



His
WOLF
Heart
Lila Dubois

HIS WOLF HEART

...Micah crossed his arms. "I see you still haven't grown up."

"Asshole. You have no idea what life is, what living is."

"I know that being a part of something—a pack, a family—and taking responsibility for that family, is the most important thing in life. You go ahead and run around Europe fucking artists and feeding your narcissism. If you think that makes you a rebel or some revolutionary, fine. Have a nice time."

Micah turned his back on James, prepared to head to his house.

James jumped him, and even with Micah's quick reflexes he wasn't able to get away. The tackle threw Micah facedown into the dirt. Micah's beast snarled to life, feeding superhuman strength to his muscles. With a snarl, he threw James off his back and jumped to his feet. James scrambled up, squaring off with him. They circled each other, the actions of wolves, in the bodies of men.

James, lacking Micah's patience and tactical skill, leapt first. Micah caught him mid-leap, fisting his hands in James's shirt as he sidestepped so that the man's own motion carried him to the ground. Using his hold on James's shirt, Micah followed him down, pinning him and throwing one leg across his thighs to hold him in place.

Micah let out a shout of triumph as James thrashed. The younger man bared his teeth.

"Let me up," James demanded.

"No."

"Then you'd better be prepared."

Micah bared his teeth. "Prepared for what?"

James broke Micah's hold on his shoulders, sat up, grabbed Micah's hair, and kissed him...

ALSO BY LILA DUBOIS

Hunting Passions

HIS WOLF HEART

BY

LILA DUBOIS

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*This story is dedicated to T. A. Chase
who had to answer all my stupid questions as I wrote it.*

Also for Brandon, who rocks.

CHAPTER 1

The prodigal son has returned.

Micah Heiney leaned back in the driver's seat and stared at his phone.

James is home. Drama! Hurry up.

The text was from Elizabeth Farrant, the youngest blood-child of his pack. At eighteen she was a hopeless gossip, which usually annoyed Micah. He really didn't need text updates about what was happening on *American Idol*, but tonight he was glad of her desperate need to pass on information.

James is home.

James Farrant, the oldest blood-child of his pack—a dark and dangerous man.

Micah snapped his phone closed and threw it on top of his gym

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bag in the passenger seat. Time to go home and greet the prodigal son.

* * *

Micah should have gone straight from his car into the main house—it wasn't as if the Farrants would be offended to see him in his gym clothes. Micah had been a member of the pack headed by Craig and Anita Farrant since he'd pledged his life to them at the age of twenty-three.

Micah was a Guardian, a pack member who would never be part of a breeding pair, and, therefore, never head his own pack. As was the way of wolves, he'd left his blood pack—headed by his own mother and father—at the age of eighteen. He'd moved to LA for college and been taken into the house of the Farrants, becoming a member of their pack.

Blood-children stayed with their parents until they were young adults, then moved out, much like human children. Though unlike human children, werewolf kids had to move someplace where they could be watched over by another pack.

There was nothing he didn't know about the Farrants, or they about him, but tonight he bypassed the main house for the guesthouse out back where he lived. Slipping inside, he left the lights off so they wouldn't know he was there, though if they cared to check they would see his car in the drive.

Micah stripped off his gym clothes, dropped them neatly into the hamper, and jumped into the shower.

James was back.

At twenty-eight, James was one year Micah's junior. When Micah'd come to the Farrant pack James had been seventeen and

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in his last year of high school. Micah had been living on the university campus, not with the Farrants, but he'd seen James every Sunday for the mandatory pack dinner.

James had been full of the confidence and ease of the young, beautiful, and privileged. Micah, on the other hand, had felt uncomfortable in his own skin. He'd been fascinated by James, desperate to know exactly what it was that allowed James to move through life so fearlessly.

The fascination had led to a hopeless crush.

That hadn't been hopeless at all.

Micah hadn't officially come out then. He was still struggling to admit to himself he was gay. Though their culture had a place in it for gay men and women, if he were gay there would be no hope of having his own pack. The highest position he could hope for was Guardian.

There had been no doubt in Micah's mind that James was straight—James had even brought a girlfriend to one of the pack dinners, which was a serious matter. And yet, the night before James was to leave, moving north to attend the University of Washington under the protection of the Vinar Pack, James had cornered Micah in a dark corner of the backyard.

A kiss. Nothing more.

But what a kiss.

Micah turned down the hot water, his shower turning icy cold. He was a grown man—it was pathetic that the memory of a teenage kiss still aroused him.

Micah scrubbed dry. He hadn't shaved, but he hated shaving, so perpetually had a two-day stubble. Jessica, the second youngest Farrant girl, said it made him look dangerous. Since part of his job as Guardian was to play bodyguard, Micah had decided scary was

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a good look.

He brushed his teeth, moisturized his face and arms, and checked for any stray eyebrow hairs.

Well, a guy had to have standards.

“Idiot,” he told himself as he put on cologne and his favorite button up shirt and best jeans. It had been a long time since that kiss, and they were different people. Very different.

Thinking about what, and who, James had been doing in the past eleven years brought a tick to Micah’s eye. To say James had run wild was polite at best, laughably inaccurate at worst.

And yet, here Micah was, primping for their first face-to-face meeting in years.

CHAPTER 2

The decibel level in the kitchen was astronomical. Micah slid the patio door closed behind him. Leaning back against the glass, he took in the family tableau in front of him.

He liked where he was, on the fringes of the madness, able to escape but more likely to be sucked in.

Elizabeth was the first to see him. She swept her artificially straight bangs to the side, then patted them back into place over her right eye. “Finally, you’re late to the drama-fest.”

He pushed away from the wall and gave Elizabeth a one-arm hug about the shoulders. “Heya, gorgeous.”

“He’s taking a shower.”

“Micah! Did you hear? James is back.” When Micah just nodded, Jessica looked sourly at her younger sister. “Of course you

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did.”

Elizabeth smirked.

Jessica was seated at the breakfast bar. On either side of the twenty-one year old sat two of the other non-blood pack members, both girls and both students at USC along with Jessica. Theresa Sanchez had dark hair and eyes and caramel skin that Elizabeth was constantly trying to emulate. Kara Guillimen had fuzzy light brown curls and glasses. Micah saw a bit of himself in her—she was clearly unhappy in her own skin, though for Kara it had more to do with the fact that she was a werewolf and the only girl in the Aerospace Engineering Program than questions about her sexuality.

Craig Farrant, the Alpha male, was trying to lean masterfully against the counter but was foiled by Anita, the Alpha female, who kept shooing him out of the way as she bustled about the kitchen.

“Micah,” Anita asked without looking up, “do you want tea, coffee—”

“Beer?” Craig asked.

Micah nodded. He took up position leaning against a bank of cabinets near the doorway that connected the kitchen and dining room. He could see the sliding door to the backyard, the living room, and the dining room.

Standing here, he was watching over the heart of the pack.

Micah took the beer Craig handed him. The Alpha was a fit man with a close-cropped hairstyle he’d kept since his time in the military. He was older than one might guess from looking at him—he’d been drafted into Vietnam and then served for another five years. He was now a consultant on military psychology. Who better to teach the psychology of hunting, fighting, and pack behavior than an Alpha wolf?

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Anita still wore a suit, with her wildly curly hair styled in a smooth bun. She was a corporate lawyer and, like Craig, looked younger than she was.

“Do you need anything?” Micah asked her as she passed him on her way to the girls, mugs of coffee in her hands.

Anita smiled at him. “Let’s wait for something to go terribly wrong, then I’ll let you know.”

The sound of chatter cut off abruptly. A human wouldn’t have heard, but the kitchen full of werewolves caught the faraway sound of footsteps coming down the steps.

Micah straightened, caught himself, and slouched against the cupboards once more. He was pathetically grateful the beer gave him something to do with his hands.

James appeared in the entrance to the kitchen. He was tall and lean, with defined forearms and a beautiful neck. Micah jerked his gaze away from James’s neck.

“Nice to see you clean,” Elizabeth said, fiddling with her bangs. “You smelled rank when you got here.”

“When I left you weren’t as mouthy. Bitch,” James said with a smile.

“James!” Anita barked in reprimand. James bent his head and murmured, “Sorry,” though he shouldn’t have bothered as Elizabeth smiled in pleasure.

James looked away from his sister and met Micah’s eyes. Micah held James’s stare for two long breaths, then tipped the beer to his lips, looking away.

* * *

Micah?

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Holy shit.

James swallowed, and swallowed again. His mouth felt dry and his fingers tingled. Was that Micah? Tall, dark and dangerous looked nothing like the skinny, freaked out guy he remembered from ten years ago.

Micah took a second drink from his beer and James watched his throat work.

A hand on his arm jerked James's attention away from Micah. His mother had come around the counter and smiled up at him. He smiled back, pushing Micah from his mind, for now.

"James, I'm sure you remember Micah. I know I told you, but Micah is now our Pack Guardian. He's very good. He's also single."

James jerked and the younger members of the pack groaned in unison.

"Be less subtle, Mom," Elizabeth said.

"What?" Anita asked, all innocence.

James hoped he wasn't blushing. His parents had to know he was gay, though he'd never officially come out to them. It was hard to hide the fact he was gay when he'd been living his life on the front page of the European tabloids as the much younger lover and model of a famous Dutch artist. Jaap Vadergraff painted nudes—erotic ones. James hoped his parents hadn't seen Jaap's paintings.

"Seriously, Mom, leave Micah alone. Besides, he's seeing someone, remember?"

Anita held up her hands. "I'm sorry to have said anything." She turned her gaze on Micah. "Maybe I wouldn't have forgotten if you'd brought your boyfriend around to visit."

It wasn't an order from the Alpha female, as of now it was still

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just mom-guilt, but it was getting close. Being protective of her pack, blood-children or otherwise, came as naturally to Anita as breathing.

