



Poised to run. Aching to stay. What lies between is sweet torture.

For nine years, Scott Lund has been erasing himself. Making sure his own kind—those who can control people's minds—can't track him down. It has been a lonely existence. So lonely, that when he makes a real connection with a stranger, he breaks his own cardinal rule and falls asleep in the man's arms.

Rory McIntyre has been sent by his pack alpha to keep a protective eye on Scott. Seduction wasn't part of the plan, but once he lays eyes on the Minder, Rory isn't satisfied to keep his distance.

The moment Scott opens his eyes, he panics and flees—straight into a Minder trap. The handsome stranger from the night before turns out to be his rescuer, who whisks him away to a safe place. Wolf Town.

Overwhelmed by Rory's family, Scott knows only two things for sure. His attraction to Rory is growing by the minute. And to keep his lover safe, he must put as much distance between them as possible...

Warning: Contains dangerous mind control, bone-cracking violence and full-body-contact sex with an irresistible wolf shifter.

**eBooks are *not* transferable.  
They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.**

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Samhain Publishing, Ltd.  
577 Mulberry Street, Suite 1520  
Macon GA 31201

Wolf Town  
Copyright © 2010 by Joely Skye  
ISBN: 978-1-60928-055-0  
Edited by Sasha Knight  
Cover by Natalie Winters

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Samhain Publishing, Ltd. electronic publication: June 2010  
[www.samhainpublishing.com](http://www.samhainpublishing.com)

# Wolf Town

*Joely Skye*

# Chapter One

Rory pulled in a breath and tried to ignore the unpleasant smell of exhaust mixed with human sweat. The October day had turned unusually warm, and it seemed like everyone and their brother was overdressed. Actually sweat wasn't much of an annoyance. It was the antiperspirant and perfumes and colognes that came with it, assaulting his nose.

He leaned casually against the bus stand, giving the impression he was gazing vacantly down the road, one of many waiting for the streetcar to arrive. His target walked past, hunched over as usual, staring down at the sidewalk. Rory could have been dressed in neon orange and doing jumping jacks, and the man wouldn't have noticed him.

Rory straightened from his slouch and detached from the bus stand to follow Scott Lund, twenty-eight years old and apparently entirely alone in the world. Was he headed to his apartment, or would Friday night bring a break from that routine?

Please God a break. Four days on the job and Rory was already dying of boredom.

He didn't want to be here, bodyguarding some unstable psychic mind-control-type person whose file didn't make him sound particularly appealing, let alone nice.

Which was why Scott's rather defeated posture intrigued Rory. Although he recognized that wolves were more aware than others of body posture and considered it an important signal, this guy evidently did not. Quite frankly, if a wolf walked the way Scott did, Rory would have assumed he was a dysfunctional pack's omega—the unfortunate wolf everyone else abused. But Scott was a Minder who lived by himself, and Rory had to be careful not to make assumptions or perceive him to be weak when he was not.

Even if this Scott was apparently in need of a bodyguard. Not for the first time, Rory wondered if his father and Trey had cooked up this job simply as a make-work project. He glared at Scott's back, as if he could blame him for Rory's predicament vis-à-vis pack politics, that is, his being the son of the alpha.

Scott turned left onto Bloor and Rory sighed. The man appeared to be walking home.

But to Rory's relief, Scott then did something outside his normal routine. He ducked into a side street and into a pub.

*Excellent.* A much-needed change in protocol. Rory followed, exchanging the pollution of the city for the smells of cooking, alcohol and disinfectants—which meant the place was kept halfway clean.

Scott slid onto a stool near the end of the bar and nodded at the bartender. They traded lackluster greetings, and Scott was passed a beer while he ordered “the usual”. He even mustered a halfhearted smile for that. Scott, generally, was not a smiley guy, at least that Rory had observed.

Before Rory made it too obvious about who he was stalking, he grabbed a stool for himself, three down from Scott, and leaned on the bar.

“What can I get you?” the blond bartender asked, and Rory toyed with the idea of flirting. But his wolf didn’t want to draw attention to himself in this strange city, so he quietly requested the day’s special, with coffee, and left it at that.

Muted music, not quite Muzak, played in the background, and an old clock ticked overhead. Did this Scott not talk to anyone ever? It was getting a little ridiculous. Wolves might be more social than Minders, but Rory couldn’t see a complete lack of friends, or even acquaintances, as being healthy. He’d be reporting this back to Trey, if nothing else.

It occurred to him that if Scott had been a wolf, Trey would never have left him alone for so long. Common wisdom was that wolves needed social contact to stay sane. Minders on the other hand apparently made each other *more* insane when they got together.

So Rory was here, making sure Scott didn’t get co-opted into a “pod”. God, just their word for a social group was creepy.

Scott wasn’t creepy though. Rory cast a sidelong glance at his target who looked so completely normal if, frankly, a little...sad. Or perhaps that was Rory projecting, because he’d be one unhappy puppy if he spent his life in the city with no friends.

Trey hadn’t banned contact with Scott, had just told Rory to be careful if he went that route. Trey had been talking about acquaintanceship or possibly friendship, Rory knew, but after watching Scott for four days, Rory figured he could sleep with him too—if that worked out. It would pass the time. Might get him more information, might make him more likely to be aware of any danger threatening Scott. Trey, with his FBI background, would never counsel such an approach, but Rory sure as hell wasn’t Trey. The old man called this a job, but it was a favor and they both knew it, and Rory couldn’t stay away from his accounting job forever, pack politics or not.

He waited till the bartender was busy with polishing glasses or whatever it was bartenders did, then turned, angling his body towards Scott. “Excuse me. Do you have the time?”

Bent over his plate, Scott flicked a wary glance Rory’s way, enough for him to catch a flash of gray eyes, before he raised his wrist and spoke softly to it. “Sure. It’s 5:50.”

“Thanks.”

Scott nodded and went back to work on his food.

Hmm, Rory wasn’t sure that exchange had been worth much. Now there was little chance Scott wouldn’t recognize him in the future. Which wouldn’t be such a problem if Scott knew Rory was actually

looking out for his interests. Wracking his brain for another way in—Rory didn't normally have trouble making conversation but this situation had him stumped—he was surprised when out of the corner of his eye he saw Scott straighten his back, pull in a breath and face Rory again.

“Visiting Toronto?” The question was diffident, but Scott's body language was not. In some way he was counting on Rory's answer.

*Good.* He flashed a quick smile. “In a way. I'm here for a couple of weeks for work.”

Scott nodded, then offered a suggestion. “Be sure to see the CN Tower.”

Like hell he'd go up that sky-high elevator. The wolf in him rebelled at the idea of enclosed space, entrapment. But nevertheless Rory asked, “It's worth the price of admission?”

“The view's impressive, if you like that sort of thing.” Scott shrugged, picking up Rory's doubts, which indicated that Scott might be more observant than Rory had guessed. Scott lapsed into silence, seemingly having little to add.

“Have you lived in Toronto long?”

“A few years,” Scott answered vaguely. “I like it.” He fiddled with his knife.

“What's the nightlife like?” Rory kept his tone close to neutral, just the slightest hint of interest showing, easy to ignore. *Don't frighten him off* had been his biggest instruction for the job. Trey would kill him if he put this Minder on the run, especially by showing too much interest.

“It's all right.” Not exactly a huge affirmation, but Scott turned towards Rory, met his gaze full on and something shifted in his expression. Those gray eyes had a kind of power and Rory wondered if Scott was going to try to push him. He hoped not. He didn't want to have to report that to Trey.

They gazed, for longer than was comfortable, but Scott remained silent, so it was Rory who spoke next, keeping everything about himself, his voice and his body language relaxed. “You can lead the way, this being your hometown and all.”

Scott cocked his head, considering, before he answered, “Sure.”

And that was that. They had some kind of agreement. They paid off their bills and exited the pub. The now-cool air hit Rory's face—refreshing. Night had fallen, and with it the worst of the day's smells lessened.

“So what would you like to see?” asked Scott.

“High Park.”

Scott stumbled, then stopped to face him, disappointment more than dismay on his face. “A *park*? Uh...”

Rory laughed and held up a hand. He was so not a city person. “For walking, not sex. I thought we'd go back to my hotel. If you were inclined.”

Scott gazed at him doubtfully.

“Really. I'd like a walk in the park. I live in the country. I don't particularly enjoy the city streets.”

“Then you want to go back to your hotel?”

“Yes.” Rory watched as Scott seemed to debate something within himself.

The Minder’s gaze intensified, and his voice turned harsher as he said, “At High Park we’ll chat only, no sex, no touching. *Then* back to your hotel.”

And Rory felt it. Scott had tried to manipulate him, and he could even see the appeal of the Minder’s suggestion though otherwise wasn’t much affected. If Rory were human, not wolf, he apparently wouldn’t have realized anything was off, would have simply believed it was a great idea of Scott’s and agreed wholeheartedly.

Scott wasn’t supposed to use his powers on unsuspecting humans, of which he was one, to Scott’s knowledge. Rory wondered what Trey would make of it.

“Okay,” Rory said slowly since Scott was observing him closely.

“You said that’s what you wanted.” Scott spoke with just the slightest strain of defensiveness.

It was insurance, Rory recognized, in case he had other ideas Scott wasn’t prepared to entertain. It seemed almost fair. “How do we get to High Park?”

Scott gestured forward with one open hand, and they walked.

The conversation stuttered and stopped, began again. Scott worked as a mailman, and he liked getting outside for his job. Rory admitted he was an accountant.

“Why are you in Toronto then?” Scott asked.

“Courting a new client.”

It had the ring of truth, and Scott accepted that as they walked through the not-very-well-lit path of High Park. Rory smelled Scott’s increasing nervousness. Perhaps he didn’t like being here at night. Perhaps it was Rory himself. But Rory felt safer. He could hear and smell and see everything he needed to know they were alone, not being followed. It was different on the streets where his level of alert had to remain high.

The park calmed Rory too, so that by the time they exited, he felt confident about what he was doing. Trey hadn’t told him to stay hands-off, but he wouldn’t approve. However, Rory didn’t see a better way to insert himself into Scott’s life and the surveillance from afar had its own problems.

Besides, the man appealed to Rory, despite everything he knew. It was partially the body language Scott used, which roused Rory’s too-strong protective instincts. Also Scott plain smelled good to his wolf. And though Scott’s face was not remarkable, his eyes were quite something, a vividness there that intrigued Rory.

Even if Scott used his eyes and voice to manipulate others, he couldn’t manipulate Rory.

Scott stopped, rubbed his forehead and said with a mix of weariness and sadness, “I’m more tired than I realized.”



Interesting. He was trying to back out. Even if Scott had thought he'd pushed Rory, he wasn't exactly chomping at the bit to do it again, wasn't thriving to be a master manipulator as the government informationals on Minders sometimes suggested.

Rory stepped closer and watched Scott tense even if he didn't move away. "Maybe the park wasn't such a good idea."

"Well, it was if you liked it."

"Come back to my room with me," he murmured.

Scott stared, pupils large and dark with the night, and Rory caught the scent of his arousal. Good. Scott was attracted. Rory placed a hand on Scott's hip, felt him jerk slightly under his palm, but still Scott didn't retreat. Instead he asked, of all things, "How old are you?"

He leaned towards Scott's ear. "Twenty-six."

"You look younger."

"So I've been told. I can show you ID if you'd like."

Scott simply shook his head, and Rory lifted his other hand, wrapped it around the nape of Scott's neck, felt and watched as Scott jerked against his touch then settled into it again.

This reaction of Scott's had Rory both turned on and worried. Protective instincts worked in odd ways on him. If Scott were a wolf, Rory would be wondering who had hurt him, but humans were different and Minders were different again.

"No force, no penetration." Scott's eyes had gone intense, and for the second time in an hour, Rory felt his words. In other circumstances, he might have been angry or at least irritated that Scott was trying to manipulate him. But these pushes were all about self-protection, and Scott had tried to cry off.

"Agreed." Rory was tempted to kiss him but something told him to wait for the hotel room. So he stepped back. Scott was surprised to be released.

"You're still interested?" That was a question, no push behind it, and Scott seemed puzzled by Rory's continued attraction.

Rory smiled, slow and easy. "Absolutely."

## Chapter Two

It would be okay, Scott told himself, if he kept a grip on his stupid panic. The man with the velvet voice hadn't fought his suggestions at all, which should mean they would be in for a tame exchange. This encounter was something Scott could handle, something Scott *needed*. As they walked silently down the street towards the hotel, Scott realized they hadn't introduced themselves. Normally that would be right and good, but this man was so beautiful, liquid brown eyes, buzz-cut dark hair and absolutely ripped arms. No longer visible under the jacket, but they'd been what he'd first noticed in the pub when he'd been asked the time.

Scott wanted to know his name so that afterwards when he remembered this night, it wouldn't be a nameless encounter. He glanced up. The other man wasn't much taller, but he was stronger, younger, hotter. Scott supposed him being an available body in a strange city was good enough for this out-of-towner.

"I'm Scott," he offered.

"Rory."

"Sounds Scottish."

Rory said wryly, "Do I look Scottish?"

Scott guessed he didn't. "I don't know."

"Well, neither do I. Someone found me and my sister playing on their doorstep when I was five years old."

"Oh." Jesus, what to say? *I'm glad someone did find you?* He'd meant to keep to small talk. Although Rory had imparted the information rather cheerfully, and he continued in the same tone.

"My adoptive father is Scottish though."

This time Scott replied with an articulate "Ah," which was enough to encourage Rory. He liked the name Rory, hadn't met someone with it before.

"When I was young, I liked to think I looked Scottish, because I adored my father. He didn't bother to disabuse me of the notion. But others did." Rory slanted him a look, a little calculating. "What do you think I look like?"

"I think you look beautiful."

Rory stopped, smiled. He had such a wide, engaging grin. It brought Scott a strange pleasure.

Rory picked up Scott's hand and linked their fingers. "Sweet talker, are you?"

No one had ever told that to Scott in his life and he felt his face grow warm. Rory had to know he was extremely attractive. He was clearly confident of himself, in the way he moved, in the way he talked. They'd stopped now and were facing each other, but Scott stiffened as Rory's gaze dropped to his mouth. He didn't want to be kissed and he really didn't want to be kissed on the street.

Then Rory retreated again, as he had earlier when he'd had that warm hand of his around the back of Scott's neck. "We're here."

Scott looked up at the Holiday Inn sign.

"Ready to see my room?" The words were soft, beguiling. Scott was certainly beguiled, though he realized he was taking a risk. Still Rory hadn't balked at Scott's small suggestions so far. He knew it was fundamentally wrong to bring his power into this sexual transaction, but it was that or nothing for himself. And the latter was too bleak to contemplate. They were small protections, to ensure things didn't go bad. Ethically dubious perhaps, but not a sign of evil, he didn't think.

"I'm ready."

Rory blinked and Scott realized he'd said it wrong, as if he was girding himself for something unpleasant. You weren't supposed to bring so much baggage to hookups, for Christ's sake, and Rory's frown said as much. He released Scott's hand. "We can just go for coffee, Scott."

*No.* Talking was an even worse idea. "I'd like to come up. Really."

Rory eyed him, something like disbelief in his eyes, and Scott thought it was going to end then and there, but he said, "Okay."

The room was spartan, one queen-sized bed, a window on to the city. Rory strolled to the window and shucked his jacket, stared out as if the room was a bit of a trap. This wasn't going quite as Scott expected. His hookups to date followed a certain pattern of behavior, and the pensive expression on Rory's face didn't quite fit.

When Rory turned back to him, Scott expected his approach, prepared himself for it, since Rory had been...assertive earlier. But it wasn't happening. Instead he was observing him, not in a critical way, that Scott could tell, but with curiosity.

If Scott didn't act soon, whatever lay between them, which admittedly wasn't much, was going to splutter and die. And right now, given the choice between doing nothing and doing something, Scott reached for something. He pulled off his jacket, felt encouraged by Rory's dark, silent gaze, and stepped towards him.

Rory's T-shirt was thin, like his jacket had been, as if the cool autumn weather didn't affect him. Scott slid his hands under Rory's shirt and felt warm, firm skin tight over strong muscle and bone.

Rory's chest rose and fell as Scott touched his back, his sides, his solid muscular abs. Then he unbuttoned Rory's jeans, unzipped him, taking him in hand. Like the rest of him, Rory's cock was warm,

solid, alive. A shiver ran over Scott, thinking about exploring Rory with his mouth, tasting and sucking, licking every contour.

It was the one thing he liked to do with men, suck them off.

Condom. His grip didn't lessen, but his movement, the stroke up and down Rory's cock, slowed. Sometimes Scott just didn't know how to think ahead, when he should have learned by now. As he lifted his face, he saw Rory's so close to his, still that watchful look that made Scott feel special, important. Suddenly, it was easy to ask.

"Condoms?" Already the precome was like lubricant in Scott's hand and he enjoyed the slide of it, just enough friction. "I can do more with a condom."

Instead of leaping at the offer, Rory's large hands came to rest on Scott, one caressing his neck, the other edging under his shirt to skim up his side and rest under his armpit. Rory's thumb brushed his nipple. Scott felt captured then, and he trembled. It had been too long and not long enough since someone had laid hands on him like this. Most strangers were more than happy to just receive blow jobs.

"Uh," managed Scott before Rory angled his head up and bent to, well, the best word he could think of was nuzzle his throat. It was hard to focus on Rory's dick now, with his nipple being caressed, his throat being nipped and kissed, his nape being held so firmly.

