

Del Fantasma

Black Wolf

Jade Buchanan



Aspen Mountain Press

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by Jade Buchanan

Aspen Mountain Press

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Dedication

One night, back in August, I was sitting down with my sister, Sarah, and our cousins—Jarrett, Jeremiah and Jayme—when I happened to mention I was plotting out this book. Over a drink or two, they proceeded to give me one idea after another, amidst hilarious laughter. Whoever said writing is a solitary occupation has never met my family!!

Black Wolf is dedicated to four incredible relatives who can make me plot out an entire story—in a bar—around the phrase "ooh, what if he had a furry nut sac?" You guys are the best!!

My humblest thanks to Maura and Jo for encouraging me from the very beginning, and to Nik for inviting me into this wonderful series!

Chapter One

It was the noise that woke him; a dull buzzing droning sound behind him. Adam Bates cracked open an eyelid, regretting it instantly. *Frog legs*, he hurt.

Of all the ways he'd imagined dying, this hadn't even been on the list. Who'd have thought it would end this way?

The phone finally stopped ringing, and he was blessed with silence for a moment. Almost immediately it started to ring again. Who the heck would be calling him at ... wait, he had no idea what time it was. His head was pounding, and his entire body ached. Realizing he was lying on the floor, Adam gingerly rolled over. What the heck?

Suddenly, it all came back to him in a rush of clarity. Scott! He had to get out of here. Where was Scott? A single inhale told him he was alone. The scent of the human surrounded him but it wasn't strong enough to indicate he was still inside the apartment.

Adam wheezed, pulling himself up on the arm of the chair beside him. It was ripped, cotton stuffing escaping from the blood-stained fabric. How did that happen? Confused, he paused to consider his surroundings. Blinking when his eyesight went fuzzy, he swiped a hand over his face. His hand was sticky and red when he pulled it away. Shaking his head, Adam groaned.

His apartment had been trashed, kitchen chairs were overturned, rips and stains decorated the cheap sofa and armchair. His tiny TV was overturned and busted open. Oh

well, he hadn't been able to afford cable anyway. The bed in the corner of the one room apartment was rumpled, the covers balled at the foot of the bed, the mattress pad nearly torn right off.

He had to get out of here. Now.

Without pausing to consider his actions, he ignored the ringing phone. The sound of it followed him out the door, keys in hand. He stopped to lock the door and realized it had been busted open. *Frog legs*. He turned and ran. Well, hobbled really. His knee ached something fierce.

Scott might come back at any minute. He had to get out, needed to get out now. There was only one place he felt safe ... Del Fantasma. Cody'd know what to do.

Adam panted, unable to catch his breath, stumbling in his haste to run down the stairs. He tripped, missing several steps on his downward journey, and grabbed hold of the banister with a shaky grip. Reaching the ground floor, he gasped at the pain in his knee. He had no idea what'd happened to it, his memories of that afternoon were still a little hazy. He couldn't do anything about it at the moment, but he'd about kill for an ice pack.

Hurrying down the street, he kept his head down, not wanting anyone to stop him and ask if he was alright. He wished he had a car or something that would make his getaway easier, but he couldn't afford the payments, so he was stuck taking the bus. He only hoped he could catch it in time. He was sure he'd missed the earlier one.

A warm trickle of blood ran down his face, sticky wet. Adam reached up his hand and wiped it away. The cut stung,

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a sharp bite high on his left temple, but at least he didn't have to worry about the blood getting in his eyes if he kept wiping it away. It would heal soon, anyway. It was his leg he was worried about, but he didn't have enough time to shift and heal it. Already it was throbbing, and he had a full night's work ahead of him. At least he hoped he did. Adam didn't know what he'd do if Cody fired him for being late. He had nowhere else to go. He couldn't go home. Not yet.

"Stupid, stupid cat!"

He shook his head, fighting back the tears that threatened to spill over. It was only his second week at work, and already he was screwing up. He couldn't afford to lose this job; it was the only thing keeping his head above water at the moment.

He'd tried to time this right, thinking to confront Scott when he knew he'd have to leave right away. Adam had given himself ten minutes before he had to leave to catch his bus, and now he was hopelessly late. He didn't even know when the next bus would arrive, and it was going to take him another hour between the buses and the connections he'd have to take before he'd get to the bar.

He made it just in time, breaking into a hobbling jog to catch the bus before it pulled away from the transit plaza. He wished for a phone so he could call work, but he'd have to wait until he got off to catch the route eight bus. He normally had a ten minute wait between stops and it would be just enough time to call in to let them know he was still coming in to work.

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Ignoring the stares around him, Adam hunched his shoulders, ducking his head down. He curled his lip, hissing softly when the man across from him looked at him a little too long. He hated being around strangers. Right about now, he'd kill to be in comfortable surroundings, listening to the soft wash of conversation among his sisters and his parents.

He wanted to go home. He couldn't though, not just yet.

Angrily wiping away the tears that once again filled his eyes, Adam sniffed, rubbing his cheek against his shoulder.

It was a good thing his stop was coming up next, he needed to distract himself from his homesickness. It wouldn't do any good. He'd left for a reason, and he hadn't reached his goal yet. He needed to prove to himself—and his family—that he could stand up for himself. That he wasn't going to just blindly follow his father's dictates.

"Right, cause you've done such a great job of taking care of yourself so far." His muttered words were soft, but they still drew a few stares his way. Great, now he was scaring people with more than just his appearance.

He limped off the bus when it pulled over, making his way as quickly as possible over to the payphone. Digging out a handful of change from his pocket, he dialed the number to Del Fantasma, tapping his foot nervously.

"Del Fantasma."

Adam jerked at the low, clipped baritone. He'd been caught up in rehearsing his speech for Cody.

"Uh, h-hi, M-Matt. It's, uh, this is Adam. I, uh, didn't expect you to p-pick up."

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The voice immediately softened, the drawl becoming more pronounced. "Hey, Adam. The place is pretty busy. I'm just helping Cody out since I was right beside the phone. Aren't you supposed to be in tonight?"

Adam nodded, sniffing when he realized the man couldn't see the movement. "Yeah, I'm a little late. I, uh, had a little ... well ... C-could you tell Cody I'll be in soon? I promise I'm coming in; I'm just a little late. Well, more than a little, but ... Uh, yeah. Can you tell him?"

"Sure thing."

Adam hung up the phone after saying his goodbyes, taking a deep breath. "You're okay. Just breathe." If he wasn't careful, they were going to think he was the world's biggest chicken. He needed to get a hold of himself. This was ridiculous. There was no need to be stuttering and stammering on the phone. He didn't even want to imagine how much worse it was going to be when he saw them all in person.

Half-heartedly wiping at his face, Adam stepped up to the bus that had just pulled in. He got on, standing near the front, making himself as small as possible so he didn't have to touch anyone. If he'd been in his other form, he just knew his fur would be standing on end. He needed to be alone, not squashed into a bus with dozens of smelly, sweaty humans. Adam shuddered, cursing his sensitive nose for the millionth time since he'd moved to San Diego.

* * * *

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Marcus cradled his beer protectively in his hand, lifting his arm above the people around him. They were packed like sardines inside the bar, and he desperately needed some fresh air before he snapped and growled at someone. He'd been bumped from behind one too many times tonight, and he wasn't exactly in the most peaceful frame of mind. Reaching the back of the bar and the door marked 'Private', he turned his nose up and fought the urge to sneeze at the strong odor of coyote.

"Goddamn coyote bastard."

He grinned at the surprise the coyote had in store the next time he stepped out into the parking lot. Marcus hadn't been able to stand the overpowering scent of coyote so he'd done a little marking of his own territory in the parking lot—in wolf form, of course.

Sure, he respected the man, and they'd met a time or two in the past, but facts were that Texas was a coyote, and Marcus was a wolf. They didn't really get along that well. Although, he'd take a coyote over a human any day. The ones crowded into the bar tonight had no respect for personal space or decorum. Fuck, he couldn't stand this.

Curling his lip, Marcus sidestepped a lady wearing a tiny bit of lace over a stupid excuse for a skirt. She batted her eyes up at him in what she probably thought was a seductive expression, but it only served to make him want to slap her upside the head and tell her to go put some damn clothes on. This night was fast turning into a waste of time.

"This is why I fucking hate coming out in public," he muttered. The woman stopped with a smile, probably thinking he was talking to her, and Marcus beat a hasty retreat.

