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DEDICATION

For you as always

THE ALPHA'S ARDOR

Wolves of Flathead, 1

Rebecca Brochu

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Chapter One

Declan wanted to head south, had planned to head south the entire time, but the wolf hot on his tail had driven him north against his will. He'd been running for days with the other wolf nipping at his heels with an unusual sense of determination. As often as he and his twin brother Lachlan had been chased out of different territories over the years, he'd never been chased for so long by another wolf.

There'd been one determined set of betas from a puma clowder a few years back that had chased him and Lachlan for a couple days at the order of their alpha, but wolves tended to be different. They didn't normally stray far from whatever territory their pack had claimed, so Declan and Lachlan had always been able to outrun them in the end.

This was different.

This time the wolf who'd run him out of the territory they'd been in had kept on him long after he and Lachlan had been forced to split up. A handful of days later and still running, Declan was exhausted. Only his superior speed had allowed him to keep one step ahead of the sleek brown wolf that was tailing him so far. Declan wasn't sure exactly how long he'd been on the move, but the ache in his bones and the exhaustion that was quickly working its way through him told him that he probably didn't want to know. Still Declan didn't think he could keep up the pace he'd been forced to set for too much longer.

Breathing ragged, Declan pushed himself harder, forced his

legs to keep moving despite the way his paws were beginning to stumble over nothing. He could still hear the other wolf, could smell him when the winds changed, and he knew he was too tired, too hungry and weak, to put up much of a fight. Plus, the still slowly healing wound on his side was draining his strength faster than he wanted to admit. The claw marks were the reason he and Lachlan had tried to barter for some time from the pack the beta that was chasing him belonged to.

They'd run afoul of a bear about a week before, and Declan had taken a heavy paw to the side in an attempt to protect his brother. Lachlan, wracked with misplaced guilt and anger over the wound, had talked him into seeking out refuge with the pack that they'd caught wind of a short distance to the north. Declan had been reluctant at first, but the thought of finding a territory they could settle in to get some rest, even if it was only for a few weeks, was too tempting to pass up.

It hadn't ended well to say the least. The alpha had been willing to hear their case, had seemed interested in what Declan had been willing to offer in exchange. Yet as soon as their identities became known, they'd been chased out. As a result the healing that Declan had already done had slowly begun to unravel. The strain his body was being put through had drained the energy he would have normally used for healing, and as a result the wound was unable to close as quickly as it should have.

He wasn't losing blood anymore but the injury, three deep grooves that were cut into the flesh of his side, throbbed in synch with his heartbeat. The straps of the small pack on his back dug into his side painfully as he ran, but Declan refused to slow down long enough to shimmy out of it. Besides, the bag, a twin to the one his brother carried, was filled with things that he could ill afford to lose if something happened. Things like a change of clothes, a disposable cell phone, cash; things that they'd need to move quickly. Without it he'd be stuck moving around in his wolf form no matter what, that or forced to steal some clothes from somewhere. Theft was something both he and Lachlan tried to avoid for a number of reasons. Mainly it had to do with the fact that the kind of extra attention they would undoubtedly gain was likely to attract hunters.

And once hunters were on their trail they were always hard pressed to shake them. Those people would run a were to ground if they were suspected of having put a paw out of line for even a second. With some hunters that didn't even mean they had to hurt someone or anything of that nature. Declan had more than one memory of being run out of towns for various bullshit reasons, but he and Lachlan had always moved on peacefully. It was better than trying to start a fight with a group of insane assholes armed with guns and pouches of wolfsbane. Plus, any hunter who might find out who they actually were would be twice as determined to hunt them down.

A loud howl from entirely too close behind him startled

Declan, and he stumbled and went down hard. He yelped as pain flared through his side but he regained his feet quickly, turned his attention back to his surroundings and forced himself to move forward. The wind shifted suddenly, and Declan reared back in surprise and skidded to a halt as his senses screamed at him that he was about to cross the border into another pack's territory. The sound of the wolf on his tail caused his heart to hammer even harder in his chest and Declan, trapped between a wolf out for his blood and the border to an unknown pack's territory, had a decision to make. The wolf behind him snarled, low and threatening as his indecision helped it to close the distance between them even quicker, and Declan made a split second choice. He threw himself over the borderline, turned his muzzle towards the wind, and ran hell bent for where the scent of pack was strongest. He heard the wolf behind him hesitate for a moment before he followed Declan over the line. Declan did his best to ignore the pain in his side and pushed himself to run even faster.

Declan had just skidded his way around a large oak tree when something slammed into his injured side hard. His vision darkened at the sudden burst of agony that tore through him as he went flying and hit the ground with a muffled thud. Declan's first instinct was to come up snarling, teeth bared and hackles raised, but before he could move he caught the scent of what had hit him.

Alpha.

The scent was strong and thick and male. A potent mix of forest leaves and bitter dark chocolate, it made Declan want to roll over and show his belly, to offer up his neck in submission before such a powerful wolf. Instead he flattened himself out against the ground and squeezed his eyes closed tightly as he tried to fight the dizziness that was closing in around the edges of his mind. If the alpha was going to kill him, there wasn't much Declan could do about it in the first place. Even in peak condition he didn't stand a chance against such a powerful wolf on his own. The best he could hope for would be for the alpha to acknowledge the fact that he'd immediately backed down. Hopefully after that he would let Declan speak and plead his case before he made his choice to either kill Declan or chase him out.

Just then Declan heard the brown wolf, the one who'd been chasing him, burst through the underbrush behind him. There was a roar and an answering bark of aggression, and Declan could feel it in the air the moment the two wolves clashed. There were the sounds of fighting, of fangs and claws on fur as they ripped at each other. Then there was a high-pitched yelp and the scent of fresh blood was in the air and the sounds faded. Declan knew the other wolf was still alive, could hear its heart beat in the air around him, but he also knew it was injured.

He wanted to get to his feet, wanted to flee from being trapped between an alpha and a beta who, while now injured, was out for his

blood. Instead he curled in on himself as much as he could despite the wound on his side because he knew better. If he ran all he would manage to accomplish would be to give the alpha a chase as well as the brown wolf, something that Declan knew would more than likely end in his death.

In the next second the alpha let out a rumbling growl so loud and deep that Declan could feel it in his bones, and it sent a harsh shiver down his spine. When he felt the air around him shift, Declan dared to open his eyes and glance around quickly. The sight that greeted him was surprising. The brown wolf was bleeding sluggishly from a place high on his neck as well as fresh claw marks across his muzzle. Despite that he still paced back and forth some distance away, hackles raised and teeth bared as he stared in Declan's direction. The surprise however came at the fact that directly in between the wolf and Declan stood the strange alpha. He was massive, his chest wide and strong and his coat, a mix of dark greys and black, looked thick and heavy. Declan shifted slightly despite his attempts to keep still and when the alpha flashed a quick but relatively unconcerned look in his direction Declan saw that his eyes were a vibrant crimson.

The beta wolf across the way postured for a moment or two more but when the alpha took a single threatening step forward he tucked tail and ran, limping, back the way they'd came. The alpha stared after his retreating form for a moment or two before he turned

back towards Declan. They gazed at each other in silence before Declan once again lowered his eyes in an act of submission. The alpha made a pleased chuffing noise in the back of his throat as he stepped forward and to Declan's surprise began to sniff lightly at Declan's own dark fur.

Declan stayed frozen as the alpha checked him over slowly. A whimper escaped him against his will when the larger wolf's muzzle bumped against the wound hidden in the thick fur on his side. The alpha backed away then with a loud snort, and Declan wasn't surprised when the other wolf's fur began to ripple and shift as the change overtook him.

The man that soon stood in the wolf's place was tall, wide chested and broad shouldered with skin tanned bronze from the sun. His hair was thick and dark where it curled loosely at the nape of his neck, and when Declan dared to meet his eyes again he saw that they were a deep russet color. Declan could almost still see the red in them, the color that marked the man as alpha. His jaw was strong with a layer of thick stubble, and his lips were lush and full even though they were twisted into a deep frown that made his face look entirely too foreboding for Declan's taste.

All in all Declan wasn't surprised by how powerful the man looked, not when his wolf had been so large and obviously strong. He was however surprised by the twist of arousal that shot through him at the sight of the alpha's body, thick muscled and strong with narrow

hips and his cock half hard and nestled in a bed of thick dark hair. He shook the feeling off as quickly as he could and tried to ignore the sight of so much smooth tanned skin stretched over finely crafted muscles. Declan obviously wasn't quick enough because the alpha inhaled deeply for a moment before his handsome face broke out into a smirk.

“Oh pup, me and you need to have a little talk because you're trespassing at the moment. As much as I'd hate to have to kill a fine looking wolf like you I'm perfectly willing to rip out your throat if you give me a reason to.” The alpha rumbled, voice deep and rough, but Declan could hear the amusement in his tone. “Now how about you shift and let me see if the other side to you is as pretty as this one?”

Declan was speechless and for a moment he didn't move at all. When the alpha's eyes flashed crimson in command he scrambled shakily to his feet and hurried to obey. It had been a long time since he'd been under the influence of an alpha's command, but his body remembered the desperate need to obey. He and Lachlan had been on their own without a proper pack or an alpha for years but that pull, that instinctual need to obey wasn't something that ever faded. Even without it he still wasn't stupid enough to think that it'd be a good idea to try to outright refuse this alpha something so simple.

He was actually trespassing on another pack's territory, and the alpha had full rights to follow through with his threat. The fact

that he'd taken the time to shift and speak with Declan at all spoke volumes about the alpha's patience and hopefully about his mercy as well. Declan would be an idiot to throw that kind of generosity back in the alpha's face.

Declan wiggled his way out of the pack on his back, sucked in a deep breath, clenched his eyes closed, and let the change overtake him.

Chapter Two

“Well, look at that. I was right. You’re a pretty little thing in and out of your fur. Now are you going to tell me why that beta was hell bent on taking a chunk out of your ass, pretty boy, or am I going to have to make you?” The alpha stalked closer to where Declan was huddled, sore and pale on the ground as his gaze raked over Declan’s bare form with what looked unexpectedly enough like approval.

Declan was quick to scoop up his previously abandoned pack so he could have something to hide behind. He turned his gaze determinedly towards the ground to keep from staring at the way the alpha’s muscles bunched and pulled as he moved. Declan could feel himself flush when the alpha chuckled low in his throat.

“Can I put some clothes on first?” Declan forced himself not to stutter or stumble over the words, kept his tone firm but respectful at the same time. He knew he wouldn’t be able to get out of the conversation, and while as a shifter he had little to no real modesty left he would still rather be at least partially clothed for the conversation. The alpha made him feel a little too vulnerable. Even though he knew that a few bits of cloth wouldn’t really make a difference it would still give him a small piece of mind.

“Of course.” The alpha lost some of the rather apparent amusement in his expression and with a small frown took a step back from Declan.

Declan scrambled to pull a pair of loose pants from his bag,

stand, and then tug them on as quickly as possible. The clothes he and Lachlan both carried on them were always simple and easy to get into and out of. Everything else of value they had was packed away and sealed up in a storage locker in Georgia that they'd rented when they were nineteen and desperate to keep the few things they'd managed to accumulate safe. It was barely anything, a few photos and trinkets they'd picked up over the years. It gave them something to hold on to, something to think about when the stress of their lifestyle hit them hard. They'd both hoped for years to have a reason to go back for all of it, to have a place to take it that they could finally call home, but so far they hadn't had any luck in that area. Instead they made the trip each time their lease ran down and paid to keep it for another year. It might be a waste of hard-earned money, but to them it was worth it.

“Don't bother with a shirt, little wolf. I'm sure you'll be shifting again in a few minutes, for one reason or another.” Declan froze with his hand inside his bag again when the alpha spoke and then he quickly nodded in understanding. Declan settled for clutching the bag to his chest as he hunched his shoulders in an effort to look small and submissive.

“I meant no disrespect, Alpha. I would never have trespassed if I'd had a choice. Once I realized I was in another pack's territory I ran straight ahead in the direction the scent was strongest. I'd hoped to introduce myself before any offense was given.” Declan kept his voice low and submissive and chanced a quick look up at the alpha

from behind his down swept lashes.

Neither he nor Lachlan was naturally so submissive, not after so many years with only each other for company. However, like the urge to obey from earlier, Declan knew that submission, even if it was only the appearance of it, was always the best way to deal with foreign alphas. He'd come across enough alphas in his lifetime to know how they normally reacted to strange betas who refused to show respect. Needless to say the wolf that had been chasing Declan had gotten off easy in the long run. A few bites and scrapes was nothing compared to what the alpha could have done without worrying about retaliation from the beta's pack.

"Well, for some reason I find that a bit hard to believe, the fact that you stumbled into my territory without realizing it that is, not the other bit. You were obviously too preoccupied with fleeing to come up with any major plans to be disrespectful. So why were you running in the first place?" The alpha smiled slowly at Declan, but he didn't seem too angry about the situation, just intrigued. Almost as if the idea that Declan had run head long into his territory on purpose interested him.

