



WERE
LOST

THE WERE CHRONICLES

AERYN TRAXX

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La-Z-Boy

CHAPTER 1

Spring had come to the mountain, and Colin Freeman took the opportunity to embrace his werewolf. At six foot four, he was a formidable human. In his wolf form, black fur and blue eyes, he was an equally impressive sight. For hours he ran, enjoying the rebirth of the land after the short but brutal winter.

Entire mountains, federally protected forests and deserted mining camps were the homesteads provided for werewolves in the year 2125, monitored by a government that had hoped seclusion would bring about their demise. Instead the *were* thrived in their harsh environment.

Colin was the alpha of the Raeford/Solon pack of over one hundred men, women and children. They had grown from their original seventy-two since being relocated to the Colorado Mountains three years ago. The ten acre fenced housing compound at times seemed small, but the government allowed them access to roam the entire mountain as long as they did not kill any of the wild animals. Penned in no matter how you looked at it, Colin and his pack mates held to the old idiom that what didn't kill you made you stronger. And indeed they had become one of the wealthiest packs in the northern half of the United States. Most homes boasted a small business

internet venture, and the other half were paid by the government to do jobs within the compound. It was an existence both the *were* and the government were comfortable with.

Unfortunately, there was a portion of the human populace who wanted nothing more than to wipe the *were* off the face of the earth. Recent deaths in Utah had proven that, even though the government had come to terms with the fact there was another species on the planet, there were those who would never accept the fact. Gunning down innocent *were* seemed to be a hate crime humans would not be prosecuted for.

As Colin ran along the perimeter fence ever watchful for breaks, his mind wandered back to the recent deaths in his own pack.

Three couples had requested permission to camp outside of the compound for two weeks in a ski cabin. The government had given their approval, and the couples made preparations to leave the safety of the enclosure. Colin had voiced his misgivings, but the couples had assured him they would be careful and ever watchful for the rednecks that constantly harassed them in town. One would think that several feet of snow would have insulated the cabin from bad guys, and that below freezing temperatures and the lack of a road to the cabin would have proven enough of a

deterrent.

It had not.

All six had died at the cabin with single shots to the head. They had obviously been caught unawares or the men would never have allowed their females to be killed. Since all were dead, that meant there had been an overwhelming number of assailants. It had been two months, but it felt like it had happened yesterday. He found himself double and triple checking all security for the compound. His run today included checking out the four secret caves that his pack could escape to if they were being hunted. Carefully hidden from even the government assessors, they were stocked with provisions for up to twenty five people per cave. When Colin and his men had first set the caves up as refuges in the event of disaster, they had never thought they would be needed. Now, it was no longer *if* but *when*. Something deep inside Colin knew beyond a shadow of a doubt the caves would be used. He just hoped it would be enough to save his pack.

Colin stopped at a break in the fencing and shifted back into his human form. The break was not at a joint in the fencing or caused by a fallen tree. Someone had cut through the fence, and it was a hole large enough for a man to go through easily. His leisurely run was over. This had to be addressed immediately. A section by section

examination of the entire eight foot high fence around the compound would have to be done.

Shifting back to his wolf form, Colin jumped through the hole, his mind already whirling with plans, backup plans and contingency plans. It was going to be a long first day of spring.

CHAPTER 2

He raced into the compound and through the back door of his cabin, shifting mid stride. Colin was dressed and hurrying out the front door in a matter of minutes. His first thought was the children. The adults could shift and defend themselves against a threat, but the children could not. It was a given every man in the compound would give his life to defend a child. Problem was their sacrifice would be in vain as this type of assailant would just as soon kill a newborn at his mother's breast as a full grown *were*. Colin knew he had to take drastic measures to insure the safety of the next generation of *were*.

Outside of the security building, Colin met up with Greg, one of the trusted few that knew all about the past threats to the pack.

“Colin, you look worried.”

“I am, Greg. Can you have Bret and the others meet me here in fifteen minutes?”

“Urgent?”

“Yes. I'd say it was an emergency.” Colin eyed the younger man who understood this was not your everyday get together.

Greg nodded then shot off towards the administrative building to gather the troops.

Inside the security building, Colin went to the TV room, which held a wall of closed circuit TV screens displaying the activity from the cameras along the fence line.

“Robert.”

“Colin. What brings you here, boss?”

“Camera 27. Can you bring it up?”

“Sure.” The red-headed human punched a few buttons, and a fuzzy white screen appeared directly in front of Colin. “That’s odd.”

“Nah. It’s what I expected.”

“What’s up, boss?”

“Break in the fence just at the edge of Camera 27’s line of sight.”

“Break in the fence? There’s no trees near 27 to fall and break it.”

“Someone cut it, but you keep that under your hat.”

“Will do. You have someone on tap to fix it? I’m off duty in forty-five minutes. I can—”

“We’ll work it out, Robert. For the time being, I would prefer you stay near Charlotte and the baby when you aren’t on duty.”

“That serious?”

“I don’t know yet, but I don’t want to take any chances that we might have surprise visitors.”

“The kind with guns?”

“The kind with guns. I’m going to take over the lounge for a bit. Can you let the guys in? Should be here in a few minutes. Thought it best to have this conversation away from the women.”

“I’ll send them back, boss.”

Colin shook his head. He hated being right almost as much as being wrong some times. Something was up. He just hoped he could figure it out before it was too late.

The small lounge had two La-Z-Boy chairs and a table in the middle of the room. Eight men barely fit in the small room, yet no one would complain because the urgency of the situation was palpable.

“Gentlemen, thank you for coming so quickly. Before I go on, I want all of you to promise me this will be kept quiet. I don’t want anyone panicking, especially Meghan and Trista. Having twins nearly killed them both, and they aren’t out of the woods yet according to Doc Lincoln.”

Colin made sure to make eye contact with each man in the room. Muted responses came from the assembled men. He went over his morning run and what he found. The looks ranged from shock to anger on the faces around the room.

“You’re sure the fence was cut?”

“No doubt about it, Mark. There was a pile of the clipped links on the ground. Someone wanted that hole to be quick and easy to go through.”

“Any scents left? Any tracks? Any anything?” Jeff, the tallest man in the room asked, a forlorn look on his face.

“No, Jeff. No tracks on the ground, not even a fleeting scent. I’m going to assume they did this during that snowstorm three weeks ago so it would wipe out any traces of who did it.”

“The humans are getting wise.” Grant said with a shake of his head.

“They are. But we have the upper hand at the moment, Grant. Knowing the hole is there is going to make it easier to thwart their efforts to sneak up on us.”

“I hate to be a Nervous Nelly, Colin, but my baby is only a year old. I’m not willing to let those assholes get close enough to hurt her.”

“And I’m not suggesting we do, Blake. I called you all here so we can brainstorm as to what should be done. We can’t fix the fence, or they’ll know we’re on to them. We haven’t had an overcast night in weeks so I’m thinking that’s why they haven’t already attacked. They’ll want a dark night to keep them hidden for as long as possible.”

“Broken fence should have set off the perimeter

alarm. Hell, you should be able to see the hole in the fence from the TV room.”

“The top and bottom of the fence is intact, they just popped a hole in the center. Anyone trying to go over or under and the alarms go off but through the center... I don’t know. Evidently, they found a flaw in the dynamics of the fence. As for the video, Camera 27 has been shorted out.”

“Shorted out!” Blake shouted. “And not replaced? Who’s asleep at the wheel here?”

