



## **Wanna Be Your Dog**

### **by Glyn Soitiño**

Lying on his belly on the concrete floor, Ethan huffed out a breath and buried his nose between his front paws. The bitch in the next cage, a pretty collie mix, was in heat, and he found her scent profoundly disturbing. Her little whimpers and the glances she kept casting his way made him grateful that there were metal bars between them.

He'd been on the road for two years or more when a concerned citizen enticed him into her kitchen with a plate of roast chicken and called the refuge. He'd heard her speaking on the phone, knew what she was up to. But the chicken tasted so good, and Ethan had been so tired of running that he just didn't care anymore.

While on the run, he'd had little time to spare for thinking about the future. The only thing on his mind had been where the next meal was coming from, and not letting himself get caught stealing it. Now, neither one of those considerations was relevant.

He'd been here nearly three months now, during which time he'd done some serious thinking but without reaching any conclusion. Life at the refuge wasn't so bad. Of course, he could leave almost any time he wanted, but to go where? At least here, he had food and shelter, and the wardens were kind. The other dogs, although a little fearful in his presence, treated him with respect. All in all, there were a lot worse places Ethan could be.

He knew it couldn't last, that sooner or later he'd have to move on. But until he made up his mind what he wanted to do with his life, the refuge was fine by him.

Except on Saturdays. Saturday was when visitors came to look over the rescue dogs and perhaps decide to adopt one. Ethan gave a little growl as his ears caught the sound of strange voices approaching, footsteps clunking along the concrete aisle that separated his row of cages from the ones opposite.

The other dogs got to their feet, tongues lolling, ears pricking up. The sudden, expectant look of hope in their eyes aroused Ethan's pity; all they wanted was a loving home, and he hoped at least a few of them would be chosen this time. As for Ethan, he was determined to make damn sure that he wasn't.

Keeping his head down, he closed his eyes, only to open them again with a start as a small, warm hand settled on his nose.

"Daddy!" the little boy said over his shoulder. "Look at this one! He's really pretty!"

Ethan stayed stock still, scarcely breathing as footsteps rapidly approached.

"Kevin, you're not to touch the dogs," the man chided, and gently pulled the boy's hand back through the bars.

"But he's so pretty," Kevin insisted. "Can we take him home?"

The boy's father shook his head. "He's too big, Kevin. He's twice as big as you. And we don't have room for a big dog." He glanced at the little Westie cross in the next cage down from Ethan's, and tugged at Kevin's hand. "Look! This one's pretty, too. And he's just the right size."

In an instant, Kevin switched his attention to the smaller dog, leaving Ethan in peace. Ethan heaved a sigh of relief, glad that he hadn't been forced to resort to scaring the kid off. The relief was short-lived, however, as his eyes focused on the pair of shiny black boots that had come to a stop right in front of his nose.

"Why isn't this one standing up, George?" came a strident voice that grated on Ethan's ears. "All the others are standing up. Is he sick, do you think?"

"If he were sick, dear, he'd be in the dog hospital or whatever you call it, not out here with the others." The man's voice was patient, his tone world-weary; Ethan couldn't resist looking up. "See?" George said. "He's not sick."

"Hmm." The woman, middle-aged and dressed as loudly as her voice -- even with his black and white doggy vision, Ethan could tell that much -- stared down at him, a calculating look in her eyes. "Well, yes, he is a fine-looking dog." She peered at the label on the cage. "And he is a he. But it doesn't say if he's castrated or not. If he isn't, we'd have to get him done. I wouldn't want to be sued by the neighbors if he got one of their precious pedigree ladies pregnant."

Ethan rose to his feet, baring his teeth in a vicious snarl, and the woman took a step back.

"I don't think he's too fond of that idea, honey," George said. His wife tossed her head and stalked away as George leaned in closer to the cage. "I know how you feel, boy," he whispered. "Good luck."

And so the day went on, visitors coming and going, some of the dogs being chosen, the wardens placing new labels on the lucky ones' cages that read, "provisionally adopted pending home approval." The same old Saturday routine. Emotions filled the air, the excitement of those who would soon be leaving, the misery of those who had been passed over. Ethan lay on the floor and watched as the last visitors left. Amy, his favorite warden, was just tacking up a "provisional" label on the cage of the bitch next door when a rush of footsteps came pounding down the aisle.

"I'm not too late, am I?" the newcomer said as he skidded to a halt beside Amy. "The man at reception said you were just about finished up, but he let me through."

Amy gave a little laugh. "If Jeff let you through, then no, you're not too late. Are you looking for anything in particular?"

"I won't know until I see him."

"Him?"

"Or her," the man amended. "I'm not biased either way. But I'll know, when I see."

Ethan's view of the man was blocked by Amy's body, but there was something in that voice, in the tone of conviction it held, that aroused his interest. He got to his feet, then settled his backside on the floor and waited. For what, he wasn't sure.

"Well, you've got the place to yourself. Feel free to look around." Amy stepped aside, affording Ethan his first look at the mystery man. What he saw made the prospect of adoption suddenly seem more attractive.

"Will you look with me?" The visitor paused and gave a shrug. "That's not a pick-up line, I assure you. But you know these dogs, and I don't. Would you mind?"

"Of course not. Come on, I'll show you around."

She walked right past Ethan's cage, the man at her side. Ethan let out a bark; Amy stopped in her tracks, then turned and retraced her steps.

"Hey," she said, looking down at him. "What's the matter, boy?"

Ethan ducked his head, then cocked it to one side and pricked his ears. Amy reached a hand in through the bars. He licked it and fixed her with a sappy stare.

The stranger reappeared at her shoulder; his eyes widened as he gazed at Ethan. "Who's this?" he murmured.

"We don't give them names," Amy said, scratching between Ethan's ears. "If someone adopts a dog, they usually give it a new name anyway, and it can be very confusing, even traumatic, if the animal doesn't know what name it's supposed to answer to."

"That's understandable," the man allowed, his eyes fixed on Ethan's. "Wow. He's beautiful!"

Ethan could say the same thing for the visitor. The man was in his late twenties, certainly no more than thirty, with a slim, trim figure outlined by tight jeans and a close-fitting T-shirt, a denim jacket completing the ensemble. From Ethan's vantage point, he appeared to be of average height or maybe a little less. His hair, thick and trimmed fairly short but not cropped, the little wave in it natural rather than styled, was more light than dark. His eyes were also light. Blue, gray, or green, Ethan couldn't tell. His features were strong and regular, and his mouth... Ethan let out a little whimper as he gazed at those pretty, luscious lips.

"Yeah, he's beautiful all right," Amy agreed, still petting Ethan's head. "And he's sweet as candy. With me and the other wardens, that is. With prospective adopters, he's aggressive and obstinate. It's as if he doesn't want to be adopted."

"Maybe he's just happy where he is." The man stretched out a hand, offering the back of it for Ethan to sniff.

Ethan duly sniffed, then got to his feet, and pressed his muzzle up against the bars, crotch height. He heaved in a deep breath through his nose. Damn, the man smelled good, a mixture of sandalwood, fresh sweat, and pure man musk. Licking his chops, he retreated and settled back down on his haunches, his arousal concealed by the shaggy fur on his belly.

Amy heaved a sigh. "Well, he won't be happy much longer. Today is his last chance of being adopted. Which means that if he isn't, tomorrow we're supposed to have him put down."

"You can't!" the gorgeous visitor protested, a look of shock in his eyes. "I won't let you!"

"It's okay," Amy assured him. "If you don't take him, I will. I'm not prepared to see him killed either. However, I've already gone down that road four times -- my house is a little crowded. So if you want him, take him, with my blessing. But, as I said, he's difficult."

Ethan's prospective adopter -- the only person he'd ever so much as considered being adopted by -- nodded, then squatted down in front of Ethan's cage. "Hey, Beautiful," he said, staring into Ethan's eyes. "Would you like to come home with me?"

Ethan hesitated. If he rejected this guy, Amy would take him, and then he could skip and get back on the road again if he felt like it. On the other hand, the man seemed a decent sort, sensitive and caring. Not to mention that, even in black and white, he was one hell of a stunner. And if he'd tried that line on Ethan in a bar, the answer would have been a definite yes.

Being taken -- adopted, Ethan corrected himself -- by this guy would be no hardship whatsoever. And he could still skip when the time was right. Raising a paw, he let it hang in the air and cocked his head to one side, whining endearingly.

Amy stared, then let out a hearty laugh. "He likes you! Well, now I've seen everything."

"So, can I take him?"

"Just wait here." Amy disappeared, returning about a minute later with a strong leather leash in her hand. She took the key from her pocket and unlocked the cage, then clipped the leash to Ethan's collar and led him and his adopter back into the main building. "Usually we do a home visit before granting custody," she said, looping the end of the leash over a hook on the side of the reception desk, then opening a drawer and pulling out a sheaf of papers, which she set on the desk for the man to sign. "But in this particular case, I think we can give you a week or so for him to settle in before we visit. For the record, though, I need to know: is your residence appropriate for housing a large dog? Will you be able to walk him at least twice a day? And do you have young children?" She paused, looking at the first of the papers that he had signed and slid back to her. "Mr. Ashton."

Mr. Ashton looked up and smiled, running his free hand over Ethan's muzzle. "In the order of your questions: yes, yes, and no. And it's Luke. But don't I have to pay you anything?"

Amy shrugged. "There's no set adoption fee, but if you'd care to make a contribution, it would be most welcome. These babies can eat us out of house and home, never mind the medical costs."

"Speaking of medical," Luke said as he finished filling out the last page, "does he have any special requirements? I'm assuming you had him checked out when he came here."

"Of course." She reached into the drawer again and handed Luke another sheet of paper. "Had him checked out thoroughly. This is his medical report. As you can see, he's in perfect health, the healthiest stray I have ever come across, in fact."

Luke took a wallet from a back pocket of his jeans and extracted a bill, then folded the medical report into the wallet and replaced it in his pocket. Ethan hadn't been able to see what denomination the bill was, but from Amy's raised eyebrows as Luke had handed it to her, he reckoned it must have been a pretty big one.