He was just about to leave the bar, his promise to Cody that he'd stay the night be damned, when the sweetest scent drifted close to him. Marcus froze, ignoring the body that bumped into his back—and the accompanying curse—to try and pinpoint the scent.

He turned, raising his nose and drawing air deeply into his lungs. Almost instantly, his cock hardened, testing the limits of his jeans. Christ, he hadn't had that happen since he was a randy teen, popping wood at the slightest breeze.

Snapping his head to the right, his gaze was unerringly drawn to the small man making his way through the crowd. He moved sinuously, gracefully, stepping around people without touching them. His right leg dragged briefly and Marcus frowned.

A low growl came from deep in his chest. He cursed silently, trying to grasp control of his wolf. He couldn't let it take over in a crowded bar, but it took everything in him to stop from plowing through the crowd and screaming for the assholes around the man to move out of the way. What the hell was wrong with his wolf?

The man had his head tucked down so it was almost uncanny how he seemed to know where to move next. The low light in the bar wasn't the best for seeing the man's features, but Marcus felt that they were arresting. Although, it wouldn't really matter if he looked like the ass end of a Coyote. He was about ten minutes away from belonging to

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the big, bad wolf in the bar. Marcus stepped forward, making his way closer to the man, uncaring of the people he was cutting off.

Stripes of brown, ochre and black hair tufted up around the man's face, with a little black M shaded in the hair right above his forehead. Marcus had only ever seen that on ... wait. Being closer to the man made the subtleties in his scent intensify. He smelled like a cat and he looked like a tabby.

Actually, he smelled like more than cat. He smelled like mate. Deep inside him, he felt the wolf give an impatient snap of teeth, anxious to get out and claim what belonged to him.

Marcus grinned, ignoring the two men who abruptly backed away from his feral expression.

He kept his gaze locked onto the small tabby, the man who was completely unaware that he was now being hunted. He licked his lips, starting forward. This was going to be fun.

Chapter Two

Adam stepped up to the bar and raised his head to glance at the man behind it, currently polishing a glass. He hoped he hadn't screwed up royally. A part of him was positive the ringing phone from before was Cody calling to check up on him and ask if he was coming in tonight.

He really didn't think Cody had wanted to hire him in the first place, so this didn't bode well for his chances of keeping his job. Cody had considered him when he'd gone in to ask the man if he needed any new labor. Studied him from cold, sea blue eyes. Adam was sure he had been a minute away from saying no, when suddenly he cocked his head and told Adam he could start the next day. It was the weirdest thing, but then again, Cody wasn't exactly human. Maybe he'd seen something in Adam that made him change his mind.

Cody was the only reason he'd asked for work at Del Fantasma. The man had a reputation in the supernatural world. His bar was a haven where they could come and be themselves, hang out among the humans who thought it was all just a joke.

Adam had virtually no experience at any type of work, but that didn't seem to matter when his only duty was to bus tables. More often than not, he stood at the back of the bar, holding his tray and waiting for people to finish their drinks. There was a lot of staff at the bar, and Adam couldn't figure out why Cody had hired him. He didn't seem to need him much.

His oldest sister had told him to look the man up when she heard he intended to go west. It was pretty much why he'd settled in San Diego. He could have gone anywhere, but this was okay. Or, it would have been okay if not for Scott. Adam didn't want to leave, but he needed to do something. Soon.

Cody watched him now, his gaze moving intently over every cut and bruise on Adam's body. That was exactly what it felt like, as if he could see everything that had happened earlier, even the bruises Adam's loose clothing hid. Cody frowned, a hint of fang peaking out when he curled his lip.

Cody opened his mouth, freezing for a moment before his gaze settled on something to Adam's right. Adam wanted to turn to look, but he was afraid to take his attention off Cody. He needed to say something. Geez, what was wrong with him? He was hours late for work, and here he was like a simpleton, just standing in front of the man not even trying to offer him an excuse.

"I'm sorry," he finally whispered, hanging his head.

Cody's attention snapped back to him. "For what? Getting beaten? Or for not telling me you were in trouble? Who touched you? Who laid their hands on you like this?" With each question, Cody's voice dropped lower, the temperature around the bar seemingly dropping as well until Adam shivered, despite himself.

"I-I, uh ... I should get my apron. Right? I st-still have a j-job?"

The glass in Cody's hand shattered, raining clear chunks of glass onto the bar in front of Adam. He flinched, whimpering,

silently cursing himself for his cowardice. Cody wasn't mad at him; he knew that.

"He's a dead man."

"N-no, you don't understand—"

"I don't understand? What don't I understand, Adam? The fact that some man laid his hands on you, beat you, intentionally? He did this on purpose, and if I'm not mistaken, he meant for it to be a lot worse. If you were human, you wouldn't be up and walking right now and you know it."

"No, it wasn't like that. I f-fell. That's all." For some reason, he didn't want his boss to know his shame. What kind of stupid supernatural idiot got beat up by a human? It would never have happened to one of his sisters. They would have torn anyone who tried to pieces. What was wrong with him that he couldn't stand up for himself? To a human, of all things.

A low snarl suddenly filled his ears—a sound no human could make—right before a solid presence towered over him on his right side. Adam jerked, confused. He tilted his head, peering up at the man beside him.

He wasn't huge, not by human standards. He topped six feet but he was wiry, not massively muscled. What Adam could see of his body was corded and strong. Regardless of his size, Adam knew immediately what he was. He had a presence that would make men consider him warily, and women drop their panties the minute he walked into a room. Alpha.

Oh, fiddle sticks. Like his night couldn't get any worse?

Alpha's took. That's what they did. They saw something they wanted, and did everything possible until it was theirs, with no regard to whatever anyone else might think. Oh, sure, they protected what belonged to them, and you'd have to be a complete dummy to go up against one, but you had to *belong* to an Alpha before they'd protect you. Adam hated that word. It was what Scott said to him not hours before. *"You belong to me."*

He wouldn't belong to anyone. Not ever.

"That's got to be the lamest, dumbest, fucking thing I've ever heard. *You fell?*"

"Marcus, calm down."

Strange, but now it was Cody who looked like the more level-headed person. He had his hand out in a placating manner, his voice softer than the wolf who'd almost shouted his words.

The wolf—Marcus—bent his head, sniffing along Adam's cheek, careful of the bruise covering half his face. A soft puff of moist air soothed the worst of the sting on his forehead. Adam purred, briefly, before he realized what he'd done.

He shook his head, silently cursing the ache caused by the abrupt movement. He was actually leaning into the man. His smaller body was angled in as if he accepted the protection offered by the larger man. Accepted it and yearned for it. *Frog legs*, what was wrong with him? Maybe he had a concussion. It was the only explanation.

He couldn't want what Marcus represented—it was abnormal. His dad's voice echoed in his head. "You're a

fucking tabby, start acting like one." It had the effect of splashing cold water on his thoughts.

"Who did this to you?" Marcus' voice was as smooth as smoked whisky. Dark and sweet, that carried an edge you just knew would burn all the way down if you accepted it. He could get lost in a voice like that.

"I-it. Uh..." Helplessly he turned to Cody, appealing to the man with wide eyes. He didn't know what to say. Not wanting to air his dirty laundry right here in the bar, he was conscious of the press of bodies around them. They were safe in a little cocoon of Marcus' making, no one was stupid enough to come close to him right now, but there were just too many people in the bar.

He felt closed in, almost panicky. Too many people.

"Adam, I think you need something strong in you right now. You've suffered a shock."

"Is that a good idea, Cody?" Marcus leaned in, studying Adam's eyes closely. A finely shaped hand cupped his cheek, bringing their faces closer together.

"I know what I'm doing, and trust me, the little cat isn't suffering a concussion."

"You're sure?"

"I can smell the blood, and he's healing as we speak."

Adam looked from one man to the other, following their conversation at first, but deciding to focus solely on Marcus when his vision started to blur. The man was attractive, not pretty-boy handsome, but more mature. He had deep lines beside his eyes, as if he'd either spent a lifetime laughing or frowning. Adam hoped they were laugh lines. Although, he

suspected differently. Marcus looked like the type to take things seriously.

Marcus' eyes were a deep dark chocolate brown—so dark they almost looked black. They were set under thick brows a shade darker than his eyes. When he moved his head, glints of warm russet and brown flashed in the low lights of the bar. His face was tanned and weathered, interesting. It gave him character, made Adam want to learn what had made him into the man he was now.

He was clad in a black tee, nearly molded to his muscular chest. While Adam watched, his nipples beaded under the cloth. Adam gulped, swallowing with his suddenly dry throat.