*Tamp it down*, Scott told himself, though this idea seemed to come from too far away to be useful. Besides it wasn't quite panic rising in him, it was a yearning, a need.

His throat surprised him with a moan.

"That's it," Rory said, and Scott hadn't the wherewithal to know what he was talking about while Rory's attentive tongue and lips ascended to Scott's jawline.

Things were getting out of control and a part of Scott wanted to speak words that would make Rory pull away, but he didn't have the will for that, not now, with Rory's warm breath on him. He was coming in for the kiss and Scott tried not to seize up. He was thinking too hard again when, for a moment, he hadn't been able to think.

Instead of a full-mouth onslaught, Rory kissed the corner of Scott's mouth while he pressed his thumb against Scott's nipple. His mouth opened and Rory nipped his bottom lip lightly, kissed it, then licked it, all this attention on his bottom lip for God's sake, and Scott barely processed that Rory's hand had come around, was wrapped around Scott's throat for the briefest moment, like a threatening caress, before Rory's palm slid down and began unbuttoning Scott's shirt.

"You're a complicated mystery," said Rory as if it was a compliment, and Scott opened his mouth to answer. Rory's tongue slid in, danced with Scott's, skillful, teasing, not coming on too strong, and as Scott began to relax in it, Rory made the kiss more forceful, angling their mouths to go deeper.

Scott could barely breathe now, couldn't keep up. He didn't do kissing with hookups—which meant he didn't do kissing—but here his head was spinning. He'd long since released Rory's cock and cool air hit his back as Rory divested him of his shirt.

Warm hands gathered him close, pulling his body right up to Rory's so their cocks rubbed against each other through his clothing. He hadn't meant to lose control like this, had wanted to take care of Rory and leave. But right now he couldn't even speak as Rory held him close and kissed the life out of him, kissed the life back into him as Scott felt his arms rise, wrap around Rory's neck.

Somehow Scott couldn't get near enough, their bare chests pressed together wasn't enough, and it was too much. Rory's mouth wouldn't release Scott's, his hand had come back to Scott's nape, holding him in place and worshipping him, and Scott's entire body was melting under the onslaught.

The moaning was his, he recognized it dimly, though he couldn't remember being vocal. Then again, he couldn't remember anything like this.

Rory pushed down his pants and briefs. A hand cupped Scott's ass. All of a sudden, Scott felt abandoned, for there was space between them as Rory rid himself and Scott of the last of their clothing. He should say something, this was his chance, except Rory took Scott's head in his hands and began kissing again, gently now, encouraging Scott to respond and Scott answered as best he could.

*It's okay, this is okay.* That voice from far away reassured him and his body thought so too, no longer bracing itself for...something, but trying to keep up while Scott responded to Rory's amazing touch.

They walked in lockstep until Rory fell back on the bed, Scott on top, unsure about what came next, until Rory took both their cocks in hand, rubbing together, finding friction despite the pre-ejaculate that lay between them. Scott attempted to find a rhythm. Simply rubbing, he hadn't done it this way before, and he glanced at Rory, trying to figure out how to move.

"Put weight on your knees, just a little." Again Rory palmed Scott's ass, then arranged him. "That's it."

Christ. Scott couldn't look at Rory's dark, knowing gaze anymore. He felt too lost, this was totally outside of the script, so he let his head fall to Rory's chest, let his body embrace this unusual coupling. His balls tightened, his body on the edge, and he wanted to give back, to delay so he kissed Rory's chest, nipping and licking as Rory had done earlier with his neck. When he latched on to one dark nipple, Rory arched and shouted, a joyous sound that shocked Scott enough to ease him back from the edge, even as Rory shot his come over his own belly.

Slowly Scott released Rory's nipple. Scott's body was tight with want and need, and he was breathing hard, that awful uncertainty returning with a vengeance. He was getting whiplash, this back and forth between feeling this coupling was perfectly right and a step into the unknown.

“Arms around my neck,” said Rory. Scott’s world shifted as he was brought upright, Rory lifting him on his lap, one hand wrapped around Scott’s aching cock, the other his balls, both hands slick with his own come.

“You want it.” Rory’s voice was soft, encouraging, no impatience there, and Scott responded to his skillful hands pumping up and down, sliding a thumb across his slit. The wave felt physical as it rose up his body, his tension sexual and otherwise, and he buried his face in Rory’s neck, wanting it to end, never wanting it to end.

Rory’s hand moved backward from his balls, one finger entering Scott without preamble, slick and wonderful, and yet Scott’s heart began to pound and he feared he would never come, the tension gripping him growing too thick.

“That’s it.” The velvet voice undid him, so full of pleasure. “That’s wonderful, you feel wonderful.” Rory spoke meaningless words as he moved in counterpoint, his palm sliding down Scott’s cock, his finger sliding up Scott’s ass. “You’re with me. Come for me, baby.”

The groan rose from deep within him, stiffening his body, opening his eyes, arching his back. Scott’s gaze met Rory’s eyes—intent, determined, warm, dark. All those things pinned Scott as he spurted in Rory’s hand, trembling and unable to stay silent, even with Rory watching him.

Rory didn’t release him after Scott had spilled but kept hold of his cock, kept his finger inside him, as if he could loosen Scott’s body of everything it held.

“Okay?” Rory asked.

He gave the shortest nod possible, unable to look away, unable to breathe, not sure what the hell he’d just done, wondering why Rory still held him like this.

To his amazement, Rory slid a second digit inside and that got Scott breathing again. “What...?”

Rory wrapped an arm around Scott’s waist. “Trust me.”

The odd thing was Scott’s body accepted the invasion easily, welcomed it even. “I can’t.”

“Can’t trust me?”

“I...” Scott jerked as Rory hit his pleasure spot and he made an “ungh” noise. His chest was so tight and full he could barely speak.

“I’d kiss you senseless right now, but I want to make sure you’re all right with this.”

Scott was hardening again. “I don’t know.” He sounded so uncertain. “I think I need a break.”

Rory tilted his head, brushed a kiss against Scott’s mouth and slid out his fingers slowly, pleurably.

“Okay.”

The loss felt immediate and something must have showed on Scott’s face, because Rory smiled. “I’ll be right back.”

Scott flopped down and lay there, breathing like he'd run a marathon while Rory disappeared into the bathroom and returned with a washcloth to wipe him off. He watched as Rory bent his head to the task, cleaning Scott's belly, his dick and balls and then his ass very carefully and thoroughly.

As Rory disappeared a second time into the bathroom, Scott gripped the sheets wondering how he was going to slip out of here any time soon. He wasn't supposed to be making this kind of impression. He should say something to Rory about how he wasn't going to remember Scott's face, not just for Scott's sake, though clearly it was important that other Minders couldn't ID him through Rory's memories. But he also didn't want Rory coming to the attention of any Minders.

It hurt to think of erasing himself from Rory's mind. Scott stared at the ceiling, building himself up for that kind of betrayal.

"Hey, you're getting chilled." Rory wrapped his warm body around Scott, pulling the blankets over them both. Earlier Scott had been pinned by Rory's gaze, but now he was trapped by his leg across Scott's thighs, his arm around Scott's chest.

The warmth was beguiling.

*Not yet, thought Scott. I won't erase myself quite yet. First we'll sleep and when we wake, before we have a chance to start take two, I'll erase myself, get away.*

"Sleep," murmured Rory, velvet voice deep and thick now, mesmerizing, commanding.

So Scott slept.

## Chapter Three

Scott woke in the dark, coming out of a deep sleep into warmth and someone wrapped around him.

That wasn't right. He held still, trying to find his bearings, and the evening came back to him, even as he registered Rory's leg tangled with his as he spooned him.

Scott thought Rory was asleep, his breathing sounded deep and even, but he was hard, his cock pressed against his ass.

*That* wasn't happening. He had to get out of here.

He couldn't believe he'd fallen asleep like this, couldn't remember when he'd slept with anyone, ever.

*Sleep*, Rory had said when Scott never fell asleep easily or quickly. But this time he had.

What was wrong with this picture?

Scott's heart rate picked up, the panic rose within and he worked to keep calm. He had to slip away without waking this man who had him trapped in this bed. He had to get away and think this through.

He slid his leg out from under Rory's, then held still, held his breath. After he inched his lower body away, he started to edge out from under Rory's arm.

The slack arm tensed, became muscle and tendon that banded Scott's chest, holding him down, while Rory rumbled, "Where are you going?"

"Bathroom." Scott pushed against the arm.

Instead of letting go, Rory rose on an elbow and stared down, though Scott couldn't see his expression in the dark. He stayed still, hoping Rory would continue the charade of being normal and wouldn't push him. Scott wanted to avoid a battle with another Minder, a battle he was likely to lose. He wasn't terribly strong.

But instead of forceful words, a warm hand pressed against his chest, against his rapidly beating heart, and Rory asked a question, seemingly concerned. "What's got you so worried?"

*Play along*. "Nothing."

Rory sat up, wide awake. "Scott." His tone had changed though, almost a warning, so Scott struck first.

"You want me to leave now." He pushed the words at Rory, needing the distance, needing to see if they worked or if Rory was a Minder like him, only stronger.

Rory blinked and Scott scrambled off the bed, grabbed his clothing and bolted for the bathroom. He pissed, got dressed, washed his face and stared into the mirror.



Okay, how to handle this? If Rory wasn't a Minder, he'd be wondering why Scott was freaking out—and wanting him to leave. If Rory was a Minder, he'd push Scott as soon as he stepped out the door. So far, Rory had tried for the subtle approach, and Scott hoped he continue that route.

He pulled in a breath, swung the door open.

“Scott—” began Rory.

“I'm out of here,” he declared, grabbing the handle of the outside door and yanking it open. He almost threw himself out into the hall, and he ran, to the stairwell, down the stairs, listening for footsteps to be following him and heard none. By the time he hit the streets, he started to have real hope Rory wasn't hard on his heels. He hadn't been properly dressed, just sitting on the bed as if he didn't expect Scott to leave.

That wasn't right, Scott realized with a sickening lurch of his stomach, because Rory had been pushed, told that he wanted Scott to leave. Rory should have been saying goodbye and waving Scott on his way.

What the fuck was going on? Even the sex hadn't been quite right, or too right or something. Scott supposed “no penetration” was open to interpretation, but still.

Something was off with Rory, and it wasn't simply that a gorgeous young guy had picked him up, though that sure as hell was part of it.

After rounding the corner, Scott bent over, heaving breaths, and became aware of a large man approaching him. He said quickly, forcefully, “Stay away from me.”

The man hesitated and Scott feared that the stranger wouldn't react to Scott's prompts, that a group of Minders were hunting him and Rory had let him go only to walk into a trap. But then the large man veered away and kept going. Scott blew out a breath as he straightened up.

He jogged again, heading for his apartment. Maybe at home he could pull himself together and figure out what had happened. Nothing made sense, including Rory's expression as Scott had fled.

For God's sake, Rory had looked *sad*.

He'd wanted to physically stop Scott. What a bad idea that would have been, but Rory had been sorely tempted. He'd believed, still did, that Scott was touch-deprived and that what he needed was Rory's hands on him, reassuring him. But that was such a wolf attitude and he'd been told, more than once, that non-wolves were different. And Minders different yet again.

So he'd let Scott go, pulled on his own clothes, and followed him at a safe distance. He knew how to track someone, even in the city, and he'd needed to make sure that Scott made it safely home.

Trey was going to kill him for bringing Scott to his hotel room. Better to get that confession over with. So once Scott was inside his ground-floor-level apartment and Rory had heard the lock snick shut, he dug his phone out of his pocket.

Yeah, Trey was going to be thrilled at being woken at three in the morning too.

*Suck it up.* He hit dial.

“What?” Trey’s voice was alert, tone abrupt.

“I messed up.”

“Did they get him?”

“No. He’s safe. He’s in his apartment. I’m outside watching.”

“So what’s the problem?”

Rory felt his face heat up, and he wasn’t usually embarrassed. “I made contact.”

Silence.

*Man up.* “I took him back to my hotel room. We had sex.” More silence. “We fell asleep. He woke panicked and took off.”

“Are you fifteen years old?”

Rory ran a hand over his head. “He was interested, I was interested.”

“I don’t send you on these assignments to think with your dick.” Under his breath, Trey muttered something about Rory being a “fucking idiot, literally.”

So Rory shut up while Trey tore a strip off him. He had no defense except that it had felt right, and that wasn’t going to fly with an ex-FBI agent. Rory’s head even went a bit light as Trey talked about Scott’s past in more detail. There’d been abuse there, and it caused Rory pain. Nothing like the pain it caused Scott obviously, but still. By the time Trey was finished, Rory had an arm wrapped around his stomach.

He felt like shit.

“You have a reputation for being a gentleman to your gentlemen,” Trey said.

“I was careful,” Rory replied between clenched teeth. He was never, ever going to do anything like this again. He actually felt ready to vomit. The evening had been special to him, the way Scott had softened and reacted under Rory’s coaxing, the panic easing away as Scott began to trust in Rory’s touch. Rory was an attentive lover, he liked it that way, and he’d been extra attentive this evening, given the circumstances. “I don’t know what went wrong.”

“Make a wild guess.”

Rory rolled his eyes. “Yes, I know. He tried to manipulate me, use his power, and I didn’t react right. But I don’t know *why* he tried to manipulate me.”

“Because that’s all he knows.”

“Why is he here by himself? It isn’t right. You sure as hell wouldn’t leave a wolf alone like this.” Rory thought that after Trey’s lashing he wasn’t going to explain. Or maybe the silence that followed was partly made of guilt because Trey actually sighed.

“Scott had a mentor. But he wouldn’t stay with him for more than a few months, couldn’t get comfortable with another Minder, even a good guy. Can’t get comfortable with humans either, who he can

manipulate. He wants to be by himself. I've even talked to him, and I can't change that for him. I can't tell him how to think."

"You should have brought him to a pack. He can't manipulate us and we can't manipulate him."

"I think a pack might be overwhelming," Trey said dryly, "even if it's all *you* know. Besides, he doesn't trust me."

*He trusted me for half an hour, he trusted me while he slept.* But that wasn't nearly enough.

"Scott's mentor was the one who heard rumors. I need you to keep watching him, without freaking him out so he runs. Do you think that's possible or is he already running?"

"I don't know," said Rory miserably.

"But he's in his apartment now."

"Yes."

"Well, watch and follow if necessary. And no more seductions, got it? Though fuck knows, I shouldn't have had to spell it out the first time."

"I got it," he said hoarsely.

"Feel like shit, Rory, because no matter how bad you feel, it's worse for him."

"Great. I'll remember that."

Trey cut out. Typical. Rory hung up, put the phone back in his pocket and sank to the ground, holding his head in his hands as he watched Scott's apartment. The lights didn't go off the entire night.

Scott paced. It helped when he needed to think things through, and God knows he needed to think this past evening through.

If he were convinced Rory was a Minder, Scott would have flown by now, perhaps not even come home, though it was fucking difficult to start over like that. But while Rory's behavior didn't add up for a normal, it didn't add up for a Minder either.

Point number one. If Rory was a Minder, Scott wouldn't have even left the fucking hotel room, and if he had, Rory would be here now, talking to him, pushing him, telling him exactly how it was going to be from here on in.

None of that had happened.

What had happened? Well, the sex had been more like making love. Making love with a stranger, yes, but Scott hadn't had sex like that before.

Okay, but normals could do that, normals could make love. He was getting off-track.

It was the sleeping that freaked Scott out. He had trouble getting to sleep. He had real trouble sleeping in strange places. But he'd fallen asleep in Rory's arms right after Rory had said one word. *Sleep.*

Maybe it was a coincidence. Maybe it was endorphins, maybe Scott secretly longed to be held. He rubbed his face, stopping in the middle of the room. Okay, so say that hadn't been manipulation, just a normal word. Then what else *was* the problem?

Rory should have been more disturbed by Scott's strange behavior, and beyond that, he should have been bothered by the pushes. Instead the stranger took everything in stride, in as easy a manner as possible when generally people wanted to get away from Scott after they'd been manipulated.

It was a natural reaction, but Rory had seemed oblivious. Only a strong Minder would react that way.

Or a shifter. Scott remembered Trey who had no fear of Minders and what they could do—for good reason.

But was it possible? Shifters avoided cities and would have no interest in him, or any ability to identify him. Shifters despised his kind, saw them as scum who violated people. The only one who'd ever sought him out, Trey, barely tolerated him. And Rory was nothing like Trey.

Scott threw himself into a chair and rubbed his face. Okay, just take a day to recover. It didn't help that the sex had blown him away, undid him, he'd been embarrassingly close to crying at one point. Maybe that was the beginning and end of the problem.

But he could never see Rory again. Because if Rory was a Minder he was dangerous. And if he wasn't, well, Scott had wronged him by using his abilities. While his ethics were questionable at best, Scott drew some lines. He was not going to use his twisted power on a human who had treated him so...

The word Scott came up with was *lovingly*. And then he did curl up in his chair and let himself go, let himself cry. Because he sometimes thought he was too lonely to go on like this.

It was seven thirty that morning before Scott fell asleep, and the sleep was fitful, full of the fear he was constantly trying to escape. Hours later he jerked awake exhausted, with a crick in his neck and a pounding at his door.

No one pounded on his door.

