice bitch and settling down with her, giving her a few litters, he was going to tear Donald's throat out. Which would make *him* Alpha, and that was a job that he most definitely did not want. Not now, not ever. He'd never even dreamed of wanting it when he was a young pup cutting his first set of teeth.

Nope, lone wolf was the way he rolled. And that's the way he liked it. Well, lone and with a mug of hot chocolate in front of him.

He put his nose in the air, scenting for it. There, faintly from the direction of the kitchen, came the smell he was looking for. It was only a few moments later before he heard the clink of the mug being set on the pass and Betsy came around from the kitchen to pick it up and bring it over to him.

She plonked it down in front of him, and he held his breath a moment as it sloshed around, nearly spilling. He didn't lose a drop, though, and he wrapped his hands around the warm mug, grumbling out his thanks. Her grunt was equally laconic and then she was gone again to settle behind the counter and shoot the breeze with the deputy. She'd forgotten the whipped cream, but now that he had the chocolate in front of him, he didn't want to be disturbed and decided to cut his loses.

Leaning over the mug, Dayton breathed in deeply, the chocolate steam filling his nose. Sweet with a hint of bitter and the very faintest underlying richness from the milk Betsy had made it with. That was almost as good as drinking it. Almost.

He didn't drink it right away, though. He wanted it to last. The diner would start to fill up around six thirty, seven in the morning, the smells and looks from the other patrons chasing him away, but until then he could keep his ass planted and not be bothered and slowly savor the sweet drink.

It was probably too hot to drink yet, anyway; if he burned his tongue on the first mouthful, he wouldn't be able to taste the rest of it and that would be a crying shame, not to mention a waste of decent hot chocolate.

He kept blowing on the liquid in his mug, making the steam rise up, bringing with it the yummy scent over and over again. When it had cooled a little and he couldn't wait any longer, he took a careful sip. Oh, perfect. He took a bigger mouthful, letting the taste slide over his tongue and coat the inside of his mouth.

Managing somehow not to groan out loud, he still couldn't keep his eyes from rolling back in his head. God, it was good. While it didn't quite scratch the itch he'd been having all night long, it did warm him and mellow him out. The sting of rejection faded fast under the onslaught of the liquid chocolate.

Speaking of chocolate... he was about halfway through his drink when something new hit his nose. Sweet, a little spicy, all male with a lovely chocolate undertone. He looked up, eyes searching for whoever it was who smelled so intriguing.

"Hey, Betsy." The voice, belonging to a very nice-looking man dressed in chef's whites, was a lovely

timbre, settling as nicely on Dayton's ears as the smells had on his nose.

"Connor." Betsy nodded to the newcomer. She didn't give him any more attention than that, which allowed Dayton to observe as this Connor made his way along the counter and then into the kitchen.

Connor was fair -- hair and skin -- and slim. If Dayton's eyes weren't fooling him, the man was also green-eyed, and his hair was an almost-brown red. As he'd already observed, Connor was decently built, thigh muscles on display through the white pants as Connor walked.

The scent that had first caught his attention grew stronger as Connor came nearer, and then faded slowly away once the man was in the kitchen.

This had to be the new baker Dayton had heard rumblings about. Of course 'new' meant that the man had been in town for some time now. Almost a year, he thought. It was too bad he'd never noticed before now, because gossip also told him that Connor was gay. Dayton had always assumed the man was in his fifties and a little plump from eating his own wares. He wasn't sure why he'd made that assumption, maybe because his father had been a baker, so Dayton associated the job with older guys.

He knew Connor worked out of the diner, so how come he'd never actually seen the man before now?

Tempted as he was to stay and figure it out, about a half hour later he was not only finished with his hot chocolate, but the place was starting to fill up. Okay, two customers had come in, but that was two more than he wanted to deal with. He did check out the baked goods counter that had gone in next to the counter by the door when the baker had started working. Dayton had

never checked it out before. Bread, pies, cakes, cookies, and pastries. And they looked pretty damn good at that.

"Huh." With that single grunt, he let himself out and headed for his bike, promising himself he'd try to find out more about this Connor before he needed his next chocolate fix.

Everyone Loves a Bad Boy

Connor parked his little red Mini Cooper behind the diner and shook his head when he saw the junk still piled up by the back door. Two weeks ago Bill Deans, owner of the Silver Kitchen Diner, had promised him the garbage blocking the back door would be removed, and it was still there.

He knew part of the problem was that he was the only one who'd complained and because Deans didn't approve of Connor's "lifestyle," he was going to drag his feet on any requests Connor made, including this one. Connor had a half a mind to call the fire inspector -- this wasn't just an inconvenience for him to have to go around to the front to let himself in, it was a fire hazard. If he had to get out of the kitchen in an emergency, he wasn't going to be able to do it out the back door. Nor was anyone else -- employees and customers alike.

Deciding to give Deans one more chance before siccing the fire inspector on him, Connor opened his cell phone and called the owner on the spot. Deans wasn't going to appreciate being woken at four a.m., but maybe that would get it through his thick skull that Connor wasn't fooling around here -- the diner's back door needed to be accessible.

Deans finally picked up after the sixth ring. "Huh? Whu?"

"It's Connor Griffins. There's still two tons of garbage blocking the back door of the diner. If it isn't removed today, I'm calling the fire inspector out to look at it."

"You called me at four in the fucking a.m. to tell me this?"

"It's been two weeks, Bill, and I won't work another day risking my life -- if there's a fire, I'm the one who's going to get caught in it because I can't make it out the

back door. Do something about it. Today." He hung up, feeling good for having made his point without screaming or yelling, but it was mitigated by the fact that he'd had to call again and that he had to go through the diner proper to get to the kitchen. It was never very busy at this time of day, but he'd likely have to pass Hank, who smelled of old, cheap wine, and Deputy Steve, who would look him up and down and then give this smug, I know your secret grin. Connor just hoped Deans was going to take him seriously this time because he didn't want to start missing work.

