

The book cover features a dramatic scene between two men. On the left, a man with dark hair in a braid is seen from behind, wearing a grey collar and a chain around his neck. He is reaching out with his right hand towards the neck of another man on the right. The second man has short dark hair and a light beard, looking back at the first man with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark, form-fitting shirt. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an industrial or urban setting. The title 'Brannan Black' is at the top in a silver, serif font. The author's name 'WOLFMAN' is in the middle in a silver, serif font. The word 'REVELATIONS' is at the bottom in a large, stylized, red-outlined font. The publisher's name 'Changeling Press' is at the very bottom in a small, white, serif font.

Brannan Black

WOLFMAN
REVELATIONS

Changeling Press

Wolfman 2: Revelations

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Wolfman 2: Revelations

Brannan Black

The world fell apart after a virus killed billions and turned most male survivors into violent wolfmen. That left the world in the hands of a lot of lonely women... As the last gay man standing, how much worse could things get?

I thought getting captured by said wolfmen -- who don't tolerate smart-mouthed humans -- topped the list. Although that turned out to have a silver lining named Mace. Best sex of my life and he cares enough to fight for me. Life was starting to look up, in a kinda weird way.

That's when Murphy's Law kicked in. All those lonely women I was escaping? They want me back, even if they have to kill my lover to get me. And then there's my mother. How the hell do you introduce your alpha wolfman lover to your mother, the man-eating former head of surgery?

Toss in a psychotic Major, a wolfman willing to start a war to take Mace's place and a whole lot of mistrust. Old Murphy is having a damned field day...

Chapter 1

Sleeping with the boss has certain advantages. No one bitches if you're late for breakfast. Not even if they're waiting for you.

By the time we'd gotten cleaned up after Mace's knock down with Tat yesterday, the weather had gotten too ugly for scavenging. So we were headed out today without Fang or Spike. *Yes!*

Yesterday's drizzle was drying up fast. I drew a deep breath of fresh, clean air. One of the few benefits of society's collapse -- clean air.

Mace slapped my back as he passed. If not for being braced on my crutches, I would have fallen face down in the gravel. "Get a move on, brainiac. You've wasted enough time this morning." He sounded perfectly serious.

Oh yeah, that was my fault! I was just standing at the sink shaving when *someone* pressed his hard on against my ass...

* * *

"Need some help?" Mace's thick cock ground against my ass while his arms slipped around my waist. One went up, teasing a nipple. I sucked in a breath. His other hand cupped my balls, his thumb stroking my cock through my jeans.

A wave of fear rippled through me when he pulled my loosely zipped pants down, thrusting his hips into my ass. Without a word he turned me. He whispered over my lips. "I won't hurt you, chosen."

Our lips met, hard, hot, demanding. Our tongues dueled for dominance. He lifted me to the edge of the sink as if I weighed nothing. Hot kisses trailed down to my nipples, suckling first one then the other until they were both stiff and achy.

My cock thrust up, bumping his chin. So swiftly it took my breath, he engulfed my cock, sucking so hard I thought my balls would come out. "Agggghhhh..." He'd reduced me to moans again. A single finger wormed under my ass and found my hole.

"Fuck! Mace!" He rimmed me over and over while he sucked up and down my length.

"Fuck! Aaaahhhha!" My hips bucked up and he swallowed as I shot.

He stroked my back, pressed between my thighs. My heart settled back to a normal rhythm. "Let me off the sink. My ass is getting cold."

He laughed and let me slide down his body until my feet touched. I let my knees bend, continuing down his body. I sucked a nipple and he gasped. My tongue played in his navel and his cock jumped against me, demanding my attention. I slipped lower until I knelt at his feet. Head tilted to watch his face, I licked the broad head.

His mouth parted on a sexy gasp, hands on my head, urging me to take him. I swallowed him down. His head tossed back, mouth open. Fuck, he was sexy! I went to work, wringing every bit of pleasure I could out of his cock. He whined and moaned and bucked into my mouth.

Relaxing my throat, I took him deeper than I ever had. He froze, balls tight, and I swallowed.

He bucked hard, body quivering as I swallowed pulse after pulse of his semen. "Daniel!"

* * *

"Daniel! You need some help?"

Shit! I'd gotten lost in remembering. And I was fucking hard again. Baggy pants, I needed to find some baggy pants. I adjusted my cock while Mace laughed.

* * *

We were hauling the last of the stuff I needed to the truck. Without warning, Mace shoved me down by the truck, covering me with his body. A distant gunshot echoed in the still air. At the same time I heard a howled groan. Slade lay nearly face to face with me. Blood dripped onto the broken pavement. He'd been shot!

"Fuck!" I wormed a bit trying to keep a piece of broken pavement from castrating me. A puff of concrete exploded behind us.

I felt Mace twist and from the corner of my eye saw him give a hand signal to Vegas. Struck me as odd. Military. A glass storefront shattered as the shooter took a shot at Vegas dashing for the alley. If he hadn't been so fast, she'd have got him. Or maybe if she'd been closer. It wasn't Glory, she'd have nailed both guys regardless. It could be Deb or Angie. There weren't any other groups of refugees in the area. They had to be from my compound.

I drew a deep breath. "They might be looking for me. Let me the fuck up and I'll find out."

"Wait. Stay down." Mace kept me pinned tight.

"Seriously? We just lay here until they get bored?" Did I have to sound so snide? I really was trying to be more submissive. It wasn't going well.

Mace growled softly, a hair's breadth from my ear. "No, brainiac, we keep them distracted until Fox can grab them."

The shooters wouldn't be expecting this group of well-organized wolfmen. Rabids, they attacked straight on. Mace's pack had lookout posts in a few tall buildings and worked foot patrols. Which is how they spotted me in the first place. And used the same damned distract and bag tactic. "Fuck, Mace. You can't just kidnap them."

He arched a brow. "They're in my territory, they shot Slade, and, in case you missed it, they're trying to kill us. They deserve a lot worse."

Slade shifted to sitting against the truck tire. He pulled his shirt out to examine the damage to his shoulder. The bleeding had already slowed to a trickle. "Hate to complain, but the bullet's still in there. Hurts like hell." He felt around the wound.

"Then quit poking it, dumbass," Mace snorted.

Slade snickered.

Mace rolled to a sitting position and gave a nod to Jeff, crouched behind a derelict car. He dashed toward the alley, drawing fire and being just slow enough to get sprayed with pulverized brick.

A shot sprayed glass over us. Fuck! They'd shot my truck! Those bitches!

"Damn it, what's taking them so long?" Mace snarled.

God damn stupid. Didn't they know they should move after a couple shots? Damn rabids could trace a shot by sound just as well as Mace's pack. The next one hit low, sending pieces flying under the truck to pepper my face.

Mace yanked me behind a tire. Mace and Slade froze. They got these looks like they were listening to something I couldn't hear. Mace grabbed my shoulder. "Got 'em, now let's get your stuff loaded and go home."

What exactly did that mean? Got the shooters? Fuck, I hoped they weren't dead.

Slade pulled out a whistle and blew it. Only I couldn't hear a thing. Mace winced. "Warn a guy first, Slade. My ears are gonna ring all day!"

No fucking way. They used dog whistles to communicate?

* * *

The smaller truck from my compound sat out front of the pack building. Which of the women I'd lived with for the last few years would be getting a taste of wolfman hospitality? I really hoped they hadn't roughed them up too much.

I followed Mace into the gathering room. Groping, growling, snarling beasts surrounded the small group of women. Crissy and Deb looked terrified. Angie looked ready to bust balls and take names. She'd obviously put up quite a fight judging by her bruises and the way she favored one leg. I craned my neck to see who was behind her.

Oh, fuck no! "Get your fucking hands off her!" For a moment, I forgot all about my bad leg as I lunged across the room. A fucking beast had his hands on my sister! I raised one of my crutches to smack him but Mace jerked it out of my hand.

I was so pissed I didn't even slow down. "Get your fucking paws off! You wanna play, go rough Angie up, she'd probably like it." I yanked at a beast's arm. It distracted him from Lindsey but left me facing a pissed off beast. I glared back and seconds later I was smacked onto the floor with claws digging into my neck. With the wind knocked out of me all I could do was gasp for air and look away.

Just as suddenly, the beast on me went rolling from a well placed boot in his ribs. Mace stood over me snarling. "I swear, Daniel, are you really too fucking stupid to live?"

Baring my throat, I heaved a deep breath of relief.

"Back off the women, all of you." Mace yanked me to my feet and shoved my crutches into my chest. I dropped my gaze and swallowed. Submissive, shit, I sucked at being submissive.

Lindsey launched herself into my arms. "My God, Daniel! It really is you." She sobbed into my shoulder. Her jacket looked dirty, her hair mussed, but I didn't see any blood. That was good, really good.

"Are you all right, Linds? Ah shit, Linds, did they..." I swallowed hard.

She shook her head against my chest. "No, they didn't really hurt us, other than to capture us. Daniel, what the hell's going on?" She leaned back and took a long look at my face and then at my crutches. "God, Daniel, what have they done to you?" Her voice wavered and choked. Her eyes flew wide.

I pulled her into a tight hug, rocking her slightly, pressing her head back to my chest. "It's OK, Linds. I'm fine." I tucked my chin over her head.

"Who's your friend, little human?" Mace growled and took hold of her hair, jerking her face around.

"Mace! Fuck, let go, man." Hot anger battled with the cold hand of fear clutching my guts.

He cocked a brow, waiting with a tight anger twisting his face. Jealous? Fuck.

"Mace, Lindsey Baker." I grabbed his hand still wrapped in her hair. "My sister. Now, please, Mace, you're hurting her." Getting slammed into the ground had returned just enough sanity to keep me from yelling in his face.

He leaned closer and inhaled deeply. Fucking sniffed her like a dog.

"You never mentioned a sister. Such a good looking woman." He turned his hold into a stroke of her red-brown hair.

God damn it all to hell. Bad enough a guy was hitting on my sister, but Mace? My lover and my sister? Oh, I don't think so! I pulled her away, tucking her under my arm as best I could. "And why would I? It's not like I was gonna invite her over for Sunday dinner."

Yellow-gold eyes bore into me. What the fuck was he thinking? He snorted softly, eyes running down my length. Lindsey pressed into my side, and I wrapped my arms tighter around her. "It's OK, Linds. What the fuck are you doing here?"

"You disappear for nearly two weeks and think no one is going to look for you?"

"I figured you'd think I was dead if I didn't make it back after the storm. No point in looking for a shredded body." She smacked me and then threw herself back into my arms. I hugged her tight to me, stroking her hair.

Mace paced around the other four women, looking them over carefully. He stopped in front of Angie. With her close-cropped blond hair and fatigues, she looked every bit the soldier she was. "Is that the only reason you're in my territory?"

Angie drew herself up, falling several inches short of glaring straight in Mace's eyes. She spit at him. Mace grabbed her by the throat, claw tips pressing in but not far enough to draw blood, yet.

Angie didn't flinch. She was too busy trying to stare Mace down. His grip tightened on her throat, and blood started to well around his claws. "Go ahead, beast, smack me around, tear my throat out, rape me. Do whatever, but I ain't giving you jack."

I had a serious bit of déjà vu. Had I sounded that arrogantly stupid? Probably worse.

Mace growled, showing plenty of fang. Despite the catch in her breath and sudden swallow, she continued to stare.

"Ang, honey, unless you want the shit kicked out of you, don't stare them in the eyes."

She rolled her eyes to glare at me. She hated being called Ang. And honey? Back at the compound, she'd have busted my balls. Just for good measure I winked at her.

Her pale face flushed red and her eyes narrowed in obvious anger, but it took her attention off Mace. A heartbeat later she was face down on the floor with Cowboy's knee in her back, one arm twisted behind to hold her even more firmly.

"I take it you know these women." Mace didn't spare me a glance as he looked over the trembling black haired sprite of a woman Angie had been shielding.

Sarah could shoot with the best of them but a too close encounter with rabids had left her badly shaken. She kept her head bowed with her hair draped over the scars on her face she'd carry the rest of her life. They were nothing compared to the ones you couldn't see. What the hell had the Major been thinking sending *her* in? She cowered away from Mace, looking so pale I thought she might faint. He brushed the hair from her face. She jerked back with a soft scream and fell to the floor, shaking.

"Shit, she does that every time we touch her. Passed out when we grabbed them." Fox looked totally confused.

"She had a run-in with rabids last summer. They held her for a couple days before she escaped." Which in itself was a miracle. Unless they hadn't been rabid at all. Maybe others like Mace's group, only not as nice?

Nice? When the fuck did I start thinking of these guys as *nice*?

Mace looked the others over. Deb and Crissy looked shaken up but not badly damaged. Neither one would look Mace in the eye. "I understand looking for Daniel, but why shoot at us?"

Angie snarled from the floor, "What do you think, beast? Target practice."

The tension in the room ratcheted up. Fuck, it was a bad day when I had to play peacemaker. "Look, with a rabid's fucking strength and speed, it's strike first or die for us humans. They didn't know the difference. Hell, they didn't know there *was* a difference. Mace, they've never seen pack, just like I hadn't."

Angie snarled, "Different? Are you shitting me? They're all fucking beasts, Daniel."

Mace growled, and Cowboy leaned more weight on her back and snarled in her ear. Shit, if that had been me, they'd have slammed my face into the floor.

"So, what are your former pack mates really doing here?"

"Despite what Lindsey says, I doubt they came looking for me. Not after all this time. They want the truck back." I didn't add they needed some of the supplies in it. "If they aren't back by dark, another team, maybe two, will come in. Normally teams list what section of the city they'll be in. The search'll start there."

"You're a pathetic coward, a fucking traitor! That's what you are, Daniel." Angie snarled and struggled even harder. This time she did get cuffed upside the head.

I crouched down in front of her. "What I am is the guy who doesn't want a building full of innocent women and children caught in a crossfire!"

Angie froze. "What children?"

At Mace's order, Cowboy hauled her to her feet and turned her toward the kitchen where several women stood. Then he yanked her chin up. A dozen of the kids that called the den home stood or sat watching through the railing. A mother with her baby girl stepped forward into the light.

"Fucking son of a bitch." Angie's voice trailed off.

"Now you're starting to see. This is a pack, a community, not so different from the compound." Whoa, where'd that come from? Fuck if it wasn't the truth.

"Daniel," she turned to take a good look at me, "what the fuck? They don't look, you know, like..."

I snorted. "Like they've been beaten, raped and gnawed on? No shit. They *are* different. This is Mace, he runs this pack."

Angie turned to stare at Mace, then turned in a circle looking, really looking at the wolfmen as if seeing them for the first time. Angie might be a hard ass, but she wasn't stupid. She paled slightly when she saw Doc pulling the bullet out of Slade's shoulder right there in the room. "Shit."

Mace nodded, as if deciding something. "Here's what's going to happen. You two," he pointed to Crissy and Deb, "will be escorted out of our territory with a message for your leader." Mace paused, eyes narrowed in thought. "Since you won't be

missed until nightfall, you will stay for a few hours. Den-Mom, keep them in the kitchen out of the way."

Den-Mom stalked forward, yellow eyes full of fire.

"They are not to be harmed, unless they try to escape." Mace raised his voice. "Their health is your responsibility."

She growled softly but nodded. "That way." She gave Crissy a shove toward the kitchen.

"Oh my God! You're... you're a beast!" Crissy clapped a hand over her mouth and stumbled back.

Den-Mom snarled, flashing her full set of fangs. "I am not the monster! I don't sit on rooftops shooting anything that moves. Now get your asses moving." She growled and snapped, and both Crissy and Deb whirled and all but ran toward the kitchen. Laughter followed as Den-Mom swaggered after them.

"You three stay. Behave yourselves and you'll go home in one piece, eventually."

"You can't just keep us here!" Angie whirled on Mace, all spit and fire.

He smiled coldly. "I can and will."

"At least let Sarah go before she freaks out completely." Angie crossed her arms in defiance.

He ignored her and searched the crowd on the second floor. Mace zeroed in on China and her bodyguards. "No, she especially stays. China, she's with you. Wraith, Ice, guard her as you would China."

"This is my team, I say who stays or goes. Send Sarah and Lindsey -- ack!"

Mace had her by the throat and this time picked her off the floor. She clawed desperately at his arms. "Not your choice, little human. You would do well to keep your mouth shut or I may have trouble returning you in one piece." He dropped her gasping to the floor. He towered over her. "Mind your tongue, do as you're told and you might learn something about us.

"Daniel, your sister and Angie can follow you about today. Hawk, keep an eye on them. I want you to treat them like any new woman coming in."

I sucked up my pride and approached Mace with as much humility as I could. "Not to be an ass, but send my sister home, please."

He froze and looked at me with the most shock I'd ever seen on his face.

"What?" I winced as that came out harsher than I wanted.

"Please? No swearing?"

I shrugged and stared at the floor.

"I thought you'd like to spend some time with her. Let her see how you live." He flashed a grin. "Let me get to know her."

"Ah, no. Just *no*." He arched a brow. "She's my little sister, Mace. Last thing I want is any of you getting to know her."

"Beasts not good enough?" The smile vanished.

I snorted. "No one is good enough, Mace. It's my job to protect her, from, you know, guys that just want to fuck her."