“Calm down, Blake. There are over a hundred cameras that cover the fence that goes around a ten acre compound. There are going to be equipment breakdowns. There was no way anyone could have suspected this was deliberate.”

“But—”

“Yes! I know this is serious, and we’ll take steps to make sure it doesn’t happen in the future. But, for now, what do we do about the situation at hand?” He once again looked each man in the eye. Together, they would come up with something, but for now, all he saw was a group of men both frightened and angered at the threat to their families. Just as Colin was about to say something, the intercom buzzed and Robert’s voice came over the loud speaker.

“Boss, we have a visitor at the front gate who insists

on talking to you.” The intercom light went off, and Colin shook his head. Why was it everything had to happen at once?

“Well, gentlemen, it seems I have another matter to attend to. How about you all spend the afternoon thinking about this and we can meet after dinner back here to figure out what we should do.” Colin moved towards the door, holding it open for the men to pass through.

Blake hung back to be last in line. With head hung, he approached Colin.

“Sorry, Colin. Having a mate and a child in less than a year has made me a bit nervous about any threat to either of them.”

Colin placed his hand gently on the man’s shoulder. “You only spoke what the others felt. I’m your alpha and bred to protect you and your family, and that is exactly what I intend to do even if it means sacrificing my life to do it.”

Tears welled in Blake’s eyes, and he nodded at his leader then left the room and escaped quickly down the hall.

Colin left the security building and made his way towards the front gate. He could hear shouting from several hundred yards away.

Yeah, this was turning out to be a long first day of

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spring.

CHAPTER 3

“Whoever this Colin person is, *I want to see him now!*” The young man with the overstuffed backpack was still yelling at the guard on duty as Colin came in through the back door of the guardhouse.

“I’m Colin,” he said clearly, looking over the handsome young man quickly. He bore a resemblance to someone in his pack.

“Then you have some explaining to do, mister!” the young man shouted. The guard with the shotgun tried to step in between the visitor and Colin, but Colin stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

“All right. I’m sure we can work things out. Why don’t you come with me, away from prying eyes and we can talk?” Colin neither backed down nor made any aggressive gestures as the young man glared at him.

“Might I know your name?”

“Liam. Liam Crawford,” the young man said.

“My name is Colin Freeman.” Colin offered his hand to the young man and waited patiently for him to accept it. He was a good-looking man to be sure. Five foot ten, hazel eyes, and dark blond hair. Yep, he was a very handsome young man. It took several minutes before Liam finally took the proffered hand. “If you’ll follow me, Liam,

I'll take you to my home where we can have a little privacy."

He led Liam towards his cabin after seeing him nod in agreement.

Colin spent the five minutes of silence trying to place the man's scent and the name Crawford. Somewhere in the tangled mess of his brain he knew he should know the name. The man's scent was having a hell of an effect on his beast. Never had he met someone before that interested his beast enough to push for control. But push he did. And for the first time in his life, Colin felt a tingle at the base of his skull. A tingle that meant his mate was near. Colin shook his head. With everything going on, now was definitely *not* the time to finally find his mate. But one thing he had learned from his brother was that nature didn't care what was going on when a *were* found their mate. It was the meeting of two hearts that made one whole, and from that moment on, it would be hard to concentrate on anything else but bonding with your mate. The fact that the very survival of his pack was at stake made this a very awkward situation to say the least.

They reached the front door of his cabin, and Colin held it open for Liam. He took a deep breath of the man's scent as he passed and felt his beast press for control once more. Liam turned and looked directly into Colin's eyes as

if he too had felt the connection. Colin was the first to turn away as he closed the door. Turning back to his guest, he said with a smile, “Seems we do have a lot to talk about.”

Liam’s mouth hung open, and Colin couldn’t help but smile back at the handsome young man. Colin led the dumbstruck Liam into the kitchen. “Can I get you a drink? Something to eat?”

Liam dropped his backpack on the floor as Colin pulled two cans of ginger ale out of the fridge.

“Answers. I came for answers.”

“Answers to what questions?” Colin filled two glasses with ice and set them on the counter then opened the soda.

“My sister’s death,” Liam announced. Suddenly, Colin knew who the man was and why he had felt he resembled someone. Danae Reed, wife of Josiah Reed. They were one of the couples killed two months ago.

Colin finished pouring his drink. “Alright. I’ll tell you anything you want to know. Mind you, we know very little about what happened.”

“Who killed her?”

“And that would be the ten thousand dollar question. The authorities haven’t come up with any suspects yet.”

“I wasn’t asking about the authorities’ incompetent

efforts. What have *you* and the pack found out?"

"I'm sorry to say we haven't come up with any leads. Nothing was left behind. All six people were killed out in the open and not found for nearly ten days. The only scent we found was from vehicles. They used snowmobiles to get to the cabin."

"And the tracks led to...?"

"Too much snow had fallen. All we were able to conclude is that they came from the base of the mountain."

"So you've given up on finding the killers?" Liam asked brusquely.

"No. I didn't say—" Colin started to say.

"Well, what *are* you saying?"

"I can understand how you feel," Colin said.

"No, you can't! My twin sister is dead!"

Colin felt the younger man's control start to slip, and his beast pulled at him. Yet, for some reason, he was not afraid. His own beast clawed at his insides but not in an effort to defend him. His beast wanted to embrace and hold the younger man down until he regained his composure.

Colin stepped back away from the counter, his drink in his hand. He was going to give Liam all the room he needed. If shifting would make him feel better, he'd give him the room to shift.

"Liam, you are her twin, but I'm the man sworn to

protect her. My loss is as great as yours.” Colin spoke softly as he watched the younger man shift into his *were* form, clothes ripping and falling to the floor, his teeth bared, and his claws clenching and unclenching at his side. “I was her alpha, and it was my duty to protect her unto death. As I told you in my letter, her mate died at her side. I lost six members of my pack. You lost but one.”

Colin set his glass on the counter behind him and crossed his arms, the butcher-block counter in the center of the kitchen the only thing between them. He watched as a myriad of emotions crossed the face of the beast in front of him. There was no mistaking that the young man was fighting an inner battle. His *were* wanted revenge, and his human self knew that Colin spoke the truth. With supreme effort, Colin kept his *were* in check and waited for Liam to come back from the edge. His heart nearly broke when the beast reared his head back and howled his grief. Colin moved around the kitchen to stand behind the young man and waited for him to change back into his human self.

The change complete, Colin caught Liam’s limp form in his arms and made his way to the guest bedroom. He laid the exhausted man down on the bed and sat beside him. Colin guessed Liam wasn’t as young as he looked, but he was still young enough to take the loss of a twin sister hard. His beast whimpered in the back of his mind. He

fought the urge to lie down beside Liam, take him in his arms and whisper words of encouragement. His entire being wanted nothing more than to make slow passionate love to this man, to ease the hurt. But now was not the time to speak of mates and new beginnings. Colin settled for holding Liam's hand, a lifeline to the here and now. He sensed Liam harbored more than just grief for the loss of his sister.

Liam stared as if in a trance, his eyes riveted on the sliding glass doors across from the bed he lay in. Colin feared Liam would retreat too far into himself if he didn't do something. With a squeeze of his hand, Colin tried to bring Liam back from the edge.

