

## Blurb

Mating season. The time when a young man's heart turns to creating a permanent bond with the one he loves. At least, in theory. But Adam seems to have no interest in mating with Cullen, though they've been together for years. Cullen can't even take comfort in sure knowledge of Adam's feelings for him as Adam has yet to say the words "I love you."

Adam's parents screwed up when they mated. The bond forged by the mating bite, supposed to be a way for mates to share their love and devotion, became a conduit for their hatred and bitterness. He won't do that to someone he loves, or to himself. Cullen seems to understand, which is one of the things Adam loves about the man.

But Cullen *doesn't* understand, and Adam's forced to decide if he's strong enough to face his fears for the man he loves.

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## Chapter 1

Spring sucked.

Cullen Stark sighed and stared out his office window. Yet another email had landed in his inbox about another mating planned for this spring. That was three altogether. Three more times he'd have to watch a couple exchange mating bites and experience the mating bond.

He glanced down at the manuscript he was editing and shut it down with a disgusted snort. The last thing he needed to read was a freaking romance.

God, even Cullen's wolf was growling. What he needed was to shift, have a nice long run, and maybe eat a rabbit or two.

Of course, just as he was pulling off his shirt, his BlackBerry beeped. Shit. That was probably his alpha, Declan, wanting to talk about all the damn spring matings.

He picked up his smartphone and glanced at the screen. Yep. Declan was summoning him.

Well, he couldn't exactly ignore a message from his alpha, even if they had been friends since they were pups. He tugged his shirt back down and stuffed his feet in his shoes.

The walk to the alpha's house was not nearly long enough to clear his mind. He let himself in and had to take a step back when Quinn came barreling into the foyer, laughing his fool head off, waving something white over his head.

"Quinn. Will you get back here with my shirt? Cullen and Adam will be here soon and you don't like for anyone else to see my body, remember? You get all growly." Declan's voice floated down the hallway until the man himself appeared, loping after his smaller mate.

Declan barely spared Cullen a glance before focusing on Quinn again. "Come on, beautiful. Give me the shirt."

Quinn laughed like a lunatic but launched himself at Declan, who caught the blond wolf easily. "I like you this way. Besides, it's only Adam and Cullen coming over, and they've been together way longer than we have. I don't have to worry about them making goo goo eyes at you."

Declan's expression softened. "You don't have to worry about anything at all, baby. You're the only one I want to be looking at me."

Quinn smiled up at his mate and kissed him lingeringly.

The two wolves snuggled together, completely oblivious to the fact Cullen was standing right there.

Great. Just what he needed. More happy mates shoved down his throat.

Cullen was happy for Declan, he really was. His best friend deserved to be happy. And Quinn? Quinn was awesome. He'd helped turn the pack from a group of wolves to a real family.

A warm hand slid up Cullen's back until it rested on his shoulder. "Hey, babe. They at it again?"

Cullen couldn't help the shiver that ran through his body at his lover's touch. He leaned into Adam a little before pulling away. "Looks like. Think we need to get a bucket

of water to cool them off?"

Adam cleared his throat a couple of times. "Do you want us to come back?" he called loudly.

Declan broke the kiss and growled at them a little, enough to let them know he wasn't exactly pleased with the interruption. Quinn merely laughed and wiggled around until Declan set him on his feet.

Grabbing the shirt from his mate's hand, Declan slipped it over his head and smiled fondly at Quinn. "I love you, Quinn. Mating you was the best thing I ever did."

Cullen flinched a little at the words. "You okay, babe? You're a little pale." Adam massaged the back of his neck with one strong hand.

No, he wasn't okay. Six years with Adam, and they were no closer to mating than they were the first time they hooked up.

It wasn't like Adam and Cullen had just been fuck buddies. Adam had moved into his house a few months ago. They shared everything. A bed, a bathroom, meals ... hell, they'd even shared a toothbrush a time or two.

But Adam refused to become mated. Every time Cullen brought the subject up, Adam found a reason to put it off. Cullen tried not to read too much into it. He knew Adam loved him, even if the man never said the words. But he ached, knowing there was something more for mates, a kind of bond nothing, not even nature, could break.

Watching Declan and Quinn, happy and secure in their mating, drove home how much he was missing.

He walked behind everyone else, ignoring the concerned look Adam shot at him.

Could he live like this for another six years? For the rest of his life? Could he live knowing the thing he longed for wasn't even on Adam's radar?

He was miserable, and it was starting to affect everything he did. How was he supposed to carry out his duties as pack beta like this?

The answer was simple. He couldn't.

## Chapter 2

Adam resisted the urge to drum his fingers on the table. Cullen sat next to him looking like he was at a funeral. All Adam wanted to do was take him home and find a way to soothe the man.

“Adam? You wanna pay attention here? This is some important shit, you know.”

He blinked and looked up at Declan, directing his gaze to the man’s chin. Declan may have been one of his best friends, but the guy was still his alpha. “Sorry. I just don’t find arranging all these matings to be very interesting.”

“Adam Tulloch,” Quinn scolded gently. “You should take an interest. Mated couples are what keep a pack strong, and you know it.”