Lindsey just had to butt in. "I'm a big girl, Daniel. If you can live here, I'm sure I'll be OK."

"No. Fucking hell, no!"

Mace crossed his arms and stared at me, waiting.

"Fuck, Mace, you know how things get around here at night. I don't want my sister in that."

Linds mimicked Mace's stance. "In what?"

Mace's smile was anything but friendly. "Your brother refers to it as the nightly fuck fest."

"Oh." Lindsey's face blanched white. "Um, and if we, ah, don't want to join in?"

A shit-eating grin exposed Mace's fangs. "If you're like your brother, I'm sure you won't be that hard to convince." He ran his gaze down my body in a way not lost on Lindsey or Angie. He winked at them then strode off, long black braid swinging slightly with each step. My face burned but damned if my single-minded cock didn't enjoy the view of that man's ass.

Both women stared at me. Angie sounded disgusted. "Tell me you aren't fucking that... that..."

"Wolfman? And yes, he is." Doc joined us. "Which one of you bitches shot my mate?" She stood hands on hips, glaring at Angie, who looked taken aback. "Yes, that means I'm fucking one of them too. And one of you tried to kill him in cold blood!"

Angie lifted her chin. "I'll take responsibility, since it was on my orders."

Doc nodded, once. The sound of hand meeting flesh echoed around the room. A large red mark bloomed across Angie's cheek where Doc had backhanded her. She turned on her heel, stalked over to Slade and practically crawled up his body and down his throat kissing him. She threw an arrogant glare over her shoulder before leaving the room.

Slade did a great deer-in-the-headlights impression before rushing after his chosen mate.

Chapter 2

I gave Lindsey and Angie a run down on basic etiquette while we sorted the stuff in the back of my truck.

"No staring, no arguing or yelling. No wonder you look like hell, geek," Angie snorted.

I chuckled. "They can't seem to figure out what to do with a fully human man. Hey, Mutt, put that over there, gently." I kept my voice even but still got a snarl from him.

"Mutt, move your ass." Hawk stretched, exposing toned abs, flexing his bulging biceps.

I snickered when I saw how distracted Angie got. Wasn't so thrilled at my sister ogling him. "Here, sis, take this over there." I shoved a box of plumbing parts at her. Hawk snickered and winked at me. Then he sauntered over and took the box out of Lindsey's hands. Bastard made sure to brush up against her, too! If I could growl I would have.

Angie was in the truck bed, shuffling things down to the tailgate to unload. She squatted down to talk softly, thinking the wolfmen wouldn't be able to hear her. "Have you found a way to escape?"

I shook my head. "If it runs, they chase it. In case you've forgotten, they run faster than we do. Oh, and they can hear you just fine." Hawk, Jeff and Mutt all grinned at her. Mutt flashed some fang just for fun.

She glowered down at me. "So you haven't even tried?"

"I'm not stupid, Ang. It's not much worse here than at the compound."

"You didn't get the shit beat out of you or forced to fuck someone at home," she retorted.

"Oh yeah, being harassed, ridiculed and made to feel like an outsider in my own home is *so* much better. And while no one had tied me to a bed, yet, I am fucking sick of the arm-twisting to fuck some chick until she gets pregnant. 'The good of the human race,' my ass. And for the record, I'm not being *forced* to fuck *anyone*."

Her mouth dropped open. "You want to screw these beasts?"

I crossed my arms and smirked. "They got all the right man parts. And Mace sure knows how to use them."

"Well, I sure as hell ain't fucking any beasts."

"Ang, honey, they aren't that desperate." I smiled sweetly.

"Daniel, what are they going to do to us?" The fear in Lindsey's voice distracted Angie and I from one of our renowned shouting matches.

"I don't know, Linds. But I do know what they won't do. Hold you down screaming while they rip out little pieces and eat you alive."

Angie snorted rudely.

Mutt leaned over the back rail of the truck and tugged at Angie's shirt collar. "He's right about the ripping part but I wouldn't mind eating you alive. Over and over while you scream for more." His gaze raked down her chest to settle on her crotch. His hand closed around the back of her neck, pulling her toward him.

"Like fucking hell!" Angie grabbed his thumb and twisted. Instead of letting go, he yanked her by the neck against the side of the truck bed.

He snarled, "Are you sure this one isn't related, brain boy? She's as fucking stupid as you are." She struggled, clawing into his arms as his hand closed off her air.

"Mutt, let go. Mace said they leave here in one piece. Unless she is stupid and tries to run. Then you can have all the fun you want." Hawk never raised his voice. In fact, often times you had to really listen to hear him. It just added impact to his words.

Mutt snarled close to her face again then shoved her back.

Angie glared at me as if it were my fault. Lindsey stared at the floor but I could see her hands trembling. Hawk and Mutt grabbed some long pipes and hauled them off as if nothing had happened.

I tugged Lindsey into a hug. "Shh, it's OK. I won't let anything happen to you."

"Shit, you can't even protect yourself. How the hell do you think you can protect her?" Angie glared at the wolfmen.

I shrugged. "They want what I can do. Mace won't let them kill me." Fuck, I prayed he wouldn't. But how far could I really push it? "Stick close to me, Linds. Whatever happens, stick close."

"And what about me?" Angie demanded.

I laughed. "I'm sure I can find a bottle of wine to get you in the mood, Ang." She looked ready to kill me. I leaned closer. "Just like you fucking tried with me. Only they won't sneak into your bed in the middle of the night. They're not that desperate -- or devious."

* * *

Mace settled onto the couch next to me. Slade slouched in his normal spot with Doc. Lindsey sat next to me with Angie on the other side of her. With a sly grin, Hawk wedged himself between them. Tat headed for his normal end of the couch but a snarl from Mace and he shifted to one of the chairs. Alpha shot Mace a dirty look but chose to sit with Tat. *Hmm, what's with that?*

"Brainiac, I sent those two back with a message setting up a meeting tomorrow at noon, here." He leaned forward to watch Angie's face as he spoke to me. "Told them as long as they follow my instructions, these three go home tomorrow unharmed. What do you think they'll do?"

"I don't know. It all depends on whether or not the council believes what Crissy and Deb say about you and the pack. Just the fact you want to talk will shock the shit out of them. Knowing the Major -- she's in charge of compound security -- she'll want to shoot first. Even if she comes to your meeting, she's gonna come locked and loaded."

Mace looked from me to Angie. "You think she'll attack rather than talk?"

Angie refused to even look at him.

"The council could order her to talk, but she's a take no prisoners kinda woman. For certain, whoever comes will be armed and wary."

"How well armed? How many fighters?" Slade leaned forward.

"Shut the fuck up, Daniel. How can you betray your kind like this?" Angie tried to pin me with her stare.

Mace stroked along my thigh. "We can't protect ourselves if we don't know what we're up against."

"Fuck, Mace, I..." I looked at all the tense faces turned our way. Fucking beasts. And women. And children. What the fuck could I do to stop this train wreck? I scrubbed a hand across my face. "Fuck, I don't really know. I'm not Army. The Major was real, pre-collapse Army. That's what could be coming here. Not tanks or anything, but well trained and well armed."

Mace stared off into the room but didn't seem to be looking at anything. Other than the sound of children fussing, the room fell silent, waiting for Mace to speak.

He nodded briefly. "Right. Slade, defensive status as of now. Get GI Jane and her team set up for the roof. Pull the patrols but set up the alternate watch posts. Den-Mom, Doc, make sure the inner rooms are secure and be ready in case this gets messy."

The sudden quiet of the room erupted into activity. Only Hawk and Mace stayed sitting. They opened the weapons locker and started passing out rifles and handguns.

Tat directed a group of wolfmen bringing in heavy crates. I stared in shock when they opened them. I don't know a lot about guns but those looked like military issue fully automatic assault rifles. And enough ammo to start a war. Or defend a den. Fuck! I wanted to stop a war, not start one.

"Assault rifles? Shit, tell me they can't shoot." Angie's voice rose in pitch and volume.

Mace chuckled. "Better than your sniper today. We don't miss."

"Fuck it all to hell, Daniel, you God damn fucking traitor! They'll slaughter our people!"

Hawk had his hands full keeping a hold of her. "Settle your ass down, woman!" He finally flipped her face down on the couch with her arms trapped behind her back.

Fuck, could this get any worse?

Lindsey buried her head against me. "God, Daniel, what are they going to do?"

Mace cupped her chin, pulling her face up. "Defend ourselves, if needed. I'm still hoping we can avoid any more bloodshed."

Angie snorted into the couch cushion. "Yeah, right. I can't believe you'd betray your own kind for these monsters, Daniel! Is it worth it? Is he that good a fuck?"

"Fuck you, Ang. We both know the Major would slaughter every last one of them if she could. And she won't give a shit if a bunch of innocents die in the process." I turned to Mace. "You really want to avoid bloodshed, let them go, now. And send me with them."

Mace's eyes narrowed and a soft growl rose in his throat. "You really want to leave, Daniel? Go back to your pack full of women?"

I stared at my hands. Well, shit. I'd been looking for a way out since Fang nearly killed me. Now that it might be here, did I really want to leave? I scrubbed a hand across my face. "God, Mace, I just... fuck, I don't know." Being with Mace, that I wanted. Live with his pack? I massaged my torn up leg. Damn thing hurt and itched at the same time. Fuck. But was I any better off back at the compound? With two homophobes, a bunch of horny women, and a fascist Major who wanted to use me as breeding stock whether I liked it or not?

Mace's face softened as he drew mine up to look at him. He brushed the back of his hand so gently across my bruised jaw, running fingers through my hair. His head dipped down and his lips brushed softly across mine.

Angie sat up, rubbing her arms now that Hawk had let her up. "Sick, that's just sick. Bad enough you're a damned queer but he's not even human!"

Mace drew back and snarled at her.

Lindsey snorted. "Is that your problem, Angie? He'd rather have sex with a... a wolfman than you?"

From the red on Angie's face, I'd say little sister had it right. I couldn't help it, the laughter just bubbled out. Hawk had to restrain her from throttling me. Pissed me

off a bit that she didn't get the crap beat out of her. Guess they did treat their women differently. Good for them, sucked to be me.

* * *

The room was a lot emptier tonight with so many on guard duty. Tensions ran high judging by the number of snarls and fangs flashed. Sarah came in with China and sat nearest the stairs to the upper floors. Wraith and Ice kept an eye on everyone within spitting distance. Even from here, I could see how nervous Sarah looked. Worry lines creased her brow and she froze every time someone walked by. But at least she didn't look like she might faint any minute.

Angie sat curled up in the corner looking pissed, still. She refused to even look at me. Which suited me fine, fucking bitch.

Mace said little but, as always, he watched the room. A woman's shrill cry sounded right in front of us. A couple of beasts were fighting over her, literally. Mace jumped one as Spike nailed the other one. Slade and Doc got the poor woman out of the way. Both men left the room bleeding after Mace reminded them how to treat women.

"You can dress 'em up but they're still beasts," Angie sneered.

"If that were true, that woman would be shreds by now. In fact, there wouldn't be any women running around in one piece, much less any with guns." I pointed where a group of five heavily armed women started up the stairs. I guessed by the fatigues that must be GI Jane and her team.

"What the hell? Aren't you afraid they'll shoot all of you?" Angie watched them in utter amazement.

Hawk snickered.

"Jane! Come here a minute." Mace beckoned with his hand. Jane's group waited at the top of the stairs while she sauntered over.

"Yeah, boss?" In fatigues, black hair braided in cornrows and a rifle in her hands, she looked like the badass bitch from a bad slasher movie.

"This one wants to know why you don't shoot us given the chance."

Jane's dark brown eyes took in every inch of Angie before returning to stare her in the eye. She slung her assault gun to her back and pulled her shirt loose. She raised it to show long furrowed scars running up her dark-skinned ribs. They looked a lot like some of mine.

"Four years ago, my patrol fell to a group of rabids." Her voice held a hint of ghetto in it. "Three died in the fight. They kept the rest of us for entertainment." Her voice wavered slightly over the word "entertainment" but her gaze stayed hard. "Mace and his men, they saved our butts and took care of us. We stuck with 'em. We weren't the first they'd rescued or the last. Even though most humans try to shoot 'em on sight."

"You expect me to believe a bunch of beasts saved you from another bunch of beasts? Like they're some kind of heroes? Seriously?" Angie snarked down her nose.

Jane stepped closer, a sneer on her face. "Maybe not like Hollywood, but it works for me. Now you get all up in their face, sure, they will slap you back. Course, where I come from, someone woulda busted yo' arrogant white ass by now." She snorted dismissively. "Anything else, boss?"

Mace smiled. "Thanks, Jane." He nodded for her to go. "You two can help carry dinner over." Mace waved at Lindsey and Angie.

Lindsey jumped every time one of them bumped or rubbed against her. I started to get up but Mace held me back. Hawk stretched and sauntered after them. Vegas and Cowboy had just returned and met him partway. With the three of them looming over the women, no one else bothered them.

The rest of dinner went uneventfully. Right up to orgy time.

* * *

Vegas sprawled out on the couch, leaning close to Angie. His gaze wandered up and down her length. The bulge in his pants left no doubt what was on his mind even before he slipped his fingers through her short-cropped hair.

"Fuck off! Don't you dare touch me again." Angie made the mistake of grabbing his wrist in a nerve pinch. For the second time, she found herself face down on the floor with a knee in her back.

"Fucking animal! Get off me!" A string of curses even I found crude followed. Her voice went from pissed to scared when Vegas shifted to straddle her, catching both hands and drawing them over her head. Which left him pressed against her back. He nuzzled against her neck and I can only imagine how hard his cock must have felt against her ass.

"God, he's not going to... Daniel, make him stop!" Lindsey's voice grew more frantic.

A sudden snarl and snap startled us all. Blood ran down Vegas' cheek where she'd bit him. Vegas' claws raked her head, seeking a hold in her short hair. Surprisingly, no blood followed. His body ground hers into the floor and his fangs closed on her neck.

With a sigh, Mace got up. "All you have to do, woman, is hold still. He won't hurt you." Mace squatted down and took her chin, turning her ash white face toward him. She flailed her arms, trying to reach one of them. Her body twisted as she tried to throw Vegas off.

"You've been warned. Now yield," Mace snarled in her face.

Lindsey grabbed me tighter, tears running down her face. "Please, Daniel, make them stop. Please!"

Just what the fuck could I do? "Ang, honey." I put all the sarcasm I was known for in my voice. "You do know they consider that foreplay?"

That got to her. She froze, chest heaving as she got a grip.

"Better, woman. Vegas." Mace motioned him off.

She dropped her whole head to the floor. Shudders ran through her body. I bet she knew just how close she'd come to dying.

Vegas stroked her head. "Shhh, it's all right now. Come on, back up on the couch." He all but picked her up, urging her to sit.

Angie stared at him like he'd grown a second head. His face hardened and she swallowed and dropped her gaze.

Mace snorted as he stood. "If it fights, we subdue it. Learn this well and no harm will come to you."

"I don't like being touched." She squeezed as far back into the couch as she could get, drawing her legs up in front of her.

Vegas settled right up against her. "We like to touch. I've never seen a woman with hair as short as yours." He ran a hand across her head. She shivered but held still and quiet. "It's much softer than I thought it would be." He dropped his hand but stayed snuggled right up against her.

Lindsey huddled against me. Her breath caught and a soft sob tumbled out as she watched wolfmen wrestling, stroking and finding bedmates for the night.

She jerked when Hawk shifted up against her. I wrapped my arm around her, hoping he'd get the hint. No such luck. He simply pulled her away from me.

"Daniel!" She clung to my shirt.

"Not going to hurt you, Lindsey." Hawk's soft voice barely carried over the sounds of the room. With Tat and company exiled from the couch, new beasts took the places on the floor in front of us. I didn't know the one now leaning against me and running his hands up Lindsey's leg.

I tensed to boot the guy but Mace's grip tightened on my leg. Hawk snarled and growled. The offending hand withdrew.

"Mace?" It was all I could get past the lump in my throat.

Mace stroked the side of my face and pulled me close. "Don't worry, Hawk won't make her do anything she's not interested in." He nibbled at my ear as his hand ran up my thigh. A single finger brushed my growing hard on. "Any more than I forced you."

Oh, like that made me feel any better! Images of Linds with Hawk twisted my gut. A guy's not supposed to think about shit like that.

"Um, Daniel, could someone show me where we're sleeping?" She stared pointedly at her lap. "I, uh, could use some rest."

A loud moan of male pleasure sent heat rushing up her face.

Doc snickered. "Not enjoying the nightly entertainment?"

Her lips pursed in a thin tight line. "No."

Hawk stroked her hair. "Most women find it strange at first. They get used to it. To us it just feels right, to touch and share with our packmates." He stood and offered her his hand. "Come, I've a place you can sleep."

Her eyes flew wide and looked from his hand to me.

"Lindsey, say no, and mean it." I looked up at Hawk. "Do you understand family?" He nodded. "Then leave her the fuck alone."

Mace growled softly, his hand gripping my shoulder hard. Hawk smiled while raking her with his gaze. Only Mace's hand on my shoulder kept me down.

"Don't worry. I've never forced myself on a female. Come, Lindsey. Unless you want to sleep here?" He glanced over his shoulder at the twined male bodies getting naked here and there around the room.

Eyes wide, she took his hand.