Rory had come back. Scott was sure of it. Not come back. Rory had never been here. But however Scott had been found, it didn't matter, and Scott didn't think, he just grabbed his jacket and headed for the kitchen, towards the back entrance. As he jerked the door open, a man came into view, a man who'd been waiting for him beside the door, and he placed his foot on the threshold and said forcefully, "Go back inside."

It had been years since he'd last been ordered to do what his body fought against, but Scott felt the sickening twist inside him as his feet obeyed. He stopped his forward motion, slid one foot back, then another, until he stood inside the apartment.

*Speak now.* "Sh—"

But the man whipped a hand up, placed it over Scott's mouth, cutting off speech. "You won't speak to me. You'll nod for yes, shake your head for no. No words." Fingers dug into Scott's cheek. "Got it?"

Scott had to work at nodding, the man was holding his face so firmly, but he managed it.

"Good." The man smiled. "Can you open your front door? We seem to have a visitor."

Again Scott nodded, the awful hand still muffling his mouth. His heart was rabbiting and his head was light, floaty. He could barely think except for whatever words this man had to say to him. Nod, shake head. That was it.

He had his own words but they simply wouldn't come to him, wouldn't protect him. Not with other Minders. Not with his own kind.

The man released his face and Scott turned around, walked to the front door and opened it.

The front-door man entered wordlessly and glanced at back-door man who gave a brief thumbs-up to indicate Scott was under his control.

"You're hard to find, Scott," said back-door man.

He nodded. He liked being hard to find. He'd been hard to find for nine years after all.

"We didn't used to care, but our numbers are dwindling. Ever since our existence was made public, it's been harder for us. Has it been harder for you?"

Scott shook his head.

"We need to set up a new pod."

God, no, he never wanted to be part of a pod again.

Silent front-door man laughed and placed an arm around Scott, making him jump. He tried to extract himself and front-door man said, "Stay still," and Scott did, breathing hard, in and out, so he could stay still, with the weight of a stranger's arm on his shoulders. "What do you think, Ben? Is he with us?"

"Don't play with him," Ben snapped and the arm fell away immediately, to Scott's immense relief. "Scott."

Scott brought his gaze towards Ben but kept it on his mouth, not his eyes. The eyes had power.

"Look straight at me."

Slowly, Scott raised his eyes, to find himself pinned by a knowing blue gaze. "I'm going to be your leader and I'm going to take care of you. You'll like me, and I'll protect you. Even from Anthony here."

*Liar.* It was a huge relief to be able to think that, to be strong enough to fight this Minder, even if it was all internal. Scott had, after all, fought Minders before.

As Ben opened his mouth to say more, the doorbell rang, and he frowned. "I'll get that. You expecting anyone?"

Scott shook his head, and the front door was opened.

That Rory was the one standing on his doorstep didn't surprise Scott. Clearly he'd led the pod here. But it hurt. Because Scott had been hoping Rory was not a part of this. He'd wanted to keep their night separate. It had meant something to him.

He looked at Rory full-on, not bothering to hide how weak he was. It was written all over the situation.

Odd that Rory looked...angry. His body was coiled tight, not like the easygoing guy of last night. Maybe there was a power struggle between Ben and Rory. Ben even tried to dismiss him, saying, "You don't want to be here. You don't want to remember any of us. Leave."

Turf war? Scott wondered, baffled by this turn of events. And Rory was stronger than the words thrown at him, because he walked right in, instead of leaving, and placed himself between Scott and the two strangers. In any other situation, it would have been a protective stance.

"Okay." Ben held up his hands placatingly. "Where are you from?"

"That's none of your business."

"Neither is this."

"Wrong." Rory turned his head towards Anthony. "I've seen pictures of you. You're a serial killer."

The man gave a proud, feral grin. "What of it?"

"Scott—" began Ben and Rory spun, slammed a fist into his mouth and he dropped.

Anthony moved forward, Rory sidestepped him, and Scott thought he was going to be attacked. He threw everything he had inside himself into his next words: "Don't move!"

To Scott's amazement it worked, and Anthony's feral grin froze in place while Scott's head pounded in pain. He thought he might pass out as he watched Rory step behind, wrap a hand around that awful face and twist his neck until Scott heard a sickening snap.

The body dropped to the floor.

Rory looked down at the other man. "Speak a word and I'll break your neck too." He jerked his head towards the front door. "If you want to live, get out now."

Ben wasn't stupid. He scrambled to his feet and flung himself outside. Rory stepped forward and locked the door, then gazed over at Scott, a kind of wary satisfaction on his face.

Scott braced himself for another push.

"We work well together, don't you think?"

Scott searched for the power behind the words and found none, though maybe that was his headache blocking his ability to sense anything. Nevertheless he tried to work up a response so Rory wouldn't feel obliged to push with his next directive. But Scott couldn't even think about whether he should shake his head or nod. Couldn't remember if Rory had given instructions. Pain lanced through Scott's temple and he gripped his head in his hands just before he passed out.

## Chapter Four

Rory didn't think he'd be forgetting that bruised expression on Scott's face anytime soon. When Scott had seen Rory on his doorstep, he'd thought Rory had betrayed him, that much was clear.

He wanted to explain, but it was difficult with Scott passed out on the couch, white as a sheet. Rory wiped his face with a damp cloth and tried to ignore the overwhelming smell of death in the room. Dead bodies meant urine and feces.

Rory closed his eyes, pulled out his phone and called Trey again. He'd thought last night was bad, but what a clusterfuck this was.

"Yes." Trey.

"Dead body."

"Jesus Christ."

"Anthony Renault."

He heard Trey blow out a breath. "Good he's dead. Where's the body?"

"In Scott's apartment."

"Not good. Dump it."

"I can't stay to do that," Rory said flatly. "There was a second man, I didn't recognize him from your files so I let him go." Maybe he shouldn't have, but it was one thing to murder a serial killer Trey had warned him about, another to murder an unknown.

"All right. All right. I can get someone to take care of it." Rory could practically see Trey pinching his nose. He was supposed to be retired, and he mostly was. Just not this week. "Lock up the apartment for God's sake."

"I'm taking Scott to the pack."

"Really." The tone was wry which meant, if Rory was reading him correctly, that Trey approved. In fact, Trey didn't sound all that angry with him, considering. Maybe because he'd killed Anthony, maybe because in the end Rory had protected Scott. "Angus won't like that."

"Dad'll get used to the idea."

"I'll warn him. Now get moving."

"Thanks." Rory closed the phone and looked over to see Scott's eyes were open wide, glazed.

Too much fear, Rory could smell it. "We have to get out of here, before they bring reinforcements."

Scott shifted backwards, away from Rory, to sit up against the arm of the couch. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Trey sent me.”

“*Trey?*” Scott straightened, disbelief written on his face. “Like hell. Why would he send you?”

“To make sure these assholes didn’t get you.”

“No,” Scott scoffed. “Trey despises me.”

“I don’t think he despises you,” Rory said slowly. He reached for the glass of water he’d brought out earlier from the kitchen and passed it over. “Here, drink.”

Scott took the glass, and Rory was glad to see his hands weren’t trembling, much.

“How’s the head?”

“Bad. As you must know.”

“I’m a wolf, Scott.”

Scott blinked, staring, trying to look for truth, perhaps. He appeared to believe Rory. There was something like relief in his expression when he finally said, “I don’t understand what you’re doing here.”

“Trey was warned that you might need some help. I was sent.”

Clearly this left Scott nonplused. Well, Rory didn’t have time to help Scott work it out. They had to leave.

“We’ve got to go. I’ll call a cab to take us to my car.”

“Better to split up.”

“Why is that?”

Scott set his jaw, then winced.

“Would Tylenol help?”

“No, time only.”

“So stay with me, and I’ll make sure you get away. You don’t want to be here if more come back, do you?”

“No,” Scott whispered.

Rory took Scott’s upper arm, felt him stiffen in his clasp but didn’t let go as he pulled Scott to standing. “Anything you need to take with you?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Scott said dully.

“Let’s get your ID, at least.”

Scott patted the pocket of the jacket he was wearing. Presumably he’d been on his way out when the Minders had arrived.

After Rory called a taxi, he said, “We’ll worry about your apartment later.”

Scott snorted, the noise devoid of humor. “What is this ‘we’ you speak of? Did Trey send you to have sex with me too?”



“No.” Rory looked away briefly, then back, to see the flat expression in Scott’s eyes. He’d been through too much today. They needed to talk about this later. They needed to move. “That was all my idea. Let’s go.”

Scott walked more slowly than Rory would have liked, to the cab, from the cab, but they got to the hotel room without incident. Rory grabbed his bag, checked out, all with Scott in tow. Despite Scott’s apparent obedience and obvious headache, Rory didn’t trust the Minder to not just up and disappear if given an opening.

The parking garage was empty, though it made Rory antsy, being underground like this, so easily trapped. They made it through the turnstile, but Rory didn’t breathe easier until they were off Toronto’s busy, slow-moving streets and on the highway, speeding northwards.

He looked over to see Scott was sleeping or passed out, tucked into the corner between the passenger door and seat, as far from Rory as possible.

Rory had been wrong, immature and plain stupid to sleep with Scott. *Fucking idiot, literally* came Trey’s voice from yesterday. He should really regret what he’d done more. He did regret the pain he’d caused Scott, but he also wasn’t sure that he’d have gotten Scott calmly into his car if they hadn’t spent the night together. If he’d just shown up on the doorstep, Scott would be trying to get away from him, he was sure of it.

When they’d been touching last night, it had felt like Scott had been soaking up everything Rory could give him. The sensation had been incredibly appealing. Rory had always bought in to the idea, fostered by his father, he had to admit, that wolves had greater needs than non-wolves and it was better to mix with his own kind.

But Rory found he wanted to mix with Scott again.

“Scott.” He heard his name a few times, wrapped in that velvety voice that so appealed to him, and Scott tried to respond. No one had been this interested in him for a very long time, he’d made sure of it. He shifted, suddenly aware he was waking in a car and the car was moving and it was night.

His noisy inhale had the voice, *Rory*, saying, “It’s all right.”

It wasn’t all right, but what the hell. Twenty-four hours ago he’d been walking in the dark in High Park—which should have been his first clue, the wolf had wanted some greenery—and now he was driving God knows where after being rescued from two of his kind by this gorgeous werewolf sent by Trey.

“Is your head any better?”

Scott sat up straighter, shifted his now-sore shoulder that had been wedged in between the door and the seat, and found his head was much better. Sleep was the healer of all things Minder-related. Of course, he’d done only the slightest of manipulations for years, had almost forgotten this godawful nausea-inducing pain. He’d made himself a fine-tuner, a tweaker, encouraging people in the direction they were already

going or wanting to go as they forgot him or left him alone. That never cost him much. But today, he'd been a sledgehammer.

He had stopped the front-door man, Anthony, and Rory had killed him, a supposed serial killer. If not, Rory was a little murder-happy and he was stuck in the car with him.

Truth was, he wasn't proud to be in this car. That had been a moment of weakness. As if last night in any way bound them together. He knew better than that, and maybe once his head recovered, he could slip away.

"Scott?"

"What?"

"Your head."

"Oh, it's better. Almost as good as new."

Rory slanted him a strange look. "Okay. Well, we're about fifteen minutes away from my town, that's why I woke you up."

"Jesus, how long have we been driving?"

"Ten hours."

Wow, he'd been out for a long time. "Did we stop?"

"Pit stops. You didn't wake up. Trey said you had to sleep it off."

"Trey, the fount of all knowledge, is that it?"

"Not really." Rory's tone wasn't argumentative, but easy, as if they were talking about the weather. Scott stared out the window, into the woods that ran beside the road. He didn't even know where he'd be staying tonight, what he'd got himself into, and he didn't have the energy to ask.

He'd find out soon enough as they moved through the night towards Rory's home.

Scott had almost expected some kind of barricaded place that kept werewolves in and non-werewolves, like himself, out. But it was a small town Rory drove into, Wolf Town the sign even said. He pulled down a side street and parked in front of a tiny bungalow.

"Here we are."

"Where is 'here'?" Scott asked with a sinking feeling. Somehow he'd thought he'd stay at a hotel or something.

"My house." Rory even stated this with some pride, as if he was completely unaware of Scott's discomfort. It wasn't until Rory opened Scott's door and held out a hand that Scott figured he might as well get out of the car. He ignored Rory's hand, avoiding any contact, walked towards the house, and waited for Rory to unlock the front door.

He didn't, he simply swung the door open. Maybe they didn't bother with locks in werewolf towns.

It was tinier inside than he'd thought. One bedroom, Scott observed with dismay. This time though Rory seemed aware of Scott's reaction and said, "I'll sleep on the couch, if you'd prefer."

“No.” The word came out more strongly than he intended. “I mean, I’ll sleep on the couch.” He did *not* want Rory sliding into bed with him after he thought he’d be alone.

“All right.”

It wasn’t all right. But Scott would leave. Maybe not tonight, he was exhausted despite all his sleep, but tomorrow or the next day. Rory couldn’t watch him 24/7 and would no doubt be happy to be rid of him anyway.

Wordlessly, Rory dumped bedding on the couch, got out food that they both ate, and pointed Scott to the bathroom. He even provided an extra fucking toothbrush. Scott felt like he’d entered the Twilight Zone.

“All right,” said Rory, using his apparent catch phrase. “I’m off to bed. See you in the morning.”

Before Scott could realize what was going on, Rory slid a hand across his shoulders, held him in a half-hug while a tremor ran through Scott and Rory pressed lips against Scott’s stubbled cheek. Then he was gone, ducking into his bedroom.

He stood stock-still in the living room, wondering why Rory would bother with a hug. Scott should have resented the embrace, even been repulsed. But he stupidly wanted more, even after all that had happened in the last twenty-four hours.

He stared at the doorway into Rory’s bedroom. Scott had expected Rory to shut his door, but he didn’t. Werewolves, he recalled, had exceptional hearing. Presumably he wouldn’t be sneaking out of here in the dead of night without Rory noticing.

With that thought, oddly comforting that someone was noticing him since he’d worked so hard for so long to get along with not being noticed, Scott lay down on the couch. Despite his weariness, he found it hard to sleep and he spent most of the night staring at the ceiling.

The next morning, there wasn’t much point in asking Scott if he’d slept. Clearly he hadn’t. Rory had heard him shift restlessly through the night and this morning Scott looked sleep deprived.

“I don’t think the couch is very comfortable,” said Rory.

“It was fine.” Scott had that bruised expression again, the one that made Rory’s throat thicken. He wanted to pull Scott into his arms and nuzzle him.

“The bed’s more comfortable.” He didn’t say it with innuendo, just a statement of fact, yet Scott appeared uncomfortable.

“Yeah, well. Not entirely sure what that other night was about.”

“I was following you for days.”

Scott’s eyes widened.

“Your invisible bodyguard.”

“So why’d you go visible?”

"I liked the look of you." That was true, but Rory felt compelled to add, "I was bored with keeping my distance."

Scott raised his eyebrows and looked away.

"I'm no longer bored, the last couple of days were more than interesting, but I still like the look of you."

Scott continued to stare at the couch's arm, as if he had to concentrate very hard. Rory had distressed him, he could smell it.

He sat down beside his guest, the too-soft couch swallowing him up. Scott stiffened but didn't rise.

"Look, Scott."

"No," he said quickly. "It's okay."

Rory frowned, unsure what Scott was referring to. "What's okay?"

"No apologies. They're not very useful."

They were talking at cross-purposes. Rory wrapped a hand around Scott's arm, felt him tense up at the contact, but when he didn't move away, Rory tugged him closer.

"What are you doing?" Scott demanded as Rory slid in, drawing Scott into his embrace and burying his face in Scott's throat. He could feel Scott's heart rate speed up, his breathing grow shallow, and he wondered if Scott would fight.

"Stop, okay?" Scott's voice was uncertain more than scared, but Rory listened—after he lapped at Scott's pulse and took his hand to pull him to his feet.

"Okay. But let's get you fed." Still holding hands, Rory led Scott to the kitchen. Sat him down—he seemed so lost—and dug out as many different food types as he could find.

He glanced at the clock and realized he was running late. "Shit, gotta go see some people, including my dad. They'll want a report. But I'll be back later. Eat your fill and try to sleep some more. You're welcome to take the bed."

With that Rory grabbed his boots and jacket and headed outside.

Once he'd eaten, Scott put away the food as best he could, especially the perishables. Then it was time to leave, but instead he found himself staying put, taking a seat on that lousy couch again and staring around Rory's living room.

What was wrong with him? Before everything went to hell, he needed to go, get away while Rory was making his report, whatever the fuck that meant. Scott pulled in another breath as he stood, then grabbed his jacket and marched out the front door to see a...wolf. A four-legged one.

"Christ!" He stopped, unsure what this signified. Maybe in this town it was normal to have wolves on front lawns.

The creature woofed in greeting and Scott stared into gold eyes, not Rory's eyes. Not Rory in wolf form.

Okay.

"I'm just leaving."

The wolf shook its head. When Scott tried to move forward, the wolf blocked him, and then in the most non-threatening way possible, herded Scott back inside the house. Which freaked him out enough that he shut the door and leaned against it. He'd go out the back. But when he stepped onto the porch, the wolf appeared again. This time, Scott didn't bother trying to talk to it or step around it, he just jumped back inside.

He was a prisoner. He should have been appalled. He'd been a prisoner before. But there was a part of him relieved that he couldn't leave, couldn't even make the decision to leave. It was out of his hands. At least for today.