Amy gave an appreciative grin. "Why, thank you, Luke. And if you have any problems with him, just give us a call and we'll see what we can do to help."

Outside, a cool breeze ruffled Ethan's fur as Luke led him toward a smallish, dark-colored car in the mostly deserted parking lot behind the refuge. Luke switched the leash to his left hand, already full of photocopies of all the papers that he'd signed, and reached into his pocket, drawing out a set of keys.

Suddenly unsure of his decision, Ethan glanced at the leash, held loosely in Luke's fingers. One sudden, unexpected bound, and he'd be free. If he bolted now, he could be miles away before anybody would be able to track him down. He could be out there, picking up where he'd left off, running. Yeah, right, running from everything, and to nothing. Lost, aimless, and alone.

"Hey, Beautiful," Luke said, opening one of the rear doors and ruffling Ethan's ears. "You coming?"

Well, what could you say to that? With a little bark of agreement, Ethan jumped up onto the seat and settled himself down for the ride. He'd stick around this Luke fellow. For a little while, at least.

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"I don't know if dogs are allowed to sit in the front seat," Luke said, glancing across at his new pet, "so if you see a police car coming toward us, you'd better get down on the floor until it's gone past."

The big dog looked back at Luke and ducked his head, tongue lolling from one side of his mouth.

Luke laughed. "Yeah, like you can understand what I'm saying. Damn, you are one gorgeous dog."

On the way home after leaving the refuge, Luke had stopped off at a pet shop to get supplies. He'd taken Beautiful inside with him so the salespeople could advise him on what he needed. Strangely enough, only two steps into the place, the squeaking and twittering of the little animals for sale had suddenly ceased. Beautiful sniffed the air, then made a little noise deep in his throat, and gradually the voices started up again.

Luke had come out of the shop laden down with feeding bowls, sacks of biscuits, cans of dog food, grooming tools, doggy toys, and anything else the salesman had managed to persuade him to buy. He knew he was probably being ripped off, but he didn't care. And after all the purchases had been loaded into the trunk and the back seat, there was little room left for Beautiful. Which was why he was now riding up front with Luke.

Luke's visit to the refuge that day had been a spur of the moment thing, a delayed reaction to having discovered, around three weeks ago, quite by chance, that his boyfriend -- no, call a spade a spade -- the man who'd been fucking him for the last six months, who'd told Luke, "I love you," was married, with one child already and another about to drop.

He'd known from the start that Kyle was something of a control freak. But the attention from an older, more experienced man, and the interest that Kyle seemed to show in everything Luke did, made him feel special. Nobody had ever made Luke feel special before.

Kyle lived in a different town, and whenever he showed up at Luke's place, maybe twice a week, it was always without advance warning, so Luke had given him the spare keys to the house.

Every evening, after leaving the bank, Luke headed home with a little knot of anticipation in his belly, wondering whether or not his lover would be there to welcome him.

As time went on, however, Kyle had become increasingly domineering, almost scaring Luke on occasion with the intensity of his apparent need to control Luke's every act. Though troubled by Kyle's attitude, Luke had put up with it, not wishing to rock the boat, telling himself it was just Kyle's way of showing he cared. And when Luke heard about Kyle's family, his first reaction was to dismiss the allegation out of hand.

But the seeds of doubt had been planted. The next time Kyle visited, Luke asked him if it was true. To Luke's dismay, Kyle hadn't denied it, had even seemed proud of himself.

Broken-hearted, Luke had dumped the two-timing son of a bitch there and then. The dumping had not gone down well, and Luke still had the tail end of a black eye to prove it.

Sex with Kyle had been fantastic, at least in the first few months of their relationship. But sex was one thing, and love was another. Kyle didn't love him, had merely been using him while Kyle's wife was indisposed. And more than sex, what Luke needed right now was unconditional love, the kind a dog would give its master.

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you, Beautiful?" Luke murmured, glancing at his new housemate. "You wouldn't use me and screw my mind up." He scrubbed a hand over his face and gave a laugh. "And I can't keep on calling you 'Beautiful.' So, what should I call you?" He paused, considering the animal's physical characteristics. "Blackie?"

The dog slipped its tongue back inside its mouth and gave a little growl.

"Right, that's pathetic. Well, how about Shaggy?"

The growl intensified.

"Too Scooby Doo? Yeah, I get you. But... hey, what do you think of Jet?"

The growling stopped, the dog's ears pricking forward.

"You like that? I do. You're jet black, and it's a short, snappy, masculine-sounding name. You want me to call you Jet?"

The dog stretched toward him and licked his neck, sending shivers all through Luke's body.

"Okay," he said, one hand caressing the dog's muzzle, the other on the wheel. "Jet it is."

Luke hadn't felt so happy in ages. He'd never had a dog of his own before. This was a new adventure, and a new responsibility. In all his twenty-eight years, he'd never had anyone -- animal or human -- who relied on him to look after them. Confident that he was up to the task, he broke into song, the words occasionally turning to laughter as Jet accompanied him with some surprisingly tuneful whining.

The journey was over in no time. Turning in to the driveway that led up to his front door, Luke cursed under his breath, his good humor evaporating in an instant as he recognized the big, fancy car parked in front of the garage. He pulled up next to it and cut the engine.

Jet looked into his eyes and gave a little whimper, as if sensing Luke's change of mood.

Luke heaved a sigh, putting off the moment. Perhaps he should leave Jet in the car while he dealt with his unwelcome visitor. Then again, this was his home, and Jet was his dog, and damned if he was going to let that bastard dictate his actions. And this time, he was going to make sure he got the keys back.

He opened the door and climbed out, then reached for the leash and wrapped it around his fingers as Jet jumped down after him.

"We'll leave the stuff out here for now," he murmured and locked the car. Taking a deep breath to steady his nerves, he reached into his pocket for the house keys. "Stick close behind me, Jet," he said as they reached the front door. "This may get nasty."



Kyle was in the living room, just where Luke had expected him to be, sprawled on the sofa, watching TV, a glass of Scotch on the coffee table in front of him. As always, Luke felt his pulse quicken at the sight of him, but this time it was in anger rather than desire. Standing in the doorway, with Jet sitting obediently to one side, out of sight, Luke swallowed a couple of times and cleared his throat.

"Kyle. What do you want?"

Kyle glanced up at him and gave him that sexy, seductive smile that used to turn Luke's knees to water, then reached for the remote and pressed the mute button.

"Hey, kiddo. I've come to give you a second chance."

"Give *me* a second chance?" Luke wondered how he could ever have been so naïve. The traits he'd once admired as self-confidence and strength of character, he now recognized for what they were -- pure, unashamed arrogance. "I think you've got that the wrong way round, Kyle. And you're wasting your time. Even if you hadn't hit me, there's no way I would even consider taking you back."

Shaking his head, Kyle leaned back in his seat and spread his legs. "Come on, you know you still want me. You know that hungry little ass of yours is just aching to be plugged by my dick."

Luke's face flushed as he remembered how good it used to feel to have Kyle's big, fat cock inside him, filling him, taking him to heights of pleasure he'd never known before. But all that was in the past now, and the last time Kyle had fucked him there had been no pleasure, only pain. In any case, there was more to a relationship than sex, and Luke wasn't prepared to be anybody's piece on the side. Or punching bag, come to that.

"My ass wants nothing further to do with your dick, as I told you last time I saw you. You're a lying, arrogant, self-centered bastard. God, I pity your poor wife. Just give me the keys and get out."

Kyle reached for his glass and drained it, then pushed himself to his feet. "My wife knows what's good for her, which is more than can be said for you. Now, get your pants down, or do you want me to rough you up a little first to get you in the mood? I seem to remember that worked pretty well last time."

"For you, maybe," Luke said, feeling sick to his stomach at the memory. "From my perspective, it was rape."

A low growl sounded from behind him, and Jet stepped up to stand by Luke's side, hackles raised in warning.

Kyle was a big man, tall and broad, and his physical strength was awesome, as Luke knew to his cost. The look of fear that flashed across his face as he stared down at Jet was eminently gratifying.

"What is that?" Kyle said, pointing an accusing finger.

Luke laid a hand on Jet's head, ruffling the fur. "I believe it's called a black, long-haired German shepherd."

"It's a dog! I told you, I don't like dogs."

Luke remembered Kyle once mentioning his dislike for dogs, due to something that had happened to Kyle in his childhood, though Kyle hadn't been willing to explain further and Luke hadn't pushed the issue.

"And I told you, you're not welcome here anymore. So you can take that sorry limp dick of yours and fuck off home to your wife."

"Why, you little--" Turning his attention from Jet, Kyle rushed at Luke, his fist raised to strike.

Luke let the leash fall from his fingers and covered his face with his forearms, ready to take the blow. A blow that never landed. Lowering his arms, he opened his eyes and looked around him.

Kyle was lying on his back on the floor, immobile, Jet's front paws pinning his chest, the dog's powerful jaws clamped around his throat. Kyle's eyes were squeezed shut, sweat beading on his brow. Luke watched as a dark stain spread over the front of Kyle's jeans.

"That's enough, Jet," Luke said softly. "Let him up."

Jet did as he was told and backed off, then sank to his haunches in front of Luke, his eyes still fixed on Kyle. Luke reached out a hand and stroked the dog's head, marveling at Jet's intelligence -- it was as if he understood every word Luke said.

Kyle sat up and wiped a sleeve over his throat, grimacing at the saliva. "That animal is a menace," he ground out between clenched teeth. "I'm going to bring charges, Luke, just see if I don't. I'm gonna have that precious dog of yours put down!"

"You want to bring charges, Kyle? How about I bring some of my own -- rape, for instance? Now, how would your wife feel about that? And don't think I couldn't back it up; I have the evidence." Which was a lie, but Kyle wasn't to know that.

"You'll be sorry for this." Kyle got to his feet, seemingly oblivious to the pee stain on his jeans. "Once I'm finished with you, you'll regret the day you ever crossed my path."

"Oh, I already do," Luke assured him. "Believe me."

Giving Jet a wide berth, Kyle made his way to the front door, only to be brought up short by a low growl at his heels.

"You forgot the keys, Kyle."