Declan's mind whirled as he tried to think of an explanation, of something close enough to the truth to tell the alpha without giving himself away. There was a good chance that this wolf would react the same way all the others had if he knew just who he was dealing with, just who Declan was.

“It was a dispute between packs, a mating negotiation that didn’t work out.” Declan tried to keep his breathing even and his heartbeat calm as he lied.

In a move that made Declan jump, the alpha stepped forward and crowded him back up against a nearby tree, bent his head and inhaled Declan’s scent deeply.

“There’s only one other scent on you, but it’s not a mate scent, not even close. So who is it, little wolf? Whose scent is wrapped around yours so close that it’s damn near a part of you? Hmm?” the alpha asked him, voice low, rough and commanding with the wolf so close to the surface.

“Brother. It’s my brother.” Declan breathed out. Lachlan was the only person he’d been close enough to in years for their scents to mingle and last for any length of time. Declan knew he was trembling, knew the stink of his fear was sharp and heavy in the air, but he couldn’t help it. Not when he was so obviously outmatched by the wolf that was so close to his throat.

“Brother? It’s so close though, almost too close to be a brother,” the alpha rumbled.

“Twin, he’s my twin.” Declan didn’t want to give up the information, didn’t want to risk giving his identity away, not when twins were so rare in their world, but he didn’t have a choice. He knew the alpha wouldn’t back off until he had his answers. Declan knew that even in this the alpha was perfectly within his right to do

whatever he wanted under the banner of protecting his pack and his territory from whatever threat Declan might pose. If anything he was being kind in simply asking instead of trying to pry the answers out of Declan in another way.

“Hmm, interesting. That would explain it, why it’s almost a perfect match for yours, only a tiny hint of something else to let me know there’s two scents instead of one.” Declan jumped and had to bite back a sharp moan as fear and arousal twined through his stomach when the alpha ran his tongue, warm and wet, across the exposed skin of Declan’s throat. “So a twin but no pack, nothing else in your scent or your taste. Well, I know you weren’t running away from home, not with your scent so clean and pure except for the way your brother’s on you. So tell me, little wolf, why was that beta chasing you? The truth this time, if you please.”

The reminder that his scent, and by default Lachlan’s as well, was clean was painful. The two of them hadn’t had the chance to stay in one place long enough for other scents to intertwine with their own. It made the wolf inside of Declan whine, made it whimper from the deep-seated pain of being relatively packless. Still Declan knew he couldn’t sidestep the question gracefully enough to not offend, not after he’d been caught out and still not punished. So he decided to answer.

“We were only looking for somewhere to rest, just long enough for my side to finish healing really. The pack there, well, they

were less than welcoming.” It was the truth, just not all of it, and

Declan prayed desperately for it to be enough to satisfy the alpha.

“And you expect me to believe that beta chased you all the

way up here because of that?” Abruptly the alpha let Declan go and

back away, his mouth pulled down into a deep frown. “I’d hoped that you’d be honest with me this time, little wolf.”

“What? I am! It’s the truth, I swear!” Declan could feel fresh

panic and fear begin to stir to life in his chest.

“I might have believed you, might have took you for your

word since you sound so sincere, but that beta was from the Tricot

Pack and while we’re not exactly friendly I’ve known their alpha for

years. She’s always been hospitable to strays; hell, she normally sends

them to packs she knows are low on numbers if she doesn’t absorb

them herself.” The alpha was back on Declan then, a strong claw-

tipped hand wrapped firmly around the long line of his neck. “So if

you expect me to believe that she had you *chased across three states*

for no fucking reason then you’ll be sorely disappointed.”

Declan couldn’t help the way he reacted, the way his body

thrashed and a snarl ripped its way out of him. He knew better than to

challenge an alpha, knew better than to struggle, but the claws at his

throat set him off in a way the threat of the alpha’s teeth from earlier

didn’t. It brought back memories he’d have preferred stayed buried.

The alpha barely seemed to notice his struggles, just tightened his

hand slightly and rode them out until Declan was finally able to

overcome the reaction. Face flushed and panting, Declan stared up into eyes that were almost entirely crimson and a face that had begun to go slightly long, like the alpha was on the verge of shifting but was holding it back for some reason.

“So you’re not nearly as well behaved as you make out to be, are you? I’d begun to wonder.” The alpha sounded like he was talking more to himself than to Declan, but then his eyes sharpened and his lips peeled back to reveal sharply pointed teeth. “Now this is the last time I’m going to ask you, little wolf. Why was he chasing you?” The hand around Declan’s throat tightened alongside each word like a physical reminder to tell the truth.

“I was-wasn’t lying.” Declan managed to rasp out, but then the rest of the story came tumbling out when crimson eyes flashed in barely banked anger. “We just wanted shelter! I swear! We meant no harm, and we would have left peacefully when asked.” Declan’s mind struggled to find the right way to explain, the right way to tell the alpha just who he and Lachlan really were. He could feel the other wolf’s impatience beginning to rise, could hear his heart begin to speed up and could scent his anger in the air as the alpha’s hand tightened even further. Declan was finding it hard to breathe and when he spoke again the words were rasped out through a throat gone tight.

“You ... you never asked ... me my name.” The words were breathy and harsh, but Declan forced them out anyways.

“Why should I care what your name is when you’ve lied to me before? When I’ve given you more chances to tell me the truth than I rightfully should have? Why should I believe you when you might just try to lie to me again?” Sharp fangs made the alpha’s words slightly slurred, but they still came across with the full power of his rank behind them.

“Ask ... me.” It was the last card Declan had, and it could either save him for the moment or provoke the alpha into killing him quicker. Either way he was out of options.

“What’s your name, little liar?”

“Declan ... Declan Adair.” The alpha froze, and Declan saw the moment his name registered, saw the surprise blow crimson eyes wide. Abruptly Declan was released as the large clawed hand that had been around his throat was pulled back as if Declan’s skin was on fire.

“Prove it!” the alpha barked.

Declan sucked in a deep lungful of air and tried his best to still his shaking. When he finally felt like he could move without coming apart he turned, stomach in knots at the thought of giving the alpha his back, and lifted sweat-soaked black hair from the nape of his neck. There was a harsh inhale, and Declan felt the heat of the alpha against his back again when the wolf reached out and traced the ink on the back of his neck with a clawed fingertip.

“W-Three-G-D-A?” There was a question in the alpha’s softly

spoken words as he read out what was tattooed across the vulnerable skin of Declan's neck. Declan clinched his eyes closed at the pain it brought him.

"Wolf ..." Declan cleared his throat roughly. "Wolf, third generation, Declan Adair. It was my ... identification of a sort."

"Your brother, your twin, he has one too?" The alpha's voice sounded almost gentle, not filled with anger like Declan was accustomed to after someone find out just who he was, what he and his brother had both been born to do.

"Yes. It was ... standard procedure." Their father, their alpha, had hated his and loved it at the same time. He had always seemed oddly proud of it, of the memories he always told Declan and Lachlan it carried for him. In quiet moments they'd catch him running his fingers across the tattoo softly, like he was touching something else. They both knew whom it was he was really thinking about, but they also knew better than to mention it.

"Most would say I should kill you right here, right now, for what you and yours have done." The words were breathed into Declan's ear.

"You wouldn't be the first to feel that way, and we both know that I'm not strong enough to fight you. Everyone wants us dead for what they think we did." Declan knew there was a sort of resigned sadness in his voice, but it was true. It was the reason they didn't have a pack, the reason they had never been able to stay in one place for

long enough for a scent to settle. Declan and Lachlan could make false identities, could lie and hide their real names, but in the end they always got found out. In the end they couldn't get rid of the tattoos, couldn't get rid of the proof of their pasts, the proof that always turned everyone against them.

The alpha sighed, and Declan shivered at the feel of his warm breath against skin gone clammy with fear and nerves. Declan had to force himself not to jump when the alpha pulled away and, with hands that were surprisingly gentle, tugged Declan around until they were facing each other again. Russet-colored eyes searched Declan's face for a long moment before the alpha wrapped thick arms around Declan's shoulders and pulled him into the firm wall of his chest. Declan froze, mind racing and breathing gone shallow at the unfamiliar gesture. No one except for Lachlan had hugged him for years. Even their father, their brave and strong alpha, had never been one for touches and affection. He was always too lost in memories, too preoccupied with a ghost to worry about more than keeping them alive.

They stood there for a while until Declan, wrapped in a sort of warmth and security he couldn't remember ever feeling, finally relaxed. When the alpha finally pulled away, Declan was loose limbed and calm in a way he didn't want to admit to from such a simple thing. Just then, in a way that caused Declan to go hot and red with embarrassment, his time running caught up with him as his

stomach growled loud and long. The alpha chuckled and tapped the tip of a long, blunt nailed finger against the curve of Declan's jaw.

“Come on, little wolf, let's go get that side of yours checked out and then see what we can do about getting you fed.” The alpha moved back a few steps and instead of shifting he reached out and wrapped a large hand around Declan's own and tugged gently.

Declan, confused by the abrupt switch and the invitation, found that he could do little else but follow.

Chapter Three

That confusion continued to haunt Declan a few hours later as he sat, side bandaged and with a steaming bowl of stew in front of him, at the counter in the alpha's kitchen. The alpha whose name he'd learned was Law. Declan was slightly dazed because on top of everything else Law wasn't just any alpha, he was a Carson. The Carson family had ruled the largest pack in the northern Midwest for generations. The wolves were known as the Flathead Pack due to their alpha seat having always been in that particular county, and they had control over an amazingly vast territory. For as long as anyone could remember a Carson had ruled over the Montana territory. With abundant land and room to spread out, not to mention access to Glacier National Park, the pack had remained large and strong where so many others had dwindled and died out.

The shock that he'd been driven so far north without realizing it had hit Declan hard in the chest. He and Lachlan had heard about the pack, just like everyone else had, despite how out of touch they'd always been with the information rings in the were communities. The size and reputation of the pack was the main reason that they'd always made it a point to give Montana a wide berth. While still dangerous they'd always figured they'd fair better against the smaller packs in the southern states, with the exception of Texas, which was a place that they avoided at all cost.

“An Adair? Alive? And so far north? Law, that's damn near

impossible. If it wasn't for his tattoo, I'd call you crazy." Declan could hear the conversation taking place in the hallway outside of the kitchen perfectly. The wolf who was talking to Law was Trace, a powerful looking were with shaggy dark brown hair and vibrant green eyes, the pack's head beta and Law's younger brother.

"Trust me, I know how crazy it sounds Trace, but it's true.

Plus, according to him he's got a brother. A twin brother at that."

There was a hint of something in Law's voice that Declan couldn't place, but he was distracted by Trace's low and slightly amused voice.

"Now that's an image, pretty little thing like him ..."

Whatever Trace was about to say was cut off by Law's low and threatening growl. Trace laughed loud and long and didn't seem very worried.

"Oh, so that's how it is, huh? Don't worry, I won't poach."

Trace seemed even more amused than before, and there was the sound of a furniture shifting and bodies moving. Declan recognized the sound of playful scuffling immediately. He and Lachlan did it enough for him to be able to pick the sounds out anywhere.

Declan wasn't sure what Trace meant, but he didn't dwell on it for long. Instead his thoughts turned back to Lachlan. He felt the wave of sadness and almost panic rush through him, and he heard the voices in the next room abruptly stop. His brother, his twin, was out there somewhere without him, alone and possibly hurt, and Declan was too far away to help him. Even though he knew Lachlan was

smart, knew he was strong and just as capable as he was, the distance between them still hurt. It always did, but this time Declan was tired and wounded and all he wanted was his brother, his pack mate.

“Declan, little wolf, what’s wrong?” Law was there, hand gentle on his shoulder in that way that Declan wasn’t used to. Law had led him all the way back to his house without ever letting go of his hand, had guided him up the stairs and into a bathroom before he’d finally let him go. He’d taken the bag that was still clutched tightly in Declan’s hand away from him, tucked it under his arm and then turned and pulled some towels and another pair of loose sweatpants from a small closet. Law had handed the bundle to Declan, told him to shower and then he’d walked out of the bathroom and closed the door softly behind him.

Declan had bathed mechanically, hadn’t let himself luxuriate in the hot water as much as he wanted to. When he’d finally left the bathroom, Law had been back by his side in seconds. After that Law had led him into the kitchen where he’d wrapped his side and pushed him down at the counter where a large bowl of stew was waiting for him before he’d gone to talk to Trace, who’d been eyeing Declan curiously from the door.

The hand on his shoulder squeezed lightly, just enough to get his attention but not enough to hurt, and Declan forced himself to focus on Law.

“Sorry, it’s nothing.” He’d already told Law more than he’d

ever told anyone, had been open in a way that he never was, even if it was under duress. It was something he didn't need to keep doing.

"Declan." Law's voice was sharp. "Don't lie. You know I don't like that."

Declan winced and averted his eyes back down to his bowl, but the sound of his own voice surprised him because he'd honestly not meant to speak.

"I'm worried about Lachlan."