Selling his wares out of the diner wasn't ideal, but the building he'd been looking at for the storefront of his bakery had gotten tied up in probate and, even when it finally did become available, he'd have to do renovations before he could bake and sell out of it. In the meantime, he worked out of the diner. Deans got a share of the profits and Connor got a place to work, and a growing, increasingly loyal clientele. When he finally did open his own place, the customers would follow him.

He went in through the front door, making a beeline for the kitchen doors at the other end of the counter. He didn't make eye contact with anyone and made a noise of some sort in response to Betsy's, "Morning, Connor." He wasn't in the mood for small talk, chit-chat or anything else cute that required him putting on a happy face and pretending he wasn't grumpy as hell over the whole garbage thing. He was not a bright and cheery morning person under the best of circumstances, which made his being a baker with a starting time of four a.m. feel like the universe making him the butt of a joke.

He wasn't sure what made him look over at the booth in the corner; maybe he'd done it inadvertently while trying to avoid looking at anyone else. He really did

want to get to the kitchen and get to work without having to deal with social niceties with anyone. Of course the man sitting in the last booth, hunched over a steaming mug like it was the very much-needed hair of the dog that bit him did not look as if he and social niceties were very well acquainted at all. Connor was intrigued.

It could have been the heavy scruff on the guy's face. It could have been the muscles that were clearly trying to break through the tight T-shirt. Or maybe it was the leather pants. It was probably the dangerous look in the dark eyes that glanced up to meet his, though. Connor had a bit of a thing for bad boys. Not that he'd ever actually dated one, but they were his true type nonetheless. And this guy had bad boy written all over him.

He didn't realize he'd actually stopped until the guy in the booth straightened, holding Connor's gaze all the while, and cleared his throat before growling out, "What?"

Pulling himself back to the here and now, Connor shook his head. "Nothing. Sorry." The little squeak in his voice had him fighting not to wince and he turned, fleeing through the doors to the kitchen and trying to make it look like that wasn't exactly what he was doing. Unfortunately, he'd never mastered the art of making a quick retreat look casual and uncaring.

The swinging doors hit him on the butt once he was through, and, though he moved around busily, he wasn't really doing anything for a good ten minutes before his heart stopped racing so hard.

Connor told himself off. It wasn't like he was going to approach the bad boy out there. Hell, he didn't even know if the man was gay, and he had a hunch asking someone as muscular and strong if he wasn't gay would

not be very good for Connor's health. Of course, no one had ever said he couldn't indulge in a fantasy or two in the wee hours while he took care of the morning wood with a smidge of lube and his hand. He'd have to file this particular bad boy away for later.

Once he had the bread started, he indulged in a peek out one of the windows in the double swinging doors, jerking his head back immediately when he realized that not only was his bad boy still out there, the man was looking right at him.

He spent the rest of the morning steering clear of the windows and the pass, but no matter how hard he worked at not looking, he couldn't keep himself from wanting to.

Old Story, New Story

Dayton tried to forget about Connor, but he'd seen the man twice now, and Connor's scent was in his nose. Lilton wasn't his usual hunting grounds for a reason, though. He avoided trolling for sex so close to home -- there was also the little matter of Lilton having very few men of his persuasion to troll after, but that was neither here nor there. He had enough of a reputation already, both with the town and with the pack. If he didn't have to hear about it from either side, he was a happy wolf.

Sometimes, even going out of the area for his hook-ups didn't save him from a lecture from Donald. The man thought that just because he was Alpha, he needed to have his finger in everyone's business. Donald was kind of like the town gossips like that. The thought had Dayton sniggering.

"You think this is funny?" Donald was in full nag mode, his nostrils flaring, his eyes full of self-righteous anger. If he wasn't careful, he was going to sprout a muzzle and ear hair. Pointy ears. Maybe the beginnings of his tail. The days after the full moon were always like this -- Donald always felt the need to throw his weight around a little. Dayton thought it was to cover feelings of inadequacy.

He had to swallow his laughter. "Listening to you go on and on like one of the old gossips? No, I don't find it funny at all."

Donald sputtered and glared, and Dayton would swear his ears actually did change back and forth a few times.

It was probably a good thing they were alone. If anyone else had been around, as Alpha Donald would have had to attack Dayton for insubordination and Dayton would have had to defend himself and that

would lead to that whole pesky becoming the new Alpha thing. There was a reason Donald never had these little chats with him in public. He might not be the brightest bulb shining, but he wasn't stupid and they both knew that Dayton could kick his ass without trying. Hell, a bunch of the pack males could -- some of the females, too -- but like Dayton, none of them particularly wanted the job. It was thankless, and you had to put up with jerks like him.

"I don't find it funny either, Dayton. It's embarrassing."

One of Dayton's eyebrows went up and he could feel the hair on the back of his neck rise. Maybe he was going to have to reassess this whole Donald not being stupid thing.

"It is! The rest of the pack thinks I can't control you. Not to mention the townsfolk barely tolerate us as it is, and you're just making it worse. You need to find a mate -- a *female* mate -- and make babies. Contribute!"

Dayton stood up tall and growled. "Aside from the fact that I do most of it away from Lilton, my business is my business and no one is going to tell me what to do -- not the townsfolk, not the pack, and not you."

"I'll kick you out of the pack." Donald took a breath, clearly working up to a whole new tirade. Dayton wasn't going to let him unleash it.

"Consider me kicked out."

Donald's mouth opened, closed, and opened again. Before the man could say another word, Dayton turned and walked out.

He wasn't putting up with that shit.

