

Stood Up

Word Count: 2953

- >M/M
- >Hurt/Comfort
- >Coming Out
- >Biphobia

There was something different about his friend which caught Len's attention. It wasn't the mystic purple shirt that punctuated the snow leopard's success in his work, nor the confident swagger he'd gained through experience. No. There was a fresh scent surrounding his feline friend, and it wasn't a new cologne.

Not like Len knew his friend's choice in fragrance...*totally*.

"Another coffee, Terry?" Len asked, shaking the thought away. The wolf was working at the moment, there wasn't time to deal with such thoughts.

The snow leopard glanced up at the waiter, giving a curt nod before returning his gaze to his mobile. He was in his own little world. That caught Len's attention. There was usually banter between the two friends, inside jokes about the wolf's exceptional service to the ounce and how the canine ensured everything was perfect for him alone. They would act like the other booths: filled with laughter and cheap grub. The lingering aroma of strong coffee and cigarettes - long after the smoking ban - was comforting.

To all the customers, and especially from the two friends, it felt like home.

"Earth to snep...everything alright there?" Len waved his paw in front of the feline, causing the latter to tense up and jump in his seat. "Dude, what's gotten you riled up?"

"Sorry, just a bit...nervous, you know?"

“I really don’t.” The wolf cocked his head to the right, placing the coffee pot beside his friend’s mobile. “Last time I saw you like this was before your interview, so it’s either that or...”

“...or I’m waiting for a girl.” The feline answered for his friend, chewing on his lip. The smile came out a little strained, but Terry was so excited! He was going on a date! A mixture of happiness and stress bubbled through him. It wasn’t something he’d done before; romance had always been an unknown to Terry, but after joining a local landscaping gardening firm, he wanted to make new connections. Have new *experiences*. Still, there was this gnawing anxiety at the back of the snow leopard’s mind. Had he done something wrong?

His date, Vikki, still wasn’t here.

Nor had she sent any messages....where is she? Terry thought as he wrapped his paw around the hot mug before typing another message out to his supposed Mate-Match.

(Terry) [16:44] Still waiting at the diner, where are you? Has something happened?

“That’s great! I’m...happy for you,” Len replied with a strained smile. In truth, the wolf *was* glad to hear his friend had found that special someone. But the twist in his gut was something he couldn’t stop. Naming the emotion was...*impossible*. The wolf had always felt close to Terry. *Really* close. His parents had always seen their son’s relationship with the snow leopard as being kind of weird. They spent so much time together!

A sip of the coffee had that very same, supposedly *weird* leopard smacking his lips, breaking the wolf from his reminiscing.

“Too hot?”

“I need some milk...yeet.” The feline deadpanned, making Len snort as he scooped a soy milk pot from the diner counter. “So yeah, I ended up trying that Mate-Matcher app. I’m meant to be meeting Vikki...a wolf, believe it or not. As you can see she’s not exactly shown.”

“I’m sure she’s been held up,” Len reassured, hovering his hand over the feline’s shoulder, hesitating before touching his friend. “You know how the traffic is around here, especially since the main road keeps getting upturned.”

The feline let out a chuff, rolling his eyes. The local council seemed to be digging the roads up every chance they got nowadays, probably so they had something to do rather than bicker over the colour of the park bins. “Still...I can’t shake the feeling something happened to her you know? Like, did her car break or did her dress rip? Is she wearing a dress? Maybe I’m a bit overdressed-”

A loud BUZZ from his phone stopped the cat's slow spiral into panic central. The light buzzing of the phone stopped the big cat's spiralling, allowing him to sigh. A text meant everything was fine. The notification abridged most of the text but it was still comprehensible.

(Vikki) [16:52]: OMG Can't believe tha....

It probably said that traffic was hell or something.

“Gotta dash for a sec, Ters.” Len strode away from the leopard’s table, to another who was holding their arms up, calling for a waiter.

“About time you got back to me Vikki...” Terry muttered as he unlocked his phone and made it to texts. The sparkle in his eyes faded as he read the message. No...what!? The snow leopard read it again and again. His guts twisted on themselves. The feline’s mouth grew dry; his phone clattered to the table.

The BANG of the smart device echoed in the diner.

Everyone was staring at him.

Fuck... Terry cradled his head in his paws, keeping his gaze hidden. The last thing he wanted was a scene. He just wanted to leave. Run away...but he knew that would cause more people to *talk* about him. To look down at him like dirt.

“Terry...is everything alright?”

The big cat shot his head up, locking his wide eyes with Len’s. He was...concerned. It went against his fears. His anxieties...yes.

That’s why it didn’t make sense. All of his thoughts were knotted, twisting everything to the illogical extreme. Terry peeled his eyes away from his friend, looking at the diner that went back to normal. There wasn’t any gawking, nor hushed whispers. It

was him jumping to the worst case. Was that worse? Everything in Terry's world had been crushed and yet nobody even took notice.