Vegas urged Angie up. "You, too. Don't start, woman. Just follow me, or you might find yourself with more bedmates than you can handle."

Heart in my throat, I watched them take my sister away. Just before she disappeared down the hall, she turned to me with a shaky smile as if to reassure me it would be OK.

"Fuck it, Mace, if he hurts her..." What would I do? What could I do?

"He won't. Haven't you figured that out about us? We don't make our women take partners they don't want."

"Yeah, well, some of them sure don't look enthusiastic."

Mace shrugged. "We provide for their needs and they help with ours. If they truly dislike a partner, they can say no. And they can leave if they choose."

I turned to him. "You know they have nowhere else to go."

He sighed and urged me up. "They do now, or would your people refuse them?"

"We haven't turned anyone away yet. You'd really let them leave? With Lindsey, Angie and Sarah tomorrow?" We headed for his room while we talked.

"No, but once I know they would be cared for, then yes."

"Would you let me leave?" I asked softly as he closed the door.

"After you've finished your projects. If that's what you really want." He stayed facing the door as if he were afraid what he might see on my face.

I sat on the bed and pulled my boots off. "Well, it'll be a while getting the water system going and working out all the bugs with the electrical system."

He turned to lean his back against the door, an odd look on his face.

"Until then, you plan on sleeping standing up?" I stripped off my shirt. His eyes glowed brighter, following my zipper's slow journey down. His hand strayed down to stroke his hardening length.

Just as slowly, I peeled my briefs down until my hard cock bobbed free. A soft growl rumbled from Mace's chest. I sat back on the bed, pushing my briefs off. I ended with my feet on the bed, knees bent and spread.

Mace's gaze zeroed in on my hand lazily stroking my cock. His sexy growl turned to a moan of longing. My cock jumped in agreement.

"Balls, Daniel..." The words seemed to stick in his mouth. His tongue darted out to lick dry lips.

I cupped my balls and rolled them in my hand. Ah, fuck, that felt good, and having Mace watch turned me on more than I could have imagined. Pre-cum welled from my slit and I spread it around.

The sound of Mace's zipper being ripped down drowned out our heavy pants. His hard cock thrust out, the angry red head slick with his juice.

"Annggg... Yeah, fuck yeah, Mace. Stroke yourself." I propped up on one elbow to watch.

He wrapped a big hand around his meaty cock and stroked up and down. Our chests heaved watching each other jack off. I could see his balls drawing up. Oh, fuck yeah. "Do it, Mace. Come all over me." Fuck, could I sound any more porno?

He took the two steps to stand over me. I licked my lips slowly, gaze glued to his huge pole. He stroked harder, faster. Once, twice, then he groaned and growled as his

cum spurted over my belly, hand and cock. I had to let go and grit my teeth, fighting the urge to come with him.

"You denied yourself, Daniel."

Careful of the growing ache in my thigh, I spread my legs wider, offering. "Wanted to save it."

Mace's sexy growl filled the room. My cock jumped, eager for what was coming. Fuck, yeah, soon I'd be coming with his hard cock thrusting deep in my ass! Great, now I was even thinking porno. And when did I get so eager to bottom?

I sucked in a breath as Mace dribbled cold lube on me. Then his fingers were there, hot, hard, rimming me until I thought I would go mad. Fuck, yeah, that might have something to do with it. He thrust one finger in, seeking my prostate.

"Fuck!" My hips thrust up and I pushed into his hand when he found it. He stroked me a couple times then withdrew, only to come back with two fingers, then a third.

"Aghh, yeah!"

His fingers pulled out, leaving me desperate and empty. Propped on my elbows, I watched him spread lube on his hard shaft.

He stepped forward, lining up with my hole. Slowly he teased me with the head, swirling it around my hole. He pressed in, deeper, deeper. He looped his arms under my legs, pressing them to my body, and his balls slapped against me as he sank all the way in.

"Fuck!" My cock jumped, and the burning need to come rose hot from balls to tip.

"Hold your legs up."

As soon as I'd sucked them to my chest he started pounding me. Gripping my hips, he thrust, and his balls slapped my ass. He altered his angle, catching my prostate. My climax slammed through me.

"Fuck, fuck! Ungggn!" I cried out as my seed mixed with his on my belly.

He groaned and shuddered, hot jiz filling my ass, and still he came at me, slower now, and with a hand stroking my cock in time.

"Ahhhgghh, yeah, Mace. Don't stop!" Pleasure so intense to almost be pain rose. He stroked deeper, longer, making sure to hit my spot over and over. My heart felt like it might explode, and I could hardly breathe.

"Yeah, fuck, gaah." I moaned and thrashed as he took me up again, a steady build, growing until dark spots danced at the corners of my vision. My cock felt so hot, so hard I thought it would split.

"Daniel!" Mace threw back his head and howled as he thrust deep and pulsed in my ass.

"Fuck, Mace!" I thrust into his hand and shot, my whole body convulsing in ecstasy. My lungs forgot to breathe as pulse after pulse of semen spurted out.

Mace collapsed half on me, half off. We lay that way until we caught our breaths enough to clean up and crawl under the sheets.

My last thought was the women didn't know what they were missing.

Chapter 3

A faint rumble rolled through the building, startling me from that twilight between asleep and awake. Mace bolted up in bed, a snarl curling his lips. He didn't bother to dress before racing from the room.

Fully dressed and carrying Mace's clothes, I hobbled into the main room on my crutches.

Most of the women huddled near the kitchen or on the balcony above. Every beast in the place looked on edge. Mace grabbed his pants, dressing while he calmly barked orders. His calm spread and the obvious tension began to settle back.

"Are they under attack?" Lindsey and Angie both sought me out.

"Fuck if I know. I just got here."

Angie looked nervously around. "I'd guess the Major isn't feeling patient today." She put her back to us in a defensive stance. Several beasts shot us killing glares as they assembled and moved out under Mace's orders.

The cold hand of fear stroked my spine like a long time lover. Shit, would it ever end?

The door flew open and a wolfman helped another streaked with blood and barely on his feet. I suspected he'd run from the outer watch post by the way everyone stopped what they were doing and focused on him.

"Mace," the runner paused to suck in a breath. "They've got a rocket launcher! A God damned rocket launcher. They took out the top floors of the south watch post."

Fuckin-A! Mace turned to me with that cold look.

"Hey, I had no fucking idea. Fix it guy, not military."

"We lose anyone?" Mace's voice stayed calm and controlled, ignoring the growing growls and snarls around us.

The runner shook his head no. "Think Fox's back may be broke. Eagle's bleeding bad. Got impaled by a splintered post. The rest of us caught shrapnel and debris, no burns."

"And then what?"

He sucked a breath. "They have some kind of speaker thing. They want the women and Daniel or they'll level this whole area."

Angie snickered. "Better let us go now. The Major doesn't fuck around."

Son of a bitch! That fucking dog humping whore! "Mace, I think they missed hitting us directly on purpose. It was a warning."

"Yeah, I got that." Mace set his hand on the runner's shoulder and gave it a squeeze. "Have Doc take a look at you. Tat, you'll take a team in Daniel's truck to bring our boys back."

Tat nodded and waved to Spike and a few others on his way out.

"Wait!"

Tat paused and turned to Mace.

"Hawk, Slade, you're in charge until I get back. Time I had a talk with these women." He stared right at Tat the whole time he spoke. "Tat, we'll ride with you most of the way. I don't want them to see the truck so we'll walk the last bit. Hopefully the wounded will have retreated out of the line of fire."

"Mace..."

Mace cut Doc off. "Take care of our men." He gave her a reassuring smile and shoulder squeeze. He looked up to the balcony. "China, if you want to join Sarah, I suspect they'd take you in."

Ice and Wraith stood behind her. Shock briefly flashed across their faces.

She turned to them and a silent message seemed to pass between them. "No, this is my home now." She gave Sarah a hug. "Tell them about me."

Sarah hugged her back with tears in her eyes. "I will. Maybe we'll see each other again." China hugged her tighter then stepped back between her guardians. A slight

smile curved Wraith's lips. Ice glanced down at her with what I would call affection. That was the most emotion I'd ever seen from any of them.

I turned to a more critical issue. "Mace, they're as likely to shoot you as not. Let us go. I'll talk to the council."

Mace cupped my face. "They've threatened my pack. We talk now or we know there's no talking. Then I expect Slade and Hawk to do what it takes to defend the pack and our territory."

I did not like the sound of that. Sounded like a whole lot of people could get dead. "Mace, don't. Not alone. There's no telling what any of them will do faced with a real live wolfman."

Mace smiled and leaned his forehead against mine. "I trust you to have my back, Daniel. It'll be all right."

Well, shit! Nothing like putting a little pressure on a guy. Didn't he understand I had no authority at the compound?

* * *

Mace spoke with each of the wounded before we headed around the corner. We'd be in plain view so I insisted that Mace walk behind me. Lindsey and Sarah took his sides. He shook his head, looking amused at the silly humans trying to protect him, but didn't protest. Angie nodded and led the way.

A pair of Humvees, the military kind not the yuppie ones, blocked the road. I couldn't tell how many troops the Major had brought with her but I saw at least two rifle or shotgun barrels for every Hummer door. Shit!

"Easy, ladies, he just wants to talk. OK?" No sooner had I spoken than someone opened fire behind us. I felt the first shot hit Mace as he threw me to the ground, covering me.

"Fuck, stop shooting!" I felt two more jolts hit him. His eyes caught mine. I saw not pain but sorrow. And love. Fuck this!

I rolled us both until I covered his bleeding body with mine, dimly aware of Lindsey screaming. Fire burned through my shoulder. Mace howled in my ear.

Closer I heard Lindsey. "Stop! Oh, shit. You shot Daniel!"

"Cease fire!" Echoed somewhere even more distant.

"Shit, Daniel, you really are too stupid to live." His pain-filled voice sounded sad as well as angry. He started to roll us over again but I resisted and won. Oh, fuck, he was hurt bad.

"Told you I'd have your back. Fuck!" Someone jerked me away from Mace. I heard guns cocking.

"No, leave him alone!" I struggled to get back to him, cover him with my body. They wouldn't kill me. Fuck, I hoped they wouldn't kill me.

Whoever had me kept pulling me away.

I grabbed Lindsey's arm. "Don't let them kill him, please," I begged. I never beg.

"Daniel, it's all right. Settle down, you're bleeding pretty bad." Nan, a medic, had my shirt ripped open, working on my shoulder. I felt a prick in one arm.

"Swear to me, Linds. Stay with him, don't let them hurt him." My head started to swim. I glanced down at my arm where they'd just shot me up with something. "Mace..." Darkness closed around the edges of my vision. I fought to stay awake. Vaguely I could hear other voices, arguing. Lindsey, Angie and the Major.

"No! Don't you dare. I'll tell the council, I swear I'll see you fry. He's not even moving. He's no threat." Was that Angie? Who wasn't moving? Mace, God, not Mace. Fuck. I struggled to get up but my body wouldn't listen. Waves of dark washed over me.

* * *

A cool hand had my wrist in a light grip. Soft voices spoke nearby but I couldn't quite make out what they said. My eyes fluttered open but didn't want to focus at first.

"Daniel?" The cool fingers brushed against my face. "Daniel? Wake up, honey."

"Mom?" Her face swam into view. "God, Mom!"

Tears tracked down her face as she bent over to hug me. "Thank God, Daniel. I thought I'd lost you and then they bring you in shot and all torn up." She snuffled

against my shoulder. "I can't believe what those things did to you! And then to use you like a human shield..." She shook her head.

I hugged her hard, then gently, with the arm not in a sling, urged her back. "Mom, Mace didn't use me. I was trying to protect him. They shot him in the back! They were trying to kill him and he hadn't done a fucking thing!"

She snagged a chair closer and sat down. Her face filled with concern. "That's what Lindsey told the council. No one believed her. The Major refused to let Angie or Sarah speak until they'd been debriefed. And they're now under a psych watch. She says they're too traumatized to speak with the council."

"Fuck!" I jerked upright and pain shot from my shoulder. "Son of a bitch. Mom, tell me he's alive. Fucking bitch! I'll fucking kill her if she's hurt him."

"Daniel Baker!" Mom's voice snapped me out of my tirade. "Enough with the language! As far as I know, he's still alive. Those things are notoriously hard to kill." She pursed her lips tightly. "How can you be defending it?"

"Him, Mom, not it, and his name is Mace. They're not all beasts."

She arched a brow and brushed back the blanket, pointedly looking at the healing claw marks and bruises littering my body. "Oh, really?"

Did I feel a little weird defending them? Oh, hell yes. But Mace's life might depend on it. "Yes, really, or I'd be dead already. Fu... damn it. I need to see him."

She shook her head. "You are getting some rest even if I have to sedate you again."

"Then promise me you'll look in on him. I know they shot him, at least three times." My anger spiked again. "In the fucking back! Didn't even give him a chance. He just wanted to talk." I tried to get up but she held me back with a firm hand on my good shoulder. My head swam from the sudden movement.

"All right, I'll look in on it, him. But first, I want to hear what happened from you. And why you're defending something --" I glared "-- someone who hurt you."

Fuck, one look and that tone of voice and I felt sick all over again. She handed me a glass of water after plumping some pillows behind my back. I drew a shaky breath and told her everything. Almost everything. She didn't need to hear about my sex life.

* * *

I napped for a while after she left. Linds woke me with a tray full of hot food. "Hey, bro. Glad to see you're awake."

"How is he, Linds? What the fuck is going on?"

She refused to look at me. "I don't know. Rumors are running wild and the council and the Major aren't talking, to anyone or each other. I'm pretty sure he's alive because that's what all the arguing is about. Daniel, most people want him dead. They don't understand, can't believe that he's anything other than a monster. We've all seen too much, lost too much."

I squeezed my eyes shut and swallowed down the cold lump in my throat. "How long was I out?"

"Too long. We were starting to worry."

I cocked my head. That really told me a lot. She must have read my frustration on my face. "You got shot yesterday morning. It's mid afternoon."

Fuck me, that was a long time to be out. "You've got to talk to them, Linds. Please."

Her eyes flew wide and a teasing smile lit her face. "Daniel Baker being polite? Almost begging?"

"Fuck you. You want me to beg, hell, I'll beg. I'll beg the whole fucking council!"

She stood up, pacing nervously. "You have feelings for him, don't you?"

Not sure what those feelings really were, but... "Yeah, Linds, I do. I care about the guy I've been shackled up with. Is that really so hard to believe?"

She shook her head. "No. What surprises me is, he cares about you, too. He watched Nan working on you completely uncaring what they did to him. At least..." She swallowed hard and looked away.

"At least? Until what? Tell me or I'm out of this bed."

"They, ah, subdued him. Knocked him out to tie him up and transport him."

Fuck, what wasn't she saying? How bad had they hurt him?

"Look, Daniel, they're afraid. You have to understand. They just wanted to make sure he didn't get violent on the way back. It was that or let them kill him there and then."

I stared at her guilty looking face. "Then why do you look so guilty?"

Turning for the door, she paused but didn't look back. "Get some rest. Eat, Daniel. It's all you can do right now. Mom will be back soon."

Like fucking hell. I tossed the covers back and tried to stand. The room swirled and dipped under my feet. Fuck it all to hell! I dropped back down on the bed. Shit, guess I wouldn't be racing out of here just yet.

* * *

Mom came in all smiles, the fake reassuring kind of smile. My stomach crunched and curdled the food I'd just eaten. Ah fuck, it was bad. That's what her face really said.

She did all the doctor stuff, asked all the doctor questions. I waited, staring like a cat and not saying one fucking thing. I know she hates it when I do that, just like Dad used to.

She heaved a sigh and turned away, pacing.

She won. I couldn't stand it anymore. "Just say it, for the love of God, Mom. He's dead isn't he?" *Please don't let him be dead.*

She turned back. A frown furrowed her brow. "Might be better if he was."

Fuck, could she be more cryptic? I gave her the Dad look.

"Stop doing that!" she snapped at me. "I hated it when your father did it. Fine." She hooked a chair with one foot, pulling it closer. "He's chained in the basement of the old barn. Alive, but Daniel, I couldn't get close enough to tell how bad he's hurt. He's... Damn it, he's gone feral or rabid or whatever. Snarls and snaps at anyone who comes in the room. We thought maybe he'd recognize your sister but..." She dropped her head to stare at her hands.

Fuck, there was more. I waited.

She drew a deep breath. "Lindsey said they beat him pretty good after they dragged you off him. Despite the fact he didn't resist, someone hit him in the head hard enough to knock him out. She, uh, she thought they might just shoot him in the head and leave him. But Sarah threatened to shoot all of them if they didn't leave him alone. Sarah standing up for him shocked them, so they pumped him full of drugs, brought him home and chained him in the storeroom down there."

I nodded. "And?"

"And the council has been debating what to do with him. Maybe he was something different before, but he isn't now. He's a beast. Trust me, I've seen him. He is totally out of control and as violent as they get."

I swung my legs over, waiting for my head to catch up.

"No, Daniel. You get back into bed right this minute!"

I stood. Good, legs working just fine. "I'm going. You can hand me some pants or I go like this." I pulled at the hospital gown that was all I had on. Why the fuck did we have hospital gowns?

She set her hand against my chest. "I know you feel responsible for it but really, son."