Dayton went to the Silver Kitchen Diner and parked his Hog out back. He didn't usually show up here during the day, but he was growly and out of sorts thanks to that stupid fucker they'd let be Alpha and was craving chocolate like he needed it to breathe. He took off his helmet and left it on the back of the bike, noticing the little red car parked next to a pile of crap in front of the diner's back door. It was really little; it was tiny, like a little clown car. Shit, he'd bet he could pick it up and move it.

He went over to check it out, see if it was a real car and caught a scent. Connor. From the diner. He put his nose in the air and scented harder. Yeah. It was him. Dayton could tell from the way his prick perked up and took notice. Connor smelled better than anyone he'd scented in a long time. Better than any of the guys he'd ever taken out behind the clubs or to a hotel that rented by the hour to fuck. Better even than anyone in the pack.

His nostrils flared. He wanted Connor. A lot. Rules be fucking damned. He'd tried to be good. He'd tried to keep his hook-ups well away from the town and the pack and he was still getting reamed for it. He'd still walked out of the pack for it. If he was going to do the time, he might as well get to do the crime. Sort of. Not that getting into Connor's pants would be a crime. Hell, not getting into them would be.

He went back to his bike and settled against it, arms crossed as he waited for Connor to come out.

About forty-five minutes later, Connor came around the side of the diner. He stopped at the pile of crap and cursed, kicked it. Dayton headed over.

"...calling the inspector. Let's see how you like those apples, Bill Deans."

"I like apples."

Conner jumped at his words and whipped around. Dayton smiled, hoping he didn't look *too* wolfish.

"What?"

"I said I like apples." Dayton moved slowly toward Connor, not making any sudden movements. Yeah, Dayton was stalking Connor like the prey he was.

"You like apples?" Connor still looked confused.

"You said you hoped he liked those apples..."

"Oh... Oh! You heard me." A blush climbed up Connor's pale face.

"I did. Who's Bill Deans?" The words came out with more of a growl than he'd intended, but he wanted Connor for himself. Of course he was in the mood for a tussle, so if this Bill Deans wanted to fight him for Connor, he was up for that. Men tended to be a little less enamored of that sort of display, though. A potential wolf mate would have dug it.

Connor made a face as he said the name, looking both angry and disgusted and Dayton relaxed a little.

"He owns the diner. This stack of garbage has been blocking the back door for weeks now and I have to go around to the front to get in and out. It's not safe!"

"No, it isn't. I take it you've complained."

"I have. Repeatedly."

"So why hasn't he done anything about it?" Dayton was back to growling, but now it was about thinking this Bill Deans was an asshole.

"Because he doesn't approve of my lifestyle and this is his little way of showing it." The words were dry, resigned.

Okay, make that a major asshole. Maybe king of the assholes. Dayton's growls got louder.

Connor glared at him. "And don't you start growling at me. The way I live my life is *my* business and if you don't like the fact that I'm gay you can take your attitude

and shove it in that pile of garbage there." Turning to unlock the car door, Connor continued muttering.

"Stupid small town attitudes. Why do people even give a fuck who I do or do not fuck. Jesus. It's not like I've been laid since I got here in the first place!"

The muttering continued as Connor put on his seat belt, started the engine and drove off, the little car maneuvering like a dream.

Dayton was left standing alone in the back lot, watching the Mini disappear down the road wondering when he'd lost total control of the situation.

The Gift of Garbage

Connor grumbled as he drove through the pre-dawn to the diner. He was still in a rotten mood from his encounter with the hot -- but a little scary to be meeting him all by himself in the back of the diner -- biker yesterday. If he hadn't thought it would get him pounded into the asphalt, he would have followed his desires and kissed the man full on the mouth. That would have showed him.

To make matters worse, he'd called Deans again after getting home and not only had the man pretty much laughed at him, his threat to go the fire inspector had resulted in much merriment and a "Go right ahead," from Deans. The man probably had the inspector in his back pocket.

It didn't matter. Connor was going to call him anyway. He'd looked up the number, and it was written on the back of an envelope in his pocket. As soon as it was a decent hour, he was calling it. Whether Deans hated Connor or not, the garbage blocking the back door was a fire hazard, dangerous -- and not the fun spanky kind of dangerous like the biker had been.

Connor rolled his eyes at himself. He was not going to glamorize scary biker man. He wasn't. Even if the leather-covered muscles had been sexy as all get out. Damn it. He clearly needed to get laid. It was going to have to wait until the weekend, though, because he was an early to bed, early to rise and get to work kind of guy, which was not conducive to trips into the big city to find a gay club and get his rocks off. In fact it wasn't conducive to doing anything past nine p.m. Which might, in part, explain his lack of laidness over the last year or... well, three or four, to be honest.

He pulled up into the spot next to the back door, still trying to talk himself out of thinking yesterday's biker had been hot -- it didn't help that he'd been half-fantasizing about the guy ever since he'd caught that glimpse of him in the dinner itself the other day. Of course the guy had been less scary in the back booth with a mug of hot chocolate in front of him than he was outside at full height, making Connor jump as he suddenly appeared out of nowhere. To be fair, he'd been distracted by the garbage still being there and probably wouldn't have noticed a marching band with full colors so it probably wasn't the biker guy's fault he'd been so startled.

Connor was almost at the back door when he stopped short.

Almost at the back door. Which no longer had garbage in front of it. Which was now accessible.

He looked around, finding the garbage in a pile in the parking spot with the sign "reserved for owner." His eyes widened in surprise and he started to laugh. That was the perfect spot for that garbage.

It looked like someone in town was on his side after all. Chuckling a little, he called out "Thank you," to the sky, and grabbed his key, using it to open the back door and head into the kitchen. He had a feeling his pastries were going to be especially tasty today.

Dayton sat on his Hog, watching as Connor disappeared into the diner.