Now it was Micah's turn to wince. "I don't know if it's serious yet."

"And if it is..."

"You'll be the first to know."

"That's all right then. James," she turned back to her oldest, looking him up and down, though she'd given him a thorough inspection when he showed up, "are you hungry, thirsty?"

"I'd take a beer."

James's father, who'd been silently standing in the corner, finally moved. Pushing away from the counter, the older man went to the refrigerator and pulled out a beer. Popping the top off with a flip-flop shaped bottle opener stuck to the fridge, the Alpha male held the beer out to his son. James felt his father's gaze boring in to him, but he couldn't bring himself to meet it.

He shouldn't have come back.

"Sit down." His mother stepped neatly between James and Craig, putting an end to the awkward moment, though the tension seemed to linger in the air like a bad aroma. James took a seat between Elizabeth and the dark haired pack girl whose name he'd forgotten.

A rush of nostalgia came over him as he sat on the stool at the long kitchen counter. This was home, his home.

Setting his beer on the counter, James smiled brightly, shoving his feelings deep inside so they wouldn't show on his face.

"So what happened?" Elizabeth asked.

"Nothing happened," he replied. "I just decided to come home."

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“I totally have an online subscription to the *Sunset Stalker*, so you might as well tell us what you did. I’ll find out anyway.”

“Why do you assume whatever I did is going to end up in that crap rag?” He turned to his mother. “Why do you let her read it?”

“I have a subscription, too,” Anita said without any embarrassment.

The *Sunset Stalker*, a German tabloid that printed in both English and German, had become his nemesis. Everything he’d done wrong in the past four years had been splashed over the pages of their horrid little paper, most of the stories accompanied by photos, and if they didn’t have a photo they used a picture of one of Jaap’s paintings.

“You know they make most of that up, right?” he said. *Damn it*. If he’d known his family was following *Sunset Stalker* he wouldn’t have come home.

“I only did it because I wanted to know you were okay,” Anita said.

There was a rumble, like a motorcycle being started, but that noise didn’t come from a machine. Every person in the kitchen shifted, becoming instantly more alert as Craig growled.

The Alpha male moved to stand by his wife, facing James with the width of the counter separating them.

“You were without pack,” his father said, his voice a low rumble. “You did not report to any Alpha. You went outside our laws.”

James flinched. While living with Jaap he’d abandoned the pretense of being part of the were-world. He hadn’t reported to whatever pack held the territory he was in the way he should have. There was no use denying it.

“I was without pack,” he admitted, staring at his fingers, which

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were pressed against the counter so hard the tips were white.

“Alpha, step back. You cannot risk yourself in a fight. Tell me what you want and I’ll do it.”

James looked up at the smooth voice, which sent shivers over him. Micah was there, standing at Craig’s right shoulder.

Micah must have said the right thing, because Craig nodded, once, and took a firm step back. “I do not require action at this time,” he said, and everyone relaxed. “Thank you, Micah.”

The dark-haired man nodded and moved out the Alpha’s way. Craig left the kitchen. James listened to his footsteps recede.

“Elizabeth, take your brother up stairs and make sure he has everything he needs.”

CHAPTER 3

Micah stared at the clock. It was 10:45 P.M. He would have sworn hours had passed since he last looked at the clock, but really it had been only minutes. After Elizabeth had taken James upstairs, the pack had disbanded. Micah had driven Jessica and the other non-blood pack members back to the campus and dropped them off.

He returned home and crawled into bed at ten, which was actually late for him as he was up at five most mornings. Going to the gym should have tired him out enough so he could sleep, but he'd been lying here for forty-five minutes with no luck.

He had three options. The first was to lie here in the dark until morning, the second was grab some lube and his cock and try to tire himself out that way, and the last was to get up and go out.

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Micah threw back the covers and got up, pulling on the jeans and shirt he'd had on earlier. Knowing his luck, there would be a huge line outside the Abbey at this time of night, but he'd risk it. Dancing, drinks, and maybe some harmless making out would, hopefully, wind him down enough that he could get some sleep.

He'd been on a few dates with a lawyer, but they weren't close—at least close enough that Micah could call him for a late night fuck.

He slid into his car, backing out with the lights off so he wouldn't wake anyone. He felt like a teenager sneaking out.

The streets were packed and the cheap pay lots full, so Micah paid twenty bucks to valet his car at the Abbey. The line wasn't as bad as he feared and, as he took his place at the end and leaned against the wall, he couldn't stop himself from remembering his first meeting with James.

He'd been so young, not just in years but in maturity. He hadn't really known how the world worked or where he was going in his life, and as his sexuality asserted itself, he'd been forced to face a life without a pack of his own.

Into that tangled mess walked James, golden and god-like—Apollo reborn.

“Hello, precious, you in or no?”

Micah shook his head to clear it and smiled briefly at the cute little thing with the clipboard and pink fake eyelashes who motioned him in. He made his way up the steps to the beefy bodyguard, who checked his ID, frisked him, and then stepped aside, letting him into the buzzing interior.

The bar had the feel of old New Orleans. A half naked dancer in wrestling boots ala Madonna's current look shimmied past him to jump onto a dancing platform. Make that a bordello in old New

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Orleans. He gave a little salute to the mural of Dame Elizabeth Taylor (oh those eyes!) and then wiggled through the crowd to find some wall space.

While normally at bars places in dark corners were at a premium, in the Abbey, as with most of WeHo, the wall tables and dark corners were mostly populated by straight women out for a night with their girls. The gays were all jammed on the dance floor and around the well lit bar—all the better to see and be seen.

Living, breathing, muscular anatomy lessons dressed in short shorts danced on pedestals, while the hottest of the patrons held court at the bar. Micah tugged his shirt down a half-inch so he had a nice smooth waist and folded his arms, making his biceps bulge.

He wasn't a five night a week clubber, but he loved the dancing and music. A skinny boy in skinny jeans shot him a look—interested but not enough to make the first move. Micah thought about pushing away from the wall and heading for the dance floor, brushing by the skinny boy as he went, but he wasn't in the mood—yet. He was too rattled by James.

As if Micah's thoughts had conjured him, the music faded to a single low beat and the DJ piped up, "Hello, all you beautiful sinners. We have a *trrr*reat for you tonight. Direct from the tabloids and looking pretty is LA's own international playgag, James Farrant."

James, dressed in low-slung jeans and nothing else, appeared on the thin stage in front of the DJ booth. The music swelled—Kylie—and the crowd lost it.

James leapt from the stage with inhuman grace. Literally inhuman—he was moving like a wolf. Micah pushed away from the wall, eyes narrowed not in lust, but in annoyance. Most of the people in here were drunk, but someone might wonder how James

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had been able to leap, from standing, eight or nine feet and land with ease. As pack Guardian it was Micah's job to protect the pack, even from itself.

Micah tunneled through the crowd. He let some of his beast—the power inside him that changed his body at will—slip free. Now danger rolled off of him like a dark cloud. Some men moved aside, others turned to stare, their eyes dilated and nostrils flared.

James was dancing—head back, arms up, hips thrusting. His hairless chest was well muscled and golden tan.

Micah slid up behind James and grabbed his hips. James, without looking to see who was behind him, reached up and back, and grabbed a handful of Micah's hair. Now they were pressed together, Micah's cheek against James.

“James, it's Micah,” he growled.

“I know who it is,” James said, voice barely audible above the pulsing music, “I could smell you.”

James ground his ass against Micah's crotch, and Micah closed his eyes. James smelled like sweat and wolf—like sex and power.

Micah used his hold on James's hips to separate them, then spun James around so they were face to face. He grabbed James's left wrist in his right hand. He couldn't do anything more overt, as he didn't want to draw attention to them.

“You need to watch yourself. No human can do what you do.” Micah motioned with a jerk of his head toward the DJ booth.

“Does this crowd look like they care? I could probably become wolf and they wouldn't notice.”

“I would notice, and I would care. This isn't about you. This is about the safety of our people.”

James, who was still bobbing his head in time to the song, laughed. He was still the golden god, Apollo reborn and made

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flesh. And like the god, he was selfish and vain.

Micah transferred his grip to James's upper arm and dragged him off the dance floor. James laughed lightly, winking at boys who watched them.

Clearly he didn't understand that Micah was not joking. Micah spun James and pushed his back against the wall. "When you're in the Netherlands you can do whatever you want, but when you're here you're under the Farrant pack, and therefore my responsibility."

James's eyes had gone from warm laughter to hot furry. "I am a blood-child of the Farrant pack. Back down, Guardian."

Micah leaned into him. James may have been well muscled and oh-so-hot, but Micah was built like a brick house—this fight, if it happened, would not be fair.

"Then act like one."

Micah pushed himself away, turning his back on James. He returned to his place on the other side of the bar, knocking into people in his distraction.

Part of Micah wanted to drag James out of the club, but his action necessitated a warning, nothing more. Micah would stay and keep watch. If James slipped up again or grew petulant and showed off for attention, Micah would be in a place to control the situation.

With a sigh he folded his arms and leaned back against the wall. He wasn't posing, as he had been when he first came in. Now he was just keeping watch over his pack.

James was gone, back into the belly of the dancing beast.

The skinny boy—thin, Asian, with a hat tipped low over one eye—sidled up.

"Bump into me, muscles?"

Micah stared blankly down at the boy for a moment before he

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remembered what was going on. He must have touched the boy, indicating his interest, as he passed.

Micah should smile and dismiss the boy; he had a duty to fulfill.

Micah tipped the hat back, so he could see the boy's lined eyes. "That I did."

He shouldn't have done it. He wasn't in the club as Micah, a man looking for some fun, but as the Guardian of the Farrants, looking after a half wild wolf. But Micah the man wanted to show James that he was not the scared boy he'd once been.

