Bonded

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Hey all its the start of something new here. I think you can tell by the tags what this story is about. I'm aiming to do longer chapters as to not break this one up so much. Hope you all enjoy the journey to the end.

The Costume Box
2026

Chapter 1

Bonded: Part 1 - Chapter 1

Bonded

Part 1: A Request

In life there are sometimes people who seem to keep showing up, despite one's intentions. It seems that sometimes we are inextricably linked. It could come down to the fact that you attend the same school or maybe they live down the street from where you grew up. Maybe they are a co-worker or a friend of a friend. Somehow this person although not through no conscious effort wheedles their way in attaching like a burs on a sweater, and no matter how many are removed there is always one or two left over. For Alex this person was Mason.

They had attended school together since first grade though, they had never been friends and one could not even say they were acquaintances. They were just two people who inhabited the same place. In fact they had never really interacted until high school. Mason had been popular, athletic, and had more than a few girls crushing on him. He was the de-facto king of high school. Alex had been quiet and introverted. Mason's group made their fun of course razzing each other as well as other students. Alex being one of them on more than one occasion. It was never as if Alex had been a target but he had been caught in the crosshairs more than some. Alex merely counted the days until highschool was

over and he would be off to college and away from this town. Alex had a lot of reasons to want to get out, the biggest one being the death of his mother in middle school. This town held too many memories for him. Alex had been taken in by his Uncle and while the man wasn't mean to him he wasn't exactly warm either. They were more like roommates.

The day Alex arrived at the dorms for college felt like a chapter had ended and a new one was beginning. Imagine his surprise when he saw his roommate was none other than Mason. Mason had seemed rather glad to see a familiar face yet Alex was less than enthused. He had thought college would be his new start a way to leave it all behind. The worst part was finding out that Mason was planning on majoring in History. Same as Alex. The first week saw the two of them pretty much doing everything together from student orientation to going to the bookstore to get their books. Alex figured once they had settled they would go their separate ways. It hadn't been the worst thing in the world to have a familiar face to navigate the first week of college with. As Alex thought, Mason quickly gathered a group of friends but what he didn't expect was that Mason would include him in that group. Soon enough their dorm room became the hang out spot.

One night while Alex was trying to study he had enough since Mason and the rest of the group were loudly playing video games on the couch. Alex proceeded to kick everyone out. He had then sat down with a huff.

“If you wanted everyone to leave you could have just asked,”

Mason had said wrapping the charging cord to his controller.

“I'm trying to study and your friends are too loud,” Alex said with annoyance.

“Their your friends too dude,” Mason had said.

“No they are not,” Alex said as he gave Mason a side eyed glance.

“I mean we all hang out,” Mason had then said with a shrug.

“Correction,” Alex said. “You drag me along.”

“Just thought you wanted to be included,” Mason said sitting on the bed near Alex's desk. “Plus you're my friend so I just thought you would want to hang out.”

“What gives you the idea that you are my friend?” Alex said lilting his head to the side as he looked at Mason.

“I thought we were,” Mason said looking slightly hurt. “I mean we come from the same place and stuff so we've known each other awhile.”

“That doesn't make us friends,” Alex said shaking his head. “And need I remind you that you

and your friends used to pick on me.”

“I made them stop you know, after sophomore year,” Mason said. Alex was surprised to hear this. In fact it did line up to the point he knew Mason wasn't lying. The last two years of high school Mason and his group had pretty much acted like he didn't exist.

“Why?” Alex then asked as his curiosity got the better of him.

“Because I found out about you know...your Mom.” Mason said playing with his hands awkwardly.

“So I'm a charity case to you?” Alex said growling a little.

“Wait a minute,” Mason said standing up. “Its not like that. Look I've always kind of wanted to talk to you. Because we're alike. I only had a Dad growing up but he died when I was in middle school. Like your Mom.”

Alex was a little stunned. He had never known that about Mason before.

“I just thought maybe you were someone I wanted to get to know. Because I think you were probably one of the only people around that would actually get me.”

“If that's true then you should know the last thing I want from anyone is sympathy.” Alex said.

“Yeah I know,” Mason said. “That's why I never approached you in high school. That's why I thought it was fate or something when you showed up at the dorm on the first day. Look I don't really like the guy I was in high school. I wanted to change who I was when I got here. So when I saw you I guess I felt like I needed to make it up to you or whatever.”

“Well you don't,” Alex said. “I'm not mad at you and you don't owe me anything.”

“Thanks,” Mason said. “Still don't see why we can't be friends?”

“Yeah sure,” Alex finally said ending the conversation.