"You're welcome," he said, grinning widely.

There. Step one in wooing the town baker had begun. It was a stupid word -- wooing. It sounded too much like cooing and like hearts and candies and flowers. Of

course there were going to be hearts and candies and flowers, so he supposed it was the right word after all.

He didn't know if it was the way Connor smelled, or the way he'd gone off on Dayton, rejecting him before he'd even made his advance, but he was hooked. Big time. And he knew that nothing was going to break the surprising spell Connor had over him except for indulging himself in the man. He could think of worse things to have to do. A lot worse things.

He started up his hog and pulled off the shoulder, headed out of Lilton for the city. He had some shopping to do.

Secret Admirer

On Wednesday, the garbage had been moved from in front of the kitchen door to Deans' parking spot.

On Thursday there was a brand new industrial mixer in the kitchen next to the old one that he had to share with the cook. There was a piece of paper taped to the top with big, bold letters, "Baker mixer only."

Friday brought a large box of imported Belgian chocolates seated next to the mixer, along with a big bag of chocolate nibs, and a smaller bag of powdered cocoa from the same company. He'd been wanting to try those for his chocolate pastries for ages, but they were more expensive than he could justify -- he'd either have had to jack up his prices or lose most of his profit, neither of which was a good thing when he was trying to build both clientele and savings.

Saturday came with flowers. There had to be three hundred of them in the various bouquets, from roses to lilies, orchids and carnations, all in a rainbow of colors. They covered every free surface in the kitchen and he had to bring them home over two days, his little Mini stuffed full on both trips.

Connor didn't have a clue who was doing this, and he might have joked with Betsy and Gordy, the day cook, about how he was sure he was being courted by the town's oldest widow, but really he was pleased. It felt good to have someone... well, honestly, the only word he could think of was wooing. Someone was wooing him, making it clear that he was wanted.

He found himself meeting people's eyes in the diner and on the streets, trying to figure out who it could be.

So far, he hadn't had any luck in discovering his unknown suitor.

Deans had come in Wednesday afternoon, absolutely livid, but Connor'd just shrugged and said it had been that way when he'd come in. Funny -- only not -- how it had only taken a day for Deans to get the garbage cleared away from his parking spot. If Connor hadn't been in such a good mood from all the gifts, he might have gotten angry about that. Instead, he just thought that Deans was a miserable old goat -- who wasn't even that old -- who was going to lose his best draw, i.e. Connor himself, when that building on Main Street finally became available for sale.

It had been a fun few days and his wares had flown off the shelves -- the baked goods always tasted better when he was in a good mood, and apparently word had spread around town that he was in a very good mood indeed, because they'd sold out of everything, even the extras he made Friday and Saturday, almost before he'd gone home for the day.

So here he was, feeling special, surrounded by flowers and with the best chocolates in the world to eat - - and boy had the chocolate nibs and cocoa powder made for incredible pastries -- with a nice tidy sum pocketed for the last few days work. It almost made him want to go in even though it was Sunday. Almost.

Today was his only real day off, and he wasn't going to squander that.

Instead, he lazed in bed -- he always tried to sleep in on Sundays, but when you were up before dawn the other six days a week, it became habit and he rarely managed to stay asleep past five a.m. Just because he was awake, didn't mean he had to get up, though, so he'd lie there and enjoy the dark and quiet, or he'd read or watch some TV.

Sadly enough, even at his most lazy, he was always up by seven and this Sunday was no different than

countless others. Maybe if he had someone to share lazy Sunday mornings in bed with... but he didn't, so out of bed he got.

He threw on a pair of boxers and made his way to the kitchen. It was too bad he'd sold out of everything yesterday -- it would have been nice to have a chocolate pastry or two along with his latte. Or even a muffin. The fancy coffee maker was only half indulgence. He was, after all, going to need one for the bakery when he opened it. He had plans for a half dozen little tables for people to sit at, or they could take their coffee to go. Either way, he was going to need the machine, so buying it now and testing out its features was only good business sense. At least that's how he'd justified the expense to himself.

If he was deep down honest, he'd admit that he'd have bought the machine regardless. He had a weakness for fancy coffees. It wasn't that he didn't like regular coffee -- that had its place, especially in the get you up and moving realm -- but there was nothing quite like a specialty coffee to make the day that much better. Or to pick him up if he'd had a bad day. Or just because. He could come up with as many reasons to make himself a fancy coffee as there were days in a year.

A fancy coffee and an expensive chocolate. They seemed to go together perfectly. He grabbed one of the Belgians, lamenting the fact that, big as the box was and as miserly with Betsy and Gordy as he'd been, there were still precious few left. He'd really indulged himself over the last few days. He patted his belly; so good. How had his secret admirer known? And who was he? And what if he was a she? It could happen -- if she hadn't heard, or if she thought her love could change his orientation. The promise of more of that Belgian chocolate would almost be worth trying to do it, too.

Yeah, like he was ever going to bat for the other team no matter how good the chocolate over there was.

Laughing at himself, he listened to the coffee machine gurgle and burp and make all those magical noises that meant his latte was about to be ready. All he needed to do was take the hot milk and froth it up before adding it in.

He was in the midst of doing that when he thought he heard a motorcycle go by. It seemed pretty early for a motorcycle to be out in this nice neighborhood. He finished frothing his milk and poured it into his big mug, then wandered over to the window.

His eyes widened when he saw his car. It was practically shining in the early morning sunlight. Maybe it was a trick of the light off the glass of his windows.

He went out, and sure enough, it was sparkling clean. The driveway around it was dark, obviously wet. Someone had just washed his car. He touched the hood. Correction, someone had just washed and waxed his car. Even the tires were clean, the rims shining brightly silver.