Not always. Sometimes people tied themselves to someone entirely incompatible and were miserable for the rest of their lives. He should know.

His parents had been the most mismatched mated pair he’d ever seen. And it had not been a case of opposites attracting, that was for sure. His entire childhood was nothing more than a giant blur of screaming matches. His mom had thrown at least one glass or plate at his father nightly.

Not that his father hadn’t deserved it, the cheating bastard.

But one ill thought-out mating bite and they had been stuck with each other.

Of course, Adam hadn’t exactly been a welcome addition to their happy little family. His parents ignored him for the most part, seeing him as yet another tie to each other.

“Sorry,” he said politely to Quinn. “I guess I just don’t see it that way.”

Quinn patted him sympathetically on the hand. “Well, I didn’t see it that way either until I mated with Declan. Don’t worry about it. We’ll handle all the mating stuff. All you’ll have to do is show up.”

He nodded but frowned. Cullen was the one who usually jumped to comfort him. But the man slumped in his chair, looking like someone had died.

That was it. He needed to get Cullen home and find out what the fuck was going on. And then he needed to kill whoever had put that look on the man’s face.

“Sorry, Dec, but can we do this tomorrow? I don’t think either Cull or I are quite in the mood for all this mating shit right now.”

Declan gave him an assessing look, suddenly all alpha. Then he sighed and wrapped an arm around Quinn’s waist. He pulled the submissive wolf into his lap and rested his chin on Quinn’s shoulder. “Yeah, go ahead. Quinn and I can handle most of this stuff on our own.”

Cullen’s chair scraped across the floor as he jumped to his feet. He was out the door before Adam could even stand up.

“What the fuck?” Adam said, raising his eyebrows at Declan and Quinn. “He’s been acting strange for a little while now. Do either of you know what’s going on with him?”

Declan adjusted his hold on Quinn so that he cradled the smaller wolf against his chest and stroked Quinn’s blond hair. “He hasn’t said anything to me, but if I had to guess, I’d say all of these matings are starting to get to him.”

“You think Cullen wants to get mated?”

Declan didn’t answer his question. Instead, he stood, making sure Quinn had his

footing before straightening completely.

Adam had to smile at the care Declan took with his young mate. When Quinn had first come to the pack, he'd been quiet and shy. He had been afraid of his own shadow. Declan's love had given the man confidence and had brought him out of his shell. Now Quinn was one of the most beloved members of their pack. Every single one of the wolves in the pack would lay down their lives to keep him safe, and yet Declan always made sure he did everything in his power to keep Quinn happy and protected.

Declan threaded his fingers through Quinn's and looked Adam dead in the eye. "I think you need to give very serious consideration to your thoughts about mating, and listen very carefully to what Cullen says."

Adam nodded and followed his lover out the door. He trudged down the stairs and lifted his face so he could catch Cullen's scent on the warm spring breeze.

Cullen's clothes were scattered about on the front lawn, including his shoes. Obviously he'd shifted and taken off.

Adam picked up the clothing and folded it neatly before placing it on the bottom step. It wasn't that he was a neat freak. Far from it. It was Cullen who couldn't stand to have his stuff scattered everywhere.

A feeling of dread built in his gut as he sat and unlaced his boots. Something was seriously wrong, and Adam couldn't help but feel that whatever Cullen had to say to him, it was going to change his life forever.

### Chapter 3

Cullen dipped his paw in the icy water and splashed it halfheartedly at the robin perched on the rock next to him.

The bird cocked its head at him and went back to singing its merry tune.

He didn't want joyful, happy birdsong intruding on the funeral dirges running through his head. He was witnessing the slow, painful death of any hope of being Adam's mate, and he wanted to mourn.

A huge black wolf padded over and Cullen heaved a sigh. He'd hoped to have a little more time to think things through, decide on the exact words he wanted to use, but Adam's arrival dashed that hope.

Adam whined and flopped down next to him, snuggling against his side, nudging Cullen's muzzle fretfully with his nose.

Cullen could practically feel the concern rolling off his lover. He pushed down his irritation with Adam and licked Adam's muzzle. It wasn't Adam's fault Cullen hadn't told him what his problem was.

They lay quietly on the soft spring grass, watching the birds scratch at the dirt and listening to the water burble away in the stream. Cullen savored the warm body at his side, knowing this might be the last time he ever felt it. If he could freeze this moment and stay this peaceful forever, he would do it in a heartbeat.

But, of course, stopping time wasn't possible and eventually the sun began to set. Adam nudged him again, and he reluctantly heaved himself to his feet. It was still too cold to go traipsing about in the nude, so they stayed in wolf form until they made it home.

Adam shifted, opening the door and standing back to let Cullen go in first. Cullen shifted back to human form and turned to face his concerned lover.

"Cull?"

The vulnerability in Adam's voice shredded his heart, and Cullen couldn't stop himself from leaning forward and brushing his lips against Adam's. "We need to talk, Adam."

"No," Adam pleaded. "No. No. No." Each word was punctuated with a desperate kiss.