"Could you call him? Do you two have a way to keep in contact in case something like this happens?" Law asked him softly, brow arching up in surprise when Declan stared at him in confusion.

"You'd let me do that? I mean, it's allowed?" Declan could feel his understanding of the situation begin to shift around him into something he didn't recognize. Law stared at him for a second before he spoke, confusion plain on his face.

"Why wouldn't it be allowed, Declan?" Law's voice suddenly turned sharp and suspicious. "What did you think I brought you back here for?"

Declan felt himself flush as his shoulders hunched despite his efforts to keep his spine straight and his expression blank. There'd been one or two alphas over the years who'd thought they could get away with things, thought that just because he and Lachlan were alone with no pack they were weak. While they might not have been strong enough to fight an alpha, they were both normally fast enough

to outrun them. Declan had just assumed that this time he hadn't been fast enough. He'd gone along with it because Law hadn't hurt him yet and because it gave him time to plan, gave him time to try to find a way out despite being weaker than he'd been in years.

"Declan?" Law prompted him to answer but even with the anger that Declan could hear growing in his voice the hand on his shoulder never turned painful.

"You brought me back here, took my bag, made me shower. You're an alpha, so I just assumed ..."

Law hissed low and angry, more cat than wolf, and the hand on Declan's shoulder came off instantly. Declan watched as Law began to pace angrily back and forth in front of him. Declan's eyes were helpless to do anything but take in the way Law's wide shoulders were still bare, the way the muscles in his back flexed when he reached up to rake both of his hands through already messy hair.

The way the loose pants Law was wearing had dipped down to sit low on the cut of his hips. When Law finally seemed to calm down enough to speak, he turned back towards Declan who was surprised to see that his eyes were once again a bright, vibrant crimson.

"Have you come across a lot of alphas who've tried that sort of thing?" Something in Law's voice warned Declan against lying so he shrugged and told the truth straight out.

"A few. In the beginning it wasn't a problem but when our father died, well, most of them wanted us dead. But there have been a

couple who thought they could ... *take* what they wanted just because we have no pack.”

“That’s fucking sick. They don’t deserve to be alpha, don’t deserve to be wolf. We don’t *take* from someone not willing, not like that. We’re better than that.” Law sounded so passionate, so sure, that it brought a small slightly sad smile to Declan’s face.

“Not all of us think like that. There’s some that think the opposite, that because we’re *were* we have the right to take things whenever we want. Plus, with us there’s no danger of a pup being born outside of the pack’s reach. Lachlan and I, we were always just fast enough to keep the thing that was being taken from being either one of us.”

At his words Law clenched his eyes shut tightly and breathed out slowly, and when he opened them again the color was the same, but the rage that had been lurking in their depths was carefully banked down. Law stepped forward back into Declan’s space and with one smooth move he reached up to cup Declan’s jaw in the palm of his hand just like he had in the forest.

“That’s not why you’re here, Declan. I brought you here to rest, to get your side looked after and to get some food in you, not to take anything from you that you aren’t willing to give. I took your bag and put it in a guest room, and I gave you clothes so we could wash yours. You’re not a prisoner.” Law leaned down and rubbed his stubble covered jaw against Declan’s smooth one in a comforting

gesture that spoke directly to the wolf in him. Then, breath warm and moist against the shell of Declan's ear, he whispered quietly. "I promise that you're safe here, Declan. No one's going to do anything to hurt you. On my word as alpha."

Declan breathed out a heavy sigh and almost without thinking about it he copied Law's gesture and rubbed their jaws together. It was a move of comfort, the sharing of scent and physical affection that most wolves enjoyed regularly. It was something that Declan hadn't done with anyone but Lachlan in years. After a few more seconds he pulled away before Law could and cleared his throat softly.

"Thank you."

"Don't. Don't thank me for something that simple, little wolf."

"Do you want to call him now or wait? There's a phone on the wall right behind you that you're free to use." Law nodded to the cordless phone that was mounted on the bright, cheery yellow wall behind him.

"He, uh, he won't answer if he doesn't know the number."

"Neither of us will. It helps keep us safe, helps us hide." Declan fiddled with the spoon in his rapidly cooling stew when he spoke.

"Then sit here, eat that instead of playing with it, and I'll go get your bag. The less energy you use the quicker you'll heal. If you rest you should be good as new in a day or two." Law frowned suddenly, a dark look passing over his face. "You must have been in

pretty bad shape for that wound to linger as long as it obviously has.

I'm amazed you were still able to outrun one of the Tricot betas for as long as you did."

Declan almost told him that it was thanks to years of practice, that all of the time he and Lachlan had spent on the move had conditioned them to run without stopping. That their lifestyle had forced them to be able to outrun and outlast almost anyone they came across. Instead he nodded his thanks to Law and turned back to his food where he had to force himself not to tear into it like an animal. It'd been a long time since he'd had anything that smelled even remotely as good as the stew did, and Declan wanted to savor it in case he didn't get another chance. A part of him mourned the fact that Lachlan wasn't there to enjoy it with him. He'd always been particularly fond of rabbit.

Law's hand on the back of his neck suddenly caused him to tense before he could stop himself. All Law did was squeeze lightly for a second before he let go and then turned to walk out of the kitchen and back towards the hall where Trace was still waiting patiently. The beta was obviously able to hear everything that had just gone on, but he'd remained quiet and still. Right before he went through the doorway Law paused and looked back over his shoulder at Declan.

"Eat as much as you want, Declan, there's plenty so don't worry about not getting more, alright? Just eat and if you want more

it's on the stove." Then he was gone.

Declan, slightly ashamed at having been caught, stared down at his bowl for a second before he shrugged. He picked up his spoon and started eating with an enthusiasm he didn't normally allow himself to show. If Law was going to feed him, then Declan wasn't going to look a gift wolf in the mouth.

Chapter Four

Declan stared down at the phone in his hand nervously. Law had handed his bag to him the day before just like he'd promised, but Declan still hadn't called Lachlan. Once he knew he was free to the urgency had faded a bit even if it didn't go away completely. So instead of calling he'd eaten and under Law's watchful, but not suffocating, eye had made his way back upstairs to the guest room that Law had gently told him was his. He'd collapsed onto the most comfortable bed he'd seen in his entire life and between one breath and the next he'd fallen asleep.

Now, late the next afternoon, after eating again and being grinned at from a distance by Trace while Law hovered over him, he still hadn't called. Declan just wasn't sure what to say to his twin, wasn't sure how to put what had happened into words when he could still scarcely believe it himself. Finally, conscious of the way he could hear Law moving around in the room next door and Trace down the hall, he gathered his determination and dialed Lachlan's number. He felt his breath rush out in relief when his twin answered on the third ring.

"Declan! Dec, are you alright?" Lachlan sounded frazzled and stressed and despite the seriousness of the situation the sound of his voice forced Declan to choke down a slightly shaky chuckle.

"Lach, I'm fine. I'm peachy." There was a sudden silence on the other end of the line, and Declan knew that Lachlan understood.

Peachy was something they only said to one another when they were separated and there were other wolves around but they were momentarily safe. It wasn't an expression they'd been able to use often. "Look, where are you? Are you safe?" It was the most important thing to Declan at the moment, the one thing he needed to know that would set his wolf at ease.

"I'm fine, Dec, I'm sunning it up. You know surf, sand, sun and seafood." That meant he was somewhere dry, somewhere landlocked with a forest thick enough for him to go undetected. Most of all it meant he really was safe. Declan sucked in a relieved breath. "Good, that's good. What about the beta that was chasing you? Mine tailed me all the way up to Montana, Lach." Declan knew Lachlan would put two and two together and would understand just what Declan was telling him. With the knowledge of other wolves and the mention of Montana, Declan knew Lachlan would understand just where he was.

"I hit a river and let it take me downstream a few miles. I got lucky, and he couldn't track me after that. Seems like you got stuck with the smarter of the two." Lachlan sounded vaguely amused.

"Well, they sent the smart one after the smart twin. Makes sense." Declan couldn't help but snipe at him.

"Fuck you. At least I'm the pretty one." Lachlan laughed lightly before he abruptly turned somber. "Dec, if you need me, I can be there in a few days, three maybe four at the most on foot, less if I

steal a car.”

Declan knew his twin was serious, knew he’d break their own rules in a heartbeat if he needed him to. Declan would do the same for him, had done the same for him in the past. Plus, he also knew that Lachlan’s three or four days was probably more like one or two, which put him a lot closer than Declan had expected.

“No. No, it’s alright. I’m safe where I’m at. Just, just lay low, okay? Stay sharp and stay safe, and I’ll call you back later. I’m not sure what’s going to happen, but I need you safe, Lach. You know that.” He knew he was practically pleading with his twin, but he couldn’t help himself. Law seemed genuine, and Declan desperately wanted to believe him, but he wasn’t willing to risk Lachlan, wasn’t willing to put him into any kind of danger that might pop up unexpectedly.

“Goddamn you, Declan, you have to stop doing this. You ... you can’t keep doing this to me, alright? I need you safe too; you need to be safe with me. Just, just let me come. We can, we can handle whatever it is together.” Lachlan sounded so upset that Declan could feel his heart break a little in his chest, but he wouldn’t give in.

“Lach, little brother, I’m safe. I swear I’m safe. Just do this for me, alright? Just hole up somewhere and be careful. Promise me, Lach. Promise on Mom.” He needed to know that Lachlan would listen to him, needed to make sure he wouldn’t rush for Flathead the first chance he got. Lachlan sighed loud and unhappy in his ear.

“On Mom, Dec. I promise. But you have to call me, Dec. One day without a call and I’ll hunt you down. You know I will. No matter what, man, it’s you and me, right? That’s how it’s always been.”

“Of course, Lach, you and me. I’ll call, I swear I will, just stay safe.” Declan smiled slightly as he spoke.

“Fine. I’ll talk to you later, Dec.”

“Later.” Declan waited a beat and then he pressed end on the call. They never said ‘goodbye’, hadn’t since the last time they’d seen their mother, when she’d pressed them against her chest so tight it hurt and whispered it into their ears. Declan tossed the phone onto the bed behind him and then leaned forward until he could rest his head in the palms of his hands. He hoped he was doing the right thing, hoped Law was sincere and this wasn’t a mistake.

A part of him was afraid that he was getting ahead of himself, that the way Law could put him at ease was affecting him, was clouding his judgment. He’d come across plenty of attractive weres, alphas and betas both, as well as other shifters and humans, but none of them had ever affected him the way Law did. None of them had ever made heat curl in his gut and want pool in his chest just by looking at them. He’d always been too wary, too cautious and aware of the fact that danger could find him and Lachlan anywhere to ever feel any real attraction to anyone.

But with Law, with Law it was like he couldn’t help himself.

His wolf had whined with want in the woods the day before, had

urged him to submit and to try to entice the alpha despite the fear that had eaten away at them. It was a split sensation that he'd never experienced before.

Declan shook his head sharply to clear his mind and then fell back onto the mattress beside his phone. Law had told him to rest, had told him he wasn't a prisoner and so far he'd kept his word, even if it had only been for a day. Already the claw marks on his side were healing at a pace that Declan hadn't experienced in far too long, aided by deep sleep and being able to eat his fill. The healing made him drowsy, but that wasn't a hardship either, not with how comfortable Declan's bed was or how the clothes Law kept giving him smelled faintly of alpha.

So instead of questioning it any more, he let himself drift off to sleep, the late afternoon sun shining through the curtains of the room's window.

Chapter Five

Declan was pleased when he was finally able to get rid of the bandages after another two days of rest and healing. A day or two more after that saw him so well healed that there wasn't even a scar to show for what had happened to him. Law had seemed particularly pleased about that, had made happy sounding noises in the back of his throat when he'd inspected Declan's side for the last time. Declan had twitched and bit back a low moan when Law had rasped his tongue, hot and wet, over the place where the bear had clawed him and had then nuzzled the spot with a rough jaw before he'd pulled back and let Declan pull his shirt back down.

Declan had stared after him in confusion, barely able to resist the urge let his teeth lengthen or his claws to form as his wolf had immediately latched on to the gesture. It was one thing in a list of many that the wolf was sure said Law might want him the same way Declan wanted Law, despite the fact that they barely knew each other. It was in the way that Law made sure to touch him constantly, and each time he did it like he was afraid Declan was going to break, like he was fragile in a way that Declan almost resented. Declan had never been treated like that by anyone and to have it happen now threw him off balance. The fact that Law provided for him, the way he was insistent that Declan ate and rested and was generally comfortable added to it. The alpha was protective as well in a way that didn't escape Declan's notice. He saw the way that Law would

look on in amusement when Trace popped up to banter with Declan but was ready to snap and snarl at his head beta the second he thought Trace was out of line. It was especially apparent with the way that Declan could smell Law's scent on his own skin. He went to sleep each night with Law's scent wrapped around him like a cocoon because even though Law hadn't been in the room the bed sheets still smelled faintly of him anyways. It was in the way that after only a few days Law was working his way into Declan like no one ever had before.