He looked down the street, then up the street, squinting, trying to make out someone -- anyone -- watching him from hiding, but he couldn't see anyone at all. Maybe one of his nosy neighbors could tell him who it had been.

As if on cue, the Atterly's curtain twitched, hard, and Connor suddenly remembered that he was only wearing boxers. Blushing hot, he hightailed it back to the house. Man, he was going to hear about that one, he was sure.

Still, he had a gleaming car to add to the list of things that had made this week the best one since he'd come to town and he was going to take that as a massive win.

The Reveal

Dayton slunk into The Silver Kitchen Diner and took a booth at the far end, his back to the wall. It was just past four a.m. and Connor was already in the kitchen. He knew because he'd waited on the shoulder across the road until he saw the little red Mini. He didn't see any reason to go in before his prey got there.

Betsy was at the counter, flirting hard with Deputy Steve, but Insomnia Guy was missing. He often was on Mondays. Dayton's theory was that the man drank himself into a coma on Saturday nights and was still passed out come Monday morning. It meant one less person interfering with his sense of smell -- it was damn hard to pick out Connor's scent from the kitchen -- what with it being in the other room and a room full of food smells at that -- and more bodies made it even harder.

Betsy came over with her pot of coffee, but Dayton had already turned over his mug. "Let me guess -- you want hot chocolate with whipping cream on top." She had the young deputy at her counter and wasn't messing around with Dayton today.

"I do, but I want the guy in the kitchen to make it."

"You don't like the way I do it all of a sudden?" She actually looked put out, which was funny because Dayton would have figured anything that gave her more time to work on Deputy Steve instead of doing her job would have been all right in her book. Or maybe the look on her face was actually more offended than put out.

"You make it fine. I want to see if baker man can make it better."

She shrugged. "Sure. You want a pastry or some pie, too? It's been amazing all week -- he's in a good mood."

Dayton considered it for a moment. He really did want to try Connor's wares -- and not just the ones Connor's pants. But he also didn't want to be too hopped up on chocolate when he made his move, which he was planning on doing today. He shook his head. "Just the hot chocolate. And tell him to use the good stuff."

"The good stuff..." She rolled her eyes at him, but Dayton was in a good enough mood he ignored her.

In fact he was in a very good mood. So good, he probably could have easily resisted the chocolate. He wanted to indulge himself today, though, and he planned to do it with both his vices -- chocolate and men. Or at least man.

"I want him to deliver it to me, too."

Betsy turned and gave him a look like he'd lost his mind, then she turned and continued back to the counter, calling out the order through the pass. "One hot chocolate, use the 'good stuff,' and bring it out yourself."

Dayton couldn't hear Connor's reply, though from the sound of it, Connor wasn't too pleased.

"Don't blame the messenger -- I'm just telling you what the customer wants. Customer's always right, you know." That was all Betsy had for the baker, because she turned her back on the pass and topped up the deputy's cup, once again in full flirting mode. The thing was, he was flirting back, and Dayton wouldn't be surprised if she was off the market before winter.

Dayton attention turned to what he could see of the kitchen through the pass. He wondered whether Connor was going to come barging out and give him an earful, or if he was going to make the hot chocolate and bring it out. Maybe he'd do something awful to it as revenge. Dayton hoped not -- the chocolate nibs he'd bought Connor were the best money could buy and they deserved better than to be rendered undrinkable.

He waited and he waited, getting more growly the longer it took. Was Connor going to ignore his request altogether? No hot chocolate and no man was not the end result Dayton had in mind. He wanted both. And he wanted them quite badly. He was even willing to forgo the chocolate for the man.

It had been a long time since he'd wanted anyone as badly as he wanted Connor. Sure he'd gone after guys before, but it was always the fucking he was in need of, that mattered. With Connor he wanted the man, not the sex. Oh, he wanted the sex; in fact he wanted to fuck Connor until the man screamed his name. Out loud and repeatedly. But that wasn't all that he wanted. It might not even be the first thing he wanted.

It was as weird as the whole wooing thing he'd gone through and it left him a little unsettled. Which would explain why his leg was twitching and why a growl was building in his throat, growing closer and closer to becoming vocal the more time passed without any sign of Connor.

The kitchen doors finally swung open and Dayton's nostrils flared as the scents of Connor and chocolate mingled and filled his senses. He looked over, admiring the lean body as Connor made his way over, steaming mug in one hand. He couldn't read Connor's expression, didn't know if the man was angry or not.

"I assume this is for you." Connor set the mug down in front of him.

Dayton leaned over and took in a deep breath, pulling the fragrant steam in. He could still smell Connor, too, the man's scent strong this close up. It was a heady mixture and he moaned happily. "It is. Smells amazing." He was about to add, "So do you," when Connor interrupted him.

"I hope so, because I don't have 'the good stuff' in stock very often and it'll probably be a long time before you get another cup of hot chocolate that good."

Connor's lips tightened, and he crossed his arms over his chest. "Just how did you know we had 'the good stuff' in the first place?"

"I could smell it?" he tried.

Connor snorted. "Right. You've got a nose good enough to smell a closed bag of chocolate in the kitchen, and to know that it's not just the usual chocolate either, but something special. What are you -- a bloodhound?" The man's eyes went wide. "Not a bloodhound -- you're a werewolf!"

He wasn't sure if it was accusation or amazement that colored Connor's features, but he was glad that particular revelation was dealt with and he was pleased Connor was smart enough to have figured it out on his own. "You got a problem with that?"

"No, no. I just... I thought you guys pretty much kept away from the town." Connor sat across from him without asking, simply plopping down and staring at him with wide eyes.

"The pack pretty much does." In fact it was an unspoken agreement that both sides stuck to -- no wolves in town, no people in pack territory. "I do my own thing."