Kyle reached into his pocket and flung the keychain in Luke's general direction, then ran out of the house without another word.

Luke stood still, fingers idly scratching between Jet's ears, until the drone of Kyle's engine had faded away. Jet shifted his head and nuzzled Luke's hand.

"We're safe now, Jet," Luke said, looking down into deep brown eyes. "He was just bluffing. I won't let anybody hurt you, ever. I promise."

Jet stood up on his back legs, his front paws braced on Luke's chest, and licked his master's neck.

Luke let out a little laugh and rubbed his face into Jet's warm, shaggy fur. "Yeah, baby, I love you, too. Now, let's go and unload the car so I can spoil you with all those presents!"

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Lying on his side on the sheepskin rug in the living room, Ethan gazed up at his master and let out a little sigh. The hi-fi system was playing something light and classical, unobtrusive and soothing, the volume turned down low so as not to distract Luke from whatever it was that he was reading.

In response to the sigh, Luke reached out one bare foot and curled his toes into the fur on Ethan's chest.

Ethan huffed and wriggled himself against those cute little toes. He'd been Luke's dog for over two weeks now, a lot longer than he'd intended when Luke had first brought him home. But after that confrontation with Kyle, Ethan had decided he'd better stick around, just to be sure that Luke was in no danger. So far, it appeared he wasn't.

Kyle had not followed through on his threat to have Luke charged with assault and Ethan put down. Not that he'd been likely to, given what Luke said he had on him, but Ethan was still wary. The man had smelled wrong, somehow. Ethan couldn't put a name to what he'd sensed, but there was definitely some craziness in there somewhere. And just as Luke had sworn not to let anybody hurt Ethan, Ethan was equally determined not to let anyone hurt Luke.

As for Ethan's situation, Amy had come by the previous day to check out the house and see how they were doing. After observing the two of them together and inspecting the house from top to bottom, she'd given them a clean bill of health and told Luke that 'Jet' was now well and truly his. Which meant that Ethan was now free to run off whenever he chose without landing Luke in trouble.

Which he would, when, or if, he had to. But in the meantime, he was perfectly happy to be Luke's dog.

Well, maybe not perfectly happy. 'Perfectly' would involve getting intimate with his master's sweet little ass, and while Luke obviously loved his dog as a pet, there were certain boundaries that couldn't be crossed.

Even so, Ethan's craving just wouldn't let him be. Last night, a few hours after Luke had gone to bed, Ethan had taken the risk and shifted. It had been a lot more difficult than he remembered, but that was probably due to lack of practice -- Ethan had shifted only a handful of times since he'd left home.

Using the sofa for support, he'd pushed himself to his feet and taken a few deep breaths to clear the dizziness that always came with shifting, then gazed around him. Whether in doggy or human form, Ethan's eyesight was phenomenal -- to him, the moonlight shining in through the window was as bright as day. Now, from his greater height, the room looked different, smaller. Like everything else about Luke, the color scheme he had chosen was tasteful and understated, a blend of cream, beige, and various shades of brown.

Unused to having only two legs to stand on, Ethan had made his way slowly up the stairs, holding tight to the banister. Of the three doors leading off from the landing, two were closed, the third half-open. Standing outside the dimly lit room, Ethan listened hard. From the gentle, even breathing, it sounded like Luke was fast asleep.

Mustering his courage, Ethan stepped into the room. The curtains were open, the casement window gaping wide. By the light of the full moon, Ethan gazed down at Luke's sleeping form, seeing his true colors for the first time. In the heat of the night, the comforter was rucked down below his waist, revealing a smooth, pale chest, the nipples pink and tiny. A narrow line of brown hairs, a little darker than those on his head, led down from his navel to disappear under the bedclothes.

There was a sudden hitch in Luke's breathing. Ethan held still, his heart pounding. If his master woke to find a naked stranger standing over him, that would be the end of the honeymoon.

But Luke merely sighed and turned over onto his stomach, oblivious of the scrutiny as he nestled his cheek into the pillow. He looked so sweet, so innocent, that Ethan wanted nothing more than to snuggle down there next to him and take Luke in his arms, leaving it up to Luke to make the next move.

But of course, Ethan hadn't. Instead, he'd padded back down the stairs and given himself relief with his hand for the first time in over two years, images of Luke, bent over and naked, flashing through his mind as he climaxed. That had taken the edge off, at least for a little while. But not for long enough.

Now, in the familiar evening atmosphere of the house, he let out a little whine of frustration and rolled onto his belly.

"Hey, baby," Luke said, setting the book aside and leaning down to scratch at Ethan's ears. "Are you okay?"

The peace was suddenly shattered as the side window imploded. A beer bottle, spewing gasoline from around the flaming plug of wadding in its neck, landed on the rug beside Ethan. He jumped to his feet and shook himself. The acrid stench of burnt hair filled his nostrils, and he rolled from side to side on the hardwood floor, quickly extinguishing the sparks that had settled in his fur.

Standing up again, he surveyed the damage. The sheepskin rug had caught like tinder, a bright puddle of flame on the floor, fueled by the book that Luke had been reading, its pages blackening and shriveling in the heat. The sofa, where Luke had been sitting, was smoldering in a dozen places. But where was Luke?

"Jet?"

The voice came from behind the sofa. Ethan hurried over. Luke was crouched on the ground, coughing, choking. Ethan nuzzled at his face, then glanced around. The room was filling with smoke, little pockets of fire taking hold all over the place. Luke raised a hand and laid it on Ethan's head, holding his gaze.

There was no time for dissimulation. Ethan licked at Luke's cheek and shifted. "Get out of here, Luke," he ordered, his voice rough and rusty from lack of use.

Luke's eyes went wide as he stared up at Ethan. "What? Who?"

"I said, get out of here!" He grabbed Luke by the arm and dragged him to his feet, then placed a swift but passionate kiss on those soft, full lips. "Go now, get! I'll deal with this."

"But--"

"Just go. I'll be with you in a minute."

Ethan waited just long enough to see that Luke had obeyed, then grabbed the throw from the back of the sofa and approached the Molotov cocktail, which was now lying on the wooden floor, still aflame, still intact. Ethan didn't know whether the damn thing would explode or not, but if it did, it could set the whole house alight. Holding his breath, he pulled out the burning plug and threw it onto the remains of the rug, then swaddled the bottle in the throw and hurled it back out the broken window.

The immediate danger was past -- now to see to the rest of it. Ethan looked around him, assessing his priorities. The sheepskin rug was a pile of greasy ashes, only the flames from the plug still alive. The sofa was scarred and smoldering, but not yet actually on fire. Patches of fuel still burned on the floor, but the sturdy wood resisted. Ethan tore down the curtains and used them to smother the flames, then ran into the kitchen and fetched the little fire extinguisher from

its bracket on the wall, next to the stove. Aiming the nozzle at the sofa, he squirted it again and again, until the cylinder was empty.

Ethan's eyes were stinging from the acrid, thick black smoke filling the room. As far as he could see, the flames had all disappeared. The sofa was secure. There was nothing more he could do. All in all, he considered, it could have been much worse. Except that now, having involuntarily outed himself to Luke, he'd have no choice but to leave and go back on the road. Surprised at how much the prospect pained him, he succumbed to a fit of coughing as the sound of approaching sirens reached his ears.

Ethan glanced at his blistered fingers and palms. His face and left shoulder stung from where sparks had lingered too long in his fur. Apart from that, he appeared to be intact. "Well," he murmured, "I guess it was good while it lasted." Stifling another cough, he shifted back into doggy form and went outside to join his soon-to-be-ex master.

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Sitting cross-legged in his driveway, Luke stared at the front door of his house, ignoring all the hustle and bustle going on around him. It seemed as if the whole street had turned out to watch the show.

"We called the fire department," Jackie, his next-door neighbor, was saying, on her knees in front of him. Her husband, Ralph, draped a blanket around Luke's shoulders and stood back, awaiting further instructions.

"Did you see who did it?" Luke asked, his attention still fixed on the door. Where was Jet? *What* was Jet? *Whatever he is*, he begged silently, *please let him be okay!*

"Didn't see anybody," Ralph said. "Just heard the smash of the window breaking, saw the flames, and called the fire department."

"Thank you." The sound of sirens smothered the murmurings of the assembled onlookers. Moments later, a police car pulled up, closely followed by a fire truck. One after the other, they cut their sirens, the sudden stillness soon filled by renewed speculations. Jackie patted Luke's knee, then got to her feet and stepped aside.

And there was still no sign of Jet.

"Sir?" Luke spared a glance for the fireman now squatting down in front of him. "Is there anyone else in the house?"

"Just my dog, I think," Luke said. "I didn't see him come out." He ran a hand over his head, wincing as sudden pain spiked a finger. Damn, there was glass in his hair. He leaned forward and shook his head as hard as he could to dislodge the fragments, then returned his attention to the doorway.

The fireman waved to the rest of his crew, signaling them to go on in. As the first man stepped inside, a dark shape came trotting out and made its way toward Luke.

"Here he is, sir, all safe and sound," the fireman said, then went to join his men.

Jet sank down on his belly, looking up at Luke, and gave a little whine.

Weak with relief, Luke opened his arms. "Jet," he said. "I'm so glad you're safe. Come here."

The big dog whimpered and snuggled into Luke's embrace, his body trembling.

"Hush, now," Luke murmured, stroking his brave, beautiful Jet, and burrowed his face into the dog's singed fur. "It's okay, baby. We're safe now."

Safe, maybe, but the ordeal was far from over. Luke's face and neck were stinging with cuts from flying glass, his eyes sore from the smoke. Gently pushing Jet to one side, he braced his hands on the gravel driveway and prepared to get to his feet.

"Please, sir," came a female voice. "Don't get up."

Luke squinted against the sudden glare of the police car's headlamps. A young woman dropped down beside him and placed a bulky first-aid kit on the ground. The fire crew's paramedic, he guessed. "Why not?"

"Because I can see better down here." A latex-gloved hand reached out to gently turn his face to one side. "Thanks," she called over her shoulder, in the direction of the police car. "You have a few cuts, sir. None of them deep, no glass embedded in them that I can see. Don't worry, they won't scar."