Spice filled his nose, the spicy scent of the wolf in front of him. He couldn't be attracted to a wolf, how messed up was that?

"What would you like to drink, Adam?" Cody gestured to the rows of bottles lined up like little soldiers behind him.

He swiveled his head to look at Cody. Confused, he frowned. "I, uh, I don't drink."

Cody smirked. "At all?"

"And you work in a bar?" Marcus snorted in disbelief.

He turned to look at Marcus. The man wasn't smiling. *Ookay.*

"Uh, yeah. Ummm ... yes, I do?" He swiveled to look at Cody again.

Cody curled his lip, another hint of fang flashing at him. "If you ask one more time..."

Adam grimaced, nodding. He guessed that meant he still had his job. Heaven knew he wouldn't keep him on if he was

the boss, so it was a good thing Cody was making the decisions.

Cody grinned. "I have the perfect thing in mind for you."

"Is it good?"

"Well, some say it's an acquired taste. The first sip might be too much for you, overpowering as it is. But, I've always been a believer in letting things build. You can't always trust your first sip. It's a good thing to experiment with something you've never tried before. You might grow to love it, once you get used to the burn."

Marcus growled. When Adam turned to glance at him, he caught the man rolling his eyes.

"What's in it?"

"Does it matter, Adam?"

He shook his head. It wasn't as if he was used to drinking, so he probably wouldn't know what it meant anyway if Cody started listing off the ingredients.

He watched Cody mix his drink, pouring it all into a shot glass. It felt weird picking up a bar glass that was full, he was more used to picking up after folks finished their drinks. He glanced at Marcus again, but the man didn't give any indication of his thoughts. If Cody had given him something bad, Marcus didn't move to stop him.

Putting the glass against his lower lip, he considered it for a moment. How the heck did someone drink a shot?

"You have to open your throat. Relax. Besides, you should get used to it."

Adam sputtered, moving the shot glass away just in time. "Wh-why would I have to get used to it?"

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Marcus grinned, raising one eyebrow. "I'm a big man. You don't want to choke, so it's a good idea to learn how to relax your throat now."

Blushing furiously, Adam ducked his head when Cody chuckled. He felt completely out of his element. He didn't know how to respond when someone flirted with him. Wait ... that was what Marcus was doing, right? He shouldn't be even talking to the man, but he couldn't help himself. What was wrong with him? His dad would kill him if he could see him now.

To distract himself, he tipped the shot glass again, opening his mouth and hoping like heck he was relaxing his throat like Marcus told him to. The liquid poured into his mouth, sliding down his throat easily. And then the burning started.

"*Frog legs!*" He bent over, coughing against the flaming taste in his throat.

Marcus started to laugh. "Frog legs?" A warm hand settled on the middle of his back, soothing him when Marcus started to pet his back in long, comforting strokes. "Breathe, little cat. Just breathe in."

He wheezed and choked out, "Wh-what was that?"

Cody pursed his lips. "That, little cat was a Black Wolf. Half an ounce of Green Chartreuse, half an ounce of Black Sambuca and four drops of Tabasco. I told you it was an acquired taste."

"I don't know if I want to try that again."

"It's worth it, once you get past the initial shock. Once you get a taste of a Black Wolf, you'll never want anything else."

Adam felt the heat of his blush again, certain his face was flaming. Why did he get the feeling Cody wasn't talking about the drink?

"I think you should take the night off. You've had a shock, and as much as I need to hear what happened, you shouldn't be out with this many people. Marcus, take him home. Stay with him, and make sure that miserable sack of bones doesn't come back for our little cat. You know what to do if he does. Understand?"

"Oh, but I don't need—
I told you ... I fell..."

"Don't lie to me, Adam. I can smell it when you do. Now go."

Marcus prevented Adam from voicing his objection again by the simple expediency of grabbing the back of his neck in a firm hold.

Adam stepped away from the bar, walking to the door, surrounded by the wolf at his back. No one got in their way. Actually, several people who got a look at Marcus' face just about fell over themselves trying to get *out* of their way.

The cool night air was a balm on his heated face. The door swung shut behind them, and the sudden silence was almost shocking.

Marcus released his neck, grabbed his hand and propelled him over to a big, black four by four at the edge of the parking lot. Without saying a word, he opened the passenger side door, and herded Adam inside. He reached over and buckled Adam's seatbelt, pulling it tight, somehow managing to avoid every one of the many bruises on Adam's torso.

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Adam stared at the door as it shut. What was he going to do now?

Chapter Three

Marcus breathed deeply, trying to calm the wolf. He was so close to losing himself completely. When he'd drawn near to Adam in the bar, he'd scented what he'd missed initially. The blood and pain should have been obvious, but he'd been too absorbed in the scent of his mate to notice the condition of the man.

He wanted to let his wolf out and tear the human responsible limb from limb. He could smell the stink of him, subtly clinging to Adam's skin. He wanted nothing more than to get rid of that stench. The only scent clinging to Adam from now on would be his.

His little tabby was jittery enough, though, without him going all He-Man and demanding answers. He didn't want Adam to get spooked. He needed to relax, and let himself be taken care of first.

Marcus opened his door, immersing himself once more in his mate's tempting fragrance. It was calming, just being beside him. Which should have worked to soothe his beast under normal circumstances, but Marcus was too keyed up right now to even think about being calm. He wouldn't be relaxing any time soon. Although, if he could fuck that tight little ass, he just might. He didn't think Adam was going to go for it though. For a man who worked in a bar, he was surprisingly naïve.

"Which way do I go?"

Adam jerked beside him, turning to consider him out of wide eyes. "Uh, I'm not sure."

Marcus raised a single brow.

"Uh, I'm normally on the bus, I don't know the quickest way there."

"What's the address?"

Adam rattled off the address, twisting his hands in his lap. Yep, there were definitely two very keyed up people in the vehicle. They needed to release some tension before one of them cracked.

Marcus turned on the radio, letting the sound calm Adam. He kept silent on the drive to Adam's apartment, content to just sit and breathe in his mate. His wolf snapped inside him, impatient. He had a hard time believing his mate had been abused the way he had. Mates should be protected, cherished. Instead, his had been beaten.

A low growl trickled out of his throat before he could stop it. Adam shifted on the seat beside him, and Marcus shrugged his shoulders to try and get rid of the ball of tension sitting between his shoulder blades.

Even though he had just met the man, both he and his wolf felt like they'd failed Adam. It was an unsettling feeling, and he didn't like it one bit. He'd never failed on a mission, not in all the years he'd been in the service. He wasn't about to start now. He snorted at the thought of this being a mission, but truth be told, you could take the man out of the military, but you couldn't take the military out of the man.

"Uh, I ... Cody never said..."

Marcus glanced at the other man, raising his brow again.

"He never said who you were."

Frowning, he realized Adam was right. Cody never actually introduced them. Feeling ten kinds of fool, he grinned.

"I'm Marcus Black, served in Special Ops for near about fifteen years. Met Cody overseas a time or two. He must have heard I left the service, since he sent me a message a few months back extending an offer to come visit whenever I felt like it. I needed a bit of a break, didn't have anything planned, so took him up on it."

"Hi." Adam grinned back, cheekily.

His wolf growled, turned on by that glimpse of humor. It was gratifying to see he had a spirit inside him. He wasn't beaten down. Good. It would just take a bit of loving care, and he should have his mate back to normal in no time.

"And you, baby?"

"Oh, I'm Adam Bates. I, uh, came here a few weeks ago, looking for, well ... Looking for something different."

"Different how?"

"Well, I grew up in a house with three older sisters and pretty protective parents. When I turned twenty, I-I ... Something happened. Anyway, I figured I needed a change. To find out what I really wanted, not what my parents wanted, you know? It took me a year to figure out that meant I had to leave home. My birthday was last month, and I decided then that I needed to get out. Explore a bit more of the world. I didn't really know where to start, and my oldest sister said I should come to San Diego and see if Cody needed extra help around the place. I think she figured if I was here, I'd be around other supernaturals and wouldn't feel

too out of place. Either that or she figured I was going to screw up royally, and thought Cody could help me. I guess she was right."

He looked dejected.

Marcus glanced at the other man, trying to figure out what to say. He wasn't good with words. "She wasn't right. It wasn't your fault you got mixed up with a fucked up excuse for a human being. Why should you expect people to abuse you? If you grew up in surroundings like that, you probably weren't expecting what happened."