CHAPTER 4

“Liam, you need to talk to me.” Colin waited for some kind of response. None came. He reached up and pushed the hair out of the young man’s face, trailing his fingers along the smooth cheek. Liam’s eyes fluttered then closed. Tears leaked from the closed eyelids and nearly tore Colin’s heart in two. Colin squeezed Liam’s hand once more and was rewarded with a squeeze back. Liam opened his eyes and looked directly at Colin, tears rolling down his face.

“We only had each other for such a short time,” Liam whispered.

“I remember Danae telling me that.”

“Our parents were killed by humans. And now Danae...”

“They fear what they don’t understand,” Colin said.

“She was as gentle as a butterfly. Full of love and laughter.”

“I’m sorry, Liam. There are no words I can say to make this easier for you. I take great solace in knowing she’s in the hereafter with the man she said she had waited her entire life to find.”

Liam took a moment to reflect upon Colin’s words before he inquired, “She was happy then?”

“Happier than I had ever seen her before. They all were.”

“Tell me we’ll find the men who did this and punish them.”

“They will be punished one way or another, Liam. That I promise you. We cannot sit back and let our friends and family be killed like this.”

Liam squeezed Colin’s hand and closed his eyes. Tears continued to fall, but Colin sensed Liam was no longer on the edge.

* * * *

The sun started to set, and Colin looked in on the young man who had fallen asleep hours ago. He’d covered the naked man with a blanket which now lay on the floor.

Colin couldn’t help but look the man over from head to toe. Liam was a beauty. It was easy for Colin to see the resemblance to Danae. Scenting the room, Colin remembered how he had reacted the first time he’d met Danae four years ago. Aware of his sexuality since he was thirteen, Colin was startled when he’d gotten aroused that first meeting with Josiah’s intended mate. Danae had played it off politely, but Colin never forgot the encounter. And now he understood the whole thing. Josiah was a

distant cousin so it explained why Danae could appeal to both men. Liam was most certainly everything Colin ever wanted in a man. And the way his beast clawed at his insides, he was certain Liam was what both man and beast wanted in a mate.

Unfortunately, now was not the time to be contemplating a mate. He had a pack to defend, and it would be dark soon. Liam would have to wait.

CHAPTER 5

Night had descended hours before as Colin made his way to the cabin. He fully expected his guest to still be sleeping and was surprised to find all the lights on and the smell of food being cooked in the air. He opened the door and heard Liam in the kitchen.

“You can come in. It’s your place.”

Colin laughed to himself, closed the door and made his way to the kitchen where he found a very naked man wrestling pots and pans on the stove.

“You surprised me. I wasn’t expecting you to be awake.”

“Sorry about that. I’d been so focused on getting here and confronting you I hadn’t really grieved for her.”

“Takes time.”

“Yes, it will. But for now I need to go on. Keep her alive in my memories and live for both of us.”

“Excellent way of looking at things. And cooking helps?” Colin asked with a smile.

“Man’s gotta eat, and with my metabolism, I eat four times a day.”

“Thanks for warning me.”

“Hope you don’t mind.” Liam turned away from the pans on the stove top to look at Colin.

“Are you kidding? I eat those rations the government gives us just so I don’t have to cook. Hate cooking.”

“Man, that’s downright disgusting.”

“Well, if I’m doing the cooking that’s what is served.”

“Okay, now that we’ve established who cooks, want to explain why my *were* goes nuts every time you get near me?”

“Uh... maybe now isn’t a good time... to talk about that. You are just getting over your sister and all,” Colin stuttered as he watched Liam work the pans on the stove like a pro.

“I can take it, Colin. Never had my *were* react to someone with just a handshake before. Human or *were* for that matter,” Liam answered as he began to load a plate with food from the assorted pots and pans.

“Liam, really—” Colin started.

Liam turned and placed the plate in front of Colin. “I’m a big boy, Colin. I can take it. Our packs have a blood feud or something?” Liam asked as he handed Colin a fork and knife.

Colin stared at his plate. “I had all this in my house?”

“Yes. You have a very well-stocked kitchen. Now,

please tell me what's going on.”

“Well... um... not exactly the way I pictured this, but you're my mate.” Colin dove into his meal, hoping that would keep Liam from asking him any more questions.

It didn't.

Liam turned from the stove with his own heaping plate of food and placed it on the butcher block counter across from Colin.

“Mate? That would explain your scent.”

“Heavy? Musky?” Colin asked between mouthfuls of food.

“Hmm, yes it is. I think that even though I've only known you a couple hours I will recognize that scent for the rest of my life.”

“And the tingle?”

“Yes, at the base of my neck. Never had that happen before.”

“They say that in time it goes away. I've had others tell me it never goes away.” Colin dropped his fork and went about getting drinks out of the fridge, accidentally bumping his hip with that of his guest.

“And that?” Liam glanced down towards his erection. “Does that lessen in time? I can't be walking around with a woody every time you touch me.” He forked more food off the plate.

Colin laughed as he set the cans of soda on the counter along with glasses and the ice bucket from the freezer. “Man, I have no clue. I’ve never had a mate before either. My beast has been fighting me since the minute I shook your hand in the guardhouse.”

“Oh? Your beast wants me? What about you?”

Liam asked with a grin.

“Listen. You’re going through a lot, and unfortunately, you have shown up when we are in the midst of a crisis.”

“A crisis? Have anything to do with my sister’s death?”

“Not sure, but if I had to put money on it, I would say yes.”

“So you’re telling me we’re mates, and you’re in danger.”

“Yes, we’re mates and the entire pack is in danger. Liam, really—”

“Stop right there. I’m not a defenseless child. I may have been hiding out for the past few years, but as you saw earlier, I’m definitely a *were*. I can help you with your crisis.”

“Danae said you were living with the humans. They didn’t know you were a werewolf.”

“Because Danae and I were orphaned at ten, no one

knew our parents were werewolves so we were never registered with the government. I've been careful over the years not to show my hand as it were."

"If we bond as mates, you'll have to stay here," Colin said seriously.

"I understand. Not sure I have a say in the mating thing. I've had a hard-on since you walked in the door, and the fact that big bed is just down the hall... well..." Liam blushed, grabbed his empty plate and turned towards the sink. "Tell me about your crisis."

"Found a break in the fence this morning. One of the cameras had been shorted out so we wouldn't notice it. I suspect they're going to try and attack us under the cover of night."

"Colin, that's pretty serious." Liam looked at Colin, hands on hips.

"I know. I have men posted at key points. Forecast calls for clear skies tonight so it should be safe. I assume they will wait until it's overcast then attack." Colin pushed his half empty plate away, his appetite gone. "I'm sorry. The food was excellent I'm just worried about the situation."

"How many in your pack?" Liam retrieved the plate and set it in the sink.

"One hundred and nine. Two of the women

delivered twins in the past month.”

“Werewolf lore says that’s a good omen,” Liam offered with a smile.

“Finding the fence this morning sorta shot that to hell.” Colin shook his head.

“Not necessarily. You found me this afternoon.”

“You found me, remember?” Colin grinned at his companion.

“We found each other. And now I think it would be a good idea if we found that bed I was talking about.”

“You think this is a good idea?” Colin asked with just a hint of apprehension.

“Just sex, the ritual will come later when the danger has passed.”

“Right. If my beast takes over, I can’t guarantee I won’t bite you.” Colin shook his head and smiled at the young man.

Liam came around the butcher block, still sporting an erection. He took Colin’s hand and pulled him along towards the bedroom they’d both shared earlier in the day.