If Declan didn't know better, he would think he was being courted. Declan forced himself not to think about it, not to let hope blind him to reality. Law had his pick of betas, male and female alike. There was no way he'd want someone like Declan, no way he'd pick a beta without a pack, one half of a pair that was constantly shunned by other weres. Declan knew it was true, but it didn't stop his wolf from whining in want when he curled up to sleep. It didn't stop the way Declan had started to wish he were bedding down each night *with* Law instead of in the next room.

The next few days passed in the same sort of peaceful daze. Declan called Lachlan every night, sometimes during the day, and he couldn't help but notice the way Law and Trace would suddenly appear within ear shot whenever he was on the phone. At first it made him suspicious, but after a few times he relaxed slightly. The other two wolves didn't know where Lachlan was—they were both too

careful to let that happen—and if anything they seemed almost amused at the way they liked to snipe at each other gently.

Trace in particular seemed especially interested in the calls, and after a few days stopped pretending like he wasn't listening in.

Neither Trace nor Law ever said anything, barely did more than breathe when Declan was on the phone, so despite the fact that Lachlan always knew they were there their presence never disrupted the phone calls.

It wasn't until Law called him into the living room one night and motioned for him to take a seat on the couch beside him that Declan got an inkling about what might actually be going on. To say it was a surprise would be putting it mildly. They were alone in the large house, Trace gone for the night and no one else around like always. In all the time Declan had been there he'd never met another member of Law's pack besides Trace. He'd smelt them, heard them on occasion outside the house and even in the forest surrounding the property, but he'd never met them. He couldn't help but wonder if that was deliberate. Couldn't help but wonder if Law was finally getting rid of him, finally going to send him on his way. While a part of him was almost eager for it to be over with, eager for the pain to come and go so he could get back to Lachlan and put it all behind him, another part was desperate to stay.

"This house is huge," Law stated suddenly, and Declan stared at him in surprise. That wasn't how he'd thought the conversation

would begin. “It’s huge, and it’s empty. You’ve been here for a while now, little wolf, and I know you have to be curious about the pack, about why you’ve never met them.” Law glanced at Declan out of the corner of his eye, and Declan could only nod in agreement. “The pack is huge, one of the largest in the country. We’re family, and we’re strong. But besides me and Trace, this house, the alpha house, is empty. The rest of the pack either have mates and families or prefer their own space. So it’s just us two here with all of these rooms and no one to fill them.”

Law paused and turned to look at Declan straight on for a moment before he turned and leant his back against the edge of the couch so he could stare up at the ceiling. The light from the television flickered across his face in the otherwise dark room, and all Declan could do was stare. Law was beautiful in a rugged sort of way, all tanned skin and hard-earned muscle, the perfect wolf. Just the sight of him was enough to have want like nothing he’d ever known curl its way through Declan’s body.

“Trace and I have talked about it, and we both agreed that we’d like to offer you the chance to join the pack, you and Lachlan both, and that we’d like you to stay here. We thought you could give it some more time, could stay here by yourself for a while, maybe go out and see Flathead and meet everyone else. Get a feel for the place before you decide if you want to call Lachlan in to see if you two would like to stay here. I know you’re protective of him, that you’re

protective of each other. Me and Trace can always hear it when you talk. It's ... nice."

Declan was speechless, frozen in shock and barely able to breathe. It took him a few minutes before he could speak, before he could gather himself enough to even think clearly.

"I don't know what to say."

"Just, just say yes. Say yes to trying, to seeing if maybe this might be a home for you two one day. That's all I'm asking, little wolf, just say yes to trying." Law still wouldn't look at him, and Declan, still shocked, found himself mirroring Law's position so that he could stare up at the ceiling as well. They sat there together in silence, Law deceptively relaxed and Declan's mind whirling.

"We were born into it. Into captivity, that is, me and Lachlan both." The words spilled out of him before he could stop them, and he felt the way Law tensed up instantly. He knew that the alpha understood just what he was talking about. When Law didn't speak Declan kept going, confident that he wouldn't be interrupted and that he could finally say this and get it over with.

"Our father, our alpha, he was born into it too. His parents had been caught when his mother was pregnant with him in a raid in Mississippi. His father was an alpha, but their numbers were small, and the pack was wiped out quickly, all but his parents." Declan took a deep shuddering breath because this part of the story had always upset him and Lachlan both, had always sent their wolves to howling

in a mix of rage and pain for the pack elders they had never gotten the chance to meet.

“She was pregnant, so they were vulnerable. The hunters had a lot of experience, and eventually he broke. They put the first tattoo on him, species, generation, and name. They trained them like animals, Law. Then when Dad was born they did it to him too, and when he was old enough they set up a breeding plan. Something to keep the bloodline strong, they used to say. When we turned ten, me and Lachlan got the tattoo too. Wolf, third generation, Declan and Lachlan Adair, just like I told you in the woods.” Declan could almost feel the tattoo on the back of his neck tingle in remembered pain. It had hurt so bad, had been so painful and their mother, Keela, had cried when they’d been brought back. Their father had stared at them, stone faced as always, but he’d run gentle fingers through their hair and dried their tears with his thumbs.

“That place, the compound, was all either of us knew. We had books and television and all of that. Hell, we even went to school. We just didn’t know any better at the time. We always looked on it as home, never thought to run or escape. Didn’t even know that escaping was something we should be thinking about. When we turned fifteen they took us on a hunt, made us track our first were. We thought it was alright, thought we were doing good, that whoever we were after had to be evil or something. But they weren’t. They were just wolves, regular terrified wolves trying to protect their pack.” Declan

swallowed back bile and shame. He remembered how upset he and Lachlan had been, how devastated they'd been to discover everything they'd been taught was a lie.

"Little wolf ..." Law's voice was soft, almost sympathetic, but Declan didn't let himself focus on it, just forced himself to keep talking, to get it all out in one go.

"Afterwards ... when it was done ... our mother convinced our father that we needed to leave, that we couldn't have the life he had. She ... uh ... she didn't make it out, but we did, the three of us. And once we were out we thought we'd be alright, that we could keep one step ahead of everyone else, that other weres might help us. But we found out the hard way that we didn't have any allies, not since it had gotten out about the Adair pack, the ones who worked with hunters, the ones who acted like hunting dogs. Dad didn't know it would be like that, didn't realize that Adair was synonymous with traitor." Declan could taste the bitterness in his own words as he remembered those first years, the way they'd had to struggle alone, still reeling with the loss of a mate and a mother respectively. The way their father, who'd always been so strong and calm, had splintered and grown weaker year after year.

"What happened to him? To your dad?" Law had turned in his spot on the couch and leaned forward towards Declan. They were so close that Declan could feel Law's heat, could feel the way his breath was warm and moist on the side of his face.

“Puma clowder just after we turned nineteen, he fought back but once me and Lachlan were clear it was like the fight went out of him. It’s been me and Lachlan for the past seven years. Constantly traveling, constantly running, trying to stay ahead, looking for somewhere to go.” Their father was never the same after their mother had died. He’d just always seemed to be living on borrowed time, like he was only concerned with keeping Declan and Lachlan alive until they could do it for themselves. They’d all known he wouldn’t be following them the night the puma clowder had attacked; they’d all known it was goodbye.

“Why are you telling me this, Declan? I would have asked eventually, we both know that, but you didn’t have to lay it out like this for me. Didn’t have to be so ... vulnerable.” Law spoke softly, and Declan let his eyes drift closed as he breathed out slowly.

“You ... you offered me and Lachlan both a place here, Law, offered us a home. I just thought that you deserved to know exactly what it was you were inviting to live with you and Trace. Just what kind of blood and history we’d be bringing with us. Other packs would turn on you if we stayed. They won’t be interested in our side of the story, Law. All they’ll care about is the fact that we used to live with hunters.” Declan knew it was true, knew that other packs would rage at Law’s when they found out he’d opened his doors to not one but two Adairs. It was just the way things were and in all honesty Declan had never blamed the other weres, not really. Sure, he was

bitter about never being accepted, Lachlan was too, but he understood not wanting to welcome such a large potential threat into the fold. For all the other pack knew they could have been released and told to gain the trust of others instead of escaping. It was something they'd been accused of more than once.

“Let them try.” Law sounded fierce, and Declan was sure the alpha's eyes would be that beautiful bright crimson color if he looked. “If they think they have any right to dictate who or what I allow into my territory, into my pack, then they'll learn their lessons the hard way. We didn't grow to be so strong by letting the other packs tell us what to do, Declan.”

“But what about your wolves? What about your pack? Are they going to just welcome us with open arms, Law? Let us around their mates and their pups like nothing is wrong?” Declan half shouted before he could stop himself, agitation growing as he felt the need to move, to pace and not feel so trapped by what he wanted but was reasonably sure he couldn't have. Law gave a low, displeased rumble when Declan shifted to spring up from the couch, and he splayed one large hand on the center of Declan's chest to keep him still. The way Law molded himself even closer to Declan's side forced him to relax and breathe deeply, almost against his will. The alpha had a much larger effect on him than Declan wanted to admit even to himself, but that part of him that wanted it to be real couldn't help but bask in it while he could.

“I’m alpha, and my wolves respect that. If I tell them to welcome you and Lachlan as pack, they will. Plus, any reservations they might have beyond that will be put to rest when Trace vouches for you as well. And he will, he’s already said as much. With our support the rest of the pack will fall in line quickly, Declan. You, both of you, would be welcome here.” Law sounded so persuasive, almost seductive, and Declan wanted to give in to him, wanted to try even though he was sure it would end badly. Only the thought of Lachlan, of forcing his twin to feel the same kind of pain he would if things went sour, stopped him from outright agreeing.

“I can’t make that kind of decision alone. Not without talking to Lachlan. I can’t decide to stay here alone for any longer than I already have, not even to test the waters, without talking to him, Law. Please understand that.” For once Declan wasn’t sure what Lachlan would think about the situation he was in. They’d never had anything like this happen to either of them before.

“I know that, and I wouldn’t force you to, little wolf. It wasn’t my intention to make you think I would. I’ve never met him, but I would never force that kind of decision between you and Lachlan.” Law pulled away from Declan then, moved until he was well on the other side of the couch. Declan struggled not to feel abandoned, not to mourn the loss of Law’s warmth and the way it had felt to almost be held again.

“I can’t promise you anything, Law.” Declan wanted to,

wanted to so badly. He wanted to promise Law anything he asked for, wanted to swear he'd do whatever was required of him to make this work. He wanted to do all of that, but he could not, would not. Not when there was more than just his own safety on the line. He'd never be selfish enough to blindly risk Lachlan like that. Law had moved while he was speaking, had gained his feet and moved until he stood directly in front of where Declan sat on the couch, legs splayed.

“You don't have to promise me anything except that you'll take your time. That you'll call your brother and you two will talk about it and that you won't say no without a good reason, Declan. Don't say no just because you're scared. Just give me a chance to prove that this is where you, both of you, belong. Give me the chance to be your alpha, little wolf.” Law leaned back down over Declan suddenly, braced himself with one strong arm on the back of the couch as he dipped his head and pressed his lips softly against the vulnerable skin of Declan's throat. Declan had to force himself not to moan, had to hold back the wolf's desire to give Law the submission he was asking for. “I'll protect you, I swear I will. Both of you.”

Law pulled back slowly, let his lips linger on Declan's throat as he rubbed his jaw against the underside of Declan's chin, sharing scent in that way that drove Declan's wolf crazy. When Law finally pulled back enough so that they could look each other in the eyes, Declan was sure for a moment that Law was going to kiss him. His tongue flicked out on instinct to wet his lips, and he could see the way

Law watched it, could smell the woodsy scent of Law's arousal mixing with his own in the air around them. Instead Law took a deep breath, clenched his eyes closed tightly before he straightened and without another word stalked out of the room.

Declan sat there stunned and uncomfortably aroused as he listened to Law make his way upstairs and into his bathroom. His cock was hard and heavy in the loose fitting pants they both favored, and his heart beat out a staccato rhythm in his chest. It only got worse when he heard the shower turn on, when thoughts of Law, of all that power and strength, shower slick and glistening, filled his mind.

Declan groaned low in his throat, pressed the heel of his hand against his cock through his pants and desperately prayed for the strength not to throw himself at Law's feet. There was too much at stake for him to ruin it all in a moment of weakness.

Just because Law had been aroused didn't mean that he *wanted* Declan. It didn't mean he wanted him for keeps, not the way that Declan had already begun to resign himself to wanting Law.

Chapter Six

“What does he want, Dec? We’ve never had ... no one has ever offered us anything like this before. It can’t be for free. We’re not that lucky.” Declan could hear the same frustration in Lachlan’s voice that he knew was in his own. He could see his twin in his mind’s eye, knew Lachlan would be pacing, one hand fisted in thick black hair, dark blue eyes that they both shared narrowed and focused as he vibrated with restless energy. Lachlan had always been like that, even when shifted he had always seemed like he was two steps from shaking right out of his fur.

Despite being identical, Lachlan had always seemed so much more alive than Declan had ever felt, had always seemed so much more passionate and vibrant. It made Declan love him even more.