"Yeah, I guess." He smelled dejected, a bitter scent that had Marcus wrinkling his nose.

"You said something happened. What?"

"Oh, I-I, it doesn't matter."

"Don't lie to me. I want to know what made you leave home."

Adam shifted again, curling his shoulders in and ducking his head.

"Adam."

"My dad caught me with another boy. He was giving me a birthday kiss, and when my dad saw it, he was furious. We aren't supposed to be with other men, it's abnormal, he said. I-I d-didn't think he was right."

"What happened to the other boy?"

"Oh, he was just fooling around, it wasn't serious for him."

"But it was for you?" Marcus had to stop himself from screaming, 'mine!' He hated the idea of Adam with anyone but him, but his mate needed him to be calm right now. He would rein his instincts in if it killed him.

"Not really. I mean, not with him. I was curious, but I didn't love him or anything."

Marcus grinned. "It isn't abnormal. Your father is wrong. Love is never abnormal. And you will be serious about me, is that clear?"

Adam giggled, a burst of sound in the truck. "Are you going to give me a choice here?"

"It's too late for that, baby."

Swallowing loud enough for Marcus to hear, Adam simply nodded. He twisted his hands in his lap. "I thought you'd say that."

Out of things to say, Marcus let the silence take over again. He'd just have to prove it to the tabby that they belonged together. He wasn't going to let anyone hurt him again.

"It's just on the right, up ahead." Adam's scent intensified, fear filling the inside of the truck.

Marcus pulled over to the side of the road, placing his hand over Adam's in his lap. "I won't let him hurt you."

Adam nodded. "He probably won't be there. I think Scott had a poker game anyway. It'll take him most of the night."

"You aren't going to try and pretend like you fell?"

"What's the point? You know I didn't fall. I don't want to lie to you."

"Good."

They got out of the truck, Marcus coming around to take Adam by the arm. He didn't need the tabby to show him the way, Adam's scent was strong in front of his building and Marcus could follow the trail blindfolded if he needed to.

They walked up the stairs, Marcus inhaling deeply to pick out the different scents. There was no one home on Adam's floor, although he wrinkled his nose at the strong odor of overcooked beef and spices coming from one apartment. Stopping in front of Adam's door, Marcus had to restrain his wolf again. He could clearly see where the other man had busted open Adam's door. Pushing the door open, he got his first glimpse at what had happened to Adam earlier.

He snarled, pacing around the small room. It was tiny, cramped, and made his wolf vibrate with disgust. This was barely fit for human occupation, and was no place for a sweet little tabby cat.

Adam picked up a chair, setting it to rights. He remained silent, not looking at Marcus.

Marcus twitched, reaching Adam in two strides. Grabbing the man's shoulders, he hauled him up until they were eye to eye. "He'll never touch you again. Do you hear me?"

"I think the neighbors down the street can hear you."

Pausing, Marcus realized Adam wasn't afraid of him in the least. Good, his mate should never fear him, though Marcus knew he came on strong occasionally. But, it was mind boggling that a man who'd just been beaten and terrified should stand up and make jokes when Marcus' wolf was barely hanging on. He was probably a lot fucking scarier than some pissant human.

It was the first time he realized the mate bond went both ways. It would be impossible for Marcus to abuse Adam because of the mate bond. He'd rather cut off his own arm than ever raise it to strike Adam. Maybe Adam realized that.

"You'd never hurt me, Marcus. I'm not a complete dummy."

Marcus frowned.

"Sorry, it's just your thoughts were clear on your face just then."

"We need to talk."

"I'd rather not."

"I'd rather we did."

Adam grinned tiredly. "I'm about to fall over right now. I think I'm crashing."

"Fuck! I'm sorry, baby." Marcus picked the smaller man up in his arms, carrying him over to the bed set against the wall. Cursing himself, he couldn't believe he hadn't noticed when Adam started to fade. Granted, it had been a strange night for both of them.

"I just need to lay down for a bit. I'll be better in a ... minute." He blinked, closing his eyes. Without another word, he was asleep.

Marcus shook his head in disbelief. He'd seen some guys fall asleep at the drop of a hat when he was overseas, but this was ridiculous. Adam was curled up, completely zonked out. Maybe they shouldn't have given him the drink. Although, it might be better that he was asleep right now. He needed to rest, and let his body heal itself.

He cleaned up while Adam slept, hearing an occasional snore escaping the smaller man. Marcus chuckled, adjusting his cock where it pressed up against his zipper. He was seriously fucked when a snore turned him on.

Rigging the door took a bit of work, but he finally had it closed and locked to his liking. He wasn't too worried as long as he was inside with Adam, but he didn't want to be caught unawares. If that bastard came back for another shot at Adam, he'd find a much bigger threat inside. Marcus wouldn't stop himself from ripping the man a new asshole.

He settled himself in the ripped and faded armchair. It wasn't comfortable, but he'd been in worse positions over the years. He didn't trust himself to get too close to Adam right now. He'd better keep his distance until the other man was ready for him. But, Adam better be prepared. The minute he showed any indication he was up for more, Marcus was going to be on him like fucking white on rice.

Chapter Four

It was the noise that woke him. Adam froze before he realized it was the soft shushing of the shower. Last night came back to him in a rush of memories, at once overwhelmingly frightening, and unbearably sexy. He couldn't believe he had a man in his apartment, one he was attracted to in the worst way. A twinge of guilt settled in his chest, but he ignored it. He refused to care what anyone said, this was what he wanted. Wasn't it?

Stretching, he realized he was nearly completely healed. Unfortunately, he was also completely clothed. Wasn't there a rule that when some drop dead gorgeous man brought you home, he was supposed to ply you with liquor and take advantage of you? Well, he'd gotten the liquor, but he still felt achingly pure. *Frog legs*, he needed to get laid. Snorting, he figured if his family had their way, he'd be back home with a parcel of female felines right now.

Adam peeled off his clothes, letting them drop beside the bed. He wished he'd gotten the chance to shower last night before lying down to sleep. If he could do it all over, he'd definitely have that shower. He was still covered in various places with dried blood. It wasn't exactly the most comfortable sensation. Okay, fine, it was disgustingly gross.

Finally naked, he lay on his side for a minute, listening to the shower. Marcus was going to run out of hot water soon. Although, he had no idea how long the man had been in there. Maybe he was already showering with cold water. He

kind of hoped he was, since a cold shower meant he might be nearing his breaking point where Adam was concerned. Was it wrong to hope your savior ravaged your body? He was so ready to be ravaged. Past ready, actually. Heck, he'd already gotten in trouble for it when he'd never even done more than kiss. He might as well actually be guilty of what his father accused him of.

He hunched his shoulders, sighing. He hated feeling torn like this. The years of conditioning in which he was supposed to follow in his dad's footsteps wasn't easy to get rid of. He had no intention of settling down with a few females. It wasn't going to happen.

Adam concentrated, feeling the tingling in his limbs that signaled his change. He didn't know how Marcus shapeshifted, if it was anyway similar to him, but he'd always loved shifting. It felt freeing, natural. His limbs shortened, his tail grew out from the base of his spine, lush fur sprouted along his body, and aches and pains he hadn't known he'd had all of a sudden disappeared.

His weight balanced out and his every sense grew sharper. He heard Mrs. Jamison down the hallway as she watched her morning program, heard the cloth Marcus used to clean himself with as it ran over his skin, and smelled the eggs Tommy in the apartment below him was eating for breakfast. He knew it was Tommy since the kid was the only person Adam knew that put ketchup on his eggs.

Marcus sighed in the next room, the sound amplified by the acoustics in the bathroom. It sounded like Marcus was

going to be in there for awhile. Just enough time for Adam to groom himself while he had a bit of privacy.

He started with his paws, licking them clean, before making sure to get every bit of skin and fur he could reach. He realized he was purring, and smiled as much as he could in this form. It was weird, but he felt completely safe. Marcus would hear if anything happened, and he was sure the man would be able to take on Scott blindfolded, with both arms tied behind his back. For the first time in several weeks, he felt safe.

Adam blinked, changing back to his human form. He felt better, stronger, than he had before. The uninterrupted sleep, coupled with his shifting, healed the majority of his aches. A few more shifts between human and cat form, and he'd be good as new. Better probably. He'd had a stress headache for a few days, and it was finally gone.