Scarring was the last thing on Luke's mind. "I'm fine," he said, and hitched in a sharp breath at the sting of the antiseptic the paramedic was applying to his superficial injuries. "But can you check my dog out? He may have got burned."

She gave him a little smile. "Well, I don't usually do dogs, but okay. Are you sure you're not burned anywhere?"

"I'm sure."

The paramedic had finished with Luke's face and was dressing the cut on his finger when a uniformed police officer stepped up, his polished black shoes reflecting the light.

"You finished yet, Katie?"

"He's all yours, Pete."

"Can I get up now?" Luke asked, since the policeman showed no sign of descending to Luke's level.

"Sure." Katie turned to Jet as Luke pushed himself up with his good hand. "Hey, boy, will you let me take a look at you?"

Jet looked up at Luke and let out a whimper.

"It's okay, Jet," Luke assured him. "She just wants to check that you're not hurt." Jet settled back on his haunches and passively allowed the paramedic to do her job. Satisfied that his dog was in good hands, Luke turned to the policeman, who introduced himself as Officer Morrisson, and gave him the short version of the evening's events.

The middle-aged, gray-haired officer noted it all down, prompting Luke with a question now and then, and finished up with the inevitable one, to which Luke had an immediate answer. There was no doubt in his mind as to who was responsible for damaging his house and potentially costing both him and Jet their lives. And no way was he going to let the bastard get away with it.

Luke drew himself up to his full height and looked the policeman in the eyes. "The only person who might have a reason, however twisted, to have done this is Kyle Waitrose," he said, his voice strong and steady, and proceeded to name the town Kyle lived in and the company he worked for. "He's a rep, spends a lot of time on the road."

"And what might Mr. Waitrose's 'twisted' reason be?"

Still holding the police officer's gaze, Luke explained his history with Kyle, what had happened the last time they met, how Jet had defended Luke, and what Kyle's parting words had been.

"Well," Officer Morrisson said, nodding his head, "if you want to bring charges, sounds like you've got yourself a whole bunch to choose from."

Luke shook his head. "The only charges I want to bring concern what happened tonight. I could have died. More to the point, Jet could have died, and after I promised him I'd never let anybody hurt him."

"I can understand that," the policeman said, "but some folks might think it a little 'twisted' that you're more upset about breaking a promise to your dog than you are about getting raped and nearly killed."

"A promise is a promise, Officer, whether to a dog or a human." Luke paused, looking down at Jet. "And Jet here is worth twenty Kyle Waitroses."

Morrisson shrugged. "Well, it's your call. We'll speak to Mr. Waitrose as soon as possible. We'll need you to drop by the station tomorrow morning to make an official complaint and sign your statement. In the meantime, I suggest you try to get some sleep."



Luke let out a sigh of relief as the officer went to join his colleague, who was busy taking statements from Jackie and Ralph. Having expected his accusations to be met with thinly-veiled contempt, Luke had been pleasantly surprised at the officer's attitude.

Katie got to her feet, ruffling Jet's ears, the first-aid kit clasped under her other arm. "There's a little sore patch on his face and another on his left shoulder," she announced, "and the pads of his front paws seem a little tender, but other than that, he appears to be fine. If he hadn't had all that fur to protect him, it could have been a lot worse."

"Thank you," Luke said as Jet pressed up against his legs.

Sudden movement caught Luke's eye as the fire crew emerged from the house and began to search the yard, their flashlights playing over the grass. Katie said her farewells to both Luke and Jet and headed back toward the truck, while the chief firefighter made his way over to Luke.

"Are you by any chance trying to do us out of a job?" the man demanded, the accusation softened by the twinkle in his eye.

"Excuse me?"

"You had the situation all under control before we even got here. That's quick thinking, for sure."

Luke shrugged. "I don't recall any thinking, quick or otherwise."

The fireman nodded. "That's often the way of it," he acknowledged. "Some people panic, others just automatically get on and do what needs to be done. In any case, the house is safe now. You'll have to redecorate, but there's no structural damage."

"Will this do?" Ralph said, dragging a sheet of plywood behind him as he approached. "It's not enough to keep a burglar out, but it'll cover the hole for the time being."

"That'll do fine." The chief gestured to two of his men, who came trotting over with hammer and nails.

Luke gave a weary smile. "Thanks, Ralph."

"Hey, boss!" called one of the firefighters searching the yard. He bent down and scooped something into his arms, then made his way over to where Luke, Jet and the chief were standing in the driveway. The neighbors had dispersed, there being nothing of interest left to see. With a gloved hand, the man carefully moved aside the folds of what Luke recognized as the throw from the living room, revealing the bottle, now all but empty of gasoline.

"That's what came through the window," Luke confirmed, and smiled down at Jet.

Five minutes later, the emergency vehicles were gone, leaving Luke alone with his dog. Jet looked up at him and whined.

Luke heaved a sigh. His face and hand hurt, his head was beginning to ache, and he needed a drink. "Come on, Jet," he said and headed toward the open front door, his dog following at his heels. "We need to talk."

Standing in the living room, Luke surveyed the damage, tears of frustration springing to his eyes. The charred curtains and the remains of the sheepskin rug had been swept into a corner. The sofa was ruined. The beautiful hardwood floor was blackened in places, the largest of them being where the rug had sat. The stink of smoke, mixed with the acrid reek of burnt hair from the rug, permeated the still hazy air.

"Kyle, you bastard!" he yelled. Not content with violating his body, Kyle had now violated his home, too. Clenching his fists, Luke strode toward the kitchen and flung the door open. He switched the living room light off, the kitchen light on, and slammed the door behind him and Jet, shutting out the sight of the devastation.

Jet sat quietly in the corner, his deep brown eyes following Luke's every move. Luke took a bottle of Scotch from a cupboard, two glasses from another, and placed them on the table before settling himself down on a wooden chair. Fixing his gaze on Jet, he took a deep breath, striving for control.

"Okay, Jet," he said softly. "Tell me I'm not going crazy."

Just like the first time, Jet's body seemed to shimmer, losing focus. The transformation was so swift that if Luke had blinked, he would have missed it entirely.

"You're not." The naked man got to his feet, his eyes fixed on Luke's. "Gray," he murmured.

"Gray what?"

"Your eyes. They're gray."

Well, yes, they were, but what did that have to do with anything? Shoving the thought aside, Luke focused his attention on the man who had taken Jet's place.

He appeared to be in his mid-twenties or thereabouts. He was tall, even taller than Kyle, and powerfully built, but whereas Kyle's muscles were more of the bulging kind, this man's were long and lean. His face was handsome, Luke noted. His hair was black, like Jet's, and loosely curled, reaching down to just past where Jet's thick leather collar rested around his neck. The light scattering of curly hair on his chest and the little line of it that ran down his belly were black, too. Remembering that hurried kiss, he felt the blood rise to his cheeks as his gaze traveled down to the man's crotch -- Jet's alter ego had no reason to envy Kyle in that department, either.

Swallowing hard, Luke got to his feet and crossed to the door. "Stay here. I'll be back in a minute."

He shut the door behind him and headed for the stairs, pausing only to adjust his cock, which had begun to swell uncomfortably down the leg of his jeans. Refusing to let his mind dwell on the craziness of the situation, he fetched a bathrobe from the bedroom closet and the first-aid kit from the bathroom.

'Jet' was still standing in the corner where Luke had left him. "Here." Luke handed him the robe and gestured toward the table as the man slipped the robe on and tied the belt. "Take a seat." He set the first-aid kit on the table and opened it as his instructions were obeyed.

"Thank you, Luke."

"You're welcome." Luke perched his ass on the edge of the table and took a sterile burn dressing from the kit. "Now, who are you, and what have you done with my dog?"

"I'm Ethan. And I haven't done anything with your dog."

"Uh-huh." Luke taped the dressing onto Ethan's cheek, then slid the robe off the man's left shoulder and repeated the operation, his erection subsiding as he concentrated on his task. "So, you're a man, and you're a dog." It was crazy, he knew, but there really was no other explanation.

"Yes."

"Like a werewolf? After all, it is full moon."

Ethan gave a little chuckle and sat back in his seat, allowing Luke to apply dressings to his blistered hands. "No, not like a werewolf. I can shift whenever I want."

"In that case, you didn't really need me to adopt you. You could have left the refuge any time. So why did you come home with me?"

"Because I wanted to." Ethan looked up at him, his dark eyes intense. "You're taking this whole thing a little too calmly, aren't you?"

Luke shrugged. "What do you expect me to do? Freak out, call the cops, and get myself committed to the loony bin? So you're a dog -- so what?"

Ethan chuckled again and wrinkled his nose. "You wouldn't happen to have a cigarette, would you?"

"Haven't you had enough smoke for one day?" Luke said as he finished taping the last of the dressings in place.

"Cigarette smoke covers the smell of the other smoke," Ethan explained, "or at least, that's the theory. Even in here with the door closed, it still stinks."

"Well, you're not wrong there." Luke packed the rest of the dressings back into the kit and went to a cupboard. "I think I still have some. Yes. Here they are." Turning back to the table, he slid into the seat opposite Ethan and passed him an opened pack of cigarettes and a lighter, with a saucer to serve as an ashtray. "I keep them for visitors," he said. "I don't smoke myself, but I'm not a rabid anti-smoker. They're probably a little dry by now, though."

"Dry is fine." Ethan lit up, inhaled, exhaled, and raised his eyebrows. "Hey, it really does help."

Luke sniffed at Ethan's smoke but refrained from taking one himself. "How did you know about that?"

"From a firefighter I used to date, way back when. Although 'date' isn't exactly the right word. He couldn't risk being outed, so we had to keep it all under wraps."

Luke's expression darkened.

"I know what you're thinking," Ethan went on, "but John was a really good guy. Nothing like that bastard Kyle. You should have let me rip his throat out."

"You're joking, right?" Though from the look in Ethan's eyes as he'd said it, Luke had his doubts. Tearing his gaze away, he poured Scotch into the glasses and slid one across the table before recapping the bottle.