Cullen never was able to resist Adam and he arched his neck so the other man could string a line of moist, open mouthed kisses down to his chest.

Hands gripped roughly, they fought for dominance. Adam shoved Cullen into the wall with a crash, pushing against his shoulders.

*No way.* Cullen pushed back hard, forcing Adam to stumble, mashed his mouth to his and herded Adam toward the bedroom. He knew he couldn't win this battle. Adam was far too strong for Cullen to even have a chance at winning. But if he was going to be taken, it was going to be on the bed. There was no way he was going to sport carpet burn on his knees for the next two days.

Once he'd wrestled Adam into the bedroom, he stopped fighting so hard. He didn't mind being dominated so much. He just wanted his lover to work for it.

Adam pushed him onto the bed with enough force he bounced on the mattress. He

loomed over Cullen, one corner of his mouth drawn up in a silent growl. “On your knees, Cull,” he snarled.

“Use lube,” was all he had to say, rooting around in the nightstand for the tube they kept there. He knew Adam would never hurt him, but he did get carried away on occasion.

Adam growled wordlessly and grabbed the lube from him.

What felt like the entire contents of the tube was dumped between his cheeks, and he shivered. “Cold.”

“You won’t be cold for long.” Adam grabbed his hair and yanked until Cullen was forced to bare his neck submissively. He used the fingers on his free hand to quickly stretch him out.

Cullen panted through the burn, concentrating on relaxing his muscles and pushing back onto those digits. He knew from experience the burning sensation would fade into a pleasure so intense he would be screaming and begging for release before they were done.

Adam’s fingers pegged his gland, and Cullen’s eyes rolled back. There was that pleasure he’d been waiting for. “Now,” he practically sobbed. He wasn’t sure if he was nearly weeping because of the pleasure or because of what they needed to discuss.

The latex-covered dick nudged his pucker and this time, tears really did start flowing. The condom just brought home the fact he and Adam weren’t mated. Their scents would never mingle to create a new one. Sure, other wolves would smell him on Adam’s clothes but without a mating-bite scar or their own unique scent, there was nothing to speak of their commitment to each other.

His body didn’t care, though. All it knew was the unspeakable pleasure Adam was giving it. His balls drew tight, and when Adam’s fist wrapped around his cock, Cullen howled and shot. Long, creamy ropes painted the dark blue comforter.

Adam grunted and froze for a single second. His grip on Cullen’s hair hadn’t loosened at all, and he tugged harder, forcing Cullen to expose his neck more than usual.

Cullen relaxed, knowing Adam’s wolf was close to the surface. The wolf wouldn’t hurt him, but Adam hated to lose control.

Sharp teeth grazed the sides of his neck and Cullen froze. God, could this really be it? Could Adam really be ready to finally claim his as his mate?

The growl that ripped from Adam’s throat told him just how close to the surface the wolf really was, and Cullen’s misery returned, the pain as sharp as a knife to the gut. Cullen knew the wolf considered him their mate. It was the human part of Adam that wanted no part in a formally committed relationship.

But allowing Adam’s wolf to take control and seal their fate by delivering the mating bite when Cullen could do something about it wasn’t fair to Adam.

“Adam. Adam.”

Adam pulled away with a gasp and collapsed on the mattress next to Cullen, panting and sweating.

And with that, all hope Cullen had for the future died.

## Chapter 4

Adam watched his lover sleep, pushing a lock of chestnut brown hair off Cullen's forehead.

Those dreaded words, *we need to talk*, had stolen his breath and thrown him into a panic he'd never experienced before. Whatever Cullen wanted to talk about, it wasn't good.

He'd taken Cullen three more times, until the man had passed out from exhaustion. But even in his sleep, unhappiness was etched all over Cullen's face.

Cullen stirred, and his eyelids fluttered.

Damn. Adam had hoped for more time. He took a deep breath and watched Cullen drag himself out of sleep. He couldn't help but smile. Cullen loved to sleep, and waking up was always a battle. But, God, he was adorable when he first woke up, all affectionate and warm and hard ... and usually horny.

True to form, Cullen nuzzled close and pressed his morning wood against Adam's hip. Soft kisses were dropped on Adam's collarbone, and he reveled in the feeling until Cullen stiffened and pulled away. His face was a study in abject misery.

"Cullen, baby. Tell me what's wrong? Whatever it is, I'll fix it. If someone is making you feel this bad, I'll rip their throat out. I promise."

He meant every single word, too.

Cullen studied him and shook his head. "We need to talk, but I don't want to do this here, in our bed."

Adam swallowed around the sudden lump in his throat. "Okay. Just let me get dressed." Somehow, this didn't seem like a time for naked skin.

Cullen didn't answer, just rose from the bed and pulled on a pair of sweats that had been sitting neatly on the top of his dresser. He walked out of the room without a backward glance.

Adam took a second to use the toilet and stared at his reflection in the mirror as he washed his hands. Something big was about to happen, and he wasn't sure he was ready.