"Buy me a drink?"

"What'll you have?" Micah replied.

"Some of this." The boy rose onto tiptoe and pressed his lips to Micah's. The kiss was soft and gentle, an invitation for Micah to take control. Micah fisted his hand in the boy's shirt, holding him in place so he could ravage him.

His tongue pushed into the boy's mouth, tasting gin and mint. The boy's cheeks were soft against his. He smelled of musk and cologne.

A week ago Micah would have been planning the rest of the evening.

A day ago he would have been contemplating ravaging more than this boy's mouth.

But today...today everything was different. James was home.

The boy jerked back, crying out. Micah blinked, only to find James there, holding the boy so he dangled a few inches from the floor.

CHAPTER 4

“Hands off, bitch,” James snarled. He made as though to toss away the boy. Micah grabbed his arm, which was steely hard with muscle.

“Let him go, James.”

James still looked at the boy, who was squeaking. There were several flashes of light—cameras. The situation was getting out of control.

“James, now,” Micah said, all command.

James released the boy, who stumbled away.

“What are you thinking?” Micah demanded, grabbing James’s arm.

“I thought you were supposed to be watching me, *Guardian*.”

“That would suit you, wouldn’t it?” Micah growled, pulling

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James to him. James's pupils were dilated and in the dim light it looked as though there was no iris at all. "All the attention on you, all these people watching you."

"You're jealous. Well, you know what? I think it's pathetic you never learned to deal with what you are."

Micah saw red. His beast crept along his skin, slithering and sliding around him. He should change, change now. This was a situation for the wolf, not the man.

But he forced down the beast. James in hand, he stalked across the floor to one of the pedestals where a go-go dancer gyrated. This one was against the wall. Strategically placed bars gave the dancer something to hold onto and allowed him to perform some interesting acrobatic tricks.

"Get. Down." Micah growled. His beast, angry at having been denied release, had settled for poking and prodding Micah's human half into doing something he shouldn't.

The dancer looked at Micah, looked again, and leapt down. Micah pulled James to the pedestal. "This is what you want, isn't it?"

Micah grabbed James by the waist and lifted him. Micah heard James gasp in surprise and Micah set him on his knees on the pedestal. "Well, isn't it?" Micah demanded.

"Hypocrite," James snarled, planting his hands on the edge of the platform so he could lean forward, snarling in Micah's face. "You think the humans could do something like that?"

Micah grabbed James by the throat. "You have no idea what I'm capable of."

James's gaze flicked to something over Micah's shoulder. He whirled, expecting attack. There was no attack, but there was a half moon of watchers. What Micah had done attracted much more

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attention that James's leap. James was right.

The realization of what he'd just done cleared Micah's head of the anger that drove him. Micah's beast also changed focus, now recognizing the danger the watchers posed to their secrecy.

Salvation came from an unexpected source. The music fizzled out and the DJ piped up. "There's something hot, hot, hot happening here! For those of you too drunk to remember, we have a very special guest in the house. You've probably seen his cock, if you're into art. But maybe not, because you're a bunch of trashy gays, aren't you? Here he is once more...James Farrant!"

The lights in the rest of the club dimmed, the pin light for that pedestal growing brighter against the gloom. For a moment James was caught by that light, on all fours, looking savage, more animal than man.

In the next breath he shook it off. Pushing to his feet, James struck a pose and the crowd cheered. Turning to the wall, James grabbed the bars, bending so his tight ass was displayed in the equally tight jeans.

The crowd pressed down around them. Micah was rooted in place, watching James dance. This was ridiculous. Go-go dancers were for the newly gay or the overly dramatic, they were fun and sexy, but not sexual

And yet, the semi-hard-on he'd had all night grew rock hard as he watched James dance.

James whipped around, his eyes bright in the darkness. They focused on Micah. Something passed between them—and awareness of each other as grown men—an awareness that surpassed their past.

Before Micah knew what he was doing, he'd leapt up to join James on the pedestal. He grabbed James, shoving him back

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against the wall. Micah could hear the crowd screaming their approval. Micah cupped James's neck with his left hand, his right gripping the bars on the wall, caging James in.

He tipped James's chin up with his thumb.

"This is a mistake," Micah said, searching James's face.

"I make good mistakes," James said, just before he pressed his mouth to Micah's.

James's lips were hot and wet. Micah pressed his hips into James, grinding his cock against him. The kiss touched something inside Micah—something no man had touched before. There were prickles of light moving up and down his arms and back. The sensation was so startling he broke the kiss.

"Whoa," James breathed.

"You felt it?"

"Yea."

Micah ran the hand cupping James's neck down his arm, linking their fingers. "I thought it was just me."

James looked away, and Micah wished he could take his words back, wished he hadn't admitted to feeling anything.

The reality of where they were, and what they were doing, finally penetrated Micah's awareness. It was time for them to leave.

"Let's go," he said. Micah jumped down, and James followed. James's head was bowed. A knot of disgust settled in Micah's belly. Maybe they hadn't been talking about the same thing. Maybe James had said "whoa" because he thought the kiss disgusting. Hell, maybe the thing he was referring to feeling was Micah's hard-on—he'd been rubbing it against James hard enough.

They made their way out of the Abbey, Micah using his bulk to get them through the densely packed crowd. He could hear the

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men's comments to James—invitations, propositions, admiration.

It was humbling to realize James could have had any man in there.

Micah took a few deep breaths when they were out on the sidewalk. He hadn't touched a drop of booze, yet felt tipsy.

"How did you get here?" he asked James, without looking at him.

"Cab."

"I drove."

Silence reined. Micah didn't want to offer a ride only to have it turned down. The implications of why James would turn down a ride—either he found Micah disgusting, or he was planning to go back into the club and accept one of the offers—were too much for Micah to deal with.

"You expect me to beg?" James said, finally looking at Micah.

"You want a ride?"

"Well, yea. If you're not offering, I'll take a cab."

"No! I mean, of course I'll give you a ride."

The valet brought around Micah's black Mercedes. Taking the keys, Micah slipped behind the wheel.

James settled into the passenger seat with ease, seemingly totally comfortable. Micah drove them home in silence. James's head was back, his eyes closed.

He flipped off the lights before pulling into the driveway. James's low chuckle had Micah looking over.

"Nice trick, turning the lights off. It makes me think that isn't the first time you've snuck out."

"I don't want to wake anyone up," Micah said as they climbed out of the car. "I don't sneak out, I can come and go as I please."

James snorted. "As long as you don't mind getting grilled

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about it later.”

“The Farrants are brilliant pack leaders,” Micah defended.

“Sure, sure. They’re great.”

“I don’t like your tone.”

“And suddenly you’re in charge of policing that also, Guardian?”

Micah leapt over the hood of the car in one powerful movement, landing squarely in front of James. “Don’t tempt me, blood-child.”

“You’re no better than I,” James snarled, shoving Micah back a step. “Except that I had the courage to leave this.” He flung out his hand, indicating the house. “I had the courage to go out and be who I am, live my life, instead of being shoved into one of the little boxes they reserve for us.”

“Who are you that you should be exempt from the rules the rest of the world plays by? Every society has rules. Wolves are no different.” Micah’s temper rose, boiling like lava in his belly. Who was James to judge him?

“So, because I like to fuck men I have to settle for being the watchdog, for raising the pups of bitches too stupid to take care of their own young?” James was breathing heavy. Moonlight touched his golden hair, and Micah hated himself for still wanting him.

Micah crossed his arms. “I see you still haven’t grown up.”

“Asshole. You have no idea what life is, what living is.”

“I know that being a part of something—a pack, a family—and taking responsibility for that family, is the most important thing in life. You go ahead and run around Europe fucking artists and feeding your narcissism. If you think that makes you a rebel or some revolutionary, fine. Have a nice time.”

Micah turned his back on James, prepared to head to his house.

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James jumped him, and even with Micah's quick reflexes he wasn't able to get away. The tackle threw Micah facedown into the dirt. Micah's beast snarled to life, feeding superhuman strength to his muscles. With a snarl, he threw James off his back and jumped to his feet. James scrambled up, squaring off with him. They circled each other, the actions of wolves, in the bodies of men.

James, lacking Micah's patience and tactical skill, leapt first. Micah caught him mid-leap, fisting his hands in James's shirt as he sidestepped so that the man's own motion carried him to the ground. Using his hold on James's shirt, Micah followed him down, pinning him and throwing one leg across his thighs to hold him in place.

Micah let out a shout of triumph as James thrashed. The younger man bared his teeth.

"Let me up," James demanded.

"No."

"Then you'd better be prepared."

Micah bared his teeth. "Prepared for what?"

James broke Micah's hold on his shoulders, sat up, grabbed Micah's hair, and kissed him.

CHAPTER 5

Locked together in a kiss, they stumbled into Micah's little house. They didn't turn on the lights, as much as Micah would have liked to get a good look at James. Micah's hands fumbled with James's jeans. He wasn't wearing anything underneath. *Hallelujah.*

When Micah broke the kiss long enough to shove James's pants down to his knees, James cursed briefly.

"Why am I naked and you're still dressed?" he demanded.

"Don't know," Micah panted. James had shucked his shoes and jeans. There was just enough ambient light for Micah to see James's cock, which was thick and hard, standing straight out from his body.

Micah pulled him in for a kiss, his free hand going to James's

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cock. James mumbled something into the kiss when Micah's hand closed around his dick. Micah squeezed him gently, then switched his hold so he could rub the tip with his thumb.

James's hips thrust forward and back. Micah kept his touch light, frustrating.

With a growl, James grabbed the front of Micah's shirt and ripped it open.

"That was my favorite shirt," Micah said through his very satisfied smile.

