

Gaylias Prologue (9 Years Earlier)

“Another lonely night in Boy’s Town,” Nicholas Inker lamented and ran a hand through his blond highlighted hair, unable to help admiring how short it was on the sides. Dean always did a phenomenal job. Gay stylists...gotta love em’.

“Not this again.” Agent Richard Landis, his field trainer, exhaled in frustration. “You’re 24 years-old, surrounded by some of the hottest, most shallow men in Chicago and could easily go home with one or two of them tonight after we stand down. Tell me again how that qualifies as lonely?”

“It’s a quick fix,” Nicholas responded matter-of-factly.

“It’s the only fix, especially considering how often you’re being moved around during your training.” Richard scanned the crowd of drinkers, dancers and deviants’ delights, only The Ox was nowhere in sight. Their target could smell chicken halfway across the city and tonight held some promising bait.

“I’d just like a little depth, a little genuine intimacy and a little more conversation other than ‘are you a top or a bottom and would you mind if my roommate joined us?’”

“Then quit going shirtless in the clubs and showing off your washboard abs.”

“Because that happens.” Nicholas wasn’t amused. “You know how self-conscious I am.”

“Yes and you’ll make a lovely woman in a relationship one day,” Richard teased.

“Your girlfriend says the same thing about you.”

“Oh?” He hated that she talked to Nicholas. “Are there any other words of philosophical wisdom she’s imparted upon you?”

“Ever get the feeling that you’re walking around with your fly undone?”

“Why?” Richard cocked his head to one side, puzzled. “Is she referring to my inability to open up emotionally, yet my ever-present ability to make it seem like I’m hinting at vulnerability, which is naturally a total fabrication?”

“No.” Nicholas raised his eyebrows in mock amusement. “You’re walking around with your fly undone.”

“*Shit.*” Richard was nervous enough being a folically-challenged, toupee-wearing undercover straight man in a gay bar, but the last thing he wanted to give anyone was the wrong impression. “Please tell me you haven’t been checking me out.”

“I’m not into Lean Cuisine.” Nicholas suppressed a smirk. “A couple of guys walking by did and since it’s the only time anyone’s checked you out in the entire three weeks we’ve been staking the place out, well...”

“You’re saying I’m not a gay man’s type unless I’m advertising with my zipper down?” For a heterosexual, he actually managed to sound offended.

“Uptight and straight is a type, but that just means you’ll make a terrific Assistant Director one day.” Something, or rather someone, caught Nicholas’s attention. “Hey, that guy who checked me out the last two Saturdays just showed up again.” He grinned despite himself.

“Who?” Richard glanced in the direction Nicholas was peering, yet trying to look like he wasn’t really peering. Gay men were so ridiculous with the whole ‘I’m staring at you, but I don’t want you to think I’m staring at you even though we both know we’re really staring at each other’ game. “The Asian guy?”

“Yeah.”

“What is it with you and Asian men?”

“Not all Asian men. Just this one.” Nicholas felt a momentary hot flash when he caught the object of his appreciation glancing his way. The guy was around his age, stood at maybe 5’10”—an inch or two shorter than himself—had perfectly styled black hair, innocent-yet-penetrating almond eyes, the smoothest complexion he’d seen in a long time and incredible taste in designer clothing. Ah, love at first...second...third sight!

“What about Tall Guy?” Richard pressed. “Wasn’t he Asian?”

“Okay, so two.” Nicholas cringed.

“What happened to him?”

“He was hot! Nice body, pierced nipple, sweet tats, but he had this annoying habit of falling asleep right after he’d...” Yes, there had been issues. “He also didn’t have a clue what he wanted long-term.”

“Fucking twinks. So why go through it all again?” Richard had at long last arrived at his point.

“Because this one’s different.” Wasn’t that the cliché?

“And off limits.”

“Meaning?” Nicholas wasn’t fond of limits.

“His name is Anthony Hamilton: Chinese, born in 1978, originally from Paw Paw, Bachelors of Science in Computers from Michigan State University, Masters from UofM, graduated both with Honors, achieved a GPA quite a bit higher than yours and accomplished it in two years less time.”

“No kidding?” Nicholas ignored the obvious jab that he’d been outdone by someone of Asian heritage. Big surprise. While the average Chinese student was enjoying the benefits of literacy, the average American one was still learning how to spell it. He caught a glimpse of Anthony discreetly checking him out again. “He’s trying to be coy, but I keep catching him. How is it he’s Chinese and his last name is Hamilton?”

“ABC, my friend.” Richard put his hand on Nicholas’s shoulder. “American Born Chinese. Guess the family wanted to fit in a bit more.”

“That’s a damn shame.” Okay, where was the rest? “So, are you going to tell me why you ran him through the database or do I actually have to ask?”

“I didn’t have to run him. I know him,” Richard informed his trainee. “He’s an IT Specialist here for our Chicago branch. Hold on.” He reached down and pulled a pager out of his pocket. “Okay, The Ox is heading out of the city, which means he’s somebody else’s problem. We’re relieved for the night.” Oddly enough, there was no discernable reaction from his trainee. “Nicholas?” Nothing. “Don’t even think about talking to him. You know the Agency’s rules on relationships between employees.”

“You’re right.” It was the answer he knew his superior wanted to hear.

“You don’t need this on your record,” Richard cautioned him. “Besides, knowing the way your people play, he won’t even tell you his real name.”

“Sorry, my prince.” Nicholas took one last look. “It just wasn’t meant to be. Alright.” He motioned to Richard. “Head for the door. I’ll be right behind you.” His trainer wasn’t buying it, so he grinned and added: “I promise.”