CHAPTER 6

Liam shut the bedroom door behind Colin and found himself in the big man's arms. Colin's kisses made him weak in the knees. He had never experienced anything like this in his life. Yeah, he was a bottom and his past partners had come on strong at times, but this was different. Colin wasn't taking. It was more like possessing. Liam gave in to the sensations readily, his cock so hard it hurt. Colin suddenly released Liam and stepped back. Both men fought for breath.

“What's wrong, Colin?”

“If we keep going, this isn't going to be just sex. My beast is screaming to take you, bite you, and claim you.”

“And?”

“We've just met! It's not fair to throw this at you. This isn't what you came here for.”

“I came for answers, Colin. What I didn't know was that I would find my mate. Unless I'm misinterpreting that scent, and the tingle at the base of my skull and this...” For emphasis, Liam wrapped his hand around his erection, a bead of pre-cum oozing from the tip.

“Liam—”

“Colin, we can sort it out later. My beast is just as

overwhelmed as yours. I'll be surprised if we make it through the next fifteen minutes without one or both of us shifting."

"It doesn't frighten you?"

"No. Does it frighten you?"

"I'm an alpha! I don't want to screw up your life."

"But you do want to screw me, right?"

"Liam..."

"Okay, bad joke. Stop fighting this. Get your clothes off and get into that bed. I need to be fucked, and you're the only man I want doing it."

"Liam, a mating can't be undone," Colin said as he ripped off his shirt, exposing a muscled chest complete with six-pack abs.

Liam stepped forward, unable to resist running his hands over the man's chest while Colin worked at the button on his pants.

"I know a mating is for life, and since we live longer than humans, that could be a long time." He helped Colin get his clothes off. "I want you, big man, in the worst way."

* * * *

Colin let Liam explore his body. Yeah, every fiber

of his being wanted to just throw the smaller man on the bed and claim him, but that's not the type of man he was. Tonight, he would have to keep his *were* in check and show Liam he could be a considerate lover even when they both wanted it hard and fast. He ran his hands along Liam's back, coming to rest on the smaller man's nicely rounded ass. Kissing Liam again, Colin massaged the man's ass cheeks as he plundered his mouth. Liam leaned into Colin, his hands wrapped around both erect cocks. Colin tested Liam's entrance with one finger, and Liam broke their kiss.

“Okay. In the bed. Where's the lube?” Liam said. Colin smiled at his lover and pointed towards the night table.

“So much for romance,” Colin joked.

Liam pulled open the drawer and brought out a black bottle. “There will be plenty of time for romance after the first round.”

Colin pulled back the bed covers and lay in the bed, his cock leaking pre-cum as he watched Liam lube himself up. Colin licked his lips and patted the bed beside him.

“I want to taste you, Liam.”

“As long as I get to taste you too,” Liam said as he climbed into the bed and straddled Colin's body, his cock hard and leaking.

Colin pulled on Liam's hips until he had him sitting

on his chest, his cock close enough to suck. He took Liam as far down his throat as he could while inserting a finger in his puckered and lubed entrance. Liam moaned loudly and rocked gently to Colin's rhythm. Increasing the pace, Liam kept right up. Colin found Liam's prostate and stroked firmly. Liam cried out, and Colin tasted salty cum. He stroked a bit harder.

"I can't hold back." And before Colin could do anything, Liam shot his mouth full of cum again and again. Colin kept up, swallowing everything his mate had to give.

Spent, Liam pulled his cock out of Colin's mouth and rolled off of him onto the bed. "Please tell me we're going to do that again," Liam said.

Colin rolled on top of his lover and kissed him.

"As many times as you like, love. Right now I want to bury my cock in that hole of yours and see if I can't get us both to come at the same time."

"Who said romance was dead?" Liam started, but Colin's finger in his lubed ass cut off any further conversation.

"You're mine now, Liam." Colin pulled Liam's legs up against his chest and grabbed him by the hips, pulling them together. He added a second finger to the younger man's entrance, but after just a few strokes, he found he couldn't wait. "I'm sorry, but this is going to be hard and

fast.”

“Fuck me, Colin!”

Colin replaced his fingers with his cock and, with a single push, buried himself to the hilt in the man beneath him. He tried to hold back and give Liam a chance to adjust, but there just wasn't going to be any holding back. Colin's beast pushed him hard to claim Liam. He fought just as hard to stay in control, taking hold of Liam's cock and pumping him in time with his plunges into his ass. Liam came again with a shout, cum bathing them both. Two strokes later, Colin cried out, spilling into Liam's body, again and again. It seemed to go on forever before Colin felt there was no more to give, and his limp cock slid out of Liam's slick body. He rolled off the smaller man and lay panting on the bed. He felt Liam snuggle up next to him. It felt so right. He had no doubt they were mates. The only question left was whether they would live long enough to complete the ritual.

CHAPTER 7

Liam woke with a start, a heated discussion from the other room bringing him instantly awake. He grabbed Colin's discarded shirt from the floor and threw it on, then made his way towards the argument.

"I won't be separated from them."

"It's for their safety."

"I don't care. I won't be..." Both men turned as Liam came into the room.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt. I heard voices."

"Bret, this is Liam Crawford, Danae Reed's twin brother." Colin nodded at his guest and Bret politely nodded toward the young man as well.

Liam smiled at the pair and continued on to the kitchen. "Can I fix you gentlemen some breakfast?" Liam called out from the kitchen as he rattled pots and pans.

Colin and Bret looked at each other as if unsure what had just happened to their heated discussion.

"Need to keep up your energy if you're going to spend the day arguing," Liam continued.

"No thank you, I already ate," Bret said sheepishly.

"Yes, breakfast would be great, thank you," Colin said.

"Don't let me interrupt your discussion, gentlemen.

Although I would think that working together for a common goal instead of arguing amongst yourselves would serve the greater good.”

“I won’t be separated from my wife and family. You’re not from this pack! You don’t know what we’re up against,” Bret said defensively.

“No. I’m just the man who lost his twin sister to rednecks two months ago,” Liam retorted.

Bret fell silent and hung his head. Colin reached over and touched him on the shoulder. “Make no mistake, my friend. The safety of every last pack member is my concern. Sending the children away was only a suggestion, not an order. We’ll talk about this more at the meeting this afternoon.”

“Colin... I...”

“I know, Bret. Why don’t you help the others with the fence detail? If they are watching, I want them to think we just missed the area near Camera 27.” Colin smiled reassuringly at Bret, who smiled back weakly.

“Thank you, Colin. Sorry for waking up your friend.” Bret turned and left the cabin quietly.

Colin took a seat at the butcher block and watched silently as Liam worked on breakfast.

“Did you sleep well?” Colin asked.

“Believe it or not, better than ever.”

“Same here. At least until Bret came banging on the door. Sorry we woke you.”

“No worries. I’m normally up at sunrise anyway. If you don’t mind my asking, what was he all fired up about? You thinking of sending the children to a safe house?”

“It was a suggestion a few had last night. Nothing solid yet.”

“That means the women go too. Nothing comes between a *were* mother and her pups.”

“Yeah. Becomes a bit problematic however. If too many leave the compound, it will alert the bad guys. If we make it look like they’re going off to camp or a retreat, we could get them safely away.”

“Ya’ll are playing this like you’re sure they are going to attack.”