"Fuck that." James kissed down Micah's neck to his bare chest. Fingers fumbled with Micah's belt, and then James's hands were on his zipper.

"How cute, you still wear underwear," James teased, the words whispered against Micah's chest.

"We can't all be little sluts," Micah replied. He winced, hoping James wouldn't take that the wrong way...he'd meant to tease.

James laughed lightly as he pushed Micah's pants and underwear down to his knees. "Hello there," James whispered as he wrapped his hand around Micah's cock.

The first touch of James's fingers sent bolts of pleasure through Micah. His knees went weak and his mouth dry. It was no more than fingers on his dick, but like the kiss in the club, there seemed to be something more there.

James released him and helped Micah shuck the rest of his clothes. Micah took his hand and led James into the bedroom. The open curtains let in more light than there had been in the living room. The silver light of the moon highlighted the curves and planes of James's perfect body. The curling hair at the base of his cock was as blond as his head.

"You're beautiful," Micah whispered.

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James's brows knitted as he looked at Micah. Micah's self-esteem shriveled under the puzzled scrutiny, until James reached out and touched one of the many scars that dotted him.

"How?" James asked.

"Later," Micah replied, pulling him in for another kiss.

Wrapped in one another's arms, they kissed hard and deep. Their cocks rubbed each other's, their hands smoothed over backs, sides, and asses.

"I need you," Micah whispered.

In reply James grabbed his ass, digging his fingers into the muscle.

They turned to the bed. Micah yanked open a drawer and pulled out a row of condoms and a bottle of lube. James grabbed him by the waist and tossed him onto the bed. A human would never have been able to manage it, Micah was well over two hundred twenty pounds of solid muscle, but James managed it easily.

Micah landed on his stomach. James straddled his thighs and kissed his shoulders. His hands moved down to Micah's ass, kneading the muscles. He heard the click of the lube top and then cold, slippery fingers pushed between the globes of his ass.

Micah jerked in surprise. Surely James didn't think *he* was going to be doing the fucking. Micah was always on top.

Micah went to throw James off, just as James's index finger found his anus. The finger pushed in, and Micah moaned in pleasure, fisting his hands in the sheets.

"You like that don't you."

"This, this isn't how I do it," Micah panted. Ribbons of pleasure wound through his belly as James gently pushed his finger in farther.

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“Oh?”

“I top.”

“Well that’s too bad, because I top, too.”

Micah couldn’t reply as James’s knuckle speared the tight ring of his ass. He couldn’t relax, couldn’t see, could barely breath.

“You have a tight ass, don’t you? A very tight ass,” James crooned. “I’m going to like fucking this ass. I have a thick cock. This is going to hurt. Do you want that? Do you want it to hurt a little bit?” James’s voice was rough, panting. The words were dark and deliciously menacing.

Micah grabbed a pillow and pressed his face into it, biting down on it as the pleasure controlled him.

James’s finger curled inside Micah’s ass, massaging his prostate, and Micah yelled into the pillow.

“Fuck,” James panted, “can’t wait.” He yanked his finger from Micah’s ass, using none of the finesse he’d shown inserting it. Micah heard a condom packet ripping, then he was being drawn up onto his knees, his legs forced apart.

James spread his ass, baring his anus.

No one had ever treated Micah like this; he’d never had sex this visceral and wild.

The blunt tip of James’s cock pressed into Micah’s ass. He was thick, painfully so, but when Micah tried to wiggle away, James’s spanked him. “Stay still. Take it,” he demanded through gritted teeth.

Yes, yes, fuck me. Micah gave himself over to the pleasure/pain of James’s thick cock tunneling into his ass. Once James was fully in, he paused. Micah breathed deep, forcing himself to relax until there was nothing but pleasure.

James drew his cock out slowly, taking it all the way out.

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Micah's ass pulsed as it was withdrawn.

This time when James thrust in he wasn't soft, wasn't slow. This time it was hard and rough, but Micah took it. Stretching out his arms, he braced his hands on the headboard as James fucked him.

"Your ass is so good, it feels so good. That's right, fuck. Fuck yea."

His thrusts grew more erratic even as the speed increased. In a brief moment of clarity, Micah realized James was close to coming. Taking one hand from the headboard, Micah reached down and squeezed the base of his own cock, holding back his orgasm.

James shouted as he came, his fingers digging into Micah's hips so hard he was sure it would bruise. When James reached around to yank Micah to completion, Micah pushed his hand away.

"Micah?"

Micah took advantage of James's confusion to wiggle away. James's still hard cock slipped from his ass. Micah rolled off the side of the bed. James made a pretty picture as he knelt there—tousled hair, chest glistening with sweat, jacked cock still hard.

"I normally do the fucking," Micah said, and then he leapt.

James's eyes widened as Micah grabbed him and forced him facedown on the bed. Micah flipped him onto his back and grabbed his wrists. He positioned James's hands on the pillow beside his head as he bent and kissed him. James, spent from the orgasm, tried to keep the kiss soft, but that wasn't what Micah wanted.

He savaged James's mouth, pushing his tongue between the younger man's teeth to taste him. He nipped his lower lip and licked the corners of his mouth.

Micah moved from his lips to his chest, kissing the hairless

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flesh, sucking his flat nipples. While he played, he had one hand on James's cock. Pinching the tip, he pulled off the deflated condom and dropped it on the bedside table. Once that barrier was gone, Micah let his fingers roam. He gently scrapped his nail down the vein on the underside, then circled the tip and toyed with the foreskin, rubbing it up and down the head.

"Oh fuck, Micah, fuck. I can't. I can't."

"You can," Micah assured him. Unable to wait, Micah rolled on a condom and smeared some lube on one finger. As he did James started to roll onto his belly.

"What are you doing?" Micah demanded.

"Assuming the position," James teased.

"Lie down. When I fuck you I want to see your face."

Something fluttered across James's features; Micah's words had hit a nerve. Micah was too riled up to care. He needed to fuck James. Now.

Shoving James's legs apart, he knelt between them. He slid his hand between the cheeks of James's ass, smiling in satisfaction when his fingers brushed his anus, resulting in a moan.

James tipped his head back, his throat working, as Micah eased one finger in. Micah worked methodically even as his cock throbbed with the need to fuck. Normally a methodical and gentle lover, Micah always prepped with two fingers, but since James had only used one on him that was all the younger man would get.

Pulling his finger from James's ass, Micah grabbed his cock.

"Bend your knees and spread your legs more," he demanded.

James obeyed, and Micah positioned the tip of his cock at the entrance to James's ass. He flexed his hips and the tip of his cock slid in. God, it felt good. James's ass was tight and hot. The look on James's face, the flush on his cheeks, made the moment more

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perfect.

Inch by inch Micah pushed in. Inch by inch he penetrated James, owned him in this small way.

Once he was in, he pulled out, halfway, then gently slid in again. With each thrust, James's dick pressed against Micah's belly, rubbing against the trail of hair that ran from Micah's belly button to his groin.

"Talk," James panted.

"What?"

"Talk to me. I want to hear you."

Micah didn't do dirty talk, sometimes it sounded forced, like the audio on bad porn. "I can't."

"Talk, talk to me," James demanded, looking him in the eye. "Just say what you feel, what you see."

Micah looked down at his cock, watched as it slid smoothly into James's ass. "I'm, uh, I'm fucking you. I'm fucking you in the ass. And you look good. Your ass is tight, and hot. I like that you were rough. I was rough, too, and I liked that. I like looking at your face. I like looking at your cock as I fuck you."

The words tumbled from Micah's mouth. James's moans of arousal at the words spurred Micah to thrust harder, faster. Soon all he was saying was James's name as he lost himself to the pleasure.

Micah braced himself on his elbows, his cheek alongside James's as he fucked his ass. James wrapped his arms around Micah, his short nails pressed into the skin. James's cock was a hard pressure between their bellies.

James wrapped his legs around Micah's back, lifting his ass to meet each thrust. Micah pressed his face into James's neck, smelling sex and sweat and beast.

"I'm going to come," he whispered into James's ear.

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“Do it, I want to feel it.”

Micah grabbed James’s shoulders for leverage and jack hammered into him. On the seventh stroke he came, throwing his head back as the sweet release flooded him.

Micah stroked through his climax, then collapsed on top of James.

He’d just fucked James. James Farrant.

What had he done?

CHAPTER 6

“Stop freaking out,” James whispered. He was still hard, well actually, he was hard again, but it wasn’t the sort of hard-on that had to be satisfied. He was content to let his dick find what pleasure it could pressed between them.

“What?” Micah mumbled.

“You’re freaking out, I can feel it,” James said, rubbing Micah’s tense shoulders.

“I’m not great at one-night stands,” Micah said. He wasn’t relaxing.

God save him from nervous gays, James thought. “Oh really? You wouldn’t have taken that cute little Asian piece home?”

“Who? Oh, the boy at the club. No, I wouldn’t have taken him home. I might have had some fun, oral or something, but

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sex...no.”

“Third base? Not bad,” James teased. It was the wrong thing to say.

Micah pushed away, his cock sliding out of James’s ass. “Sorry, I take sex seriously. I know it’s not a popular attitude.”

James cursed himself. God, why did he always say the wrong things? “That’s not what I meant.”

Micah looked at him, and it was the cold dark eyes of the Micah he’d met in his parents’ kitchen. “I guess I’ll take this as an instructive experience from one of the world’s best.”

James saw red. “You know what? Fuck you.”

“I just did.”

“You know *nothing* about me,” James snarled. He was so tired of people making assumptions based on tabloid gossip.

“Yea, I do.”

“Why? Because you’ve seen the Vadergraff paintings?” Most of the past ten years of James’s life had been lived in the public eye. Jaap Vadergraff, a talented artist, outspoken gay man, and passable lover, had taken James in. It had started as sex, but, frankly, the sex wasn’t that good.