“I know, Lach, I know. But Law, the alpha here, he seems ... genuine. Lach, whatever it is that he wants he doesn’t seem like he wants to hurt either one of us, him or Trace.” Declan hoped he was right, hoped that his instincts weren’t leading him astray for the first time ever. He hoped that his wolf’s infatuation with the alpha wasn’t clouding his judgment.

“Trace? He’s the head beta, right? This Law’s younger brother?” Lachlan sounded so suspicious it made Declan smile slightly.

“Yeah. He’s funny; I think you’d like him, Lach. I think you’d like both of them a lot. Law is ... he’s unlike any other alpha we’ve

ever met.” Declan could tell from the thick silence on the other end that he’d given something away, and he cursed harshly in the back of his mind. He was beyond grateful that Law had agreed to give him some privacy for this call and had gone to town to pick up a few things with Trace instead of sending the beta after them.

“Declan ...” Lachlan sighed across the line, and Declan knew he was caught, knew Lachlan was on to him. They knew each other so well, knew each other inside and out, and Declan knew that there was a chance this would happen eventually. He knew that he’d slip up and say the wrong thing in the right way and Lachlan would know just how he felt about Law.

“Lachlan, please, please don’t be angry.” He didn’t want Lachlan to be angry with him, didn’t want his twin outraged over feelings that Declan couldn’t help. He didn’t want his weakness to hurt his brother. Not with so much distance between them, not when they couldn’t see each other face to face, couldn’t fight it out or comfort each other afterwards.

“Declan, no! It’s fine. Just be honest with me, alright? Do you want this? Forget about me for a moment and just tell me what you’d do if it were just you. Would you stay?” Lachlan sounded so serious, and Declan couldn’t help but lean back against the wall of his room and let himself sink to the floor.

“I can’t do that, Lach. You know I can’t. You’re always going to be with me no matter what. I can’t think like that. I won’t.” The

very idea of it sent his wolf to howling in denial. To even imagine what his life would be like without Lachlan, his twin, his brother and his pack mate, was unthinkable.

“Declan, I know how you are! If you think for a second there might be some kind of risk to me you’ll write it all off no matter how much you want it. I feel the same way about you. That’s why I’m asking you to tell me what *you* want. Are you willing to take the chance that this might not work? Is he worth that?” Declan forced himself to take a deep breath and to really, truly do what Lachlan was asking him to do. His twin deserved the truth.

“I think so, Lach. I really do. Or at least I want him to be.”

Declan tipped his head back against the wall behind him. “He’s just been so good to me, Lach, so gentle and respectful in a way no one has ever been with either of us before. The things he does and says, it’s almost like he’s ...” Declan trailed off slowly. He wanted to tell Lachlan, wanted to share it with his twin, but the fear of sounding ridiculous made him pause.

“Like he’s what, Dec?” Lachlan sounded oddly gentle.

“Like he’s courting me, Lach, like he’s honest to god courting me.” It all spilled out of Declan in a rush. “He’s scenting me. He does it all of the time, Lach. He touches me so much, nuzzles and even licks me on occasion, and it’s driving me crazy. Both sides of me. My clothes, my bed, my skin, it all smells like him even if he hasn’t been in the room. Hell, the clothes I’m wearing are *his*. Not extra pack

clothes, Lach, not things set aside for visitors or anything like that.

They're his."

"Do you like it, Dec? Is it ... is it even remotely like those other alphas? Like what they wanted from us?" It was something that Declan had already thought about more times than he wanted to admit, something that plagued him.

"I don't think so. Or at least I don't want to think so. I told him about them, that first night I was here. I thought that was what he wanted, that my luck had finally run out and I'd gotten caught. But, Lachlan, you should have seen his face when I said that to him. He was so pissed but not at me." Declan remembered Law's fury with an almost sense of awe. "He gave me his word, as alpha, that no harm would come to me. Or to you."

Declan heard Lachlan suck in a harsh breath. That kind of promise, that kind of vow, wasn't given lightly. With wolves, especially with alphas, there was *power* in those kinds of words. They both knew that Law had to have been serious to invoke a vow like that. The reality of that hit Declan a little late.

"He swore, Lach. He swore we'd be safe. He gave me his *word*." He knew his voice sounded just as awestruck as he felt.

"Alright, Dec, alright. Stay. I want you to stay there, scope it out, meet the rest of the pack and find out from this alpha of yours just what we're going to have to give in return. If he gave his word, gave an oath that we'll be safe then it might not be anything we're not

willing to give.” His voice was steady and strong, and Declan’s heart began to race in his chest because he knew that Lachlan was serious.

“What about you? Are you going to come? Do you ... do you not want to stay here even if it all works out?” Declan felt so vulnerable in the way that he’d always been with Lachlan, in the way that they were with each other. Vulnerable in the way he’d never been with anyone else. Not until Law.

“Declan! Declan, stop. You know I will, you know I do. We haven’t had a home, somewhere safe, in a long time. If this place can be that for us then I want it too. Especially if it’s what you want. I’ll come, just not right now. I’d like to scout around some more first, scope out the edges of the territory, maybe get a better lay of the land. Let your alpha know and hopefully he’ll spread the word so I won’t have to dodge angry betas every two seconds. Besides, if something does happen then it’ll be better to have one of us on the outskirts in case we have to outrun them.” Lachlan sounded vaguely amused, but they both knew it could happen and that in the end both of them could probably outrun most of the betas in the Flathead pack if they were pushed to it. Uninjured and with the amount of rest they’d both gotten from staying in one place, even separately, they’d be faster than ever.

“Alright.If you’re sure, Lach.” Declan did his best to ignore the pleased warmth that rolled through him at the way Lachlan called Law *his* alpha.

“I am. Now be careful and work things out with this Law of

yours.” Lachlan chuckled.

“He’s not mine, Lach,” Declan mumbled back, even more grateful than before that neither Law nor Trace were around.

“Not yet he isn’t.”

“Be careful, Lach.” Declan smiled softly even though Lachlan couldn’t see it.

“Stay safe, Dec.” They both stayed silent for a moment, listened to each other breathe in the quiet that followed, and then they both hung up.

Declan stayed where he was for a moment longer, head tilted back against the wall behind him, phone held loosely in his hand.

Talking to Lachlan, telling him everything, took so much weight off of his shoulders that he almost couldn’t believe it. He wanted Lachlan there with him, wanted to be safe and secure in the knowledge that he was an arm’s reach away, that he was only in the next room, but for now the calls helped. He understood Lachlan’s hesitance, understood and agreed with his reasoning even if he wished that it wasn’t necessary, wished that for once they could both take something at face value. Just once he wanted to be able to have something nice without waiting for it to blow up in his face.

Restless, Declan pushed himself up off of the floor, tossed his phone onto the bed and began to tug his clothes off with jerky movements. When he was naked he let the shift take him, let the change wash over his body as his bones shifted and fur rippled then

spread across his skin like wildfire. He had a while yet before Law was due back, before he had to ask the alpha just what he and Lachlan would have to give up in exchange for a place in the pack. He wanted to run one last time before that happened. He wanted to take joy and pleasure of the deep safe woods that encircled Law's house just in case he didn't get another chance.

With a small, almost playful growl Declan took off down the stairs, mind focused on the forest that was waiting on him.

Chapter Seven

Law was waiting on him by the time Declan got back. He was sitting on the back porch, gaze turned towards the woods, a serious expression on his face and a long necked bottle of beer in his hands. A slow smile spread across his features when Declan trotted, still shifted, out of the trees and into the clearing of the yard itself.

“If it wasn’t for the fact that you left all of your stuff here I would have been afraid that you weren’t coming back.” Law sounded amused and nonchalant, but Declan could see real relief on his face. The sight of it warmed Declan’s heart, made him yip happily and trot over towards Law, head high and tail wagging. Law laughed, loud and undeniably fond. “What are you, a dog? Have some pride, little wolf.”

Words like that would normally make Declan furious, would have his fur up and his teeth bared in seconds. But coming from Law, whose eyes were still warm with laughter, he took them as playfully as they were meant. He growled at Law and then yipped, high and sharp, before he turned around and trotted back towards the edge of the woods. An invitation to run.

“Oh, little wolf, you’re on.” Law put his bottle down and stood. With slow and deliberate movements, he unbuttoned the shirt he was wearing and shrugged it off so he could throw it over the railing. Even shifted Declan’s attention was focused on Law, eyes taking in every inch of skin avidly as it was slowly bared. By the time

Law was naked, mouth curled up into a half smile and eyes bleeding crimson, Declan knew exactly what he had to do.

Law's transformation was a thing of beauty. The way tanned skin and sculpted muscle gave way to fang and fur and claw was seamless. The power Law wielded, the strength and control that made him an alpha, was obvious in every moment of it. And when it was done, when wolf stood where man had moments before, nothing had changed. Law's wolf was as big and powerful as Declan remembered from that first day in the woods. Only this time he wasn't frightened, wasn't terrified of the wolf that towered over him, wasn't constantly on the lookout for an escape route. This time Declan let himself enjoy the sight of Law, let his eyes rake over him from muzzle to tail in admiration before he turned with another yip and bound off into the trees.

He heard Law howl behind him, a short playful burst of noise that he couldn't help but respond to, and then the game was on.

They weaved in and out of the trees at a breakneck pace, jumped over underbrush and splashed through shallow streams.

Declan could tell that Law was surprised by his speed, could tell that he hadn't expected Declan to be so fast, by the way Law began to take the game a bit more seriously. They nipped at each other's tails, tackled each other playfully into piles of dead leaves and then took off running after each other again.

The chase took them out into the deep woods, not too far from

where they'd first met, and Declan couldn't help but slow down a bit.

Law must have sensed the change in his mood because he slowed down as well and made his way to Declan's side to bump his shoulder lightly with his muzzle. In a move that took Law by surprise Declan jumped on him, sent them both tumbling to the ground in a heap of furred limbs. Law was quick to roll them over, quick to cover Declan's form with his own and to nose pointedly at his throat, asking him in a way that alphas normally didn't to submit.

Instead Declan let the shift overtake him and for a brief moment, before Law got over his surprise and shifted as well, he felt Law's thick coat brush against the bare length of his body and couldn't help but shiver. Law, human again, stared down at him silently for a moment before he leaned down and brushed their lips together gently. Declan froze for a long moment, but when Law moved to pull away, regret heavy on his face, he surged up off the ground, wrapped his arms around Law's neck and pulled him back down into a bruising kiss.

Law was the one to gentle it, the one to pull back an inch or so despite Declan's attempts to keep him close and to sweep his tongue lightly across the seam of Declan's lips. Declan parted them instantly, eagerly, and met the slick, hot slide of Law's tongue with his own.

Law's stubble rasped against Declan's face, and he knew the skin there would be rubbed raw if it kept up, but he didn't care. The feel of it, the slight rasping itch of it, sent heat spiraling through him, made

him buck his hips up and into Law's. The move caused their cocks, both bare and beginning to thicken, to rub together in a way that made Law groan low in his throat and press down against Declan harder. Declan spread his legs wider in response, let Law settle down against him completely even as he whined low in the back of his throat. Law shushed him with gentle sweeps of his tongue as he ran long fingered hands through Declan's disheveled hair. Their hips rocked against each other rhythmically as they kissed and a mix of sweat and pre-cum slicked the way for their cocks sliding against one another in the growing dampness between them.

Declan felt the coil in his gut begin to tighten, felt the heat of it in the base of his spine, and he could tell from the way Law's hips were beginning to falter that he was close too. Declan couldn't suppress the sharp bolt of fear that flared through him in that instance. Once this happened there would be no going back. Law tensed and froze on top of him and when he broke the kiss they were currently wrapped up in, Declan could see the confusion and concern in his face clearly.

"Little wolf?" Law questioned him softly, gently.

"Will this be alright? Will this be enough for us to be in the pack?" Declan blurted the words out and knew instantly that he'd said the wrong thing from the way Law's face went dark and his shoulders rigid.

"What the hell are you talking about, Declan?" His voice was

hard and surprisingly cold. Declan shivered slightly and wished he could curl in on himself, wished he wasn't so vulnerable and open the way he was nestled underneath Law's hard body.

"I ... we figured you'd want something, some kind of payment to let us into the pack," Declan stated as evenly as he could.

"The two of you figured? So you did talk to your brother then?" Declan could hear the anger building in Law's voice, but he wasn't sure what he'd done to set it off.

"We talked. Lachlan said that he'd be alright with joining as well if you'd allow it. But we both know this kind of thing doesn't come for free. We learned that a long time ago." Declan shrugged as best he could from his place on the ground. He tried to keep his thoughts straight, tried to ignore the way he could still feel Law's body pressed against his own, the hot brush of his cock against his hip.

"And this is the plan you came up with? To whore yourself out so I'd let you in?" Law's voice was sharp, and Declan couldn't help but flinch.