“Too many things pointing to it to not take the threat seriously. We have seven children under the age of one. In a surprise attack, both mother and child would surely be killed. I’m not going to take that risk.”

“So your meeting this afternoon is going to get a bit rowdy?” Liam turned from the stove, a plate of food in his hand.

“Without a doubt. Eggs, bacon and homefries. Where are you finding all this food?”

“I told you last night you have a well-stocked

kitchen. Go ahead and eat.” Liam set the plate in front of Colin and turned back to the stove. “You have a beta, Colin?”

“No. We’re such a small pack I never thought we needed one. I have relied on our combined forces to handle anything that came along.”

“You separate the pack, and you’ll need a beta.”

“I was pondering that very thought.”

“You’re going to need to be very careful who you choose. If you’re sending away breeding age woman and children, you’re separating the future of this pack from the men who would die to defend them.”

“We think alike then.” Colin moved food around his plate with his fork. Liam turned with his own plate of food and set it on the counter. Between mouthfuls, he continued to query Colin as to his intentions for the pack.

“Do you have a place picked out yet?”

“A pack about six hours away. I’ve talked to the alpha, and he says he would gladly take in anyone we send their way.”

“Now you just have to convince the mates and figure out how to get them out of here without raising suspicion,” Liam said as he waved his fork like a baton.

“Yeah. I have my work cut out for me all right. At least the weather is on my side. Forecast is clear skies for

the next four days. Gives me a little time to work things out.”

“Unless the weatherman is wrong.”

“Thanks.”

“Just making sure you have everything covered.”

“Well, I need to get it in gear and get some things set up before the meeting this afternoon. I’d like to introduce you to everyone at the meeting. Your years among the humans might give them some hope we’ll be able to pull this off.”

“Sure. This is my life now. Your people need to know I’m not a threat.”

“I want them to know you’re my mate.”

“That too, of course,” Liam said with a grin.

“You’re taking all of this rather calmly,” Colin said.

Liam took his empty plate and set it in the sink.

“Ever since I got your letter that Danae was gone I’ve been in a fog. Nothing made sense, everything hurt, my world was off center. But from the moment I shook your hand in the guardhouse yesterday I’ve been... I’m... I don’t know how to say it, but I feel everything will work out for me here. With you.”

“That’s good to hear because I feel the same way.”

“Well, why don’t you head off and get ready for the big meeting and I’ll get things cleaned up here?”

“I’ll be back in a few hours.”

“I’ll be waiting.” Liam smiled at Colin as he came around the butcher block counter and took the smaller man in his arms.

Colin kissed Liam, who gave as good as he got. “I wish I didn’t have to go. I’d like to...”

“Don’t say it or we’re going to end up in bed and you’ll be late for your meeting.”

“I can’t wait to mate you properly. They were right about it being the only thing you think about. It’s all I’ve thought about all morning.”

“Soon enough, Colin. Your pack is in danger. Our mating will happen in due time.”

“Tell me you’re as affected by this as me,” Colin said with a hint of a smile. Liam took the bigger man’s hand and placed it on his throbbing erection tenting the borrowed shirt.

“That answer your question?” Liam answered with a grin.

“You could just be an exceptionally horny male.”

“And you could get yourself raped if you don’t get out of here,” Liam teased.

Colin kissed him on the nose then left him standing in the kitchen. Liam waited until he heard the door slam closed before he relaxed against the counter.

“What the hell have I gotten myself into?” Liam shook his head and laughed then turned his attention to the remains of breakfast.

CHAPTER 8

Liam walked across the compound towards a large administrative building, a bundle under one arm, his other hanging loose by his side. He wanted to present himself as defenseless to any who happened to see him. It had taken years and years of patient training to hone his body into the killing machine he could be if needed. Yet he wanted these people to accept him, not fear him. Liam entered the building and used his senses to find his way to Colin, who was busy setting up chairs in a small room. He looked up as Liam sauntered in.

“Everything okay?” Colin asked.

“Fine. I figured I would bring you some lunch since you didn’t come back in a few hours like you said.”

“I’m sorry Liam I—”

“You have a pack to take care of. But seems someone needs to take care of you. Now stop for just a few minutes and eat.”

“Thank you for this. I didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

“You’re worried about this meeting, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Colin answered between bites. “We’ve only been in this compound for three years and some of the pack are still nervous about being so close to the humans.”

“But you have humans who live here. I assume they’re mates to some of your pack members. Two of the men in the guard house yesterday were human.”

“As a matter of fact, one quarter of the population of this pack is human.”

“So many? Most packs believe in blood purity.”

“I’m a hopeless romantic I guess. If a *were* falls in love with a human, what am I supposed to do? Deny them what nature commands? Force a female to breed with a male not of her choosing? No. That’s not the way we do things in this pack.”

“Those humans can never go back into society.”

“We are very clear about the consequences, Liam, just as I told you yesterday that once we go thru the mating ritual, you will never be able to go back and live among the humans.”

“Will you be speaking with human and *were* today?”

“Yes. Every male in the pack and every female that does not have a child to care for.”

“And what do you plan to say?”

“We are in danger and only through careful planning and observation will we get out of this alive.”

“Don’t sugarcoat it or anything, Colin. Damn.”

“No time to dance around the situation.” Colin

handed the empty container and fork back to Liam, then returned to setting up chairs. “Those who show weakness at the news will need to leave. I will be watching their reactions carefully.”

“And naming a second. Will you do that at this meeting?”

“Yes. The pack needs to know that should something happen to me the beta will see to their needs.”

“How do you plan to tell them about me? Maybe now isn’t a good time.”

“I have that covered. Don’t worry.”

“You have it covered?”

“Don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry? What if they don’t like me?”

“They will like you. Trust me on this.”

“I’ve known you exactly twenty-four hours, and you want me to trust you.”

“You slept with me. Doesn’t that mean you trust me?”

Liam shrugged. “Sometimes the little head tells the big head what to do.”

“Ah, so last night was...”

“Wonderful. Let’s get back to the subject at hand, shall we?”

“Okay,” Colin said. “I have everything under

control.”

“Famous last words, kemosabe.”

CHAPTER 9

Liam stood stunned beside Colin. Sixty-two people sat in the small auditorium looking right at him. He opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out. A woman raised her hand, and Colin called out to her.

“Yes, Gretchen.”

“Colin, I don’t question that you’ve found your mate, but how can you name him our beta when he’s been here less than a day? Do you not think it better to choose one of your pack mates?” the blonde woman asked without any hint of malice or anger. Liam found his voice and tapped Colin on the shoulder.

“I second what she said,” Liam blurted out. Colin turned and smiled at his companion then turned back to the assembled.

“I will be happy to explain my decision with a question. If a decision had to be made between saving his wife or his child, which would your mate choose? Better yet, could he choose?”

Colin looked around the room to see the males being questioned by the females. “Liam has no choices to make. As my beta, he would carry out my wishes to the letter without delay.”

Liam pulled gently on Colin’s shoulder to turn him

around.

“Colin, please...”

“This is the right thing to do. Trust me.” Colin reached over and took Liam’s hand in his own and squeezed it for reassurance. “I know what I’m doing.”

“You’re sure this will be the best thing for your pack?”

“Our pack. You are part of the pack now.” Colin pulled Liam into his arms and hugged him. “Forever together, never apart.” Colin kissed him on the cheek before releasing him, and their hands still clasped together, he turned back to the assembly.