Of course, there were still things that needed to be dealt with. There was that whole business with Scott in the first place. He'd confronted the man for a reason, and despite Scott's denial, he knew the man was to blame. There was no other answer. Maybe Marcus could help him. No, that wasn't a good idea. He'd need to see Scott again to get everything sorted out and the last thing he needed was to bring Marcus into contact with Scott. That would be a disaster waiting to happen.

Adam scratched his belly, noticing a flick of blood on his thigh he'd missed when he'd groomed himself before. Drats. Rounding his spine, thankful for his tabby heritage that made him way more flexible than the average person, Adam licked

his thigh just above his knee. He'd gone to a yoga class once with his youngest sister, and the instructor constantly had to chastise him for overextending every pose. He just couldn't help it. Raising the leg higher, he cocked his hip, reaching with his tongue for another spot on the inside of his thigh.

"Fuck me..." The words were low and drawn out, pained.

Adam froze, not moving a single muscle. He'd been so caught up in what he was doing he hadn't even realized the door to the bathroom had opened.

Shifting his gaze, Adam looked over at Marcus, embarrassed beyond anything he'd ever felt, that Marcus had caught him almost licking his balls. Hell, he was just about to go to town with his licking there. Trying for nonchalance, he lowered his leg, raising his hand to scratch his ear.

"N-nice shower?" He could barely get the words out of his suddenly dry mouth. Marcus had one of Adam's small white towels slung around his hips. The things were nearly threadbare, and he really should have bought new ones, but right now he was glad he hadn't. The thin cotton was molded to Marcus' damp body, highlighting the muscles that were now tensed. His legs were long, and his calves were shapely enough to have Adam purring. He was a sucker for nice legs on a guy. Marcus had a nice body, period, not an ounce of fat anywhere on him.

Marcus growled, the sound vibrating through the room. It wasn't anything a human throat should be able to produce. It made the little hairs on his body stand at attention and he shivered.

Striding across the room, Marcus was suddenly in front of him. His large hands came up, pushing Adam to his back on the bed. "Let me help you with that."

Before Adam could open his mouth to respond, Marcus had shimmied down the bed, ending up with his head near Adam's crotch. A long, wet tongue darted out, tasting the same spot on his thigh that he'd just licked.

Adam moaned, his voice almost drowned by the heated snarl from Marcus.

Tossing his head, Adam closed his eyes at the feel of Marcus between his legs. He almost bit his tongue when Marcus plied that long appendage to the crease of his groin. Jerking his hips, he whimpered.

"I fucking love that. Your body is so sensitive."

Adam couldn't respond verbally, the moisture in his mouth had up and vacated without him noticing. He could only nod.

"Mmm, I love the feel of your skin. Like silk."

Marcus ran his hands down Adam's legs. Everywhere he touched, Adam's muscles jerked and danced for him. The small hairs covering his body were standing straight up. If he was in his cat form, with his thicker overgrowth of fur, he'd be puffed up like a blowfish. Oh, *frog legs*, he'd thought the word *blow*.

His cock jerked to attention, standing up proud and just about waving at Marcus from between his legs. He felt hard enough to be able to hammer nails with the darn thing. He'd never felt this way before.

Licking his way down Adam's legs, Marcus paid special attention to the soft skin behind his knees, reducing Adam to

a whimpering, quivering mass of flesh. He'd never last if Marcus kept this up. He was about to blow at any minute. Oh, no, he'd thought the word blow again.

His cock throbbed, weeping from the slit. It was flushed red, throbbing in time with his heartbeat. Which was a little fast at the moment. He prayed he wouldn't up and die from a heart attack. That'd probably be awkward for Marcus to explain.

"Please, please, please, please..."

"Please what, baby? Talk to me."

"Oh, *frog legs*. Marcus..."

Marcus chuckled, laying his head against Adam's thigh. He blew a puff of heated air onto his cock, making it jerk again. Adam cried out, almost undone from that touch of air. He was afraid to have Marcus touch that one part of his body. He'd never survive it.

Marcus must have agreed with him because he moved higher on Adam's body, sucking up a mark on his belly before nibbling his way to Adam's chest. Whimpering, shaking hard enough to rattle the headboard, Adam waited impatiently.

"I'm going to dirty up that pretty mouth of yours, baby. I'll have you saying the naughtiest things before we're done here. That's a promise."

"Oh, oh..."

"Not yet. You're going to hold on just a bit longer for me. I don't want you coming yet. Understand?"

Marcus raised his hand, bringing it to the side of Adam's face. They studied each other from inches away, Adam

panting loudly. He felt like he was hyperventilating. Gosh, he was loud.

"I-I ... Please, Marcus. I need..."

"What, baby? What do you need?"

"I-I..." He had no idea how to ask for what he needed. Glaring at the wolf, he pursed his lips. Marcus was the one with all the experience, why was he making Adam tell him what to do? He felt like an idiot because he didn't know what to ask for. Already this was more than he'd ever done. More than he'd even dreamed of doing lately. The only men in his life lately had been Cody—who he wasn't attracted to—and Scott. He'd rather swallow turpentine than kiss him.

"Come on, baby. Say the words. Fuck me, Marcus. Say it." Marcus ran his palms down Adam's body, reaching around and cupping his ass and squeezing gently. He was making little circles on Adam's skin with his fingertips.

Adam panted, eyes wide as he considered the other man. He couldn't say that! Could he? Shy, he ducked his head.

Marcus chuckled. "You'll say it before we're done. That's a promise, since I won't be touching *this*," he emphasized his words with a tap to Adam's ass, "until you ask me nicely."

He could only shake his head, too overwhelmed by everything that was happening. He couldn't control what was going on. For a minute, he was reminded of Scott earlier. He'd had no control then, either. Panicking slightly, he jerked in Marcus' hold.

"Whoa, no you don't. I can practically see the wheels turning in that pretty little head of yours. Is that about the human?"

"Scott." He tried to pull air into his lungs, breathing loudly.

"He has no place here, got that. What happened before has nothing to do with now."

"I-I, I couldn't ... he ... I couldn't stop him."

"Okay, you couldn't stop him. So, take it back."

"What?"

"Take it back. You feel weak, is that right? You couldn't control what happened before and now you want that control back?"

Adam nodded reluctantly, not wanting Marcus to move from where he'd sprawled on top of him. "But, that has nothing to do with—"

"I didn't say it did. You felt powerless to stop him, despite being stronger than him. Did you fight back?"

"I tried, but..."

"But what?"

"He hit me in the head first, I couldn't concentrate enough to fight him after that. Every time I tried, I got dizzy. I couldn't stop him."

Marcus smoothed his palms along Adam's sides again, turning them over until Adam lay on top.

"So, fight me."

"What? Are you crazy?" He tried to push himself up but the other man was holding him down.

"Sometimes you have to lose control to gain it. Fight me, hit me, bite me. Do whatever you want, anything you wanted to do to him. You can't hurt me."

"I-I couldn't."

"You could. Take it back. Show me you're not some weak-willed pussy." Marcus grinned widely, looking exactly like his wolf counterpart.

"Don't call me that!"

"Or what, pussy? Whatcha going to do? Pussy. Is da wittle pussy mad at me?"

Adam balled his fist, thumping it on Marcus' chest. "I told you not to call me that."

"Make me stop. C'mon, pussy. Make me stop."

Something snapped inside Adam, a release that pinged its way through his body. He hissed, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up. Without even thinking about it, he raised his left arm, swiping it down at Marcus in one fast motion. Marcus blocked him, chuckling and enraging Adam even more. This wasn't funny!

Marcus rolled with him, and Adam erupted into a hissing, spitting ball of energy. He wasn't completely aware of his actions. A part of him was horrified, but the majority of him was overjoyed that he could finally let it out. Let out all the tension that had been building up inside him.

He knew at least one of his blows had hit Marcus, the scent of blood filled the room. Marcus held him down, moving with him, evading him when he could. They rolled again and again, staying on the bed by some miracle. He had a feeling the wolf was letting his strikes hit where he wanted. He realized it was true when the man shifted easily to block Adam's knee that came perilously close to his groin.

He paused, shocked at himself. He'd never done anything like that. Marcus held him, loosely enough he could pull away

at any minute. They'd ended up with Adam on top again. Figuratively speaking, of course. Huffing for breath, Adam let his body relax into the other man, feeling the tension he'd been holding for weeks just let go. Marcus wouldn't hurt him.

"Better now?"

He nodded, pressing his lips to the wolf's shoulder in gratitude.

"Good, cause I'm in control here." Marcus nipped his shoulder in retaliation, soothing the bite with his long tongue.