Jaap had asked James to pose for him one day when they returned from a nice lunch. More than willing to postpone what would be mediocre sex, James agreed. He’d spent less than thirty minutes posing that day. The next time he came to Jaap’s studio it had been to see the photos Jaap took pinned up all around and three canvases in place with pencil drawings of the photos sketched in.

After that Jaap never had sex with him again. What they had was a deep and personal friendship. James was Jaap’s muse; Jaap was James’s mentor. James himself had briefly experimented with

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painting, then photography, but had found his passion in music. Jaap bought him a piano and placed it in the studio. James taught himself to play while Jaap painted.

Lovers for less than six months, they'd been friends for over eight years. Everyone assumed they were lovers, and so James's other affairs were considered adulterous and made tabloid news. Nothing he or Jaap said ever changed anything, and as Jaap's fame grew, and James, rendered in paint, began to grace the walls of museums, the scandal grew.

"The paintings are beautiful. They're art," Micah said, surprising him, "but you clearly have no regard for men you're in a relationship with, and I don't like that."

"Didn't my sister say you were seeing someone?" James shot back.

Micah didn't flinch. "We've been on a few dates but we are not together."

"So, that's it, you just assume I'm some cheater."

"Well, you're here with me, aren't you?"

"If you think I'm with Jaap, why did you sleep with me?"

"Because—" Micah stopped mid-sentence and narrowed his eyes. "You said *if*."

James, who was hunting for his pants, didn't look up. He wanted out of here, fast.

Micah touched his shoulder. He didn't grab or pull, just touched. "James, are you with him anymore, your artist?"

James straightened, still naked. "Would you believe me if I said I wasn't?"

"Of course."

That surprised James. He could see in his face that Micah was totally sincere.

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“Okay, then, what if I told you that I hadn’t been with Jaap for years, that we weren’t lovers, we were friends and I was his model, nothing more?”

Micah nodded. “You used to say that, I mean you used to give statements to the European press saying that. But then you stopped, so I assumed you were with him, and had been the whole time.”

“You believe me?”

“Yes.”

“And you remember what I used to tell the press five years ago?”

Now Micah blushed and it was terribly cute. James turned away to hide his smile, and the fact that his heart was fluttering.

“Just so you know,” James said, “I didn’t have half the affairs the tabloids reported. Especially with the women. I definitely didn’t sleep with girls. Ew.”

Micah laughed and sat down on the side of the bed. He scrubbed his hands over his short hair. James wished it were longer. He remembered the way Micah had looked all those years ago—bad skin, lank hair hanging over his eyes, but still so sweet with the cutest butt and nice lips.

He’d thought about Micah, and that kiss, more than he’d liked, over the years. Seeing Micah again tonight had reignited a ten year old crush. He’d gone out looking to dance and drink away the urge to knock on Micah’s door and cause trouble.

But trouble—Micah—had come to him.

James stood there awkwardly, not sure what to do. Should he laugh and leave, making their parting light? Should he crawl back onto the bed?

“Will you, uh,” Micah cleared his throat, “will you stay the night?”

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A smartass response sprung to James's lips, but he bit it back. The laughing attitude was his defense against the world. The only way he knew how to deal with emotional situations was to make a joke of them.

But this was too important. Micah was too important.

"I'd like that."

Micah held out his hand, and James took it.

* * *

"Oh, my GOD! I knew it. I told Jessica. I told her you were perfect for each other. I knew it. Oh, wow. I can't wait. This is great."

There was a rattle and then Micah grunted. James pushed himself up to see a tray of breakfast food was on Micah's stomach. Elizabeth was standing beside the bed, a big, dumb, grin on her face.

"I can't wait to tell Mom; she's going to be so happy."

Elizabeth sprinted from the room.

James flopped back down. "What just happened?"

"Your sister likes to bring me breakfast so she has an excuse to bug me," Micah grumbled. His voice was gravely from sleep and the sound sent shivers of sensation through James. "But usually I'm already awake."

"Aren't you going to stop her?" he asked.

"You've been gone way too long if you think she can be stopped. She can't."

James was not about to be outed by his baby sister. He slipped from the bed and ran for the door, grabbing his jeans from the floor of the living room. He pulled them on and raced out. Elizabeth was

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on the far side of the pool, headed for the house, skipping.

James got a running start, leapt the width of the pool, and grabbed her from behind, one hand over her mouth to muffle the scream. She shrieked long and loud into his palm, then bit him.

“Ow! God, I forgot how annoying you were,” he grumbled.

She elbowed him in the stomach.

James released her to bend and cough. She definitely had werewolf strength.

“Ha! Micah taught me to do that.”

“Of course,” James wheezed.

“Are you and Micah supposed to be a secret?”

“Yes, yes, it’s a secret. Can you help me keep a secret?” James said, smiling.

Elizabeth planted one hand on her hip. “I’m not a baby. That doesn’t work anymore.”

“Just keep your mouth shut, okay?”

“Why? Mom would be really happy. She’s been worried about you, for like...years.”

Elizabeth bit her lip and James cursed himself. He hadn’t really considered how his life would affect his sisters. He knew they were safe and happy, and that should be all that mattered, but clearly it wasn’t.

“I’m sorry, Lizzy. I didn’t do any of it to make them worry. I had to go...for me.”

He pulled her in for a hug. She hugged him back and it was sad how big she was. The last time she’d hugged him like this she’d only reached his waist.

He kissed the top of her head and let her go.

“So, we’re good?” he asked.

“Yes...but I’m telling Mom. She’d want to know! Plus you

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might break Micah's heart."

"You are not telling Mom, and I won't break Micah's heart."

She skipped back when he reached for her. "You won't break his heart because you're just fuck buddies or because you're in love and are going to be together forever?"

"Where did you learn words like that?" He managed to grab her, but she pinched his bare waist. Losing any semblance of maturity, he pulled her hair.

"Ow! I'm in high school, you know," she said as she tried to step on his toes.

"Children! What are you doing?"

They both froze and looked up. Their mother stood at the sliding door, her hand raised above her eyes to block out the early morning light.

"Mom, James and—"

James smacked his hand over her mouth and lifted her off the ground. She flailed, occasionally landing hard punches. James smiled through it all. "Good morning, Mother. How are you?"

She laughed, then looked over James's shoulder. "Good morning, Micah. I hope they didn't wake you. Could you take care of this?"

James looked over his shoulder to see Micah casually circumnavigating the pool. "Good morning, Anita."

Micah stopped in front of James, faced him, and winked.

James was still trying to puzzle out the wink when Micah reached out and casually shoved James, tipping both him and Elizabeth backward into the pool.

James had enough sense to take a breath before he splashed into the cool water. He remained underwater for a moment, letting the cold wake him fully, then planted his feet and pushed, breaking

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the surface. Elizabeth was already clinging to the edge, bitching.

“I can’t believe you pushed me in. What if the pool chemicals ruin this shirt? What if I’d had a cell-phone? What if—”

“Thank you for bringing me breakfast,” Micah said in a cool tone. There was no hint that he’d had only a few hours of sleep due to some rousing sex. He was back to being the cold warrior. He turned and walked away.

He had a really great ass.

Elizabeth turned to look at James as he sighed. She giggled when she saw what he was looking at. James splashed her, then climbed out and helped her out.

They stood beside the pool, dripping.

“Lizzy,” James said, totally serious, “don’t say anything, please. Don’t mess this up for me.”

“Are you serious about Micah?”

“I don’t know. I mean, we barely know each other.”

“Of course you know each other.”

“He’d just arrived in LA when I left.”

“I know that, but you’re both wolves, that means you can talk to each other. It’s nothing like when you date humans.”

“Okay, you’re right. Just...don’t say anything.”

She stared at him and finally nodded.

James remained by the pool after she’d gone inside. What was he doing here? He’d returned home because he was at a crossroads in his life. The time of zipping all over Europe, the only guide his own pleasure, was over. He was tired of casual boyfriends or super hot one-night stands.

He wanted to have something...real, something of consequence.

And he needed to face his wolf.

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He'd been ignoring the rules of their people for years. He hadn't ever checked in with the pack he was technically under, he hadn't ever tried for a guardian position—the only real option for someone who would never be a part of the breeding pair. As a totally out gay man he hated that he was part of a family that limited people based on their sexual orientation, but also knew he was lucky. There were plenty of human cultures that were far less tolerant than the werewolves; at least they had a place for gays.

He'd come home...because that is where you had to go when you were lost.

Last night was a mistake, not because he didn't like Micah—he did—but because Micah was not the kind you fooled around with. He was boy-next-door material.

He'd been home only twenty-four hours but had already created a mess. And it was only going to get worse.

CHAPTER 7

“Would you like to go to dinner?”

James quickly closed the portfolio he held before Micah could see that it was sheet music. He tucked the folio into his bag, on the floor beside the couch. Everyone else was gone—his parents at work and sister at school.

“Are you asking me out on a date?” James asked, smiling up at Micah.

Micah planted his forearms on the back of the couch so he loomed over James. “I am.”

“Then, yes, I’d like to go out to dinner.”

Micah smoothed James’s hair away from his eyes. Before he knew what he was doing James had turned his head and kissed Micah’s wrist. The both froze in surprise at the unexpected and

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tender move.

Micah stroked James's cheek with his thumb and then withdrew.

"Do you like sushi?"

"Yes."

"Good. Eight?"

"Okay."

Micah turned on his heel and slipped out the sliding door. James sat up so he could watch Micah walk away.

A date. He was going on a date. With Micah.

He never went on dates—at least not your traditional two people at a restaurant dates. He was more of an, "I'll meet you at that hot new bar at nine," kind of guy.

Smiling to himself, James pulled out his music. He had a date.