I grabbed her hand. "Stop calling him a fucking thing! All he wanted was to talk to the council. Fucking make peace, not start a war. He hurt no one and for that, we -- no, you -- have done nothing but treat him as a fucking monster!"

"Watch your language, young man!"

"I'm going, so let go of me." I jerked loose.

"They won't let you see him."

"What the fuck are they gonna do? Shoot me again?" I jerked on the sweats she handed me. She knew when it was pointless to argue.

My leg still hurt and I could only use one crutch, the other arm being in a sling to keep my shoulder still. I didn't care. All I could think about was Mace. Alone, hurt and fucking chained! And we're the civilized ones? Shit.

* * *

Kim and Chris stood guard outside the lower barn door. "Daniel, good to see you up and around. Hey, you can't go in there!" Kim made a grab for me and met my fist with her jaw. Fuck, that hurt!

I kicked the door open while Chris was distracted. That latch never was any good. They caught me at the back of the barn, right outside the storeroom.

"No one goes in without permission. Daniel, stop. We don't want to hurt you."

A loud growling howl full of pain and anger came from the other side of the door. Shouts from the yard told me I didn't have much time. Kim grabbed my shoulders, trying to push me back. I grabbed her gun.

"Back the fuck off!" That pained howl sounded again. "Unlock it or I swear I will fucking shoot you and take the keys!" Kim fumbled with the keys and unlocked the door.

I burst in and froze. In the stream of light coming from the far barn door stood Mace. One eye had swollen shut and a huge lump swelled along his jaw. Blood streaked his torn clothes and one arm hung limp. His one good eye glowed that eerie yellow-gold. His swollen lips curled up in a snarl.

His gaze fixed on me and a growl swelled from deep inside him.

"Daniel, don't. It's dangerous." The Major gripped my shoulder, the one with the bullet wound, while Kim took the gun from me. Mace roared and jumped toward me. Chains on his neck pulled him up short. My head spun and I felt sick, watching the chains digging in until blood ran from barely healed cuts under the chains.

"You fucking bitch! You fucking sadistic bitch!" I whirled on her, shoving her back with both hands, ignoring the pain screaming from my shoulder. "What the fuck did he do to deserve this? Huh? Not a fucking thing! He let your snipers go un-fucking-harmed just like he promised! And you shot him in the *back*!" My voice rang off the ceiling in my fury.

More of the Major's troops poured in with guns drawn. I backed up. All I could think about was protecting Mace. Shielding him with my body. I forgot he seemed a little pissed. Yeah, more like rip my fucking throat out enraged!

Claws sank into my skin as strong arms yanked me back against him. He snarled and growled with his jaws right by my ear. My heart pounded in my chest. Fuck. *Oh fuck!* “Mace, it’s me, Mace. Daniel, your chosen mate. Remember? You don’t want to hurt me. Mace, let up on the claws, man.” Ever try keeping your voice calm when faced with imminent dismembering? Not easy.

“Daniel?” Had he really said my name, or was that just another snarl?

“Hold still. I think I can get a head shot from here.” The Major’s voice grated across my nerves.

“No!” Mom grabbed the Major’s arm. “Don’t even think about it! You could just as easily hit Daniel.”

“You want to stand here and watch that thing tear him apart?”

Their fucking yelling wasn’t helping, but it might just get me killed. So far, Mace hadn’t done more than grab me and snarl, but I could feel as well as hear his growl growing stronger. “Get out, all of you. Now.” Amazingly, I sounded calm.

“God, Daniel. We can’t leave you.” Mom looked at a loss, for once.

“You got two fucking choices. Shoot us both or leave. ‘Cause if you shoot him and leave me alive I fucking swear I will kill you all! Now get the fuck out before you piss him off any more!” Shit, getting angry wasn’t going to help me, either.

“Daniel!” Still more growl than word, but at least I knew he was in there still.

I heard the click of a gun cocking. I threw my head up and shoved back with my feet. We tumbled to the floor in a heap as plaster exploded behind us. Mace rolled me under him but he was fucking weak enough I kept us rolling until I shielded him with my body again.

“Stop! Who gave you permission to fire?” Mom’s angry voice echoed around the room.

Mace growled and placed those sharp fucking fangs on my throat.

“All of you get out, now.” He hadn’t bitten me hard enough to cut my wind off, yet. My stupid suicidal cock noticed that it was Mace under me with an equally stupid hard on pressed against me.

"Oh, God, he's got you..."

I cut her off. "Go! I can handle this." I let myself relax against him. "Please, go." I heard shuffling. Mace rolled us so I was under him again, fangs still at my throat, his knees straddling my hips.

"No, don't!" That was Mom again, I assumed stopping the Major from doing something stupid enough to get my throat torn out.

Mace turned to snarl over his shoulder at them.

"Go on, we'll be OK. He just needs to calm down. Mom, trust me." I knew damned well I was risking my life, but I had to try.

"All of you, *out*." When Mom, former head of surgery, spoke in that voice, smart people moved. I peered around Mace's shoulder to see her face off against the Major just outside the door. She yanked it closed without breaking her stare-down with the Major. I fought back the urge to laugh. Looked a hell of a lot like Mace and Tat.

Chapter 4

Mace turned his one good eye back on me. Not much light made it under the door and through the wall cracks. Fuck, they'd left him in the dark. And his clothes were wet. And he stank. Fuck, the whole room stank! Old barn stink mixed with newer urine, blood and other even less pleasant smells.

"Hey, Mace." I blew out all my tension and rolled my head to the side, offering my neck. I fought the urge to fight when I felt his mouth on it. His tongue swiped along the length, up my jaw. His lips brushed mine.

"Daniel?" His voice sounded wispy and rough. I could feel the tension knotting his body.

"Yeah, it's me."

He kissed me like a drowning man. Our cocks slid along each other in a dance that had become so familiar. Relief and adrenaline fed my growing passion.

A faint taste of copper flowed from his mouth to mine. "Mace, are you bleeding?"

"Need you, Daniel."

"Let me up, Mace. You're hurt."

He growled softly, nuzzling against my neck. "Need you, now. Need to touch, to hold, need *you*." He punctuated his words with hard thrusts of his pelvis. My determined cock pulsed its approval.

I let my hands stroke over his back, and little whines followed the winces when I hit a sore spot. There were a fucking lot of them. His body moved over me, hungry, needy sounds replacing the growls and whines. Fuck, the floor was wet and lumpy. I pushed and tugged until he rolled. At the very end of his chain, the floor wasn't quite as disgusting.

I slipped a hand between us, grasping his cock through his soaked jeans. He moaned softly. "Yesss, so good, Daniel. *Uhggnnn...* need you." He fought with his zipper but with only one working hand, it was just pissing him off. Together, we managed. His hard, weeping cock leapt into my hand. I trailed a finger down its rigid length.

"Unnnnggh, yesss." He gripped me through my jeans.

"Fuck, Mace!" I wanted him, wanted to come with him. Together we got mine undone and I took us both in hand.

Mace curled his arm under my neck, pulling me tight. He devoured my lips, fucked my mouth with his tongue. Ah, God, that felt so good. I found the rhythm with my hand.

Our moans and sighs mingled, filling the ugly space with our life. My peak pushed from my tight balls. His cock swelled even harder. His head jerked back as his whole body jerked into release. Cum slicked my hand as I stroked us harder, faster.

"Fuck! Mace!" I jerked and pumped my seed to mix with his. His cock continued to pulse next to mine. Spasms of delight rocked us both.

He clutched me tight, twining our legs. Tremors ran through him, but far less tension. I stroked his back and he flinched when I crossed a bad spot.

"Mace, can we get the fuck up now? This floor's fucking wet and freezing and so are you."

He snorted. "They..." His voice caught and he coughed softly to clear it. "They said I stank so they threw cold water on me. Called it a shower."

"I'm gonna kill those fucking whores."

Chains rattled as he levered himself into sitting. "They told me you died. After I woke up here in chains. They said you died, from the gunshot." His voice sounded low and lost.

I took him in my arms and held him. He nuzzled the side of his face along my head and neck. I could feel his breath chuffing in and out like he was smelling me. "Tell me this isn't a dream, Daniel." His words rumbled in a growl.

"Dream? More like a fucking nightmare! I can't believe they just shot you like that! Or fucking tossed you down here."

His tone lightened. "In this dream, is there any water? To drink? I couldn't get much off the floor."

"No one brought you food or water?" My voice slid up to crack on a high pitch.

"Other than when they soaked me down? No." He buried his face in my throat. His lips nibbled and his tongue swept out to taste me.

Fuck! I stood with some effort. Mace let his hand trail down my body as I rose. "If I open that door, can you stay calm while I get you some water?"

He answered in a low growl. "Just don't go too far. If I see that woman again, no promises."

I hobbled to the door and jerked it open. Mace growled and I shielded my eyes against the sudden light. I could just make out two forms backlit in front of me.

"It's just me and Lindsey." Mom's quiet voice eased my brief panic.

"He needs water. They didn't even give him any fucking water!"

"Dear God. Daniel, I had no idea the Major would be so cruel." She stepped to the side where she could face Mace. "I apologize." He snarled and she jerked back.

"Mom, don't stare him in the eye. Especially not right now."

She cleared her throat. "Right, Lindsey was telling me." She waved at my sister. "OK, Mace, I'd like to get a closer look at you. You OK with that?"

Mace's deep growl had a wary tone to it. "Depends. Are you going to shoot me or beat me with a pipe?"

"Good God. No. Daniel, grab that lantern. The light in here sucks." She covered her nose against the stench.

I held the lantern over Mace's head. Fucking bitches! My hand shook with outrage. "Beat him pretty good? Fuck, they nearly beat him to death!" Despite the odd shadows cast by the lantern, I could see most of his face was mottled with bruises. Blood streaked his torn clothes and his arm looked broken. "Fuck them all!"

"Hold that steady and stop with the swearing. Really, Daniel, I taught you better than that."

Mace cocked his brow over his one working eye. "Ah, Mace, this is my mother, Dr. Sylvia Baker. A real doctor, surgeon."

She glanced over at me in a scowl.

"They have an ER nurse they call Doc," I explained with a shrug.

She went back to examining him. Her face showed less and less emotion, which meant someone would be catching hell later. "Mace, I need to get you out of here to treat your injuries. You have to stay calm and behave. Can you do that? Can you walk?"

His lips twitched slightly. "Yes to both, just as long as that woman keeps away."

"Don't you worry about the Major. You just focus on walking."

He used his good arm to steady himself as he climbed to his feet. Without hesitation, Mom reached out to steady him when he wavered. "Lindsey, help me get this chain unlocked and off him."

They'd run the chain around his neck and secured it so they could stand at the door and drag him against the back wall. Deep oozing sores showed where he'd fought it.

Mace cradled his broken arm in the other while they removed the chain.

Lindsey and Mom put Mace between them, Linds with a hand under his good arm. Not that he seemed to need that much help once he found his feet, but Mom looked ready to help, or maybe just protect him. I went first, squinting against the bright Colorado sun. The Major stood just outside the barn door with several of her troops, all with guns pointed at us.

"Back the fuck off!" Not caring if they shot me or not I stomped toward the Major. Just behind her line of gunwomen stood the bulk of the compound, including the council.

"Get out of the way, Daniel. That thing is dangerous," the Major snarled at me.

"The only fucking dangerous thing here is you! Crazy vicious bitch!"

"They kill, Daniel. They're animals. Why you of all people would insist we keep that thing alive I can't understand."

Everyone stiffened and looked over my shoulder. I turned to look. My gut twisted and I felt sick. He stood tall in tattered clothes covered in blood, bruises and filth. The broken arm? Pulped like maybe someone had beaten him with something solid, like, oh, a pipe? I could see bone peeking out of the mangled flesh. The side of his jaw had a clear shoeprint bruise. It wasn't just the eye swollen, that whole side of his face swelled into a grotesque mask. Two of the slugs had gone clean through, leaving ugly exit wounds low in his gut.

Squinting against the bright light, he focused his one good eye on the Major. His torn and swollen lips peeled back in a snarl. Dark bloody goo oozed from his neck and mangled arm. How the fuck could even a wolfman stand and walk with that kind of damage?

I turned and stalked closer to the Major. "*He's* an animal? What the fuck does that make *you*? Never, not once did they ever chain me in the dark and beat the living shit out of me!"

"We've all heard about your extensive injuries, Daniel. What you're feeling is Stockholm syndrome."

If she was trying to sound sympathetic, she failed. That smug, tight-lipped smile ruined it. "Compared to this, I got slapped a couple of times for being a smartass." A few snickered -- I had a reputation. "And they *always* took care of any injuries. And, horror of horrors, the nasty beasts *fed* me and gave me water, wine even. In a glass instead of expecting me to lick it off the filthy floor!"

Several of the Major's soldiers had the good graces to look ashamed, at least now that the rest of the compound knew what they'd done. Weapons lowered at the urging of the council.

Except for the Major. Her lips drew into a tight line and her aim never wavered.

A hand clutched her shoulder. Kacey, one of the council members, spoke over her shoulder. "I doubt he can cause trouble at the moment." Her gaze lingered on his

nearly destroyed arm then looked up at Mom. Kacey looked a little green around the gills.

The Major glared at Mace. He bared his fangs and growled loudly.

Mom urged him forward. "Come on, dear. Let's get you patched up, clean and fed, shall we?" She looked at the Major. "Move. Now. This is still my ranch."

The Major snorted, tossed her head and stalked away, tossing back, "When he starts tearing you all apart, I'm going to laugh and let him."

"I'll be right behind you, Mom, Mace." I turned to Kacey. "You better pray he recovers fully. His pack is going to want their leader back."

She looked startled. "Their leader? Like alpha wolf or something?"

"Yup, and he's got some real loyal followers. Unlike the beasts we've known, this group is well organized and armed. I never got a total count, but there are easily between twenty and thirty, and that doesn't count the women who will fight beside them. They'll tear this place to fucking pieces. Mace wanted to avoid that, at least until a certain gun-happy fascist nearly killed him." I stalked away, leaving her with her mouth hanging open.

* * *

I caught up to them at the clinic. First we had to get the muck off him along with his trashed clothes. "Grab a chair and he can sit in the shower while we get him cleaned up a bit." Lindsey had already started on his shredded clothes. Mom had no doubt gone to set up the surgery room.

It was freaking me out having my sister's hands all over my boyfriend. *Boyfriend?* Huh, I guess.

Mace didn't seem bothered at all that my sister was helping him strip. "Ah, Linds, I can take it from here."

She chuckled. "The idea is to get him clean, Daniel. Somehow I think you two might forget that."

I stared at her. What the hell was she talking about? She pointed to the growing bulge in Mace's jeans. I snickered and shook my head. Was it a wolfman thing or just Mace? He seemed to be hard as often as not, at least around me.

Mace smiled and shrugged, giving me a what-do-you-expect look. I got wash rags and warm water as Lindsey finished slipping his pants off. I tried really hard not to stare at that bad boy thrusting out from his groin.

Shifting my own package, I caught Lindsey silently laughing at me. I started rinsing dirt and grime off, careful not to get any more into his wounds.

"Men! Even when you're this close to dying." She pinched her fingers almost together. She picked up a rag and started on his back.

"I'm not dying. Trust me, been worse." Mace snorted.

We both looked at him, then at the three gunshot wounds showing clearly on his back, two that went straight through, the mangled arm and more bruises than I had. Then looked back at him.

"Seriously, Doc pulled six bullets out of me once, after I fell about twenty feet. I've forgotten how many bones I broke."

Lindsey stared wide-eyed, mouth open at his tale. Mace smiled. It didn't look so good with his eye swollen shut and his jaw mottled with purplish bruises. "And then there was that time I tangled with Tat. I think Doc put over a hundred stitches in and she only did the really deep gashes. Broke some bones then, too."

"Damn, you guys really are tough." She shook her head.

Mom walked in on the end of this. "If you three are done playing around, that arm isn't going to heal like that. And I suspect even one of you can get sepsis if we don't get that last bullet out."

"Yes, ma'am." Even with his rough voice he sounded contrite.

A smile quirked the corners of Mom's mouth. "A polite patient. Maybe you can teach my son some manners."

Mace snorted. "Not likely."

We finished cleaning him under Mom's watchful eye, got him in a gown and into the surgical room. I'd worked hard to make sure we had the best medical equipment we could under the circumstances. We were missing a few hard to move pieces, like an MRI and CT scan, but we did have a portable x-ray. And until the tanks ran out, compressed oxygen. We even had some IV equipment. We could make our own sterile saline, but transfusions... we could type and match the blood, but not for Mace.

"Mace, I'm going to give you a sedative, but I don't have any painkillers that work on your kind. Your arm is going to take some serious rebuilding. It's going to hurt. If it gets to be too much, say something before you feel the need to scream." She paused a moment. "Or get the urge to bite me."

He nodded. "Just put it back together best you can. I'll heal."

"If you were human..." She stopped, suddenly aware of what she'd just said.

"I know I'm not human anymore." His soft voice filled the sudden silence of the room.

She nodded. "If you were, I'd cut it off. There's so much damage, and the risk of throwing a blood clot or getting infected is high. I'm still not sure I can save it."

His good eye narrowed. "Do your best, but don't cut it off. I'd be better off dead."

