



Pigs & Prey (Feral Fairy Tales #1)

Author: *JC Dark*

Category: Fantasy

Description: I come to the Porkwell offices ready to bite heads off—not mount them.

Specifically, I plan to threaten the smug pig bastard who's bulldozing Wolfstone Preserve, destroy his proposal, and maybe claw a few throats while I'm at it. I'm a proud wolf-shifter, an environmental activist, and totally in control of my heat cycle.

Until I'm not.

One ill-timed hormonal flare-up, one smug tusked menace in a suit, and suddenly I'm flat on my back moaning Percy Porkwell's name.

Now I'm entangled with three very hot, very complicated pigs:

Percy: The golden boy architect who knows exactly how to use that tusked mouth

Prescott: The awkward genius who's been stalking me (politely... but still)

Hamilton: The ruthless, cocky CEO with pigheaded shadow-daddy energy who wants revenge—and to ruin me in every possible way

I hate them all.

I want them all.

And the forest isn't the only thing at risk of being claimed.

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Page 1

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Ruby

Once upon a time, the Big Bad Wolf made a terrible mistake.

Spoiler: I'm that wolf. And the mistake is currently lying on top of me.

His breath is hot against my neck—sweat-slick and sweet like damp earth after a summer storm.

I shouldn't be here, sprawled across Percy Porkwell's Egyptian cotton sheets while his tusked mouth works its way down my collarbone.

But when you're a wolf in heat confronted with one of the gorgeous heirs to the Porkwell empire, sometimes your body makes really stupid decisions before your brain can catch up.

And my brain is scrambling to catch up.

"You like that, don't you, Little Red?" Percy grunts, his fingers tangling in my hair. For a second, something in his eyes—uncertainty, maybe?—betrays the cocky facade before that familiar smirk returns.

I hate that fucking nickname.

Even more, I hate that brief glimpse of something real behind his pig-prince act. It's easier when I can pretend he's nothing but a corporate drone with good bone structure.

I hate how he and his brothers think it's hilarious to reference fairy tales that demonized my ancestors. But my back arches, betraying me as his thumb brushes against my nipple.

"Don't call me that," I growl, though it comes out more like a whimper.

Pathetic.

He snorts—literally snorts—and the sound should repulse me.

Instead, my thighs clench involuntarily.

Damn these hormones.

Damn this heat cycle.

And damn Percy Porkwell's surprising skill with those fingers.

"Whatever you say, Ruby," his voice drops an octave, rough around the edges. "Or should I call you Ms. Wolfhart when you're writhing underneath me?"

I scoff even as my hips buck against his. "Don't flatter yourself, Porky. I'm not writhing."

His tusks glint in the dim light of his penthouse bedroom as he grins. The room itself is annoyingly perfect—minimalist black and chrome, with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the city he's helped reshape.

"Give it time, little wolf."

The worst part isn't that I'm naked on this trust-fund pig's bed. The worst part is how

desperately I want to be here, despite knowing better. Three generations of wolf-kind warning me about the Porkwell brothers, and here I am, giving the middle one access to parts of me no pig should ever see.

What would my fellow activists think if they could see me now? I, Ruby Wolfhart, who once chained herself to a tree in the Moonpaw Heights to stop the Porkwell bulldozers, am now willingly pinned under one.

His mouth dips lower, trailing wet kisses down my stomach, and I have to bite my lip to keep from howling. The bastard knows exactly what he's doing, and each move is calculated like one of his precious architectural designs.

The Porkwell's built half this city—literally—and Percy acts like he's building me too, brick by shuddering brick.

“You've got that look like you're about to lecture me,” he murmurs against my inner thigh. “Relax. I've got you.”

“Maybe I'm plotting your demise,” I say, my claws slightly extending and digging lightly into his shoulders. Not enough to draw blood—I'm not stupid enough to leave evidence—but enough to make him grunt in that delicious way that sends sparks racing down my spine.

“Murder fantasy, huh? Kinky.” His lips nudge higher between my legs. “Let's see if I can make you forget all about it.”

The first touch of his tongue makes my eyes roll back.

Shit.

Percy Porkwell should not be this good at going down on a wolf.

It defies natural law.

I grip his sheets, catching sight of the Porkwell Corp logo embroidered on the corners—because, of course, this narcissistic pork chop even monograms his bedding.

The same logo I'd seen on the bulldozers that flattened Moonpaw Heights last spring.

Hundreds of wolves displaced, generations of history buried under concrete.

All while Percy probably sipped champagne in some boardroom.

The same company that's bankrolled every anti-predator bill in the last decade.

Yet here I am, moaning as one of his two thick fingers pushes inside me while his tongue does unspeakable things to my clit.

“God, Ruby, you're soaked,” he groans, and the vibration against my most sensitive parts nearly launches me off the bed. “Is this all for me, or is it just because you're in heat?”

I grab his head and tug, perhaps a bit too roughly. “Do you ever shut up?”

“Make me,” he challenges, those beady eyes gleaming with something dangerous and thrilling.

So I do, clamping my thighs around his head and shoving his mouth and tongue right back into my dripping heat, muffling any last words he might have prepared. His tusks rub against sensitive flesh, and the obscene friction sends me reeling.

I came to argue. Not ride his tusks like I'm at a damn amusement park, but here we

are.

My hands fist in his hair, pulling him deeper, which only seems to encourage the bastard. He groans against me, the sound so carnal that I have to stifle my own cries. I could leave him there forever, lost between my thighs and never coming up for air, but that feral part of me demands more.

It demands all of him.

So I relent, pulling him up my body and crashing my mouth against his.

He tastes like me, like a wolf, and the primal part of my brain—the one currently driving this terrible decision—howls in approval. His large frame presses me into the mattress, and I wrap my legs around his glorious body.

His erection prods insistently against my thigh, impressive enough to make me reconsider some wolf supremacist rhetoric I may have casually tossed around at pack gatherings. Percy Porkwell might be a pig, but there's nothing small about what he's packing.

He's about to enter me when a noise from the hallway makes both our ears prick up.

"Percy? You home?" A gruff voice calls out, followed by the distinctive sound of the front door slamming.

We freeze, my legs still wrapped around him, his hardness still throbbing against my inner thigh. Percy's eyes widen in what might be the first genuine expression I've seen on his smug face all night.

"Shit," he hisses. "It's Hamilton."

The eldest Porkwell brother.

The CEO.

The one with the most reason to despise wolves—particularly this wolf, considering what happened between us at the city council meeting last month.

“You said they were going out of town after the gala!” I whisper-yell, shoving at Percy’s chest.

“They were supposed to be!” He scrambles off me, nearly falling over in his haste. “Ham wasn’t due back until tomorrow.”

Great. Just great.

One Porkwell brother between my legs and another was about to catch me in the act.

The headlines practically write themselves: “Wolfhart Pack Representative Caught in Pig’s Blanket.”

My alpha would disown me.

The wolf preservation committee would revoke my advocacy credentials, and my grandmother would resurrect herself to die again of shame.

“I need to hide,” I say, gathering my clothes.

“Hide?” Percy says, surprised, tossing me my bra. I catch it just before it hits my face. “You’re not some dirty secret, Ruby.”

The irony that I am his dirty secret is not lost on me. But self-awareness takes a

backseat to indignation when you're a naked wolf scrambling for dignity.

“Percy, please,” I whisper urgently as heavy footsteps echo down the hall. “Hamilton will literally kill me if he finds me here. And probably you, too.”

He knows I'm right.

During a heated debate about the Wolfstone development project, Hamilton Porkwell once threatened to turn me into a fur coat.

Public record.

Multiple witnesses.

He gestures toward his massive walk-in closet, and with a growl of relief, I dart inside, pulling the door shut just as the bedroom door swings open.

“Percy? You in here?” Hamilton’s voice is closer now, laced with that signature Porkwell condescension.

Through the slats in the closet door, I watch Percy yank on a pair of silk boxers—monogrammed, naturally—before his brother’s hulking silhouette appears in the doorway.

“Hey, Ham!” Percy’s voice is an octave too high. “Thought you were in Boarstone until tomorrow.”

“Meeting got canceled.” Hamilton sniffs the air suspiciously, and my heart nearly stops. Pigs might have poor eyesight, but their sense of smell rivals even wolves’. “What’s that scent?”

Percy coughs. “Probably my new cologne. Timber and Wild Berries. Just trying it out.”

I roll my eyes so hard I’m surprised they don’t make a noise. Timber and Wild Berries? Really?

Hamilton grunts, unconvinced. “Smells more like a kennel.”

I bite my tongue to keep from snarling. A kennel?

Fucking asshole.

“Anyway,” Hamilton continues. “We need to discuss the Wolfstone project before tomorrow’s board meeting. The zoning commissioner’s being difficult.”

Of course he is.

Commissioner Vance is a bobcat shifter—and one of the few left in the city government who hasn’t sold out to the Porkwell’s. He’s also a longtime friend of my cousin’s mate, which means he actually listens when we raise environmental concerns.

They’re planning on bulldozing the last protected wolf habitat in the county. It’s literally why I confronted Percy tonight before things got... complicated.

Crouched in Percy’s closet among tailored suits that probably cost more than my apartment, naked except for my hastily donned panties, I’m struck by the absurdity of my situation.

How the hell did I end up here?

It wasn't supposed to go like this.

I came to argue, threaten, negotiate—anything to save Wolfstone. Not to end up nearly fucking the enemy.

But the truth is, the moment I caught his scent, I was already losing.

My heat didn't just make me want—it made me burn . And the only thing that could put out the fire was Percy's hands, Percy's mouth, Percy inside me.

It didn't matter that he was the enemy.

Maybe that made it worse.

I could've walked away. Could've said no, even through the haze of instinct and heat-slick desperation.

But I didn't.

And now I'm hiding in a damn closet, still aching for him.

My mind rewinds to just a few hours ago, when I was still clothed, dignified, and hadn't yet discovered what Percy Porkwell could do with that mouth of his...

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

Four hours earlier...

I 'm standing at the bar of The Golden Trough, the most pretentious watering hole in Shiftown, where the drinks are overpriced, and the clientele is mostly hooved.

The Trough is all new money and new tech—crystal chandeliers reflecting off the smartphones of Shiftown's elite. Pigs, horses, cattle, and prey shifters dominate the room, their expensive colognes and perfumes assaulting my sensitive nose.

My palms are sweaty around my sparkling water (fifteen dollars, highway robbery), and my tailored red pantsuit feels too tight.

It's borrowed, by the way. I don't do galas unless I have to. I do town halls and policy drafts and late-night ramen noodles.

The Annual Builders Association Gala is the last place any self-respecting wolf wants to be, but I'm here on official Wolf Preservation Committee business.

Specifically, to stop the Porkwell Brothers from turning the last piece of ancestral wolf territory into luxury condos with "authentic wilderness views."

The irony is thick enough to choke on.

I spot exactly three other predator species, all wearing the same uncomfortable expression I'm probably sporting; the face of someone who knows they don't belong.

The predators have become the outcasts, the unwanted, the lowest members of society, all because of our biology.

The bartender, a nervous-looking rabbit shifter with large white bunny ears, keeps a careful distance as he asks. “Another sparkling water, ma’am?”

“No, thanks.” I force a smile that doesn’t show too many teeth. Since the Predator Registration Act was passed five years ago, showing fangs in public can get you slapped with an “intimidation” fine.

I scan the room for my targets.

The Porkwell brothers are Shiftown royalty. Over three generations, their family transformed the city from a mixed forest-meadow ecosystem into a concrete jungle.

Their grandfather started with straw—cheap, fast builds on stolen land.

Their father graduated to sticks, expanding into lumber developments and log homes that carved deeper into the once-protected wilderness.

Now the three brothers specialize in brick and steel monstrosities that scrape the sky, hoarding the skyline like it’s their birthright.

Hamilton, Percy, and Prescott Porkwell—three little pigs who grew up to become very big problems for predator-kind. The Porkwell empire follows them: real estate, tech, and anti-predator politics.

And I’m determined to dismantle it one brick at a time.

I spot Hamilton, the eldest, holding court near the stage.

He's all business—tailored suit stretched tight across his broad shoulders, gold watch catching the light as he gesticulates to Mayor Hoofington.

I can practically hear his oozing condescension from here, crafting deals and alliances that serve their agenda and crush ours.

“You're not welcome here,” Hamilton had said to me at last year's gala in those exact words. He wasn't just referring to the event.

“Predators don't belong in civilized Shiftown.”

I had almost been escorted out by security, saved only by the strategic arrival of the press. But this year, it's different. This year, it will be me who does the kicking out.

My claws itch to wipe the smug right off his face.

But not yet. The time will come.

The youngest, Prescott, hovers near the tech display, probably pitching his latest “smart home” security system. His previous invention was specifically designed to detect predator heat signatures—the paranoid bacon strip.

He notices me watching and, unlike his brother Hamilton, who would scowl or ignore me entirely, Prescott offers a small nod of acknowledgment.

Once, at a city council meeting, he'd actually held the door for me and apologized when Hamilton had cut me off mid-speech. “Everyone deserves to be heard,” he'd murmured, earning a glare from his eldest brother.

He's always been the odd pig out, more interested in his gadgets than in building developments. I wonder what secrets I could extract from him if I played my cards

right.

I don't see Percy, the middle brother. The architect.