"Yeah? Somehow I'm not surprised."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" Dayton knew he was growling again, but he couldn't help it. Connor riled him up six ways to Sunday, and if he couldn't pounce the man and take him right then and there, the emotions had to have some other release valve.

"You seem like the loner type -- you know, the whole bad boy biker vibe you've got going."

"Oh." Dayton relaxed back in his booth, one hand wrapped possessively around his mug. Kind of like how he'd like to have it wrapped around Connor. "I am."

Connor smiled. "A bad boy loner wolf biker with a center as gooey as a marshmallow."

"What?" No one had ever accused him of being soft before. No one.

"Well, let's see. First you shift the garbage out of the way of the door for me. And into the owner's parking spot -- that was a bit of brilliance if you ask me."

Dayton couldn't help preening, even as he asked, "How did you know it was me?"

Connor shrugged. "I didn't, not until I got over being pissed off that some customer had demanded that I make them hot chocolate, and that I use my precious stock of premium chocolate to do it, and realized that only the person who'd supplied me with said chocolate would know about it. You were the only one out here besides Betsy and her deputy, plus you were there for my complaining the day before the garbage was shifted, so I put it all together and came up with you as my secret admirer."

"Guilty as charged." Dayton was proud of Connor for figuring it all out and pleased all over again at how smart the man was. Not to mention how pleased he was that Connor was still there, talking to him -- that was a good sign.

"How did you know what chocolate to buy?"

That one had been easy. "It was the most expensive."

"So you didn't know those were my favorites?"

"No." He hated to admit it. "But I'm not surprised -- you've got a good palette."

It looked like it was Connor's turn to preen. It was cute. The preening didn't stop the interrogation from continuing, though. "And my favorite flowers?"

"Hey, I bought you every kind they had -- figured that way you were going to get the ones you like best."

Connor laughed. "Okay, so those were just luck. But how did you know I didn't have my own mixer out back?"

Dayton made a face. "I tried one of your pastries and could taste the meatloaf on it. The only way that could have happened is if you made your stuff in the same mixer the cook uses for savory crap."

"My pastries tasted like meatloaf!" That was definitely offense on Connor's face.

"Only someone with as good a sense of taste and smell as me would notice. And it was still the best pastry I've ever tasted."

Connor looked slightly mollified.

"How did you get it into the kitchen?"

"Pretended to be a delivery guy. I only come here during the early hours so none of the afternoon waitresses know me from a hole in the wall. And who walks into a kitchen and leaves a mixer if they don't belong there?" No one had even batted an eyelid at him.

Connor nodded, face pensive. "So can I ask you a question..." Like Connor hadn't asked a ton already.

"Dayton," he supplied. "And yes. Ask me anything you want." Especially if it was "Can I see you after work?"

"Dayton. I like that." Connor gazed at him for a moment before shaking himself. "So my question -- why? Why all this stuff? Why me? You like my baking that much?"

"I'd never tasted it before the other day." He shook his head. "No, it's got nothing to do with your baking. This is my way of saying I like you. After our first meeting in the parking lot, I knew I had to do something

special, something other than walking up and startling you again."

"When you do something special, you go all out." Connor looked rather stunned. "You really did all this just to meet me?"

"I did it to make a good impression on you. When I met you, I wanted you to be receptive. Are you?"

"I..." Connor looked a little startled that Dayton had simply come right out and laid it out on the table. He swallowed, nodded. "Yeah, I am."

"Good. What time do you get off?"

"Get off?" Connor's voice squeaked.

Biting his lip, Dayton managed not to laugh at Connor -- it wasn't like he was upset Connor had immediately gone to the naughty place at the words 'get off.' "Yes. Get off. You know. Leave. Finish working. Go home."

"Oh! Right." Blushing, Connor laughed a little. "At uh, well, things have been selling better than usual lately, so I should probably keep baking 'til four or five."

Dayton tried not to let his disappointment show -- just because he'd wanted Connor to drop everything and leave with him now, didn't mean it was going to happen. And just because it hadn't happened, didn't mean that Connor wasn't interested in him, too. The man had a job to do, a living to make.

"I'll be waiting for you outside at four."

"Okay. I'll be there."

"Good." Dayton picked up his mug and took his first sip of the best hot chocolate he'd ever had, made by the most intriguing, best smelling, best looking man he'd ever met.

He was in so much trouble, but it was the best kind of trouble he knew.

Get Your Motor Running

Connor spent the rest of the day torn between anticipation and worry. After Dayton had left, he'd spent ten minutes quizzing Betsy about the man. Wolf. Just what did one call a werewolf, anyway?

"Oh, he's a bad one that Dayton. He comes in here after being out catting around all night and always orders a hot chocolate!"

She looked at him like he was supposed to know exactly how that made Dayton a bad guy and for the life of him, other than being amused by her describing a werewolf as 'catting', he couldn't figure out what the significance of her words was.

"Don't you know? Chocolate is bad for wolves! It can be deadly. But he comes in at least once a week and asks for one."

"I thought that was dogs?"

"Dogs, wolves -- werewolves -- they're all the same in the chocolate department."

"Okay..." He still wasn't sure why liking chocolate made Dayton bad news.

"He lives on the edge! All that chocolate. It's going to up and kill him one of these days."

"So living on the chocolate edge makes him a bad guy?" Connor had to admit that he liked Dayton and wanted to get to know the man better -- in the biblical manner of speaking as well as the literal -- but he didn't think that was why he was failing to see the eating chocolate/bad boy connection.

"That and the catting around. With men. But then I guess you'd know all about *that*."

Connor frowned at her, a little pissed at the implication that he was also out catting around and that because he, and Dayton, were into men, that somehow

made it worse than when a straight guy went after women. "I didn't think you were homophobic, Betsy."