Mom looked at me with a question in her eyes.

"He's the top guy, and, ah, they don't elect their leaders."

She nodded to Betty, her assistant, a former vet tech, who injected the first dose of sedative.

"Go lay down, Daniel. This is going to take a while and you *are* fully human. You need to take care of yourself, for once."

I sighed. When she used that tone there was no arguing.

* * *

Kim and Chris stood guard outside the room. Kim pursed her lips in a frown, a nice red spot swelled along her jaw where I'd popped her. "The Major wants to see you."

I snorted. "She can kiss my ass. Doctor's orders that I get some rest." It's hard to swagger using a crutch, but I gave it my best shot.

Unfortunately, Kacey wouldn't be put off so easily. She nailed me right outside the clinic. "Daniel, we need answers. Now. You've endangered us all by bringing that thing here."

I stopped. "He is not a fucking *thing*!"

She held up her hand to stop my burgeoning tirade. "So convince us otherwise." She gestured toward the main house.

"Shouldn't we wait for all the council members?"

"I know your mother spoke with you already. And frankly, I don't think this can wait. The whole compound is on edge. And like you said, if they find us it could be bad." This time she yanked my arm. I either went with her or pitched face first into the dirt.

Chapter 5

A crowd massed around the door to the big house. Even though the new barracks were larger, we still called it that. Next to the original 1880's ranch house, it was big, a good three thousand sprawling square feet plus the new additions.

Miss Ellie, third generation rancher, the oldest member of the compound at 72 and a council member, waited on the porch to give me a big hug. "Welcome home, son." She had tears in her eyes. "I can't tell you how glad I am you're home safe and sound." She gave me a last squeeze and let me go.

A gauntlet of well-wishers formed on my way to the door. I hadn't thought anyone really gave a shit other than my family.

The council used what had been the formal dining room. Kacey set me at the foot. Normally, Mom would sit at the head. It was her house, after all. The table sat eight, so seven council members, leaving an extra chair for whoever the council needed to talk to -- the hot seat, and I had a feeling it would scorch my butt before this was over. Meetings were never in private, limited only by space in the room. I could barely get to my chair through the throng.

Kacey sat to the right of Mom's chair and in her absence, ran the meetings. "Let's start at the beginning, when the beasts captured you."

The Major flew in looking pissed as hell. Her angry glare lit on me and I smiled while giving her the finger. "You have gone too far this time, boy."

She liked to call me boy, even though she was only ten years older. Did she really think that would intimidate me? It hadn't in the two and a half years she'd been here. Fists clinched in anger, she stomped past me for the other end of the table.

Kacey gave the Major an acknowledging nod before turning back to me. "All right, let's hear it."

The Major barely let me get started before interrupting. "I'm amazed you managed to convince them you were an asset before they killed you. You must be very talented to talk with beast cock in your mouth. Or did they just ream your ass?" The Major's smug tone grated across my nerves.

"Fuck you. They could smell the ethanol in my truck. Mace wanted to know about it."

"So you bent over and gave it up just like that. Pathetic."

I knew she was baiting me. Fuck if it wasn't working.

Kacey leaned forward. "Major, that's quite enough. Let's keep this out of the gutter. To speed things up, no more questions until he finishes. Daniel, please continue."

"As long as you listen -- *really* listen." I glared at the Major, who rocked back in her chair with a smug smile, but she kept quiet.

The room had gotten pretty quiet by the time I finished.

"So there are a number of women we need to rescue." The Major leaned forward.

"How the fuck do you get that?"

"You said there were women being held by this pack. They obviously need rescuing."

"Un-fucking believable! You only hear what suits you. Those women don't want to be *rescued*. Ask Angie or Sarah. Hell, a good number of them will tell you Mace rescued them already." Trying to convince the Major was pointless, it was the rest of the council I spoke to.

Kacey let out a deep sigh. "Leaving that for the moment. The real question is what do we do with him? And, Major, we all know your opinion already. I want to hear some others."

What? They were going to decide his fate just like that?

"Do any of you even care why he's here? He knew there was a good chance he'd get shot on sight but he came anyway. Any thoughts on why?"

The Major laughed. "He's a stupid beast?"

I ignored her completely. "Because he wanted to talk to this council. You declined his invitation so he was coming to you."

"Invitation? Like we would put more of us at risk by going to their den? He was already holding four of our people, doing God knows what to them, to you." Jill could always be counted on to support the Major.

"What did he want, Daniel?" Kacey asked quietly.

"To reach some understanding. That's their territory, their home, and we keep coming in stealing their stuff and trying to kill them whenever we can."

"So what? Like they wouldn't attack us given the chance. Look what they did to you." Jill jumped in again.

"Hey, in case you haven't noticed, I'm still alive. Believe me, I didn't expect to be at first. I've seen what beasts can do. Shocked the living hell out of me to find out they aren't all like that. You should try talking to him, after he's out of surgery getting his fucking arm put back together." I glared at the Major.

She shrugged. "He shouldn't have put up a fight."

I started to laugh. They stared like I'd gone completely nuts. "I heard the same fucking thing from Mace. Shit, you're so much like them it's scary. Sure you don't have fangs?" I leaned close, dipping my head as if trying to look in her mouth.

The Major drew herself up, a cold killing stare pinning me. I stared right back.

"Let's leave that for now," Kacey calmly redirected us. "What can you tell us about their compound?"

The Major smiled evilly. "Like how many there are. What the setup is. You mentioned guns?"

I pushed back. "Like fucking hell I'll tell you any of that!"

She smirked. "I'd heard you let them fuck you into submission. That's why the military shouldn't take queers."

I snorted. "Fuck you, bitch. I wouldn't tell Mace those things about us, either."

"According to Angie, you told them a lot about us, enough for them to be well armed and prepared to kill us when we showed up."

"Hello, innocent women and children needing protection."

"Innocents we could have rescued."

"Which is why you threatened to flatten the whole area with a rocket launcher."

She sat back with a smug grin. "It got me what I wanted."

"One risks his life to negotiate with us. The other shoots him in the back with some of her own in the line of fire! Which one is really the monster here?" That earned me another glare. I flipped her off again.

"For pity sake. You two are worse than kids! I'd like to know more about their social structure. You said this Mace is in charge?"

"Try talking to Sarah or Angie, maybe you'll fucking listen to them. The doc ordered me to get some rest. After getting shot and all." I waved the arm in the sling and sent a cold hard stare toward the Major.

Kacey looked directly at the Major. "We've been told they are too traumatized to speak to us."

"And you fucking believe that? Talk to Sarah. I think you'll find her perspective rather interesting." I shoved my chair back and hobbled for the door.

Frank blocked the doorway, glowering at me, his tone as sneering as always. "Figures the beasts are God damn fairies."

I smiled and stepped forward, ready to give him a big hug. "Frank, God, I missed you, buddy."

"Agggk, you're disgusting!" Frank looked suitably horrified and as expected backed out of my way. Fucking prick. I would get trapped in a compound with the most homophobic redneck in the whole country.

* * *

Feeling exhausted after my grilling by the council, I hunkered down on the couch in the clinic waiting room and promptly fell asleep.

A firm hand on my shoulder woke me up. "I thought I sent you to your place to get some rest."

I stretched and sat up. "Got shanghaied by the council on the way there." Her eyes narrowed and she got that too calm look. "Don't sweat it, Mom. How is he?"

She sat down next to me. "Better than I expected. As soon as I'd get two parts pressed together, his body would start visibly healing. I think his arm will heal up just fine." She stood. "I cast his arm but have no idea how long it will take to heal. At any rate, he's resting but not exactly out. And, Daniel," she set her hand on my arm. "He's not to leave the room. They have shoot to kill orders if he does. Very few of us are comfortable with him running loose."

Part of me was pissed as hell but I knew as well as any how much damage his kind could do. Worse than a bull in a china shop. More of an enraged bull with a death wish in a china shop. I nodded in understanding. "Could you get some dinner sent over? Enough for four? They eat a lot."

She smiled. "I'll bring it myself. Make sure he rests and gets plenty to drink." She gave me a hug. "I missed you, son," she whispered in my ear before leaving.

With a nod to Kim and Chris, I let myself in. He lay on his side facing the door, his left arm in a cast and secured in a sling. Bandages swathed his shoulder and what I could see of his torso. The swelling on his face had gone down enough he could look at me with both eyes. A slight smile curved his lips.

"Hey, Mace." My heart stuttered and picked up a fast rhythm. Even covered in bandages he looked damn sexy!

"Daniel, come, lay with me. You look as tired as I feel. Those shots they kept sticking me with are making me feel funny." His words slurred slightly and his voice still sounded rough and strained.

"Shit, that's a good thing, man. Enjoy the high." I hiked my hip next to him on the bed.

He wiggled over. "Let me hold you for a bit. I need you, Daniel." He sounded less desperate than he had earlier, but the need was clear.

"Have some water first." Done with that, I stretched out next to him with a sigh. He ran his good arm under my neck, urging me to press closer. I snuggled against him,

lying on my back since my wounded shoulder didn't want me laying on it, and pulled the sheet up over both of us. It felt so right to be here, like this. His breathing relaxed along with the tension I'd felt in him.

He nuzzled into my neck. "You feel so good. You make me feel so good."

What the fuck did he mean by that? Before I could ask, his head fell to the pillow and his arm went limp. A deep sighing breath and I figured he was asleep. I settled down in his warmth and drifted off with him.

* * *

The door opened without warning and before I had really even woken, Mace vaulted over me and stood toe to toe with Mom. Growling. The only thing between them was a tray full of food.

"Easy, Mace. Mom, stop staring at him, it's a challenge." I swung my feet to the floor but worried if I got up it could trigger more than the current stare-down.

Mace's growl deepened and the guards outside filled the doorway, guns drawn. Mom blocked their way. "This is my clinic, young man. I will not pussyfoot around anyone, and especially not my patient." Her chin lifted and she stretched up so she wouldn't have to look up so far to stare him in the eyes. His growl rumbled deeper, louder. "Growl and snap all you want. This. Is. My. Clinic. You can move so I can set this heavy tray down or you can lick your dinner off the floor!"

I winced. I hated that tone. It still made me feel like a little kid, and pissed me off all at the same time.

One-handed, Mace took the tray and set it aside. A small smile tugged at his lips. "Your mother is alpha, too." It was a statement.

"You have no fu..."

Her lips pressed tight but she still stared at Mace.

"Um, idea how alpha." I wanted to scream at her for being so pig headed and almost getting her throat torn out but it wouldn't have mattered. She'd been head of surgery. Dealing with arrogant, overconfident men came with the territory. Of course most surgeons wouldn't really rip your head off.

He dropped his head slightly. He fucking dropped his head! "Your den."

Fuck me. Mace giving ground.

"Can your guards put away their guns now?" Neither one had moved.

"Get out, you two, now," Mom tossed over her shoulder. "And close the door!"

I sighed and sank back against the bed. Mace slouched into a chair in the corner of the room, which put the nightstand with the food between us. He didn't wait but dug right in.

"Normally, one would say thank you. And eat slowly. I'd hate for you to throw it back up."

Mace froze with a spoon of stew halfway to his mouth. His eyes unfocused for a moment like maybe he was remembering something. "Uh, thank you, ma'am."

Mom smiled and found the chair on the other side of the door. She arched a brow at me.

"Thanks, Mom, for the food and for not letting them shoot Mace. Again."

She chuckled. "I hate to have to do things over."

"I see now where Daniel gets it from. Alpha mother, alpha son."

I'd never thought of it quite that way but it would explain why our relationship was rocky at best.

Mom's brow wrinkled. "Alpha son?"

Mace snorted. "Never met someone so determined to get his ass kicked."

She chuckled again. "Always was stubborn and willful. And that mouth of his could try the patience of a saint!"

"Hey, I'm sitting right here." Shit, that sounded petulant.

"I can see you, dear, I'm not blind."

Thanks, Mom, for verbally swatting me like a kid in front of my lover. Mace choked on his food trying not to laugh. Mom's lips drew down in that tight line. Then I guess she saw the same humor Mace did. She chuckled and shook her head.

"Was his father like that too?" Mace asked once he could breathe again.

"Of course not. Daniel's father had more sense."

He smiled into his food.

"I must say, I had no idea you would have a sense of humor, or manners. I'm beginning to see why you see yourself as different from the other beasts -- excuse me, wolfmen -- we have known in the past."

"We call them rabids. We are pack." Mace shrugged. "Daniel thinks wolfman sounds better."

"I find myself agreeing. You are as much a man as anything else, aren't you?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. We have different instincts. Humans don't seem to know how to submit properly. We have to teach our women."

"So you prefer your women to cower?" Her voice chilled the room several degrees.

Mace cocked his head, puzzling it out. "Cower, I don't think so. No, they just need to know their place and not challenge those above them. That is how pack works. The strongest rule."

"Hmmm," she tapped her chin in thought. "Much like a wolf pack then. And of course, Daniel lacks your strength."

Mace smiled and winked at me. "Physical strength, yes. Inside he is strong. He won't accept his place at the bottom."

She stared haughtily at him. "I should hope not. I didn't raise any weak kneed sheep."

His grin widened, twisting the healing bruises on his face.

Mom leaned forward, brows drawn down tight while she focused on his face. Mace froze then a low growl erupted.

She sat back quickly. "Sorry, I just noticed how much the swelling has gone down on your face. Amazing, really amazing."

Mace shrugged. "If I hadn't lost so much blood, it would have been gone by now."

"You do feel pain though, don't you?"

Mace looked surprised. "Of course I feel pain. I just know I'll heal and how fast."

"Ah, lots of experience?"

"You don't get to be top without a few scrapes and bruises."

A sharp rap sounded at the door just before it swung open. "Doc, Daniel." Allie nodded to us. "Miss Ellie wants to organize a welcome home gathering for Daniel. If he's up for it."

Mom's lips pursed. "Not tonight. He needs to rest."

"Ah, for Christ sake, Mom. I'm not ten. I think I can decide if I'm up to a little get together!"

"I'm speaking as your doctor. I did just sew you up yesterday. Tomorrow is soon enough. Now, you need to go get some sleep. I'll walk you to your place." She stood.

"I think Mace might need some pants before he goes tromping around outside."

She and Allie stared at me with blank expressions.

"I'm not leaving him here, alone."

"Surely you're not afraid someone is going to sneak in and try to kill him?"

I shrugged. "Had crossed my mind. Especially since those two answer to the Major. Besides, my bed is much more comfortable."

Mom's eyes narrowed and her lips drew into a line. "Too many are still afraid of him to let him run loose." She arched a brow to shut me up. "And he's safer in here. My clinic, remember?"

"Then I'm staying here." I crossed my arms over my chest.

"Daniel..."

"I'm a big boy. I can decide where I sleep."

She glanced over at Mace, who was finishing every last crumb on the tray. A hint of amusement tugged at the corners of his lips. She sighed deeply. "I guess we could fit another bed in here."

"Don't bother, won't get used."

"Seriously, Daniel, try not to be a pain in the ass for once. You're not sleeping in a chair."

"Mom," I leaned close, "I told you I was gay how long ago? I won't be sleeping in the chair either."

She looked from me to Mace, who had the smuggest smile I had ever seen. His gaze traveled down me in clear lust.

"*Eeww*, TMI!" Allie fled out the still open door. I heard someone in the hall snickering.

Mom took my arm and tugged me out the door and down the hall to her office. I could hear Mace's chuckle cut off when a snickering Kim slammed the door.

"Are you telling me you, the two of you, have what? A relationship? Even after he held you captive and let someone tear the living hell out of you? Daniel, I can tell those injuries were serious. You could have died."

"Tell me something I don't know. What's between us is... It's hard to explain."

"Daniel, I know you haven't been with anyone since Steve died, but are you sure about this? It really could be Stockholm syndrome."

I toed the floor, debating what to tell her. Would they try to use me against him if they knew I was his chosen mate? Or would that help? "Look, I don't know where it's going, but I do know I enjoy being with him, most of the time. Which is as much as I can say for anyone I've ever been with."

"Even Steve?" She threw the gauntlet in my face. Steve had been my world. Before he was killed in action, before the virus changed everything.

"Shi --" I tried again. "You know how long it took Steve and I to mesh. Mace and I are good together. Me and his pack? Not so good, but better than Mace and my 'pack' at this point." I put my hand on her shoulder. "Mom, we both know it's not going to be easy. But I'm never easy, you know that."

"You're free now. You don't have to go back to that pack of his."

"Assuming the Major doesn't kill him first, are you planning on just letting him go?"

Her face went blank. "I don't know how we could keep him, and I've never sanctioned killing in cold blood, ever. And, Daniel, I will see to it more than just the Major's soldiers are here tonight. You let me worry about that woman."

I gave her a hug. "Thanks. And I will make sure we both get plenty of rest. No strenuous exercise." It took a great deal of effort not to grin. We'd just have to take it easy.

She snorted and left.

Chapter 6

Mace was lying on his side, naked and aroused. Long black hair tumbled around his face and over the white sheets and pillow. Fuck, my cock jammed itself into a knot inside my briefs. I slipped the door shut behind me, but not before I heard the sharp intake of breath that said someone had gotten an eyeful. They could look, but they better keep their fucking hands to themselves!

