

How Joey got his Mate by Harrison Phillips
For Lisa

His little paws hurt. Must have been walking forever. He studied the nice lady who said she would take him to his new home. But he missed his human, and his possum, not that the limp thing was interesting, and he did try to bury it after he was done with it but it kept coming back clean, and his heated bed, and.... Before he needed to sit down and whine, he focused on the good. His headache was gone. He hadn't had this much energy since he was a pup. And best of all, his joints didn't hurt anymore and his teeth were all back. But damn it. He missed his human. Where was she?

This time he sat and whined. The glowing lady turned. "I'm sorry it is so far but we will soon be there. I forgot how small you are, little one."

He growled.

"Just in size, dear one." She picked him up. "Just in size. You have a brave and loving heart. You were a good friend and companion. But you had lived your days there and nothing could bring any of them back." A soft kiss and hug helped. "Now someone special needs you. He's very lonely. You were so good. This is your reward. And once there, you will never be alone again. And when the time comes to leave there, you can introduce him to your human when you meet again."

Raising his head, he studied her eyes. Tears filled his.

"I promise. My sisters and I grant you this but first a long happy life with someone who will cherish you."

He growled again.

"I know your human did. But this is different." She had stopped at the end of a woods and set him down. Waving a hand, she smiled. "That will do. Now, I know you won't bless me for the grooming you will have to put up with but..."

Grooming? His eyes opened wide and as he backed up he growled.

"... But as I was saying, I want you to howl for me. I want the biggest and the best howl in the world." She looked sad and knelt beside him. "Just as if you could call your human from the other place. Howl little one."

Howl? Okay. It seemed the least it could do for her, damn know why. He gathered up all his new precious energy and let loose from the bottom of his heart. The pain of missing his human released in the howl. Looking up, he realized she vanished. Oh shit. He looked around the dirt road and at the woods and the flat land so different from where he lived and howled again; this time with fear.

A crashing stopped his howl. At the edge of the woods stood a small ratty looking dog who sniffed the air and started to tremble. In answer to the howl, he barked. *'Come over here, please, come over here, Mate. Mate. Never thought... Mate. Please come here.'* He whimpered the last. *'Please.'*

Making his way to the edge of the woods, he found himself stopped. No barrier was in sight, but he couldn't make it through. His mate.... mate?... He rolled that around in his brain. Yes, his mate. His mate whined. *'I can't get through.'*

The answer made no sense. *'Fae need to fine tune. Wolf's fault.'*

Wolf. He certainly hoped there was no wolf. He wouldn't be two bites.

'Good wolves here. My wolf.'

Dogs didn't have wolves. He wondered if his mate was sane but it didn't matter if he wasn't. His mate. His friend. Never alone again. Laying down, he whined, exhausted from the headache, the trip and now this.

His mate had lungs. The howl calling his mate's pack blasted him. Pack? There was a pack? A family? He laid his head down and panted. Family. Pack. He realized he didn't even know he needed that. Mate and Pack. His. He smiled.

Crashing sounded. A toy poodle ran out followed by three others, a small Maltese, a small French Bulldog, and a fluffy Pomeranian. Pack. They started to yip at each other and his mate explained that this was his mate and a ward... what is a ward... was a problem. They all looked at each other then howled. Sheesh, they must hear

them for miles.

Another sound of crashing and the wolves appeared along with a huge Palomino who... glowed? He stood up and growled. His mate. The Pack. They needed protected.

His mate turned *'No. My wolves. My horse. Our pack.'*

Okay. His mate was certifiable.

'No hurt.'

The wolves and horse shifted, and three humans stood there. He sat stunned. Humans couldn't do that. Ever. His human wrote stories about shifters, but they weren't real. Where they? No matter he wasn't leaving his mate.

His mate ran to the smallest of the humans back to him and back to the smallest. Whining. "Joey? Did you find a friend? He looks as if he's been walking awhile."

"Some damn fool probably dropped him, Raff."

"Nereus, I..."

"I know." The biggest one pushed back his long hair. "Teilo? Could you go get Vassago or the Fae? They are going to have to lift the ward."

"It might be a trick." Teilo studied the tired dirty puppy that Joey kept running back to."

"Well then bring everyone you think we'll need. But somehow I think Joey's found his mate." Nereus sighed and rolled his eyes upward then looked from Teilo to Raff. Teilo nodded and changed into a large wolf. As he loped off, Nereus hugged Raff. "We'll get him and you are going to be buying Kane's boots for the rest of the year."

"They need to fine tune the barrier."

"I know. We just couldn't take the chance at the moment."

"He's alone." Raff declared. "I can't smell anyone else."

Nereus sighed and hugged him.

His mate was Joey. There were others? More in pack.

He asked Joey.

'Sort of Pack and Pack. Killer our Alpha. Kane, their Alpha.'

'Don't understand, Mate.'

'Complicated.'

Great. All he wanted was a warm bed, food and to cuddle his mate. He didn't want complicated. He put his nose against the barrier and laid down. Joey stood guarding him.

More crashing? It was serious noisy here. He glanced up to see more wolves. Huge wolves and a huge Cat. Oh Anubis... Cat. That couldn't be good. Complicated was an understatement.

They turned human, too. What did his human call it? Shifted. That was it. They were Shifters!

"Oh fuck. Another..."

A hand clapped over his mouth. "Kane, Teilo says he thinks that is Joey's mate."

"But..."

"How would you feel if I was over there?"

"But..."

"And besides you are out of boots to steal. You'll have to buy double pairs at a time."

"But..."

Raff spoke shyly. "I'll replace any boots. Please."

Kane looked around for support.

The man with his arm around the cat said, "His mate, Kane."

"Fine. Just fine. But you eat one boot buddy..." he motioned to three standing together by Joey.

Suddenly, Joey shot through the barrier to nuzzle him. *'MATE.'*

He stood and pushed against Joey to lick his ear. Raff reached down and petted him. "Come on in little guy. Welcome home." They stepped back inside the barrier and he followed. "See not a trap. Hey, you have a collar. Let's see." He turned it to look at the name tag. "Scruffy. Well, you sure are but we'll fix that."

Oh, shit. No. Another with a fucking grooming fetish. Joey vibrated from excitement and licked some dirt off his fur. Okay, maybe he could stand it. Maybe.

"Maybe we should advertise?" Raff was uncertain.

Nereus froze then said, "Thanatos just said he needs a home with his mate. Maybe something happened to his owners?"

"I don't know but they are happy. Scruff, Joey? Let's go back to the house." He called.

Shawn patted Kane's shoulder. "See it will be fine. Nothing else will happen to you."

A bored possum wandered into the clearing. Scruff froze as if he was at point. He started to vibrate. Joey and the rest took notice. Giving a loud growl, he charged the possum followed by the entire pup pack. The indignant possum headed to for nearest tree. A lone tree. When Killer jumped for the possum the rest followed suit.

"What the hell..." Teilo looked at Ruff. "They usually ignore possums."

"Not anymore it appears."

"See I told you..." Kane turned to Shawn and the possum decided it was his only chance. He leapt from the tree, bounced off Kane's head to reach a tree in the forest. Rubbing his knees from where he fell, Kane muttered, "Shit. I think I preferred it when they chewed my boots."