“Hey...what happened?” Len asked, crouching down to be eye-level with his friend.

“I’m f-fine,” Terry stammered out. That was a lie. He was nowhere close to being fine or okay, but there wasn’t anything else to say in that situation. He didn’t want to say what happened, it was too painful. All the snow leopard could do was slide his phone over to show the text to the waiter.

(Vikki) [16:52]: OMG Can’t believe that you’re Bi! That’s so fucking disgusting!!! Can’t believe I was tricked by a fag!

Silence. There wasn’t anything to say from the duo. There was just this nauseating betrayal that permeated the air around the text. Len silently wrapped a hand around his friend’s shoulder, giving what little comfort he could to the snow leopard. This...was a lot to take in. Attacks like this *stung*; hearing about it was a special kind of pain, but seeing it first-hand was worse. The wolf just felt anger. His friend was attacked for being...bi.

Len never knew his friend’s sexuality.

“Jesus...” Len muttered, flipping the phone so the screen was facing down. Terry shouldn’t have to see that, he thought. Nobody should. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.” The snow leopard took his phone back, pocketing it - the action was akin to shoving the bad feelings away for later. There was too much going on right now; too many overwhelming emotions. Betrayal summed it up, he supposed.

“I should go...”

“No.”

The big cat quivered at the command of the wolf. He’d never heard Len like that before, stern, but...something else. Concerned, perhaps? Yes, but it was something deeper than that. Protective.

“Sorry. I think you should just sit for a bit and clear your head,” The gray wolf scratched the back of his neck, darting his eyes to the right. “You shouldn’t drive

when you're like this. How about I get you a tea and we can....I dunno...talk? I mean, if you want to?"

Terry chewed on his lip, sinking back down into the booth. He didn't say anything. He didn't need to. Slumped shoulders and a glassy look in his eyes told the canine everything.

"Okay, I'll be back in a bit," Len said before walking to the counter. He pushed his paws to his snow before sighing. What was he going to do? Counselling a friend over a break-up was one thing but this? He shook his head before sighing. Len knew Terry hadn't eaten since he's been in so maybe food would help?

The waiter hummed, glancing at the slouched cat before turning to the serving hatch to the kitchen.

"Hey chef, I'm going to take my break if that's alright?" Len asked, knowing that his manager wouldn't mind. "Just the usual please...and uh, two plates, please?"

The clunk of a plate pulled Terry out of his thoughts.

"Uh...Len? I didn't order this," The snow leopard tilted his head at the soya burger in front of him. It looked delicious with its toasted bun and stack of chips that looked like it was going to topple over. The classic, good old American cuisine.

"I know, I did." Len sat down opposite the big cat, plonking his own plate down and automatically reaching for the sauce packets. He hovered over the limited selection before taking barbecue for himself, drizzling the burger and chips with it. "Sauce?"

"I'm good, thanks." Terry replied, eyeing the plate. After everything today, he wasn't sure if he could manage any food, even if it smelt tempting.

The wolf shrugged his shoulders before picking his burger up and digging in. Before it touched his lips, Len knew it was amazing! The warm, fatty flavour danced over his tongue, while the sauce added the smoky barbecue flavour he loved. It was comforting, good and just what Terry needed. The canine kept an eye on his friend, who stared at the plate of food before slowly picking the burger up and nibbling it.

That was a start at least.

“So...you’re bisexual?” The question made the waiter cringe internally but it was the first thought on his mind. He wasn’t angry that Terry kept this from him. He probably had his reasons. Len considered this as he munched away at his burger. The wolf was more...*curious* than anything else. It made Len think back to see if there was anything he'd accidentally done to make the cat uncomfortable, maybe a few jokes?

Nothing came to mind.

“Yeah...or at least I think so,” Terry replied between mouthfuls of his burger. “It’s confusing, to be honest, and I was planning on coming to you about this too. I hate that you found out this way.”

“It’s alright, really it is.” The canine reassured, keeping his ears low. The last thing he wanted his friend to feel was unsafe. “Take it you were afraid telling - coming out to - me would change things between us?”

“Pretty much,” The leopard replied with a head tilt. “Like, I knew you’d be fine with it but it does become a bit of an elephant in the room, you know? Usually with me wondering if I’m really bi or something else, or wondering if people hate me for identifying as it.”

“What, because of tonight?” Len asked half-heartedly. He expected a rebuttal of some kind, a joke about them being intimidated by his impeccable fashion sense. All he got in response was silence. Len stared at the leopard and studied his handsome face, the forlong expression was skewed with a deep frown. Oh no. The canine’s ears fell back. “Terry? Has this happened before?”

Terry slowed his chewing down and sighed.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.”

The snow leopard waved his paw, propping his arms on the table. “It’s fine. Honestly, it’s happened a few times now but...well not like this.”