The one whose signature appears on all the Wolfstone development plans.

The one I need to corner.

He's the pretty boy with a ruthless signature stroke—designer stubble, golden-brown hair that's always a little too perfectly tousled, and those smug, brown eyes that have probably undone half the city. Add a killer smile, and you've got a predator in a pig's suit.

My plan is to catch him alone, hit him where it hurts, and make him reconsider his family's latest atrocity.

I weave through the crowd as a group of cows and pigs giggle nearby.

Their animal traits are on full display—twitching ears, curled tails, cloven hooves peeking out from designer heels.

They look about ready to stampede the stage as they whisper and nod toward Hamilton, eying him like he's the main course—ironic, considering they're the ones built for slaughter.

Predators may be an endangered species around here, but one thing's clear: the Porkwell's are in no danger of losing their title of Shiftown's most eligible bachelors.

What a joke.

Pigs are usually smaller, with more girth than height. But the Porkwell's?

Those damn pigs have been blessed by the pork gods. They're tall and trim, at least by swine standards, like they were made in a lab for high-end breeding. I guess it explains why cows drop their milk and pigs squeal for a piece.

My eyes swivel back to Prescott.

He taps away on a tablet, oblivious to the crowd around him. He has the same deep concentration in his eyes that I get when I'm working. It's like the whole world disappears when I'm focusing. But it's more than that—he's not just absorbed in his work.

He looks nervous. Anxious, out of place in a way I recognize.

I brush past the crowd, determined to find Percy and make him listen.

I'm sure he's around here somewhere, charming the pants off some unsuspecting female and casually avoiding me like the smug bastard he is. Can't say I blame him; I wouldn't want to face me either.

Every moment I waste is another moment the Wolfstone plans move forward. It's another moment lost, and I can't let this be last year all over again.

"Looking for someone?" A voice like velvet sounds just behind my right ear.

I don't jump, but I'm rattled, nonetheless. I turn and find myself face-to-tusk with Percy Porkwell himself.

"Mr. Porkwell." I take a step back and extend my hand professionally, noting that he's better looking this close than under the harsh lighting of our often heated debates in court or in the multiple newspaper clippings plastered across my research board.

His eyes are sharp and intelligent, his tusks tastefully maintained, and his navy suit is clearly custom.

“Ruby Wolfhart, Wolf Preservation Representative.”

He takes my hand, and his grip is firm—warm.

“I know exactly who you are, Ms. Wolfhart. “We’ve met before. Several times, in fact. Though I don’t recall you ever offering a handshake.

And your opinion piece in the Shiftown Gazette last week called my family—let me see if I remember correctly—‘environmental terrorists with the foresight of lemmings and the ethical compass of vultures.’”

“I stand by my assessment.”

His mouth twitches, almost a smile. “The vultures filed a speciesist complaint, by the way.”

“Of course they did.” I resist rolling my eyes. “Look, Mr. Porkwell—”

“Percy, please.”

“Mr. Porkwell,” I say, withdrawing my hand from his lingering grasp. “I’m here to discuss Wolfstone.”

He sips his amber-colored drink—whiskey, neat, I can smell it—and regards me with unexpected interest.

“I gathered as much. Though most activists prefer protest signs to formal wear. I must say, the suit is a good look for you.”

Is he... flirting with me? The absurdity of it makes me snort. "I'm not here to exchange pleasantries."

"Shame. I find pleasantries with you can be quite... pleasant." His eyes crinkle at the corners, and something warm and unwelcome flutters in my stomach.

I straighten my spine.

What is wrong with me?

This is Percy Porkwell—the same male whose signature appears on every document that's slowly erasing my heritage. And yet, there's something in the intelligence of his gaze that has my brain stumbling for the words to continue this verbal sparring match.

Dangerous territory, Ruby.

Focus.

"The Wolfstone development can't proceed. That land isn't just real estate—it's the last protected territory where wolves can live according to traditional ways. Your luxury condos would destroy ancient den sites, hunting grounds, and—"

"And create affordable housing for two hundred families, plus commercial space for small businesses, and a public park," he interjects smoothly. "I've read your objections, Ms. Wolfhart. I'm intimately familiar with every detail of your... position." He leans in a fraction closer.

The way he says "position" makes my hair stand on end, and a shiver travels down my spine at his renewed closeness. I won't back away this time. He needs to know I will stand my ground.

“You could build anywhere else,” I argue, trying to ignore how his scent—sandalwood, ink, and something distinctly male—is affecting me. “Why there? Why now?”

I must be losing my mind. Or maybe just my wolf instincts.

Percy leans even closer. I have to force myself not to retreat. “Why don’t we discuss this somewhere more private? The acoustics in here are terrible.” He speaks low and is so close now that I can feel the heat of his breath on my neck.

My instincts scream “trap.” This must be some kind of distraction tactic, but my curiosity—and something else I refuse to name—pushes me to nod. “Five minutes.”

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

He guides me with a light touch on my lower back (which I should object to, but don't) toward a small terrace off the main ballroom. The night air is a welcome relief from the heat building inside me. The city sprawls below us, a testament to pig engineering and predator displacement.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Percy says, leaning against the stone balustrade. "When my grandfather came here, this was all mud and underbrush."

"It was a thriving ecosystem," I counter. "Home to dozens of species."

"Who now live in climate-controlled comfort with indoor plumbing and broadband internet." His tusk catches the moonlight as he smirks. "Evolution, Ms. Wolfhart."

"Forced eviction isn't evolution."

He turns to face me fully, and the playfulness fades from his expression. "You really care about this, don't you? It's not just political posturing."

"Of course I care!" My voice rises despite my best efforts. "Wolfstone is the last piece of our heritage that hasn't been paved over or turned into an 'exotic wildlife experience' for prey tourists. It matters."

Percy studies me with unexpected intensity. "Then propose an alternative."

I blink. "What?"

"An alternative development plan." He shrugs those broad shoulders. "If you're so

convinced we're doing it wrong, show me the right way."

I narrow my eyes. "Are you serious?"

"Deadly." He steps closer, and suddenly the terrace feels much smaller. "I've read your file, Ruby. Master's in Environmental Engineering from Meadowland University. Thesis on sustainable urban development. You're not just an activist with a picket sign—you've got actual expertise. So use it."

I'm momentarily speechless, from his unexpected knowledge of my background and the fact that he called me Ruby instead of Ms. Wolfhart. And the way he said it—like he's savouring my name.

"I... could draft something," I say cautiously.

I take the card he offers me, trying to ignore how my fingertips tingle when they brush against his. Must be the adrenaline of confrontation, though something feels off. I've been on edge all evening, attributing it to the stress of the mission, the uncomfortable heels, the too-tight suit.

"Have it on my desk Monday morning," he says, and I'm suddenly aware of how dry my mouth is, how each breath brings his scent more sharply into focus.

That's when it hits me—the signs I'd been ignoring all evening.

A warmth blooming low in my belly, the heightening of my senses, a sudden hyper-awareness of Percy's scent—sandalwood and ink and male.

No. Not now. Not here.

My heat cycle, arriving four days early and with spectacularly bad timing.

Biology doesn't care about your politics, your pride, or your five-year plan.

Percy's nostrils flare, and his pupils dilate.

He knows.

"Are you alright, Ruby?" His voice drops an octave, the concern in it seemingly genuine.

"Fine," I lie, taking a deliberate step back. "Just warm. I should go."

He follows, closing the distance I tried to create. "Your scent changed."

"That's not an appropriate observation," I say, willing my biology to behave itself.

"Appropriate?" he chuckles, the sound rumbling through me like distant thunder. "We're past that, I think. You're in heat." There is a tenderness and a hint of concern in his voice.

I should slap him. Report him to the event security for harassment. Storm away in righteous indignation.

Instead, I stand frozen, my body betraying me with each passing second.

"This doesn't change anything about Wolfstone."

"Of course not." He has the audacity to look amused. "But it might make our negotiations more... interesting."

"There will be no 'negotiations' of the kind you're implying," I say, even as my traitor body leans imperceptibly closer to him.

Percy's smile is slow and knowing.

"I'm implying nothing. Simply observing that we both might benefit from continued conversation in a more comfortable setting. Our penthouse has an excellent view of the city's planning model, including Wolfstone. I could show you exactly what we're proposing."

It's the thinnest pretense I've ever heard. We both know what he's really offering. What's worse, we both know I'm tempted.

"Your brothers—" I begin.

"Are heading out of town after the gala and won't be back until tomorrow." His gaze is steady on mine. "Just me, you, and a scale model of disputed territory. Completely professional."

I almost laugh at the absurdity. "Professional."

"Unless you'd prefer otherwise." His voice is silk wrapped around gravel, and my resistance is crumbling by the second.

I should say no.

Every rational part of my brain is screaming to get out of here, to put as much distance between myself and Percy Porkwell as possible.

I hate these males. Hate his brothers. Hate what they've done to our community.

But my heat-addled body has other ideas, and the wolf in me—the primal, instinctual part—is already deciding this mighty, powerful male is exactly what I need tonight.

“Show me this model, then,” I hear myself say. “But I’m not agreeing to anything beyond that.”

His smile widens, showing the full, impressive length of those tusks. “Of course not. My car’s waiting downstairs.”

And that’s how I ended up in Percy Porkwell’s penthouse, my professional integrity compromised and my panties following shortly thereafter. From righteous indignation to writhing beneath a pig in record time—surely some kind of rock bottom for wolf kind.

Except now, hiding in his closet while his older brother discusses my ancestral land’s destruction, I realize I’ve found a way to sink even lower.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

I stay frozen in Percy's closet, barely breathing as Hamilton and Percy leave the room. Hamilton drones on about construction permits and profit margins.

After what feels like an eternity of budget talk (though my wolf hearing catches every damning detail about their plans for Wolfstone, even though Percy closed the door), Hamilton shifts to a tone I recognize all too well from city council meetings—the condescending big-brother voice.

“Remember what happened last time you went soft on a project, Percy,” he says, his voice lower but still audible to my wolf ears.

“The Riverside fiasco cost us millions because you insisted on ‘preserving the ecosystem.’” He practically spits the last words.

“Dad put me in charge for a reason. Don't forget that.

” Percy's response is too quiet to hear, but his tone sounds tight, defensive.

Hamilton whispers something else in Percy's ear—I catch only fragments about “family reputation”—but it sounds clipped, threatening.

Then, he finally grunts his goodbye, the door slamming closed with unnecessary force.

Silence fills the penthouse for three long beats before Percy whispers, “Ruby? He's

gone.”

I push the closet door open with more force than necessary, nearly sending it flying off its hinges. Percy stands there in his silk boxers, looking equal parts relieved and apprehensive.

“So,” I say, clutching my clothes to my chest like armour, “that was enlightening. You’re not just building luxury condos—you’re adding a ‘predator-secure’ shopping district with anti-wolf security measures. How progressive.”

Percy, at least, has the decency to look uncomfortable. “Ham likes to exaggerate the security features for investors.”

“Really? Because it sounded like you’re installing silver-infused perimeter fencing. Silver, Percy. Do you know what that does to wolf skin?” My voice rises with each word, my nakedness forgotten in my anger.

“It burns us. Scars us. Some wolves never recover from silver exposure.”

“It was never my idea,” he says, stepping closer. “Hamilton pushes the anti-predator angle. I just design the buildings.”

“Just following orders?” I sneer. “How noble.”

He runs a hand over his face. “It’s complicated.”

“It really isn’t, Percy,” I snap. “What you and your brothers are proposing will destroy my heritage.”

I yank on my clothes, my hands trembling with the effort to focus. The heat is still there, humming under my skin, but my anger cuts through it.

For once, fury wins over instinct.

Percy watches me dress with a mixture of disappointment and something else—something that looks suspiciously like admiration. “Wolfstone is really important to you.”

Is he dense, or do the Porkwell brothers all share the same brain cell?

“Of course it’s important!” I bark, struggling with my bra clasp in my agitation.

“It’s the last place where wolves can just...

be wolves, where we don’t have to pretend to be something we’re not to make prey species comfortable.

Where our pups can run free without being registered and tagged like criminals. ”

Before I realize what’s happening, Percy is behind me, his fingers gently taking over my mangling clasp. “Let me.”

His touch on my bare back sends an unwelcome shiver down my spine. Despite everything I’ve just heard, my traitorous body still responds to him.

“I really did want to show you the development plans,” he says softly, his breath warm against my neck. “I’ve been working on alterations to Hamilton’s original vision, preserving more of the natural landscape, incorporating wolf-friendly spaces.”

The clasp clicks into place, but his hands don’t leave my skin. They rest lightly on my shoulders, neither demanding nor retreating.

“Why would you do that?” I ask, turning to face him, suddenly aware of how close

we're standing.

His eyes meet mine, unusually serious. "Because your article was right. Not about my family being terrorists—that was excessive—but about the importance of preserving heritage. I've been researching wolf cultural sites."

I blink, genuinely surprised. "You have?"

"I'm an architect, Ruby. I respect history, structure... Meaning." His thumb traces a small circle on my shoulder. "I'm not the villain you think I am."

I should step away. I should finish dressing and leave. Instead, I find myself searching his face for deception and finding none. "Prove it," I challenge.

"How?"

"Show me these alleged alterations." My chin lifts defiantly. "Right now."