I raised my brows and gave him an approving look. "I told her we'd get plenty of rest. No strenuous exercise."

"Which is why I undressed already. Wouldn't want you to exert yourself getting me naked." His lips twitched and his eyes sparkled impishly.

I shucked my sweatshirt. "You do know we've got an audience right outside the door?"

His grin bared fangs and he winked evilly. "Can't see much with the door closed. Maybe you should open it. They might want to join us."

"Fuck that! What is it with you guys and orgies?" I couldn't help laughing. I knew he was baiting me. Fucking bastard was getting off on it, too, by the way his cock jumped when he said it.

I finished stripping down and slid in next to him. "How much of my conversation could you hear?"

He smiled that wicked smile. "Other than all of it? So, who's this Steve guy?"

I sighed and lay on my back. He ran a finger up and down my cock. It rose to meet his touch, eager for more. Pleasure shivered up my spine. He toyed with the head. I gasped and thrust my hips up.

"So, who is he?"

"Huh?" Like I could talk when he was doing that? Hell, I couldn't even think straight.

"Steve, who's Steve?" One finger stroked along the slit.

"Oh, fuck, Mace! You can't do that and ask me to talk." He pulled his hand away. "Fuck, don't stop."

"Then answer."

Fucking bastard! "Can we talk about this later?"

He arched a brow.

"Fine. Steve was my love, my life. He was leaving the Navy and we were going to spend the rest of our lives together. Only he died on his last mission." At least that's what the Navy said, but without a body to bury, I'd always wondered, even hoped they were wrong.

Mace grew quiet, stroking my face, running his hand through my hair. "I'm sorry, Daniel. I shouldn't have pushed. It's hard to lose a mate."

I sighed. "It's been over six years. I should be over it by now." And yet, being with Mace brought up those feelings like it was yesterday. A look, a gesture or a turn of phrase would remind me of Steve. The worst was that moment on waking when I'd forget who held me. It was tearing me apart.

Mace leaned in to kiss me softly. "I wanted to tear his head off. Just thinking of you with someone else makes me crazy."

What the fuck was I supposed to say to that? Couldn't think of a damn thing so I just kissed him back. My tongue pressed on his lips, demanding entrance. He moaned softly and opened. Our tongues twined, danced, fought for dominance.

Biting back a groan, I rolled to my side facing him. I slipped my thigh between his legs, letting it caress his balls.

"Umm, Daniel!" Mace thrust his hard cock against my thigh. His good hand was pinned under me. Mine was trapped between us. Fuck, we made a pair!

Wriggling until I could reach, I circled the tip of Mace's engorged cock with a single finger. I toyed with the slit and spread the pre-cum leaking out around the head.

Mace's breath stuttered in his chest. "God, Daniel. Yessssss." His words turned into that sexy whine that got me harder than steel.

I stroked down his length to cup his balls. He gasped and pulled me into a kiss. His tongue thrust into my mouth and his hips into my hand. I opened and sucked his tongue like his cock. He moaned into my mouth and thrust harder.

I started stroking him in earnest, matching the rhythm his tongue set as it plundered my mouth. With a deep chuff, he pulled back. "Stroke us both, come with me."

I wrapped my hand around us both but the awkward position prevented me from getting much motion. I flexed my hips, fucking my own hand. Mace matched me.

"Ah, fuck!" That felt unbelievably good!

Mace's whines deepened almost to a growl. But I still couldn't get the grip I wanted. "Hang on." I used my good hand and a fair amount of wriggling to free my other arm from its sling and rolled to my back just long enough to grab a handful of lotion. I shifted until I could use both hands on us. As long as I didn't move my shoulder too much it would work. "Yeah, that's better."

Setting a slow burn rhythm, I jacked us both. Our breaths panted into each other as our rhythm increased. The warmth in my groin washed away all the aches and pains. Good, so fucking good.

"Uggnn, yessss! Daniel!" Mace's face relaxed into that fallen angel look as his body tensed just before releasing.

I squeezed us just a bit tighter. Fuck! My balls drew up and our cocks swelled together. "Mace!" My body bucked and shook as I shot between us. Mace followed me, his normal howl echoing.

We both jumped at the sharp rap on the door. "Daniel, everything OK in there?"

I snickered. "It is now."

Soft swearing leaked through the wooden barrier.

Mace pulled me close and whispered in my ear. "I think they wanted to join us."

Fuck, horny, lonely women and an oversexed wolfman. As if worrying he'd get shot wasn't enough.

Mace nuzzled my neck and held me tight. Would have been nice to spoon but then one of us would be lying on our bad arm. Finally, I lay on my back and Mace draped himself over and around me.

* * *

The bathroom was down the hall. Would have been nice to have one in each room but when you're building things without power tools, simple is better. At least that was how I felt when building it. Now that I needed to use the bathroom I cursed myself for being so fucking lazy. Would it have really been that much work?

Just to come down here, Mace had three women with guns shadowing his every move. Fucking nightmare in the middle of the night and not much better first thing this morning.

Mom was checking over and re-bandaging Mace's wounds when I got back.

"There you are, dear. How's the shoulder? I hope you didn't strain it last night after I told you to rest." Her chiding tone started the morning off just perfect.

I love waking up to feeling like a witless kid. I wondered how far the juicy gossip about Mace and I had gotten. Without celebrity TV, everyone and anything became food for entertainment.

"It hurts, but it's better. Wish I had some of that shit Doc makes. Um, the other Doc, Mace's doc." Fuck, I even sounded like a stupid kid.

"What stuff would that be?" She'd finished with Mace and started on me.

I shrugged. "She's got this pain medicine that's about half whiskey. Works really well. And then there's the stuff she made from plasma taken from the wolfmen. It speeds up healing, a lot, or I wouldn't even be on crutches with this leg wound. I might not have made it at all."

She stared at me then at Mace. "Plasma? Blood plasma?"

"How the fu -- heck should I know?"

She gave me that look again, the “you’re such a disappointment” look. “I see. Mace, you feel up to breakfast at the big house? Daniel, get dressed.”

Great, she asks him and tells me.

“I’m not on the menu, am I?” His voice deadpanned it but his eyes twinkled with a hint of mirth.

Mom looked horrified for a moment then laughed. “No, I promise. Just a few for breakfast and then the council wants some of your time. But if you get tired, just say something. That goes for both of you. You’ve both been seriously injured and shouldn’t be stressed. Believe me, under other circumstances, you’d both still be in bed. Alone. Here’s something for Mace to wear.” She gave me a stern look before walking out.

* * *

Getting dressed with only two good arms between us proved entertaining. Just try putting even something simple like sweats on with one hand. Laughter may be the best medicine but not so much when everything hurts. Not that Mace would admit it.

Out of desperation, we had to get Angie, who was on guard duty, to help with the shirts. All three women acted like we’d lost it. Bet they never thought a beast could be playful or laugh.

Still, all three had guns drawn as Mace stepped into the hall, although Angie kept an eye on the other two more than on Mace.

We stopped just outside the door. Looked like the whole compound had turned out to watch him walk across the dirt yard to the big house. Mace carefully looked over the crowd and even the roofs. His head cocked and I swear if he’d had wolf ears they would have been twitching. Then he went back to scanning the crowd. His gaze stopped on each rifle-toting woman, six in all, including two taking aim out the windows of the barracks. Several in the group had bats or other chunks of something solid. Most looked nervous. The scary ones’ faces filled with hate. Felt like at any minute it could turn into a lynch mob.

“What the fuck do you think he’s going to do? Start trying to eat people? Seriously?” My mocking didn’t seem to make a dent.

A low growl vibrated deep in his chest.

Mom stepped out on the porch. "Don't you all have something to do besides stare at MY son and MY patient? No one's getting eaten *or* shot this morning."

The Major leaned against the wall of the barracks. A building I'd designed and helped build for her. Fucking ungrateful bitch. She didn't say anything, not even when Mace caught her gaze. For several tense moments they stared. I could hear his growl growing louder -- loud enough others could hear it too.

"Hey, Mace. Breakfast is waiting." I stepped between them, effectively breaking the standoff.

If I hadn't known him like I did, I might have thought he was relaxed. But I'd seen this utter stillness while walking before. Just before he tore into Tat. Fuck, he was prepared for a fight. Not that I could blame him with half the compound looking ready to take him apart.

Mom held the door open and her stern frown halted the crowd that wanted to follow. "After we have a quiet breakfast, the council will meet for a civil conversation with our guest. Anyone who brings any weapons of any kind in my house will be looking for a new home. Am I clear?" She looked straight at the Major and then at the two guards she'd appointed.

"You mean for him to be unguarded?" I didn't see who said it, but worried murmurs rose from the crowd.

"Right now, I'm less worried about him doing something stupid than the rest of you."

Mace paused just before going in, got that listening look again. Was that a slight smile curving his lips? One of Mom's mastiffs growled low as Mace passed. He growled back, staring the dog down before going in. I had never seen that fucking dog back down, not even from that cougar last year.

"Daniel, are you going to join us or stare at the dog all morning?"

That tone, that God damned tone of her voice. I hate it when she makes me feel like a fucking kid! Made me nostalgic for having Fang kick the shit out of me.

* * *

Miss Ellie, her daughter-in-law Megan, and Lindsey joined Mom, Mace and I at the kitchen table. Miss Ellie's three grandkids raced around, two girls and a boy. Megan's oldest son, all of thirteen, had undergone the change this last winter. The council was still arguing his fate when he disappeared. We all dreaded when one of the boys approached puberty, knowing the virus would kill them or change them. Only one in hundreds of thousands was immune like me.

Mace froze when the kids all squealed and dove for cover behind Mom or Grandmom. "Huh. That doesn't usually happen. Teach them young to fear us?"

"And coyotes, cougars, bears and strangers." Megan's dry reply had a surprising effect on Mace. He laughed.

"Wise. Better to be safe than dinner." Amazingly healed, his grin didn't look half bad this morning. "We teach our young similar things. Including to avoid rabids and pack they don't know."

"You have young? Yours or um..." Megan's voice dwindled off.

"I am pack leader, so in a sense they are all mine regardless of who sired them. But I haven't sired any children of my own. That I know of anyway." He shrugged.

The rest of breakfast turned to child rearing in these difficult times. Even I was surprised to learn the pack children attended a school set up in the women's area. They'd pilfered books from the local schools and libraries just as we had.

Mace's calm and thoughtful replies seemed to impress them. The youngest, a girl about six I think, came out of hiding to get a closer look. Mace even showed her his fangs, sending her squealing back behind her mother. She didn't stay long before she was pestering him with never ending questions that would have sent me into orbit. He handled them with an enormous amount of patience.

* * *

Breakfast done, we headed to the dining room. Mom, Lindsey and Megan checked for weapons as everyone filed in. The rest of the council had already taken their seats when the Major arrived.

"I don't see why we have to be unarmed. That thing isn't. His claws and fangs are sharp as any knife," the Major snapped from the entryway.

Mom's voice dripped sickly sweet. "You have a point. Lindsey, get the Major a nice butcher knife. Considering he has one arm in a cast, you get one knife."

"And guns for Kim and Glory."

"Nope, only one of him, so only you get to carry a weapon. Or you can stand outside for all I care." Mom left an open mouthed and angry Major at the front door.

"Time to get this started." Mom sat at the head of the table as regal as any queen. Mace sat at the foot. Someone had gotten a bar stool from the kitchen so I could sit near Mace. Everyone else had to stand in the overcrowded room. Looking at the number of hostile faces, I still worried about a lynch mob. At least I didn't hear a gallows being set up. Nah, the Major'd probably go for the firing squad. No setup needed.

The Major shoved her way to her chair where Lindsey set down a rather dull looking knife. If looks could kill...

"Now that we're settled. I have only one real question and then we'll let others ask theirs." Mom barely waited for nods of agreement before continuing. "What do you want, Mace?"

He cocked his head slightly. "Your people have trespassed on my territory, twice. I want you to stop. It can be that simple... or not."

"You don't really expect us to believe that shit?" the Major sneered.

Mace turned to her with a tight smile. "I expect nothing from you but a fight. Doesn't make it less true."

"What do you mean by it's that simple or not?" Kacey sounded puzzled.

Mace leaned forward, eyes glowing a cold yellow-gold. "Everyone and everything in my territory is one of three things: my pack, my possession or a threat. If you don't want to be one of those things, stay out. Simple. Keep challenging me or threatening my pack, not so simple. We don't tolerate threats." He let his steady gaze roam the table.

The Major smirked when his gaze reached her. "And you're hoping to make us your possession?"

"If that were the case, I wouldn't have bothered with talking." He turned his next comment to the rest of the council. "We coexist peacefully with other packs in the city. I had hoped we could do so with you." He glanced at his cast. "Now I'm not so sure."

"You had to know the risk of coming alone to meet us. Why not just send a message with Daniel?" Kacey asked.

"I did send a message. I didn't like your answer. By coming alone, I had hoped to avoid escalating things. But mostly, it was a test." He looked to the Major. "One which, so far, you have failed."

"Test?" Mom's brow drew down.

The Major snorted derisively. "Of what? Your stupidity?"

"A test to see if you could overcome your fear of us enough to either leave us be or treat us fairly." He took a slow look around the room.

The Major barked out a rude laugh. "Why would we fear you when we could flatten you at any time?"

A smug smile with a hint of fang stretched Mace's face. "Do you really think you'd get anywhere near my den without me knowing?"

"Ha! Even Angie's team got the drop on you!" Could she look any cockier?

"We watched and waited to see what they'd do before taking them. If there is a next time, we won't wait, and we won't give them back."

"Big words for a thing that walked unknowing into a trap."

He smiled and leaned back. "You had two teams on opposite roofs, one sniper, two lookouts each. The one who shot me first was hiding behind a dumpster in the alley with only one companion. The second shooter was across the street on the second floor, again with two lookouts."

A sudden silence filled the room.

"No way you could know that! Who told you?" The Major threw furious looks at her people.

Mace smiled and this time showed all his fangs. "Currently, you have a sniper on a roof across the yard with a bead on the back of my head." He inhaled sharply. "That one and that one --" he pointed to two women standing in opposite corners, one behind him, "-- have guns hidden. I can smell them despite the overpowering odor of fear in this room."

Forget the whole "so quiet you could hear a pin drop" thing. It was so quiet you could hear the heartbeat of the person next to you.

Then I got the part about the sniper. "Fucking son of a bitch!" I jumped behind Mace, shielding him.

He rubbed his temple. "Too stupid to live, I swear. Daniel, sit down before you get yourself killed. I'll be fine."

"Fuck that! They won't shoot me."

"*She* won't hesitate to sacrifice you." He pointed to the Major. "In fact, I think she might even enjoy watching your insides splatter. At that range a high-powered rifle slug will pass right through you, killing us both. Besides, I can move faster than the woman on the roof can shoot. Although if I do, your mother will likely get hurt." He added the last with a shrug.

The entire council turned to the Major.

Mom had that calm exterior that made arrogant surgeons tuck tail. "You will call off that sniper. And you two with the guns, on the table, now!" She stood up and I swear sparks flew from her eyes.

The one behind Mace tried to make a run for it, but angry women tackled her. Chris gave hers up, but didn't look at all ashamed.

"Both of you, out. You have packing to do." They weren't the only ones who looked shocked, but Mom just cocked a brow. "Did you think I was kidding? Now, that sniper, or you're next, Major."

Chapter 7

The Major crossed her arms over her chest. "No. And if he moves, she has orders to fire. It's too damned dangerous to have that thing sitting here like this. Why can't you all see that? It may talk like us but it's a beast. The monster that destroyed our world and killed everyone we held dear."

She stood up, her voice rising with her impassioned tirade. She turned to Megan. "How could you sit there, have breakfast with it, let it play with your children?" She looked around the room seeking sympathetic faces. "You know it could turn on us any second. Those monsters cost us everything!"

Mace's quiet words filled the stunned room. "You lost almost everything. You still have something precious: yourselves, your memories, your humanity." He looked up, pain clear in his eyes. "We don't even have that. So don't whine to me about loss."

"You don't remember anything from before?" Someone in the crowd voiced the surprise I'm sure we all felt.

"A stray memory or sense of having been somewhere or done something, but nothing clear, nothing that feels real. We are able to do things but don't remember learning it. There's a deep sense of something missing, but we have no idea what."

The crowd grew still, listening to Mace's deep growling voice. So matter of fact, so even, it gave his words even greater impact.

"Fortunately, most don't remember much of the first few months after the change. The time when we've lost who we were but haven't found who we are. During that stage, we were all rabid. Beasts, you would call us. And when we'd fought our way out of it, started to be someone again, we knew without a doubt we'd helped destroy our world. Maybe even killed the people we loved most. At that point, we truly have nothing."

I hadn't thought of it that way. They were victims of the virus as much as anyone.

"Cry me a river, beast."

Looking around the table, I could see the Major found little support.

"Major, I will ask one more time, call off your sniper." Mom turned the full force of her will on the Major.

"Fine." The Major got up, went to the window and signaled. She thumped back into her chair, arms crossed, lips pursed.

"Thank you, Mace. That can't have been easy. Perhaps we can reach a better understanding now."

Mace's gaze locked on Mom's. "I think I understand you better. Enough to know your fear poses a threat to my pack. Enough to wonder if you can overcome it or if there can ever be any level of trust between us."