"No! But we both knew you'd want something, and we agreed that I needed to find out what it would be first. I figured since we don't have much to trade with I could ... offer you *this*. I know you said you wouldn't *take* something like this, but I'm not unwilling." Declan bucked his hips up against Law's as best he could to prove his point, but the alpha above him remained still.

“Declan ... little wolf ...” Law’s face had smoothed out, and his voice was gentle, but Declan knew he was still upset, could see it in the set of his broad shoulders. “That’s not what I want from you.”

“I thought ... after the other night on the couch I thought you wanted me too.” Declan knew his face was flushed with embarrassment and a hint of anger. If Law was so against the idea then Declan had obviously been wrong about everything, had obviously seen something between them that wasn’t there.

“Declan, I want you to listen to me this time, alright?” Law’s hands came up to frame Declan’s face until he had no choice but to stare at Law head on. “I don’t want anything from you in exchange for entering the pack. Not from you and not from Lachlan. *I* brought you here. *I* extended the invitation. There’s no need for a trade or a pay off or anything like that. Just decide if it’s what you and Lachlan really want, and if it is you’re in. Okay?”

Declan swallowed hard and forced himself to nod in response.

There was suspicious tickling in the back of his throat, a burning in his eyes that he refused to acknowledge. Law slid his hands back up into the thick of Declan’s hair and used it to turn his head to the side so he could lean down and fit his mouth against the curve of Declan’s ear again.

“Don’t think it’s because I’m not interested either, because I am,” Law whispered against Declan’s ear. “I’d love to lay you down and spread you out. To cover every inch of you with my tongue and to

eat you out until you're sloppy and open and waiting for me to fill you up. I want to watch you shake apart under my hands and my mouth. I want to make you twitch and mewl on my cock until all you can do is come and beg for more." Law pressed his hips down against Declan's again, and Declan could feel the way he was still hard, still hot and thick against the curve of his hip.

"After that I want to tie us together and make us both come over and over again until neither of us can anymore. Then I want to do it all over again. I know you'd look perfect drenched in my cum, saturated with my scent until everyone knows who you belong to, who your alpha is. You have no idea how bad I want that, how bad I've wanted it since the moment I first saw you in the woods." Law's tongue traced the shell of Declan's ear and then down the long slope of his neck until Law could press his teeth against the curve of Declan's neck just hard enough to make him gasp. When he spoke again the words slid across the skin there, made Declan's wolf whine high and sharp with the need to submit. "You smelt so good, so sweet and right and perfect, Declan. Like you were made just for me. I knew the only way you'd ever smell better would be if you were mine."

"Please. Please, Law." Declan moaned low and harsh in his throat as he struggled to get enough breath to be able to speak. The thought of being Law's was enough make his cock so hard it hurt, even as his wolf whimpered in want and need. His hips bucked up against Law's, desperate for friction, for touch. Desperate to try to

entice Law back into what they'd been doing minutes ago before

reality had intruded.

“So perfect for me. Listen to you begging already and I

haven't even really touched you. Haven't even gotten started. I can

smell how bad you want it, how hard and hot you are just from a little

dirty grind and from me talking to you like this. I bet I could make

you come, could make you spill all over yourself like a teenager just

from this.” Law pressed his teeth into the curve of Declan's neck

again and made a harsh pleased noise when Declan's head lolled back

to expose his throat. “I bet I could, but I won't. Not yet. Not like this.

You're going to come to me, little wolf, going to ask me for what you

want, beg me for it for no other reason than you want it. That way

we'll both know you're willing, that way there'll be no confusion. But

when you do, you'll be mine after that, Declan. You'll be mine, and I

don't share. So be careful.” Law nipped sharply at the exposed length

of Declan's neck, and then he let him go and levered himself up and

off of the ground. He gazed down at Declan for a second, raked his

eyes over Declan's naked and spread form like he was memorizing it.

Instead of saying anything else, Law breathed in deeply, turned and in

one fluid move shifted. Wolf once more, Law paused for a second and

then turned and trotted back into the trees in the direction of the

house.

Declan could only stare dazedly up at the trees that surrounded

him in a way he was quickly becoming familiar with where Law was

concerned. The implications of what Law had just said and the idea of actually having what he'd described happen had Declan reaching down to wrap a hand around the base of his cock tightly. Law had said he'd make Declan beg for it, had said that when he finally had him Declan would be his.

Declan knew it was true, had already come to terms with it. He'd known before he'd convinced Law to follow him into the woods, before he'd shifted and they'd kissed. He'd known the second the thought crossed his mind that if he ever let Law inside of him like that, if they ever got that far, that Declan would be a goner. Even if it only happened in some sort of exchange, even if it was only the price Declan had to pay for him and Lachlan to finally have a home, it would have still happened. He'd known that Law would own a part of him that he'd never get back, a part of himself that he'd never given to anyone else.

What he hadn't expected was for Law to realize that and to apparently want it to happen.

Declan began to stroke himself, slowly at first but then quicker as his breathing deepened. Law had said Declan would belong to him, would be his and his alone, and that was something Declan wanted almost desperately. Declan cried out when he came, pleasure rushing through him as Law's name echoed through the trees around him.

In the distance, Declan swore he heard an answering howl.

Chapter Eight

Declan spent the rest of the afternoon and much of the early night in the forest, trailing through the trees as a wolf, deep in thought. When he finally dragged himself back to the house he was beginning to consider home despite himself, the lights were all off except for the one in Law's room. Declan stared up at the window for a moment before he shook himself, shifted, and made his way inside to grab a shower and collapse in his room.

The next morning, when Declan pulled himself out from the tangled sheets of his bed, it was a silent house, Law and Trace nowhere to be found. Declan felt his heart twinge in his chest and couldn't stop himself from burying his face in the collar of the shirt he pulled out of the dresser. It was one of many that actually belonged to Law but had been given to Declan to wear for the time being.

Later that morning, when the house remained empty and there was no sign of Law returning soon, Declan called Lachlan. He was unable to hide anything from his twin for long, as usual, and he poured out his uncertainty and confusion. When he told Lachlan exactly what had happened, what he'd offered, his twin was furious.

"You told me he'd already said he wasn't like that, Dec! You told me he swore you'd be safe! Why the fuck would you do that? Put yourself in that kind of position?" Lachlan had practically roared at him. Declan had winced and tried to explain his side of the situation.

"I thought ... we talked about there being a price, Lach. We

both know this sort of thing doesn't normally come free, and I thought that it would be something small, something that wouldn't hurt either one of us in a way that mattered." It had made sense to him at the time, had seemed like the thing to do. Looking back on it, Declan wasn't sure what had really prompted him to act. The desire to find out what payment would be required for them to be pack or his own more selfish desire to have Law.

"But Dec, it would have hurt you. We both know it would have hurt you if he took you up on that. You like this Law too much, think too much of him," Lachlan said softly.

"Yeah, yeah, it would have. But maybe in the end it would have worked out better, Lach. At least then we would have been paid up, would have given him something and then I wouldn't be so confused, so anxious about what he's going to want out of us later in exchange for joining." Declan knew he sounded as confused and as frustrated as he felt but like always he felt safe letting Lachlan know that about him in a way he never had with anyone else.

"Declan, I thought you liked this alpha. I thought you said he wasn't like the others?" Lachlan said.

"I do, and he isn't." Declan was adamant in that regard. Law had already proven himself more honorable and decent than any other alpha they'd ever met.

"Then maybe, just this once, maybe we can trust someone that's not us. Maybe he really is what you want to think he is." Declan

could practically see Lachlan's shrug over the phone and the distance between them.

"It's just hard to come to grips with the thought of not being forced to give up something in exchange for what he's offering us." It was tearing Declan apart, the ongoing war inside of him between wanting to believe Law when he said they didn't need to pay and the ingrained truth that nothing was free.

"I understand that but regardless, Declan, I trust you. If you think so highly of him then there has to be a reason. If he proves you wrong in the end then we'll get out, simple as that. We've talked about this." It wasn't that simple—they both knew that—but the words had their intended effect and helped to soothe Declan's rattled nerves. No matter what they'd always have each other.

"I miss you, you know that, right?" Declan missed Lachlan like a limb, like maybe if he was around he'd be able to think clearer.

"I know, brother, I miss you too." Declan knew it was true, and he knew that both of them were reaching the end of their endurance when it came to being apart. It had been weeks already and their wolves howled for each other constantly, for the bond that had always been between them to not be stretched quite so far.

After their conversation Declan wandered around the house, trailed his hands along the walls and the railings and tried to imagine actually having the type of life that Law had offered them. It sounded so good, sounded perfect and right in a way he'd never thought either

him or Lachlan would find. He wanted it, wanted it with every fiber of his being, and with a deep breath Declan stilled his resolve and headed back upstairs. He was quick to grab his phone and some cash before he headed back downstairs where he pulled on his boots, picked up his key from the hanger by the door, the one that Law had given him days before but he'd never used, and headed out the door.

The walk towards town was longer than Declan expected, but the noise and the variety of scents that he could sense from a distance kept him pointed in the right direction as he ambled down the side of the highway. More than one car slowed down and a few people stopped and asked him if he needed help. Still it wasn't until another were, an older woman, her grey hair pulled back into a sensible bun and her eyes lined from laughter, stopped him on the edge of town and asked him if he was alright, if he needed him to call Law that Declan realized that everyone who stopped knew exactly who he was. He'd thanked her kindly but turned down the offer, told her he was just out to see the town.

"I'm sure you'll run into Law sooner rather than later if I know the alpha. Enjoy the sights!" She'd laughed at him before she'd reached out to pat him gently on the shoulder. She had gracefully ignored the way he'd stiffened in response to a strange were touching him and then she'd waved and been on her way.

In hindsight it was obvious that Law had already told his pack, told all of Flathead really, about him being up at the house. And

judging from the lack of hostility, Law had also told them about his decision to invite Declan and Lachlan into the pack. It was a novel experience, being treated like a normal person instead of something that needed to be destroyed by people who actually knew who he was.

Declan wandered around for a while and before he knew it he'd wandered into a few shops. He only bought a few things, just some shirts and a pair of pants, all of them a few sizes bigger than what he normally wore. He forced himself not to acknowledge the reason why he bought them that way. The clerk, a young girl with heavy makeup and the strong scent of being one half of a mated pair, inhaled deeply when he walked up and then winked and chuckled knowingly at him as she bagged his stuff.

Declan flushed but smiled back at her awkwardly before he scooped up his bag and scurried out of the shop, conscious of the fact that he probably smelled like he'd *bathed* in Law. The clothes that he'd just bought mocked him with the fact that they were all big enough to fit Law's broad shoulders and narrow hips. His wolf reveled in the fact that they smelled so strongly of alpha and that same part of him was hoping that Law would keep sharing clothes with him in the future.

After that Declan continued to wander around the town, conscious of the eyes, were and human alike, that followed his progress down the streets. About halfway through town a scent caught his attention, and he found himself following it almost without

realizing it. The scent trail led him to the town's library and, curiosity pushing him forward, Declan slowly walked through the door. Inside the building the scent was concentrated, and it hit Declan suddenly why it seemed so familiar despite being partially covered up by the many different scents in the town.

Fox.

The smell of fox was heavy in the air of the library, but Declan could still track it back to where it was strongest. Around the corner, a shelving cart at his hip and a book in his hand, stood the source. He was small, in the way that most werefoxes were, whipcord lean and built for speed and maneuverability. His hair was buzzed short, but its unusual shade of rich auburn that Declan knew would match his pelt when he shifted was still obvious. Declan knew the moment the fox smelt him, saw the way he stiffened for a moment before he turned his head and flashed his eyes, lamp yellow with slit pupils, at Declan over his shoulder.

Declan put his hands up slowly in a gesture of peace, tried to let the fox know that he meant him no harm, that he'd just been curious. The stranger stared at him for a moment, eyes narrowed in a pixie-like face before he snorted harshly, obviously dismissing Declan as he turned back to his shelving. Declan could see in the tense line of his shoulders that the fox was still very much aware of him and the threat he could pose.

Declan continued to watch him for a moment in puzzlement

before he slowly turned and made his way back out of the library.

Foxes were normally family creatures, normally kept to small groups and closely guarded their dens and their young. Plus, despite their size and the lack of sheer physical strength to match most other weres, foxes were still creatures to be leery of. They were different from any other type of were Declan had ever come across. Foxes normally had what they liked to call *tricks*, special things that they taught to their kits at a young age, but it was nothing short of magic from what Declan had seen. To see one working and apparently living in the middle of wolf territory was more than slightly unusual.

“I see you’ve found Quinn.” Law’s voice startled Declan so badly he jumped. He’d been so caught up in the mystery surrounding the fox that he hadn’t realized the alpha had walked up to him where he stood on the sidewalk. What Law had said still caught his attention once he’d managed to calm his heart rate back down.

“Quinn?” Declan arched a brow at Law in question.

“Hmm. Our librarian and resident bottlebrush.” Law jerked a thumb over his shoulder and back towards the library and the fox.

“Bottlebrush?” Declan asked.