"Oh, I'm not. I didn't mean it like that, Connor, honest." She looked genuinely sorry for him having taken it the way he had. "I like you, you know? And I don't want to see you get hurt by Mr. Love 'em and Leave 'em and Go Eat Chocolate When It's Going to Kill Him."

"Mr. Love 'em and Leave 'em and Go Eat Chocolate When It's Going to Kill Him?"

"You heard me."

Connor managed not to laugh. Somehow. Because Betsy was genuinely being nice and seemed to honestly be looking out for him.

"I did. And I'll be careful, I promise."

"Good." She patted his shoulder. "I know the pool for you is small here in town."

Connor couldn't hold back his snort this time. The pool, as Betsy so sweetly put it, consisted of a single member other than himself, and Jordan Hammond was eighty-five if he was a day. Not exactly dating material. Hell, he almost wasn't breathing material.

Betsy continued as if he hadn't made a sound. "But that doesn't mean it's safe to go after the first thing in pants that shows an interest in you, honey."

"Betsy!"

She blushed and giggled and patted his shoulder. "You just take care of yourself. And you tell Mr. Wolf that I've got my eye on him."

"Thanks, Betsy." What else could he say? She clearly had his best interests at heart, even if she didn't have a clue what they were.

So, not at all reassured, he'd gone back into the kitchen and gotten to work on his baked goods.

Now it was just past four and he was supposed to go. Dayton was going to meet him, would be waiting out there. All his stuff was cleaned and put away, the baked goods out front, waiting to be sold, or what was left of them anyway -- they'd done another day of great business, his wares selling like hot cakes. The little pun made him giggle.

Gordy looked up from his station. "Huh?"

Connor shook his head. "It's nothing. I'm headed out now."

"Okay. See you tomorrow." Gordy went back to working as easy as that.

Betsy had clocked off at her usual time of noon and the two waitresses currently serving the customers had no clue what was going on, so with no one to help or to hinder him, he headed out, hoping he wasn't setting himself up for a broken heart. He had a feeling he could fall hard for Dayton. Maybe he already had.

He headed out the door, pleased all over again that he could -- and that it was Dayton who'd done that for him. It certainly was a unique way of trying to get into his good graces. It had worked, too.

Smiling as he went out, Connor immediately zoned in on Dayton, who stood leaning against his motorcycle, the leather of his pants seeming to bulge at the seams. The man was all leather and muscles. It was pretty damn sexy.

Connor found himself caught in Dayton's gaze. This man wanted him, had gone to great lengths to let him know that. Licking his lips, Connor moved toward Dayton instead of toward his own car. His emotions coalesced into excited and arousal.

Smiling, Dayton handed over a helmet that had a rainbow sticker on either side. It made him laugh and

Connor put it on, letting Dayton close it for him, the man's fingers lingering against his skin.

"Barely any five o'clock shadow."

Connor shook his head. "I'm not that hairy." His skin was far too fair.

"I am."

Dayton's words made him grin. "I just bet you are. I've never been with a werewolf before." It was kind of exciting. Like the appeal of a bad boy.

"Most folks haven't. Wolves tend to stick to their own kind."

"You don't."

"No. I don't. I'm not like the others."

"You're not like anyone I've ever met before." It was true. Connor hadn't actually met a whole lot of gay men, despite his orientation. Dayton looked pleased at his words.

Putting on his own helmet, Dayton straddled the bike, and then patted the seat behind him. "Saved a spot, just for you."

Connor laughed, the sound the tiniest bit shaky. Was he really doing this? Was he going to get on the back of the town bad boy's bike and drive off into the night? Dayton's dark eyes met his, full of heat. He could see the desire there, the need, and it was all directed at him.

Fuck yes, he was doing this.

Connor straddled the bike and pressed himself up against Dayton's back; he was in this for the full-on experience and refused to be timid. Reaching back, Dayton grabbed Connor's arms and wrapped them around his waist. "Hold on tight."

"I will." He did, stroking the flat stomach through far too many clothes. He'd just have to be patient.

Dayton kicked the bike into life, the whole thing vibrating between Connor's legs.

"Oh, God." He was going to get so hard. He was already halfway there.

He could feel Dayton's laughter against his chest and then they were off and he clung even harder to the strong body in front of him.

Take Me Home Tonight

Dayton's place was a room above a garage that let him do work on his bike using their tools. It was a good deal for him, and private at night when the garage was closed. He didn't take his one-night stands there -- that's what back rooms and hotels were for and he made good use of them when needed.

He didn't take Connor there either -- the man deserved better than his messy little room with its permanent stench of car grease. Hell, he didn't stay there often himself -- it was just a place and while he'd gotten used to the smell, more or less, it wasn't a home. He didn't know what was, really.

No, he didn't take Connor to his crappy little room over the garage. Instead, he took Connor back to Connor's place. It was in a nice neighborhood with a front lawn and flowers in the beds under the windows and a mailbox and everything. It was quiet as they pulled up, though Dayton was pretty sure he saw curtains twitching all up and down the street. He'd bet the hidden faces behind those curtains didn't miss a thing.

He let the engine idle and shouted back to Connor. "Your neighbors going to disapprove?"

Connor's laugh was wild, full. "Yes! Of every single thing."

Dayton liked that; what was more, he was pretty sure Connor did, too, so he revved the engine up high, letting it growl, letting it make noise until the curtains at Connor's neighbors twitched again.

Laughing hard, he brought the engine down a few notches and drove to the garage, nodding at Connor's shouted question of whether not Dayton wanted to put the Hog in the garage. He did.

His ride taken care of, Dayton followed Connor up the front stairs, watching the cute ass ahead of him. He wanted in that. And now that they were here, he wanted that badly.

He waited until Connor had opened the door and ushered him in before pouncing. They didn't even get the door closed before his mouth covered Connor's. Surprisingly strong arms wrapped around his neck, Connor holding onto him. A needy moan opened Connor's mouth to him and he plunged in, tongue sweeping in to taste Connor.