The scent of coffee drifted up the stairs. Crap, this was worse than he thought. Cullen never drank coffee. In fact, the only time Cullen ever made coffee was when he was upset and wanted something warm to hang on to. Adam asked him about that particular habit back when they first started seeing each other. The answer Cullen had given him melted his heart. "I usually make hot chocolate when I'm upset. You don't drink hot chocolate, so I thought I'd make coffee instead."

No one had ever put him first. Ever. And it had scared the shit out of him then.

It scared the shit out of him now.

Taking a deep breath, he left the bathroom and went downstairs, feeling like he was about to meet his executioner.

Cullen was standing at the huge picture window in the living room. He wasn't cradling the coffee like Adam expected. There was a mug steaming on the coffee table, but Adam could tell from the scent that Cullen had poured it for him, since it held no hint of cream or sugar.

Instead, Cullen was staring out at the forest, his arms wrapped around his middle as

if he was trying to hold himself together.

This was *so* not good.

“Babe? You wanted to talk?” Damn, if his voice got any more hesitant, he wouldn’t be talking at all.

Cullen nodded, the movement jerky, and the scent of tears flooded Adam’s nose.

He was at Cullen’s side in a flash, wrapping his arms around Cullen’s middle and tugging his lover against him. Cullen didn’t unwind his arms from around his waist but he did lean his forehead against Adam’s shoulder, his tears dripping down Adam’s bare chest.

Adam let him cry, totally at a loss. Cullen had never cried in front of him before, and the silent tears broke his heart. “Cull, you need to tell me what’s wrong, babe. I can’t fix it if I don’t know what I’m trying to fix.”

For the first time since they’d started seeing each other, Cullen was the first one to pull away. Adam shivered as emptiness invaded his soul.

Cullen swallowed once, and then twice before clearing his throat, clearly trying to get himself back under control. “I can’t do this anymore.”

Pure terror tugged at Adam, and he locked his knees so he didn’t collapse on the floor. “Do what?”

Cullen finally unwrapped his arms from around his middle and waved his hands around vaguely. “This. I want it all with you, Adam. I want to be yours. Completely, totally, unequivocally yours. I want to wear your mark and your scent. And I want you to be mine. That you don’t want to mate me is killing me.”

Adam’s stomach dropped, and ice began creeping through his veins. “So, I’m not enough for you?”

Cullen snarled and grabbed his shoulders, shaking him. Adam had never seen him like this. “You will always be enough for me, Adam. That’s why I want to have that mate bond with you, you bastard.” The anger suddenly drained out of Cullen, and his grip turned from painful to caressing. “Sorry, Adam. I just ... it hurts to know that you don’t love me as much as I love you.”

Oh God, and Adam thought his heart had broken a few minutes ago. That pain had nothing on this one. It was like his heart had shattered into a million pieces and someone was grinding those shards into dust. “Cullen, I do love you. Baby, we don’t need to get mated to love each other.”

Cullen stepped back, putting even more distance between them. “But getting mated is a commitment that every other wolf recognizes.”

Adam watched with confusion as Cullen pushed his pants down. Why the fuck was he getting naked *now*?

“Look, Adam. I get it. I do. Your parents fucked each other up. I know that you won’t mate me because you want an out if things between us go south. Thing is, we’re not your parents. I have spent the last six years trying to prove that to you. But I can’t keep living with the fact that you can just walk out on me without a word. I can’t.”

Cullen’s words hollowed out the already gaping hole in Adam’s chest. Cullen was right, of course. He’d always known Adam better than anyone else. “Cull. What are you saying?”

Cullen had been in the process of walking away, heading toward the door. Naked. He paused but didn’t turn around. “I don’t want to pressure you, Adam. But if you don’t

have any intentions of even considering mating with me, then... I talked to Declan. He said that if it comes down to it, he'll put my name in for a transfer to a different pack. Also, he decided to split us up for patrol. I'm going out now. I think he has you down for tonight. You'll have to talk to him about your patrol shifts once you go back to the firehouse."

He didn't wait for Adam to reply before he shifted and bounded out the doggy door Declan had installed in all the pack houses.

What the fuck was he supposed to do now?

## Chapter 5

Adam banged his way through the door of the Alpha house. “Declan.”

Quinn poked his head out of the front room and smiled at him. “Hey, Adam. Declan’s not here right now.”

Narrowing his eyes at Adam, Quinn pointed the way to the kitchen. “You look like someone died. Need a drink?”

Adam followed Quinn into the kitchen and sat at the table, more for lack of anything better to do than to actually have a heart to heart with the alpha’s mate.

Quinn cracked open the fridge and came back out with a bottle of beer.

Adam’s lips curled up in a small smile despite the fact he felt like he was dying inside. “It’s only ten in the morning, Quinn. A little early to be drinking, don’t you think?”

“It’s noon somewhere,” Quinn said with a shrug. “Besides, you look like you could really use this.”

Well, he couldn’t argue with that. If there was any time for a beer, it was now. He took a swig and eyed the alpha’s mate carefully. The man had an annoying habit of ferreting out exactly what was wrong, no matter who he was talking to. It was probably why he was so good with the pups. In fact, he ran a daycare out of the basement, and the kids adored him. Which, now that he thought about it... “Where are all the kids?”