“It’s the tail. It’s all ... bushy.” Law made a motion with his hands like something was exploding, and Declan couldn’t help but chuckle at how ridiculous he looked. Law grinned back at him, a warm light in his eyes.

“What’s a fox doing in the middle of your territory? I didn’t

think they'd do something like that," Declan asked curiously and was surprised when Law's face went hard and serious.

"It's not really my story to tell, but the long and short of it is that Colby, a beta in the pack, saved him a year or two back." Sadness flashed across Law's face. "He's the only one left in his family unit, and he didn't have anywhere else to go after he healed so we let him stay."

Declan didn't want to imagine how that would feel. While his life hadn't been easy, while it had been nothing but running for years now, he'd always had Lachlan. He couldn't imagine being all alone in the world like that.

"I hope I didn't scare him." Declan shot a look back over his shoulder towards the library. Law snorted and laughed low in the back of his throat as he moved closer to Declan so he could wrap an arm around his shoulders and pull him closer. Declan resisted for a moment but then gave up and let Law tuck him underneath his arm and set them to moving back down the street.

"Don't let the fact that he's alone fool you, little wolf. That bottlebrush has some wicked teeth, and he's well versed in those *tricks* his kind favor so much. Quinn's the closest thing we have to an omega and he normally keeps to himself, stays on the outskirts of things, but he's far from helpless. He doesn't really say much either, so don't take it personally in the future. Except for when it comes to the library, he's fierce about that place. That place and Colby, come to

think of it, are about the only things I've ever seen him get upset over." Law looked almost amused, and Declan imagined that there were some memories behind that look that he might want to hear one day.

"And the pack accepts him? Doesn't mind having someone so different on their territory?" Declan knew the question came out more vulnerable than he wanted it to. They both knew why he was asking, both knew that the question was more about him and Lachlan than about the fox.

"I'm not going to lie to you, Declan. There are a handful of wolves that don't like having him around, that think he should either be chased out or killed. The pack's not perfect. They give him trouble from time to time, but Quinn will never come clean about who it is. It pisses Colby off more than anything, but he has my permission to take care of anyone he catches acting out of line." Law looked displeased, like the thought of such things happening in his territory unsettled him in some way. "In the end Quinn is safe because he has my blessing as well as Trace and Colby's. Plus once they gave him a chance the number of people who like Quinn grew far bigger than the ones who don't." Law leveled him with a hard, serious look like he was trying to get Declan to understand something.

For once Declan thought he might actually get it. With Law and Trace's support the majority of the pack would take the time to get to know them no matter who or what they were. Even if everyone

didn't accept him and Lachlan in the end they should find more than enough acceptance for life to be good.

Declan felt as if a weight had been lifted off of him, as if something that had been eating away at him had finally been settled. He smiled up at Law who bent down and nuzzled the side of his head with his nose.

"Now let me show you the town." Law steered Declan around the corner and back down the main street of the town.

"Law, I've seen the town. I've been here for hours. You're a little late." Declan stared up at Law and felt warmth and a startling amount of affection twist its way through his chest when Law sent him a boyish grin and kept moving.

"Ah, but you haven't seen it with me, now, have you?" That was all Law said on the matter and then they were off.

Law pulled him into shops he hadn't wandered into yet, and a few he had, including the clothes shop with the woman who had winked at him his first time through. She took one look at Law's arm draped over Declan's shoulders and wiggled her brows at him teasingly. It surprised a laugh out of Declan that had Law looking at him in surprised pleasure before he tugged him through the door and back out into the town.

Declan let himself get lost in Law's lively chatter, let himself get caught up in the alpha's enthusiasm. Law's joy, his unrepentant pride in his pack and his territory, was contagious. When night began

to creep in around the edges of the town, he was only too happy to let Law tug him into a diner. He was surprised by the way the people inside, were and human alike, called out loud and happy greetings to Law and him both. He was more surprised however to see Trace, apron around his waist and a grin on his face, holding a coffee pot in one hand and a spatula in the other.

“Oh, alpha, my alpha! You finally brought Declan out on the town! And no better place to come than my humble eatery. Declan, you won’t find better food in all of Flathead.” Trace grinned at him from behind the counter.

Declan smiled back as he and Law slid into an unoccupied booth in the back of the diner. He turned to look at Law only to realize with a faint sense of wonder that Law was already looking at him, had been watching him for a while by the look of it. The soft look, the genuine expression of affection on Law’s face, made Declan’s heart skip a beat like always. The thought that maybe Law really was sincere struck Declan suddenly and wouldn’t go away.

Maybe he really did want Declan for more than just payment. Maybe, in some strange twist of fate that he had never really thought possible, maybe Declan had been right and Law really was courting him.

The hope that he’d been ruthlessly squashing began to take root and for once Declan was content to let it.

Chapter Nine

After his night out with Law, Declan stopped fighting with himself so hard. He stopped trying to crush every bit of positivity that threatened to sneak into his head, and instead he focused on enjoying his time with Law. As if he sensed the change in Declan, Law began to gently push Declan into doing things with him. Declan, feeling lighter and more joyful than he ever had, agreed.

They ran through the woods together on more than one occasion. They spent nights together on the couch watching television, or laughing at something with Trace, all three of them around the island in the kitchen. Declan missed Lachlan with the ache of a severed limb in those moments, but he couldn't deny how much he still enjoyed himself. Besides, Lachlan seemed happy enough for the moment if his attitude during their phone calls was anything to go by.

Most of all Declan and Law talked. They talked about Law's past, his family and some of his duties as alpha. Declan found out that Law's parents had both died when he and Trace were younger and that things had been difficult for a little while in Flathead as Law settled into his new power and position. He'd confessed that there was a moment when he didn't want to be alpha. When he'd spent two weeks in his room doing nothing but drinking until the point that he'd been ready to turn the position over to Trace, but his brother hadn't let him. Instead Trace had dragged him bodily into the forest, thrown him

into a lake and then they'd beat the hell out of each other until neither one of them could move.

Afterwards Law had officially claimed his position as head of the pack and to the surprise of no one had nominated Trace as his first in command.

In return Declan had shared a few stories of some of the better times he and Lachlan had during their lives on the road. He told Law about waking up in one state and then going to sleep in another, about the stars in the middle of the desert or the feel of sea spray on his fur in the early morning. He told him about the time he and Lachlan had almost gotten captured by a forestry ranger in southern California.

Thanks to all of the talk about their pasts and about brothers, Declan finally remembered to say something to Law about Lachlan scouting the territory after a few days.

Trace, who was sitting on the kitchen counter with a cup of coffee in his hand, wanted Lachlan to come all the way into the territory as soon as he was able. After a quick explanation he seemed to understand when Declan told him that they were going to take Law's earlier suggestion and let Declan scope things out with the pack first. They all knew it was a safety measure, that Lachlan and he were being careful in case something didn't work out and they had to make a run for it, but they were all content to have it left unsaid.

With each day that passed it seemed more and more likely that it was an option neither of them would ever have to take.

It was a week or two later when he and Lachlan erupted into a hot and heavy argument during one of their phone calls. Declan was in the kitchen and his angry outburst brought both Law and Trace running, but he ignored them as he continued to trade barbs with Lachlan. After all of their talks about being careful Lachlan had managed to run headlong into a small pack of hunters in a town just on the other side of Law's territory boundary to the south.

Declan, angry and scared, demanded Lachlan tell him where he was at, was prepared to shift and track him down by scent if he had to. Lachlan was just as adamant that Declan stay put, that he stay where he was, safe and protected. He was unable to suppress the snarl that twisted his features, the way his eyes flashed and his claws slipped out when Trace snatched the phone away from him.

"You're in the south edges, right? Then you need to head north and cross over the territory line. There are beta patrols out in that area, and the hunters won't dare cross into our territory. I'll call ahead and tell them that you're on the way and that you might have heat on your tail." Trace spoke, his voice urgent and serious in a way Declan had never heard before.

"Who the fuck are you? Where the hell is Declan?" Lachlan's loud and angry voice could be heard over the phone's speaker easily.

"I'm Trace, he's here, now shut up and do what I told you."

Trace managed to snarl across the line before Declan grabbed the phone back.

“Lach! He’s right. Just ditch the hunters and get across the territory line. We’ll figure the rest of it out later.” Declan didn’t care about anything but making sure Lachlan was safe.

“Fine! I’ll call you back when I’m at the border. That son of a bitch had better make that fucking phone call, or I swear I’ll rip his spleen out with my teeth.” Lachlan hung up abruptly, and it was only Law’s comforting hand on his shoulder that kept Declan from rushing out of the house in an attempt to track Lachlan down.

“It’s going to be alright, little wolf. I sent out word that Lachlan was to be protected the minute you told me he was scouting the territory lines. Trace makes one call, and he’ll have half a dozen wolves out looking for him and safe passage into the territory.” Law’s calm and confident voice helped Declan to pull back his anger and his worry enough for him to be able to breath normally again.

“So, Declan, this twin of yours ... you two are identical, right?” Trace asked like he didn’t already know the answer, but his question broke some of the tension in the kitchen, and Declan was almost grateful. “Should be fun having two sweet little bits around the house.”

Helpless amusement warring with worry, Declan nodded, but he couldn’t stop a faintly confused grin from turning up his lips at the way Trace was so obviously excited. “You should know we’re only physically identical. Lachlan’s not as ... peaceable as I am, as I’m sure you just figured out.” It was a longstanding joke between him

and Lachlan, the fact Lachlan's temper ran hot and wild while Declan had always favored the cunning and calm approach. It made them an excellent team, and Declan knew it was one of the things that had kept them alive for so long despite not having a proper pack.

"He's feisty. I approve." Trace chuckled lowly from where he was standing halfway through the kitchen door way.

"That's putting it mildly." Trace looked like he wanted to ask more questions, but he shook his head sharply and turned to head out the back door, hand digging into a pocket and coming out with a sleek black phone as he moved. He was in the yard in seconds, and Declan heard him barking orders to someone on the other end of the line for a few moments before Declan heard him hang up.

"Law, I'm going to the diner. It'll be a few hours, but I'll call when he's through the line." Trace spoke from the yard, and Declan could hear the sound of clothes being shed and dropped on the back porch as Trace, without waiting for a reply, shifted and took off.

Declan had a sneaking suspicion that Lachlan would be meeting the head beta sooner rather than later. Trace seemed oddly determined to be a part of the welcoming wagon now that Lachlan was finally on his way into the heart of the territory. Surprisingly enough the thought helped him to relax even quicker.

"Why's he so interested in Lachlan?" Declan turned his head to look up at Law curiously.

"I suspect you'll find out pretty quickly when Lachlan gets

here. It's going to be fun having the two of you living here with us."

Law chuckled. "Hell, it'll be even more exciting once Lachlan's been introduced to the rest of the pack. I'm pretty sure the two of them are going to be the talk of the territory if Trace has his way. Then again hopefully he'll have to compete with me and you. It's not every day the alpha takes a mate." Law grinned down at him, a hopeful light in his face. Declan couldn't suppress the hot curl of arousal that spiraled through his stomach at the way the expression brightened the alpha's face. Then what Law had said hit him, and he could feel his heart begin to race at the implications.

"A mate?" Declan breathed out slowly, shock curling in his chest. "You and me ... mates ..." Declan felt himself trail off as he stared up at Law in surprise, the hope that he'd spent so long denying, the hope that he'd just now started to embrace, exploded to life inside of him.

Law moved around into the space between Declan's legs and reached up to cup his face in the palms of his hands. Law stared down at him for a moment, eyes gentle and mouth curled up into another soft smile. In a move that caused Declan's eyes to slip slowly shut Law leaned down and pressed a sweet kiss to Declan's mouth. It was nothing but a long press of lips on lips, just like the first time they'd kissed. It was something that Declan had been afraid he'd never get the chance to feel again. Just like then, Declan's heartbeat stuttered and he almost whimpered when Law pulled back and reached up to

swipe his thumb across Declan's bottom lip.

“Oh, little wolf, if you've not already figured out that I'm gone on you then I've been doing things wrong. And here I was thinking I'd been obvious.” Law kissed him again briefly, and Declan stared up at him in breathless wonder as Law kept talking.

“I meant it, Declan, when I offered you and Lachlan a place here weeks ago. I thought you knew that. I want you to make a home here, in this territory, in this house. I want to get to know Lachlan, to have the chance to love him like you do. I want to see the both of you with the rest of the pack. I want us to be a family.” Law was entirely serious; Declan could see it in his face, could hear it in his voice, in the way his heartbeat was steady and strong.

“Are you serious? Is this ... is that really what you want? With me? Us? Even after what our family, our pack, did?” Declan was desperate to know. He'd thought that at the most he and Lachlan might stay at the alpha house until they could find a place in town, jobs, that sort of thing. He'd thought the invitation to live with Law and Trace was something much more casual, much more temporary. That was why he hadn't tried to convince Lachlan to come up into the territory yet. He'd wanted to get to know the town, to see about a place to live so that when Lachlan did come they'd have a place to go. He hadn't wanted his twin to like the alpha house, to fall in love with anything about it like Declan already had if they were just going to have to leave in the end.