Adam jerked, realizing neither one of their erections had faded at all. If anything, he was probably harder than before.

He propped himself up, managing to sit with his knees clasped to either side of his wolf, and his ass planted firmly on Marcus' pelvis. The other man's shaft pressed up behind him, insistent. Marcus' hands slid down to grasp his hips. Licking his lips, he realized he had a prime opportunity in front of him right now. He wasn't about to let it slip through his fingers. Flexing said fingers, he tentatively touched Marcus' chest, testing the muscles, running the pads of his fingers over his nipples.

Marcus tossed his head, baring his teeth. His hands wandered over Adam's skin at the same time, finally ending up between his legs, cupping his balls. Adam gasped, squeezing his knees to either side of Marcus' chest.

"I thought I was imagining this the first time I saw it. This isn't hair, is it?" Marcus rolled his fingers, kneading his testicles with a firm grip.

Adam blushed, feeling the heat creep up his chest and bloom on his cheeks. He shook his head.

"You don't actually have hair, do you?"

Adam shook his head again.

"Anywhere?"

He shrugged. "Most people don't know the difference. They think my hair's just really soft, but it's not. It's fur. Even the hair on my body, it's really just a very fine covering of fur."

Marcus growled, touching his balls. "I fucking love this. You literally have a furry nut sac. God, what that does to me."

"Yeah?"

"Oh yeah, baby. I love it. Can't you feel me? I'm about to burst and I haven't even gotten to the good parts. Just touching you like this is almost enough to have me shooting off."

Overcome with pride, Adam rubbed his cheek on his shoulder, too choked up to say anything. Marcus slapped his ass, causing Adam to buck.

"Enough sap, get up here so I can suck this pretty thing."

Marcus didn't give him much of a choice. Adam was suddenly being pulled up Marcus' chest, ending up with his knees on either side of the man's head. He gazed down at him in disbelief, unable to tear his gaze away from the sight of his cock inches away from those luscious lips. He'd never thought a man could have attractive lips, but everything about Marcus turned him on. Just did it for him, plain and simple.

Those lips were now fitting themselves to the head of his cock, and he hissed at the warm, welcoming feeling. It was unlike anything he'd ever felt before. Going back to jerking off

would never be the same after this. He'd just have to keep the man. Could he do that?

"Marcus, please."

Marcus hummed, sending vibrations up his shaft, and setting off rockets in Adam's brain. He sucked strongly, concaving his cheeks and nearly pulling Adam's brain out. He wasn't going to last long. Already his balls were drawn up tight, rubbing against Marcus' chin, the five o'clock shadow that rasped the skin and drove him that much more out of his mind.

He jerked his hips, uncontrollably, short little stabs into Marcus' mouth. Oh, it felt incredible. "So incredi ... ah ... ble. Marcus!"

His sac drew up tight, the pressure built in the base of his spine and he squeezed his eyes shut as his entire body throbbed and jerked within Marcus' strong hold. Marcus swallowed his cum, humming again. Whimpering, Adam collapsed forward, barely catching himself with his forearms. His head smacked into the headboard, then he was suddenly lifted in strong arms.

"Hey, hey, you okay there?"

Marcus smoothed his palm over the fur at his forehead, probably checking for the bump. Adam thought he might have said something, but he was so out of it, he wouldn't be surprised to learn he was drooling. He felt turned inside out, drained, so relaxed he could just sink into the bed now and sleep forever.

"Whoa, don't be leaving me hanging here, baby. Guess I need to get you up again, so to speak."

Smiling lazily, Adam let Marcus turn him over until he was laying on his back on the bed. Marcus leaned over him, grinning down at him. "You look like the cat that ate the canary. Good for you, baby?"

Adam nodded, utterly boneless.

"Mind if I get my nut now?" Marcus chuckled.

Waving his hand, Adam smiled.

"Oh, thanks, Majesty. So glad to have your agreement."

They both laughed, although Adam's was a lot more sated than Marcus. The other man sounded like he was hanging on by a thread.

He reared up, fitting himself between Adam's thighs. His cock bumped Adam's ass, causing him to close his eyes in wonder. It still felt amazing. His shaft twitched, returning interest.

"Remember what I said?"

"Hmmm?"

"About dirtying up this pretty little mouth of yours. What do you want? Want me to fuck you?"

Adam nodded, shyly.

"Say the words."

"I-I can't."

"Say the words."

"Oh, *frog legs*..."

"Oh, I'm sorry contestant number one, that answer is incorrect."

Adam wheezed out a breathy chuckle at that.

"Say the words." Marcus tapped his hole with his finger, pressing against the pucker.

"Oh God, Marcus, fuck me..."

"And that, baby, will get you anything."

Marcus began to pull back. Panicked, Adam wound his legs around the other man's hips, holding him tight. "No, no no no no, don't go."

"I need lube, baby, that's it."

"Don't go."

Marcus groaned, leaning down until their lips touched. He thrust his tongue into Adam's mouth and he happily accepted it.

A loud bang reverberated through the room, and suddenly Marcus' weight was gone. Adam screamed, looking wildly around and spying the five men standing in his doorway.

One of the men stepped forward, scowling at them. Oh, *frog legs*, Scott...

"You think you can escape me that easily? You think you can bring some fucking asshole in here and I'm just going to let it go? That I wouldn't know about it? *This is my fucking place!* Did I shake something loose earlier, or are you really that stupid to think I'd let you get away with this? Boys, take care of his little friend."

Chapter Five

Marcus exploded into action, shapeshifting in midair to meet the first of the men who came toward them. Three of them had baseball bats, but he had them at a disadvantage. They sure as shit hadn't expected to find Adam with someone that could become a snarling wolf. The first man was easy to take down, shocked as he was.

Marcus hit him full on with his weight, pushing him back into the other men. Lucky for him, the man fell wrong and ended up knocking himself out on one of the bats that came up in a reflexive action. The man holding the bat swore loudly, unable to get out of the way before his legs were taken out from under him with the added weight of the falling man.

Jumping out of the way, Marcus went for the next attacker. Someone got in a lucky blow and his involuntary whine filled the room. Disorientated for a minute, he was unable to get away from the man. The bastard lifted his leg and kicked Marcus hard in the ribs. Whining again, he shook it off and charged the asshole. Snapping his jaws into the first bit of skin he could reach, he gloried as the skin on the man's family jewels gave way and he tasted blood. The man dropped hard, screaming in agony.

Without pausing, Marcus turned on the third man, conscious that there were still two others. He couldn't let them get to Adam. Desperation made him clumsy and one of the men got in another lucky shot with his baseball bat.

Black Wolf [Del Fantasma]
by Jade Buchanan

Behind him, he heard Adam scream. Fear filled his mind, an unfamiliar emotion. He'd fought in countless battles, against battle-hardened men and suicidal fanatics, but this was the first time he felt fear grip him. Freeze him. Shit, he needed to shake out of this.

Two of the remaining men fell on him, cursing and shouting as they tried to subdue him. He let his wolf out completely, surrendering to the wildness inside him. His wolf snarled, clamping his jaws on one of the men, tasting blood while the other man tried to tear him off.

Suddenly, without warning, the man at his back was pulled away. Marcus scented coyote, but he was too distracted to worry about that right now.

The loud scream of an angry cat sounded, and he could hear a man screaming. He dispatched the man he was fighting, taking advantage of his distraction by clamping his jaws around the man's throat. Pressing down carefully, he waited until the man stopped flailing his limbs and passed out.

Spinning in place, he shapeshifted quickly, brushing off the vertigo when he turned back into his human form.

Matt "Texas" Martinez was standing in front of him, the man who'd been attacking Marcus was on the floor at his feet. He nodded once to the man, before turning to see what was making all the racket. There was still one man left.

He just about swallowed his tongue at the sight before him.

The last man was on the floor, his hands held protectively in front of his face. He was whimpering, jerking his body to try to get away from the spitting terror on his chest.

Adam had shifted into his tabby form and was tearing strips off the man. Bloody gouges covered his arms, chest and what they could see of his face.

Matt chuckled, leaning up against the wall. "Cody's never going to believe this."

Marcus shook his head. "Baby, let the man up now."

Adam ignored him, hissing at the man and deliberately swiping his paw over the man's forehead.

"Baby, enough."

Exasperated, Marcus walked over to Adam, picking the tabby up by the scruff of his neck. Adam mewled, hanging limp in his hold. Marcus held him up until he could look in the cat's eyes. "I said enough."