At the time Alex didn't see it as a big deal. He still had a whole year with Mason in the dorms so he might as well try to get along with him.

It truly hadn't been all bad. The more time Alex spent with Mason the more out of the shell he became. Mason had dragged him to a house party a couple of weeks later even though Alex would have never gone on his own. That night Alex had lost his virginity to a blonde bombshell thanks to Mason's wing manning. More time passed and Alex joined a rec league disc golf team since no one else in the group wanted too with Mason. Alex even got himself a motorcycle. When it came time to move out of the dorms Alex moved into a house with five others including Mason. A couple of years later they got a place together after both of them got accepted into graduate school.

Currently they were coming to the end of their final year. After this they would probably go their separate ways. Alex was trying to get an adjunct professor position while Mason was working on publishing a book. They seemed to be drifting apart and Alex didn't really feel one way or another about it.

“Please, please I'm begging you,” Mason said with his hands together as he stood in front of Alex outside of the seminar they had both just left. Alex pushed some of his long brown hair back. It was a funny scene to be sure. Mason had not lost his athletic physique and was a full five inches taller than

Alex who had a slim build. Yet Mason was practically on his knees begging him for a favor.

“That sounds like a hassle,” Alex said. “Can't you just ask someone else.”

“She asked for you by name,” Mason said.

“Me?” Alex asked raising an eyebrow. He had only met Mason's girlfriend once. They had talked for five minutes so it was kind of weird that she even remembered him.

“She says the rest of my friends are all meatheads and you're the only one who would like be respectful about it.” Mason explained. Alex didn't know much about Sara, Mason's girlfriend. They had been going out for awhile and Mason seemed pretty serious about her. He was convinced she was the one so Alex could see why he was so desperate to not disappoint. Sara was pretty keen on doing some cultural thing in the city. Why she wanted Alex there was a mystery.

“I guess, but you gotta do something for me,” Alex then said.

“What?” Mason asked looking nervous.

“Put in a good word with Dr. Collins about considering me for the adjunct professor position.” Alex said. He knew Mason had already been offered the position by Dr. Collins but he had turned it down.

“Yeah of course,” Mason said straightening up.

“Alright, I got a class to teach, but I'll drive up after,” Alex said as he began to walk away.

“Great, I'll text you her address...oh and Alex,” Mason called out.

“What,” Alex said looking back.

“You know I would have recommended you regardless,” he said with a smirk.

“I'm reconsidering,” Alex then said.

“See ya tonight,” Mason said in a sing song voice as he walked off.

Alex pulled up to the apartment building turning off the engine on his bike. He texted Mason letting him know he was there. Getting up into the apartment Alex was surprised. Sara lived on her own but her apartment was rather spacious. There was a living room that lead into a kitchen area. There was also a hallway with a couple of rooms. Alex didn't know what Sara did for work but whatever it was it paid well. It didn't take long for them to be in Sara's car on the way to wherever they were going.

“I'm really happy you agreed to come Alex. Hopefully Mason didn't have to twist your arm too much.” Sara said.

“Not at all,” Alex said. He was getting something out of this too, so it wasn't like he was here out of the goodness of his heart.

“You come around the city often?” she asked. “Its pretty historical and I know you and Mason are into that kind of stuff.”

“Not really,” Alex said. “Been a little busy.”

“Maybe you should make some time,” Sara said. “They've got tons of tours around here to see the sights. Mason never wants to do them.”

Alex could hazard a guess to why. He and Mason probably knew more than the tour guides anyways.

They arrived at the spot in no time. Walking in, the room looked normal enough in fact this place was a yoga studio going by the sign on the window. The room was done up for the event though. There were a few tables low to the ground. As they walked in their were already people sat at them. As they took their place at an open table Alex couldn't help but notice that all the other groups were the same. It was a man and a woman and a younger person whom Alex could presume was the child of the other two.

“So what exactly are we doing here?” Alex asked.

“Its a ritual,” Sara said as she looked at Alex her eyes seemed to be shining as if she were really excited. “But don't worry,” she chuckled noting Alex's apprehension. “We aren't sacrificing live chickens or nothing. Its more ceremonial than anything.”

“So what is your culture exactly?” Alex asked.

“See, I knew you were the right one to do this with,” Sara smiled. “My roots go back very far to a tribe that existed in Europe a long time ago. It got broken up when the Romans took over. There are still small sects but most people kind of

just dispersed. It was very family oriented though. That's kind of what this ceremony is about. Strengthening family bonds. So we will each take on a role. Me and Mason will be the mother and father and you Alex will be our child."

"C-child," Alex stammered a little immediately feeling awkward as he and Mason exchanged a look.