A smile tugs at the corner of his mouth. "They're in my office. Down the hall."

Part of me—the advocate, the protector, the voice for my pack—genuinely wants to see these plans. But another part—the wolf in heat, the female responding to a powerful male—just wants an excuse to stay.

"Lead the way," I say, leaving my unbuttoned blouse open over my bra.

Percy's office is what you'd expect from a high-end architect—drafting table, multiple monitors, and scale models of various buildings. But what catches my eye is the detailed Wolfstone Preserve model, complete with miniature trees, the winding creek, and even the sacred rock.

“This is your plan?” I ask, leaning over the model.

Percy moves behind me, pointing to various sections.

“Hamilton wanted to clear-cut everything, but I’ve redesigned it to preserve the old-growth forest on the north ridge.

And these areas—” he indicates several green spaces “—would remain untouched natural zones. Including the traditional den sites.”

I look up at him in surprise. “How did you know where the den sites are? Prey shifters never enter wolf territory.”

A slight flush colors his cheeks. “I might have spent some nights hiking the area—observing, learning.”

The image of Percy Porkwell trudging through wolf territory in the dark, probably in expensive hiking boots utterly unsuited for the terrain, makes something warm bloom in my chest.

“You could have been hurt,” I say, oddly touched. “Lone pig in wolf territory after dark... not everyone would recognize you as a Porkwell.”

“Worth the risk.” His eyes hold mine, and suddenly, we’re not talking about architectural plans anymore.

Heat surges through me—a jolt of lust that leaves me slightly dizzy. My skin tingles, hyper-aware of his closeness, his scent, the warm breath that grazes my cheek as he speaks. This thoughtful side of him is both surprising and dangerous, burning through my defenses effortlessly.

He leans around me to point at something on the model, and my body betrays me—arching into him, pressing my ass against him, craving his touch, his cock.

I don't know who moves first.

One moment we're discussing land use, and the next, his mouth is on mine—hungry, insistent, possessive. My back hits the drafting table, sending pencils scattering across the floor. I should care about the Wolfstone model, which sits mere inches from being crushed beneath us.

I don't.

“This doesn't mean I agree with your plans,” I gasp as his mouth travels down my neck.

“Noted.” His tusks graze my collarbone, sending shivers across my skin. “Consider this a preliminary negotiation.”

My laugh turns into a moan as his hands push my open shirt off my shoulders. “Is this how the Porkwell's do all their business?”

“Only with very special partners.” His mouth captures mine again as his hands make quick work of my bra.

The feeling is different from our earlier encounter.

Before, it was all heat-driven urgency and shock at our own actions. Now, there's an undercurrent of something else—curiosity and exploration. His hands are more deliberate, and my responses are more honest.

When he cups my breasts, I arch into his touch, willingly savouring the softness of

his hands. My fingers trace the muscled expanse of his back, and I feel him shudder; the reaction feels unguarded.

We're discovering each other beyond the species stereotypes, beyond the professional antagonism.

"You're beautiful," he murmurs against my skin. "Every inch of you."

Coming from anyone else, I'd scoff at the line. But Percy's voice holds wonder, as though he's genuinely surprised by his own reaction to me.

I pull back enough to look at him. "You don't have to sound so shocked."

He chuckles, the sound vibrating pleasantly against my chest. "I've spent years looking at architectural perfection, Ruby. I know beauty when I see it—even when it comes in unexpected packages."

"Sweet talker." I push him back toward the leather office chair, surprising both of us with my boldness. "Sit."

He complies without hesitation, and the significance isn't lost on me.

In the boardroom, in public spaces, prey species never yield to predators.

They've built an entire society around making sure we know our place.

Yet here, in this intimate space, Percy—heir to the Porkwell empire—follows my lead without question.

The power of it sends a thrill through me that has nothing to do with my heat cycle, and everything to do with being acknowledged as an equal.

Or maybe, in this moment, even something more.

I straddle his lap feeling a rush of heat as his eyes widen. His hands immediately find my hips, steadying me as I grind my soaking panties against the impressive bulge in his boxers.

For once, I'm not the wolf trying to be heard in rooms designed to silence me. Here, he listens to every move, every sound I make.

He is completely at my mercy.

"You're staring," he murmurs, his thumbs tracing circles on my bare skin.

"Just thinking about how different this is," I admit. "Out there, I'm just the angry wolf activist. In here..."

"In here, you're Ruby," he finishes. "And I'm just Percy. No family legacies, no species politics. Just us."

It's a beautiful thought. I wonder how long it can last.

"This is better than our meetings at City Hall," he says, voice strained.

I nip at his ear, letting my teeth graze the sensitive flesh. "Speak for yourself. I enjoy watching you squirm during my public comments."

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

His hands tighten on my hips, guiding my movements against him. “I noticed. You always wear red when you plan to eviscerate us publicly. Like a warning sign.”

I’m surprised he noticed. “Red is a power color.”

“It’s your color.” His mouth finds my breast, and coherent thought becomes significantly more challenging. He sucks my sensitive nipple into his mouth, sending a shiver through my core.

We move together with increasing urgency, and all pretense of professional decorum is abandoned. His boxers join my bra on the floor, and soon, I’m sliding against him, slick with want.

Unable to wait any longer, I slide my panties to the side and sink down onto his thick hog.

The sensation is exquisite—a perfect fullness, a connection that transcends our biological differences.

We both gasp, frozen for a moment in mutual shock, at how right it feels.

The heat of his body against mine, the gasp of pleasure that escapes his mouth unbidden, it all drives me wild.

Then instinct takes over.

I move on him with increasing confidence, setting a rhythm that has him gripping my

hips hard enough to bruise. His mouth finds mine. Our kisses grow messier, more desperate as the tension builds.

“Ruby,” he groans against my lips. “You feel incredible.”

I should have some snarky response, some witty retort to maintain emotional distance. Instead, I whimper his name as he hits a spot inside me that sends sparks shooting up my spine.

The wolf in me—the primal, untamed part—begins to surface. My movements become more aggressive, my nails digging into his shoulders. A growl builds in my throat, rumbling out as he matches my intensity, thrusting up to meet each downward motion.

“That’s it,” he encourages, seemingly unafraid of my predator side emerging. “Let go, Ruby. Let me see you.”

Something about his acceptance, his encouragement of the very part of me society demands I suppress, pushes me closer to the edge. My head falls back, exposing my throat in a display of trust no wolf gives lightly.

Percy understands the significance. His mouth finds my throat, but instead of a dominant bite, he places gentle kisses along the vulnerable line of my neck.

The tenderness nearly undoes me.

“Percy,” I gasp, trembling on the verge. “I’m close.”

“I’ve got you,” he urges, one hand sliding between us to circle my clit with surprising dexterity.

That's all it takes.

I shatter around him, my body clenching as waves of pleasure crash over me. Percy follows moments later, his release triggering aftershocks of my own as he pulses inside me.

We cling to each other, both shaking, both stunned by the intensity of what just happened. His forehead rests against mine, our breath mingling as we struggle to return to reality.

His hands, now gentle on my back, tracing patterns in my skin. "You're going to ruin me."

I should climb off his lap, find my clothes, and restore some professional distance. Instead, I find myself curling against his chest, listening to his heart hammer against his ribs.

"The Wolfstone plans," I murmur. "Were they real? Or just a line to get me into bed?"

His arms tighten around me. "See for yourself." He gestures to the model we somehow managed not to destroy in our passion. "Everything I told you was true. I want to find a compromise, Ruby. One that respects what that land means to your people."

I study his face, searching for deception and finding none. Just Percy—complicated, surprising Percy—looking at me with what appears to be genuine respect.

"Why?" I ask simply.

He's quiet for a moment, his hand continuing its gentle exploration of my back.

“Because some things are worth preserving,” he finally says. “Heritage. History. Connections that matter.”

I’m not sure if he’s talking about Wolfstone or something else entirely.

Maybe both.

We stay like that for a long time, my body curled against his, both of us suspended in a moment neither of us expected to find. Enemies on paper, something entirely different in reality.

Eventually, I stir. “I should probably go. I think I’ve overstayed my welcome.”

Percy wraps his arms around me, pulling me close. “Not when I’ve finally got my hands on you, Ruby Wolfhart.”

There’s a raw yearning in his voice that catches me off guard. “You have no idea how long I’ve dreamed of you.”

A rush of heat and disbelief knots low in my belly. “Me?” I blurt out, too stunned to filter the thought. “The wolf threatening to take down your empire?”

“The one who challenges me at every turn.”

The admission is startling... and oddly thrilling.

A part of me wants to deflect, to mock it the way I do everything else. But another part latches on, clinging to the weight of this moment. “And now that you have me?”

His grin is pure mischief. “Now I plan to ravage you all night long.”

He stands, lifting us both in one smooth motion, and for a second, the world tilts around me.

“Back to the bedroom?” he murmurs, pressing a kiss to my temple that feels almost too tender for someone who just said “ravage.”

“Yes,” I say, surprising myself. “I think we have more... negotiating to do.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

“You’re thinking too loudly,” Percy murmurs, eyes still closed, one arm draped possessively across my waist. “I can practically hear the self-recrimination.”

I poke his side. “Don’t flatter yourself. I’m mentally drafting a scathing letter for next week’s Gazette about predator discrimination in urban planning.”

He cracks one eye open, his mouth curving into that infuriating half-smile. “At two in the morning? After three orgasms? I’m offended.”

“Four,” I correct with a smirk. “That thing you did in the shower definitely counted.”

“Ah, yes.” His smile widens to showcase those tusks I’ve become intimately acquainted with. “The thing with the—”

“Yes, that.” I cut him off, heat rising to my cheeks despite everything we’ve done. “Very... innovative use of bathroom fixtures.”

He laughs, the sound rumbling pleasantly against my side where our bodies touch. “High praise from Ruby Wolfhart, wolf rights advocate and apparent shower sex connoisseur.”

“I contain multitudes.” I stretch languidly, enjoying how his eyes track the movement. “Don’t stereotype me, Porkwell.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.” His hand traces lazy patterns through my hair. “You’ve

shattered every preconception I had about wolves tonight.”

“Likewise, about pigs.” I roll onto my side to face him properly. “Though I maintain your family’s business practices are morally bankrupt.”

“Fair.” He doesn’t even argue, which surprises me. “Hamilton’s vision for the company is... problematic.”

“Problematic?” I arch an eyebrow. “That’s like calling a forest fire a ‘friendly breeze.’”

Percy sighs, his expression growing serious. “My grandfather built homes. Simple ones, sustainable ones. My father expanded, but maintained some principles. Hamilton just sees profit margins and legacy.”

I study his face in the dim light. “And what do you see?”

“Balance.” His eyes meet mine. “I see the potential for development that respects what came before. Buildings that complement landscapes instead of obliterating them. Communities where different species coexist instead of...” He gestures vaguely between us. “Whatever the opposite of this is.”

“Mutual hostility and public character assassination?” I suggest helpfully.

“Exactly,” he chuckles, then sobers. “The Wolfstone plans I showed you aren’t approved by the board yet. Hamilton will fight them.”

I prop myself up on one elbow. “So why bother re-designing?”

“Because they’re better.” Percy’s voice holds conviction. “Better for the land, better for the community, better for long-term sustainability. And because a very passionate

wolf with stunning amber eyes and beautiful red hair wrote an article that made me question certain assumptions.”

Something warm unfurls in my chest at his words. “You read my article and decided to redesign an entire development project?”

“I read your article, got really angry, hiked out to Wolfstone to prove you wrong, and ended up sitting by the water until dawn watching a wolf family teaching pups to fish.” His expression softens at the memory.

“They were so... joyful. Free, in a way you never see with wolves in the city. I went back to the office and started redesigning that same day.”

I’m momentarily speechless. The image of Percy—privileged, powerful Percy Porkwell—sitting alone by the creek, watching my people in their natural element, challenges everything I thought I knew about him.

“That might have been my cousin’s family,” I say quietly. “Mara and her mate had five pups this season.”

Percy’s eyes widen. “They’re beautiful. The pups have this way of pouncing that’s—”

“Like they’re spring-loaded?” I finish, smiling despite myself. “Wolf pups do that until they’re about a year old. It’s how they practice hunting.”

“What else?” Percy asks, genuine curiosity in his voice. “I saw one of the adults—the father, I think—howling while the others hunted. He stayed on this rocky outcrop the whole time.”

“That’s the watcher,” I explain, surprised by his observation. “In traditional packs, we

always leave one wolf to guard the territory and signal if there's danger. My great-uncle was our pack's watcher for twenty years. It's considered an honour—the most trusted position.”

“But don't they miss the hunt?” Percy's brow furrows. “Seems lonely.”

“It's not about the individual, it's about the pack,” I say, realizing how different this mindset must be from the individualistic pig culture.

“When the hunt returns, the watcher gets the second choice of meat, right after the nursing mothers. And during the Moonhowl ceremony, the watcher leads the first call.”

Percy looks thoughtful. “I like that there's recognition for sacrifice. In my family, sacrifice is expected but rarely acknowledged.”

We share a moment of surprising connection, and I realize we're having a genuine conversation about wolf culture without the usual political tension or species awkwardness of a public forum.

The usual posturing has given way to an open and honest conversation, and I find Percy is not really who I thought he was.

I'm starting to trust that he's being genuine—and it's throwing me off more than I care to admit.