Okay, the problem here was that he was too tired. He needed to rest, sleep. Then he'd figure out a strategy that didn't involve using his powers, given that he was surrounded by wolves who didn't respond to Minders anyway.

Letting out a long sigh, he realized he did not want to be on that couch again where he'd spent hours lying awake last night. After standing still for five minutes, he gave in and walked to Rory's room and crawled under the covers of Rory's bed.

The smell was strangely soothing. He breathed in, filling his lungs with Rory, and within ten minutes Scott was in a deep, dreamless sleep.

"Well, well, well."

Scott jerked awake and bolted up to sitting to find an older man staring down at him. The frown had been intense, but something eased on the man's expression and he stuck out a hand.

"I'm Angus, Rory's father."

Scott scrambled out of bed to standing and managed to take that hand, though his own was trembling slightly. He hadn't expected anyone else to come in the house. Had assumed no one would dare trespass with the wolf on guard. Was it normal to have fathers walk into houses unannounced? Before he could figure it out—those bright blue eyes gave no answers—Angus did something wholly unexpected and bizarre. He pulled Scott into a hug. It was rather perfunctory, but a hug nevertheless. After being released, Scott simply stared, until he realized a response was in order.

"I'm Scott."

Angus nodded in acknowledgement. "Scott Lund. Trey's told me about you."

*Fucking great.* Scott felt his face warm.

"Glad to have you here. You let me know if Rory's not treating you right."

Scott found his mouth was hanging open.

"I'm the alpha here, so I have some clout." With that pronouncement, Angus winked and walked out of the room.

Scott was grasping for some appropriate way to reply, some nicety, some way to say farewell since Angus appeared to be leaving. *Nice to meet you? See you around? Have a good day?* None of them seemed quite right or entirely truthful. Couldn't wolves smell truth?

"Sorry I woke you up, but I need to inspect all newcomers. Part of my job." Angus was now holding open the front door. "See you tonight."

"See you," Scott echoed weakly before Angus shut the door.

Then the door popped open again, making Scott jump.

"Forgot to tell you. Rory will be back in a couple of hours. I was supposed to pass on that message from him."

"Thank you," Scott managed as Angus once again shut the door.

What the hell was going on tonight? He needed to get out of here.

Except there was a wolf keeping him prisoner. Hadn't kept Angus out though. Then again, he was alpha, so he could do what he liked, including walking into Rory's bedroom while Scott was sleeping.

Scott had to conclude he didn't understand much about wolves.

## Chapter Five

Rory knelt and hugged Aileen. “Thanks, doll, for watching him.”

She gave his arm a friendly nip and trotted off, having done her duty and not one for greetings and farewells. Aileen was never going to be what you called a human friend—she’d spent too much of her childhood as a wolf—but she was dependable and loyal. And while he was out and about the town, Rory felt better knowing someone could watch over Scott and raise a ruckus if there was any kind of trouble.

His father had been looking for a different kind of trouble, and thankfully hadn’t found it after his short visit this afternoon.

*He smells fine, too much fear, but not evil.* That had been Angus’s verdict. Not that Rory had expected him to march into his house and wake up Scott. He’d assumed he and his father would come over together, and Rory would mete out introductions. But it was done and Rory tried not to dwell on the many things his father did that annoyed him.

Angus had run into a Minder or two in the past, and he’d expected worse of Scott. Or Scott’s scent. That was probably Angus’s greatest power and Rory had never met anyone like it. He could smell out a person’s “goodness” for want of a better word. And he didn’t get it wrong.

Rory smiled to himself, happy that Scott was deemed good, that his own judgment hadn’t been called into question. The smile faded as the next part of the remembered conversation came to the forefront. *Don’t get too attached.* Of course, that warning had got Rory’s back up. He knew what it meant. Scott wasn’t a wolf, therefore Scott wasn’t to be taken too seriously. Even if Angus was happy to provide a temporary haven for him.

Rory jogged up the stairs and entered his house.

Scott, who’d been sitting on the couch watching TV, jumped up immediately, as if expecting an invasion.

“It’s me,” Rory said unnecessarily. He hung up his jacket, keeping his eyes on Scott who stood at attention, seemingly waiting for a blow. “So you met my dad.”

“Yes. Briefly.” Scott crossed his arms and hunched, making Rory wonder if Angus had given Scott a hard time. “What is tonight?” he demanded rather hoarsely.

Rory blinked, taking a moment to understand the question. “Oh, Dad’s invited us for dinner tonight.”

“Dinner?” Scott said aghast, as if they’d been invited to, Rory didn’t know, climb Mount Everest. An insurmountable task.

"Sure. He's a better cook than I am." Mostly because Rory couldn't be bothered to cook.

"I have to leave," Scott blurted out. "I can't stay here and you've got, you've got—" he pointed at the door,—"a *wolf* on your doorstep, keeping me prisoner."

"Guarding you, keeping you safe," Rory corrected him. "Aileen is great."

"Aileen?"

"Aileen," Rory repeated, wondering what the problem was. "Very nice young woman, though she's mostly wolf. Childhood issues. Very dependable."

"Dependable?"

Scott seemed a little freaked out so Rory eyed him, wondering how he'd take a hug. Not quite yet, he decided.

"She wouldn't let me out the front door."

Oops. "Oh, that's my fault. I didn't think you'd be going out today, you were so exhausted, so I didn't leave instructions. Not that she always listens that well once she gets something in her head. But she's good at guarding. She was making sure no one bothered you."

Scott wasn't looking terribly reassured by Rory's explanation. "Your dad got in."

"Well, yes, my dad would. He's the alpha." Here Rory smiled. "He said you were sleeping in my bed. That's good."

Scott's expression turned embarrassed.

"Don't worry. He decided he liked you."

"*Liked* me?"

Rory began to worry about how bewildered Scott seemed. Maybe the first evening wasn't the best for dinner at Dad's. "Sure."

"What's to like?" Scott even threw his arms out as if the idea of anyone liking him was beyond comprehension.

"Hey, don't talk like that."

"Seriously." Scott waved a hand for emphasis. "He barely met me, I acted like an idiot, and I'm a Minder who might bring other Minders to your pack. *What is there to like?*"

"Well, you were probably polite," Rory offered, deciding the whole smelling-goodness thing Angus had going on might freak Scott out more.

"Barely," Scott muttered, looking down.

"And he's a good judge of character. Renowned, actually."

Scott snorted and Rory gave up on the idea of not touching him. He walked over and placed an arm around Scott's shoulders, felt Scott judder under him before he actually turned his face into Rory's shoulder. Rory felt extraordinarily pleased by this.

"I think we'll cancel tonight, go to Dad's another time."



Scott nodded against him, and they stood like that for a while, until Scott seemed to melt into him on a long exhale. "I don't understand what's going on."

Rory didn't want to respond, just wanted to keep his arms around Scott, but finally he said, "We're hugging."

Scott pushed against him, then stepped away. "Listen to me."

Those gray eyes mesmerized Rory and he wondered if Scott was going to try to manipulate him. He placed a hand on Scott's cheek and ran a thumb across his mouth, stopping him from speaking, feeling the soft lips under his calloused thumb.

"I'll listen to you," Rory said quietly, reluctant to move his thumb away.

"I don't want them to come to your home." Scott was worried for him, which touched Rory, though the worry was not justified. They knew how to look after themselves here in Wolf Town.

"We can take care of them, that's what I've been setting up today. Organizing so some people are on watch."

Scott's eyes widened. "I don't want that. I can slip away, hide, I know how to do that. The last time I involved someone in my life, it...it didn't work."

"I know."

"You know? How do you know?" Scott's guilt was palpable, as if Rory was going to despise him for what had happened.

"Trey told me. When you were a teenager, you contacted your Big Brother to help you, and your dysfunctional pod took over his life."

Scott appeared entirely taken aback that Rory and Trey would have had such a conversation so Rory leaned down, placed his forehead against Scott's.

"I almost ruined him," Scott whispered. "I'm not doing that again."

"Hey. That last time, he wasn't a wolf and he was only one guy. We're a pack, a town."

"No, but..." Scott stopped talking as Rory once again was touching his mouth. The distraction wasn't quite fair, Rory knew, as Scott was seriously worried, but he couldn't help himself.

"Can I kiss you?" It seemed a good idea to ask about some of these things, get Scott's mind caught up with his body, because it was clear Scott's body responded well to Rory's touch.

"I should say no."

"Why? Do you want to punish me?"

Scott gave a harsh laugh. "No, I'm not that foolish."

Hmmm, a little hard to decipher.

"I..." Scott looked away. "Goddamn. I'm not good at this and you're too good."

Rory pulled Scott flush with him, so he could feel Rory wanted him. That trembling of his began again, borne of the fear-desire mix that Scott carried with him and Rory found so fascinating. He nipped Scott's throat lightly. "We're good together. That's what I thought the night before last."

"I feel like I've run out of choices."

Choices were important so Rory pulled back. "Let's eat. I'm starving."

Scott blinked as Rory withdrew, and that made him smile.

"I'll call my dad to cancel and then we'll throw in a couple of frozen pizzas, okay?"

Scott eyed him as if he'd asked a trick question. "You'll tell Aileen I can go out tomorrow?"

"Absolutely."

Now that they weren't going out and Rory was at least acting as if Scott wasn't his prisoner, Scott found he could eat. Not as much as Rory, mind you, who inhaled his food, following up a pizza and a half with cold cuts and french fries, then opening a frozen ice cream cake. Scott ate one-quarter, felt absolutely stuffed, and Rory finished the rest.

"My dad's a good cook, but I'm not," Rory admitted.

Scott gave a cautious nod. "Do you have any beer?" He usually drank before a meal, but had been too rattled to ask. However, he thought he might be able to unwind and maybe sleep tonight if he could drink something.

Rory jumped up. "I'll run next door."

"Doesn't matter."

Rory held up a hand. "Won't take long."

And he was gone.

Well, here was Scott's chance to escape, although wolves were great trackers and it was dark and he didn't really know where the hell he was. He needed a plan to get out of here. He stared at the front door with some dread.

*You don't want to get out of here.* The truth of that ate at him. He didn't want to leave, but he certainly couldn't stay. Rory thought being wolves would protect the town, but Minders could work on third parties, bring violent men to this apparently peaceful community.

Not that he knew much about the people here beyond Aileen the wolf and Angus the dad.

Rory banged back into the house and the phone rang. He plonked the beer down and grabbed the handset. "Hi, Dad." After a pause, he said, "Not tonight. Another time we'll come for dessert. Yup. Uh-huh. I did. No problem. Talk to you later. Bye."

He appeared a little sheepish after he hung up. "My dad's convinced I don't know how to eat enough."

What a baffling idea.

Rory cocked his head, assessing Scott now. “You look tired. Why don’t you sleep in my bed tonight? I’ll sleep out on the couch.”

“That’s not necessary.”

“I think it is.”

“Then *you* won’t sleep,” Scott pointed out.

“Oh I can sleep anywhere.”

The idea of the bed was appealing. He’d slept well there earlier. But if he went to bed now, without Rory, he’d be convinced Rory would slip in later. Maybe it was better to just get it over with. “We can both sleep in the bed.”

“We can. If you’re okay with that.”

Scott’s chest felt tight, but he nodded. Whatever happened happened, he decided fatalistically. Besides, he kind of felt like he was moving through sludge as he got ready for bed, including a shower. By the time he moved back into the bedroom, Rory was lying down on one side of the mattress. He flipped the covers back for Scott, so he climbed in. Rory turned on his side to face him.

He couldn’t do this, not tonight. “I’m really tired, Rory.”

“I can tell. So am I.” Then Rory took Scott’s hand, twined fingers through his and promptly fell asleep.

In three minutes max.

Scott stared. Flabbergasted that someone could fall asleep so easily. Of course given that he’d spent the last decade of his life isolated from just about everyone, he was perhaps unused to any variation of behavior that differed from his own.

Okay, Rory might wake up later, looking for activity from the guy who he was sheltering, but for now, Scott found being in bed, alone but not quite alone, a little reassuring. Better than last night anyway. Or even last week.

Besides Rory might sleep through the night. Scott found his eyes fluttering shut, his mind getting groggy, and he didn’t fight it. He let the sleep pull him under.

As Rory came awake the next morning, he realized he wasn’t alone. He moved towards the warm body next to him while he tried to recall who he’d brought home.

He slung an arm around...Scott it was, whose body stiffened. Everything about Scott and the last few days came rushing back.

It was early, and Scott needed some more courting before they had sex again, so Rory murmured in his ear, “Sleep some more,” and tried to drift off himself.

Scott lay very still beside him, as if any movement would be some kind of giveaway. Perhaps he didn’t realize how easily wolves knew if someone was awake or asleep. But as Rory dozed, keeping a little

part of his mind aware of the Minder, Scott gradually relaxed against him. Yes, Rory was hard, but not unbearably so, and it wasn't as if he hadn't slept with a boner before.

Though never with a lover in his bed.

This Scott was unusual. Angus's biggest concern seemed to be that Rory's protective instincts would lead him to believe he was in love when what he was only feeling was protective. As if Rory was fourteen again and couldn't tell the difference.

Angus was a loving, protective father—where the hell did he think Rory got his protective instincts?—but warning him away from Scott pissed Rory off. In truth, it was a relief not to have a wolf in his bed, one who couldn't help but calculate that his status in the pack had risen because he'd bagged the alpha's son. Safe to say Scott hadn't even managed to comprehend that Rory had an elevated position in the pack due to his family ties.

Most wolves would have been panting to go over to the alpha's for dinner, and certainly would have been thrilled to death that Angus had decided he liked them. Scott had reacted with utter disbelief.

It gave Rory a sense of freedom he hadn't had before, knowing that Scott wasn't with him because of his dad.

## Chapter Six

“I should probably go to work.” Rory was showered, dressed and all set to face the day.

Whereas Scott was struggling to sit up in bed. He managed to stop himself from saying, *You work?* Just because Rory was a werewolf who lived in a seemingly idyllic town didn’t mean he didn’t work. So Scott cleared his throat and asked, “Where do you work?”

There, that sounded more measured.

“My office. I am an accountant, like I said. I just wasn’t after a new client in Toronto.”

“No, I guess not. Bit too busy following me around.”

Rory grinned, as if it had been his pleasure. “Yep, I was after you.” He straightened his cuffs, and Scott felt like he was watching a *GQ* model or something. “I’ll be back for lunch. Oh, feel free to borrow my clothes.”

With that Rory was gone.

Well. Scott threw himself back on the bed, trying to figure out his next move. He had to leave, but he had a cushion of time before this pod that had targeted him could find him. It would take a few days to demand answers from people who didn’t necessarily want to give out information and locate this town. And it would take more time to mobilize angry people against other people, even werewolves—by which time Scott had to be long gone.

So today he’d scout out the town. Tomorrow he’d leave.

He found some clothes in the closet, slightly big but not too bad a fit, and pulled them on. Despite his jacket, the cold wind hit him hard as he stepped out onto the front step. The temperature had dropped since yesterday.

Aileen the wolf trotted up to him, and Scott wasn’t entirely sure what to say. “Hi” seemed like a good start though she didn’t react much to it. “I’m going for a walk around town.”

Rather gingerly he stepped down the front stairs and found that Aileen was content to trot alongside him. While this was an improvement over being herded back into the house, he wasn’t quite sure how he was going to give Aileen the slip tomorrow.

One thing at a time. First he had to explore the town and find a bus schedule.

He spent about an hour and a half walking around. He’d expected to see wolves out and about but in fact there was only one other in sight, and that one had looked like an overgrown pup. Perhaps a teenager skipping school, was that possible? Scott shrugged and moved on, trying to observe more important things

like if a Greyhound bus actually ran through this town, where the bus station was located, and if his bank was here.

The latter was easy to determine, but Scott hesitated. Depending on how determined they were, Minders might be able to locate him more quickly if he withdrew money from this branch. He had enough cash to get out of town, so he'd wait and withdraw from a branch situated elsewhere. Let them never know he'd stayed in Wolf Town a few nights.

Inwardly he groaned. He was going to have to get himself entirely new ID and the effort of forcing people in offices to grant him new ID was daunting. He hated the confusion on their faces as they changed his name from Lund to Smith to Jones.

Jesus.

Aileen whined then nudged against his leg as if she wanted something. Maybe she was getting bored? Cold? He looked down questioningly. "You don't need to stay with me, I'll be fine."

She simply licked his hand, which was kind of sweet, though Scott had to admit he was having trouble thinking of her as a person. Then she woofed and tilted her head, wanting him to follow her.

He paused, weighing the pros and cons, and cautiously followed her down the street. She reared up at the front door of an office, pushed down on the lever handle and in she went.

It was only then that he realized the front window said MacIntyre Accounting. Scott didn't really want to disturb Rory, but the door swung wide open and a strange young man swept an arm inwards. "Come on in."

Ever obedient, Scott did.

"You must be Scott. I've heard all about you." The smile on the stranger's face didn't appear to be entirely genuine, and Scott found the idea that he'd heard all about him rather alarming.

"You have?"

"Sure. Since you're staying at my boyfriend's house."

"I'm sorry?"

"Rory." Now he spoke as if Scott were a simpleton, which maybe he was. *Boyfriend?* Jesus. "He's told me all about you." The man nudged Scott with his shoulder. "Don't worry, we have an open relationship, but we share. You can invite me over if you like." He waggled his eyebrows.

While Scott supposed he should be grateful the guy wasn't jealous, mostly Scott felt hurt and a little threatened. The desire to get out of here was overwhelming. And where was Aileen? How did a wolf just disappear? Scott swallowed. "I didn't actually intend to come in. If you'll excuse me."