Quinn smirked at him and shook his head. “Dude, you are really out of it. It’s Saturday. The kids are at home.”

They sat quietly, Adam nursing his beer, and Quinn sipping from his glass of juice. Unable to stand the silence anymore, Adam began to blurt out everything. When he was done, he slumped in his chair, exhausted beyond belief.

A glass of juice appeared in front of him, and Adam blinked. He had been so wrapped up in his despair he hadn’t heard Quinn move.

He waited for the other man to say something but Quinn remained silent. “Well?” he finally said.

Quinn gave him a sad smile. “Let me ask you this. What is the worst thing that can happen if you mate with Cullen?”

That was easy. “We have no way out if things go badly. We would end up hating each other. And I can’t have Cullen hate me.”

Quinn nodded and then sat forward. “And what’s the worst thing that can happen if you *don’t* mate with him?”

Horror crawled through him when he realized he was already teetering on the very edge of the worst that could happen. “I’ll lose him,” he whispered.

Reaching across the table, Quinn patted his hand. “It’s okay to be afraid, Adam. Lord knows I was afraid when I got mated to Declan. But I’ve never regretted it.”

Adam thought back to when Quinn had first come to the pack, abused and looking like a survivor of a refugee camp. Mating with Declan had been life-changing for Quinn, and not just because he’d finally had enough to eat. The man had been scared out of his mind the night he’d stood in front of the pack and let Declan mate with him. The scent of rank fear had saturated the air so thoroughly, it had been hard to smell the pine on the

crisp fall air. But somehow, he'd found the courage to mate Declan so the man could take over as Alpha.

By comparison, Adam should have nothing to worry about. He'd been with Cullen for more than six years and things had been great. Sure, they'd fought. They were two dominant wolves—things were bound to get heated sometimes. But they'd always been able to work things out with a minimum of damage. Usually any damage could be attributed to the make-up sex.

He sat at the table, thinking everything through while Quinn pattered away in the kitchen. While the thought of being tied to someone for the rest of his life with no way out scared the hell out of him, living without Cullen was unacceptable. He might as well cease to exist if Cullen wasn't in his life.

"Hey, Quinn? Do you think Cullen wants a public mating or do you think he would be okay with a private one?"

Quinn pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows. "I guess that depends. Why do you want a private mating? Because if the answer is that the fewer number of people who know, the better—I'd tell you to take a flying leap off a short pier."

Adam grinned. Quinn certainly had a way with words. "Oh, when I mate with Cullen, I want every pack member to know he's off the market, as soon as possible. But I was thinking that a private, romantic mating may be more meaningful than a pack-wide one."

Quinn's expression softened. "I think Cullen will love it. Does that mean I can go shopping for a mating gift?"

Now the fear racing through Adam was because Cullen could actually say no. That he'd finally had enough of Adam's shit and decided he wasn't worth the effort. "I'll get back to you on that."

"When?"

God, Quinn was a nosy little thing, but Adam felt no irritation. Not when he'd managed to get Adam to extract his head from his ass. "When I'm wearing Cullen's mating bite and our scent."

A huge grin spread over Quinn's face. "Good deal, man."

Adam stood up and stretched. Now all he needed was a plan.

## Chapter 6

Cullen shifted to human form and walked back to his house. He'd spent the afternoon patrolling the grounds with Declan.

Adam had left a change of clothes for him on the front step, and Cullen pulled them on as he stared at the front door and gathered his courage. He'd never been afraid to enter his home before but the idea of Adam not waiting for him was terrifying.

What the fuck had he been thinking, giving Adam an ultimatum? Of course the man was afraid of mating. He'd been royally fucked over by his parents. He understood Adam's reluctance to bind himself to another. He really did. But was it really so horrible for him to want that bond? Didn't he deserve to know they had something permanent?

Gathering his courage, Cullen walked up the steps of the front porch and opened his door.

Relief flowed through him when he spotted Adam walking toward him. "Adam," he blurted out.

Before he could say anything else, Adam crossed over to him and kissed him gently. "Would you take a walk with me?"

Cullen took Adam's proffered hand and followed him back outside.

They walked together silently, Adam rubbing his thumb over Cullen's knuckles with every step. Hope began to blossom in Cullen's heart. Adam wouldn't be this attentive if he was going to walk away, would he?

The sweet, soothing sound of the stream reached his ears, and Cullen smiled. The clearing by the stream was one of his favorite places. It was where he and Adam had made love for the first time. It was also where he'd first confessed his feelings for Adam.

Adam never said the words back, but the desperation with which Adam had taken him told Cullen he felt the same way.

He gasped when they finally made it to the clearing. A huge blanket was spread out over the soft spring grass. Another blanket was neatly folded in the corner. A nest of pillows waited for someone to snuggle up and make long, leisurely love with his partner.

A cooler sat next to one of the trees, the blue box out of context with the rest of the scene. He couldn't resist. "What's in the cooler?"

"Some sandwiches, a box of cookies, and a couple of beers for later."

Cullen's brow rose almost without his knowledge. "Beers?"