“We have much yet to discuss before supper. Does everyone agree to my choice of beta?” Colin looked among the assembled and was relieved to see everyone nodding in the affirmative to his question. “Good. Then let’s discuss how we’ll get the children out of the compound without raising the interest of those who wish to harm us.”

CHAPTER 10

Night had fallen, and the stars shone brightly overhead. Liam lay in the large bed looking out the sliding glass doors up at the night sky when he heard Colin come into the cabin. They had gone their separate ways just before supper, and Liam had spent the afternoon alone contemplating the events of the day. Less than forty-eight hours ago he'd been alone in the world. No pack, no family, no home. Now he had a pack. And he was their beta. He had a mate and a home. It was a lot to take in.

“I hope you’re not too sleepy. I’ve been thinking about you all afternoon,” Colin said as he began to remove his clothes. Liam watched with anticipation and was not disappointed when Colin dropped his pants to reveal he was already hard and ready for him.

“Not too sleepy, but still a little overwhelmed by your little announcement earlier,” Liam said as he watched Colin climb into bed.

“Like I said at the meeting, you’ll do what is best without hesitation. Every male here has a mate. You truly are the best man for the job. The fact that you have lived among humans your entire life helps, too. Never know when that experience will come in handy.”

“So you’re going to send the children away ’til the

danger passes and me with them.”

“That’s the current plan.”

“Colin, I appreciate your trust in me, but this is all happening so fast.”

“Your sister trusted me with her life, and I let her down. I won’t let those bastards harm any more of my pack.”

“You’re risking a lot by fighting back.”

“They’ll continue to hunt us if we don’t make a stand and show them we can defend ourselves.”

“You really have thought this through then.”

“Yes. Now, no more talk of the pack. I want to spend the night making love to you.” Colin ran a finger around Liam’s nipple.

“That sounds very romantic. Not what I expected from an alpha.”

“I’ve waited a lifetime for you to come into my life. There’s no denying you’re my mate, but I’m the kind of man who wants love in his life, not just a mate.” Colin laid his hand over Liam’s heart.

Liam reached over and stroked Colin’s cheek.

“It won’t take much for me to fall in love with you, Colin. I didn’t realize it until today, but you are everything I ever wanted in a man,” Liam said, a blush coloring his cheeks. Colin pulled the smaller man into his arms and

kissed him soundly.

CHAPTER 11

The days flew by for Liam as he watched Colin weave a web of lies for the benefit of the children and their nervous parents. After making arrangements for forty-two men, women, and children to stay with another Colorado werewolf pack, Colin had gone about making up a story. There was an exchange program between werewolf packs. It was their turn for the children to go and stay with another pack for two weeks. The parents knew it was a lie, but the children believed it whole-heartedly and embraced the chance with zeal. The day of departure had finally come, and the compound was in utter chaos. Liam shook his head as he contemplated the scene before him. Backpacks were piled up next to the bus. A truck was being slowly filled with supplies. Every single pack member was crowded around the bus.

“I know you can handle this,” Colin said from behind Liam.

“I don’t envy you, Colin. There’s a lot of emotion over there. Those left behind are going to be hard to handle.”

“Which is exactly why you’re going and I’m staying.”

“Heaven help the bad guys,” Liam said as he shook

his head.

“Yeah. Just got the weather report. Rain forecast for tomorrow night.”

“Colin, promise me you’ll be careful. I know you think you have all of this under control, but if they do something unexpected, it could get you killed.”

“I promise. The survival of this pack hangs in the balance. Maybe you should start getting the kids on the bus. I’ll see about getting the rest of the supplies loaded. You’re leaving in less than an hour.”

The bus left the compound at exactly noon, and a morose group of men and women mulled around the compound for a short time afterward, then made their way back to their cabins. Colin felt the loss deeply. He had only known Liam for nine days. They hadn’t gone through the mating ritual, but Colin knew deep in his heart Liam was already bound to him body and soul. This separation of pack members, while necessary, hurt him as deeply as those who were sending children away. Liam had been right. Heaven help the bad guys.

CHAPTER 12

Three days had passed since the children had been sent away. Each night had been overcast or raining. Each night, guards had been posted all over the compound, yet nothing had happened. Nerves were on edge, and Colin felt it acutely. Staying up all night waiting for something to happen then unable to sleep during the day because Liam was gone made for a frazzled alpha. The mid-day sun was shining, and the forecast was for a clear night so Colin did what any werewolf would do under the circumstances. He went for a run.

Shifting effortlessly behind his cabin, Colin made his way to the break in the fence. To his dismay, there did not seem to be any activity. No new scents, footprints, or tire tracks. Could he have been wrong about the threat to his pack? Last night had been overcast with a full moon. Most humans thought all werewolves were vulnerable during a full moon. It would have been the perfect night for an attack. So what was going on?

Colin left the area and continued around the perimeter looking for any signs of recent activity. He detoured and checked out the caves one by one to make sure they were secure. He was standing naked at the back of the last cave, looking over the mountain of supplies,

when he felt a presence at the front of the cave. He turned his senses to the threat and smiled. The scent was now so familiar to him he'd remember it for the rest of his life.

"I've missed you," Colin said into the darkness. Liam in his wolf form came slowly into the cave, shifting just inches from his lover.

"I thought you might want to know how things were with the children."

"You could have called with a report."

"Yeah, but then I wouldn't have been able to do this..." Liam kissed his lover.

Colin wrapped his arms around Liam's naked form, bringing their bodies flush against each other.

"Think your men can handle things for a little while? I left the kids in good hands."

"I'm sure they can manage 'til nightfall."

* * * *

Colin woke to the sound of a gunshot. He could see Liam running toward him from the cave opening.

"They didn't wait 'til dark." Liam said.

Colin cursed and ran for the cave entrance shifting as he went, Liam close on his heels. They ran like the wind to a spot above the compound where a dense grove of

evergreens stood, a place where they could see what was happening but not be seen. They shifted and looked down on the melee below. The gated entrance to the compound was in ruins, the guard house nothing but a pile of tangled aluminum siding, wood, wiring, and to Colin's dismay, dead bodies littered the ground. Within the compound, there were five pickup trucks and men with rifles walking around everywhere. His heart sank when he got a clear view of kneeling pack members and people being hauled out of cabins. His beast howled in his mind, and Colin fought hard to keep from shifting. It was Liam's hand on his shoulder that stopped him.

“Colin, you can't help them. We're outnumbered.”

“I can't sit here and watch while my pack is obliterated.”

“I'm not asking you to. I'm just saying we need to be smart about this.”

“My pack...”

“*Our* pack, remember? You said you trusted me to follow your orders without hesitation. You told me to keep our pack safe when you sent me away three days ago. You're part of the pack, and that means I have to keep you safe.” Liam rubbed Colin's arm, the connection between them solid.

Colin shook his head then looked over at his mate.

“I did choose wisely,” Colin said.

“There’s no way we’re going to be able to do this alone. We’re going to need help.”

“Who? The authorities will just turn a blind eye. The Caspar pack took in our women and children. I can’t ask them to put their lives on the line for us.”

“Funny you should say that because I have a message from Dominic Caspar.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. He said to tell you if you need help nailing the bastards just give them a call.”

“If only I had a phone.”

“I think we should go back to the cave and sort this out.”

CHAPTER 13

Colin had boxes of supplies strewn about the cave. Liam was digging through the boxes, a piece of paper hanging from his mouth.

“Did you find the twine and the matches yet?”