"It wouldn't be the first time." Ethan's tone was so low that Luke wasn't sure he'd heard him right.

"First time for what? Joking?"

Ethan stubbed his cigarette out in the saucer and took a sip of Scotch, then looked Luke in the eyes.

"Luke, you're a good man. Any dog would be proud to have you as his master. And if you want me to, I'll stick around, as Jet, until Kyle is safely behind bars. Before tonight, I'd have been happy to stay indefinitely. But now you know what I am."

"Well, it's not like I'm going to tell anybody!"

Ethan sighed. "That's not the point. I know you, Luke. I know how much you value honesty and openness. I couldn't stay with you, as Jet or as Ethan, without coming clean about my past. And there are things that, if you knew, you'd never want to see me, or Jet, ever again."

Luke sipped from his glass, considering his options. He could do as Ethan suggested, keeping Jet close until the danger was past, and maybe even start something up with Ethan himself, all the while knowing that it couldn't last, that at some point he'd be left alone again, with neither lover nor dog for company.

Or, he could insist that Ethan come clean about his past, and then decide for himself how he felt. After all, Jet had defended his honor, and Ethan had probably saved his life. The two of them were a fundamentally good person, Luke was sure of it -- what could they possibly have done that was so bad?

He set the glass down on the table and reached for the cigarettes and lighter. "Ethan," he said, once he'd finished coughing, "I love Jet, and in case you haven't realized it yet, I'm also very much attracted to you. And I'm not prepared to let either one of you go without good reason. So please, tell me your story, and then I'll make up my own mind as to whether or not I want you to leave."

For a long moment, Ethan sat there, saying nothing, just staring into Luke's eyes as if trying to judge his sincerity. "Well," he said finally, "okay. Just remember you asked for it."

Luke listened attentively as Ethan spilled the whole sorry tale. Ethan's father had married late in life. His wife was young and wild, but the two of them were devoted to one another. They lived in a farming community, a fair distance from the nearest town.

Ethan's birth had been premature. With no time to get to the hospital, his mother delivered him alone, at home on the farm the couple owned, having made his father swear to stay out of the room until it was over. She was a shifter, but her husband didn't know that. At least, not until he broke his promise, out of concern for his wife, and walked into the room to find, not a woman and her baby, but a black, long-haired German shepherd bitch and her pup. Apparently, giving birth was easier in doggy form than in human.

Distraught, Ethan's mother shifted back and begged her husband not to kill her and the child. Luckily, his love for her was stronger than the shock of knowing what she really was, and he'd accepted both mother and pup with open arms. It had taken Ethan less than two months to learn how to shift. When his father first saw Ethan in human form, he'd broken down and cried for joy.

Ethan's childhood had been a very happy one, and on leaving school he'd gone to work with his father on the farm, where he was free to shift and race through the fields, sometimes on his own, sometimes with his mother, without fear of being seen. And it was during that time, on his occasional Saturday night trips into town, that he'd discovered and then given vent to his burgeoning sexuality.

For the next few years, everything had been fine. Ethan managed to keep his doggy side secret from his lovers, and his gay side secret from his parents. But then Ethan's mother fell ill. Neither the human nor the veterinary doctors had been able to save her. Her death hit Ethan's father very hard. He was now an old man, and his heart was no longer strong. Barely a month later, the owner of the neighboring farm offered to take the place off his hands. The price was fair, but the old man refused to sell, wanting to leave the farm to Ethan.

The neighbor, a hard-headed businessman with dreams of expansion, was not the kind of man to take no for an answer. Determined to get his hands on Ethan's home, by fair means or foul, he sent two men over one night to make a final offer.

Ethan had been in doggy form when the men arrived. His father told him to stay that way, and went outside to talk to them. Ethan sat in the open doorway, listening, as his father refused the offer yet again. At which point one of the men pulled out a gun and pressed the muzzle against Ethan's father's head.

"Suicide is such a sad business," the man had said, sneering. "I guess the poor old guy just couldn't go on living without his wife."

Ethan was on the gunman in an instant, ripping out his throat before he even had a chance to squeeze the trigger. The other man ran for his car and took off, still screaming. But the strain was too much for Ethan's father's heart. He collapsed, told Ethan he loved him, and died cradled in Ethan's now-human arms.

"I walked away and kept on walking until I felt it was safe to shift back," Ethan finished up. "That was over two years ago, and I've been mostly in doggy form ever since." He gulped down the last of his Scotch and looked Luke in the eyes. "So, there you have it, Luke. I, or Jet if you prefer, killed a man. And I'd do it again if I had to, to protect someone I love."

Someone he loved. Luke gazed back at him, his heart aching for Ethan's loss, the loss of his parents and of his innocence.

Ethan turned away. "I have to stay in human form, for a few hours at least, because of the dressings," he said, "but I'll leave in the morning, if that's what you want. Can I spend the night in the spare bedroom?" He forced a smile. "Seeing as how the sofa's all messed up."

"No, you can't."

"Oh." Ethan heaved a sigh. "Okay, then. I understand."

"No, Ethan," Luke repeated. "You don't." His mind made up, he stood and pushed his chair back, then held out a hand to Ethan. "You're spending the night with me. And I don't want you to leave in the morning, or ever, come to that. Both you and Jet are welcome to stay for as long as you want."

Ethan gawped at him, a look of shock spreading over his handsome face. "I am? You don't? We are?" He closed his mouth and swallowed hard. "You're really going to let me sleep with you?"

"I don't recall saying anything about sleeping," Luke said, raising an eyebrow. Careful of the dressings, he took Ethan by the wrist and pulled him to his feet. "Come on, Beautiful. Let's go to bed."

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Dressed all in black, his jeans, sweater and jacket carefully chosen to help him blend into the night, Kyle crouched behind some rose bushes in the front garden of a darkened house on the

other side of the street, around fifty yards from Luke's. He raised the binoculars to his eyes and trained them on the little group of people standing in Luke's driveway. Although he lacked the proper equipment -- the night-vision goggles he'd ordered over the Internet being temporarily out of stock -- the headlamps of the police car provided enough light for Kyle to make out what was going on.

That little whoreson Luke was talking to a police officer, who appeared to be taking rather a lot of notes. That wretched dog was there, too, being examined by a paramedic. Kyle snorted in disgust that a paramedic should waste her attention on a dumb animal.

Kyle's eyes were beginning to sting from his daughter's face paint that he'd blacked up with. Blinking involuntarily, he let go of the binoculars, hanging on a leather strap around his neck, and scrubbed at his eyes with the back of a hand. The movement unbalanced him, and he slumped forward and down onto one knee. Rose thorns gouged his face and snagged on his clothes. With a silent curse, he extricated himself from the tangle and turned his attention back to the task in hand.

Luke was now talking to some firefighters, the disgusting animal plastered against his legs. Kyle watched, keeping a grip on his impatience, until everybody else had left the scene and Luke and the dog had gone back inside.

Kyle was seething with frustration. The firebomb should have worked, should have wiped out the whole house. He'd found the instructions on the Internet and followed them to the letter, but obviously the idiot who had posted them hadn't known what he was talking about.

But what should Kyle do now? He had no doubt that Luke had snitched on him to that policeman, and that he'd be arrested sooner or later. In which case, it would be Luke's word against his, since Kyle was sure he'd left no prints on the firebomb and that nothing could be traced back to him. Well, fairly sure, he amended. Probably. With any luck.

He hesitated. Perhaps he should give it up and go home, and simply wait for the cops to pick him up for questioning. Then again, if he could get something on Luke, perhaps that would convince the little bastard to let things drop, and maybe even let Kyle back inside his tight little ass. And unless Kyle was mistaken, there was definitely something very wrong with that dog.

Kyle didn't just dislike dogs -- he hated them with a passion. At the age of seven, he'd been chased by a Doberman. If he hadn't taken refuge in a Dumpster, the beast would have killed him for sure. He'd burrowed down under the trash, quaking in fear while the dog snuffled and pawed at the rim of the container. Almost suffocated by the stench, he'd waited for what seemed like hours until the sounds faded away and he finally dared to surface.

He'd never thought that anything could scare him as much as that Doberman. He was wrong. Luke's dog -- Jet, Luke had called it -- was far worse. Kyle knew that dogs were supposed to be intelligent, but he'd seen the look in Jet's eyes after Luke had told the creature to let Kyle up. Intelligent didn't even begin to cover it.

And it took time to train a dog, Kyle knew that much. Even if Luke had gone out and bought Jet the very next day after dumping Kyle, Luke would have been the animal's master for three weeks at the most. And yet Jet had obeyed Luke's every word without hesitation.

It wasn't natural. Something weird was going on with Luke and that dog.

Determined to find out what it was, Kyle scurried across the now-deserted street and zigzagged his way through the back yards of the houses until he was under Luke's kitchen window. The light was on, the blinds were down, the window closed despite the warmth of the evening. The only way he could get a peek inside was to crouch on one leg, kneel on the other for balance, and crane his head on one side to see past the vertical edge of the blind. Which was torture for his neck, but worth it, as he soon found out.

The dog was sitting in the far corner of the kitchen, looking duly pathetic. Luke was sitting at the table, a bottle of Kyle's Scotch in front of him. Not that Kyle had actually bought the Scotch, he graciously admitted -- Luke bought it for Kyle -- but it was his nonetheless. Then Luke said something, but through the double-glazing Kyle couldn't tell what, having never learned to lip-read. And suddenly the dog was gone, and a naked man stood in his place. A man who was wearing the beast's collar.

His mind reeling, Kyle took a welcome break as Luke left the room. Incredible as it might seem, he couldn't deny the evidence of his own eyes. If the man was a dog, the dog a man, then that was definitely something he could use against Luke. He could threaten to expose it, bring in the scientific community, have the animal subjected to the worst kinds of laboratory experiments. Yes, he thought, happy despite the gouges on his face and the rips in his clothes. That would definitely do it.

Movement caught his eye, and he got back into position. Luke had reappeared and was offering the dog-man cigarettes. The beast was now wearing a bathrobe, the one that Luke had bought for Kyle. Kyle growled under his breath, watching the two of them talking and sipping Kyle's Scotch. And then Luke took a cigarette and lit up. What the hell? Luke never smoked! It was all Kyle could do to keep from smashing through the window and strangling the manipulative abomination with his bare hands.