Adam colored, a beautiful flush staining his high cheekbones. "I'm not great at this romance stuff. Quinn told me to pack some champagne, but neither of us like champagne, so I figured beer would be a better choice. I could have gone with some sparkling apple cider or something but—"

Cullen cut off Adam's rambling with a kiss. He wound his fingers through Adam's dark hair and held him close so they were nose to nose, even when he pulled his lips away. "I love it, Adam."

"Yeah?" Adam asked. The uncertainty was plain in his voice. "Do you still love me?"

Oh, his poor love. "I never stopped loving you, baby."

Adam nudged him gently until they were directly over the blanket. Their clothes

seemed to melt off, removed by gentle, reverent hands. Skin on skin had never felt better.

They stood together, feeling each other's hearts beating, their lips barely touching, and their breathing totally in sync. Cullen skimmed his palms over Adam's ribs. "Love you, Ad-man."

Adam nuzzled close and stroked his fingers over Cullen's back. "God, I love you so much, Cull."

Somehow, they ended up stretched out on the blanket, the pillows cushioning their bodies against the still damp ground. They were pressed together from chest to thigh, arms wrapped around each other, holding each other close. If they got any closer, they would be under each other's skin.

Cullen closed that scant millimeter between their mouths and licked over Adam's lips. Adam opened under his tongue and sucked it into his mouth, playing with it gently.

Cullen's cock hardened, and he rocked his hips, shivering when Adam's dick rubbed against his own.

This was what he wanted. He wanted Adam in his arms, covered in his scent, and if this was all Adam could give him, he was going to take it and wallow in it.

Slick fingers touched his hole and Cullen's body relaxed automatically. Apparently Adam had stashed some lube somewhere because everything was wet and slippery and oh, so good.

It was awkward though, with Adam reaching around him. It meant that his finger couldn't breach Cullen very far at all. And Cullen wanted to be breached so badly.

"Adam," he said on a breathy sigh. "More."

"Mmm," Adam moaned. Adam pushed gently at his hip until Cullen rolled over. He would have rolled all the way to his stomach and pushed up on his hands and knees but Adam stopped him when he reached his side.

Adam spooned against him and Cullen shuddered at the feeling. They'd had sex more times than he could count, but they'd never done it this way. It was probably going to be a little more difficult to coordinate, but the feeling of Adam's muscled chest against his back, warming him all the way through, was worth it.

Another finger joined the first in Cullen's body, and his eyes rolled back. He could feel every ridge of Adam's knuckles stretching his inner muscles, and he'd never had the chance to savor the feeling before. Sex between them was nearly always rough and passionate. It seemed Adam was all about savoring today, though, because no matter how insistently Cullen pushed back on those fingers, he refused to be rushed.

Warm lips brushed against the back of his neck, and Adam paused to lick at the sensitive spot behind his ear.

By the time Adam had three fingers inside him, Cullen was frantic for release. "Adam," he whimpered. "You need to slow down, or I'm going to blow."

Instead of withdrawing, he circled his hand around the base of Cullen's shaft and pumped slowly. "It's okay, baby. I want you to come. I want to feel you explode around my fingers and soak my hand. And then, I want to feel you come on my cock."

Adam's words, and the rough, sexy voice they were said in, pushed Cullen even higher. "Twice in a row," he managed to tease. "Not sure I'm young enough to pull that off anymore."

The fingers in his ass pegged his prostate, and white hot pleasure zapped down his spine. Adam chuckled in his ear. "Oh no, Cull. We're not stopping at two. You're going

to have to come a third time when you take me.”

Cullen had no breath left for words, so he decided to simply let the pleasure take him away. It wasn't like Adam was going to give him a chance to do anything else, anyway.

Adam pressed against his gland firmly and began a short, quick stroke right over the tip of his cock.

Pleasure rained down on him, and his hot seed spurting, drenching the pillows and blankets even as Adam continued to milk the last of the spasms out of him.

He was so lost in the sensations he completely missed the fact Adam had replaced his fingers with his dick. “Shit,” Adam swore and froze.

Cullen whined and pushed back. He still had a hard on and it throbbed in anticipation. “Why are you stopping?”

“Feels too good,” Adam said on a groan.

The realization Cullen was feeling Adam in him without a barrier of latex separating them hit him suddenly. “Adam? What the hell?”

“I love you, Cullen. I don't want to lose you because I was too much of a pussy to man up and make an honest wolf out of you.”

Oh God, now Cullen's heart was pumping for an entirely different reason. “Ad? We should talk about this before we do anything rash.”

“You don't want to mate with me, now?” Adam asked, his voice breaking.

Cullen could hear the uncertainty in his lover's voice. That would not do. He couldn't look into Adam's eyes, and he couldn't kiss away any doubts because of their position, so he did the next best thing. Seizing Adam's hand, Cullen pressed it against his heart so that Adam could feel it beating. “I will always want to mate with you, Adam. Make me yours.”

“Mine,” Adam agreed with a snarl.

They rocked together, both moaning. God, doing it raw was probably the best thing next to heaven. Maybe even better than heaven. Cullen could feel every ridge, every pulse and throb. The drag of skin on silken skin was too much.