"Uhh I don't know," Mason said looking as equally uncomfortable as Alex. "This is sounding a little weird."

"Geez you two," Sara laughed as she waved her hand. "Its not like we have to role play or anything. We're just going to drink a little tea."

Alex now understood the cup and tea kettle that were on the table along with a mortar and pestle and some dried out leaves. Alex figured if that's all it was then he could go along with it. If it helped Sara connect to her culture then that wasn't the strangest reason for all this.

A lady then walked into the room as the conversation in the room quieted. She was older and had gray frizzy hair. She wore a pink scarf around her neck along with a long gray sweater.

"Good evening," she said with a bubbly smile. "Are we ready to begin?" There were some nods before she nodded. "Then first I would ask the fathers to place the leaves into the mortar," she said demonstrating at her own table.

"Guess that's me," Mason said picking up the leaves and placing them into the bowl as he then began to grind them up

as the other “fathers” were also doing. The lady walked around making sure everyone had thoroughly grinded them up.

“Now the father offers the cup to the mother who will accept it with gratitude and will say thank you for providing for us,” the woman instructed. Mason handed the cup to Sara as they both did little bows with their heads as Sara said the words. The next step was for the mothers to pour the warm water from the kettle into the cup. “And now we present the cup to the child and say “Drink the fruits of our labor.”

“Drink the fruits of our labor,” Sara said extending the cup to Alex.

“And now with the sweat of the fathers brow and the warmth of the mother's care the children may drink. But only a sip please,” the lady said. Alex eyed the the cloudy gray liquid. He took a sip and was surprised by the taste. Despite having seen only powder and water go into the cup it was creamy and sweet. He was then instructed to hand it back to the mother. Sara took a sip closing her eyes as she swallowed. Then finally it was Mason's turn to drink and the father's were instructed to finish the cup. As Mason put the cup down he grimaced.

Afterwards everyone was instructed to close their eyes and meditate on the family bonds. Alex closed his eyes but he was thinking about the research paper he was in the middle of writing. Twenty minutes later the ceremony was done as people started packing up. As the group walked out onto the

street. Alex turned to Sara.

“That was... interesting,” he said. “But I suppose its time for me to hit the road.

“You came all this way,” Sara said. “At least let me treat you to dinner.”

Alex agreed. He was rather hungry and everything would be closed by the time he got back home anyways.

The group made their way to a restaurant and they ordered their food.

“So Alex what did you think about the tea?” Sara asked.

“It was good,” Alex said. “I was surprised by how sweet it tasted.”

“Sweet?” Mason questioned. “That stuff was really bitter.”

Alex looked at Mason with a confused look. How could anyone think that stuff was bitter?

“It taste different for everybody,” Sara said looking like a magician reveling a trick. “The closer you get to the bottom of the cup the more bitter it becomes.”

“So what did it taste like for you?” Mason asked looking at his girlfriend.

“A little sweet and a little earthy,” Sara said. “Quite pleasant.”

After dinner the group made their way back to Sara's place. Alex picked up his helmet that had been sat by the door.

“Thanks for everything, but I gotta get back,” Alex said doing his best to make a quick exit.

“You could stay the night, I have plenty of room,” Sara offered. “I think its supposed to rain.”

“She's right,” Mason said holding up his phone that was displaying a radar of an incoming storm.

“Although if you leave now you should be able to stay ahead of it.”

Alex was unsure if Mason could sense his unease at staying the night or if he just wanted Alex gone so he could be alone with Sara. Whatever it was Alex didn't care, he didn't want to stay.

“I better get going then,” Alex said donning his helmet. Soon enough he was out on the road. It was dark and the sky was covered with clouds. Alex just hoped he could make it. Fifteen minutes later it started to downpour. Alex pulled over at a rest stop. He was completely soaked. Alex sat under a covered bench as he checked his phone. Looking at the weather radar the storm had seemed to grow in size, he was going to be stuck here all night at this rate. A moment later his phone rang. It was Mason. They talked for a minute. Then Mason hung up. He was going to come and get him. Mason pulled up in his pick up truck.

“Sorry about this,” Mason said.

“Not like you control the weather,” Alex replied. Getting back to the apartment Sara immediately set upon Alex like he

was a drenched puppy.

“You're soaked,” she said. “Why don't you get that stuff off and take a nice warm shower. I'll throw your clothes in the wash and have them dried in the morning for you.”

“I don't have a change of clothes,” Alex said sounding a little sheepish.

“Oh well maybe you can borrow something from Mason.” Sara said.

“I only brought some sweatpants to sleep in,” Mason said. Sara put her fingers up to her lips as if she were thinking.