“So what happens now?” I ask, addressing the question we've both been avoiding. “With Wolfstone? With... this?” I gesture between our naked bodies.

Percy takes my hand in his, examining our intertwined digits thoughtfully. “Professionally? I'll present my alternative plans to the board next week. They'll hate

them. I'll fight for them, anyway."

"And if you lose?"

His eyes meet mine, steady and determined. "Then I resign as chief architect and blow the whistle on some questionable environmental practices Hamilton would prefer to stay buried."

I stare at him, shocked. "You'd tank your family business? Your inheritance?"

"I'd force it to be better." He shrugs. "Besides, Prescott's tech division is the real money-maker now, anyway. Construction is practically Hamilton's vanity project at this point. He would never allow me to leave. He'd agree just to keep me on board."

A few hours ago, I wanted to eviscerate this male. Now... I'm in bed with him, plotting to overturn the Wolfstone project. I've definitely lost my marbles.

"And..." I hesitate, surprised by how much I care about the answer, "What about this? Maybe we just... pretend it never happened?"

Percy's expression softens. "That depends. How do you feel about secret rendezvous and scandalous inter-species dating?"

"Dating?" I repeat, the idea oddly thrilling. "Bold of you to assume this wasn't just a heat-induced lapse in judgment."

He moves closer, his nose nuzzling my neck, making my pulse quicken. "Your heat explains the sex, Ruby. But not why you chose me, not why you are still here."

He's right, damn him.

There are plenty of eligible wolves I could have sought out to satisfy my biological urges. Hell, even other prey species would make more sense than a Porkwell.

“Maybe I just wanted intel on my enemy,” I deflect.

“Or maybe...” His voice is low and serious. “That underneath all the species politics and the family legacies, there’s something real here. Something worth exploring.”

The sincerity in his eyes makes my chest tight. It would be easier if this were just physical—a forbidden fling, a heat-driven mistake. Instead, I’m lying here having genuine feelings for a pig who understands wolf pup behavior and redesigns construction projects because of my articles.

“My pack would disown me,” I murmur.

The truth is more complicated. My Alpha would see any connection to Porkwell as betrayal, especially after her daughter lost her den in the Riverside development.

The elders would question my loyalty, my judgment.

And Grayson, who’s been trying to court me for the past year, would use it as proof that I’m “contaminated by city thinking.”

“My brother would have an actual heart attack.” Percy counters. “Though that might be a net positive for wolf-kind.”

I laugh despite myself. “We’re insane for even discussing this.”

“Completely.” He grins. “Though I have always found sanity to be overrated.”

His phone pings from the nightstand, and we both jump. Percy reaches for it,

glancing at the screen.

“Prescott,” he explains. “His conference ended early. He’ll be home tomorrow afternoon.”

Reality intrudes on our bubble. I should feel relieved—an easy out, a return to normalcy. Instead, disappointment washes over me.

“I should go,” I say reluctantly, making no move to leave the warm comfort of his bed.

“Or,” Percy counters, setting the phone aside, “You could stay until morning. Have breakfast with me. Help me prepare for the board meeting. We could go through your research and strengthen my proposal.”

“Professional collaboration. At your dining table. Naked.” I narrow my eyes suspiciously.

“Clothing optional, but recommended for pancake preparation.” His smile is infectious. “Safety first.”

I shouldn’t say yes. I have countless reasons to put distance between myself and Percy Porkwell. But if there’s a chance I can add my ideas to the project and make it better...

“Do you have blueberries?” I ask instead. “For the pancakes.”

His smile widens. “I’ll have groceries delivered at nine. With blueberries. And that fair-trade coffee you mentioned liking in your interview with Shiftown Public Radio last month.”

“You listened to that?” I’m genuinely surprised.

“I make it a point to study my opponents thoroughly.” His fingers trace the curve of my hip appreciatively. “Though I clearly missed some key details.”

I should be creeped out.

Instead, I’m charmed.

What is happening to me?

Who even am I, lying in bed with a Porkwell, discussing dating and development plans like I’m not the same wolf who led a protest outside his office just last week?

“I suppose I could stay,” I concede, as if doing him a favor. “For research purposes.”

“Of course.” He nods solemnly, though his eyes dance with amusement. “Purely professional.”

“Exactly.” I settle back against his pillows. “And I’ll need your personal cell number. For Wolfstone updates.”

“Already programmed it into your phone. Under ‘Devious Bacon.’”

I gasp in mock outrage. “You went through my phone?”

“It was unlocked.” He doesn’t look remotely sorry.

I should be mad. Instead, I curl against his side, my head finding the surprisingly perfect spot on his shoulder. “We’re going to complicate each other’s lives terribly, you know.”

“Worth it,” he murmurs into my hair. “Some complications are worth having.”

The intimacy is alarming yet thrilling, and I’m unsure how we got here or what happens next. Passionate, frenetic, exhausting—I expected that. But this quiet, tender aftermath? This is entirely new territory.

“I should warn you,” I say, as much to myself as Percy, “I’m terrible at relationships. Especially ones that involve secrecy, controversial politics, and inter-species scandal.”

He makes a low, contented sound, the vibrations sinking into my bones. “Good thing I’m excellent at all those things.”

I bite back a smile. “And so modest, too.”

“You know,” he says, his voice growing sleepy but still full of quiet conviction, “I’ve never met anyone who challenges me the way you do, Ruby. I didn’t expect to... like it so much.”

“Don’t like it too much,” I warn. “I reserve the right to go back to hating you in the morning.”

“Noted.”

Then his breathing deepens, and I realize that this reckless, infuriating male has actually fallen asleep. I’m glad one of us is at peace with the situation. I stare at the ceiling, wide awake.

My mind won’t shut up—replaying every little detail, every touch, every moan.

What the hell was I thinking?

I slip out from under his arm as carefully as I can manage. He shifts slightly but doesn't wake. It's tempting to curl back into his warmth and worry about everything later, but that's how I ended up here in the first place.

I grab my clothes and head to his office. Scribbling my note on a Post-it, I stick it on the model.

“If you remove all the buildings and man-made structures, you might be getting closer to what I had in mind.”

— R

Then, just as I'm about to leave, I see Hamilton's room. He's left the door open and I know it's his by the austere, immaculate decor, and the precise nature to which everything is organized.

I have a terrible idea. A fabulous, terrible idea.

I wander into his room and shift the stapler on his desk an inch to the left, then I remove a single book from his shelf and lay it sideways on top of the row, and finally I climb into his massive king size bed and roll around like a lunatic.

He thinks I smell like a kennel—then let him sleep in it. Arrogant bastard.

With a smirk, I let myself out of the penthouse apartment.

The crisp morning air fills my lungs as I hit the street.

I keep my pace brisk, ignoring the tiny pang of regret about those thousand-thread-count sheets and pancakes... definitely the pancakes and not Percy Porkwell.

I take a deep breath.

Worst case, I've got intel for my anti-Porkwell campaigns. Best case, there's hope for Wolfstone and whatever strange, impossible thing is happening between Percy and me.

I smile to myself, imagining Hamilton's face when he finds my scent in his pristine space. Serves him right.

Maybe I haven't lost all my marbles after all.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Hamilton

Ruby's scent hits me the moment I open my bedroom door.

Earthy. Wild. Unmistakable.

My body reacts before my brain can catch up—cock twitching, heart pounding, nostrils flaring.

That fucking she-wolf has been in my room. And I know exactly who let her in.

“Percy,” I growl, slamming the door behind me.

I knew Percy had fucked her. I could smell her all over him last night. We share females often, which makes it easier; they sign an NDA and stay for a day or two while we let loose out of the public eye.

But this. This is different.

Percy always had a bleeding heart for every sob story in a hundred-mile radius. But letting that forest-dwelling menace into our home—into my personal space?

This crosses every line.

It took me every ounce of control yesterday not to punch his brains out.

What the fuck was he thinking?

I inhale again, deeper this time, tracking the invisible trail of her presence.

She touched my desk. Pawed through my papers, probably.

Lingered by my bookshelf, the nosy bitch.

But the strongest concentration hovers around my bed, where her scent clings to my now rumpled sheets.

She rolled in my fucking bed.

The mental image of Ruby writhing on my mattress, those long legs, twisting in my sheets, that infuriating smirk playing at her lips as she deliberately rubs her scent into my most private space.

My nails dig into my palms, leaving half-moon indentations in the flesh.

“Goddamn it,” I mutter, adjusting my suddenly too-tight slacks.

This isn’t the first time Ruby’s scent has driven me to distraction. That’s her specialty—getting under my skin, making my blood boil in all the wrong-right ways.

She’s been a thorn in my side. At first, she was just another tree-hugging activist until she revealed she was part of the Wolf Preservation Committee with ancestral ties to the Wolfstone land.

I should have known.

Wolves have always complicated my life, from the predator kids who bullied Prescott in elementary school, to the pack that literally blew down Grandfather’s first straw-construction houses.

Even my ex-fiancée left me for a wolf—“ more passionate, less controlling ,” she’d said in her break up letter, as if my self-discipline was somehow a character flaw.

Predators have taken what they’ve wanted without consequence or responsibility for generations. Now that prey species are finally thriving, building our own legacies and reclaiming our power, wolves like Ruby want to paint us as the villains.

As if success is something to apologize for.

I refuse to back down just because history’s tide has turned. We earned our place at the top through intelligence and hard work, not teeth and claws.

The fact that Ruby’s educated and intelligent, combined with her newspaper articles, protests, and petitions, makes me respect her—a little.

Prescott wanted to negotiate. Percy suggested we find another location.

But I’ve never been one to back down when I want something. And Wolfstone is prime real estate—too valuable to abandon because some mangy wolves claim it’s their “heritage.”

More than that, Wolfstone represents my vision for the future of Shiftown.

It’s not just another development—it’s the cornerstone of my ten-year expansion plan.

The integrated commercial district will connect our downtown properties to the lakeside developments, creating a continuous Porkwell presence across the city’s most valuable areas.

Father always said, “Own the arteries, not just the organs,” and Wolfstone is the

critical artery that completes our network.

I loosen my tie and sit on the edge of the bed, right where her scent is strongest. The memory of our last confrontation bubbles up, unbidden and unwanted.

It was at the town hall meeting last month.

Ruby had been particularly vicious that night, calling our development company “ecological terrorists” and me personally a “corporate parasite.” She’d cornered me afterward in the empty hallway, those amber eyes flashing with righteous fury as she jabbed a finger into my chest.

“You think you can just bulldoze generations of wolf history for your luxury condos, Hamilton?” Her voice had been low, dangerous. “Wolf packs have protected those woods for centuries.”

“Wolf packs,” I’d sneered, “don’t own the land. We bought it legally.”

“Some things can’t be bought,” she’d shot back, stepping closer until I could feel her breath on my face. “Some things are sacred.”

She’d been so close that I could smell her breath and see the rapid pulse at her throat. Something in me had snapped—the culmination of months of frustration, heated arguments, and sleepless nights thinking about her impassioned speeches and flashing eyes.

I’d grabbed her by the neck, my large hand easily encircling her throat. Not squeezing—just holding her there, feeling her pulse jump against my palm.

“You need to learn when to shut your smart mouth,” I growled.

Her eyes had widened, but not with fear.

With challenge.

With heat.

And then I'd kissed her.

It wasn't gentle or romantic.

It was angry and desperate and hungry—my mouth crashing against hers, my tusks scraping her lips. She'd kissed me back for one stunning, electric moment, her nails shifting into claws and digging into my shoulders.

Then she'd bitten my lower lip.

Hard enough to draw blood.

I'd jerked back, tasting copper, watching as she'd wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, those amber eyes never leaving mine.

“Try that again,” she'd said, voice husky and dangerous, “and I'll bite something you'll miss a lot more.”

Then she'd walked away, hips swaying with that perky ass of hers, leaving me hard and furious and confused as hell.

I've replayed that moment a hundred times. The way she didn't cower like others do when I use my size and position to intimidate. The taste of her—wild berries and defiance.

No one challenges me like Ruby does.

No one makes me lose control.

It's infuriating. And intoxicating.

I'm always in command. People defer to me, seek my approval. But Ruby? She looks at me like I'm just another obstacle to remove. She sees the pig, not the power.

And some twisted part of me responds to that authenticity.

I run a hand over my face now, feeling the phantom sting of her teeth. And now her scent is all over my bed, taunting me, reminding me of how she felt pressed against me for that brief, maddening moment.

Worse, the thought of Percy and her together—of her giving him what she denied me—makes me want to put my fist through a wall.

Percy, my brilliant, naïve little brother.

Always the talented one, the creative one.

"Percy's designs are revolutionary," Father would say, while I managed the boring but essential business operations that kept us all wealthy.

Percy gets the accolades while I handle the messy realities—the difficult negotiations, the zoning fights, the financial stakes.

I've always protected him—from business rivals, from his own impractical idealism, from Father's occasional disappointment when his artistic vision exceeded practical constraints. That's my job as the eldest. I make the hard decisions so Percy can keep

his hands clean and his conscience clear.

And how does he repay me? By bringing my nemesis into our home. By potentially compromising the biggest deal of my career. By betraying family loyalty for a piece of wolf tail.

“Fuck,” I mutter, flopping back onto my mattress. I’m not the jealous type.