Cullen lost it again—every muscle in his body contracted as incredible pleasure swept through him.

Sharp teeth pierced his shoulder, and for the first time ever, Adam pulsed inside him, flooding him with the mating pheromones.

Cullen lay stunned as his soul seemed to shatter apart and mix with the broken pieces of Adam's soul only to knit back together, entwining them as one.

“You okay?” Adam asked, pulling his hips back slightly.

Cullen winced when Adam's softening shaft slipped out of him. He turned around so that they were facing each other again. “I'm so much better than okay. I'm great.”

He pushed his fingers through Adam's sweaty hair and feathered a kiss against his forehead. “Why now?” Cullen asked before he could stop himself.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid.* Why did he have to go and mention it? The seed dripping out of Cullen's ass was still hot, and he had to go and ask something so stupid.

Adam returned the caress, and the kiss, before answering. “I talked to Quinn and realized that as scary as it is to be mated, the thought of living without you is far more terrifying.”

Oh, his dear, sweet mate. “I love you, Ad-man. So much.”

Adam smiled and stretched, groaning as he straightened. “Now all that's left is for

you to claim me.” He drifted his fingers over the side of his neck, indicating the spot where he wanted Cullen to mark him.

“God, I don’t think I’m able to get it up right now.” He wanted to try. Oh, he wanted to try so badly. But he was pretty sure he’d just blown his brains out through his dick. He held his breath, hoping beyond hope Adam wouldn’t take his answer for a rejection.

“Well,” Adam said. “Maybe we should wait until Declan and Quinn can arrange for a public mating. That way everyone can watch you claim me as yours.”

Cullen melted, relief and love flowing through him. “I could get behind that.”

Adam smiled and petted his face until he fell asleep.

## Chapter 7

“How can you be so damned relaxed?” Adam grumbled at Declan.

Declan looked up from his book and smirked. “Because I’m not the one who’s going to get naked and boned in front of the whole pack.”

Quinn smacked Declan in the chest. “Matings are supposed to be romantic, Declan. It’s not ‘getting naked and boned’. It’s declaring their love in front of their friends and family.”

Adam made a face at his alpha and resumed pacing the room. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask why Dec and Quinn hadn’t had to do the whole thing in front of the pack, but then he remembered the condition Quinn had been in at their mating.

Besides, he had been the one to suggest the public part of their mating.

Declan stood and stretched before helping Quinn to his feet. “You ready, Adam?”

God, he was about to hyperventilate.

Quinn was at his side in a second, patting his arm. “Why are you so nervous?”

“He’s probably got performance anxiety.” Declan flinched when Quinn swung at him again.

It wasn’t performance anxiety. Hell, he was catching tonight. He technically didn’t even have to get hard—although he was pretty sure Cullen would make sure he enjoyed it. He just wanted to make sure everything was perfect for Cullen, that was all.

There was no way he was going to admit that in front of Declan though. The man would never let Adam live such a sentimental thought down.

“Don’t be so sure about that, Ad. Quinn has totally changed my way of thinking. I know what it’s like to be so in love with someone, you’re willing to make a fool out of yourself for them. Things are perfect. Quinn made sure of that, remember?” Declan draped a heavy arm over his shoulder and pulled him close in a one-armed hug.

Apparently he’d spoken his fear out loud. He took the comfort his alpha offered before pushing away.

Quinn tiptoed over to the window and peeked out through the drapes. “Looks like everything is set.”

It was time to put on his big boy underwear. Or take them off, as it were. Throwing his shoulders back, Adam blew out a deep breath and nodded at Declan, who smiled at him encouragingly.

Declan squeezed his shoulder before he walked over to Quinn and then through the back door.

Adam could hear the alpha announcing the ceremonial words and waited for his cue to step onto the back porch, where Cullen and the rest of the pack would be waiting for him.

“Adam?” Declan called.

Shit, he’d missed his cue. He rushed out, stumbled over a loose board on the deck, and nearly fell flat on his face. Strong arms wrapped around him, saving him from breaking his nose and bleeding all over the beautiful deck Declan had had stained the year before.

Cullen held on to Adam until he was steady on his feet. “Thanks for not letting me

fall,” Adam murmured gratefully.

“I’ll never let you fall,” Cullen whispered back.

A hot rush swept through his belly, little butterflies taking up residence in his stomach. “That was so cheesy,” he commented, cupping Cullen’s cheek.

Cullen grinned and turned to press a kiss into the center of Adam’s palm. “But you love it.”

“Yeah, I do,” Adam admitted.

“Yeah, yeah,” Declan said, pushing his way between them. “Now, can we get back to the matter at hand? Please? Because Quinn just told me he has a surprise for me and that usually means I end up balls deep in him.”

Cullen looked into his eyes, and Adam could see the love sparkling in those beautiful blue eyes. “You sure you want to do this?”

Oh, God, he was never more sure about anything in his life. “Yes, I am.”

“Then let’s do this,” Cullen said. He turned Adam around so he faced Declan and the rest of the pack. “I choose this man as my mate.”