"You've barely had time to learn anything about us. How can you say that?" Kacey's face drew down in a puzzled frown.

"After trying to kill me and mine, I catch a group of you in my territory. I send two back and promise to return the others. Your answer, fire on my men with a God damn rocket launcher. In a show of good faith, I return the rest of your murderous group in good health. For that, I get shot, beaten, chained in a room with no food or water. And I am still under constant threat of being killed. Tell me, why should I tolerate such a clear threat to my pack's very existence?"

Several shifted uncomfortably and a few glared at the Major.

Mom leaned forward. "You said you don't tolerate threats. Care to elaborate?"

His lips twitched up to show fang. "We eliminate them, one way or another."

"But you said you coexist with other packs. Aren't they a threat to you?" Miss Ellie pointed out.

He shook his head. "None are currently. If that changes, we'll deal with it."

"Oh my God, Tat. He was another pack leader, wasn't he?"

He turned to me with that tight feral smile. "He was before he threatened us."

"Tat? Isn't that one of his pack?" Jill sounded totally confused.

"He is now, but I always wondered why 'cause he sure as hell doesn't like Mace."

"I don't understand. Why would you have a rival in your pack?" It was Kacey's turn for confusion.

"We fought, I won. I took his pack and his territory. He'd submitted so I couldn't just kill him. It was his choice to stay or go. He chose to stay." Mace shrugged like that was the way things always were. And maybe for them it was.

"You took an enemy and his whole group into your pack? That's crazy." Jill looked astounded.

Mace smirked his answer. "It seemed better than killing them all. We don't tolerate threats to the pack. Now he's just a threat to my leadership, and that I can live with." His gaze locked on Mom once again.

Understanding dawned on her face. "Oh my God!" Mom's eyes flew wide and for the first time she looked rattled. "You can't possibly think we would join your pack!"

Mace met her gaze once more. "Then prove to me you aren't a threat."

Silence reigned for several tense minutes.

"Oh, for crying out loud. Do any of you really think a bunch of beasts can overrun this compound? They don't even know where it is!" The Major slapped the table.

I saw Mace's mouth quirk for just a second.

"Fucking dog whistles. That's what you were listening to this morning. A fucking dog whistle!" I grabbed his arm and he answered with a soft growl. I didn't back down. "They're already here. They followed us, didn't they?"

Mace peeled my fingers loose and stood with his freaky yellow-gold eyes shining into mine. He growled out one word. "Yes."

"No fucking way, Mace, don't. Don't you fucking dare attack my family!"

"Daniel Baker, sit down before I wash your mouth out with soap!" Mom stood, leaning on the table. "Everyone, just calm down. Mace, would you please release my son and sit back down?" She might have phrased it nicely but her tone meant business.

Mace stared at her for what seemed an eternity before releasing me and sitting.

"What's this about dog whistles?" Mom continued.

Mace gave me a hard look. "We sometimes use them to communicate."

"I still don't get why everyone is so freaked out. They can't get to us. Not through that wall with us defending it." The Major glared at Mace. "We aren't stupid beasts living in burnt out buildings you can intimidate."

Mace leaned close, still speaking to Mom. "Your wooden walls might keep out bears, cougars and your average rabid, but it'll hardly slow us down. Everything inside is wood and we aren't so stupid we don't know how to make fire." He turned his eerie shining eyes on the Major. "And that toy of yours, not much good against a well armed, highly mobile and spread out target."

The Major's face screwed up in rage. "You just signed your death warrant, beast."

"You think they'll just go home if we toss his body out?" Could she be that stupid?

"While they're arguing over who's boss, we'll take them out instead. See, not a problem." The Major looked way too excited for comfort.

"You don't get it. Even if they don't wait to argue over who's in charge, that fight would take all of five minutes. Then they'll be on us like wolves on a wounded deer." My voice echoed in the following silence.

"I think you overestimate their chances, Daniel. But then I'm sure you would like to see us cowering under your new master." The Major's face twisted with deadly intent. "I think it's time we dealt with you both."

"We all know you've been looking for an excuse to cleanse the city ever since you got here, Major. You will take no action unless directed by this council. Like Mace, I

would rather find another option than a battle that will cost lives neither side can spare. No matter who wins, we all lose.”

I swear it looked like Mom might sprout claws and tear the Major apart. Finally, the Major thumped back in her chair.

Mother studied Mace for several more minutes before speaking. “I think it’s safe to say we pose equally large threats to each other.”

Mace nodded and waited for her to continue.

“I think I see now why you risked coming here. Perhaps if we learn about each other, we can find some common ground. A basis for peaceful coexistence.” She fixed her stare on me. “It’s been a long and stressful session. I think a break is in order. As the doctor, I insist my patient lay down and rest before I have him tied to a bed.” Mace shot me a hungry look. She added, “Alone!”

Several people snickered and smirked at me while my face burned with embarrassment.

Mace waited for Mom to reach us as the room emptied.

“You, too, Mace. Even you need rest. First, I want to check your shoulder, Daniel.” She gestured toward the clinic.

* * *

Miss Ellie followed us in but Mom made the guards stay outside this time. “Mace,” Miss Ellie rested a hand on his arm, “I... I need your help, I think.” She urged him down the hall to the door to the basement.

I had built a special room down there just in case we needed to confine one of the boys when they changed. Only a very few even knew it existed and as far as I knew, it had never been used.

We reached the bottom of the stairs and I heard him. A high pitched growl, like from a young wolfman. “Jeremy? I thought you said he took off.” I turned to Mom. “How long did you plan to keep him down here?”

"It's not like we could just throw a thirteen-year-old boy out in the snow. We were hoping he wouldn't get too violent before spring when he'd have some chance. Unfortunately..."

She opened the inner door and the beast in the cage threw himself against the bars. Snarling, growling and trying to reach us with his claws, he looked nothing like the sweet kid I'd known his whole life.

Mace didn't say anything, just walked closer, studying him. Jeremy's yellow eyed gaze locked on Mace. His lips pulled back in a snarl and he threw himself at the bars again.

"Good God, Ellie, I'm sorry you had to see this. I can't even get close enough to dose him anymore."

Mace never took his gaze off the boy. "You've been drugging him? For how long?"

"A couple months. He started the change in December and by late February we had to do something."

Mace snorted. "Your Major would have taken care of him for you."

"That is my grandson!" Miss Ellie retorted. "He may not remember me anymore but he's still my grandson."

Mace turned enough so that we could see his smile. "Maybe we can get along. But you can't keep him like this. It's worse than torture to keep one of us alone. I'm assuming no one has touched him since the change took hold?"

"Other than to keep him dosed with sedative, no. And his aggression's gotten worse. To the point I don't dare open that door."

"I doubt any human knows this, but we need touch, companionship. And our," he gave me a sexy wink, "drives are very strong. I think that's what gets so many newly turned in trouble. They *need*, and don't know how to fill those needs without hurting others."

Both women looked at him. "Needs?" Mom asked in her doctor voice. "Are we talking sexual needs?"

"That and more. We need to touch, to make a connection with others. We need order and discipline, who's strong, who leads and who follows. We need a pack. Alone, the needs become overwhelming. And that leads to the aggression you see."

"So if we'd just held him enough he would be like you?"

Mace shook his head. "No, not at first. He has to learn control of those needs and his new strength. He has to find himself, learn who he is all over again. Like a young child, learn what's allowed and what isn't."

"Is there anything you can do for him?" Miss Ellie's eyes shone with unshed tears.

"I can try, but you may not like it, and you must not interfere once we get into it."

They stared again.

"Think big wolf smacking down young wolf. I suspect there will be a lot of growling, snarling and even biting." I pulled the women toward the door. "You probably don't want to watch."

"You won't hurt him will you?" Miss Ellie turned a worried look on Mace.

"No more than I have to. First step is getting him to submit. Then I can begin teaching him. Keys?" He held out his hand and Mom tossed them to him.

He unlocked the door and pocketed them.

"Are you sure you should be doing that with all your injuries?" Even if Jeremy was a good foot shorter than Mace, he had two good arms.

Mace snorted. "He's a boy. I think I can handle him." He stepped in and at once Jeremy growled loudly, fangs bared and claws poised to strike. Mace answered his challenge with a louder growl. Their gazes locked and Jeremy leapt for Mace's throat. Even with only one arm, Mace had him pinned on his back with his jaws on the boy's throat in mere seconds. And just like that, the kid went limp, rolling his head to the side, baring his throat.

Mace stopped growling and whined softly. He rubbed the boy's head with the side of his face, making a strange *whuffling* noise. Every time Jeremy moved, he went back for the throat.

"He's not going to, you know, molest Jeremy? After all that talk about sex..." Miss Ellie looked to me for answers.

When did I become the wolfman expert? Oh, yeah, two weeks with Mace's pack made me the best there was. Knowing how much time the pack spent humping each other had me a little worried. I thought back and could only remember a few youths. They stuck together and the adults let them play on their own. I herded the women toward the stairs. "Don't think so. Besides, we have an exclusive deal. I think we'd best leave them alone for now. I trust Mace."

I hadn't realized just how much until then.

* * *

Mace spent hours with Jeremy. Miss Ellie even took lunch down to them, while I finally got the sleep Mom had been pestering me about. I hated to admit how good it felt.

By mid afternoon, I was bored sitting in the waiting room of the clinic. I'd thumbed through every four-year-old magazine and couldn't get into any of the books. What the hell was Mace doing down there?

Angie burst in the clinic door. "Daniel, your truck just pulled in front of the main gate. Looks like Tat's driving."

"Fuck. Is he alone?"

"Looks that way. But we've seen movement in the forest on the ridge and the dogs keep barking, first one way then another."

"Fuck. I'd better get Mace. Wait here." There wasn't time to worry about her wondering why Mace was in the basement.

I yanked open the door. With his hearing, I didn't even need to holler. "Mace, Tat's out front."

His deep voice rumbled down there but I couldn't make out what he said. Seconds later I heard the door to the cage latch. Mace closed the outer door as well. His face gave nothing away as he came up the stairs. "Anyone talk to him?"

Angie joined us as we headed out the door, shaking her head. "I came straight to get you and Daniel. He's still sitting in the truck with the motor running, a good fifty feet from the gate."

We hurried across the yard toward the gate. The compound buzzed with activity as everyone took up their defensive positions.

Mom, the Major and Kacey waited for us. "What do you think he wants, Mace?" Kacey didn't even wait for us to reach them.

"Me. And if they don't see me, it won't end well for you."

The Major planted herself in front of Mace, hand on her holstered sidearm. "We've seen signs they're trying to surround us. But we're ready for you monsters."

He ignored her and addressed Mom. "Are you going to let me talk to him?"

She nodded. "Of course. As long as you don't mind us listening in."

"He's not going to come close enough to get shot."

"Good thing you all have such great hearing then. Why don't we go up on the catwalk?"

Wow, mutual trust fest going on here, not.

We followed Mom up to the guard station next to the gate. Sometimes it felt like we were back in the Wild West living in a fort, only the natives had fangs and claws. Oh, and high powered rifles instead of bows and arrows. I glanced to the nearest ridge. For a settler, getting out of the wind and closer to the water made sense. For a modern fort, it left us vulnerable. A few snipers could decimate our defenses. Mace was right. They wouldn't have any trouble getting in.

Mace leaned a hip against the outer rail. "Hey, Tat. You're wasting fuel." He raised his voice just slightly.

The engine shut off. "Mace, good to see you in one piece." His gaze lit on Mace's cast. "Mostly. The pack was getting worried." Tat raised his voice enough for us to hear

him. Fucker probably heard what Mom told Mace. I wondered if anyone had ever tested to see just how good their hearing was.

"Here I am." Mace held out his good arm. "Enjoying a little down time with Daniel's pack."

"If I'd known you enjoyed getting shot in the back, I would have been happy to oblige. Must be nice to have an armed escort everywhere you go." Tat leaned casually against the side of the truck. "Bet one of their snipers has both of us in their sights right now."

In a few sentences, he let us know just how much they'd been watching us.

Mace chuckled. "Can you blame them? Having the pack hanging around so close isn't helping them relax either. Back them off, Tat." Mace's tone went from shooting the breeze to alpha. He stood straighter and his gaze fixed on Tat.

Tat stared back, a slight smile playing around his lips. What was the fucker up to now? I didn't trust him one bit. He dropped his head and shoulders in a submissive pose, but somehow, that didn't make me feel any better. "As you wish, Mace."

"Tell the pack to stay back. Learning trust takes time. I really am all right here. I've got Daniel to watch my back."

I swear I could feel Tat's gaze land on me. All the hair on the back of my neck stood up. Mace gave a subtle jerk of his chin and Tat climbed back in the truck. We stood watching until the truck went over a rise and out of sight.

Mom faced Mace squarely. "They've been watching a while, haven't they?"

"What did you expect after I got trussed up and hauled off? Count yourself lucky they decided to do a little recon first. They will continue to watch as long as I'm here."

"I see. So now what?"

Mace offered her a real smile. "We work on building that trust between us."

"In that case, care to join us for a little celebration in honor of Daniel coming home?"

"Any chance of not having a rifle pointed at my head the whole time? It's making the pack nervous." He stared straight at the sniper on the roof of the barracks.

Mom sighed. "Can't say I blame them. Glory! Off the roof. Now."

Glory stood and looked to the Major.

Mom cocked her head, lips pursed and waited. The Major scowled but waved for her to obey.

"But I'm not taking the guards off him." The Major crossed her arms over her chest.

"Yes, you are. Angie, Sarah or Megan can keep an eye on him."

Chapter 8

The weather had turned warm enough to set up tables in the yard. The fire pit was going and seats set around it. By early evening, pots and dishes filled with food would appear. We had an hour or so until then and not much to do.

"Don't you have any couches to sit on?" Mace frowned at the chair he was in. I shook my head no so he reached over and tugged my chair right up against his.

"Happy now?" I chuckled.

"No. I still can't hold you. Hell, I can barely reach you."

"About that, see, we don't go for that whole orgy thing after dinner. And most couples don't, you know, fondle each other in public."

"So I've heard from every new woman. And yet, after a while, most find they like it." He paused with a quizzical look. "As I recall, many of those same women expressed frustration that they couldn't get human men to cuddle."

A soft female laugh came from beside me. "That's true! Lindsey tells me your pack is very into cuddling. I like a man who's into that." Jackie smiled coyly at Mace, then pulled up a chair.

They started chatting about the differences between pack and human men. After the second sexual innuendo, I'd had enough of her flirting with my man. I slipped my hand over the arm of the chair and onto his thigh.

Mace raised his brow but he went right on talking. I let my fingers trail up and down his thigh, getting higher with each pass. Miss Flirt's gaze fixated on my hand -- or maybe the growing bulge in Mace's jeans. She could drool, but she better not fucking touch.

Mace seemed inclined to let me keep going. I shifted to adjust my own growing erection. God, it felt good to be able to touch my man in public.

"Shit, can't you fags do that somewhere private? There's kids around!" Frank glowered at us from the fire pit where he had just dumped a load of wood. "Bad enough you freaks get out of honest work, but that just turns my stomach!"

"Mace, this is Frank, the resident bigot. The tall dark one behind him is Isaiah."

"You're both immune, like Daniel?"

Frank glared but Isaiah's mouth fell open before he spoke in a choked gasp. "It really can talk."

Mace chuckled. "Among other things. I've heard about you, Frank." Mace stood up, towering half a foot over Frank's 5'10". His eyes flickered yellow in the firelight. "Unlike Daniel, I won't call you names if you challenge me." He bared his fangs briefly before turning his back on Frank, an insult among the pack.

His heated gaze blazed a path straight to my cock. He caressed the side of my cheek on his way to my neck. At his urging, I stood, wrapping my arms around him.

Someone snickered and someone else snorted rudely. Yeah, he was staking his claim, but so was I. I wrapped a hand around his neck, pulling him in for a possessive kiss. Our lips touched and everything else vanished, burned away by the lust roaring in my veins. Our bodies met and molded together, all the right parts rubbing in delicious agony.

"Are you two done putting on a show or should I start selling tickets?" Mom's sharp tone cut between us like a blade of dry ice. I dropped my head to Mace's shoulder with a groan of embarrassment. My cock shriveled under her scathing words.

"Fucking a beast? That's disgusting even for a homo like you." Frank could put more hate in a few words than anyone I'd known.

Mace whirled and had Frank by the throat in the next second. "I warned you not to challenge me, *human*." His voice dropped into the scary growl. He yanked Frank up to him, his fangs only a few inches from his face. Frank's face went from beet red to white as a sheet. His eyes crossed as Mace's fangs got closer.

"Mace! Let him go, please." Mom set her hand on his arm. "He's a jerk, true, but he's my jerk."

Mace snarled and shoved him back into the gathering crowd.

"Just like a beast to react with violence to a simple comment." And there came the second chorus of intolerance, the Major. With a disgusted flip of her nose, she moved on.

Miss Ellie rang the dinner bell a short while later. The food tasted great after the mostly canned stuff at Mace's compound. I'd converted the greenhouse to hydroponics for fresh fruit and vegetables year 'round. Mace seemed mostly interested in the meat dishes, big surprise there.