Adam lowered his lids, swishing his tail back and forth. If looks could kill...

Marcus lowered him until he was sitting on the bed. "Change back."

Adam shifted shapes, his lean body coming into view. His very naked body.

"Fuck, Texas, turn around. Adam, put some damn clothes on."

"Oh, for the love of ... I wasn't looking. I have a mate, thank you very much."

Marcus growled, still uncomfortable around the coyote, but realizing he owed the man much.

"Thank you."

"That must have hurt." Texas grinned widely at him.

Marcus decided the best thing to do would be to ignore the man. "Can you help clean up here?"

Texas nodded and turned to kick one of the men. "Move."

The man squeaked, but stood up on shaky legs. Marcus stared at him. Turning to Adam, he gestured to the room at large.

"Adam, what just happened here? Start at the beginning."

Adam finished pulling his tee on over his loose jeans. He shrugged. "You know I only came here a few weeks ago?"

Marcus nodded and gestured for him to continue.

"Well, I wanted to prove to my family I didn't need their help. My dad hasn't exactly been the most supportive person to be around lately, and I guess I didn't want him to say, I told you so. I found this ad in the newspaper the first day I arrived. It looked okay, but I'd only been here a few days when Scott started coming around."

Adam stopped to kick the man at his feet. The one he'd torn to shreds. Scott groaned, rolling over to his stomach. Marcus couldn't hold his grin in. He felt proud enough to fucking burst. His little cat found his claws.

"Anyway, Scott mentioned that he'd be willing to lower my rent since I didn't have a job yet. When I asked why he'd do that, he said that he'd be willing to lower my rent if I was willing to lower something else for him. He wanted to ... you know."

"Yeah, baby, I know." Marcus growled, his wolf's hackles rising again. The fucking bastard tried to take advantage of his mate. He was a dead man.

"I went out right away and found Del Fantasma. My sister had given me the address and told me to look Cody up, and I figured it was the best chance I had of getting a job. When I told Scott I had a job, he flipped out. I don't know how he did it, but he must have accessed my account from the blank check I gave him when I moved in. I tried to buy milk yesterday and it said I had insufficient funds. I knew I had enough money, but he somehow managed to clear out my bank account!" Adam's voice rose with each word until he was just about in a fit.

Marcus stepped forward, pulling his mate into his arms. "We'll get it fixed, I promise. This fucker is never going to touch you again, isn't that right?"

Bending down, he grabbed Scott by the back of his neck. He pulled the man up until he could stare into his eyes. Letting his own eyes shift to wolf amber, he let a soft snarl trickle out. "You are going to walk down those stairs, go back to whatever hell you came out of, and you'll never bother him again. You will reverse whatever you did to his bank account, and within ten minutes of you leaving this apartment, all his money will be returned. In fact, you will also return whatever rent he's already paid on this place and you'll throw in a nice bonus for the furniture you destroyed. If you even think about him in an inappropriate way, I will find out about it. And trust me, my claws are a hell of a lot bigger than his. You don't want to fuck with me. Got that?"

If Scott nodded any harder, he would be in danger of snapping his neck. "Get out of my sight before I change my mind. Oh, and Scott? If any of your friends even think about

coming near Adam, I'm going to come after you. So you better keep them in line. Consider this the termination of Adam's tenancy. He won't be needing this apartment anymore." He squeezed his hand, glorying in the small whimpers coming from the human. The acrid scent of urine filled the air, and Marcus thrust the man away.

They watched Scott run to the door, not even bothering to take his friends with him. The others stumbled in their haste to get out. Texas helped one of the men along but grabbing him by the arm and pushing him out the door.

When they were alone, Marcus gave in to his need to touch his mate, pulling Adam into his arms. The other man clung to him, shaking.

He considered Texas, nodding to the man. "I'm in your debt. How did you know to come here?"

"Cody phoned me, said he thought something might happen and asked if I'd come over."

"Cody?"

"Yeah, that man has talents."

They both shared a knowing look. Matt nodded at them both, "I'll see you at the bar later."

"Thanks."

"Don't worry about it. I figure you'll be torn up enough at having a coyote come to your rescue." He left, chuckling.

"God damned coyote bastard."

Adam hit him on the chest, grinning. "You can't call him that, he helped us."

"Yeah, but from what I saw, you didn't need that much help."

Blushing, Adam ducked his head. "I did good?"

"Oh, baby, you did great. You found your control. Well, you were mostly out of control, but you know what I mean."

Adam laughed brightly. "I don't know what happened to me. I was stunned when they came in. I still can't believe how fast you reacted, and all I could do was sit on the bed in shock. When that man hit you, I just saw red. I didn't even realize I'd shifted until I was jumping on Scott."

"Don't remind me of what we were doing when they came in. I think I have blue balls."

Adam ducked his head, studying said balls. "Nope, they look pretty tanned to me. Not a hint of blue in sight."

Marcus snorted, pulling Adam in tighter to him. "You owe me a fuck, baby."

Chapter Six

Adam was so ready to jump Marcus when he realized the other man suddenly had the funniest look on his face.

"What's wrong?"

"Fuck, we can't have sex here."

"What? You were fine with it before."

"Yeah, and that was before the fucking coyote came in and stunk up the place with his scent. I can't have sex when I can still smell god damned coyote all over the place. It's enough to have me lose wood."

Adam bucked his hips. "Doesn't feel like you've lost wood."

"Baby, please." Marcus' face was strained.

"Oh God, you're serious?" He couldn't help it. The first chuckle caught him off guard, and he was just about on the floor laughing when he saw the disgust on Marcus' face. The other man ignored him, turning to pull on his clothes with brisk motions.

Marcus stood with his hands on his hips, frowning. "It's not funny."

He let out another chuckle before reigning in his humor. "Oh, I think it is."

"Let's go, I can't stay here."

Adam guffawed, tears running down his face as he lost it again. It took him precious minutes to get himself under control. The occasional chuckle slipped out, but Marcus finally cracked a smile. Adam threw up his hands, letting Marcus usher him out of the apartment and down the stairs.

"Where are we going?"

"I need a drink, and we should probably update Cody on what's happened."

"I think Matt might have gone to do that already."

Marcus held open his door for him, waiting until Adam had his belt buckled before closing it gently. He rounded the truck, slipping into the driver's seat.

They were silent on the way to Del Fantasma, but it was a nice silence. He didn't see the need to let unnecessary words fill the space, and it was nice that Marcus felt the same.

When they reached the bar, it was almost packed. They parked in the farthest corner of the parking lot and Marcus growled a bit about having to walk out in the open. They paused at the front of the truck, staring at the sea of cars between them and the doors to the bar.

"He's not going to bother us again, you said it yourself."

"I'd feel a lot better about it if the fucker was dead."

Adam ducked his head, trying to hide his grin. Marcus was definitely a force to be reckoned with, but he'd realized in the past day that the man liked to bluster. Oh, he could back up his claims with brute force, but darned if the man didn't like to threaten and growl a lot.

"Don't think I didn't see that smile. You're laughing at me, and you'll pay for it later, trust me."

Adam was about to respond when a familiar scent caught his attention. "Marcus, why does it smell like you here?"

If he wasn't mistaken that was a blush creeping up Marcus' face. Adam crowed, bouncing in place. "It is your scent!"

What'd you do, mark your territory by pissing in the parking lot?"

"It smelled like the fucking coyote all over the damned place. What was I supposed to do? Couldn't breathe without snorting coyote dander."

His shoulders shaking, Adam turned his grin on Marcus, batting his lashes. "Of course, you simply had no choice. I understand." He hiccupped, trying to swallow his laughter.

A rumbling snarl was his only warning before Marcus had him pinned to the hood of the four by four. "I think someone needs to be taught a lesson again."

"Frog legs, Marcus, we can't here..."

"What did I tell you about using that phrase, baby?" Marcus cupped Adam through his jeans, squeezing his rapidly hardening dick.

"Oh, oh, Marcus..."

"Tell me what I said."

"Not to, I'm not s'posed to, uh!" Marcus squeezed his fingers, putting pressure on Adam's cock. He pressed his forehead to the heated metal, curling and uncurling his fingers.

"Yeah, that's right. What are you supposed to say instead?"

"Please..."

"Nuh uh, baby, that's not it."

He shivered at the promise in Marcus' voice. It was sinful the way the man could curl his toes with just a simple phrase. He was almost crooning to Adam, his voice pitched low.

"Fuck," he whispered.

"Almost there, say the rest."