Declan stepped forward. “I acknowledge this mating, as Alpha of his pack.” He threw back his head and howled.

The rest of the pack howled back, and Cullen gently pushed Adam to his knees. The pack’s collective gaze was on him. Rather than feel insecure, Adam’s heart began to pump and his dick twitched.

Cullen’s hands traced up the backs of his thighs and paused to tickle his ass. God, what a feeling. “You have a little bit of an exhibitionist streak, huh?”

“Apparently,” Adam grunted, his cock going from interested to full mast in a matter of seconds. “Although I think it has more to do with your hands on my body than everyone watching.”

“If you like my hands so much, you’re going to love this.” Cullen separated Adam’s cheeks with two hands and licked along his crease.

*Oh, holy hell, that was wonderful.* Cullen worried his tongue around Adam’s pucker until Adam thought he would pass out from pleasure. There was no way things could feel any better. But then Cullen inserted two fingers *and* licked delicately at the stretched-tight skin, and Adam’s pleasure ratcheted up to a whole new level of sweet-baby-Jesus-please-don’t-stop.

The muscles in Adam’s abdomen cramped painfully as he fought against the urge to come with nothing but the warm spring breeze brushing against his cock. Cullen nudging his prostate with those questing fingers didn’t help matters.

He didn’t even have enough breath to warn Cullen about his imminent explosion, but his mate seemed to know exactly what was happening.

Cullen slowly freed his fingers, and Adam felt him kneel between his legs. The already damp tip of Cullen’s cock, pushing insistently at his opening, told Adam just how aroused Cullen was. “I’m probably not going to last long,” Cullen muttered.

“S’okay,” Adam managed to grit out between his clenched teeth. “I’m already right on the edge.”

Cullen’s thick shaft breached his body, and Adam gasped. Full. He had to work to relax around his mate’s cock. Cullen hadn’t stretched him out completely, but that was okay. He liked the burn.

By the time Cullen was balls deep, the slight pain morphed into a pleasure so deep,

so intense, Adam had forgotten how to breathe.

“Shit.” Cullen pulled back a little. “Sorry, babe. Can’t hold back.” He slammed in and pulled Adam up by the shoulders so that they were pressed together, chest to back.

Wrapping his hand around Adam’s straining shaft, Cullen stroked him off. “Want to feel you come. Fuck, need you to come, Ad.”

Well, that was okay by him. He only needed one little thing to push him over that edge. “Bite me, Cull.”

“Yeah,” Cullen agreed. “Mine.”

“Yours. Always.”

Cullen grunted and sank his teeth into the fleshy part of Adam’s shoulder.

The first, stinging sprays of Adam’s orgasm were almost painful in their intensity before they melted into spine tingling pleasure. The climax went on forever and Adam only vaguely felt Cullen pulsing inside him.

The ties that had formed when Adam first took Cullen as his mate tightened into something unbreakable. He felt Cullen’s pleasure like it was his own, felt his mate’s satisfaction that nothing could tear them apart and gloried in the same feeling.

Cullen finally freed his fangs from Adam’s shoulder and let out a joyful howl.

Adam’s muscles were no longer able to support him, and he flopped forward to collapse on his belly, wincing when the action caused Cullen’s softening cock to slip out of him.

A warm body snuggled close to his, and Adam managed to throw his arm around Cullen’s waist and drag him close. Declan was standing over them, addressing the pack. “This mating has been witnessed and approved. Tonight, we celebrate this long-awaited event.”

“What Dec really meant to say was: let’s party!” Quinn exclaimed.

Cullen got to his feet and hauled Adam up. He was shaky, and he doubted his legs would support his body weight, so he leaned in to Cullen, confident that his mate would hold him up.

He smiled and accepted the congratulations from his pack members as they filed past to lay waste to the spread Quinn had put out in the Alpha’s house.

Some of the females glared at them, though, narrowing their eyes and pouting. “What the hell is the matter with them?” Cullen asked.

Adam was just as bewildered. He hadn’t thought they would meet any resistance to their mating. After all, they’d been together forever. Besides, the alpha had mated a male.

“Are you kidding?” Declan said with a smirk. “Those girls have been vying to have the first mating of the spring.”

“Yeah,” Quinn said, slapping Adam on the back. “They’ll be spring mates, but you’ll always have the distinction of being the first mates this spring.”

Hmm. Spring mates. Adam followed his alpha and Quinn into the house, still wrapped up in Cullen’s arms. He liked the sound of that.

“I think spring is my new favorite season,” Cullen murmured against Adam’s temple.

“Me, too,” Adam replied quietly. “Me, too.”

The end.

The highest compliment you can give an author is to help spread the word. If you

enjoyed this book, please consider leaving an honest review.

## About the Author

Lynn Tyler, erotic romance author, has been writing since she was young. An Amazon bestseller and a strong believer in happily ever after, Lynn writes predominantly male/male paranormal romance. In her spare time, she attempts to decide on the perfect name for her pet unicorn, should she ever discover one.

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Be the first to know about Lynn's newest releases and cover reveals by signing up for her mailing list.

Spring Mates  
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