Spice. Sweet. Chocolate. And man. Those were the tastes that made up Connor. The Connor flavor. Dayton was addicted at first taste.

Groaning, he wrapped his arms around Connor and lifted him up. Connor's legs wrapped around his waist, the sweet body pushing and rubbing against his. He pushed Connor up against the wall, taking kiss after kiss, greedily gorging on his new lover. On his mate.

Mate. Yes. Oh, yes. That's what Connor was. That was why he'd been so taken on first sight, why he'd had the urge to woo the man so extravagantly.

He threw his head back and howled, called out to let the world know he had his mate now, he was whole. Connor laughed, hands sliding on his face. Their mouths met again, the kiss making him dizzy.

"Bed?"

Connor nodded behind him. "Upstairs. Wait. Door first."

He let Connor push the door closed and then took the stairs two at a time, carrying Connor like the man weighed nothing. He was buoyed by love and lust and need and a deep satisfaction.

Connor's room was lit up by the sun coming in through the window, leaves from the tree out back

tinting it green. The dark décor and warm brown covers on the bed were like the ground. It was their very own pack land. And he and Connor were their very own pack.

He laid Connor gently on the bed. "Mine." He said it softly, gently -- he didn't want to scare Connor off; he wouldn't be whole without this man.

Connor didn't balk, though, didn't run. He just laughed and held out his arms. "Come get me then, Dayton. Come get what's yours."

So he did.

Lightning Crashes

Connor could feel the power of the moment as Dayton all but tore his clothes off. He'd felt the change when Dayton had howled downstairs, felt something shift, bring them together in a way he didn't understand and couldn't explain, but the he felt, knew, deep inside himself.

He worked Dayton's clothes off with equal fervor, moaning as the hair-covered chest was revealed. Running his hands over Dayton's chest, he reveled in the hard muscles that begged for his touch.

Dayton soon had him naked, his prick hard and reaching up against his belly, kissing it with wet need. Bending, Dayton licked at his pre-come, licked at the tip of his cock. Connor cried out, hands going to Dayton's head. He held on as the licks covered his whole cock and then continued down to wash his balls. Dayton's mouth was so hot and the licks felt so good, better than anything he'd ever experienced. Ever. Even in his imagination.

Just when he thought it couldn't get better, Dayton spread his legs and that hot tongue lapped at his hole.

Connor screamed. When his shout was answered by another howl from Dayton, he convulsed, pleasure almost like an orgasm going through him.

"Dayton. Oh, *God*." He didn't know how else to put it.

Then Dayton's tongue pushed into him, spread him and wriggled inside. Nerve endings that had never known such a touch exploded into life, and Connor shook with the power of the pleasure.

He began panting Dayton's name, over and over. It was like Dayton was making magic with his body, and the man was a master magician.

He threw his head from side to side, fists opening and closing in the sheets. He only stopped when Dayton's hands cupped his head, stilling his restless, needful movements.

"Connor. Love. Mate."

Connor whimpered at the words, his body bucking, wanting more.

"Shh. Listen a moment. I don't have any condoms."

Damn it. He whimpered. "I don't either."

"It's okay, though. My kind -- we can't get diseases, we can't pass them on."

"Really?"

Dayton nodded.

"Then we don't need condoms." He reached for Dayton, but the man stayed out of reach. "What?" he whined.

"I've never done it without a condom before because, if we do this, if I put my scent inside you, then you're mine. My mate. For life."

"Oh..." He liked the sound of that. He liked knowing Dayton had never gone this far with anyone else, that he himself was, while not a virgin, not exactly experienced. They'd kind of been waiting for each other.

Dayton waited for more, looking down at him, brow furrowed.

Opening his arms, he bucked up again. "Come on, then. Make me your mate."

Growling, Dayton brought their mouths together, his kiss wild, driving Connor's need higher. He wrapped his legs around Dayton's waist again, tugging, wanting more, needing it.

More growls filled the air as Dayton shifted, his hard, hot cock pressing against Connor's entrance. It made Connor whimper and he pulled with his legs again.

"Come on!"

Come on, Dayton did, the hard cock pushing in, stretching him so wide. The burn was better than he would have thought and it quickly eased into incredible warmth that soon was the most pleasure he'd ever felt.

Putting his own head back, Connor felt this sound rip out of him. It was suspiciously like a howl, and Dayton answered it, was right there for him as their bodies came together in hard thrusts. The slap and bump of their skin filled the air, along with the noises they both made.

The pleasure built, making his balls tight, his cock harder than it had ever been. Then, without a touch to it, Connor came. Another howl ripped out of him, and again Dayton answered it, their voices ringing together.

Heat filled him deep, deep inside, and then Dayton collapsed onto him and they panted, their breath mingling as they nuzzled.

"Wow," he said softly. "That was. Wow."

Dayton kissed the side of his neck, cock sliding out of his body.

"You..."

"What?" Dayton asked, nudging him when he didn't continue.

"That stuff about mates and life. That wasn't just to get me into bed, was it?"

Growling softly, Dayton tugged him in close, burying them both in the covers. "Just try and get away. You're mine now."

"Oh. Okay, good."

Maybe he should have been a little concerned that the local bad boy thought they belonged together for life after just one shared orgasm. But then he would have to be concerned about himself, too, because he felt exactly the same way.

And in the End

Dayton woke alone, but his mate's scent was all around him, so he opened his eyes slowly, stretched, his hand going to the empty place on the bed next to him. Still warm. Connor hadn't been up for long.

A moment later he caught the spice and sugar and male scent that was his lover. And chocolate.

Connor was bringing him hot chocolate in bed. The man truly was his mate.

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Of Cocoa and Men

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