Her scent envelops me immediately, stronger here, as if she’d lain back against my pillows.

I loosen my belt, no longer fighting the inevitable. My hand slides beneath my waistband, grasping my cock.

It’s pathetic, really, how quickly she reduces me to this—a rutting, mindless animal.

Me. Hamilton J. CEO of Porkwell Corp. The pig who graduated at the top of his class. The pig who owns most of Shifftown world, reduced to jerking off like a teenager because a wolf activist decided to mark her territory in my bedroom.

“I hate you,” I whisper to the empty room as I stroke myself roughly from base to tip.

My imagination supplies vivid details—Ruby sprawled across my bed, watching me with those challenging eyes. Ruby shedding her clothes to reveal her luscious body beneath. Ruby’s claws marking my back, her sharp teeth grazing my throat.

I kick off my slacks entirely, freeing my cock to the cool air of the room. I’m large—larger than most pigs. I would split her open. The thought brings a savage satisfaction. Would Ruby’s eyes widen at the sight? Would she still be so quick with her cutting remarks if she saw what I’m packing?

My hand moves faster, grip tightening. I imagine pushing her down onto this very bed, pinning those wrists that are so often raised in protest. In my fantasy, she doesn't bite to hurt—she bites to mark, to claim.

She doesn't fight me—she challenges me, meets me thrust for thrust, her wolf strength matching my pig bulk.

“Fucking hell,” I gasp, feeling the pressure building at the base of my spine.

I can almost hear her voice—not the public activist voice, but the lower, huskier tone. “Is this what you want, Hamilton? To fuck your enemy?”

Yes.

No.

I don't know anymore.

My free hand grips the sheets where her scent is strongest, bringing them to my face. I inhale deeply as my hand works furiously over my cock.

The pressure builds beyond containing. I come with a strangled shout, spurting thick ropes across my stomach and chest. The intensity surprises me—it's been a long time since I've come this hard.

For several moments, I just lie there, chest heaving, heart pounding. I just masturbated to the scent of the female actively trying to destroy my company.

The female who's probably seduced my brother for information.

The female who bit me when I kissed her.

“Shit,” I mutter, reaching for the tissues on my nightstand.

As I clean myself up, my mind clears enough for strategic thinking.

Ruby was in my room for a reason. Probably looking for documents, for any advantage in her fight to save those woods.

The woods that represent millions in potential profit.

The woods that will cement Porkwell Development as the premier builder in the world.

I can't let her win.

I won't let her win.

No matter how good she smells, how hot that kiss was, or how incredible she looks when passionately defending her territory.

I toss the used tissues into the wastebasket and pull my slacks back on. My body feels temporarily sated, but my mind is racing.

I need to find what Ruby was looking for.

I need to warn Percy that she's using him.

Most of all, I need to get her scent out of my room before I lose my fucking mind completely.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

My apartment feels like a cage tonight. Not the cozy den I usually love, but a place where I'm trapped with thoughts I shouldn't be having.

A pig.

I fucked a pig.

I kick off my boots and pad across the worn hardwood to the kitchen. Through the window, the trees sway in the evening breeze, silhouetted against the darkening sky. My tiny slice of wilderness, just enough to keep me sane in a world that's increasingly concrete and glass.

"Get it together, Ruby," I mutter to myself, yanking open the fridge and grabbing a beer. "He's the enemy. Literally the fucking enemy."

And yet... my body remembers everything.

I twist the cap off and take a long pull, trying to drown the memory of Percy Porkwell's eyes when he'd looked up from his design plans last night.

At me. A wolf. The irony isn't lost on me.

Apparently, my standards drop significantly when someone looks at me like I'm worth redesigning their entire world for.

My wolf stirs restlessly beneath my skin, confused by my conflicting emotions. I set the bottle down with a thunk and roll my shoulders, trying to ease the tension.

Shifter problems 101: Your animal side doesn't understand complex human bullshit like "he's cute, but he's destroying our ancestral lands."

My phone buzzes. A text from my cousin Mara: "Any progress with the pig squad?"

I snort and type back: "Define progress. I didn't maul any of them."

I take a deep breath and drag myself back on track.

Priorities over horniness.

"Working with the land,"—as if Wolfstone needed the help of a pig.

"Fuck," I mutter as I wander into my bedroom and flop onto the bed, staring at the ceiling.

I roll onto my stomach and bury my face in my pillow. Maybe if I smother myself, these thoughts will go away.

Percy's designs flash behind my closed eyelids.

I hate that I can admit they were beautiful.

Elegant buildings nestled among the trees, using natural materials, solar panels disguised as artistic elements.

Winding paths that follow the natural contours of the land.

A thoughtful, sensitive approach to development.

Still a fucking development, though.

I groan and push myself up, pacing to the window again.

From here, I can just make out the dark line of Wolfstone forest on the horizon beyond the edge of town.

In its raw state, it's perfect. Ancient trees reaching for the sky, undergrowth teeming with life, streams rushing over rocks that have lain in the same spots for millennia.

No human—or pig—design could improve on that perfection.

My mind wanders to the Lightning Oak, a massive tree split by lightning decades ago but still thriving, its twin trunks reaching skyward like outstretched arms. When I was seven and devastated after losing both parents in the same winter, Grandmother took me there.

“This tree adapted,” she'd said, her gnarled fingers tracing the scorched bark.

“It didn't let destruction define it. Neither will you.

” I'd curled up in the hollow between the split trunks, feeling the ancient heartbeat of the wood against my back, and found my center again.

That's the spot Percy's main lodge would replace—a “natural centrepiece” for his development.

He doesn't even know what he's destroying.

How could he?

My phone buzzes again. Mara: “Coming to the pack meeting tomorrow?”

Today’s Sunday. Which means tomorrow, I’m going back to the Porkwell offices to... what, exactly? Argue more? Threaten them? Bat my eyelashes and hope they suddenly decide to abandon a multi-million dollar development project?

“Yes,” I type out. “Need to strategize.”

My thumb hovers over the send button. I should tell Mara more, but how do I explain any of this?

As pack beta and my closest friend since cubhood, she’d be the first to smell the Porkwell scent lingering on my skin.

And Alpha Thorncrest, with her uncanny ability to detect dishonesty, would see right through any attempt to downplay my... complications.

The pack trusted me to represent them. Me, the University-educated wolf who could speak the language of urban planning and environmental law. “You understand their world,” Alpha had said when she appointed me liaison. “But you’ll never forget who you are.”

Except here I am, forgetting quite spectacularly.

If they knew I’d been in Percy Porkwell’s bed, let alone found myself thinking about his brothers, I’d lose more than my position as liaison. I’d lose the respect of wolves who’ve been my family since birth. Who trusted me to protect what generations have fought to preserve.

The pack needs to know about Percy's plans. About how seductively reasonable they seem. About how they still ultimately mean the end of our forest as we know it.

I delete the message to Mara and instead, I write: "Can't make it."

I wander into the bathroom and start the shower, cranking the heat until steam billows.

"They're pigs," I remind myself, voice echoing against the tile as I wash. "The Big Bad Wolf doesn't get hot for pigs."

And yet here I am, the water running cold before I realize how long I've been standing here, lost in fantasy.

I towel off and pull on an oversized t-shirt, crawling into bed though I know sleep will be elusive. My laptop sits on the nightstand, Percy's email with the full design proposal downloaded but unopened. I should look at it. Know thy enemy and all that.

But not tonight. Tonight, I need to remember what I'm fighting for.

I close my eyes and let my mind wander to Wolfstone.

To the feeling of dirt beneath my paws, wind ruffling my fur as I run beneath a canopy of ancient oaks and pines.

To the scent of pine needles and loam and the thousand subtle notes that make up the perfume of home.

To the moonlight filtering through leaves, dappling the forest floor with silver.

This is what they want to take away. This is what they want to "improve." This is

what I'll die defending if I have to.

But emotional appeals won't sway the Porkwell's. I need concrete arguments, irrefutable data.

My thoughts drift to my grandmother, fierce defender of our pack lands until her last breath. What would she think of me now, lusting after the very creatures threatening our home? I can almost hear her snort of derision.

"I know, Nana," I whisper to the dark room. "I'm getting it under control."

The Porkwell's may be handsome—irritatingly, confusingly—but they're still the enemy. And on Monday, I'll remember that. Even if the universe has a sick sense of humor, making them this devastatingly fuckable. I'll walk into their sleek office with my head high and my arguments sharp.

I'll be Ruby Wolfhart, an environmental activist and a proud wolf shifter. Not Ruby Wolfhart, a confused mess of hormones.

Rolling onto my side, I pull up the forest preserve proposal I've been working on.

Alternative plans to present to the city council, showing how Wolfstone could be protected as a natural space while still bringing economic benefits to the area.

Eco-tourism. Research opportunities. Sustainable harvesting of certain forest products.

It's good. Solid. Not as immediately profitable as luxury homes and a resort, but better for the environment. Better for the community.

Better for my people.

Monday. I'll make them listen.

Not just any wolf.

I'm Ruby Wolfhart, daughter of Luna and Harry Wolfhart, granddaughter of Silverfang, descended from the original pack that roamed these forests long before the first human structures rose.

This land wasn't just wild frontier—it was our home.

My ancestors survived centuries of persecution, adaptation, and change without losing their essential nature.

I won't be the one to break that chain.

Some stories have been told for centuries for a reason.

The big bad wolf doesn't fall for the three little pigs.

She eats them.

Time to remind them why wolves were the monsters in their bedtime stories.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

I burst through the glass doors of Porkwell Offices like I'm leading a one-wolf invasion.

Which, technically, I am.

My claws click against the polished marble floor—metaphorically speaking, since I'm unfortunately in human form and wearing my battle boots instead.

The receptionist's eyes widen as I march past her desk, my fangs practically bared.

Okay, so my actual human teeth aren't that impressive, but the snarl on my face must be doing the job because she doesn't even try to stop me.

"Miss! You can't just—" she calls after me, but I'm already halfway to the elevator, jabbing the up button with enough force to potentially break it.

"Watch me," I mutter, stepping inside when the doors slide open with an annoyingly cheerful ding. I punch the button for the top floor. Executive suite. Where pigs in suits plot to destroy my pack's ancestral lands while sipping twelve-dollar coffee.

The elevator whooshes upward, and I use the thirty seconds to gather my thoughts.

The plans I found in Percy's apartment, the overheard conversation with Hamilton, the ridiculous post-sex promises that were probably just Percy's way of getting me to stop barking about environmental impact studies.

Well, they're about to face the full fury of Ruby Wolfhart, conservation warrior and defender of Wolfstone.

And, yes, the same Ruby Wolfhart who slept with one of them less than forty-eight hours ago.

The elevator doors slide open to another reception area, this one sleeker, with abstract art of geometric shapes a toddler could create. The receptionist here—different from downstairs, blonde and polished within an inch of her life—stands immediately.

“Excuse me, do you have an appointment with—”

“Ruby Wolfhart. Tell them I'm here for the meeting.”

“I don't see a Ruby Wolfhart in the calendar.” She squints at her computer screen, perfectly manicured nails clicking against the keyboard.

“It's an emergency meeting. About Wolfstone.” I lean forward, dropping my voice. “You might want to tell them I'm here before I decide to make a scene. I'm known for being quite... vocal.”

Her eyes dart to the phone, then back to me. “One moment, please.”

While she makes the call, I notice the three distinct office spaces branching off from this central area. Each door has a name: Hamilton Porkwell, CEO. Prescott Porkwell, CTO. Percy Porkwell, CMO and Chief Architect. Of course they each need their own executive suites.

The receptionist hangs up. “Mr. Hamilton says they're in a meeting and cannot be disturbed right now. He suggests scheduling something for next week.”

I snort. “Perfect. Then they’re all in one place.”

Before she can stop me, I stride toward the large glass-walled conference room at the end of the hall. Through the transparent walls, I can see all three brothers huddled around a table covered with blueprints and a scale model that I immediately recognize as Wolfstone.

My hackles rise.

I push open the door with enough force that it hits the wall with a satisfying bang. Three pork-faced heads swivel toward me in perfect synchronicity. It would be comical if I weren’t so furious.

“Gentlemales,” I say, crossing my arms. “Let’s talk about Wolfstone, shall we?”

Hamilton is the first to recover, his heavy brow furrowing as he straightens to his full height. In his black suit and power tie, he looks every bit the corporate predator.

“Ms. Wolfhart,” he says, voice cold. “This is a private meeting. I believe my assistant informed you that we’re not available.”

“Funny thing about wolves,” I reply, stepping closer to the table. “We’re terrible at taking orders from pigs.”

Percy—standing to Hamilton’s right—looks caught between embarrassment and genuine pleasure at seeing me.

His dress shirt is rolled up at the sleeves, and his expression softens when our eyes meet. For a split second, I remember the feeling of his hands on my skin, and I hate my body for the involuntary flush that follows.

“Ruby,” he says, my name sounding different in his mouth than it did when he was whispering it against my neck. “I didn’t expect to see you until Friday’s community forum.”

“I bet you didn’t.”

The third brother, Prescott—known to most as Scott—stands with a subtle bounce in his step. Unlike his siblings, his delight at the interruption is evident. His thick-rimmed glasses and slightly rumpled t-shirt lend him the dishevelled tech-genius vibe that’s charmingly him.