“Noff. Nod yed,” was Liam’s muffled reply.

“Well, you need to hit the road. Sun’s almost down,” Colin said as he came up behind the bent-over Liam. “Although if things weren’t so critical I would....”

Liam stood up quickly, pulling the paper out of his mouth and turning to face his lover.

“Don’t even go there, big man. I’ve been struggling to keep my hands to myself for the past three hours. It would only take a teensy bit of encouragement to throw you on the ground and have my way with you.”

“Hard to stay focused on the crisis at hand.”

“We have a pack to save. *That’s* what has kept me on my side of the cave all afternoon. Now. I found some clothes that will fit me. I want you to tie this bundle around my neck after I shift.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I can’t run around the town naked, Colin.”

“Oh, I like the sound of that.”

“You perv. I don’t have any money so I’m going to

have to find someone to let me use their phone. Not too many people are going to want to let a naked man use their phone.”

“Ah... you’re a few steps ahead of me it seems.”

“Your head isn’t exactly in the game, Colin.”

“I’d like my head to be—”

“Focus, Colin.”

“Just teasing. I have a pack to save. You sure this bundle is going to stay on you?”

“Yeah. I’ve been working on a plan.”

“Care to share?”

“No. Not sure it will work. If everything goes right, I should be back in about four hours. Moon should be shining right down on the compound. I want you to promise me something, Colin. Promise you’ll wait for my return before you do anything that might endanger your life. Make me that promise or I’m not leaving.”

“I promise. Be careful, my love.”

“I will.” Liam kissed Colin on the lips quickly then shifted to his wolf form.

Colin tied the bundle of clothes around Liam’s neck and sent him on his way. The next few hours were going to be hell, and he would face it alone.

CHAPTER 14

Liam walked the streets of Aster. He had been doing the same thing two weeks ago on his trek to find Colin. He'd gotten a bad feeling the last time, and this visit was turning out to be the same. Normally, one would suppose a small town at the base of a mountain owned by the government would welcome strangers with open arms. Not Aster. All Liam got as he walked and walked was fear and hatred. After a few hours of going in circles, trying to find anyone who didn't give off a bad vibe, he came face-to-face with the town's sheriff.

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, officer."

"You been walking around these parts for a few hours. Looking for someone? Maybe I can help you find them."

"Actually, I was hoping to borrow a cell phone. Need to make a call, and I'm flat broke at the moment."

"This isn't exactly a town full of good Samaritans. How about you come to the station and use the phone there?"

"This mean I'm under arrest?"

"No. You said you needed to use the phone."

"This isn't what it looks like, sheriff. I'm not a

vagrant. I have people counting on me to get them some help and—”

“Slow down, slow down. I told you you’re not under arrest. We’ll go to the station, and you can call your friends. No strings attached.”

“I’m sorry. Thank you.” Liam nervously shoved his hands in the pockets of the borrowed jeans he wore and walked behind the sheriff to the waiting cruiser. Once inside, he tried to wrestle his thoughts into order.

“Aster isn’t exactly a town a lone *were* ought to be walking around,” the sheriff said nonchalantly as he pulled up to the stop light. Liam turned and stared at the man.

“Yes, I know what you are. My mother was a werewolf.”

“I... you...” Liam stuttered. The sheriff laughed.

“Don’t worry about it. My father did his best to beat the *were* out of my mother and me, but it didn’t work. It just made me bury that side of me deeper.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Old history. He’s dead, she’s happily remarried, and I’m in law enforcement in a town that hates *weres*.”

“Oh my god.”

“Yeah. That’s what I said when you first arrived. Figured I’d give you a chance to leave town on your own before the boys got drunk enough to try and kill you.

You're the one that dropped through here a few weeks ago."

"Yes. I was on my way to... ah..."

"S okay. I know where you were heading. Are they the ones who need help? They had a handful killed a few months back."

"Yes. My sister was one of the ones killed," Liam said somberly.

"I'm sorry about that. Truly I am. Of course, everyone in this town has a rock solid alibi so there's little hope of ever solving the case."

"Yet you have a hunch someone from Aster did it."

"Off the record I know they did it. Just can't prove how many were involved, and if I do get enough evidence to prosecute, I'd wager a week's pay there would be a loophole to get them off or the charges dropped. I'm sorry."

"Thanks for that, sheriff. Knowing you aren't one of them makes this bearable," Liam said as they pulled into the sheriff's parking space in front of his office.

"Well, come inside and make your calls, and we'll see what I can do to help."

CHAPTER 15

Colin paced the confines of the cave. He had placed homemade bombs at key points around the fence to distract the rowdies that had invaded the camp. Unfortunately, it put him within earshot of what was going on. Rednecks taunted men in the pack to shift. They threatened to rape their mates if they didn't perform on command. The smell of blood from those already beaten and bloodied at the hands of the townspeople was heavy in the air. He'd hurried back to the cave, hoping the distance would keep him from breaking his promise to Liam. Colin was nearly to his breaking point when he felt his lover's presence at the entrance of the cave. But he was not alone.

"Colin? I'm with a friend," Liam said.

"Come in," Colin said and started walking toward the entrance of the cave. He found himself wrapped in Liam's arms before he could even take two steps.

"I missed you, big man."

"I can see that." Colin laughed and embraced Liam. They exchanged a hot kiss before someone in the front of the cave cleared their throat.

Liam disentangled himself from Colin's arms and introduced their guest.

"Colin, this is Sheriff Brady Jeffers," Liam said.

The sheriff came farther into the cave, wearing not his uniform but a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. He offered his hand to Colin.

“You were here about the murders.”

“Yep. Talked to Liam about that whole affair.”

“Not wearing your uniform. I take it you’re not here in an official capacity.”

“Nah. Turned the keys over to my deputy for three days. Went hunting with my friend Liam here.”

“And if people end up getting killed?”

“Guess the deputy will have to come out and take care of things.”

“I see,” Colin said.

“Colin, Dominic and his men should be here within the hour. Maybe you should tell our friend here what you pulled together for a distraction while I was away.”

Liam, Colin and Brady crouched behind the stand of evergreens, looking down on the compound. Colin pointed out where he had placed surprises for the bad guys.

“Colin, blowing up aerosol cans isn’t going to distract them for long,” Brady said.

“I know, but it’s all I could find in the cave. I set them up as a retreat not for regrouping during an offensive. I’ll make sure when we get through this to put guns and incendiary devices in the caves.”

“If we get out of this,” Brady said

“We will. Nothing keeps an alpha down,” Liam said with pride for his mate.

“Especially when he has neighbors like us.” All three men turned at once to see a naked man inching his way through the brush towards them. Liam smiled brightly.

“Dominic!”

“Yep, and I brought a lot of friends with me who are just itching for some payback. I know Colin, but who’s your friend, Liam?”

“Sheriff Brady Jeffers. He’s on vacation and came hunting with me.”

“Nice excuse there, sheriff,” Dominic said as he squatted next to the three men. Brady stretched out his hand to the newcomer who took it without hesitation.

“Best I could come up with on a moment’s notice.”

“So someone want to tell me the plan?”

“Don’t look at me. I got the reinforcements,” Liam said, and all eyes turned to Colin.

“Simple really. Wait for the right moment. Overwhelm them with force and win the day.”

“And when exactly would the right moment be?” Dominic asked as he looked down on the compound. “They got a lot of guns.”