* * *

Micah flopped down on the couch and turned on the TV, more for the noise than any desire to watch it.

He'd just asked James out on a date. And James had said yes.

Micah grinned and rubbed his semi-erect cock. He'd stood in the doorway watching James read before he'd gone in to ask him out. Looking at him meant remembering what they'd done last night.

James had fallen asleep first last night. Micah had lain awake for a while.

After the roller coaster of emotions, Micah should have been able to fall asleep, but a single realization had kept him awake—James was human, too.

Well, that statement was wrong, as neither of them was human,

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but it was the only way Micah could express what he was feeling. James had showed sides of himself Micah hadn't expected. He wasn't some invincible god the way Micah had imagined, or some dilettante playboy. He was just a man...a super hot man, but a man.

It had never occurred to Micah that James left the werewolf community due to a real philosophical problem with their people. Micah had never had any such issues. He was just happy to have a place in their world. But James had made it clear he wanted more than they were offering.

Micah found that more arousing and appealing than James's cut abs.

He wanted to know more about the other man, wanted to talk to him. Micah had gone to the house intending to do just that—open a few beers and have a chat, but when he saw James sitting on the couch, looking serious as he read, Micah realized they both deserved something beyond that.

Micah picked up his cell and called Katana, reserving a table for dinner that night at eight-thirty.

It had been a long time since he'd looked forward to a date as much as he was looking forward to this one. Turning off the TV, he got up and headed for the closet. James had decimated his favorite shirt, so wardrobe was going to be challenging.

* * *

Elizabeth slid into his room and shut the door behind her.

James grabbed a pillow and held it over his crotch. "Could you knock?"

Elizabeth jumped onto the bed and crossed her legs. "I thought

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you'd need help getting ready.”

“Get out. I'm naked.”

“Put on some underwear then.”

Cursing, James backed to the window and slipped behind the curtains. He threw the pillow, hoping it hit her.

“Eww! That's gross. That pillow touched your penis.”

James laid his head against the window and cursed. “Could you please go away?”

“No.”

“Fine, then push my bag over here.”

Elizabeth pushed his duffle bag to the curtain and James crouched, still hiding behind the drape. He never wore underwear, but he had a pair of black silk boxers in here somewhere. They weren't underwear, they were foreplay, but beggars couldn't be choosers.

He stepped out from behind the curtain. Elizabeth seemed unconcerned by his near nakedness. Werewolves weren't particularly modest, since you had to be naked to change.

“Happy now?”

“Nice boxers. I think Micah is a boxer-brief guy though.”

“I am not having this conversation with you. I'm not.” This was just too surreal. He wasn't used to thinking of Elizabeth as a grown up. She was his baby sister, for God's sake.

James pulled on a pair of jeans, wincing as the boxers bunched up.

“Ew, no, not those. Skinny jeans? No.”

“What are you talking about, skinny jeans are in.”

“If you're emo or Asian. Or European. Guys, normal guys, don't wear skinny jeans. They'll all laugh at you.”

James stared at her. Elizabeth patted her bangs into place. He

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thought about the outfits he'd seen at the club last night...yep, she was right.

He threw his duffle bag onto the bed. "Pick me something," he said as he stripped off the skinny jeans. "By the way, these are six hundred euro jeans from Paris."

"I know, they're cute. Can I try them on?"

"Absolutely not."

She handed him a pair of Levi's so worn they were thin as linen and a button-down purple silk shirt.

"Way to pick the gayest shirt I own," he griped, then dug through his bag until he found an undershirt.

"I bet you look good in purple, with your blond hair."

"Speaking of hair, what is up with yours?" he teased, as he got dressed.

She patted her bangs protectively. "Nothing. This is hot."

"According to who? You should let it curl. Not frizz," he said as she opened her mouth to protest, "but big soft waves. And lose the fringe."

"You're back in America—they're bangs," she said, pouting.

James laughed and grabbed her in a hug. "You're pretty cool. I'm sad I missed you growing up."

Her arms snuck around him. "I missed you, too, big brother. Don't go away again."

"I'm not planning to," he said, releasing her. "Now scram so I can finish getting ready."

* * *

Micah raised his sake glass and clinked it against James's. They took a sip of the traditional warm beverage and set down

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their cups.

“You look good,” Micah told him. “I like you in purple.”

“You have Elizabeth to thank.”

Micah chuckled. “She came to help you get dressed?”

“Has she done it to you, too?”

“Many times. Your parents have grounded her more times than I can count for invading my privacy, but that doesn’t stop her.”

“She’s fun, and funny,” James said, smiling and shaking his head. “I can’t believe how big she is. I can’t believe how blunt she is. I missed her growing up. I missed a lot.”

“She wasn’t always this fun...you didn’t miss much,” Micah teased, wanting to erase the look of loss on James’s face.

“Jessica is...well she’s a grown up woman now. I think Elizabeth and I are going to be okay, but Jessica...I have no relationship with her.”

“It was harder on Jess when you left. She missed you. Elizabeth was too little to understand what was going on.”

“Tell me about her, about Jessica,” James said.

This was the last thing Micah expected. He didn’t resent spending their date talking about family. The pack, the family, was the most important thing in Micah’s world, and James showing interest in it was wonderful.

He told James about Jessica, what she liked and what she didn’t, what her hobbies were. He told James about the other non-blood pack girls.

“Did you ever spend any time with the packs in Europe?” Micah asked James.

James’s lips tightened. “No, as Father pointed out, I didn’t.”

“I wasn’t accusing you, just asking.”

James sighed. “Sorry to snap at you. I just...I had to leave the

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wolves. I couldn't deal with it. There I was having just discovered I was gay and realizing that I could never have what my father has, never have a pack of my own. I was so...angry with them, both of them. I know they didn't make the rules, but they are part of it."

"We're lucky. There are human societies that—"

"I know, I know. There are human societies that would stone us. Hell, even here"—he gestured around, indicating WeHo rather than the restaurant—"we couldn't marry. But does that mean I'm supposed to be okay with it? I'm supposed to pretend to be grateful that I have a place in our world rather than be upset that I am going to be stuck serving a pack for my whole life?"

Micah fell in love. Simple as that. The passion, the conviction, in James's words was beautiful. James was so different than the world believed him to be. He was so strong and yet fragile.

Micah had to clear his throat before he could speak. "No, you shouldn't accept it. You should stay and fight it."

James kicked back in his chair. "Fight five hundred years of tradition."

"Yes." Micah reached across the table for James's hand, twining their fingers. "You should fight for what you believe in."

James looked down at their hands. "I don't know if I'm strong enough."

Micah wanted to address that but the server arrived with their bento boxes. The tension eased as they discussed the food, drank sake, and then avidly watched as a couple sitting at the sushi bar had a screaming fight.

"It must be nice to care about someone so much that you're willing to fight with them like that," James said.

Micah chuckled. "I wonder if it isn't a case of two queens enjoying the attention."

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James grinned. "That seems more likely."

One hour turned into two as they talked about any and everything. The only subject James seemed wary of was, weirdly, music. Every time Micah brought up something related to music James changed the subject.

There was a lull as they finished the sake. The server arrived with a second carafe and the dessert menus.

"I don't feel like a werewolf," James said, looking down.

Micah's head jerked up. The server had heard James and turned around, one eyebrow up. He looked at James, then Micah, rolled his eyes and walked away. The guy had probably heard weirder things.

Micah relaxed, glad he wouldn't have to take action to protect the pack. He switched his attention back to James.

"What do you mean you don't feel like a werewolf?"

"I mean that because I wasn't with a pack, because everyone I knew was human, there were days, weeks even, that I didn't think about it. Sure, at the full moon I would change, and it was fun, but after it was over I would go back to my life and forget about it."

Micah shook his head. "That's terrible."

"It wasn't so bad."

"Just because you don't agree with aspects of the culture doesn't mean you can ignore what you are. That's as bad as...as staying in a closet, marrying Sue, and moving to the 'burbs."

"Ouch."

"But I'm right."

"I guess."

The waiter returned for their dessert order, but Micah asked for the check. He handed the waiter his credit card, not bothering to even look at the total.

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“Suddenly in a hurry?” James licked his lower lip and smiled.

Micah pressed the heel of his hand to his crotch. He didn’t want to have to walk out of here with a boner.

“Let’s go,” he said, standing the instant he’d signed the check.

James laughed and heads turned. Micah draped his arm over James’s shoulder and sent one particularly aggressive onlooker a “back off, bitch” look.

James slid his arm under Micah’s jacket, along the small of his back.

“Did I tell you how hot you look tonight?” James whispered into his ear.

Micah was tempted, very tempted, to change the plans for the rest of the evening and take James back to the house.

The valet arrived with his car. Micah opened James’s door for him. As James slid in, his hand patted Micah’s ass.

“Have a nice night,” the valet said and Micah just smiled.

* * *

“Keep it up and I will crash,” Micah said through gritted teeth.

James gave Micah’s cock one last stroke and withdrew his hand. Micah’s white-knuckled grip on the wheel relaxed.

Anticipation thrummed through James. He couldn’t wait to get back to Micah’s place. The things he wanted to do to this man...

He looked out the window to keep himself from temptation. His brow furrowed. Where were they?

“Where are we going?”

The car was climbing, following a twisting road on the side of a hill, something you never found in LA.

“You need to run,” Micah said, concentrating on his driving. It

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was dark here, away from the lights of the city.

“Where are we?”

“Griffith Park.”

James had forgotten about Griffith Park, which wasn't a park so much as a huge expanse of wilderness at the north edge of the city. Though it was well past nightfall, the gates were open and cars lined the edges of the road.

“There's a concert tonight, which is why the gates are open, but don't worry, we won't be near them.”

Micah took a side road, his nice car now bumping along a dirt road. When the car finally stopped there were no lights, no sounds except the dying hum of the engine.

