

“What the living hell are those?” Justin pursed his mouth in disgust. “And what’s that smell? It’s like a candle shop threw up in here.”

For a best friend, the lanky redhead wasn’t the most supportive of people but Angel adored the proto-Viking anyway. He was good in a pinch and adored Roman nearly as much as Angel did. In a lot of ways Justin was as much a brother to him as the one Angel’s father dumped on his door, especially when it came to voicing his opinions as loudly and emphatically as he could.

“These are gingerbread snowflakes and the smell is called spices. I just haven’t decorated them yet so don’t be a dick.” He carefully pulled out another cookie sheet from the bakery’s ancient rotating oven. “And they’re hot so don’t touch them. I’m trying to keep up with the Christmas rush. Sold out of everything I made yesterday but I’m kind of scared to make more. Suppose everyone who wanted cookies got theirs already.”

“Ange, pretty sure you could serve them baked cow shit and tell them its meringue and they’ll buy it.” Justin hitched himself up onto the sink counter, ignoring Angel’s hissed warning. “Please, there’s no food being made over here. You just keep your Slytherin expressions over there. I’ve got gossip.”

“You’ve always got gossip. You’re a stylist.” The salted butter was nearly softened by the looks of it and if he hurried, he could get the first batch of shortbread made and in the oven before Rome got home. “You going to work today? Or are you just passing through? I could use a hand bagging these when they’re cool.”

“I won’t even punch in to do it. Just buy me dinner.” Justin swung his long legs, his heels striking the counter’s steel post. “Aren’t you even curious about the gossip?”

“Will it help me sell more cookies?”

“All work and no play makes Angel cranky.” Justin’s booming laughter filled the Pizza Shack Bakery’s kitchen. “It might. It’s about the asshole trying to force you to sell the parking lot to him.”

“That asshole is my landlord and I kind of work for him a little bit, remember?” Angel reminded him. “He owns the motel I’m the super for? You know, the guy you complain to because you broke your window trying to kill a spider?”

“A motel which is attached to the parking lot you own. Seriously, Ange, and don’t take this wrong but the old lady should have given you the whole thing instead of this shack and a parking lot.” His legs stilled and Justin’s expression sobered. “Sorry, I know you liked her. She was an awesome lady and yeah, she helped you get this place going but she knew her grandson was an asshole. She should have known he’d try to fuck you over eventually.”

“So far, none of this is going to help me sell cookies,” he pointed out. “Look, I’m not selling. The dickwad he’s got in charge of the development project is just going to have to wait until I’m on my feet before I even think about selling the lot. We don’t need another fifty condos in Half Moon...okay, maybe we do... I don’t know but right now, I need to stay put for Roman so all of that crap is just noise.”

“He’s gay.”

“Who? The dickwad running the project?” Angel’s brain scrambled to picture the autocratic asshole who’d been stomping through his life ever since someone at Harris Investments decided the motel needed tearing down for new condos. Problem was, they needed the land Lang’s grandmother deeded to Angel to complete the project and he had no intention of selling. “I don’t think he’s gay.”

“Not him. Lang’s brother. West.” Justin grinned smugly. “So I was thinking maybe one of us can go talk to him. Reach out. Hell, even Lang might—”

“I know he’s gay. He’s my ex.” Angel shut Justin down with a shake of his head. “Mostly my ex. We were kids. I talked to you about this. It went bad. Really bad and I don’t think the guy I hooked up with that summer is even inside of West anymore.”

“Shit, *he’s* the Harris you were talking about?” His friend’s playful banter softened and Justin hopped off of the counter. “I always thought it was Lang. You said you had it bad back then so I thought... well, you hooked up with the human one.”

“Yeah, Lang does nothing for me.” The butter was definitely ready and Angel began unwrapping the blocks then plopping them into a bowl to be cut into the dry ingredients. “I like him and everything but he doesn’t tickle my buttons.”

“Besides, he’s Deacon’s.” Justin’s sigh was a thoughtful, mournful wheeze. “God that man’s fucking hot. So nothing at all with Lang? I mean they’re identical twins, right?”

“Yeah but... nope, not even a blip.” Angel grinned. “Kind of like you and me. We’re just better off friends.”

“So here’s the big question, maybe Mister I-Own-Everything Harris is still carrying a torch for you and this whole shut down the motel thing is kind of his way of lashing out?” Justin began washing his hands in the sink, frothing suds up between his fingers. “Maybe talking to him would be good. You guys can sit down, reminisce, then you can

talk some sense into him, so you can explain to him why Rome needs to stay in one place for a while...why he needs a home."

"Justin, as much as I love you, you're cracked in the head," Angel snorted, reaching for the flour he'd left on the work table. "West Harris probably doesn't even remember I'm alive. So no, no reaching out. No trying *anything*. You don't argue sentiment with someone who doesn't have a heart and there isn't enough roast beast in all of Whoville to get me to even try."