What Law was talking about, what he was offering was

something so much *more*.

“That wasn’t your fault, Declan, or Lachlan’s or your father’s or mother’s, or any of the other wolves I’m sure those people got their hands on. What those hunters did was sick and it was twisted and any one of us would have reacted the same way to survive, to protect our mates and our families. It’s what makes us strong, that ability and willingness to adapt even to things like that.” Law leaned down and kissed Declan again, just as sweetly as before, but this time when he pulled away he nipped at his lower lip with slightly sharp teeth.

“I’ve been telling you this from the beginning, little wolf. I want you here. I want you in the pack. I just *want* you. Not as a price, not in any kind of trade off. I just want you and Lachlan here, safe and happy, with us. If I have to wait months or years until you’re comfortable, until you believe me when I say that I want you for *you*, then I will. On my word as alpha.” Law’s eyes flashed bright crimson, and his vow hung in the air between them. “If you’ll have me, of course?”

This time Declan was the one who surged forward and captured Law’s mouth with his own. “Yes! Law, yes!” Declan murmured between kisses. Law made a harsh sound in the back of his throat, a mix of triumph and need, and deepened the kiss as he moved his hands down and gripped Declan by the hips.

Declan couldn’t stop the small, needy sounds he made when

Law pulled him closer and pressed their hips together. His arms came up and wrapped around Law's shoulders as one of his hands slid into the hair at the back of Law's neck and clenched. Their tongues tangled together hotly as Law rutted against his hip. Declan could feel his cock, the hard, long length of it through the thin layers of their pants and knew that Law's desire matched his own.

Feeling bold Declan pulled away from the kiss and ignored the way Law rumbled in displeasure. The way Law flexed what felt like claw-tipped fingers around the hold he had on Declan's hips as he tried to pull him back in sent a shiver down his spine. Declan untangled his hands from Law's hair and did what he'd been aching to do for weeks. He ran his palms over the width of Law's shoulders and down the strong line of his arms, leaned forward up a bit on his toes so he could nuzzle the soft spot behind Law's ear with his nose. The faint rasp of Law's stubble against his own smoother cheek made his breathing short and sent his heart to pounding as he slowly turned his face to press a soft kiss to the vulnerable skin of Law's throat. Law groaned low and harsh, the sound of it vibrating in his chest, as to Declan's barely contained shock he tipped his head back and bared his throat completely. Declan's breathing went shallow and harsh at the sight, at the fact that Law, one of the strongest alphas Declan had ever come across, was submitting ... to *him*.

Declan knew what a gift that was, knew that Law would have

never done something like that if he wasn't completely serious. He leaned forward and pressed a gentle and loving, if shaky, kiss in the hollow of Law's throat. Law seemed to really come to life then as his hands moved up to wrap around Declan's waist and he lifted him up so Declan could wrap his legs around Law's narrow waist.

Law turned them, took a few steps and pressed Declan up against a nearby wall so he could run his hands up Declan's sides and underneath his shirt. Declan clung to Law's waist with his legs and was prepared to arch up so he could pull the shirt up and off when the sound of ripping fabric caused his eyes to go wide with shock. The shirt, now in tatters, fluttered to the floor beside them.

"I'll buy you another one. Hell, I'll buy you all of them," Law rumbled, amusement and lust warring for dominance on his face.

Declan's responding laugh turned into a squeak when Law's hands drifted down to do the same thing to his pants and then a moan when the cool air of the kitchen rushed over his newly exposed cock.

Declan felt like he was harder than he'd ever been in his life, his cock leaking pre-cum, wet and sticky on his stomach. He could smell the salt tinged stench of his own arousal mixing with Law's heavy in the air around them. Declan saw Law's nostrils flare, saw crimson creep into his eyes and knew he smelled it too.

Law pushed him farther up the wall until Declan's cock brushed wet and ready against the stubble on Law's cheek, the movement forcing Declan to unwrap his legs from around Law's

waist. Declan made a choked off noise in the back of his throat, and his head thumped back against the wall when Law, without any prompting, opened his mouth and sucked his cock inside. It was the most intense thing he'd ever felt, and when Law paused for a second and then took Declan so deep he could feel the back of Law's throat Declan could barely think through the heat. He shouted harsh and low, had to keep from sinking suddenly claw-tipped fingers into either the wall or Law.

Declan couldn't keep his hips still no matter how hard he tried. They made jabbing, short, little thrusts forward as Law swallowed around him, moving off his cock and then taking him back down like he couldn't get enough of Declan's taste. When he felt like he had enough control Declan reached down with a shaking hand and traced the line of Law's stretched lips. Declan shuddered, sharp and hard when Law did something with his tongue and Declan could suddenly see the shape of his cock as it made the skin of Law's cheek bulge out.

Declan could feel the heat building in the base of his spine, could feel a different sort of urgency begin to take him over, and he scrambled suddenly to pull Law off of him. Law resisted, growled low and displeased as Declan tugged harshly at his hair.

"Law, Law, please. I can't, Law ... not like this ... I want you ... I want you *inside* me," Declan managed to moan out, and Law pulled off of him abruptly with a snarl. Law stared up at Declan with

a wild light in his crimson eyes, chest heaving as their gazes held.

“Are you sure, little wolf?” Law’s voice sounded wrecked; his cheeks were flushed, and his lips were slightly swollen. “We don’t have to. I can just ...” Law made a move to bend back down, to take Declan’s cock back into his mouth, but Declan’s hand, still wrapped firmly in his hair, stopped him.

“No, no, I’m sure, Law. I’m sure,” Declan panted out.

“Bedroom then. If I fuck you for the first time in the kitchen, Trace will never let either of us forget it,” Law mumbled as he darted down and licked a stripe up the underside of Declan’s cock before he straightened. Law slipped an arm around Declan’s waist to support him as he slid back down until his feet touched the floor.

Their journey to the room took far longer than it should have, but Declan had no complaints since Law managed to lose his own pants somewhere along the way. When they finally tumbled down onto Law’s bed they were both breathless and flushed. Law wasted no time. He ran the flat of his tongue down the smooth line of Declan’s chest until he could bite at the cut of Declan’s hip with teeth sharp enough to make Declan twitch.

Law took his time, sucked a mark into Declan’s skin that they both knew wouldn’t be there in a few seconds and then moved down until he could run his tongue along the crease of Declan’s thigh. Law stayed there for a moment, nuzzled at the skin, and the tickle of his stubble made Declan squirm. Then Law pulled back again and leaned

over Declan so he could reach the side table where he fumbled for a moment with the drawer before he pulled back with a tube of lube in his hand.

Declan watched, mind hazy but body hot and eager as Law poured a bit of the slick into his palm and then tossed the tube into the sheets beside them. He went willingly when Law urged him over onto his stomach and then up onto his knees. He sucked in a harsh breath as one warm, slick and thankfully clawless finger prodded gently at his hole, traced the rim and then pressed slowly inside.

“I know I said I’d make you beg for it, but that’ll come later, I think.” Law’s voice was, if anything, even more wrecked than before. Declan could practically feel the tension, the tightly coiled control radiating from the alpha’s body. “I’ll have you on your back so I can watch your eyes blow wide when I take you. So I can see the pleasure in your face when I push inside of you. But for now,” Law pressed a second finger in alongside the first as his voice went dark, “for now I’m going to knot you like this. Gonna stretch you out and fill you up. Gonna tie you to me so you can’t get away from me, little wolf, until you don’t know whether to cry or come.”

Law slid a third slick finger deep inside of Declan and pressed. Declan saw stars, felt his vision go white and his body go rigid as his cock jumped in pleasure and the need to come.

“Look at you. So eager, so perfect. I knew it was you from the moment I saw you, knew you were the one.” Law pushed and

Declan's mouth gaped open at the press of Law's pinkie finger when it slid against his rim, the burn of it as it stretched him even wider.

Declan tangled his hands in the sheets, pressed his forehead harder against the mattress and tried to breathe deeply even as he began to tremble. Law leant down suddenly and ran the flat of his tongue up the line of Declan's spine as he pushed the four fingers deeper inside of Declan and then out. Declan tried his best to stay still, but he couldn't help himself. He thrust his hips back, pushed himself farther down onto Law's fingers and heard the alpha moan in approval behind him.

They kept on like that for a while, a give and take, push and pull that was so good Declan almost lost it more than once before Law finally took his fingers away. Declan moaned in denial as his hips tried to chase Law's hand, but the alpha ran his other hand down his back soothingly before he shifted on the mattress. Declan sighed out softly at the feel of Law's heat against his back, at the way the alpha nosed at the crook of his shoulder and placed a gentle kiss there. Declan pushed his ass back towards Law in response, felt Law's cock brush against his stretched hole and sucked in a deep breath. The air rushed out of him in a gasp when Law pushed into him with one slick thrust. He keened, felt his own cock jump against his sweat slick stomach at the reality of finally having Law deep inside of him.

Law was panting harshly in his ear, obviously trying to regain

some kind of composure. Declan tilted his head forward and latched his teeth on to the strong length of Law's forearm and bit down.

Law's hips jerked in response to the sting, and the move forced him even deeper into Declan. They both moaned at the sensation, and Declan couldn't help but arch his back and press himself even closer to Law, eager to take him even deeper.

"Like that, just like that, sweet. Perfect," Law murmured in his ear as his hips began to move, short shallow thrusts that slowly grew deeper and harder until Declan could hardly think. Declan tried to get a hand underneath himself, to wrap a fist around his own cock, but Law moved suddenly, wrapped one of arms around Declan's waist and tugged.

They fell over onto their sides, and Law was quick to pull one of Declan's legs up and over his own so he could continue to thrust up into him, deep and hard. Declan reached an arm up and back and wrapped it around Law's neck. Declan could feel the way Law's cock was beginning to thicken, could feel how the base was growing as the knot began to expand.

"I thought about it, you know? That day in the woods.

Thought about what you said, how it'd feel." Declan panted as he pressed himself back and as close as he could get to Law. He heard Law swallow hard, felt him latch his mouth on to the side of his neck and press sharp teeth against the skin there. "I want it, Law, want to be yours, want everyone to know."

Law froze behind him and then thrust his hips forward

sharply, and Declan shuddered at the burn, the bright flash of pain as the knot pressed in. They both cried out, Law's more of a roar than anything as he sunk sharp teeth into the flesh of the crook of Declan's shoulder. Declan could feel Law's cock twitch and jerk inside of him, the wet, hot heat of him coming even as the knot kept them locked together.

"Law!" Declan's voice was hoarse, but he didn't care. The feel of Law inside of him, of them being tied together, sent heat sailing through him, and he tumbled over the edge without another thought.

Declan wasn't sure how much time had passed when he finally came back to himself. Law's strong, solid body was a line of heat against Declan's back as the alpha nuzzled the bite mark on Declan's skin contentedly. That was one mark that wouldn't fade, one thing that his healing wouldn't take care of. A mating mark stayed no matter what. The thought of having something like that, of having something to commemorate this moment for the rest of his life, made Declan's breath catch in his chest.

"I want one too, you know. Later when there's time I want you to put your mark on me too," Law whispered against the skin he was so fascinated with. He sounded sleepy and content, and Declan found that he felt the same way even as happiness burst to life inside his chest.

He belonged to Law now, belonged *with* Law. He was marked for the world to see and Law, Law wanted to be marked as well. Law wanted the entire world to know that they belonged to each other. Just then a thought struck Declan.

“Lachlan knew, you know? He knew this would happen. He always called you *my* alpha, like you belonged to me, like this was inevitable.” Declan reached down and tangled his fingers with the ones Law had lightly stroking the skin of his stomach.

“Hmm. Your brother’s a smart one. I can’t wait to meet him,” Law responded lazily.

Declan yawned loudly and snuggled back into Law’s heat.

“You say that now, but he’s going to be insufferable when he finds out that we’ve mated without you two even meeting. I’m not going to hear the end of it when he gets home.”

Declan felt Law tense behind him, and then the alpha took a deep breath and *melted* against Declan’s back.

“You said home,” he muttered against the skin of Declan’s neck.

“Hmm?” Declan made a questioning noise, sleep creeping up on him.

“You said ‘when he gets home’. You called this home.” Law sounded so happy, so pleased with such a simple statement that Declan couldn’t help but laugh lowly.

“I did, didn’t I? It’s true though. This is ... this is home. Here

with you and Trace and soon enough with Lach as well. I don't think I could ever find a better one." It was true. He'd found a home without meaning to, had found a home and a mate. Love and safety. Two things Declan had never thought he'd have in his life.

"We're going to be so good together, little wolf. So good."

Law nudged at the place behind Declan's ear with his nose, made a pleased noise and then buried his face in Declan's hair.

Declan smiled and silently agreed with him. There were still things to work out, of course. Lachlan would be in the territory in a few hours, would be at the house a few after that. There were introductions and all kinds of other things to deal with, but for once in his life Declan wasn't worried.

He was safe and warm in the arms of an alpha who wanted him despite everything, and there was no other place he'd rather be.

The End



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