But no, he reasoned, clenching his fists as he strove to contain his anger. Better to stick to the plan, blackmail Luke into not filing charges, and reclaim that sweet ass for himself. "He'll thank me for it in the end," Kyle murmured, quite forgetting that only an hour or so earlier, he'd actually tried to kill Luke.

And then Luke took the creature by the arm and led it out of the kitchen, switching off the light as he went.

What now? Kyle's heart began to race, and he stepped back from the house, glancing toward the upper floor. The light in Luke's bedroom, Kyle's domain, came on, and Kyle sank to the ground, wrapping his arms around him. No, this couldn't be happening, this wasn't right!



Glancing around, his eyes settled on the drainpipe that ran up the side of the house, only a foot or so from Luke's bedroom window. Kyle swung the binoculars round to his back and headed for the drainpipe. He climbed it easily, his rubber soles providing the necessary grip. Anchoring himself with both feet and one hand, he leaned toward the closed window. The curtains were open, affording him a perfect view.

Luke, still fully dressed, was unbuckling the collar from around the hell-hound's neck. He set it on the dresser, then stood still and allowed the thing that was wearing Kyle's robe to slowly strip the clothes from Luke's gorgeous body, punctuating the action with kisses. Kyle growled again, his cock stirring as he gazed upon Luke's nakedness.

The devil-spawn said something. Luke nodded and backed toward the window, his eyes still fixed on the beast, then turned the latch and flung the window open.

The edge of the window frame caught Kyle square in the face, dislodging him from his precarious perch, and he fell to the ground, the binoculars crunching into his back. He shoved a fist into his mouth to keep from crying out. His face hurt, his back hurt, and he was sure he'd sprained, if not broken, the ankle of the foot that was trapped underneath his ass.

Groaning, he rolled over onto his stomach and pushed himself to his knees, wincing in disgust as his hand pressed down on a dog poop, the mess squishing through his fingers. He wiped his hand off on the grass, then got to his feet. Taking his weight on his good foot, he stared up at the open window. There was no sign of either Luke or the dog-man; Kyle's fall appeared to have gone unnoticed.

He heaved in a deep breath, strengthening his resolve, and limped off toward the street. Despite the pain and humiliation he had been forced to endure, he'd gotten what he needed. He'd go through with the plan, and then everything would get back to normal. Except for one thing.

Even if Luke got down on his knees and begged Kyle to make love to him, there was no way Kyle was going to stick his dick in an ass, no matter how sweet, that had been fucked by a filthy dog.

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Ethan frowned, cocking his head to one side. "What was that?"

"What was what?"

"I thought I heard something. Outside."

Luke poked his head out the window, then turned back to Ethan and shrugged. "Whatever it was, it's not there now."

Reassured, Ethan gazed admiringly at Luke's naked body, now fully revealed to his eyes for the first time. Stripping Luke had been a slow and awkward task due to the dressings on Ethan's

hands, but Luke must have realized how important it was to Ethan that he did it himself, for Luke had held still and allowed Ethan all the time he needed. Feeling a little glow of satisfaction at his achievement, Ethan had to admit that the end result was worth the discomfort.

Reaching for the covers, Luke drew them aside and sat down on the bed. He gave the touch lamp on the nightstand a gentle tap and pulled open the drawer, removing lube and condoms, which he placed beside the lamp.

Ethan crossed to the door and switched off the overhead. The softer lamplight cast a warm glow over Luke's pale skin and turned his light brown hair to gold. "God, you're beautiful," Ethan murmured, his desire for the man warring with a sudden attack of nerves. It had been so long since he'd made love, he scarcely knew where to begin. What if he messed up? If he disappointed Luke, would Luke change his mind about letting him stay?

"Come here," Luke said with a little smile, and patted the mattress. "Talk to me, Ethan. Tell me what you want."

Instead of sitting on the bed, Ethan dropped down onto his knees in front of Luke and looked up into clear gray eyes.

"I want to make you happy. I want to look after you, take care of you, give you all the love you deserve."

Holding his gaze, Luke laid the palm of a hand against Ethan's undamaged cheek. "Jet already does that," he said softly. "What do *you* want, Ethan?"

Ethan swallowed hard. "The same as Jet, but more. I want to make love to you, with my mouth, my hands, my cock. I want to make you fly so high you'll forget you ever knew any other man but me. I want to make you mine."

"I want that, too." Shifting forward, Luke spread his knees and leaned down to capture Ethan's mouth in a gentle kiss as his hands untied the belt and slid the robe from Ethan's shoulders.

Ethan whimpered against Luke's lips, the sound turning to a low growl as his cock began to fill. Luke's mouth opened; Ethan's tongue darted inside, touching, tasting, exploring, and it was Luke's turn to whimper. Breaking the kiss, Ethan pressed his forehead against Luke's, his fingers burrowing into that soft, golden hair, and heaved in a deep breath. Luke's unique, natural scent was still discernable under the residual odors of smoke and antiseptic.

Pulling back, Ethan placed another kiss on those luscious lips. He nibbled at Luke's jaw, teasing the tiny barbs of stubble with his teeth. A long lick and a suck at the side of Luke's neck, the pulse throbbing beneath Ethan's lips, were rewarded with a heartfelt groan. His hands traveled down Luke's sides, his fingertips barely touching the skin, raising goose bumps in their wake despite the heat of the night. His tongue swiped at a tiny pink nipple, which hardened immediately, peaking between his lips.

"Oh, yes, Ethan," Luke moaned. "More, please!" Luke's cock was full and hard, its deep red crown gleaming wetly in the lamplight. The sharp tang of Luke's arousal filled Ethan's nostrils.

With another little growl, Ethan pushed Luke down onto the mattress and sat back on his heels. "Put your legs up." Luke raised his legs and clasped his hands around his thighs, pulling his knees back toward his armpits. His ass was now raised clear of the mattress, his balls hanging loose. Ethan dove in, nuzzling at Luke's heavy sac, breathing in the heady scents of musk and sweat. The nuzzling soon turned to licking and sucking.

Luke let out a whimper. Hefting Luke's balls in one hand, Ethan responded by running his tongue up and down Luke's crease, teasing the little pucker of Luke's hole.

Ethan growled again, deep in his throat. The ring of muscle relaxed, allowing him in, and he began to fuck Luke's ass with his tongue as he gently rolled and squeezed Luke's balls between his fingers.

"God, Ethan," Luke panted, his whole body trembling under the assault. "You sure are into oral!"

Ethan raised his head and smiled, wishing he could stick his fingers where his tongue had been. Well, he still had one undamaged digit. "What do you expect? I'm a dog, remember?"

"A very good dog." Luke let out a gasp as Ethan's thick thumb breached his hole.

"Uh-huh." Kneeling up, Ethan gazed at Luke's straining cock, at the glistening pre-come now coating it from tip to base. "And a very hungry one." He licked his lips, then swallowed Luke down to the root in one swift, easy move.

Luke tasted as good as he smelled, Ethan reflected, as he alternately lapped, sucked, and nibbled at that pretty cock, spurred on by Luke's moans and whimpers. With every jab of Ethan's thumb into Luke's ass, Luke thrust up into Ethan's mouth. Through the light dressing on his palm, Ethan felt Luke's balls shift in their sac.

Luke's fingers tangled in Ethan's hair, gently pushing his head away. Ethan let Luke's cock slip from his lips and looked down at his lover.

"Fuck me, Ethan," Luke murmured, his eyes dark with passion. "Please, baby. Fuck me now."

Ethan's cock was already painfully hard. The unexpected rush of emotion that swept through him at the look in Luke's eyes almost sent him over the edge. Taking a deep breath, he eased his thumb out of Luke's body and knelt back, his erection standing proud.

"Yes," he said, as Luke let his legs down and sat up. "I'll fuck you. But don't be upset if I don't last very long."

Luke gave a little snort of laughter as he reached for the lube and a condom. "I don't think either of us is going to last very long."

Ethan grinned back and clambered onto the bed, then raised his hands, palms out. "Would you mind doing the honors? Unless you want to change the dressings for me before we go to sleep."

"They'll probably need changing anyway," Luke said, "but yes, I'll do the honors." Tearing open the packet, he carefully drew out the condom and rolled it down over Ethan's cock, followed by a handful of lube.

Ethan groaned and closed his eyes, shivering at the sudden coolness on his overheated skin. When he opened them again, Luke was prepping himself, slick fingers twisting deep inside his ass.

"God," Ethan breathed. "I could come just from watching you do that."

"Don't you dare!" Luke's fingers reappeared, and he wiped his hand on his thigh.

Ethan swallowed hard, willing his dick to behave. "How do you want me?"

"How about doggy style?" Luke's grin was positively evil.

"You've been dying to say that all night, haven't you?" Ethan accused, rolling his eyes.

"Yeah, but it also happens to be true."

"Then doggy style it is." Ethan knelt up, one hand wrapped around the base of his cock to hold the condom securely in place, the other on Luke's hip as Luke shuffled back toward him on all fours.

"Go on, Ethan," Luke said, casting a smile over his shoulder, and wiggled his ass. "Make me fly."

Ethan bit down hard on his lower lip to keep from crying out as his cock breached Luke's hole and kept on going, all the way to the hilt. Although slick from the lube, the ring of muscle was tight around Ethan's shaft, and the heat of Luke's channel burned stronger than fire.

"Don't move, Luke," Ethan begged. "Just hold still or I'll blow right now."

"I won't." There was silence for a moment, then: "When you're in doggy form, you can lick your own balls, right?"

"Well, yeah. Licking is how dogs keep themselves clean, you know."

"So, if you can lick your own balls, presumably you can suck your own--"

"Luke!" Ethan protested. "Dogs do not... oh, that is so gross!"

"Maybe so," Luke said, grinning wickedly, "but I find that the thought of a little grossness often helps avert premature ejaculation. Am I right?"

He was. Though Ethan's cock was still hard enough to drill through concrete, he now felt he'd be able to move without ruining the moment.