Micah got out and came around to open James's door.

“What are we doing here?” James asked.

“Like I said, you need to run.”

Micah pulled off his jacket. He opened the trunk and tossed the jacket inside. His shirt and shoes followed.

“You mean...you want us to change and run. As wolves.”

“You'd rather jog in the dark as a human?” Micah's smile made his white teeth glint in the moonlight.

“Micah...I can't.”

Micah had stripped down to his underwear. *Boxer briefs, Elizabeth was right.*

“What do you mean you can't?”

“It's hard for me to change. Painful.”

Micah pulled James to him in a hug. His warm hands moved up and down James's back. Micah smelled like man...and wolf.

The scent of wolf raised a feeling of homesickness so acute James felt as though he were choking. He pushed away, gasping for breath. “I can't do this.”

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“You can. You need to. You’ve been away too long.”

“Micah...”

“I’m here. I’ll help you.” Micah was at his back, kissing his shoulder, his neck.

“Can’t we just fuck?” James pleaded. “I’ll let you be on top.”

Micah chuckled even as he started unbuttoning James’s shirt. “We’ll fuck after. And I’m going to be on top, weather you let me or not.”

This hint of menace aroused James, so that when Micah moved his hands to the button of the jeans the barest brush of fingers had James’s cock leaping.

James turned and tried to kiss Micah, but he evaded. Instead Micah undressed him, slowly and carefully. When James was standing naked in the moonlight, his clothes in Micah’s trunk, Micah shucked his briefs. James was relieved to see Micah was not unaffected by what they were doing.

Micah took his hand and led him farther up the road, away from the car.

“You’re nervous,” Micah said.

“Of course I am. We’re naked and defenseless in the middle of a dark park. This is the stuff horror movies are made of.”

“What is it that you think will be able to overpower a couple of werewolves?”

“Okay, good point.”

“If this were a horror movie, we’d be the monsters, not the damsels in distress.”

Micah took them off the road onto a little path. James minced along, wincing as he stepped on rocks and twigs. Micah didn’t seem to notice anything. Once they were deep in the trees Micah pulled James to face him.

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“You can do this. Your beast is inside you, waiting and ready. Maybe he’s sleeping or stiff from disuse, but your beast is there.” Micah pressed his hand to James’s belly, then ran it up his chest to cup James’s cheek. “Trust me.”

Micah stepped back and dropped to all fours. James did the same.

Bending his head, James tried to calm the panic inside him. It had been nearly a month since he’d changed, and that time had been painful and discouraging. He didn’t want to do this, didn’t want to fail at this in front of Micah.

“Don’t think of human things or human concerns,” Micah said. “Think only of the beast, imagine the wolf and call your wolf.”

James let Micah’s words flow over him, into him. He pushed away thoughts of embarrassment and failure; these were unknown to the wolf. Deep in his belly something rolled awake, something dark and menacing, with bright blue eyes. James called to his beast, called on the magic that could change him.

The magic came, slowly at first, but then more quickly. He felt and heard the air around him snapping and popping as the change came. There was no pain, only a brief moment of disorientation.

James blinked, looking around at a world that was now shades of gray. Micah, still human, smiled at him, then called on his own change, which was lightning fast. One moment he stood as a man, the next a wolf.

As a wolf Micah was huge, his shoulders and flanks roped with muscle. James knew he was skinnier, more like the wolves of the wild that were built for speed not strength.

Micah rubbed his muzzle against James’s, then walked alongside him, rubbing their sides together. He jerked his head, motioning for James to follow.

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With Micah in the lead, they took off into the woods, dashing and darting through the trees. The wildlife cried out in fright, seeing these two beasts they didn't know and who were so much bigger than the coyotes they were used to.

Micah and James tore through the forest, and James rediscovered what it was to be a werewolf.

He didn't know how long they ran, didn't know where there were going. He was happy to follow Micah, to smell the myriad scents of the woods, the far off smell of humans.

They ran for pleasure and nothing more. They ran because they were wolves.

When Micah brought them back to the car, James shook his head. He wasn't done yet. He was having too much fun. He bumped Micah, motioning back to the woods. Micah shook his head.

James turned, preparing to keep running even if Micah wouldn't, but the larger wolf tackled him, taking his neck between his jaws. He shook James, then released him. James petulantly started to walk away, but stopped at Micah's growl. He needed to stay with his pack.

They changed back, kneeling in the dirt beside the car.

The minute the change finished, exhaustion overtook James. His arms and legs felt like jelly. He remained kneeling in the dirt, too tired to stand, as Micah retrieved the keys from the front wheel and opened the trunk.

"You're tired," Micah said. "I should have brought us in sooner." He helped James rise, then seated him on the lip of the open trunk.

"No, that was perfect," James mumbled. Micah had pulled a baby wipe from a box in the trunk and was cleaning James's hands

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and knees. “I forgot what it was like to run with other wolves.”

“You’ve been away from a pack for too long.”

This time James didn’t take it as criticism, merely a statement of fact. Micah helped him dress, then got him settled into the passenger seat before he cleaned himself and got in.

They made their way out of the park, a calm silence filling the car.

James felt at peace in a way he had never known before. It was like the afterglow of sex, but better.

“That was better than sex,” James said.

“I don’t know about that, but it was a good run.”

It was nearly one A.M. by the time they pulled into the drive, lights off.

They walked, hand in hand, back to Micah’s place. “Would you like to come in?” Micah asked. “If you’d rather take the night off and just relax I’ll understand.”

“I want to sleep beside you,” James said, leaning into Micah so he could rest his cheek on his shoulder.

“I wish I could promise you just that. But if you walk through this door I’m going to fuck you. And I can’t promise I’ll be gentle.”

James reached past Micah, opened the door, and walked in.

CHAPTER 8

The clothes James had so briefly worn hit the floor. They were locked in a kiss, their frantic hands pulling at clothing. Once again James was the first one stripped.

“I need you,” he gasped out to Micah, fumbling with his jeans.

Micah fisted a hand in James’s hair and pushed him to his knees. James grabbed his jeans and boxers, dragging them down far enough for Micah’s cock to spring free. James wrapped his hand around it and closed the tip inside his mouth. He teased the slit with his tongue, nibbled the foreskin.

“Fuck, yes,” Micah said.

James pulled his head back to say, “Tell me, tell me what you want, what you see.”

“I see you, on your knees, sucking my dick. God, you’re

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gorgeous.”

With the tip of Micah’s cock in his mouth, James looked up. Micah moaned and pushed James’s hand away from his shaft. Taking handfuls of James’s hair, Micah pushed his cock deep into James’s mouth. James gasped and moaned as the cock filled his mouth, forcing his jaw open wide.

Micah fucked his mouth, keeping it gentle. “I love fucking your mouth. I like you there, on your knees for me.”

James squeezed Micah’s ass, feeling the muscles flex as he thrust. Wiggling his fingers between the cheeks, he teased a finger against Micah’s anus, not inserting, just stroking.

“Fuck!” Micah cried out. He ripped his cock away from James and dragged him up.

Before James could orient himself, he was being pushed down over the back of the couch. He liked this, liked the way Micah handled him. He was a top, always had been, except, apparently, with Micah.

“Stay there,” Micah said, swatting his ass. He disappeared into the bedroom only to return with condoms and lube. Within seconds the condom was on and cold lube was dripping onto James’s ass.

“I’m just going to fuck you, no prep,” Micah growled.

James pumped his hips, rubbing his dick against the couch cushions. “Fuck me. Do it now.”

Micah pulled open the globes of James’s ass, positioned his cock, and thrust.

They both cried out as Micah speared James. James felt full, used, owned. He loved it.

“Look at this sweet ass,” Micah grunted, needing no more prompting to talk dirty. “Next time I fuck you I want to see your face, but I like this. I like you like this, bent over, being used.”

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Micah put his hand on James's back and pushed, pressing him deeper into the couch. Micah's thrusts were long and slow. He was savoring this.

"Tell me you want this," he demanded.

James, so lost in the pleasure of the fuck, took a moment to respond. Which earned him a spank.

"I want you. I want you, Micah, to be fucking me. I want you to use me like this. I never want this, but with you, I like it. I want to be used, and I want to use you. I want to fuck you, and I like how you're fucking me."

"So you think you're going to be on top next?" Micah growled. "Think you're going to fuck me?"

"I am. I am going to fuck you. I'm going to fuck your mouth as I work a dildo in your ass."

Micah moaned and James smiled. Clearly Micah liked the idea.

Then he couldn't think anymore because Micah's thrusts sped up. He fucked James brutally until, on a shout of pleasure, he came.

As soon as he was done, Micah pushed James to the floor, and fell on him, taking his cock in his mouth. James, already close, lasted only seconds. Micah pointed James's dick at his chest and licked the underside as James came, shooting his seed onto himself.

When he'd finished, Micah collapsed onto the floor beside him.

* * *

They didn't sleep until dawn.

James made good on his promise. He found Micah's box of toys, which included a thick glass dildo. He shoved it in Micah's

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ass, then made Micah kneel beside the bed as he lazily fucked it in and out. Then James had him sit on the couch, so the dildo was forced deep inside Micah, and had him lean forward and suck his cock.

James came on Micah's face and chest, then rubbed his jism all over his chest, telling him what a dirty boy he was. By this time Micah's eyes were glassy with arousal, his cock hard and dripping. He put Micah on the bed and played with the dildo until Micah begged. Only then did James take Micah's dick in his mouth and suck him off while reaming his ass with the dildo.

Both claiming exhaustion, they vowed to stop for the night, but when they got in the shower together they couldn't help themselves. Wet, soapy, they finger-fucked each other while rubbing their cocks together.