Surprisingly, several more women gathered around Mace. Some even flirted. Peg was so blatant as to ask to see his fangs and claws up close, then nearly climbed in his lap. I now knew how many women had beds big enough for three. Not something I needed to know. The way he flirted back pissed the shit out of me.

I stood and stretched. "I'm off to the little boys room and then maybe to bed."

Mace gave me a wicked smile. "Mind if I join you?"

"Wouldn't want to take you away from your new friends."

His eyes narrowed. Yeah, that came out a bit pissy even for me. Mace stood and slid his hand along the small of my back, urging me to walk away from the fire. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you were jealous." He spoke softly close to my ear.

Scowling, I glanced over my shoulder. Peg and a couple other women tagged along. "I really don't think he needs your help, *ladies*." I put a good deal of sarcasm into my words. Fucking whores barely dropped back. Looking straight ahead I snarled, "Jealous? Bad enough they're drooling all over you. But you seem to be eating it up like a starving hound."

Mace dropped his hand, silent. He darted several glances at me as if he couldn't understand what had me so pissed off.

I'd make it simple for him. "How would you feel if I was cuddling up to Tat?"

A low growl rumbled from Mace's gut. "Daniel, I'm not even touching them. Just being nice, making friends."

"Do I look that fucking naive to you? Did you miss all the subtle and not so subtle offers for sex?"

He stopped me. "You are my chosen, Daniel. I don't want any other."

"Could have fooled me." I tried to pull away but he held on. Even with only one clawed hand on me, I couldn't pull free. Not that I tried that hard when he pressed his body to mine. His eyes glowed softly and his lips parted as he moved in for a kiss. I didn't open at first to his probing tongue. I was too fucking mad.

His hard cock thrust next to mine. He flexed his hips, stroking us both. I gasped and he slid his tongue in. My hand grasped his hair and pulled him tighter. Fucker knew how to make me beg.

A high-pitched growl ripped through the air. And it wasn't Mace's. Several screams followed. As fast as my crutch could carry me, I raced after Mace toward the clinic. I wasn't able to dodge fast enough. A panicked woman knocked me on my ass.

I heard shouted orders and counter orders. Floodlights lit the yard. Then all of it was drowned out by Mace's roar of challenge. I levered to my feet in time to see Mace grappling with a boy. How the fuck had Jeremy gotten out?

The two turned in their struggle and I saw why Mace hadn't taken the kid down. He had a hold on Frank. Trickle of blood ran down the bastard's chest where Jeremy's claws dug in.

"Hold fire, *hold fire*! Frank's in there!" Mom shouted, overriding the Major's orders to shoot to kill. Not many liked Frank, but he was the top stud in the compound. OK, the only stud since Isaiah was barely nineteen, shy and looked to Frank as a father figure. Poor kid didn't realize, in Frank's mind, the only thing worse than a black kid was a gay man.

Seeing an opportunity, I jumped in. A whack across the kid's wrists with my crutch and he dropped his grip on Frank long enough for Mace to knock the kid down. Jeremy rolled with it and came up straight at me.

Oh, fuck.

Mace caught him first and took him down just inches from me. Jeremy stared at me, snarling and trying to claw out from under Mace. I knew that look. He wanted to eat me, alive and screaming. Maybe I *was* too stupid to live. I just stood there, frozen.

It took several long seconds for a one-armed Mace to get Jeremy pinned under him, jaws gripping the back of his neck. The boy would start to give, then someone would catch his attention and he'd stiffen again. Blood was starting to run from Mace's bite.

"Get back, everyone get back! You're just making it worse." I turned to start shoving the crowd back.

A fight broke out in the crowd. Was that a gun Mom and the Major were fighting over?

"Look out, Frank's got a gun!"

I spun back to see him aiming at Mace. Dirt sprayed when he missed. With a roar of anger, Mace cold cocked the kid and sprang at Frank, who shot wildly in his panic. Snarls mingled with screams as Mace tackled him. The gun flew from Frank's hand to land at Kim's feet.

Oh, shit, surely she'd take the chance to kill Mace for the Major.

But she just picked it up.

Mace had Frank's throat in his clawed grasp. Frank's hands scrabbled at his, trying to get free. Mace snarled in his face. "Submit, or I will kill you."

I hurried over. "Relax, Frank, look away."

Frank's panicked glare fixed on me. I drew a deep breath and let it out, visibly relaxing. "Deep breath, look away, just like that. Now hold still," I coached in a soothing voice.

Frank's panic dialed back and he followed my instructions.

"Let him go, Mace." I glanced back at Jeremy stirring on the ground. "Ah, Jeremy's coming around."

Mace snarled close to Frank's face. "Try to shoot me again, little human, and I will tear your throat out." He shoved off and swaggered over to stand over Jeremy.

"Everyone back off, now." Even without the growl, Mace's voice could be downright scary. He dropped over the kid's back, taking his neck in his jaws again. I helped move the crowd back.

The kid relaxed under Mace and twisted his head to bare his throat.

Mace whined and leaned down to rub his face along Jeremy's. A soft whine came from the boy. Mace got up and pulled Jeremy to his feet. At once the kid stiffened, growling. Mace set a hand on his shoulder. "No, Jeremy. Not prey. Let's get you back to your den." He turned the boy to the clinic, manhandling him until he gave in and went with Mace quietly.

I turned to the Major, who was nursing a shiner and sulking between Megan and Angie. Mom looked like an ice statue. Not a good sign.

Being taller felt good. I got to look down on the 5'6" Major. Loom a little even. "How long have you known the kid was in the basement of the clinic?"

She puffed up. "What makes you think I knew anything?"

Mom snorted. "Frank's too stupid to figure it out on his own. And you were just a little too ready for shit to happen." She shouldered me aside. "I won't tolerate this anymore, Victoria. You've caused far more trouble than you're worth."

She returned Mom's icy stare. "You are a fool, *Sylvia* --" she twisted Mom's name into an insult -- "keeping one of those *things* here. Unless it's for research?"

Miss Ellie caught us all by surprise by slapping her. "That's my grandson, not some stray dog!"

The Major wiped blood off her split lip. "Your grandson died when the virus turned him into that thing. He'd kill you just as fast as anyone else and you know it or you wouldn't have kept him in a cage."

"Hate to interrupt, but I believe you have some way of making yourself heard at a distance?" Mace's quick return startled us.

What the hell? "We have a bullhorn. Why?"

"I need to speak to Hawk, but I don't think my voice will carry that far. I think someone misunderstood what just happened here. Unless you want visitors I need that bullhorn. Now."

"Dog whistles?"

He jerked his head in a nod.

We'd designed the roof of the barracks as a command post, complete with electricity. Sarah plugged the bullhorn in and handed it to Mace.

"Hawk, this is Mace, Alpha Tango."

What was with the military style code? Were they ex-military? Doc said something about Mace, Hawk and a few others coming in together. Coming into where? Could they have been some sort of special ops team like the Navy Seal unit Steve led?

He paused, listening to sounds we couldn't hear. "Hawk, and only Hawk."

Maybe he wanted a code back so he knew who was on the other end of that whistle. It was fucking weird only hearing one side of the conversation.

"Hawk, stand down, pull the men back." The way he talked sounded more and more like Steve, self-assured, in control and all badass military.

He listened, his eyes glowing brighter as his lips thinned into an angry line. "No, absolutely not! Do I look like I'm being forced?"

He arched a brow at me. "Show him you aren't armed."

We all held our hands out. Hell of a whistle code they had going.

"I need one thing only. Send Tat with the truck and two others in the morning. They have a newly turned boy who got loose and caused problems. He needs to be with the pack."

A slight smile crept across Mace's face. "Two hours after dawn. Alpha Tango Out."

* * *

We filed back to the yard. Crazy thoughts kept rolling around in my head. I couldn't stop thinking how much Mace reminded me of Steve.

"They'll take Jeremy to live with the pack where we can care for and teach him." Mace didn't ask, but his voice carried no challenge.

That wolfman speed caught us all off guard when he lunged at the Major, seized her by the throat and slammed her to the ground. "Even think about betraying your leader like this again and I will gladly rip your throat out. You are a threat to everyone around you. It's only luck that no one was killed."

Her voice sounded thin, but defiant. "I don't answer to you and I never told Frank to do anything."

Mace snarled in her face. "I can hear the lie in your voice, feel it in your pulse." He got up and motioned to Kim, who still held the gun Frank had used. "I can smell you on this gun, recently enough I bet you just gave it to him." He turned to Mom, still in full alpha mode.

Mom faced him squarely.

"Keep her on a short leash or I will deal with her my way."

Mom raised her chin. "Are you challenging me?"

A nasty smile showed all his fangs. "If I were, you wouldn't have to ask. Just a warning from one pack leader to another."

Mom held his gaze for several long tense moments. The slightest nod of her chin and Mace dropped his gaze. "Are we still confined to the clinic tonight?" Mace sounded far more relaxed than I felt.

Before anyone could say otherwise I jumped in. "Fuck that, I'm sleeping in my own bed. *We* are sleeping in my bed." There were things I wanted to know... wanted Mace to see. If there was any chance... I couldn't finish the thought.

* * *

We'd built an apartment over my workshop long before the world went to hell. I had lived and worked there until my business grew enough to need a bigger place. I flipped on the lights and Mace's eyes flew wide. Did any of it look familiar to him?

"My humble home." I pointed off to the right. "Kitchen's there." A breakfast bar separated the kitchen from the living room. "Bathroom and bedroom through that door."

And this is the rest." A couch and two chairs still faced the TV complete with DVD & Blu-ray for all the disks I'd scavenged. The far corner held my desk complete with laptop and shelves of our books lined the walls. Could have been any pre-virus apartment. But it had been ours, Steve's and mine.

"You lived alone here? No packmates to share with?"

"Not anymore. I like my privacy, and there are perks to being the only guy who can make shit work." That and the two refugees who tried rooming with me found somewhere else to sleep in a hurry. I'm really not easy to live with. Yet Steve and I had made it work.

Mace moved about, checking things out. He stopped to pick up a large picture on my desk. "Is this Steve?" A flicker of odd emotions crossed his face. Jealousy? Confusion?

I brushed up against him as I took the frame from him. "Yeah, that was a camping trip we took a couple months before he..." Still felt like a knife in my heart to talk about it. "Before the Navy said he died."

Using the back of his claw, Mace gently touched my face in the photo. "You look happy."

"Yeah, best day of my life. Steve told me he was leaving the service so we could be together." I swallowed the lump in my throat.

The longer he looked at the picture, the more confused he looked and the more certain I became he was remembering something. Maybe he just needed more.

I moved behind my desk and booted up my laptop. The battery was shot, so I had to keep it plugged in, but it worked. "Here, I have more pictures."

He grabbed the chair from the other side of the desk and joined me. For several long minutes I flipped through my photo album, showing him the life we'd had. A couple times I thought I saw something like recognition flit across his face.

"Tell me about him." Mace looked so lost. I'd never seen him look like that.

"We met through my sister. Hit it off as friends. That's all we were the first few years, friends. He was a career Navy man. I didn't think I could do a long distance relationship."

"You were both alphas."

"More than that. Steve didn't have any family left, just the service. And I had trust issues."

"Someone close hurt you." He nodded, like it was a story he knew well.

"What makes you say that?"

"Certain positions during sex frighten you." He looked at me and cocked his head, as if listening to something. "A lover?"

I drew a deep breath. "My first real boyfriend was older. I was naive, eighteen. He did a number on my head... then things... things got rough." That put it mildly but I wasn't going there. "Took me a while to figure it out and leave him." After he put me in the hospital. But I wasn't going there, either.

"But Steve made you feel safe."

I chuckled. "It was tough at first, always fighting for control, both afraid to trust enough to let go. We'd fight, swear to never talk again, but somehow we'd always come back together."

He looked at another picture from the camping trip. "There was a stream over here."

I swallowed hard. "Yes, there was." I waited, holding my breath, not daring to hope.

He turned those beast eyes on me, unfocused, like he was seeing something else. "Steve, he fell in the creek. You helped him strip and then made love by the fire." His eyes bore into me, pleading for an explanation.

"Yeah, Mace. That's right." Fuck, oh fuck. Somewhere inside I think I always knew it was him. The virus had changed his face, made him a good six inches taller, broader and deepened his voice. But sometimes, sometimes a movement, a turn of phrase, and I thought of Steve.

"When I tasted you that first time, sprawled over your truck, you tasted... smelled... familiar, I guess. I..." He swallowed. "I had a dream about the creek right after you came to the pack. Sometimes we have these weird, realistic dreams. Doc thinks some of them are memories." He looked at me, face twisted with confusion. "But you said Steve died. How could I remember these things if he died?"

"The official notice said missing, presumed dead, lost at sea." I drew a deep breath. "Sometimes you remind me of him and other times..." What the fuck could I say?

"But I'm not him." He stood up, shook his head and turned away. "Even if I was him back then, I'm not now. I'm nothing but a beast now."

I limped after him. Ah, shit. Why did I have to push it? It wouldn't change who he'd become, turn him back into the Steve I'd loved. And maybe that was for the best. Mace could handle this world. "No, you're not Steve. Not the Steve I knew. But who you were doesn't really matter now. You're Mace, leader of the largest, most civilized pack of wolfmen in the city. You've made a difference in this sorry assed mess. And you're *my* chosen."

I pulled the tie loose from his braid and ran my fingers through his hair to free it. I loved the silky feel of it between my hands. Steve would never have worn his hair so long. I tugged softly, pulling him back against me. My good hand ran up under his shirt and across his bandages.

He turned his head slightly. "You said something about a nice bed? And can you help me take these bandages off? It's not like I need them anymore."

I chuckled. "You really want to poke that hornet's nest? Best if we let Mom do it in the morning."

Mace snickered and nodded.

We staggered down the short hall, stripping each other as we went. Stroking, pausing to kiss up against the wall until the pressure sent pain shooting through my shoulder.

By the time we reached the bed, our cocks stood rigid and aching.

"Lube's in the nightstand." I pointed then ripped the blankets down.

My bed had been carefully set up at just the right height for me to stand and fuck Steve into the mattress. My bad leg made getting up on it challenging.

With a snicker, Mace grabbed my ass and boosted me the rest of the way up. I sprawled face first into the covers. The very tips of his claws caressed my bare ass. Lust laced with fear shivered through me.

"So beautiful, chosen. Someday I will claim you like this, but not today." His words growled from deep in his chest and sent a surge of need to my cock. "Move up to the pillows."

I shifted around while he watched.

Chiseled muscles, thick ruddy cock jutting out, long black hair tumbling over one shoulder and down his chest. Fuck! Broken, bandaged and bruised, he still looked like a fucking sex god. The brightness in his eyes alone had me moaning in anticipation. "You are fucking beautiful, lover." I reached to stroke myself and cocked a leg in invitation.

He whined softly and crawled on the bed. His lips kissed and nibbled their way up my leg until he reached my cock. I sucked a breath, waiting to feel those lips, that hot mouth, surround me. I let it out on a gasp as he took me all the way in. "*Ahggn, fuck!*" I bucked into his mouth.

A lube slicked finger pressed circles around my hole, driving me wild. Finally he pressed in.

"Fuck, Mace!"

He sunk a second and third finger in, stroking me. My balls drew up, the edge of my orgasm rose, and he pulled back.

"Ack, Mace. So fucking close."

He chuckled and slid the rest of the way up. I slipped my good arm under his neck and yanked him closer. Our lips met, tongues tangled, cocks ground against each other. Heat tingled up from my balls. I was so close. By Mace's labored breathing, so was he. "Fuck me, Mace. Don't make me fucking beg!"

He snickered against my mouth. "I think I just did."

I slipped my leg over him. It took a couple tries and some wriggling to get him lined up just right. The broad head of his cock pressed just inside my hole and he froze. "*Agghhhn*, Daniel!" One thrust and he buried himself all the way in. All the air whooshed out of my lungs and a burn spread from where he impaled me.

His body rocked and shook as he came. Fuck, I swear sometimes a stiff breeze could set him off. Fortunately, he didn't need any recovery time. And it made me fucking hot, knowing I could make him lose control like that!

Our lips met in a deep kiss, tongues tangling. He wiggled his hand between us and around my cock, stroking just right. "You OK?" he breathed into my mouth.

"Fuck me, already." I sucked his bottom lip. He took the hint and started thrusting. I met each hard thrust, my weeping cock smearing pre-cum across the soft hair on his belly.

"Fuck!" His fingers formed a tight sheath for me to thrust into.

I felt my peak rising like a riptide up from my balls. "Yeah! Mace!" I hollered out as my body jerked into ecstasy.

Moments later, Mace's howl announced him joining me. Hot jiz slicked my passage and his thrusts grew wild and chaotic until he was spent.

Exhaustion flooded me. I flopped onto my back. Mace got the blanket over us and snuggled up.

A stray thought hit me before I tumbled into sleep. "Why did you ask Tat to come in the morning?"

"I'm going to kill him."

Brannan Black

Brannan Black grew up dreaming about epic adventures with strong men and women doing heroic deeds. She's been a belly dancer, horse breeder, mom, Reiki master and crazy. Really, certifiable crazy. That's what folks say when the people in your head won't leave you alone. When their worlds and lives seem as real as this one. Now she writes their stories, making them happy, and people call her an author instead of nuts. She lives quietly, more or less, on a small ranch with her husband, multiple cats, dogs and horses.

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