Marcus pulled up the front of Adam's shirt, pressing him back down until he was splayed out on the hood, his bare chest pressed up against the vehicle. His nimble fingers made short work of Adam's fly and suddenly his pants were sliding down to his ankles. Marcus kicked his legs out, getting him to widen his stance. Adam pressed his aching cock into the metal at his front; unable to believe they were here, doing this.

The scent of lube filled the air. He had no idea where Marcus had gotten the stuff, but he didn't care right now. Wet fingertips circled his ass, pressing and releasing before thrusting deep. After a few teasing strokes, Marcus removed his fingers, backing up until Adam was left panting on the hood, alone. He almost whimpered at the desertion. He needed Marcus, after everything that went on before with Scott. Marcus made him feel safe and wanted ... loved. His heart clenched at the emotion filling his chest.

The snick of metal striking metal as Marcus undid his belt was followed by the slow slide of his zipper. Pressure on his back alerted him to Marcus' presence again. Cloth rubbed against his skin and he realized Marcus was still fully clothed except for where he undid his pants.

"You going to strip search me, officer? I swear, I'm a good boy, never gotten into any trouble before this." He wiggled his hips, gratified to feel the heated length of Marcus' shaft against his ass.

Marcus rumbled, leaning down until his cheek rubbed against Adam's. "I knew you were going to be a handful, boy."

Now, open this hungry ass for me. You wanted a search, and I think I can oblige you."

Adam groaned loudly, before realizing where they were. Heck, someone could come upon them at any minute. What were they thinking? A heavy presence bumped against his ass, and he arched his back. Oh, he didn't care, he needed this. He was dying to be with Marcus in the most intimate way he could. Only, he didn't think he'd be able to last long. He was going to scream the sky down if he didn't find some way of silencing himself. His control wasn't worth much right about now. Moving one arm, he brought it beneath his head, sinking his teeth into his skin to keep the worst of his screams silent.

"Nuh uh, the only one allowed to mark your skin is me, baby. You want to sink those little teeth into something, you bite me."

Marcus' arm was thrust in front of his face, and Adam gratefully took him up on his offer. His entire being was taken over by the wolf. His scent filled his nose, his taste filled his mouth, and his dick slowly filled his ass. Nerve endings screamed, sending pleasure through his body. He barely felt a twinge of pain as Marcus slid in without a hitch. He could feel everything though, every brush of flesh, the thick cock stretching him to his limit. Oh, *frog legs* ... he clenched his ass, feeling his balls draw up tight.

"Please, oh please."

"This what you want? You like me filling you up, marking you, owning you?"

Adam bucked his hips, thrust forward into the truck with every move Marcus made. The other man set up a punishing rhythm, pounding them both toward release. He could feel it, almost there. He mewled, scrambling for purchase on the metal under him. He needed to hold something, claw something.

"Yeah, you want to sink those little claws into my back again? Nothing I want more, baby, but I'm too close to ... ah ... stop."

Marcus thrust again and again, his growl trickling out. Adam squeezed his ass, almost undone at the hot presence inside him. Marcus reached down pressing his free hand in between Adam's body and the truck. His thumb swiped over the head of Adam's cock and that was it for him. He screamed into Marcus' arm, his orgasm catching him unawares. It must have been too much for Marcus because the other man followed him into release, shooting his seed deep inside Adam with a howl.

"Mine."

Adam blinked open his eyes, not even aware of when he'd closed them. He nodded. He was Marcus'. No doubt about it. His heart turned over, full almost to bursting.

"Yours." His voice cracked and he sniffed to hold back his tears.

"As I'm yours. Fuck, I can't believe I found my mate after all these years. My family's going to go nuts when they meet you."

Adam blushed, embarrassed that they were talking about family when Marcus' cock was still half-hard *inside* him.

Black Wolf [Del Fantasma]
by Jade Buchanan

Marcus backed up, extricating himself with a final kiss to the back of Adam's neck.

"Oh, yeah, I feel better now."

Adam gasped, sputtering when he met Marcus' gaze and saw the humor lingering there. Marcus slapped him on the ass. "Get yourself sorted out, baby. I need that drink."

It was with reluctance that he let Marcus pull him into Del Fantasma minutes later. He figured his cheeks were going to be permanently red. He felt like he had a neon sign on his forehead that flashed "just fucked."

Marcus ran a hand over Adam's head, leaning down to kiss his forehead. Pulling him along by the hand, they reached the bar in no time, and the man standing behind it.

Cody stared back at them, nonplussed. He arched a brow at Marcus before turning his gaze to Adam. He blushed again, ducking his head.

"You do know there are rooms you can get, right?"

"Oh come on, like you've never fucked out in the open." Marcus grinned, sliding Adam in front of him and pressing him up against the bar. Adam leaned back into Marcus' strong body, refusing to meet Cody's gaze.

"Texas said everything was sorted out."

"Yeah."

"Good." A long fingered hand brushed Adam's chin, and he looked up into sea blue eyes. "So I assume you liked the taste of the Black Wolf. Care for another sip?"

"Yeah, I want another sip." Adam giggled. "And another and another..."

Black Wolf [Del Fantasma]
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Marcus growled, nipping the back of his neck with strong teeth. Yes sir, he definitely liked the taste of it. An acquired taste, certainly, but he didn't think he'd ever get tired of it.

The End

Black Wolf [Del Fantasma]
by Jade Buchanan

Black Wolf

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Black Wolf [Del Fantasma]
by Jade Buchanan

Thank you for your purchase of *Del Fantasma: Black Wolf* by Jade Buchanan. If you aren't already familiar with the series of stories set in the fictional town of Vista Loma just outside San Diego, please stop by www.AspenMountainPress.com and take a look at the other drinks Cody Warren is serving in his paranormal bar such as Slow Fuzzy Screw, Undertow, Texas Tea, Screaming Orgasm, Sea Breeze and more.

Read on for an excerpt from *Del Fantasma: Undertow* by J.M. Snyder

Excerpt:

"By Mananan," Derek said, "you're the last person I expected to find waiting for me here. So you're the one who was calling me? Why didn't you just say so?"

A faint smile toyed around the edges of Kellen's lips. "Would you have shown up if I had?"

The smallest hesitation contradicted Derek's reply. "Of course," he said, sipping again at the drink in his hand to avoid meeting Kellen's steady gaze. "We're old friends, Kell."

Reaching for him across the table, Kellen's long, thin forefinger stroked the back of Derek's hand. The touch was ticklish but Derek didn't pull away. He watched, mesmerized, as Kellen traced runic patterns onto his skin, and remembered those fingers elsewhere, smoothing along his chest, curving between his legs. In a distant voice, Kellen whispered, "We were more than friends, once. If you remember."

Derek jerked his hand from under Kellen's, then ran it through his close-cropped hair to play off the gesture. "We were just kids then."

"There is nothing childish about the way I feel for you," Kellen replied.

Is, feel. As in time had not yet dulled the edge of Kellen's affection for him. This was why Derek would have never agreed to meet the man. He had never returned Kellen's feelings, not to the extent his friend hoped for, and for that, Derek was sorry. But his heart belonged to Tad; the moment he met the man, the rest of his old life—his old friends—had fallen away.

When Kellen's hand stretched out for him again, Derek moved his hand into his lap, beneath the table, out of reach. "No, I..." He sighed, suddenly so damn tired. "Kellen, I can't. I'm—"

With someone, he almost said, but he stopped himself before the words were free.

There was a sadness in Kellen's voice when he asked softly, "How long has it been?"

"Four months," Derek choked. He ran a shaky hand down his face as if he could wipe away the pain that tore him up inside. "Not a day goes by I don't miss him. You just don't know—"

"Don't be so sure."

Derek glanced up and for a brief moment, saw his own pain mirrored in Kellen's eyes. Then his old friend cleared his throat, sat back, and the light in his eyes turned cold, calculating. Down to business. Taking a deep breath to pull

himself together, Derek asked, "So what's this about finding what I lost? I don't..."

With a rush of clarity, it hit him. I've found ... "My God," he whispered, eyes widening. "Tad. That's it, isn't it? That's why you called. You know where he is."

Kellen stared at him, the ghost of a smile on his face. Derek struggled to rein in his thoughts—he wanted to vault across the table, throttle the man opposite him, demand answers ... but that slight grin said it all. Almost dreading the reply he might get, Derek asked, "Is he...?"

"Alive, yes," Kellen conceded. "The question is, what are you willing to do to get him back?"

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