"Don't go," the stranger protested and as he slung a muscular arm around Scott's shoulders, he added, "I'm Iain."

Scott shrugged him off immediately, stepping away towards the door. But Iain leaned over and placed a hand on it to keep it shut.

“Rory’s busy right now, that’s why I’m waiting for him. He likes to see me during the day, even when he has guests sleeping over. But you’ll be here only a few days, right? Angus says you’re temporary.”

Scott set his jaw. He wanted *out*. He’d never had such a strong desire to *force* someone away over something so stupid. Not that his words would even work on Iain who was undoubtedly a shifter. He had the corded muscles and lean build of a wolf. And Scott didn’t want Iain anywhere near him.

Aileen seemed to materialize out of nowhere and she was growling. *Shit*. Scott would have done better to stay in Rory’s bedroom and hide out for the day, than be cornered by these two.

“Calm down, Aileen,” Iain said irritably. “I’m just saying hello.”

She actually snarled and Scott realized it was at Iain, not him. Okay, so not cornered. Scott backed up to stand beside Aileen who leaned against him.

“Geez, I guess she likes you.” Iain lowered his voice dramatically. “She doesn’t like me much, never has.”

Aileen opened her mouth wide and gave the biggest yawn possible, then licked her lips.

“Look, sorry if I upset you. No worries, right?”

“I’m not upset.” Scott didn’t care what Iain could smell on him, he was not going to admit to any such thing.

“Good. Rory and me, we’re young. We fool around, you know.” Aileen was growling again, but Iain ignored her. “How old are you, thirty-five, older?”

“I was just looking for my cane, that’s why I stopped in here.”

“Ha, yeah.” Iain moved as if to approach Scott again and Aileen snarled, loudly, to stop him.

“Hey,” came Rory’s voice, clearly wondering what the hell was going on. But when Scott turned to see him exiting his office, Rory’s expression changed from perturbed to happy.

“Scott,” he said, as if simply his being there made Rory smile. “Hi.”

Despite himself Scott reacted with something like joy, both at Rory’s presence and his apparent pleasure at seeing him. But he wasn’t the only one keen to greet Rory, and before Scott could manage to get any words out, Iain walked past him.

“Hi, Rory.” Iain wrapped himself around Rory for a hug.

“All right.” Rory promptly extricated himself from Iain and set him away a good foot.

Iain appeared unfazed by this less-than-welcoming reaction. “I was worried about you. You disappeared. No one would say where you’d gone.”

“Iain...” It sounded like a warning and Rory’s expression took on something Scott hadn’t seen before—frustration with an edge of anger.

With that Iain retreated. “Don’t worry, I’m out of here. But, you know, call me soon.” Iain mimed talking on the phone, winked at Scott and skipped out the door.

If that was how Rory treated his boyfriends... Except Scott thought Iain was lying.

“That...” Rory let out a heavy sigh, “...was Iain.”

“Uh, yeah.” Like Iain, Scott was going to beat a hasty retreat. “Aileen led me in here. I didn’t mean to disturb you.” Scott jerked a thumb backwards. “I was just going.”

“Wait, I’ll come with you. We can go to Dad’s for lunch.”

“Lunch?”

“Sure.” Rory slipped on his jacket, as if everything was normal between them when nothing felt normal for Scott. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Iain had unnerved him, but Scott didn’t want to even mention that name and have Rory explain some complicated relationship. He didn’t really want to see anyone either, except maybe Rory alone. But Scott found himself walking beside Rory as they headed to Angus’s. “Does Angus know I’m coming?”

“Of course. He’s expecting you.”

Scott decided not to ask how that was possible.

It wasn’t far, this silent walk where Scott wondered what to expect next. They walked up to a house and stepped right inside, Rory calling out, “We’re here.”

Angus appeared immediately, smiling, saying Rory’s name with enthusiasm and Scott’s a little more perfunctorily. But at least he wasn’t surprised to see Scott. He aimed his sharp gaze at Scott, assessing him. “So you’re feeling better today than last night?”

“Uhhh...I guess. Yes,” Scott added, since it was true, even if it felt irrelevant.

“I told Dad you were a bit worn out yesterday.” Rory turned to Angus. “I didn’t mean to sound like he was sick.”

Angus lowered his brow while continuing to examine Scott who in turn tried not to cower. He was a solid, large man, no flab, and he radiated power. If this were a pod, he’d be the leader, and Scott had always hated pod leaders. Scott was expecting some kind of verbal blow when Angus said, “I’m used to Rory eating here.”

Scott nodded. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset anyone’s routine.”

“Dad!” Rory protested. “Come on. You’re making me sound like a teenager.”

Scott had to get out of here. “You know, I’m just going, uh, to head back to Rory’s. I’m sure you have a lot to talk about—”

“Nonsense. You misunderstand me. Both of you. We’re all going to eat together.” Here Angus inexplicably put a hand on Scott’s shoulder—what was with all this constant touching, although at least the fatherly Angus didn’t creep him out—and firmly guided him towards the kitchen as if Scott might be trying to escape. “Fathers are allowed to grumble.”

“Especially fathers who are used to getting their way in all things,” Rory noted. “Hey, where’s Jancis?”



Christ, not someone else. But, yes, a woman appeared, looking, well, looking a hell of a lot like Rory, if female. Of course she gave Rory a hug and he turned to announce, "This is my twin."

"How do you do?" Scott recalled the sister Rory had mentioned that first night.

"Hey, Scott." Her eyes were alight with, well maybe that was curiosity. For a moment Scott feared she wanted to hug him too, but instead she nodded at him. "It's a relief to have a non-wolf at the table. Have a seat."

"Thanks."

Rory had talked about his dad's cooking but it was actually Jancis who was busy at the stove. "Don't mind my father. He likes to guard the heir and prince of his fiefdom." Angus frowned, prepared to protest when Jancis continued, "But you passed the sniff test so ultimately it's okay, right?"

She looked at them all, smiling Rory's smile, and Scott wondered if there was any use in asking which sniff test she was referring to exactly.

"Shepherd's pie," she announced and served a ridiculous amount on his plate.

"What'd you eat for breakfast?" Angus asked, and Scott realized the question was directed at him, not Rory.

"Uh." Scott wracked his brain and realized he'd forgotten to eat. "Nothing."

Angus's brow furrowed and he actually glowered at Scott. "Most important meal of the day."

"He's not a wolf, Dad," Jancis pointed out.

"Doesn't matter. You look too pale." Angus jabbed a fork at him. "Eat up."

"Or what, you'll stab him?" Rory asked, sounding exasperated. "Turn down the volume, Dad, okay?"

While Scott held his breath, wondering if a fight was about to break out, Angus stabbed his shepherd's pie instead. When Angus spoke again, after a few mouthfuls, he appeared amused. "If nothing else I'll lead by example."

"Right." Rory rolled his eyes at Scott who managed to start eating so he wouldn't look out of place with these three people who were tucking it all away. "So, Dad, I got caught up on the Harlow account today. It's all good now. I just have to keep an eye on the last two shipments and we'll be done."

"Good, good."

"Mario's is a little different though..." The rest of the meal passed relatively easily with small talk and shoptalk, and Angus only urging Scott to eat five times before asking if they would be back for dinner. Stomach too full, Scott didn't think he'd be able to eat again that day.

In fact by the time he and Rory were walking out the front door, Scott wasn't sure he'd survive another one of these meals ever. Once the door closed, Rory muttered, "Sorry about that. My dad's a bit overbearing. Good for being an alpha, a little much for being a father. People think that because he's only thirteen years older than me, he's more like a brother but I think he sometimes overcompensates for being a younger father by acting like an eighty-year-old patriarch."

Thirteen years. Angus must have been... Scott did the math. He'd been eighteen when he took Rory and Jancis in. Wow. Scott cleared his throat. "I'm sure he cares for you a lot."

"He likes *you*."

Scott didn't know why Rory kept saying that. "What is the sniff test?"

Rory shifted uncomfortably. "Dad has an unusually perceptive sense of smell. He can use it to judge character."

How reassuring. "And you?"

Rory cast him a sideways smile. "You smell great to me."

Before he could stop himself, Scott asked, "And Iain?"

Rory's smile slipped and he asked on a sigh, "What did Iain say?"

"*Really* doesn't matter."

"Iain likes to pretend we're still dating. We're not."

"Like I said, it doesn't matter."

Rory looked taken aback. "It matters to me, Scott."

Scott held up a hand. "I don't mean to mess with your life."

Catching that hand, Rory cradled it between his own, his dark eyes on Scott. "You're not, believe me."

He liked his hand there, warmed by Rory's two palms. "I think you're a very nice person, Rory, but I can't stay. The Minders, if they're set on finding me, *will* find me here and cause real trouble. You don't understand how they can foment people, manipulate them. I need to leave tomorrow."

Rory's gaze became intense. "It's safe here for you. I promise. We know how to look after our own."

"I'm not your own, Rory. I know *my* own and I'm not safe here. Do you think I have no idea how it works? Give me credit for some intelligence. I grew up with these people."

His expression grew stubborn. "You're not used to the idea of others helping you, that's all."

"I appreciate all of your help, I really do—"

"That's not what I mean. Look." Rory paused, then cupped Scott's face and kissed, right out in the open, before Scott could protest. As their lips parted, Rory lingering a little, Scott glanced around the quiet but not completely empty street. Rory grinned, tipped Scott's face slightly and came in for another kiss. Scott opened his mouth to protest and Rory dived in, his tongue sliding across Scott's while his palm settled against Scott's neck.

Scott pulled away, heaving a breath, and Rory's palm rested on his chest, against his heart.

"You smell aroused," Rory whispered and he was right, Scott had hardened. "Don't worry, we won't do more in public. Just...let us be together for a little while, okay? See how it goes. I really like you."

Then he grabbed Scott's hand and they walked down the sidewalk. Scott didn't want to, but he retrieved his hand from Rory's grip even while he kept pace with him, and Rory glanced questioningly at him.

"Your boyfriend might not like you kissing me in public."

Rory didn't break his stride. "Iain is no boyfriend of mine."

"Ever?"

"He was," Rory admitted softly, "two years ago. Won't let me forget it either."

Scott guessed that was what Iain meant by "open" relationship. But Iain was not what he needed to concentrate on. Slipping away from Rory who was determined to be helpful was his priority.

They stopped in front of Rory's office, and he said, "I'll be back at five."

Scott stepped away in case Rory decided to kiss him on this busier street. Then Aileen appeared, as she seemed to, out of nowhere. Rory crouched to give her a hug, she licked his cheek, and Scott and Aileen were left outside.

Scott looked down at her. "I don't know about you, but I'm going to call it a day. I don't think I can stand meeting anyone else."

She barked and laughed. At least the tongue-lolling open mouth looked like a laugh.

Well, if Scott were going to stay here maybe Aileen could be his one friend outside of Rory.

## Chapter Seven

That night Scott urged Rory to go over to his dad's by himself, and Rory laughingly shook his head. "Don't you get it? My dad's too much, even when you're not here."

Scott looked up at him dubiously.

"It's why I was sent after you."

"What?"

"I mean," Rory added quickly, realizing that hadn't come out quite right, "why Trey asked *me* to go and not someone else." He smiled. "Trey likes to nurture my independence."

This explanation did nothing to wipe the sheer puzzlement off Scott's face, and Rory didn't know if it was because of the idea that someone was invested in protecting Scott or the mention of Trey who, Scott had decided, held him in great contempt.

Rory tried again. "Trey once told me you were very brave but misguided."

At this Scott rose from the couch, shook his head. "Never mind. I don't want to talk about Trey."

"All right." Rory didn't really want to talk about Trey either.

Then Scott peered at him, as if trying to understand. "But why you?"

Rory blew out a breath. "Trey thinks my dad is too protective and doesn't know how to give me more responsibility, so he does it and convinces Dad it's a good thing."

Here Scott nodded, but didn't appear to be any more enlightened than when the conversation had begun. Well, there was little reason for Scott to understand pack politics and Rory certainly wasn't going to get into the whole jockeying to be Rory's mate that went on below the surface. It was embarrassing. Iain had thought Rory should be flattered, as if being attractive because of status was a compliment.

"So, want a beer before shepherd's pie?"

"Okay." Scott paused. "There's more shepherd's pie?"

"Yep. Jancis sent some over to the office." His sister had figured Rory wouldn't be coming back that evening.

Scott unwound a little with the beer while Rory asked, "Aileen didn't bother you today? I made it clear she wasn't to tell you where you could and couldn't go."

"Aileen was great." No doubt there, no hesitation.

Rory smiled. Aileen *was* great, but not everyone saw it.

"Though I'm sure she has better things to do than tag after me."

She didn't, not really, and besides, Rory didn't like the idea of Scott being left unguarded. But he focused on the first issue. "Aileen does better when she has a job to perform. I hope you don't mind if this continues for a few more days at least."

Scott was clearly caught between dismay and an inability to articulate that he didn't want Aileen being his shadow. But since Rory didn't want to have an argument about it, he couldn't help him out.

With his meal Scott had a second beer and a third beer to wash it down. By then he was much looser than before, Aileen appeared forgotten, and he gestured at the bottles still left in the six-pack. "You don't drink?"

"No." Rory shrugged. "I don't like it."

Scott nodded, then eyed Rory speculatively as his eyes half-lidded. One corner of his mouth curved up. "Let's go to bed."

Huh. This was new. The proposition was clearly fueled by alcohol, which made Rory a bit uneasy. Though he'd seen drunk, and this wasn't it. If Scott had been drunk, Rory would have shut it down. But, to date, major moves had been made by Rory and he was intrigued by this reversal.

Scott rose, held out his hand. Rory took it and let himself be pulled up and led to the bedroom. There was an intent look on Scott's face as he undid the buttons of Rory's shirt.

"Scott?" Rory asked while Scott slid the shirt off Rory's shoulders.

Scott thumbed a nipple, making Rory inhale sharply, as he said, "Let me do this for you."

"For me?" Sounded like a favor, except that there was a half-smile on Scott's face as he undid Rory's belt. He smelled arousal and Scott's body was held with a certain kind of confidence Rory hadn't observed before.

"Yes." Scott bent to kiss Rory's stomach as he unzipped him. He palmed Rory's thighs before tugging down his pants. With very little force, he pressed Rory backwards until he lay on his back on the bed.

"Come up here for a sec," suggested Rory. Scott lifted his face, his expression a bit startled, and Rory felt like he had made a misstep and taken away some of Scott's confidence.

"Soon. Okay?"

"Soon," he agreed, pouring reassurance into his voice, and after a moment's hesitation, Scott kissed his stomach again, dipping his tongue in Rory's belly button. Something in Rory unwound then, since he was no longer going to call the shots or even make suggestions.

Scott's hands came to rest on his hips just before he full-throated him without warning. Rory's cock hardened further as with tongue and lips Scott explored him—all over. Tongue running over Rory's slit, circling the foreskin, skimming down his cock to suck one ball then the other in his mouth.

"Scott." But the way he said the name was more encouragement than anything else and Scott continued his skillful assault, almost bringing Rory to the edge before pulling back.

Rory gripped the covers so that he didn't suddenly sit up and grab hold of Scott. Scott had to come to him, he reminded himself again and again. *Practice patience*, and he did, a strange kind of torture as his body reached towards something, as Scott—oh fuck. Rory's balls were tightening, his cock aching from being too hard, the stimulation too much. It wouldn't be long now that Scott had created a rhythm, bringing Rory to the back of his throat and rising, then back once more.

With a shout, Rory came, letting loose, pulsing. Though Scott withdrew his warm, skillful mouth, he kept a hand on Rory's hip while Rory spent himself on his belly. A loose warmth unraveled Rory's sated body and he smiled, looking up. Scott sat there, on Rory's thighs, his mouth a little swollen from all his ministrations, satisfaction on his face. Even if he didn't quite meet Rory's gaze. The satisfaction didn't last long before uncertainty began to settle on his features.

That wasn't right. Scott needed to learn to get the most out of the post-sex glow. So despite how lax and easy his body felt, Rory demanded, "Come here."

Scott's uncertainty increased, which Rory found hard to fathom, but Rory found Scott's entire life hard to fathom. He reached out a hand, wrapped it around Scott's arm and dragged him up his body. So what if his clothes—which were Rory's clothes—got sticky.

Rory grinned. "Hi, beautiful," he said before he kissed Scott.

The word echoed in Scott's mind. He knew exactly what he looked like but he felt beautiful as Rory coaxed him into a deeper kiss, tongue sliding against his as he opened up. He was dimly aware of Rory working open his pants and then Rory's hand was on him, stroking him higher, and Scott stopped thinking.

He only knew about Rory's mouth and kissing back and moving with Rory's hand while his entire body lay on Rory, totally, utterly connected. He lost track of time, but something was building. He whimpered, strangled noises, and Rory murmured, "Come on, Scott, you're there, I can tell."

And Scott's body seized, his chest tightened, as he let go in Rory's knowing hand. Rory tamped down the kiss and Scott pulled in a long breath as he bowed his head against the strong shoulder that lay beneath him.

"You're so perfect," said Rory, and it literally sounded like there was a smile in his voice. He ran a thumb around Scott's sensitized glans and Scott shuddered on top of him, his touch flowing throughout Scott's body. "Perfect," Rory repeated, kissing Scott's cheek.