"Yeah, you're right, Mr. Sneaky. So, are you ready?"

"You bet."

Ethan's first few strokes were tentative and clumsy, but with Luke's murmured encouragement, he soon found a rhythm. The warm, smooth glide of his cock, in and out of Luke's perfect body, set Ethan's balls tingling and his pulse racing. Reaching out a hand, he grabbed hold of Luke's cock, hard and dripping. Heedless of the dressing, he wrapped his fingers around Luke's shaft and began to pump it in sync with his thrusts into Luke's ass.

Moaning appreciatively, Luke joined in the dance, moving back to fuck himself on Ethan's cock, then forward to fuck Ethan's hand.

Luke's skin was gleaming with perspiration, the heat of the summer night compounded by his exertions. Ethan could smell his own sweat, too, feel it trickling down his ribs, tickling through the hairs on his chest. He and Luke smelled right together, Ethan realized, just as he'd known that Kyle smelled wrong.

The two of them were a perfect match, Ethan was sure of it. Admittedly, he hadn't had many partners with which to make a comparison, less than a handful if truth be told, but sex had never, ever, felt this good. Too bad it couldn't last a little longer.

"I'm sorry, Luke," Ethan murmured as the warmth in his belly began to spread, his balls drawing up. "I can't--"

"Me either," Luke gasped, his body trembling. "Go for it, baby -- make us both come."

Ethan whimpered and closed his eyes as he prepared for the home run. Another one, two, three thrusts, and he was there. Holding still, deep inside Luke's ass, he tightened his hand around Luke's cock. Warmth spilled over Ethan's fingers, and his own cock began to pulse, Luke's hole clenching spasmodically around him, drawing out the climax.

Drained by the unexpected strength of his orgasm, Ethan could barely keep himself from collapsing onto Luke's back. Luke, however, appeared to be a little more *compos mentis*. Reaching behind him, he grasped the base of Ethan's cock, holding the condom in place, and carefully eased himself off, then squiggled round to face Ethan.

"Hey," he said, running a hand through Ethan's sweat-damp hair. "Are you okay?"

Ethan looked into Luke's eyes and smiled. "I'm fine. Did I make you fly?"

Luke smiled back, his eyes bright. "Higher than a skylark. Now, let's go get cleaned up and change those dressings before we go to sleep." He cast Ethan a sidelong glance. "I hope you're a snuggler."

Ethan raised an eyebrow. "Let me guess -- Kyle wasn't a snuggler?"

"No, he wasn't."

"Then I'm definitely a snuggler," Ethan said, and leaned forward to place a gentle kiss on Luke's lips.

\*\*\*

The next morning, Luke woke early, roused by the sunlight streaming in through the open window. As promised, Ethan was snuggled up against his back, snoring gently into the pillow. With a smile, Luke slid out from under Ethan's arm and placed a kiss on his brow, then paid a visit to the bathroom.

Examining his face in the mirror, he decided that the superglue-like stuff the paramedic had painted over the cuts would probably stand up to a shower -- and God knew he needed one.

Luke was clean, dressed, and busy preparing coffee and breakfast by the time Ethan joined him in the kitchen, looking delightfully rumpled and stubbly but smelling a lot less smoky after taking a shower of his own.

"Hey there, gorgeous," Luke said, noting that the bathrobe looked far better on Ethan than it ever had on Kyle. "How are your hands?" The dressings were gone, including the one on Ethan's cheek, where yesterday's burn was now just a dark flush on his skin.

Ethan smiled and showed Luke his hands. "The blisters have all but disappeared. I tend to heal pretty quickly."

"That's great. I hope you like scrambled eggs and toast for breakfast, 'cause that's what we're having."

"I'm so hungry I could even eat dog food," Ethan said with a grin as he took a seat.

Luke grinned back and set the plates on the table, then settled into the other chair and poured coffee. "I phoned my boss and told him I wouldn't be in to work this morning, and why," Luke began, watching Ethan attack his breakfast as if he hadn't eaten in days. "He said I should take the whole day off so I can get started on organizing the repairs."

"That's good of him," Ethan observed around a mouthful of eggs and toast.

"He's a good guy. Not all bank managers are bad, you know." He sat forward and pulled a notebook and pen from the back pocket of his jeans, and slid them across the table to Ethan. "Jet and I will be going shopping after we've been to the police station," he said, "so I want you to make a list of what you need -- clothes and shoes, shaving gear, and anything else you fancy."

Ethan frowned as he reached for his coffee. "You do understand that Jet and I are the same person, don't you?"

"Of course I do," Luke said with a shrug. "But it's easier for me to keep Ethan the man and Jet the dog separate in my mind. Especially when it comes to clearing up your poop."

"Right, that would be a little unsettling, I guess." Finishing off his breakfast, Ethan picked up the pen and sat there holding it a little awkwardly between his fingers. "I hope I still know how to write," he murmured, then looked across at Luke. "I won't be able to pay you back."

"You will, once you get a job."

"A job?"

"Yes. As assistant manager, I make pretty good money at the bank, but I won't be able to support both of us indefinitely." Luke took a deep breath, holding Ethan's gaze -- Ethan was not going to like this, not one little bit, and Luke couldn't blame him. But sometimes, in order to go forward, you first had to go back. "And to get a job," he went on, "you'll need papers, ID and such, to prove that you are who you say you are and get yourself back in the system."

"But--"

"I'm sorry, Ethan. I know you don't want to think about this, but it has to be done. And there's not only the matter of establishing your identity. You said your father owned the farm and intended to leave it to you. If he did, it's yours now."

"I won't go back, Luke!" Ethan's eyes were wide, panic rising in his voice.

"Not to stay, no," Luke said, squeezing Ethan's hand. "You're staying here, with me, aren't you?"

"For as long as you'll have me." Luke's touch appeared to be calming Ethan a little, although he still had that haunted look in his eyes.

"Good. And in order for you to stay here, with me, and get a job in town, and live like a regular human being, we have to get everything sorted out. Legally. We have to go back there and get your things -- if they're not at the farm, they'll be in storage somewhere. Do you have a lawyer?"

Gripping Luke's fingers, Ethan swallowed hard. "My daddy did. Mr. Bartholomew. He was a friend of the family. I've known him all my life."

"Then we'll talk to him, get him to take care of everything."

"If Mr. Bartholomew can take care of everything, do we really have to go there?" Ethan asked, a hopeful look on his face.

Luke sighed; this was the part he'd been dreading the most. "Yes, Ethan, we do. We'll check first to make sure that you're not wanted by the law in connection with what happened at the farm, but, in any case, the authorities will want to know why you ran off, where you've been all this time, and why you didn't claim your inheritance until now."

Ethan ducked his head, his eyes fixed on his empty plate. "It's easier being a dog."

"I expect it is," Luke agreed. "And you can still be a dog, whenever you feel like it. But if you want to be a man, too, and if you want me to be your lover, then it's time to stop running and face your fear." He reached out a hand and cupped it under Ethan's chin, forcing him to look into Luke's eyes. "You're not alone in this, you know. I'm with you, and I'm not going to let you down. Ever. I love you, Ethan."

Ethan didn't look convinced. "You've only known me a few hours. How can you love me?"

Luke shrugged. "I already loved Jet. Loving you is just the same, but with benefits."

"Benefits!" Ethan snorted, then heaved a sigh. "Okay, you win. But we don't have to do it right now, do we?"

"Not now, but soon." Luke heaved a sigh of relief; he'd half expected Ethan to turn tail and run, out of the house, out of Luke's life. "In a few weeks from now. That'll give us time to contact Mr. Bartholomew and get all the information we need before heading down there. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Good." Luke rose from the table and gathered up the empty plates. "Now, write that list, and don't forget to note down the sizes."

"Yes, sir!"

Thirty minutes later, Luke was feeding the meter a few hundred yards from the police station, the closest parking space he'd been able to find. He glanced down at Jet, sitting patiently on the sidewalk.

"Ready, baby?"

Jet ducked his head, licking his chops.

"Okay, then." Luke leaned down and clipped the leash to Jet's collar.



They made their way to the police station, just a man walking his dog. At reception, Luke gave the duty officer his name and the reason for his visit, and was told to take a seat while the man spoke into a telephone. After only a couple of minutes, Officer Morrisson, the policeman who had questioned Luke the previous evening, came striding up, his shoes just as shiny as before.

"Glad you could make it, Mr. Ashton," he said, and reached down to pat Jet on the head. "How's Jet today?"

"Oh, he's fine," Luke said. "Hey, you remembered his name!"

"He's a memorable dog. Had one just like him until a few years ago. Not black, though. But loyal? That dog was the best friend I ever had."

"I know what you mean."

Morrisson smiled and led Luke and Jet back to the reception desk. "Cal," he said to the duty officer, "can you get someone to watch over Jet while Mr. Ashton is interviewed?"

Looking up at Luke, Jet gave a little whine.

"Can't I take him in with me?" Luke pleaded. "After all, he was there when it happened. He's a witness!"

The duty officer sighed. "Maybe so, but it's not like he can give a statement, is it? I'm sorry, sir, but the rules are the rules."

Luke turned to Officer Morrisson. "Please? I really don't think I can do this without Jet."

Morrisson heaved a sigh. "Wait here," he said, and disappeared down the corridor.

Luke waited, Jet pressed reassuringly against his legs.

After a couple of minutes, the man returned. "Okay, Mr. Ashton," he said. "As an exception, the detectives are prepared to waive the rule and allow Jet to accompany you for the interview."

Luke heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank you, Officer Morrisson."

"What the heck," Morrisson murmured, ruffling Jet's ears. "Call me Pete." The three of them proceeded along the hallway, Jet's claws clicking on the hard, shiny floor, until Pete pulled up short outside a door. He opened it and ushered Luke and Jet inside, then followed them in and closed the door behind him.

Two plainclothes policemen were sitting at a table; that and a few chairs were the only furniture in the room. The older of the two men rose and held out a hand for Luke to shake, which he did.