“You could borrow some stuff from my little brother,” she said looking Alex up and down. “He stays with me sometimes so some of his stuff is here. I think you guys are a similar size.”

Alex merely nodded. Its not like he had much other choice. After showering Alex wrapped a towel around his waist and exited the bathroom. He walked down the hall to the room Sara had showed him earlier. She had told him she would set out stuff for him. Alex saw a folded red shirt on the bed. He picked it up letting it unfurl. It was small to say the least. He then saw a pair of white briefs that had been under the shirt. As Alex looked at the two pieces of clothing he shook his head. He had assumed Sara's brother to be in high school or something when she had said his clothes should fit him. Looking at them though her brother could have not been any older than an elementary school kid or perhaps a small

middle schooler.

He was about to go and find Sara and tell her there was no way these clothes would fit yet he stopped. He was feeling really tired all of a sudden. He picked up the underwear and stepped into them. Any thoughts about them not fitting seemed to have left his head. He then put on the shirt which stuck to him tightly. Looking at himself in the mirror he looked ridiculous. The shirt only covered just past his belly button and the underwear was so small that it sat under his hips a little with a little crack showing on his back. Yet Alex didn't seem to think anything was truly amiss as he crawled into bed. He tossed and turned a little as the tight clothing was making it hard for him to get comfortable. After a little bit though it seemed looser no doubt from him stretching them out and he was able to finally fall asleep.

“Alex wake up,” Sara's voice said as Alex came too sitting up groggily as he saw Sara sitting on the bed. Alex rose slowly letting out a big yawn as he stretched out his arms. “Ready for breakfast, I made pancakes,” she said. Alex nodded sleepily pulling back the covers and swinging his legs over scooting forward to set his feet onto the ground. Alex then suddenly stopped. Something was wrong. For a moment he felt panicked. Like there was something he was forgetting. He stood up quickly. He looked down at himself seeing he was wearing a red t-shirt that came down to just past his thighs. Suddenly he remembered.

“What about my clothes?” Alex asked remembering why he was wearing the shirt in the first place.

“I just put them into the dryer,” Sara said with a smile “Should be done after breakfast.” Alex nodded as he followed Sara out to the kitchen. As he walked past the mirror he caught sight of himself. He stopped a moment looking at his reflection it seemed strange as if it wasn't really him in the mirror. He put a hand up to his rounded smooth cheek. He then smoothed out a cowlick in his tufts of thick brown hair. He really needed a haircut or else his hair would start to curl.

“Something wrong?” Sara asked standing in the doorway.

“Oh no,” Alex said following after her.

Mason was sat at the table drinking some coffee shirtless. He turned around to see Alex standing in the middle of the kitchen.

“Hey bud sleep alright?” Mason asked.

“Yeah fine,” Alex said feeling a little awkward as he pulled down on the shirt a little to stop the cold nipping a little at his exposed legs.

“Cold?” Mason asked.

“A little,” Alex mumbled.

“I hope you thanked Sara for lending you that shirt,” Mason smirked. “Otherwise you'd be eating breakfast in your Spiderman undies.”

“I don't wear stuff like that,” Alex said furrowing his brow.

“Oh really,” Mason sort of chuckled. “I think the last time I

did laundry for you I saw more than a few pairs of those."

Alex's face reddened at the accusation. Why was Mason saying stuff like that. Also when did Mason ever do laundry for him? He felt a surge of anger well up in his chest.

"I wear normal underwear," Alex sneered. "See," he said lifting up his shirt showing off the white briefs which were a little baggy on his thin waist. Alex quickly let the shirt drop with a squeak when he realized what he had just done. His face went three different shades of red.

"Mason stop teasing him," Sara said with a frown as she came to Alex's side putting her hand on his shoulders. "Don't mind him one little bit," she said as she pushed him towards the open seat at the table.

"Don't coddle him," Mason said shaking his head. "I take it as my duty to toughen him up." Mason said giving Alex a little punch to the arm.

"Pfft," Sara said putting a pancake on Alex's plate. "He doesn't need to be toughened up. He's just sensitive which is far better than being a meathead like you and your bros."

"Hear that Alex, you're sensitive," Mason said. Alex shot him a scowl. "Don't worry though chicks dig that in a guy," he said as he ruffled Alex's hair.

"Will you just shut up," Alex grumbled as he cut into his pancake. Breakfast passed without much more incident.

"I think your clothes should be done," Sara said looking at

her phone.

“C'mon I'll show you too the laundry room,” Mason said pulling on a shirt and taking his and Alex's plate to the sink.

“Hurry back,” Sara said. “We have a busy day.”