Scott felt more overwhelmed than perfect, truth be told, and he blinked against Rory's shoulder, trying to keep his head together. He'd wanted to do something for Rory, after all that Rory had done for him, but he hadn't expected it to end this way. So much with Rory seemed to be about being held, being embraced, being wholly welcomed, and Scott liked it. Maybe it had something to do with being a wolf. Not for the first time, Scott wished he had been born a werewolf, immune to Minders like himself and, here and now, a more fit partner for the man who was stroking his back.

"You're thinking too hard," Rory told him. "Don't worry about STDs, okay? We werewolves don't get them."

Scott had known that but he nodded against Rory's shoulder anyway.

They were sticky together now, but Rory didn't appear to mind as he divested Scott of the rest of his clothing and pulled the blankets over both of them, all the while keeping Scott close against him, or maybe it was Scott who was clinging.

Because he'd be gone tomorrow and he was going to miss Rory more than seemed possible for someone he'd known only a handful of days.

"I'm guessing that's your comfort zone," Rory said.

"Huh?"

"Giving head."

Scott felt his face heat up.

"It's a *great* comfort zone." Rory's voice was husky and deep. Satisfied, and that made Scott feel good. He traced fingers down Scott's spine. "I'm lucky."

"I'm lucky I met you." The fervent, almost embarrassing words seemed to be spoken of their own volition. He spoke so low he wasn't sure Rory had heard him.

But Rory was wolf and of course he'd heard him. He wrapped an arm around Scott's neck, pulling him even closer.

"We can both be lucky, right?" Rory yawned then and seconds later, he fell asleep. Amazing. But Scott stayed awake a long time, treasuring the body contact, the skin on skin. He was never going to forget this wolf.

The next morning, Rory slipped out of bed while Scott slept on, dead to the world. He didn't know what he liked more about last night, that half-smile on Scott's face as he went down on him, or those widening gray eyes just before Scott realized Rory wasn't done with him after Rory had come.

Rory headed into the shower and got dressed for the day. Near the end Scott woke up and pretended to sleep on, and while Rory didn't know what that was about—he would have liked to kiss goodbye—he left without disturbing him. It was Rory's belief that Scott had a lot of things to adjust to. Getting used to Rory making love with him, getting used to living in a pack town, getting used to people caring.

On the walk over to work, Rory hummed. Unfortunately his good mood took a bit of a dip when he saw Iain waiting outside his work.

Trouble was, Rory felt a little guilty about lost, incompetent, lying Iain. Because Iain *had* liked Rory for Rory, just...he'd been so caught up in Rory's status it had left a bad taste in his mouth.

And the lying. Not only that he lied to other people, he made himself believe his own lies. He was frankly a bit of mess. Which, yeah, had been part of his attraction. Rory liked to be the caretaker a little too much.

But Scott was different. Scott had himself tried to take care of people all those years ago, when he'd been in an impossible situation. He'd actually saved humans from his own pod back then. Quite an accomplishment, Trey had said.

"Hi, Rory," said Iain, bringing him back to the present.

Rory stared. "Why are you here?"

"Your father asked me to check on you."

Lie number one of the day. Rory rolled his eyes.

"He did."

"Iain, you don't make sense half the time."

"Hey, that's what you used to like about me." The teasing tone was pitched right, but Rory wasn't the right guy for it.

"Used to," he pointed out and watched Iain adopt a hurt expression. "Enough. I have to work."

Iain didn't budge. "Not everyone is happy about having a Minder in town. The extra work with keeping watch, the extra attention we might get from the police. Even if people know about werewolves, it's still important that we lay low—"

Rory slashed an impatient hand through the air. "Who sent you to tell me that?"

"No one."

Rory smelled truth, so Iain at least believed himself.

"I wanted to warn you. For old time's sake."

"Thank you." Rory walked around Iain and opened the door, slipped inside.

Iain shook his head. "Is he really worth it? What's he got on you?"

"Goodbye, Iain." Rory shut the door, careful not to slam it. Like Scott had *anything* on Rory. He didn't. That wasn't the point. Christ. Iain knew nothing about relationships.

But if that wasn't bad enough, half an hour later his dad walked into his office with a brown-bag lunch in case Rory worked through the day. After a long look at Rory, Angus raised one finger and said, "Now don't get too attached."

Rory hated it when Angus actually wagged his finger at him. Through clenched teeth, he demanded, "Why not?"

Angus put that finger away, as if he recognized that was a strategic mistake, and put his hands in his pockets, rocked back on his heels. "It's like Stockholm syndrome."



“*What the fuck?*” Rory shot up to standing behind his desk, suddenly furious in a way he had not been with Iain. “I did not kidnap Scott, I *rescued* him, after Trey sent me to make sure he wasn’t harmed. I killed for him, and I have no regrets on that either. He is not my prisoner now. How can you—”

Angus raised a hand. “Calm down, Rory. I said *like* Stockholm syndrome.”

In a what-the-hell gesture, Rory threw out his hands. “Jesus Christ.”

Angus gave Rory a pitying look then, which he actually hated more than the wagging finger. “Scott doesn’t have a lot of choices right now, Rory.”

“Doesn’t mean he’s forced to like me, which is what you’re implying.” Last night, that had been nothing about force.

“If you let him go, you can find that out.”

“What? You resent spending pack resources to keep a watch on the town?”

Angus frowned. “No. That’s not my point.”

“Iain was in here this morning, telling me how this was a big problem.”

“It’s not,” Angus said flatly. “Most of what Iain says has no basis in reality, as you know. That boy likes to live in another world.” He paused and with a sinking heart, Rory knew what was coming next. “And might I point out you used to be quite taken with him too. You like to fall in love with people who are basket cases.”

Rory felt something in his jaw start to throb.

“Calm down,” Angus repeated to no effect.

It was better not to speak than to tell your father to fuck off. Right? *Right?* But there was always a first time.

Angus didn’t even stop, despite knowing how furious Rory was. “Your feelings for each other are based on being the rescuer and rescued which are real feelings but they are not long-term.”

Rory strode around the desk to get in Angus’s face. “I don’t give a shit how we met. What I care about is being with him now. Do you know why? *Because he likes being with me.* He doesn’t have a clue that being your son means anything to anyone.”

Angus blinked, then said softly, “The question is, Rory, *why* does he like being with you.”

Rory ignored the question. “You and Trey would *never* have let a wolf go on alone like Scott has. He’s been alone for nine fucking years. Fine, I understand he’s been deprived of companionship and maybe I’m just filling the void. This is the point you’re trying to drive home. But at least it’s me.” Rory slapped his chest. “Not the alpha’s son.”

“You’re still the alpha’s son. As for him being left alone, well, he’s not a wolf. There’s not a lot we can do with Minders. They’re not exactly pack. They’re either loners or members of pathological groups called pods.”

“Right now Scott *is* my pack.”

Angus looked down at the floor, shaking his head. “Well if he wasn’t, I sure as hell talked you into that, didn’t I?” Angus’s gaze lifted and turned assessing, which Rory hated. He usually ended up saying something a little too close to the bone when he looked like that. But this time all he muttered was the vague and innocuous platitude “Time will tell.”

## Chapter Eight

Now that Scott was dressed and ready to move out of town, he found himself sitting on the bed, bracing himself for the leave-taking. He didn't have a choice, he lectured himself, and he couldn't believe how weak he was, that he was tempted to stay and put this town and Rory—who had been so kind, so generous—in danger.

He pushed off the bed, marched to the front door and flung it open. Then he sighed, because there was Aileen, sitting on the front lawn, though she rose when she saw him.

How the hell did you give a wolf the slip?

He cleared his throat. "Good morning, Aileen."

She woofed in response.

No point in lying, she'd sense it. He knew that much about wolves. So he spoke the truth. "I appreciate you looking out for me, but I don't need you to stay with me now that I know the town." Wolf expressions weren't that easy to read, but hers seemed to turn a little troubled, maybe hurt. Still, Scott forged on. "So thanks for being my tour guide, and hopefully we can meet up another time."

The last was kind of a lie, but not too obvious, he thought. However, at this point Aileen didn't respond, she just stared at him.

"See you." Scott waved and strode off without looking back.

Seconds later Aileen was trotting right beside him.

Well. That hadn't worked. At all. Scott eked out the hope that once they reached town, she would go one way and he another, but nope she silently stayed close by him, as if she knew his intentions.

He planned to get on that 10:39 Greyhound bus and leave. He'd rather Aileen weren't around, but if she was, she was. As long as she didn't block him. This time, unlike when he felt he couldn't leave Rory's house, he'd fight it. He no longer feared she might turn vicious, though he supposed that was a possibility.

First though, he tried losing her by going in and out of stores. He'd noticed she didn't like coming into buildings yesterday. And indeed, half an hour later, he couldn't see her.

With huge relief, he hightailed it to the bus station, with seventeen minutes to spare, bought his ticket and sat down in the empty, slightly grungy waiting room. He wouldn't wait outside for fear Aileen would trot up to him again.

It felt like the slowest seventeen minutes of his life ticking by, and he couldn't get comfortable in the plastic bucket seat, shifting endlessly as he watched the clock. As 10:39 approached his tension rose,

spiking at 10:40 until the bus rolled up at the station one minute late. Two passengers disembarked and Scott got on, no four-legged wolf in sight.

“North Bay?” he asked and the driver grunted a yes before pulling out of the station. Scott seated himself on the bus, which was a third full, if that.

He wasn’t going back to Toronto, didn’t want to risk running into a Minder chasing him north. So he’d cut across to Ottawa and go down to Montreal, which wasn’t as big a city as Toronto, but would have to do for now. He might have to head to the States eventually—a thought too daunting to contemplate.

He was ashamed at his disappointment when the bus wasn’t somehow stopped before it left town. He didn’t know what Rory had been referring to earlier about the town having a watch, but there was nothing that he could see as the town turned to countryside. A thick blanket of snow covered the fields and forest beyond.

Scott closed his eyes, trying to ignore his sense of loss, and thought, *Welcome back to your life.*

After getting off an hour-long phone call, Rory realized it was almost five p.m. and rubbed his eyes. He had thought Scott might drop by today, but evidently not. Perhaps Scott felt he was imposing. Lunch had come and gone without Rory much noticing, though he had eaten the contents of the brown bag his father had plunked on the desk.

As he was closing up, Angus arrived on his doorstep, expression somber and Rory stiffened up. His father radiated tension.

“Where’s Scott?” his dad demanded.

Not a good question. “At home?”

“He didn’t pick up the phone.”

They took off together, running towards home, and Rory asked, “What’s going on?”

Angus just shook his head.

They arrived at the house, took the stairs two at a time and Angus yelled “Scott” while Rory zipped around the house, finding it dark and completely empty.

An envelope lay on the kitchen table and he grabbed it, ripped it open, expecting a goodbye note from Scott. How the hell had he given Aileen the slip?

But it wasn’t a note from Scott. The letters were block-like, childish and large. Yet readable. *Bus North Bay with Scott.*

“What the fuck?” asked Rory in disbelief.

“That’s Aileen’s writing,” observed Angus, and Rory sensed relief on his dad’s part. Which didn’t make sense. Because while Angus might be glad Scott had left for North Bay, he wouldn’t like Aileen to have gone with him. Aileen wasn’t one who should be away from her pack.

And writing? Aileen never shifted to human unless under some kind of pressure. What had happened?

“Bus station,” declared Rory, ready to run over, but Angus laid a hand on his shoulder.

“The two buses that pass through here are long gone. The last one left at noon.”

“I don’t understand...” Rory went silent. He’d thought he and Scott had been, well, getting to know each other last night. But Scott had been saying goodbye and Rory had been too caught up in the moment to realize it.

“Aileen will stay with him, since you asked her to.”

That was a type of reassurance, but he’d never meant to send Aileen out of town. He’d meant to keep Scott here. “Question is, when will she contact us?”

Angus gave an expansive shrug, including his hands.

“You’re glad he’s gone,” Rory said flatly.

His father’s sharp blue eyes didn’t flinch. “I am, but not for the reason you’re thinking. In fact, I’m thinking Scott’s a smart guy.”

“Dad.” Rory blew out a breath. Something was happening and for whatever reason Angus was slow about filling Rory in. “Spell it out.”

“I got a phone call about ten minutes ago, right before I came to you. That’s when I realized Scott might be gone.” Angus’s look was weary but determined. “The town’s about to go into lockdown as the police come in and sweep us, looking for a dangerous and armed man. They’re allowed, given Wolf Town’s status. Here’s the kicker—they have Scott’s picture.”

“Jesus.” Rory was having trouble wrapping his head around the notion anyone could see Scott as dangerous, Minder or not.

“Yeah.” Angus looked dour. “Someone got to them. And if that someone managed to convince them Scott needs to be killed, I’m sure as hell glad he high-footed it out of here before he became target practice. They’re really convinced their ‘fugitive’ is deadly. A modern-day Jack the Ripper, one guy informed me.”

“That is so fucked.” Rory could feel his heart beating too hard, too loud. Scott was vulnerable, in too many ways. His dad clapped a hand on his shoulder.

“You said he’s pack, so he’s pack. Especially now,” he added grimly. Angus didn’t like anyone to be threatened under his watch. “We’re going to protect him. Okay? The beta’s warning everyone we’re about to be inundated by police, but we need to get back and help him out.”

“Then we find Scott.”

Angus nodded. One thing about Angus. Once he promised something, he followed through. Rory met his father’s gaze.

“Let’s go.”

Scott lay on his motel room bed in the dark, clothes on, shoes on. He had the uncomfortable feeling he was being watched and he didn’t dare remove anything in case he had to flee. He felt safer holed up here

than lurking in the cold streets, but not by much. At least he knew no one was in this room with him. Sometime during the night, he must have dozed, but when daylight arrived he felt exhausted.

He couldn't stay here, had to keep moving, on to Ottawa. It hadn't occurred to him that he'd miss his connection from North Bay to Ottawa and it would be necessary to manipulate a motel in to letting him stay for free in a room. But that's what had happened.

After a hot shower to warm up and reinvigorate, he stepped out of the first-floor room and walked back to the bus station, got on another bus with about twenty people. This time he tried to observe them all, in case any of them were familiar, but they were all strangers. By the time he arrived in Ottawa, he was wound tight and chiding himself for his foolishness. Minders did not lurk in shadows. They came out into the light and *talked*, forced their words and will on you.

His imagination was working overtime, that was all. In part because of the tight ball of grief lodged in his chest. It hurt to think about Rory. He hadn't left a note, because he hadn't wanted Rory to try to follow him. And a note would have been encouragement of a sort. No note was dismissive.

He walked into a coffee shop, this time fishing out real money, since he had enough and he didn't have the energy to tell someone to give him something for free. Though if he was to survive he'd have to discard some of his scruples until he got back on his feet again—new identity, new job. And that only once he was sure he'd fallen off the Minders' radar.

Black coffee, to suit his mood. He brought it to his lips for a sip and almost dropped the cup as someone slid into the booth across from him.

He struck first.

"Don't speak." He threw everything he had into the instruction as he met her gaze.

She blinked, surprised. Then tilted her head with a slight smile, as if she recognized him. Of all things, she lifted her hand and gave a small wave.

A normal would be confused. A Minder would be fighting Scott's influence. In turn, Scott should be running now, before more Minders descended, if they were working in a group. But she was young and appeared almost untouched in a strange way he hadn't seen before, and her eyes were golden.

He frowned and stared, his heart sinking as he realized she did recognize him, and he her.

"It's Aileen," she said softly, her voice sounding a bit hoarse. In fact, she swallowed. "Why shouldn't I speak?"

He gave a quick shake of his head. "It's fine. Speak. I thought you were one of my kind of people."

She nodded, although her expression remained unenlightened. Then she bit her lip. "I'm starving and I have no more money. Can you help?"

God. She looked so untried, so innocent. Short, mussed hair, clothes that were too big, a kind of tentativeness to her. And she'd followed him into danger.

"Of course." He called the waiter over and ordered two meals. Aileen ate most of both of them with speed and voraciousness, shoveling it in like only a starving person could.

Once she was done she offered him a small, apologetic smile. "I meant to watch you from a distance, but I got too hungry. I hope you and Rory don't mind."

"I don't mind," Scott said automatically, quite unable to speak for Rory. "But I'm going to give you money to go back home, okay? Because it's not safe for you to be with me. Though I appreciate the thought, of you watching me."

She stared, chewed her lip. "I'll watch from a distance again, if that's what you prefer."

"No," Scott said too loudly and Aileen flinched. He gathered himself together, needing to stay calm in order to be persuasive to this otherworldly wolf-woman. "I can't take care of you, okay? That's why you need to go back."

"I am taking care of you," she pointed out calmly. "That's my job now."

Scott shook his head vehemently. "It's not safe."

"Yes, so I need to watch over you."

"You can't even feed yourself, Aileen."

"I just did. I can find other ways. This was the most straightforward."

Scott placed his hands on the table, trying to find some way to communicate with this girl-creature. "I can't focus on keeping myself safe if I have to look after you. You see?"

"You don't have to look after me." She had all the confidence in the world. "I can see this was a mistake. I'm sorry." She began to move away.

"No!" He grabbed her wrist, but at least she didn't flinch at that. "Don't watch from a distance," he pleaded. "Go home."

"I won't go home."

Okay. He wasn't going to talk her into anything at this coffee shop and people were beginning to stare. He'd give way for now, and figure out something later. "Then stay with me."