Colin opened his mouth to speak but was

interrupted.

“Hey you out there! I know you’re watching. I’m going to give you to the count of ten to show yourself or I’m going to start killing,” a rather large, potbellied man said, his rifle balanced on his chubby hip. One of the females was pulled forward and forced to kneel before the man.

From their hiding place, three men turned to look at Colin.

“Well, gentlemen, I guess that answers that question.” Colin made to stand, but Liam held him in place.

“They want to kill you, Colin.”

“I’m sure they want to beat me to a pulp in front of the pack first. You’ll have time to get everyone into place,” Colin said as he squeezed Liam’s arm. “You’re my beta. Take care of my pack.”

“*Our* pack, remember?” Liam said with a lump in his throat.

“Our pack,” Colin repeated then kissed Liam on the cheek, shifted to his wolf form and took off towards the compound.

CHAPTER 16

The sounds coming from the compound had Liam close to tears. They were indeed beating his lover to a pulp. He had to hold on until all Dominic's men were in place. His beast pushed hard to shift and run to Colin's side. It was Dominic's voice that kept him from shifting.

"Liam! Concentrate on something else. I need you here, not down there in the compound," Dominic said as he shook Liam.

"I'm here. I just..."

Brady touched the young man on the arm. "I have a full round in the pistol and two extra rounds with me," Brady said, feeling in his back pocket for the extra rounds. "We need you to give the signal from up here so we can do this all at once. We'll have the element of surprise only once. You ready for this?"

Dominic and Brady watched Liam take several deep breaths as if marshalling his resolve.

"Yes, I'm ready. Let's get this over with."

* * * *

In the compound, Colin fought to remain conscious. He knew Liam, Dominic, and Brady would be making their

move soon, and he wanted to be a help not a hindrance. Unfortunately, the three men taking turns beating on him had done a thorough job.

“I think we done beat him near to death, Travis,” the tall redhead said to his companion.

“Got us a six-pack two months ago. This time I think we should go for at least a twelve pack or maybe a case. Whatcha think, Lloyd?” the dark-haired, toothless young man asked. All around were rumblings from the rifle-toting townies.

“We got a ways to go to keep up with them Utah boys. They done took out a whole pack,” the man named Lloyd said as he kicked Colin in the side and nudged him with the barrel of his rifle. Suddenly from behind, they heard a gunshot, then a bang. And again. Then another gunshot and a bang from somewhere behind the administrative building.

“What the hell!” Travis said as he ran towards the noise.

Lloyd started shouting orders at men who weren't moving fast enough for his likes. “Rufus, James go find out what's going on... *Move it!*” Lloyd walked away from Colin's prone form and started hollering at more men. More shots and blasts rang out, echoing off the mountain until the compound was in utter chaos. There were men

with rifles running around everywhere. Lloyd cursed up a storm as he physically pulled on men to go check out the noises. Travis came back, white as a sheet.

“There’s holes in the fence. I think they’re coming for us.”

“They’re all here on the ground, asshole.”

“Well, who the hell is blowing holes in the fence then?”

Just as Lloyd was about to answer, the first wave of *were* cleared the fence and made for the band of bad guys. Shots rang out, but Colin’s people were quick to use the distraction to their advantage and their captor’s horror. One by one, they shifted in front of them. And it wasn’t the wolf form they shifted into, but rather the battle ready *weres* of television horror movies. Claws and fangs were bared, ready to rip every last one to pieces.

With the odds no longer in his favor, Travis ran for the nearest truck. Lloyd was trying to take aim at a beast when he found himself staring Colin’s *were* in the face. Battered and bruised though he was, Colin made quick work of the man, ripping his throat out before he could utter another word. Across the compound, the scene was the same as townies tried to get to the trucks before they got left behind to be ripped apart by beasts looking for revenge. Some tried using human pack members as shields

to get to their trucks. Some simply ran until they got stopped by an angry *were*. There was carnage everywhere. This was a defining moment for the *were* population. The fact was not lost on those *were* fighting for their lives and those of the Raeford/Solon pack.

It ended as quickly as it had begun. Dead and injured littered the compound yard. One truck had been able to get away. One stood in the middle of the compound and held four men huddled in the cab, the doors locked and motor running. Colin came over to the six beasts guarding the vehicle, shifting as he strode toward them.

“Let them go. There’s been enough bloodshed today. Let them go so they can tell others how this came down.” Colin then walked away, knowing his orders would be followed. He turned to say something and was blindsided by a body slamming into him in a bear hug.

“Thank god you’re alive. I thought I had lost you,” Liam said as he squeezed Colin’s bruised ribs.

“Ow. I heal fast but not that fast,” Colin said, looking over Liam’s shoulder at Dominic who had shifted and was walking towards the pair. “I see Dominic but not Brady?”

“He’s at our cabin, calling the ambulance and the deputy to come out here,” Liam said as Dominic stopped in front of Colin and offered his hand.

“You seem to have everything under control. Time to round up my guys and head back home.”

“Dominic, I don’t know how to thank you. First, you take in nearly half my pack and then come to our aid. How can I ever thank you?”

“No thanks necessary. We have to support each other if we are to survive.”

“Well, if you ever need anything from us, don’t hesitate to call, come by, send smoke signals...” Colin said with a grin that Dominic returned.

“Mind if I spread the word about what happened here today? I think it is a good idea to let the other packs know what went down. They need to know it’s possible to fight back,” Dominic asked with a wave of his hand toward the carnage.

“Sure, Dominic. If you think it will help, tell them. But maybe you should keep Brady out of this.”

“Like they say on TV, the names will be changed to protect the not-so-innocent,” Dominic said with a laugh. “Til the next time, Colin.” Dominic turned and yelled for his men, who shifted into wolf form for the trek back to their own pack.

Liam stood beside Colin as he surveyed the damage.

“We could have lost it all today. If it weren’t for

you, we would have,” Colin said, turning to the man at his side and sliding his arm around his middle.

“Me? I did what you told me to do. I took the women and children to safety and defied your orders to stay away.” Liam blushed slightly at the admission. “But we wouldn’t have won over those townies if I hadn’t brought Brady and Dominic’s pack with me.”

“I know,” Colin said then he kissed his confused lover on the cheek. They both watched as Brady came toward them.

“Well, gentlemen,” Brady said, “my work here is done. I’ve called for ambulances and the deputy to come out. You might want to get things straightened up a bit before they get here.”

“We can’t thank you enough, Sheriff.”

“I heard what Lloyd said when he was beating up on you. Guess I can consider the case closed now. Glad I could help, but I need to get out of here.”

Brady nodded at the two men then made his way out of the compound and up into the evergreens. Liam turned to Colin, a worried expression on his face.

“What did he mean case closed, Colin? I was too far up in the trees to hear much of what was going on.”

“Lloyd was one of the men who killed your sister and the others. He admitted it while he was working me

over.” Colin pulled Liam tighter to his side. “You said you had come here for answers.”

“I did. And I got them. Along with a mate, a pack and a home. Danae would be pleased for me. I’d been lost for a long time. I’m not lost anymore.” Liam laid his head on Colin’s shoulder.

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aeryn Traxx has been writing since the age of twelve, has plans to retire to the Outer Banks of North Carolina one day and is the proud parent of a teenage daughter. Aeryn currently lives in North Dakota with two dogs, a cat and a significant other. You can find out the latest news and views at www.aeryntraxx.webs.com.

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