

The clay they'd made of flour wasn't cooperating and Zig'd reached the end of her patience with it. Angel wasn't sure what she was making. When she'd first started laying down the pieces, he'd imagined it was a unicorn but then it grew wheels or wings, he couldn't be certain. Regardless, the salty dough was drying out too quickly and if he didn't step in to help, she'd be left with a lumpy mess instead of an ornament to take home.

Half Moon Bay's afternoon youth art class was a two hour exercise in biting his tongue and making sure no one set themselves on fire. And he was just one of the volunteers.

He'd enrolled his brother Roman into the classes to keep the kid busy and the boy'd latched onto it like a duck to water. Rome's best friend, Zig, joined a few weeks later and Angel'd been bringing their art teacher muffins ever since as an ongoing apology.

"Hey, Your Zigness, you need some help?" Angel peered over her shoulder. Being closer didn't help. He still had no idea what she was making.

"Nope. Just doing my thing." She looked up at him through her lashes, a too adult glance for her child-face. "Why?"

"No side-eye from you." Angel grinned, thinking of the trouble Deacon and Lang were going to have once Zig hit high school. "Just asking, kiddo. In case you needed something."

They understood one another, he and Zig. To be fair, the three of them shared more life experiences than he liked. Roman and Zig after a brief battle of wills culminating in a semi-fist fight and the long dreaded wait outside the principal's office firmed up a friendship that honestly terrified Angel on a very deep primal level. Since she'd entered their lives more than a year ago, Roman was quicker to communicate, sometimes rambling on about everything he'd done or seen for an hour after he came home from school. It was also a hell of a lot easier to parent with Lang and Deacon backing him up. They were all feeling their way around how to do things and what would work for one sometimes worked for the other kid. Not always but often enough for Angel to be willing to give anything a go.

"Do you think this sucks?" Zig poked at her lumpy creation. "And don't be all it's perfect how it is because life's not perfect cr...stuff."

"Good catch on the swear word there." He dragged a stool up to the art table. "Can I ask something and you won't get offended?"

"Yeah. Sure."

"I'm not really sure what I'm looking at," Angel sat down, edging into Roman. His eleven-year-old brother didn't notice but then Rome barely noticed anything when he was nose-deep in anything. "Is it supposed to be a motorcycle?"

"It started off as a dog but then I changed it to a robot." She wrinkled her nose, snorting in disgust. "So kind of a robot dog? I want to give it to Uncle West. I don't think a lot of people like him. He needs a pet or something."

Hearing West's name tore his calm into tatters. It would have been less painful if Zig'd taken a chain saw to his guts.

West Harris was the reason Angel steadfastly avoided Lang Harris. It'd been difficult at first seeing West's twin at their grandmother's house, especially since Angel frequently did odd jobs and cooking for her but he'd managed to keep contact down. There'd been a few times when avoiding Lang was impossible and despite the twins' very different personalities, there were sometimes flashes of West in Lang's expressions and body language.

His heart broke all over again the first time he'd seen Lang chew on his lower lip, worrying at the plump flesh while he worked something out. Angel didn't know what hurt more, seeing West in Lang's face or realizing Lang did nothing for him and any attraction he'd buried deep inside of him belonged to West and only West.

"I'm sure he's got lots of friends, Z," he weakly reassured her. "How about if you just stick to the dog part?"

"Because he's shit at taking care of people. Even Dad says so." Zig pinched at one end of the doughy lump. "This dog's going to good as he gets. And it's not even real."