“Ruby, it’s great to see you again,” he says warmly, moving around the table with a friendly smile. “I’ve heard you’re still keeping my brothers on their toes with your wolf conservation work.”

His enthusiasm is contagious, and I can’t help but smile back as I shake his hand. “It’s good to see you too, Scott. How’s the tech world treating you these days?”

“Busy as ever,” he replies, a hint of modesty in his tone.

“I’m handling the tech side—sustainable energy systems, smart home integration, zero-carbon footprint tracking.

You know, the ‘boring’ stuff no one notices until the eco-toilet stops working.

” He gestures toward his brothers with a playful eye roll.

Hamilton clears his throat loudly. “If you’re quite finished, Scott, perhaps Ms. Wolfhart could explain why she’s barging into a private meeting?”

I refocus on why I came here, eyes narrowing as I step toward the model on the table.

It's elaborate—showing the entire valley, the creek meandering through it, the hills where my pack runs during full moons, all rendered in perfect miniature.

"I'm here because I found these." I pull out my phone, scrolling to photos I took of Percy's plans.

"Security measures specifically designed to keep wolves out of their own territory? Anti-prey fencing with shock capabilities and silver? Motion sensors that emit high-frequency sounds only canids can hear?" I look at each brother in turn.

"It's not just development. It's targeted biological warfare against my species and other predator shifters. "

Hamilton doesn't even blink. "It's standard security for a luxury development. We have a duty to protect our residents."

"From what? Wolves who have lived there peacefully for generations? Wolves who only want to preserve their ancestral lands?" My voice rises with each question.

"From any potential threat," Hamilton says smoothly. "Our buyers expect certain... assurances."

Percy steps forward, gesturing to the model. "Ruby, look, I've actually made significant changes since we... since our discussion. I've expanded the green corridor here and preserved this entire section for wildlife passage."

I glance at the model where he's pointing. It's a marginal improvement, sure, but it's like saying "I'll only cut off four of your fingers instead of all five, aren't I generous?"

"The sacred howling rock is right in the middle of your golf course, Percy."

He winces. “I’ve actually designed the course around it. It becomes a feature, see? We’re marketing it as embracing the natural landscape and honouring the area’s heritage.”

“By building putting greens around a spiritual site?” I can’t believe what I’m hearing. “That’s not honouring anything. That’s commodifying it.”

Prescott—Scott—clears his throat. “For what it’s worth, I’ve designed some pretty cool tech that might help. Automated systems that go quiet during full moons, wildlife corridors with heat-signature recognition to avoid potential hazards...”

I whirl on him. “So you’re helping them, too? I thought you weren’t involved in the development side.”

“I’m not.” He shrugs. “I just provide solutions when they ask for them. Makes the whole project more environmentally friendly.”

“There’s nothing environmentally friendly about destroying natural habitat,” I snap.

“We’re preserving over 40% of the land,” Percy counters.

“The 40% that’s too steep to build on anyway,” I fire back.

“What about the old-growth cedar groves along the eastern ridge? Those trees are over 300 years old and provide critical nesting habitat for the endangered spotted owl. Your plans run a road right through them. And the wetland system at the base of the valley? It filters groundwater for the entire watershed. Your golf course will require chemical treatments that’ll destroy the natural filtration and leach into the creek—which, by the way, is one of the last natural breeding grounds for the silver-backed trout. ”

I gesture emphatically at their model. “This isn’t just about wolves. It’s about an entire ecosystem that took centuries to establish and will be gone forever in a matter of months if your bulldozers have their way.”

Hamilton steps forward, his massive frame looming. “Ms. Wolfhart, let’s cut to the chase. Wolfstone is happening. The land has been purchased, permits secured, and construction begins next month. Your little protests and community forums are charming, but ultimately futile.”

The dismissive tone in his voice makes something primitive stir inside me. I take a step closer, invading his personal space.

“Nothing is happening until the environmental impact assessment is complete,” I growl. “And your current plans will never pass, mister.”

“The assessment is a formality,” Hamilton smirks. “One we have well in hand.”

“Are you implying that you’ve rigged the assessment?” I ask, voice dangerously quiet.

“I’m stating that we understand how the system works better than you do.” His eyes—dark brown, unlike Percy’s lighter hazel—hold mine without flinching. “This is business, Ms. Wolfhart. Not a nature documentary.”

“Our lands are not for sale!”

“They have already been sold.” Hamilton’s smile is smug, victorious. “Several times over, in fact. Once to the original developers fifty years ago, then to the county when they defaulted, and now to us. Your pack’s emotional attachment to the land, while touching, doesn’t change property law.”

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

I feel my control slipping, the wolf inside me clawing to get out. My hands shake with the effort of not transforming right here in their fancy office.

"Ruby, please," Percy says, stepping between us. "Let's be reasonable. I've worked hard on these new designs specifically with your concerns in mind. It's not perfect, but it's a compromise."

"A compromise?" I laugh, the sound harsh even to my own ears. "A compromise would be not building on our land at all!"

"That's not an option," Hamilton says flatly.

"Then neither is my cooperation." I turn to leave, but Hamilton's next words freeze me in place.

"Your cooperation isn't required, Ms. Wolfhart. Though I wonder what your pack would think if they knew how... intimately you've been discussing these matters with Percy."

I turn slowly to face him, ice flooding my veins.

"Are you threatening me?"

"Merely observing that your objectivity might be questioned." Hamilton's smile is all teeth. "Sleeping with the enemy isn't generally considered effective activism."

"Hamilton!" Percy hisses. "That's enough."

Rage wars inside me. “You son of a bitch.”

“I believe the term you’re looking for is ‘son of a sow,’” Hamilton corrects with mock politeness.

I’ve never wanted to rip someone’s throat out more in my entire life. “This isn’t over.”

Hamilton nods. “Though I do think this meeting is.”

I storm toward the door, shaking with fury. Percy calls after me, but I ignore him. It’s Hamilton’s eyes I feel boring into my back as I leave, Hamilton’s smug smile that makes my blood boil.

As I reach the reception area, I hear footsteps behind me. Heavy ones.

Hamilton.

“Ms. Wolfhart,” he calls. “A word in private.”

I don’t slow down, heading for the stairwell instead of waiting for the elevator. The last thing I need is to be trapped in a small space with him.

But apparently, that’s exactly what’s about to happen.

* * *

I take the stairs two at a time, aiming for the next floor, when I hear the stairwell door open and slam shut behind me.

I’m about to take the exit when I hear it lock with a mechanical click .

Mother fucker.

I whirl around, storming back up the stairs in a fury.

Hamilton is standing there, looking far too pleased with himself as he tucks his phone back into his suit pocket.

“You locked the exits?” I snap.

He raises one eyebrow. “Security override. Didn’t want you wandering off before we had our... chat.”

“Unlock it. Now,” I growl.

“No.” He smirks.

I’m trapped in this concrete stairwell. Just me and the pig who’s destroying everything my pack holds sacred.

I back up against the wall because I need space between us before I do something stupid.

Like claw his smug face.

Or worse.

“What do you want, Hamilton?” I snarl, my voice bouncing off the walls.

“Clarity,” he says, taking a step closer.

His scent fills the enclosed space—expensive, woodsy, and infuriatingly appealing.

“I want to understand what game you’re playing with my brother.”

“No game. Just trying to save my pack’s home from being turned into a playground for the rich.”

“By sleeping with the architect?” His eyebrow arches in perfect condescension. “Interesting strategy.”

“Fuck you.” The words come out as a growl, low and dangerous.

“Such eloquence.” He takes another step.

Now we’re close enough that I can feel the heat radiating from his massive frame. Hamilton’s always been the biggest of the brothers—thicker, stronger, more dominant.

“Did you think getting Percy to redesign a few buildings would stop this development? Or were you just gathering intelligence between the sheets?”

My hand moves before I can think, lashing out to slap that smug look off his face. But Hamilton is faster than he looks. His fingers wrap around my wrist, stopping the blow midair. His grip is like iron, firm enough to restrain, but not enough to hurt.

“Careful,” he warns, voice dropping an octave. “Assaulting a Porkwell in his own building would give me every reason to call security.”

“Let. Go.” I twist my wrist, but he holds tight.

“Not until you tell me what you’re really after.”

"Is it so hard to believe I actually just wanted to fuck him?"

We're standing too close now. I can see the small flecks of gold in his dark eyes, count the stubble along his jaw. My wolf senses pick up his heartbeat—faster than it should be for someone so seemingly in control. There's something else, too, mixing with his cologne.

The unmistakable scent of arousal.

Oh.

Hamilton isn't just angry.

He's turned on.

And horrifyingly, disgustingly, my body is responding in kind.

"I'm after saving Wolfstone," I say, but my voice has lost some of its edge. "Nothing more."

"Bullshit." His grip on my wrist relaxes slightly, his thumb moving in a small circle against my pulse point. "You want something from us. From me."

"I want you to go to hell."

His laugh is deep, rumbling. "You want something, alright. I can smell it on you, Wolf."

Damn these heightened senses. Damn my body's betrayal. Damn Hamilton Porkwell and his ability to see right through me.

"So are you," I snap, but I don't pull away. I should, but I don't.

“Am I?” His free hand comes up to brush a strand of hair from my face, the touch feather-light and completely at odds with the tension crackling between us. “Tell me you’re not curious. Tell me you haven’t wondered.”

“Wondered what?”

“What would it be like? With me instead of Percy.”

That’s when I realize... Hamilton is jealous. “You’re disgusting.”

“And you’re lying.” His hand slides to the back of my neck, firm and possessive. “You’ve thought about it. Just like I’ve thought about you, sprawled across my bed instead of his.”

I should knee him in the groin. I should shift right here and tear his throat out. Before I can finish my thought, Hamilton surges forward, his lips crushing against mine, and instead of tearing away, my traitorous body clings to him, matching his fiery passion.

Hamilton responds instantly, a growl of victory rumbling in his chest as he backs me against the wall. His kiss is nothing like Percy’s careful exploration. It’s an invasion, brutal and demanding, his tongue forcing its way into my mouth as his body pins mine against the cold concrete.

I bite his lower lip hard enough to draw blood. He hisses, but doesn’t pull away. Instead, his hand tangles in my hair, yanking my head back to expose my throat. His teeth—blunt, human, but no less dangerous—scrape along my jugular.

“Fucking wolf,” he mutters against my skin. “Driving me crazy for months.”

“Shut up,” I gasp, clawing at his suit jacket, tearing it open with zero concern for what I assume is a multi-thousand-dollar piece of fabric. “Just shut up.”

His hand leaves my hair to grab my ass, lifting me against the wall. Instinctively, I wrap my legs around his waist; the position pressing the hard length of him against my core, separated by layers of clothing that suddenly feel absolutely intolerable.

“I hate you,” I pant, as his teeth find the sensitive spot where my neck meets my shoulder. “I hate you so much.”

“The feeling’s mutual.” His hands are under my shirt now, rough and possessive against my skin. “But that doesn’t mean I haven’t wanted to fuck you senseless since the first time you stormed into my office, all righteous fury and wild eyes.”

His crude words send a shock of heat straight to my core. This is wrong on so many levels.

He’s the enemy.

He’s Percy’s brother.

He’s everything I’m fighting against.

And yet, I can’t stop myself from grinding against him, seeking friction where I need it most.

Hamilton’s fingers find the clasp of my bra, snapping it open with practiced ease. Then his mouth is on my breast, teeth grazing my nipple. I cry out; the sound echoing in the stairwell, reminding me where we are—a semi-public space.

The thought should cool my ardor.

It doesn’t.

It makes everything more intense, more urgent.

“Someone could come in,” I manage to say, even as my hands work frantically at his belt.

“It’s locked.” His voice is animal-rough as he yanks my jeans down over my hips. “Nobody will see the mighty wolf conservationist getting fucked by the big bad developer.”

I should be outraged. Instead, I’m soaking wet, desperate for him in a way that defies all logic and self-respect.

“You’re the worst,” I gasp as his fingers find me, stroking through slick heat.

“And you’re dripping for me.” His smile is pure predator.

I don’t answer. Can’t answer.

His fingers are inside me now, thick and insistent, curling to find spots that make my vision blur. My claws—not metaphorical this time—extend slightly, pricking through his shirt to the skin beneath.

“Careful, wolf,” he warns, but the danger in his voice only makes me wilder.

I manage to get his pants open, freeing his large cock—so thick and hard it’s intimidating in a way that makes my mouth water. I reach between us to stroke him, my fingers unable to meet around his girth. Satisfaction thrums through me when his own rhythm falters and a deep groan escapes his lips.

His fingers withdraw from me, and I whimper at the loss before I can stop myself. He smirks, bringing those same fingers to his mouth and licking them clean while

maintaining eye contact. It's the most obscene thing I've ever seen, and it nearly makes me come on the spot.

"Sweet," he says, voice like gravel. "With a bite. Just like I imagined."

He guides his massive, throbbing cock to my entrance. If I wasn't so wet for him right now, I would worry that it wouldn't fit. For a moment, we pause there, on the precipice of something irreversible. Hamilton's eyes lock with mine, suddenly serious.

"Say it," he demands. "Say you want me."

"I want you," I admit, the words both surrender and victory. "Now fuck me before I change my mind."