## Chapter Nine

Angus had insisted Rory stay away from the police. He was too angry, Angus told him, and anger was not going to help. In this situation, cooperation worked best, especially because Angus had made a few well-placed phone calls, including one to Trey. The whole situation smelled wrong, and people were going to realize it, soon.

It didn't take long, twelve hours in fact, before it became crystal clear to the police that this "investigation" was wonky, that they were doing things that didn't make sense. Then higher-ups shut the entire operation down, especially given that the search had been thorough and there was no sign of Scott.

As the last of the police left, Angus explained that the police would be debriefed, and whoever had been tampered with would be identified. Because a Minder had gotten close enough to convince these men to be ready to shoot someone who shouldn't be killed.

"Those Minders have screwed themselves," Angus told Rory. "Do they think they can't be identified by cameras and video?"

"Good thing Scott wasn't here." Rory felt sick to his stomach thinking about it.

"Good thing," Angus agreed.

"Do you think they wanted him killed?"

Angus shrugged. "Killed, or they had a plan in place to abduct him." His mouth curved in a sardonic smile. "But what they've done is ensure that this town is safer for him. Any odd activity by law enforcement is going to get flagged immediately after this disturbing evening."

"So now we go find Scott."

A troubled expression entered Angus's eyes, though he nodded.

"What?" demanded Rory.

"At the rate you're going, you'll end up bonded with him."

*Bonded.* That was Angus's way of dancing around the fact that Rory felt like Scott was his mate. "And if I am?"

"We'll deal. Your choice."

"You always did say that," Rory said quietly. Though Angus had more been referring to the fact Rory could love men or women equally, not wolves and non-wolves.

"We haven't heard from Aileen yet. It's hard to know when she'll think it's a good time to contact us, today or next year. Her sense of time has never been great."



Rory rubbed his face. "I should have realized it might come to something like this."

"You didn't think Scott would leave because *you* wouldn't leave him. This is the problem with mating with non-wolves."

"It has nothing to do with your wolf/non-wolf *bullshit*."

Angus leveled his gaze at Rory, but he didn't say anything. So Rory continued.

"The problem is Scott thinks he doesn't deserve anything."

"Well, that's clear from the way he walks. But it's not only that. He wanted to protect you. Which is why I have a grudging respect for him, and why we're going to go after him." Angus reached for the phone. "Where do you think he'd go from North Bay? East or west?"

Rory just shook his head.

"I'll call in a few favors."

Scott hadn't expected to be sharing a hotel room with Aileen that night, but unless he knew she was headed straight back to Wolf Town, he couldn't have her wandering around. Yes, she was a wolf, with incredible senses and strength, but she was also young. Late teens, he'd guess.

Ottawa was one of the safer cities to exist, but still. She didn't even belong in the city, that much was obvious by her restlessness and discomfort.

At least he could feed her, and boy, did she eat. He was too worried about going to his bank, so Scott had regressed to talking people out of their money. Not something he enjoyed, although he tried to do it in a least-harm kind of way. Right now Aileen was tearing into her second hamburger while Scott could barely down a few french fries.

When they were done, Aileen claimed the bed by the door with a kind of ferocious sense of ownership that Scott couldn't counter. He didn't even know if it was because she had to be near the door to feel better about being locked in a strange room, or she wanted to be able to protect him from potential invaders. Not that they had a conversation about it. After showering, she announced she was beat and lay down to promptly fall asleep.

As Scott lay awake, thoughts racing around and multiplying in his impossible-to-turn-off brain, he wondered if this was a werewolf trait—being able to fall asleep at will.

Unfortunately the other werewolf traits were heightened senses. Nevertheless when he rose and went to the washroom and came back, she still seemed out. As he walked as quietly as possible to the door, he prayed the doorknob wouldn't squeak.

He'd left her money on his bed and a note. But as he turned the knob, she bolted up to sitting. "What are you doing?" she demanded, completely awake in two seconds.

He just looked at her.

"Are we going somewhere?" She pulled on her clothing rapidly.

Scott didn't bother to explain. He went to his bed and stripped down to his underwear.

"What was that about?" she persisted, now confused.

It had been too obvious for words, Scott thought, but if it wasn't to Aileen, it was beyond him to explain it. So he sighed and said, "I'm going to have a shower, Aileen."

She paused, standing there, processing what had happened, what he'd said, before dismissing it all as incomprehensible. "All right."

Maybe the hot water would calm him down and help him sleep, since nothing else was working. By the time he exited the washroom Aileen was, of course, deep asleep—but only if he stayed in this room, that much was clear.

So Scott lay down, shut his eyes and tried to rest. It took at least an hour before he dozed off.

The phone call finally came—at 11:30 p.m. that night.

"He's in the shower," she told Rory, which was great but...

"Where are you?" he demanded.

"Ottawa."

"Street name, Aileen," he practically barked out, fearing she'd hang up before she narrowed down her location. Aileen might think they could somehow locate her through the ether.

"Uh..." He was on tenterhooks, until she continued, "It says Comfort Inn on this notepad. No street name though."

"Room number?"

"Twenty-seven," she declared, sounding more confident. "Gotta go." Her voice dropped to a bare whisper. "He'll get upset and try to run away from me again."

She clicked off before he could tell her to make sure they didn't move.

"Jesus," Rory said into the now-dead connection. Still, there couldn't be too many Comfort Inns in Ottawa, surely. He phoned his dad, and Jancis, who'd been waiting on the landline in case Aileen called in there, answered. "They're in Ottawa."

"Time for a road trip," Jancis replied wryly.

It was decided Rory and his father would go. They could get back by tomorrow afternoon, so Dad wouldn't be away from pack business long—important given the last twenty-four hours—and two people Scott knew wouldn't be overwhelming—Rory's concern. Plus Aileen was best reassured by Angus, and she was well out of her usual routine, when routine was important to her.

Six hours later and many kilometers later, they stood at the door of room twenty-seven. The second room twenty-seven that night. Well, almost morning given it was 5:30 a.m. If they roused another squinting, slightly alarmed elderly couple, Rory was going to be in bad shape. His chest felt tight with worry.

Angus's knock was soft, but it should have been enough to wake up Aileen.

He'd thought he hadn't slept but Scott jolted awake, struggling to work himself free of his blankets, preparing to throw himself into battle—

Only to hear Aileen joyfully yell "Angus" and leap into the large man's embrace. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head.

"Kiddo, you're not supposed to leave town unannounced," he chided her, smiling though, and Scott wondered if he could somehow slip away now since the alpha had little interest in him.

Except then Rory stepped around his father's bulk and stared, dark eyes drinking him in. Scott felt a tremor wash through his body, and never before in his life had he felt like this—wanting so badly what he shouldn't have. He was rooted to the floor, as if Rory's gaze had pinned him there, and he couldn't move.

It amazed and appalled him that Rory had come for him.

Rory moved close to stand a foot away. "Hey," he said softly, and Scott felt like he was drowning. He clenched a fist, holding his tense arm between Rory's body and himself so he could say the words he did not want to speak.

"It's not safe for you to be with me. You need to go. Please take Aileen with you."

Rory's gaze warmed and there was a kind of regret there. "You were right. I'm sorry I didn't believe you. The police came looking for you. It could have been dangerous if you hadn't left when you did." Rory's head dipped, perhaps because of the shocked look on Scott's face. "This way everyone, including you, was safe."

Scott focused on breathing in and out, and was dimly aware that Aileen and Angus had left the room. Now he had to convince Rory to go with them.

But Rory kept speaking. "It didn't last. Twelve hours after it began, the police were pulled out, and now there's a manhunt on for the Minders who managed to manipulate them into trying to shut down our town." Rory paused. "So they won't be bothering you for a while."

It gave Scott breathing space, a chance to reestablish himself safely. He understood that and soon he would feel relieved about it. He nodded to show he was following Rory's line of reasoning. "I have time to find a safe place. Somewhere new."

"With me."

Scott shook his head. He was no longer looking at Rory, because it was getting more and more difficult to push him away. Rory's hand came down on Scott's fist, wrapping around it, then unclenching the fingers so they were holding hands. He couldn't breathe and if he wasn't careful he wouldn't be able to blink back the tears. He wanted to ask Rory why he had to make this so hard.

"Trust me," Rory murmured, tugging that arm so Scott was suddenly flush against Rory whose arm came around his neck, holding him tight.

“That’s not the problem. It never was. *You* can’t trust *me*.”

Then Rory was shushing him, because of his words or because he was softly crying on his shoulder, Scott didn’t know. But he couldn’t pull back. He needed this moment.

After a while, Rory seemed to be moving away, but instead Scott’s world twisted and turned upside down so that somehow Rory was lying on the bed with Scott on top of him, looking down as Rory smoothed tears away from his cheeks.

“Listen to me, Scott. After that rather bad spectacle, any weird law-enforcement action against Wolf Town is going to be doubly and triply scrutinized. Not only that, they got a visual of two of the Minders. These guys are going to be running for their lives, I swear. They’ll have absolutely no time for you.”

“You don’t know what it’s like to help me. You don’t know what I did.”

“When you were nineteen? I know what you did. You rescued people your pod was abusing.”

“I betrayed my only friend to do that.”

“That’s not what Trey says. You had no choice.”

Rory was so full of faith. It made Scott want to believe. “I can never see my friend again. He can never trust me not to manipulate him.”

Here Rory sank a hand into Scott’s hair and kissed him full on the mouth. “I don’t have to worry about that, do I?”

“No,” Scott muttered. “But not because of any great ethics on my part.”

“Do you want to manipulate me with your words?”

“*No!*”

“Then there’s no problem.” Rory kissed him again. This time his tongue sought entry and Scott allowed it, pushed back hungrily, suddenly desperate to connect. Rory gave as good as Scott and they wrestled, full-body twisting and shoving as they divested themselves of clothing. Scott found he didn’t care what happened, he could take anything and everything, as long as Rory didn’t stop touching him. And he didn’t. In fact, as Scott lay on his back, Rory took Scott in his mouth, sucking and kissing until eventually Scott, on a sob, came. But Rory didn’t stop. He swallowed Scott whole.

While Scott lay there, body melting and mind unbelieving, Rory kissed his way up Scott’s belly and chest, attending to a nipple on the way, before diving into Scott’s mouth. His mind started churning then. He had to reciprocate and wasn’t sure what Rory would like. Anything Rory wanted, Scott wanted to give if only he could figure it out. But it was kissing and more kissing, and before Scott could think on it more, Rory broke off with his muted shout of joy as he came against Scott’s hip.

His head fell on Scott’s shoulder. “Sorry.”

“Sorry?” asked Scott incredulous. “What could you possibly be sorry for?”

“I got carried away.”

Scott didn’t even know what he was talking about.

And Rory lifted his head, dark eyes taking him in. This connection he had with Rory, he couldn't understand it, and he didn't expect it to last. But it seemed to Scott that for the short-term, under these circumstances, they could be safe together.

"Will you come home with me?" Rory asked, watching him very carefully. For the first time, Scott could see that his answer was important to Rory, that for whatever reason, Rory wanted very badly to be with Scott.

He wrapped himself tight around Rory, pulling him down, and Rory let out a long exhale. Scott got the sense of just how tired Rory was. "Can we sleep first?"

Rory rose up slightly, a warning tilt to his head. "Answer the question, Scott."

A smile stretched his face wide, and it felt so good, to be under Rory's gaze and to feel happy he was wanted by this man, this wolf. Scott was, for a time, safe.

"Yes."

## About the Author

To learn more about Joely Skye, please visit [www.joelyskye.com](http://www.joelyskye.com). Send an email to Joely at [Joely.Skye@gmail.com](mailto:Joely.Skye@gmail.com) or join her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as Joely. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/joelyskye/>

Look for these titles

*Now Available*

*Minders Series*

Monster

Zombie

Minder

Marked

Poison

Feral

Lynx

*Damn it, a man shouldn't always have to be afraid...*

## Shining in the Sun

© 2010 Alex Beecroft

Alec Goodchilde has everything a man could want—except the freedom to be himself. Once a year, he motors down to an exclusive yacht club on the Cornish coast and takes the summer off from the trap that is his life.

When his car breaks down, leaving him stranded on the beach, he's transfixed by the sight of a surfer dancing on the waves. The man is summer made flesh. Freedom wrapped up in one lithe package, dripping wet from the sea.

Once a year, Darren Stokes takes a break from his life of grinding overwork and appalling relatives, financing his holiday by picking up the first rich man to show an interest. This year, though, he's cautious—last summer's meal ticket turned out to be more pain than pleasure.

Even though Alex is so deep in the closet he doesn't even admit he's gay, Darren finds himself falling hard—until their idyllic night together is shattered by the blinding light of reality...

*Warning: One explicit m/m sex scene and a great deal of swearing.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Shining in the Sun:*

"You must think I'm mad."

*Well, yeah.* Darren took a step back, gauged the best angle to run. *But I kind of hoped you were harmless with it.* "Why?"

"Don't go past, I think I'll die'?" Alec's laugh too had expanded, grown warm and wry. It sounded genuine, honest, likeable. But then, so had Max's honey-coated charm. "Dear God. It was a bit...stalkerish, wasn't it? I'm not like that." He turned away from the sea as it retreated before them both in its long, gentle afternoon withdrawal. His smile was that sweet, closed-lipped affair, all warm eyes and head-tilt that Darren felt had to be trained in. Nothing that heart-stopping could have come about without years of practice, surely?

"I'm not *normally* like that," Alec corrected himself. "It's the combination—it's you and the summer. They made me brave. For a moment, at least."

The hairs stood up on Darren's arms, and the skin down his spine prickled, as it did when he felt the perfect wave build beneath him and knew it was now or never to catch it. Make the wrong move and it would drill him into the ocean bed, gone for good. *What the...?* "Yeah." He tried to swallow and couldn't quite manage it. "It does that to me too. The summer, I mean. You gotta ride the wave while it's there, because the rest of the year's gonna be shit no matter what."



Alec's mouth fell slightly, and if it was possible the intensity of his gaze picked up, blue laser bright. "Oh God, you too? It's as though this is the only month I'm alive. I spend all the rest of the year being what other people want me to be. I'm not normally like this, because this is really me." He took a step forward, hand out.

Darren's heart drummed against his throat. The crawling sensation up his back intensified as all over his body his skin decided it had to be awake for this. He could feel it building like static electricity, streaming off him into the sky. Clouds should be boiling right now. If he let that outstretched hand touch him, lightning would follow the circuit, arcing down through them both, coring him out and leaving him gutted and smouldering, changed beyond all recognition.

He flinched away, dodged round the back of the board. "Hell, yeah. We must've been separated at birth, 'cause I know exactly what you mean."

Alec took his hand back, looked at the palm and rubbed it slowly across the hollow of his hip. The moment passed, and in the undertow Darren cursed himself for missing it. Before last year he would have flung himself recklessly into that wave. Not any longer. "Come over here. Are you right-handed or left?"

The sun, low on the horizon, shone orange as a streetlamp as he positioned Alec's feet on the board. Alec's hand braced on his shoulder as he felt the cling of the wax and the tilt of the board beneath him, not at all balanced on its three stubby fins. "You have to...get..."

Darren pulled ankles farther apart, pushed down on corded thighs in lieu of explanations, manhandling Alec into position. The threat of lightning crackled in his finger ends, his face so close to Alec's thigh he could feel the heat of it, welcome now that the day's warmth was draining away. He ducked his head and pressed his cheek to the soft cotton shorts. Waited for the hand on his head, the low-voiced, anxious command to "suck me".

It didn't come. Alec wobbled and laughed, spread out his arms like a child pretending to fly, and for a long poised moment, muscles working beneath Darren's exploring fingers, he was balanced on the nose and a single fin. "Shit!" said Darren, tension wiped out of him by admiration. "You know you might just be okay."

After that performance he had no hesitation over getting the board in the water and Alec with it. He zipped his wetsuit closed once more as insulation against more than cold and pushed out to waist height. Swell tugged and nudged him. The lips of the waves curled over, all golden and crinkly as toffee paper. Above, a dozen seagulls flamed like phoenixes in sunset's fire. Alec yelped and hopped. "Oh, oh God, you didn't tell me it was this cold."

Darren laughed, forgetting money and tricks and broken bones. He shoved Alec in the chest while he hopped and watched him go over in a flume of flying topaz spray. Alec emerged with his well-cut hair looking thick and slick as an otter's pelt, the new T-shirt clinging to cold-peaked nipples, and a sputtering

laugh that hovered somewhere between play and accusation. He scrambled, streaming, to his feet and launched himself at Darren in a rugby tackle that took Darren's knees out from beneath him.

The sky streaked overhead—a brief blurred image of cliffs and cloth of gold—and the sea came up to meet him. Grey underwater light, lances of sunset glitter through the ripples, and that first breathtaking chill of his dry wetsuit soaking up water. Then he emerged to find Alec laughing in glee and—bless the man—holding on to the board so it wouldn't float away.

This laugh suited the new, private Alec, whose existence he'd only just begun to suspect—unaffected, unashamed. Darren liked it. Lunging back he got an armful of Alec's narrow waist, his head jammed up against Alec's breastbone. They went tumbling together, Alec's heartbeat racing beneath his ear like the throb and hiss of the sea. Arms about him and long entangling legs between his. They wrestled, slippery in the surf, tumbling and laughing, breathing in the gold and flames of the sunset.