“What do you mean?” The canine probed, putting his burger down and reaching across to Terry’s paw. A gentle squeeze was enough to show his support. Being rejected like this would be enough to cause anyone to feel embarrassed, but multiple times? For the same reason? It made Len feel sick!

“You know, it's the usual ‘thanks for dinner but I can't believe you screwed a guy’ or the ‘I really just want to have a threesome tonight. You in?’ crap. Like...seriously?!”

“What a bunch of asshats.”

That got a snort from Terry. The first genuine smile the wolf saw all day but it quickly turned sour. “Indeed. But...I don't know...I can't help but feel it has to do with me. Like, I've been called greedy or been accused of pretending, and...it hurts.”

A gentle squeeze of his paw and the warm smile of the wolf made the leopard feel a little better. Terry didn't need to pretend now. He was safe and could lay bare his soul to the canine if he wanted to; there wasn't any judgment from Len. There never was. Terry's shoulders dropped as he relaxed under his friend's touch. He's been hurt so many times now, but this small moment for the snow leopard gave him something he'd lacked in all his previous relationships.

Hope.

“I imagine it does. It should be easy; a case of ‘you've done the deed with a dude? And...?’” Len waved a paw in the air, punctuating his point.

“Exactly! You get it!” The snow leopard sighed, shaking his head free of the bad memories. “If only it was as easy as *this*.”

Len tilted his head in the adorable canine way, taking in all of Terry's words.

“As in, good communication and that regular relationship stuff,” the fluffy feline explained. “Like, why is it so difficult?”

“Maybe you just haven't found the right person yet?” The wolf suggested, rolling his eyes at the stereotypical line. “Wow, I've watched too many chick flicks. Next, I'll be giving you a tub of ice cream to eat.”

“Har-har,” The snow leopard shook his head but couldn't fight the small upward tugging of his lips. “I mean you're right. I might need to look elsewhere for a change.”

“Like *here*? Like with *me*?” The question popped out so naturally. Len's eyes widened as he registered what he said. He didn't mean to say that, but there was something that felt *right* about it. Just sitting here with his long-time friend, eating, his tail

wagging when he manages to make the leopard smile. Feeling some unexplainable gooey feeling holding Terry's paw...Fuck. Did he really just say that?

Did the feline even notice?

"Len...are you suggesting that we...like....you know...." The big cat was dumbfounded. He was a bit surprised at hearing the question from his friend. He took a breath before staring at his companion. "I thought you're straight."

Well...fuck. Am I really doing this? The canine thought as he swallowed the lump forming in his throat.

"Uh...honestly I don't think I am." A blush crept over Len's ears. He never talked about this to anyone before; couldn't due to the small nature of the town. And now he thought about it...maybe the signs were there all along. He never had anything too deep or emotional with a girl before, it felt like an act almost. He was taught things should be, men like women. It was easier with Terry....natural, like taking a breath.

"It's weird...I know." Len let a slow breath out, trying to put his thoughts in order." Like, I think I've had *deeper* feelings for you for a while, being a close friend you know? Like *really* close. I wanted to spend all my time with you as you made me feel special. Not even my ex, Natalie, made me feel that way."

"The librarian?"

"No, the artist." Len corrected. "Anyway, the reason we split was because I was spending more time with you. She even said that I should marry you, granted she was pissed at the time." The waiter gave a hollow laugh, pushing away the painful argument he had with Natalie that ended their relationship. "It did get me thinking though....maybe I wanted to be more than your friend? It was silly to think about at the time, and it confused me. It still does. But I saw you today and everything I've been feeling was just like...*Whompf!* It...put things in perspective, I guess?"

"Yeah...that makes sense," The snow leopard nodded. It reminded him of his early exploration into his bisexuality. The confusion, the loneliness.... It felt overwhelming at times. Scary too. "Len, honestly I'm surprised but glad you told me but...it's a lot to take in. especially after tonight."

“Good point.” The wolf admitted, becoming aware that he’d been playing with the male’s paw, preening the fur. How long has he been doing that?! He let go, scratching the back of his neck.

“I mean...I don’t want you to put you in a situation you’re not comfortable in. Like, we have history, and it might be awkward. But if you like, we could leave it for a week then talk about it? And I mean *talk*. We need to process tonight.”

Terry gave a light nod, mulling it over. It would be...*different*, he supposed. A bit weird too but things were just easy to talk about with Len. No strings or favours. The wolf was being supportive and kind.

“We...could get a coffee, I suppose.” The thought caused the snow leopard to smile. “We can have cake too.”

“Love me some cake,” Leonard agreed. His fluffy tail whumped against the booth.. “Sooo~” The wolf smirked, drawing the word out. “...we’ll call it a date then.”

“Shut up,” Terry rolled his eyes and playfully kicked the wolf’s leg. “We’d better finish our burgers before they get cold. Thanks for this, by the way. I was so stressed before that uh, like...yeah. Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it!”

[End of Fic]