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

He slams into me with a force that knocks the breath from my lungs, filling me completely in one brutal thrust. The stretch burns in the best possible way; my body struggling to accommodate his size. I dig my nails into his shoulders, holding on as he establishes a punishing rhythm.

“Is this what you wanted?” He punctuates each word with a thrust. “To be filled by a Porkwell cock? Was Percy not enough for you?”

“Shut up about your brother,” I snarl, nipping at his ear harder than necessary. “This isn’t about him.”

Hamilton laughs, the sound dark and knowing. “No, it’s about you and me. Always has been.”

He shifts, angling his hips to hit spots inside me that make coherent thought impossible. I’m reduced to primal sounds—gasps and moans and half-formed curses. The metal railing digs into my back. The concrete wall scrapes against my shoulders. Everything hurts and everything is perfect.

“You feel so fucking good,” Hamilton groans against my neck. “So tight. So wet. Your pussy is gripping me like it wants to keep me inside forever.”

His filthy words push me closer to the edge. I’m going to come embarrassingly fast if he keeps this up, but I’m too far gone to care.

“Harder,” I demand, digging my heels into his lower back. “Make me feel it tomorrow.”

He obliges, pounding into me with a force that would break a human woman. But I'm no human, and my wolf strength meets his pig stubbornness thrust for thrust. We're animals in human skin, rutting against a stairwell wall; enemies turned lovers in the most primal way possible.

"Touch yourself," he commands. "I want to feel you come around my cock."

I slip a hand between us, finding my clit and circling it in time with his thrusts. The dual stimulation is overwhelming. I'm close, so close, teetering on the edge of oblivion.

"That's it," Hamilton encourages, his voice strained with the effort of holding back his own release. "Show me what a wolf looks like when she comes."

His words send me over the edge. My orgasm crashes through me like a tidal wave, every muscle clenching as pleasure radiates outward from my core. I cry out, not caring who might hear; my inner walls pulsing around Hamilton's length.

His own release follows as my pulsing heat attempts to milk his cock dry. His rhythm falters as he drives into me one final time. His body goes rigid, a guttural groan tearing from his throat as he empties himself into me.

For a moment, we stay locked together, panting and sweaty, the reality of what we've just done slowly seeping back into consciousness.

Hamilton rests his forehead against mine, his breathing ragged. "Fuck."

That about sums it up.

Slowly, he pulls out of me and lowers me to the ground.

I can feel the hot gush of his cum dripping down my thigh.

He steadies me when my legs threaten to give out.

The loss of him has me feeling oddly empty, vulnerable in a way I wasn't prepared for.

We adjust our clothing in awkward silence.

I use my panties to wipe up the mess and stuff them into my bag.

The passionate fury of moments ago replaced by something heavier, more complicated.

"That was..." he starts, but I cut him off.

"A mistake," I finish for him, though the word feels hollow even as I say it. "A momentary lapse in judgment that will never happen again."

He studies me, his expression unreadable. "Is that what you told Percy, too?"

These fucking pigs.

Shame and anger flare within me. I've now fucked two of the three Porkwell brothers, the very men threatening my pack's territory.

What kind of defender does that make me?

"I need to go." I smooth down my shirt, wincing at the tenderness between my legs, the places where his fingers and teeth have left marks on my skin. Marks that will fade too quickly, thanks to my wolf healing. No physical evidence of my betrayal will

remain, but the memory will.

“Running away?”

“Getting air.” I meet his eyes, determined not to show weakness. “This changes nothing, Hamilton. I’m still going to fight you on Wolfstone. With everything I have.”

A slow smile spreads across his face. “I’d be disappointed if you didn’t.”

I turn to continue down the stairs, needing to put as much distance as possible between us.

“Ruby,” he calls after me. I pause but don’t turn around. “Friday’s meeting. Be prepared for a new proposal. One you might actually find... satisfactory.”

I glance back over my shoulder. “More of Percy’s compromises?”

“No.” Hamilton’s smile is enigmatic. “Mine.”

I don’t respond. I just wait for the click of the lock and shove through the stairwell door, emerging onto another office floor.

But Hamilton lingers—his scent clinging to my skin, the taste of him still on my tongue. He’s everywhere.

What have I done?

Again.

I start walking, with no particular destination in mind, just needing to move, to think.

Wolfstone.

My pack.

The Porkwell brothers.

The tangled web I've woven by letting desire override duty.

And now there's this new complication—Hamilton.

So different from Percy in every way. Where Percy was passionate and gentle, Hamilton was all dominance and intensity.

Percy made me feel desired; Hamilton made me feel consumed.

The tenderness that lingered after being with Percy is nowhere to be found now—just a confusing mix of shame, lingering arousal, and something darker I don't want to examine.

What does it say about me that I responded so intensely to both of them? To males who represent everything I'm fighting against?

Percy's approach at least comes with genuine concern for the environment, a willingness to compromise. Hamilton's is pure conquest—in business... in everything.

And yet I can't deny that both encounters have left their mark on me in different ways. With Percy, I glimpsed the possibility of understanding between our worlds. With Hamilton, I experienced the raw power of our opposition.

Both thrilling.

Both dangerous.

Friday's meeting looms ahead, and now I'll have to face not just one, but two Porkwell's knowing exactly what I look like when I come. Knowing the sounds I make, the way I feel from the inside.

I need to get my shit together.

I need a shower, a clear head, and a strategy that doesn't involve sleeping with the entire Porkwell family.

But first, I need air. Lots and lots of air.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Prescott

I 'm watching her panic through five different camera angles when she bursts onto the terrace.

Ruby Wolfhart—all five-foot-seven of wild red hair and fury—gasping for air twenty stories above Shiftown like she's just outrun a predator.

Which, technically, she has.

My brother, to be specific.

Hamilton has that effect on females, though usually they're running toward him, not away.

But Ruby's different.

She's always been different

She's bolting for the terrace like the building's on fire, which it isn't—I'd know, since I designed every security system in this place. Including the one that's currently tracking her every move with annoying precision.

Hamilton's orders; my execution.

Zooming in on her disheveled clothes and the unmistakable scent-markers my system picks up. Those are new—my latest algorithm can detect pheromone signatures

through visual cues alone.

My system confirms what I already know: She's been thoroughly... Hamiltonized.

I sigh, adjusting my glasses.

"For fuck's sake, Hamilton," I mutter into my empty office, which looks more like a server room.

I've spent most of my life in rooms just like this one—climate-controlled, humming with technology, comfortably devoid of social complexities. But the digital feeds streaming across my monitors bring all those complexities right to me, whether I want them or not.

The Pred Tracker 9000, as I secretly call it (we officially named it "Urban Wildlife Movement Analysis System" for the permits), was Hamilton's pet project. "Build me something that can track throughout all of Shiftown," he'd demanded.

The first version was simple enough—facial recognition and gait analysis. But Hamilton kept wanting more. More precision. More detail. More... everything. I added thermal imaging, scent detection, behavioral algorithms.

But Ruby?

Ruby gets special treatment.

A dedicated algorithm all her own.

By version 4.0, I could tell you what Ruby had for breakfast based on her micro-expressions alone.

“She’s a liability,” Hamilton had insisted. “We need to know her movements.”

I sigh and rub my temples.

The surveillance system pings softly, facial recognition confirming Ruby’s identity for the thirty-seventh time today.

Thirty-seven.

“Alert: Target Subject Wolf-Ruby-One present on secure floor. Alert: Target Subject shows distress indicators. Alert: Target Subject in restricted area.”

“Mute alerts,” I mutter, and the system obediently goes silent, still flashing its warnings across my screen. The cameras continue their silent vigil, cataloging Ruby’s movements from every angle.

I should feel creepy about this level of monitoring, but honestly, it’s become routine. Hamilton has me tracking half the predator population of Shiftown.

But I’m also not an idiot.

My brother doesn’t invest millions in surveillance tech for business purposes alone.

He’s obsessed with her.

Has been since she rejected him that first time at the zoning board meeting.

Hamilton Porkwell doesn’t get rejected.

It broke his brain.

On my central monitor, Ruby pushes her hands through her hair, taking deep breaths. The audio feed picks up fragments of her self-talk.

“Stupid, stupid wolf... What were you thinking?... His scent is all over you now...”

I probably shouldn't be listening. But that's my job—knowing things.

Information is how I contribute to Porkwell Development while my brothers handle the more public-facing roles.

Percy designs stunning buildings, Hamilton closes impossible deals, and I...

head up our tech division, ensuring they have every advantage technology can provide.

I pull up the log files from earlier today.

Yep, there it is.

Camera 17-B, stairwell between floors 21 and 20. Motion sensors activated, facial recognition confirmed: Hamilton Porkwell and Ruby Wolfhart. Audio sensors picked up... well, exactly what you'd expect when a wolf and a pig who supposedly hate each other find themselves alone in a stairwell.

I shut that file before the sound can play.

Some things a brother doesn't need to hear, especially when it involves Hamilton in full rut.

Been there, heard that, have the therapy bills to prove it.

The surveillance system is just one of my contributions to Porkwell Tech. Most people don't realize that half the "smart city" infrastructure in Shiftown runs on my algorithms. The traffic light system that adjusts for different species' walking speeds during rush hour?

Mine.

The water conservation grid that reduced consumption by 30% last year?

Also mine.

The emergency response system that can distinguish between a fox shifter's playful yip and a legitimate cry for help? That took two years of acoustic analysis and machine learning.

The system has also helpfully cataloged Ruby's visit to our penthouse last week, specifically Percy's and Hamilton's bedrooms. The latter featuring a hilarious display of Ruby marking Ham's bed with her scent.

What I can't understand is why Hamilton is so fixated on Wolfstone. It's not even in our priority development queue. The tech campus on the north side would generate four times the revenue with half the environmental complication.

But no—Hamilton insists on developing the one patch of land that happens to be ancestral wolf territory. The one project guaranteed to bring Ruby Wolfhart growling into our lobby every other week.

Then again, maybe that's the point.

Before Ruby, the three of us shared everything. Females included. It was never complicated—no jealousy, no possessiveness. Just Porkwell boys being Porkwell

boys, as our father used to say with that disturbing wink of his.

But Ruby changed the dynamic.

Percy got defensive after their night together, keeping details to himself that he'd normally share over morning coffee.

And Hamilton? He's been checking the Pred Tracker logs daily, scrolling through footage of Ruby like some lovesick teenager.

On screen, Ruby looks up directly at Camera 72. She can't possibly know it's there—I designed it to be invisible, even to enhanced wolf senses—but her gaze sends a chill down my spine, anyway.

"I know you're watching," she says.

She doesn't, of course. She's just venting. But for a second, I feel exposed.

I switch to thermal view, monitoring her vital signs. Elevated heart rate, but decreasing. The panic is subsiding. Still, she looks lost out there, trapped between sky and pavement with nowhere to run.

Something twists in my chest. I've always liked Ruby. Not in the way my brothers do—with their primal, possessive hunger—but in a way that's harder to define.

She treats me like a person, not a Porkwell. When we've crossed paths at city meetings, she asks about my projects with genuine interest. She remembered my obscure reference to quantum computing last month.

Most females only see what they can get from a Porkwell. Ruby sees... me. She looked at me like I was a person worth knowing, not just a Porkwell worth using.

I close the monitoring screens with a decisive keystroke and stand up. I should just stay here, safe in my digital fortress. Let Hamilton and Percy handle their wolf problem.

But that's the thing—she's not a problem.

She's a person. A passionate, intelligent person currently having a panic attack on our terrace because my brothers can't keep their snouts out of places they don't belong.

I grab a bottle of water from my mini-fridge. My reflection in the glass door looks back at me—disheveled dark hair, glasses slightly askew, the least imposing of the three Porkwell brothers.

“This is probably a mistake,” I tell my reflection.

Yet I'm already heading for the elevator, rehearsing what to say. How to approach a distressed wolf without getting my face bitten off.

The elevator hums softly as it carries me. Camera feeds inside the car show me from four angles—rumpled button-down with yesterday's coffee stain I thought no one would notice, and the awkward hunch of someone more comfortable with machines than mammals.

Not exactly knight-in-shining-armor material. But maybe that's not what Ruby needs right now.

As the door slides open on the terrace, the afternoon sun momentarily blinds me. I blink, adjusting to natural light for what feels like the first time in days.

And there she is—Ruby Wolfhart, silhouetted against the city skyline, wild and beautiful and utterly out of place in our sterile corporate world.

I step forward, the water bottle cold in my sweaty palm, wondering if I've made a terrible mistake.

* * *

Ruby doesn't hear me approach until I'm about ten feet away. When she finally senses me, she whirls around like she's ready to fight or flee—probably both.

Her eyes are wild, pupils dilated, and there's a red spot on her neck that looks suspiciously like my brother tried to bite her.

I hold up the water bottle as a peace offering, trying to appear as non-threatening as possible. Which, let's be honest, isn't hard for me. I'm the Porkwell least likely to be featured in "Shiftown's Most Eligible Bachelors."

"It's just water," I say, extending my arm while maintaining a safe distance. "No roofies, I promise. Though I can't speak for what Hamilton keeps in his office."

She doesn't laugh.

"What do you want, Prescott?" She sounds almost defeated.

I place the water bottle on the concrete planter between us and take two steps back. "You looked like you could use it. Also, jumping from this height would be messy for everyone involved, especially the cleaning staff. Robert just power washed the sidewalk."