After that they collapsed, exhausted into the bed. But not before James put the chain on the door. If his sister showed up he'd murder her.

When he told Micah what he'd done, the other man laughed. It was such an artless happy sound that James fell a little in love. He leaned over and captured the laugh with a kiss. Micah pulled him in so that James was snuggled against his chest.

They fell asleep like that, together and content.

CHAPTER 9

“Good morning, everyone,” James said as he entered the kitchen through the sliding door. Micah was right behind him.

“Morning,” Jessica said sleepily. She’d decided to spend the weekend at home, rather than in her dorm, as she had a test coming up and said it was easier to study here. Micah gave her a one-armed hug, which she returned.

James wanted to do the same, but he was still uncomfortable with her.

“Where’s Lizzy?” he asked instead.

“Still asleep, thank God.”

“Want me to make breakfast?” James asked. It was Sunday morning, perfect time for a huge breakfast. He and Micah normally went out to brunch at one of L.A.’s many brunching locations.

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When Micah raised one brow, James just shrugged.

“You can cook?” Jessica asked.

“Yes, actually,” James said.

His mother had every kitchen gadget in the world, so after an investigation James decided to make waffles. Knowing the appetite of his family, James sent Micah to the store for more eggs, buttermilk, and some heavy cream.

As he got the first round of egg whites whipping Jessica spoke up. “So, you and Micah are like...together now?”

James slowed. “I think so.”

“You spend a lot of time together.”

“We do. I like Micah. He’s great.”

“Elizabeth said you’ve basically been living with him for the two months you’ve been home.”

James shifted. It was true, and it was stupid to think they hadn’t noticed. It wasn’t like they’d been hiding it, but no one had said anything to him, until now.

“Mom said I couldn’t say anything to you. She threatened Elizabeth with no prom and no summer trip to Alaska if she said anything.”

“Ah, that would be why she’s been staying out of it.”

“I don’t like going against Mom, but I don’t trust you.”

James whirled away from the sink, shocked. Jessica, seemingly harmless with her hair in a messy bun, wearing a pale yellow robe holding a cup of tea, was looking at him with cold distrust.

“I’m your brother.”

“Technically, yes, but Micah has been a better brother to me than you. He’s a better family brother, and a better pack brother. I don’t trust you not to hurt him. You ran away. I don’t know why you came back, but I doubt you’re here to stay.”

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James's shock faded as his anger grew. "You know nothing about me and why I left."

"I know you're a coward."

James leaned into the counter, staring her in the eye. "You assume, you all assumed, you knew why I left. You think it was easy for me to first, realize I was gay, second, realize that meant I would never have my own pack, my own family? How would you feel if you were told the best you could hope for in life is to be glorified police for someone else's pack, or to be forced to raise the child of a she-wolf too stupid to raise her young."

"Micah is more than *glorified police*, he's a part of our family."

"It's not like that everywhere. It's not like that in a lot of other packs. Guardians end up running errands, acting like personal servants. I refuse to let who I am, and who I love, dictate my role. I wouldn't do it as a human, and I damn well won't do it as a wolf."

"I agree."

Jessica and James both whirled to look at their father, who stood in the door.

"James," he said, "I wish you had told me how you felt."

James looked away.

"I always wondered," his father continued, "if there wasn't more to your leaving. You are too smart to be happy just screwing around doing nothing. I knew you left for a reason, I just didn't know what that reason was."

"I know the rules of the wolves," James said.

"I'm sure you do. But they've changed before, and will change again. If you want to petition the council to form your own pack, I'll stand behind you."

James blinked at his father. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard. James had always considered his father a guy's-guy, as

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straight as they made them. He knew his father loved him, but always assumed he was disappointed.

“You hate that I’m gay,” he said. “You wish I weren’t.”

“Wish? All I ever wished for was for you to be healthy and happy. That’s all any parent wishes for. I haven’t been happy with your decisions because I don’t think they’ve been smart, or good for you. But being gay? That is a part of you, and I love you.”

“I...I...Dad.”

James was shaking. He felt as though he would come apart. Here was the support he’d never believed he would get. Maybe he hadn’t believed he deserved to get support, maybe it hadn’t been his father who was angry he was gay, but himself.

Craig pulled him in for a hug, and James’s tattered soul started to heal.

Micah walked into the kitchen, looked at the tableau of father and son embracing, then glanced at Jessica. “Did I miss something?”

* * *

“Is this what you did all day in Europe?” Micah asked.

They were lying beside the pool. As the Pack Guardian Micah didn’t have a day job, as keeping track of the pack was a 24/7 responsibility. Just last week Elizabeth had accidentally obliterated some guy, tossing him nearly ten feet, in judo class. Micah had spent some time cleaning that up—stealing cameras of people who’d been there, breaking into houses to delete the original files, even pretending to casually meet the boy in question and refer to him as “that guy who got his ass kicked by a girl,” to ensure the boy would stop talking about it.

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But for the most part that left Micah with a lot of free time. Usually he helped Craig with the courses he taught, sometimes going in for physical demonstrations. But it was something he did out of fun, not duty, so Craig hadn't said anything when Micah stopped volunteering.

Over the past two months he and James had been together all day...and all night. They'd talked about everything and anything. The sex had progressed to rougher, then some bondage, then back to sweet face-to-face stuff.

They had talked about Micah's Guardian duties, and James had done his best to help when issues came up.

But Micah still had no idea what James did.

"I mean, I know you posed for your artist, but that must have left a lot of free time."

"The posing took more time than you would think. He used to just take pictures and work off the pictures, but as he got better, and more famous, he would ask me to actually pose for hours at a time. Boring."

"And he and you..."

"Like I said, we were lovers for about five minutes. His dick was small and he had no imagination."

Micah hated to admit that he liked hearing that.

"I did pick up a sort of...a hobby. I spent most of my time on that."

"What hobby?"

James sat up. "You have to promise you won't laugh."

"No promises. If you build birdhouses or something I'm laughing at you."

"It's not that. Let me just show you."

Wrapped in towels, they went into the house to the seldom-

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used formal sitting room. A baby grand sat in the corner. It wasn't dusty, there were housekeepers for that, but it hadn't been used in years.

More nervous than he wanted to admit, James took a seat on the bench. Micah propped himself on the back of the settee.

James lifted the lid and stroked the keys. "It'll probably be out of tune," he warned Micah. There was a ball of nerves in his belly. His playing was something very private. He sometimes played at parties, but that was spur of the moment, and in the moment. He never showed people he cared about, besides Jaap, his skill.

"I'll consider that," Micah said, smiling.

James put his fingers on the keys. The music was there, inside his mind. He could hear it, see it, smell it. The peace, the joy, the anger that the composer had hidden inside the notes waited for James to set it free.

He tapped out the first notes, then the music claimed him. He played the second Rachmaninoff sonata. His fingers flew over the keys; his foot pressed the pedal. His hands sprang up as he hit each cord at its exact moment. There was drama and passion, then a long line of descending notes that fell from magical to mysterious, then rose again.

James had his eyes closed. He opened them when he felt a presence beside him.

Micah was standing there, open-mouthed, utterly stunned.

"Wow," Micah said, "wow."

James smiled, his confidence soared. It was the perfect reaction.

* * *

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Micah arranged for the entire pack to come to the house that Friday night. He asked them to dress in black tie, and brought in catered food. They ate in the formal dining room, and, no matter how much they asked, Micah wouldn't tell them why he was doing this, or what was going on.

James slipped away early, grinning ear from ear. He'd agonized over which pieces to play, spent hours playing them for Micah. Micah had sat through every piece, listened to each note.

The concert had been Micah's idea. James wouldn't have dreamed of suggesting it.

When Micah led the family into the room, asked them to take their seats on the chairs and couches that had been arranged to face the piano, James felt a swell of emotion fill him.

He looked at Micah and saw his lover, his beloved, the man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

Because of Micah he'd found his place in his own family. Because of Micah he felt whole and worthy.

Because of Micah he had a reason and a purpose again.

With a wink to his mother, James started to play. He looked up to see shocked faces, which turned to smiles, then to awe as he played piece after piece of beautiful music, blending one into the other without pause.

When he stopped, everyone jumped to his or her feet, clapping. Jessica whistled and cheered, tears in her eyes.

James came out from behind the piano and bowed, laughing. "Thank you, thank you."

Everyone quieted down, and James looked to Micah.

"There is something I'd like to say," he told them, "a sort of formal announcement to my pack." He looked at his father, who nodded permission. "I'm in love with Micah." James kept his eyes

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on Micah as he said it. Micah's face registered shock, then delight. "I'm in love with him and want to spend the rest of my life with him. If he would be willing to start a pack with me, I will fight for that. If he wants to stay here, I will petition the council to let me return to my blood pack. I left because I was lost, but now I'm home. I'm home."

There was a moment of stunned silence, broken only by his mother's sniffles as she wept into his father's shoulder.

Micah stood and made his way to James.

"I'm sorry," James whispered. "I was too chicken to say it in private. I was afraid you were going to laugh at me or pity me, and I know you wouldn't do it in public."

"You're an idiot," Micah said, and James could see tears in his eyes. "I've loved you since the day you got here. I didn't want to say it because I was afraid you'd leave."

"I love you," James whispered.

"I love you."

"Kiss him!" Elizabeth shrieked.

Micah laughed, winked at Lizzy, then did what she said. He grabbed James and kissed him, right there in front of the whole family.

LILA DUBOIS

Lila lives in Hollywood, which provides an endless supply of exciting evenings and writing ideas. She is recently returned from six months terrorizing a sleepy little town in Surrey, England, where she lived with her shiny new fiancé. Having spent extensive time in France, Egypt and Turkey, and England, Lila speaks five languages, none of them (including English) fluently.

To find out more about Lila, visit her website at...

<http://www.liladubois.com>

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