"Mr. Ashton," the man said over the hum of the air-conditioning, and gestured toward a seat. Luke sat, Jet pressed close against his knee. "I'm Detective Simmons, and this is my colleague, Detective de la Santa. Officer Morrisson, here," Simmons went on, "has typed up the statement you made to him yesterday evening. Before we take this matter any further, I'd be obliged if you would read it through and acknowledge it as being a true and accurate account of what you told him."

Pete stepped forward and placed a sheet of paper on the table in front of Luke, then resumed his place behind Luke's shoulder.

"Am I allowed to correct it?" Luke asked hesitantly. "Not that I'm doubting Officer Morrisson's integrity, but there might be a little difference of interpretation somewhere along the--"

"You may correct it," Simmons said, leaning back in his chair, an inscrutable look on his craggy face.

Luke drew a pen from his pocket and started to read, correcting a few typos and grammatical errors here and there. At one point, he beckoned Pete over and told him what he wanted to change and why; Pete nodded, and the change was made. Satisfied that the statement was now true and accurate, Luke handed the sheet back to Pete and looked up at Simmons.

"So, what happens now?"

"Now," Simmons said as Pete left the office, paper in hand, "we ask you if you want to press charges, and if so, which ones. According to your statement, the man who you say firebombed your house has committed other crimes against your person."

Luke sighed. "Do we really have to go there? Look, as I told Officer Morrisson, I don't want to charge Kyle for the rest of it. Though I didn't even know until a few weeks ago, he has a family, and I wouldn't want to put his wife through that."

"But you do want to press charges for what happened last night, is that right?" de la Santa put in, leaning his elbows on the table, his dark eyes fixed on Luke's.

Luke sighed and spread his hands, the leash slapping against the edge of the table. "I really don't think I have a choice. Kyle's obsessed. If he isn't stopped now, there's no knowing what he might do next. Innocent people could get hurt, and I wouldn't want that on my conscience."

"I understand that, believe me," de la Santa went on, "and you don't *have* to press charges about the other stuff if you don't want to. But if the forensic evidence from the scene isn't sufficient to justify an arrest, we need to prove that Mr. Waitrose had motive. So, even if you don't press charges for the other stuff, we need to know that you'll be prepared to testify in court and stand by your statement. In which case, his wife is going to find out anyway."

Luke looked around as the door opened and Pete came back into the room. "I'll stand by it, but that's all. No other charges."

"Okay." Simmons reached out a hand to take the revised statement from Pete, then scanned through it and slid it across the desk to Luke. "Read it, sign it, and we'll set the wheels in motion."

Luke read and signed, then looked across at Simmons. "That's it? We can go?"

"We?" Simmons frowned, then shook his head. "Right, you mean the dog. He's been so good and quiet, I forgot he was there. Yes, Mr. Ashton, you can go. We'll get back to you in due course."

The interview was over, the wheels in motion. Dismissed, Luke said his farewells and allowed Detective de la Santa to lead him and Jet back to reception, where the duty officer made a photocopy of Luke's signed statement and handed it to the detective.

"This is for you, Mr. Ashton," de la Santa said. "Just so you--" He broke off as the main door slammed open.

Luke turned to see what had startled the man, and his heart sank as he stared at what the cat, or rather two uniformed policemen, had dragged in. The officers approached the desk, their hands clasped firmly around the upper arms of the handcuffed man struggling between them.

Kyle was a sorry sight indeed. His face looked grubby and was crusted with dried blood from a number of scratches. His sweater showed several pulls and tears, his hair was sticking up all over the place, and even through the struggling there was a definite limp in his gait. All in all, he looked like he'd been pulled through a hedge backward. He didn't smell any too good, either.

"Oh, Kyle." Luke heaved a sigh, anger giving way to pity, as Jet took up a defensive position in front of him. "What have you done to yourself?"

"Kyle?" said de la Santa. "This is Kyle Waitrose?"

Kyle stopped short as his eyes fastened on Luke's. "Done to myself? You did this to me, Luke. You did it!" Jet gave a little growl, and Kyle's face blanched beneath the dirt. "You and that... that thing there!"

"We'd had word to keep a lookout for Mr. Waitrose's car," one of the policemen explained to the detective. "We spotted it in a rest area, beside one of the main roads leading out of town. He was asleep in it." He rubbed at his jaw with the hand that wasn't clamped around Kyle's arm. "I guess you can add assaulting a police officer to whatever else he's being charged with."

De la Santa shared a look with Luke, then cleared his throat. "Mr. Waitrose, Mr. Ashton has filed charges against you."

Having given up the struggle, Kyle drew himself up to his full, impressive height, and glared down at the detective. "What charges?"

"Arson and attempted murder."

Kyle gave a snort. "Is that all?" He shook his head and turned his attention back to Luke. "I'd advise you to drop those charges, kiddo."

"And why would I do that?" Luke said, keeping a firm grip on Jet's leash; the manic grin that spread across Kyle's face sent shivers down Luke's spine.

"Because I know about that creature of yours. I know what it is."

What? Luke felt a sudden rush of panic -- how could Kyle know? Jet shuffled back, pressing close against his leg.

"Yeah," said the policeman with the bruised jaw, rolling his eyes. "So do I. It's a *dog*."

Yeah, Luke agreed silently, his spirits lifting. Jet was a dog. Even if Kyle did know the rest of it, who would ever believe him?

"Oh, no it's not," Kyle said softly, his eyes taking on a wild cast. "Drop the charges, Luke, or I'll tell them what it really is. I'll tell the whole world what it really is. And then the scientists will come and take it away from you, and do horrible experiments on it, and you'll never see it again."

From the identical look on the faces of all the policemen present, Luke could tell that he and Jet had nothing to fear. He shook his head and sighed. "I think it's you that the scientists will be taking away, Kyle," he said. "Or rather the shrinks. You tried to kill me. You tried to burn my house down and kill me and my dog. The charges stand."

"You shouldn't have dumped me!" Kyle snapped. "Nobody dumps me, Luke. Nobody." He ducked his head, then raised it again, the madness reappearing in his eyes. "I saw the beast," he whispered, nodding at Jet. "I saw it in your kitchen, smoking cigarettes and drinking *my* Scotch. I saw it in your bedroom, kissing you and undressing you, getting you naked. I bet you even let it fuck that sweet little ass of yours, didn't you?"

"You're saying Mr. Ashton here let a cigarette-smoking, whisky-drinking dog have sexual relations with him?" the other uniformed policeman said with a skeptical frown.

"Not the dog, you idiot!" Kyle yelled, rounding on the officer. "The man inside the dog!"

"A man was *inside* the dog?" queried the first policeman. "You mean somebody had sexual relations with the dog *and* Mr. Ashton?"

"Nobody had sexual relations with the fucking dog!" Kyle screamed, spittle flying from his lips. "There *is* no fucking dog!"

Jet gave a little whimper and looked up at Luke, a puzzled expression on his clearly doggy face. Luke smiled down at him and laid a comforting hand on his head. "It's okay, Jet," he said. "The poor man's just a little confused. Nobody's going to hurt you."

"Look!" Kyle screeched, hopping up and down in agitation. "He's touching it! He's touching the dog-man!"

"Okay, that does it." Detective de la Santa turned to the duty officer. "Call the psychiatric department at the hospital and tell them we've got a live one for them. And make sure he's kept under guard until they've made their assessment."

Luke watched as the two policemen dragged Kyle back outside. Although Kyle's accusations about him and Jet were true, it was a pretty safe bet that nobody would ever believe them. And while the deception might make Kyle appear even crazier than he already was, this was the ideal opportunity for Kyle's other, all too genuine psychological problems to be addressed. Luke only hoped that it would help Kyle in the long run.

"Mr. Ashton?"

Luke looked around at the touch of the detective's hand on his arm, and heaved a sigh. "Well, I knew he had a problem with dogs, but...."

"That's more than a problem, I'd say." De la Santa reached down, idly combing his fingers through the dense fur between Jet's ears. "I'm sorry you had to go through that, sir. And I want to thank you for sticking to your guns. Now that I've seen the man, I know that it must have taken a lot of courage for you to stand up to him, especially after what else you said he did to you."

Luke didn't want to think about that. "Thanks. But Kyle's family -- what's going to happen to them?"

"That's not your concern," the handsome young detective said, looking into Luke's eyes. "And to be perfectly honest, I think they're better off without him, at least for the moment. In my humble opinion, Mr. Waitrose is in need of some serious medical help."

"And I hope he gets it," Luke agreed. "Thank you, Detective. If there's nothing more, Jet and I will be on our way."

Holding Luke's gaze perhaps a little longer than was necessary, de la Santa gave a little smile and nodded his head. "Okay. Be seeing you," he said, then turned and made his way back down the corridor.

Heaving a sigh of relief that it was all over, at least for now, Luke folded the copy of his statement and slid it into his jeans pocket. "Come on, Jet," he said and headed toward the main door, only to be brought up short by the leash. He glanced back. Jet was growling under his breath, his eyes apparently fixed on the retreating detective's trim backside. "What?" Luke murmured. "You're jealous?"

Jet looked up at him and whined.

"Really? Oh, baby. Don't be. You're mine, and I'm yours, and that's the way it's always gonna be."

With a happy little bark, Jet reared up on his back legs and licked Luke's neck.

Chuckling, Luke wrapped his arms around his beautiful pet and held him close, savoring the scent of Jet's fur, similar but subtly different to that of Ethan's skin.

Despite the complexity of the situation, Luke was confident that things would work out okay. From what Ethan had said, nobody but his father had seen Ethan in human form since his mother's funeral. As far as anybody knew, including the hit man's associate who had run screaming from the scene, Ethan had absolutely nothing to do with what had happened at his father's farm.

So, it might take a while, but in the end they'd get everything sorted out, and then Ethan would be free to start a new life here with Luke.

Taking Jet's front paws in his hands, Luke gently pushed him away, then wrapped the leash around his fingers and shoved the door open. The two of them stepped back out into the baking summer heat and started along the sidewalk.

"Okay," Luke said, gazing down into Jet's beautiful brown eyes as they reached the car. "Let's go check out that shopping list. Ethan will be needing some clothes once we get home."

End

Wanna Be Your Dog

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