He let Alec win, lay under him, surrendered, while the froth of ripples tickled up him and teased his hair. Moving his hands he placed them carefully on Alec's back. It seemed a moment for care, a moment suspended between two futures. The body above his was warm. Goose bumps stood out under his fingertips, but beneath the sea-chilled surface the core of Alec's heat welled out in a delicious tide over his belly and groin. Closing his eyes, he waited for the expected kiss. And waited again. Alec's interest wilted against his hip. Looking up, puzzled, Darren smiled. "You got me."

"But what am I to do with you now?" Alec rolled off, sat hugging his knees, the leash of the board still in one hand. He watched the waves as though they worried him.

"You really don't know?" Darren scrambled up onto his knees, leaned over and took the leash out of Alec's hand. The fingers opened reluctantly, as if Alec clung to more than a board. What was going on here?

Sun, deep red as a flaring ember, touched the sea. He expected to hear the thunderous hiss and boil as it quenched itself, but only a chill, wilderness-scented wind came from it. Sand hollowed beneath his knees. What *was* going on? Could it really be that Alec didn't know the score? They both had the same board but were trying to play different games?

"I think I've said before that I'm not really like this." The goose bumps Darren had read like Braille beneath his fingers now stood out visible on the smooth white skin of Alec's biceps, swept down the length of his arm. Silver-steel droplets of water splashed off the ends of his hair, darkening his T-shirt as fast as it dried. Closer to the town a ghost of sunlight still toasted determined sunbathers, but here beneath the shaggy brown cliffs, night came early.

Rising, Darren pulled at Alec's arm, hauled him to his feet. "C'mon, it's getting too cold. How about we get some tea, and you can tell me what you're really like."

*Don't talk to strangers, young man—especially the dead ones.*

## The Dark Farewell

© 2009 Josh Lanyon

It's the Roaring Twenties. Skirts are short, crime is rampant and booze is in short supply. Prohibition has hit Little Egypt, where newspaperman David Flynn has come to do a follow-up story on the Herren Massacre. The massacre isn't the only news in town though. Spiritualist medium Julian Devereux claims to speak to the dead—and he charges a pretty penny for it.

Flynn knows a phoney when he sees one, and he's convinced Devereux is as fake as a cigar store Indian. But the reluctant attraction he feels for the deceptively soft, not-his-type Julian is as real as it gets.

Suddenly Julian begins to have authentic, bloodstained visions of a serial killer, and the cynical Mr. Flynn finds himself willing to defend Julian with not only his life, but his body.

*Warning: This novella contains phony spiritualists, cynical newspapermen, labor disputes, illicit love affairs, high-calorie southern cooking, and more than fifty-percent humidity!*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for The Dark Farewell:*

On the way back to the boarding house, Flynn stopped and bought an electric fan at the hardware store. He parked the Model T in the garage and carried the fan inside the house. In the parlor he could hear Mrs. Hoyt complaining; he didn't catch the words, but he knew the tone. Her daughter's voice murmured in acquiescence.

Farther down the hall, in the study where Gus had typed his Pulitzer prize-winning series of articles on the national coal strike in 1919, he could hear Dr. Pearson and Mr. Devereux bickering, but it sounded mostly amiable.

"David," Amy called.

Flynn glanced around. Amy was coming his way, a fair-haired, broad-shouldered man in tow. The man carried a suitcase in each hand. For one shocked instant, Flynn thought the man was Paul. Then reality reasserted itself. Aside from the light hair and the broad shoulders, the man didn't resemble Paul at all.

"David, this is Mr. Lee. He works for the Queen of Egypt Medical Supply Company and stays with us regularly." To Mr. Lee, she said, "Mr. Flynn is an old family friend."

Mr. Lee's tilted green eyes met Flynn's briefly. He looked away then his gaze returned and locked. He shifted his samples bag and offered his hand and a smile. David shifted the fan he was carrying and shook hands. He smiled back. Mr. Lee was blond and boyishly handsome.

"Casey."

"David."

“Well now, I’ll leave you two to get acquainted. Mrs. Greer helps me out in the kitchen, but her daughter is ill and she had to leave this morning.” Amy was already turning. “I need to get back to work.” She hurried away, and Flynn and Casey Lee were left to climb the stairs to the second level on their own.

“Medical supplies?” Flynn asked. He thought he recognized a fellow veteran. It was the way Casey held himself and the quick, no-nonsense way he’d sized Flynn up. During the war there hadn’t been time to waste.

Casey laughed. “Yep. I’m the original snake oil salesman. We sell everything from elixirs to remedies for warts and asthma.” He gave Flynn a sideways smile.

“You must travel around quite a bit.”

“I’m on the road pretty much all the time these days. I was in Marion yesterday.” He grimaced. “Day before that I was in Murphysboro.”

“Yes?”

“The whole of Jackson County is talking about those murders. People are pretty worked up.”

“I bet.”

They reached the second level. Casey said, “Amy lays a mighty fine table. I always eat too much. I was thinking of going out for a walk after supper.”

“I have the same problem,” Flynn said. “Maybe I’ll join you.”

Casey smiled. He turned left to go down the hall to his room and Flynn turned right.

He was still smiling as he opened the door to his room. The smile vanished at the sight of Julian Devereux lying on his bed.

Julian wore a sumptuous plum-colored dressing gown. At the squeak of the door hinges, he turned his head and looked up under his lashes, smiling with deliberate seduction. “I knew you were back.”

Flynn closed the door and leaned back against it. “What the hell are you doing in here?” he asked, keeping his voice down.

“Waiting for you.”

“You’re wasting your time.”

“It’s my time to waste.” Julian sat up, the purple robe falling open to reveal a sleek, honey-colored body. “Although I shouldn’t want to waste much more of it.”

Flynn shook his head in disbelief. “You must be insane.” He truly didn’t know what to make of this young maniac. He had neither scruples nor morals. Worse, he didn’t appear to have any commonsense. He added deliberately, “Or stupid.”

As it slowly sunk in on him that Flynn was serious, Julian’s smile faded, lost its confident curve. His bold gaze darkened with something like hurt. “Why would you say that? The moment I saw you I saw that you were just like me. That you wanted this too.”

“I’m *nothing* like you,” Flynn said with quiet intensity. “Now get out of my room.”

Julian continued to stare at him with those wide, dark eyes. "I'm not wrong." He spoke with a stubborn sort of dignity. It was almost disarming.

Flynn, however, had no intention of being disarmed. "You damned fool. You're going to get us both arrested. Or killed."

Julian shook his head. "People don't notice unless you bring attention to yourself. They see what they expect to see."

He said it quite seriously, and Flynn had to laugh. "*The Magnificent Belloc*? I hate to break it to you, Devereux, but you have a way of bringing attention to yourself." He tipped his head toward the doorway. "Get the hell out. I won't ask you nicely again."

"Fisticuffs would draw the attention you're trying to avoid," Julian pointed out, but he rose from the bed, straightening his dressing gown without haste. Flynn had to hand it to him; he wore his own skin with a panache most men only managed when fully and expensively clothed.

Flynn stepped away from the door, intending to open it. Instead, he found his arms full of Julian. He pressed his slender, taut body to Flynn's and wound his arms around Flynn's neck. Flynn could feel the other man's sizable erection poking through the silk of his dressing gown, and his own body automatically responded.

That was biology. It was pointless to argue with it. He tried, though, opening his mouth to blast Julian. The sound that escaped him was surprisingly without force, and then Julian's lips, soft and honey-sweet, touched Flynn's. It was a delicate kiss, skilful but subtle. The body in Flynn's arms felt slight and almost feminine, but the aggression, the hunger, was all male.

Flynn's own body tingled with uncomfortable awareness. It was all he could do not to respond to that kiss with a blaze of hunger. Instead, he grabbed Julian's wrists, forced his arms from about his neck, and thrust him away none too gently.

Julian staggered, but caught himself. He glared at Flynn. His chiseled nostrils actually flared.

"I don't understand you, David."

"I'm making it as clear as I can. I'm not interested."

"No one will know—"

"I'm not interested in *you*," Flynn cut in. "I don't even like you."

Julian considered this, blinking, puzzled. Flynn opened the door, glanced down the empty hallway. "The coast is clear. Go."

Face averted, Julian went without another word.

Flynn closed the door. He was tempted to lock it, but that would be ridiculous. He made room for the new fan on the dresser top, plugged it in and waited for the sparks to fly. But the fan came on smooth and quiet, the metal propellers flying fast enough to chop an unwary finger off, and a wonderful breeze washed through the warm room, erasing the faint spicy scent of Julian's cologne.

*The only way to break free is to let go.*

## Lynx

© 2010 Joely Skye

In order to protect his shifter kin, FBI agent Trey Walters hides his ability from his employers. For him, a vacation means a whole midwinter month in the Canadian wilderness, free to live in his wolf skin.

When he happens upon a rare lynx shifter, he's fascinated. And his protective instincts kick into overdrive. The young man needs to be shielded from werewolves and humans alike, whether he likes it or not.

Jonah can hardly wrap his head around the fact that other shifters exist, much less endure the presence of a stranger in his lonely sanctuary. Blaming himself for his brother's death, he lives in self-imposed isolation. Trust? Forget it. Yet Trey's patience penetrates Jonah's fear, and it doesn't take long for him to fall like a rock for the wolf.

Trey hadn't planned to embark on an intense, passionate affair, but he finds himself vowing to return after his next undercover mission is over. As months stretch into years, however, Jonah fears that Trey has broken faith with him—or is dead. There's only one way to find out. Leave the safety of his lair and venture into a dangerous, deadly world...

*Warning: violence, explicit sex.*

*Enjoy the following excerpt for Lynx:*

Jonah had spent a hellish night lying awake, too wound up to sleep and worried that if he did, he'd have a wet dream with Trey in the same room. Gawd, he and his body's urges were making himself sick.

"You're looking a little peaked," Trey observed.

"I'm fine." He could barely force his breakfast down, and he was going to have to get out of here, away from Trey again. Jonah had never seen such a dubious expression on Trey's face. He tried harder to pass off his bizarre behavior. "I'm tired, that's all. Didn't sleep all that well."

"Any reason why not?"

"No." He hunched at the tone of that *no*, which sounded surly, like he was twelve years old. But God, he wasn't prepared to explain why. He had no ability to handle this gracefully.

"I think we need to have a talk."

Jonah's head shot up, and he stared at Trey, heart beginning to pound hard, worried that somehow Trey could read his mind.

"Because," Trey continued, "I'll be gone in a week, and you'll still be here. On your own."

Jonah had been studiously ignoring anything to do with the fact Trey might be departing. He didn't see what he could do about it and he didn't want to think about it. But he said, "Okay." It came out hoarser than he would have liked.

"So, I thought we should talk about strategies that could make you a little more comfortable with your life."

Jonah nodded. What the fuck was he supposed to say? There was silence, Jonah stared at his fists. Maybe it would be better when Trey was gone. At least he'd get away from this stupid tension gripping him.

"All right." Jonah pulled in a breath and met Trey's too-sharp gaze. "But I don't see what I can say about you leaving."

"This isn't about my leaving, it's about you." Trey pulled up the bench so he faced Jonah sitting on the cot, their knees close but not touching. "First off, I'd like to come back here."

"When?" Jonah said too quickly.

But Trey didn't smile at his eagerness or his, let's face it, desperation. In fact he looked more serious. "That's the problem. I don't know when. It could be months, it could be more than a year. Longer, if I'm unlucky."

When Jonah didn't respond—his heart was sinking over that amount of time, even if a part of him was gratified that Trey *wanted* to come back—Trey reached over, wrapped a hand around Jonah's knee and gave it a shake, as if he was encouraging Jonah. He felt the warmth of Trey's palm through his long johns. He had kept on a long flannel shirt to hide any unwanted reaction to Trey, which was, God help him, starting again.

"Jonah, I'd like you to actually tell me a little about what's going on inside your head."

"Well, Trey," began Jonah, irritated by the tone Trey was taking and irritated by himself for responding so sexually to what was a friendly gesture. "I'm thinking a year is a fucking long time. Is that what you want to hear?"

"Sure."

"Sure?"

"It's great to hear anything when you're trying to get a conversation going." Trey dipped his head slightly so Jonah had to meet his gaze. He didn't want to meet that gaze which saw too much, but he couldn't resist. Trey continued, "Of course it's a long time. Too long. I'm concerned about it. If I don't get back before the summer, you need to go down to the town where you buy supplies and mingle a little more."

"Mingle," Jonah repeated in disbelief.

"It's not healthy for you to stay alone up here all the time. You've done great for three years, but you can't keep pushing it."

“*Mingle?*” The anger was building and he set his jaw when he looked at Trey. “That’s unsafe. I need to get in and I need to get out.”

“That’s your mother talking and I understand why—”

“You understand nothing,” Jonah seethed. “You come in here, live with me for a few days, and before you take off you think you can tell me what I need to do to stay *healthy?*”

Trey looked annoyed, which normally would have upset Jonah, but not once he’d lost his temper. “Grow up and learn to listen to someone who has something useful to tell you.”

*That’s it.* Jonah stood, partly to get away from Trey who was too close and too warm and too intent. “You’re a tourist, passing by and impressed by my woodsman-style life, and then you’re gone. I don’t need your advice. And I’d like to end this less-than-helpful conversation.”

Trey stood too, stepped towards him, when Jonah wanted more of his own space. But he would not back up, give way. Trey, however, had gone all earnest again, not intimidating, and that made it worse because some of Jonah’s anger faded and he was left with an awful yearning that made it hard to breathe.

“I am not a tourist. Like you, I’m a shapeshifter and I’ve done my share of living in the wild. And I will tell you that shapeshifters don’t do well if they remain isolated.”

“You’re a *wolf*. A pack animal. I’m not. It’s hard to be around you at times.”

Instead of being shocked by this information, or offended, Trey’s expression gentled, as if he understood that Jonah was attracted to him, which, Jesus, maybe he did. Jonah’s face flushed deep red and he found he needed to get out of here, forget about standing his ground with Trey, forget about not giving way. As Jonah attempted to pass by, a hand wrapped around his upper arm and he couldn’t reach the door. He tried to shake off Trey’s grip.

Trey held on. “Uh-uh. You’re not going out there to freeze your ass off again. You did that yesterday, remember?”

Through clenched teeth, Jonah said, “Let me go. I need some fresh air.”

“For God’s sakes, fresh air is about the last thing you need. I’ve never met someone who had so much fresh air in their life.”

“Let. Me. Go.” Jonah was ready to snarl.

Trey slowly released his hold, and with some dignity, Jonah stepped towards the door, careful not to act like he was bolting. He still needed to get outside. But when he reached for the handle, Trey’s hand slammed down on the door, keeping it closed.

“Not today, Jonah,” he said softly, and there was something beguiling about the voice, a little huskier than normal though maybe Jonah’s imagination was making that up. If Trey only knew what was going on in his mind, he would be pushing Jonah out the door not holding the door shut.

Jonah stared at the hand, large and broad, powerful. Like Trey himself. He wanted to stay here, to be honest, to spend as much time as possible with Trey before he vanished, but it wasn’t possible with these



feelings of longing, of desire. Bowing his head, he waited it out, though what exactly he was waiting for, he didn't know. He felt like a condemned man.

"Jonah," Trey murmured.

A shiver raced through Jonah and he couldn't speak.

"Trust me a little, okay?" With that Trey ran a palm down Jonah's spine, once, twice.

It was intoxicating, that caress, and though Trey did it to reassure him, not to arouse him, Jonah's body didn't understand that. Jonah's body refused to flee, it shuddered under Trey's touch, and Trey felt it all and didn't stop. So despite all of Jonah's fears, he leaned towards Trey. When Trey didn't back away, when Trey stood strong as if ready to take Jonah's weight, he nestled in Trey's arm, asking for a hug that was easily given, and Jonah buried his face into the crook between Trey's shoulder and neck.

An awful relief flowed through him, like he'd been starving and hadn't realized it. The knowledge that Trey would have to push him away, and soon, didn't stop Jonah from lifting an arm and hugging Trey back. Still he was careful to keep his body angled away so Trey wouldn't feel his erection.

"All right" was all Trey said, in that reassuring way of his, and even if he seemed resigned, he sounded...affectionate. That was a good sign, right? Maybe Jonah wouldn't wreck everything that lay between them. They stood there for the longest time, Trey endlessly patient, until Jonah's breathing came under control. All the while Trey repeated his assurance that it was all right, that Jonah was fine.

Eventually, because it wasn't in Jonah to end this, Trey set him slightly apart, and Jonah could feel his gaze on him while he stared at the door he'd tried to escape through.

Trey cleared his throat, the noise more amused than embarrassed. "This wasn't what I planned, for all kinds of reasons, and I'm willing to explain some of them, but...you've convinced me we need to take care of you."

Despite being puzzled by Trey's words and by the suggestive tone of his voice, Jonah couldn't look up and see what was on Trey's face. Not quite yet.

Then ever so lightly, Trey passed a hand over Jonah's rock-hard but flannel-covered erection. He would have jumped twenty meters, except Trey's arm around his shoulders held him steadily in place so he jerked under Trey's hold. When he lifted his eyelashes to look at Trey, there wasn't censure or anger on the wolf's face. Just a strange openness Jonah had never seen before.

Then Trey smiled.



# Samhain Publishing, Ltd.

*It's all about the story...*

Action/Adventure

Fantasy

Historical

Horror

Mainstream

Mystery/Suspense

Non-Fiction

Paranormal

Red Hots!

Romance

Science Fiction

Western

Young Adult

[www.samhainpublishing.com](http://www.samhainpublishing.com)