Ruby eyes the bottle suspiciously before snatching it up. She cracks the seal and takes a long drink. Her throat works as she swallows, and I notice the subtle tremble in her hands.

“I hate your brothers,” she says flatly, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.
“No offense.”

“None taken. They’re an acquired taste that I’m still acquiring after twenty-nine years.” I lean against the terrace railing, careful to leave plenty of space between us.
“Hamilton can be... intense.”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

She barks out a laugh that contains zero humor. “Intense? Is that what we’re calling it now?”

“What would you prefer? Domineering? Megalomaniacal? Pigheaded? I’ve been workshopping ‘pathologically competitive’ but it doesn’t roll off the tongue.”

That earns me a ghost of a smile, quickly suppressed.

Progress.

“And Percy’s not much better,” she continues, now pacing again. “With his perfect hair and his perfect models and his goddamn perfect smile, acting like he’s doing me a favor by designing beautiful buildings on land that isn’t his to develop!”

I nod, tracking her movement without appearing to stare. “Percy does spend an alarming amount on hair products. Our bathroom looks like a Sephora exploded.”

She stops pacing and looks at me directly for the first time. “Why are you here, Prescott? Did Hamilton send you to spy on me? Or are you recording this for some kind of sick Porkwell home movie collection?”

I wince. “Ouch. My surveillance systems are strictly for security purposes and market analysis.” I pause. “Though now I’m questioning some of Hamilton’s requests regarding the Pred Tracker—I mean, the Urban Wildlife Movement Analysis System.”

“The what?” Her eyes narrow dangerously.

“Nothing. Forget I said anything.” I adjust my glasses nervously. “I’m here because you seemed upset. Contrary to popular belief, not all Porkwell’s are sadistic land-grabbers who enjoy the suffering of others.”

Ruby takes another drink of water, studying me over the bottle. I try not to fidget under her gaze. Those amber eyes miss nothing.

“You know what happened,” she says. It’s not a question.

I nod. “The surveillance system is thorough. And soundproof stairwells aren’t actually soundproof when you have the right microphones.” I realize how creepy that sounds and quickly add, “Which I installed for security purposes only, but Hamilton has been... abusing the access.”

“Great.” She throws her hands up. “So the whole company knows I just—”

“No,” I interrupt. “Just me. Hamilton isn’t stupid enough to broadcast his indiscretions, and I don’t share the feeds.”

Ruby sinks onto a bench, suddenly looking exhausted. “Why does he want Wolfstone so badly? It’s not even prime real estate for your kind of development. The conservation restrictions alone make it a nightmare project.”

This is where I should lie. Where I should protect company interests and family loyalty. But looking at Ruby—genuinely confused and hurting—I can’t bring myself to do it.

“It’s not our top priority,” I admit. “The tech campus on the north side is where our real focus should be. Better ROI, fewer regulations, and our target demographic is already concentrated in the area.”

She looks up sharply. “What?”

“Wolfstone is Hamilton’s pet project.” I sit on the opposite end of the bench, keeping a respectful distance. “If it were up to me or even Percy, we’d focus elsewhere.”

“Then why—”

“History,” I say simply. “Your great-grandfather led the pack that drove our great-grandfather from his first settlement. The infamous Mud Creek Massacre of 1803.”

“That’s ancient history! And your ancestor was building on protected wolf territory!”

“According to wolf records, maybe. Our family chronicles tell a different story—that great-grandfather Porkwell purchased that land legally from human settlers, unaware of wolf territorial claims. When he refused to abandon his straw-built homes, the local wolf pack attacked during the spring flood, when the creek was at its highest. Seventeen pigs drowned, including our great-grandmother.”

Ruby’s expression shifts. “I’ve never heard that version. Our histories say the wolves only destroyed empty structures after multiple warnings were ignored.”

“History is written by whoever has the best record-keeping system.” I shrug, “what matters is that Hamilton was raised on bedtime stories of wolf treachery and pig perseverance.

“So this is... what? Revenge development?”

“That, and...” I hesitate, not sure how much to reveal.

“And what?”

I sigh. “And you.”

Ruby blinks. “Me?”

“You rejected him. At the very first zoning board meeting. He asked you to dinner, and you told him—let me make sure I get this right—that you’d ‘rather eat roadkill than break bread with a ham-handed developer who couldn’t find environmental consideration with two snouts and a GPS.’”

She winces. “I stand by the sentiment, if not the phrasing.”

“Hamilton doesn’t get rejected. Ever. It broke something in his brain.” I tap my temple. “Now he’s fixated on conquering both you and your territory. Two birds, one stone.”

“I’m not territory to be conquered,” she growls, a hint of wolf in her voice.

“I know that. Percy knows that too, in his way. Hamilton is... working through some issues.”

Ruby stands again, walking to the edge of the terrace. The city sprawls beneath us, a concrete jungle punctuated by the green oasis of Wolfstone Park in the distance.

“It’s perfect as it is,” she says softly, gesturing toward the park. “The natural springs, the meadow system, the old-growth forest. It doesn’t need improvement. It doesn’t need buildings or golf courses or whatever monstrosities your brother has planned.”

I join her at the railing, gazing out at the distant green patch. “I’ve never actually been in a forest before.”

“What? How is that possible?”

I shrug. “Porkwell’s don’t typically venture into wild territory unless we’re building on it. Plus, I burn after approximately twelve seconds in direct sunlight.”

That gets an actual laugh. It’s a nice sound—warm and genuine, without the practiced tones most people use around a Porkwell.

“You should see Wolfstone,” she says. “The main grove has trees that were saplings when this city was just a trading post. There’s a rock formation that looks like a howling wolf when the sun hits it just right.

And the Echo Valley—” She stops, seeming to catch herself.

“Sorry. You probably don’t care about wolf folklore. ”

“No, go on. It sounds fascinating.” And I mean it. The way her eyes light up when she talks about her homeland makes something twist in my chest.

My relationship with nature has always been complicated. I understand ecosystems as data points—biodiversity indices, carbon sequestration rates, habitat connectivity metrics—but I’ve rarely experienced them firsthand. My world is climate-controlled rooms and digital landscapes.

But I’m not blind to what we’re losing. My algorithms modeling Shiftown’s environmental decline are frightening even to me.

Every development shrinks the green spaces, fragments wildlife corridors, increases the heat island effect.

The data doesn’t lie—we’re approaching tipping points that may be irreversible.

Hamilton sees this as acceptable collateral damage. Percy tries to design around it.

But I've seen the projections, run the simulations.;there's a reason I've been pushing for greener tech, for systems that work with nature instead of against it.

“Echo Valley is where our ancestors would gather to share news between packs. The acoustics are perfect—you can whisper on one side and hear it clearly on the other. Natural amphitheater.” She smiles, lost in the memory. “My dad used to take me there for the summer solstice howl.”

“That sounds infinitely better than Porkwell family traditions, which mostly involve hostile takeovers and passive-aggressive holiday cards.”

Ruby laughs again, more freely this time. “You're not what I expected, Prescott Porkwell.”

“I get that a lot. Usually followed by disappointment when people realize I lack Hamilton's ruthless charisma or Percy's artistic vision.”

“No,” she says thoughtfully. “It's refreshing. You're... real.”

I nearly drop my glasses, adjusting them. “Real” isn't a word typically associated with Porkwells.

“Maybe that's what Hamilton needs,” I say, the idea forming as I speak it. “To see Wolfstone through your eyes. Not as a development opportunity, but as a living, breathing ecosystem with cultural significance.”

Ruby looks skeptical. “Hamilton wouldn't last five minutes in the wilderness without complaining about the lack of valet parking.”

“Probably true. But he might listen to you if you showed him what would be lost. He's stubborn, not stupid.”

“You think a tour would change his mind? After generations of pig-wolf animosity?”

I turn to face her fully. “I think nothing else has worked. You’ve tried legal channels, protests, even seducing Percy—”

“I did not seduce him! That was... my heat.”

“And the stairwell with Hamilton?”

Her cheeks flush. “That was... complicated.”

“I bet.” I try to keep the judgment out of my voice. It’s not my place. “Look, I’m not criticizing. I’m saying you’ve tried everything else. What’s the harm in showing him what he’s about to destroy?”

Ruby considers this, chewing her lower lip. “He’d need to agree first. And I find it hard to believe Hamilton Porkwell would follow me into the woods without an ulterior motive.”

“Leave that to me,” I say with more confidence than I feel. “I can convince him it’s a market research opportunity. ‘Know your enemy’s territory’ and all that corporate warfare nonsense he loves.”

“You’d do that? Help me stop your family’s development?” She looks genuinely puzzled.

I push my glasses up. “I’d help find a solution that doesn’t involve destroying something irreplaceable. Contrary to popular belief, not all tech nerds want to pave paradise and put up a parking lot.”

“Joni Mitchell. Nice reference.” She smiles, and it transforms her face entirely. The

wild panic from earlier is gone, replaced by something warmer. “I appreciate this, Prescott. Genuinely.”

“Don’t thank me yet. Hamilton is still Hamilton. But… I’ll try.”

Ruby steps closer. I catch her scent—wild and earthy, with undertones of something I can’t quite define. My system could analyze it in seconds, break it down to chemical compounds and pheromone signatures. But sometimes technology misses the point entirely.

“Why?” she asks softly. “Why help me against your own brothers?”

It’s a fair question. One I’ve been asking myself since I left my comfortable server room to find her.

“Because Wolfstone matters to you,” I say finally. “And you’re the only person who’s ever remembered my birthday without a calendar notification.”

It was six months ago, at a city planning meeting. She wished me a happy birthday. Everyone else had forgotten, including Percy and Hamilton.

It wasn’t a big moment for her, but it meant something to me. More than I expected.

I’m not used to being seen. Not really.

But she saw me.

Ruby laughs softly. “That’s a pretty low bar.”

“I’m a simple pig with simple needs.”

She studies me for a long moment, head tilted slightly. Then, without warning, she leans forward and presses her lips to mine.

The kiss is brief, gentle—nothing like the heated encounters my surveillance system has captured between her and my brothers. But it sends an electric current through me that no amount of technical knowledge can explain.

When she pulls back, she looks as surprised as I feel. Her eyes widen with confusion. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what’s happening to me. First Percy, then Hamilton, and now...” She shakes her head. “I’m not usually this...”

“Unexpected,” I stammer, my brain struggling to process what just happened.

I push my glasses up nervously. “But, um, quite welcome. Very welcome. If we were quantifying welcomeness on a scale of one to ten, that would register as a solid nine-point-seven. The missing point-three is just my surprise factor.”

I’m rambling like an idiot, but I can’t seem to stop. Ruby’s lips were soft and warm, and my brain has short-circuited completely.

“Thank you. For being decent.” She tucks a strand of hair behind her ear, suddenly awkward. “And maybe a little more.”

I adjust my glasses again, buying time while my brain reboots. “I should warn you—I’m the defective Porkwell model. Limited social skills, excessive technical knowledge, and a concerning collection of vintage video games. Hamilton and Percy got all the smooth genes.”

I shrug. “That’s always been our dynamic,” I continue, surprised at myself for saying this out loud.

“Hamilton the dominant leader, Percy the charismatic creator, and me, the awkward tech support.”

Growing up, Hamilton protected me from bullies but expected absolute loyalty in return.

Percy taught me to appreciate beauty, but never quite understood my fascination with code over concrete.

They love me in their way, but sometimes I wonder if they see me as a full partner or just the useful little brother who makes their visions possible.

When we were young, Father would evaluate our contributions to the family business at monthly dinners.

Hamilton always presented profit projections, Percy showed his latest designs, and I'd try to explain complex algorithms only to be cut off with a pat on the head and a “that's nice, Scott.

” Eventually, I stopped trying to make them understand and just built systems that made them money.

I glance down, fingers curling against my thigh. “They love me, I guess. But sometimes I wonder if they see me as a partner or just the useful little brother who keeps the engine running.”

Ruby smiles. “You're more than useful, Scott. And you're definitely more than tech support.”

She pauses., “Percy told me the tech division's the one making all the profit. So yeah, maybe you're not the face of the company—but you're the backbone.”

She leans in a little closer. “Besides, I don’t need smooth, I need real. And you, Scott? You’re real.”

Her words hit me harder than they should have. She sees me—not as Hamilton’s shadow or Percy’s quirky brother, but as my own person.

A person worth knowing, not just a Porkwell worth using.

It’s alarmingly unfamiliar territory.

The terrace door slides open behind us. We both jump apart like guilty teenagers.

“There you are,” says Hamilton’s executive assistant, looking harried. “Hamilton is looking for you, Scott. The meeting is about to resume.”

Reality crashes back and Ruby straightens her shoulders, businesswoman once more. “Thank you, Prescott. For the water. And the... pep talk.”

I nod, shoving my hands in my pockets to keep from reaching for her. “Anytime.”

Once she’s gone, I turn back to the railing, looking out at the distant green patch of Wolfstone Preserve. For the first time in years, I find myself wanting to leave my climate-controlled environment.

To see something real.

Something worth protecting.

And if I’m being honest—something worth fighting my brothers for.

Ruby

I stride into the Porkwell penthouse with a swagger that completely belies my inner turmoil.

Three little pigs.

I've been fantasizing about three goddamn pigs. The universe has a sick sense of humor sometimes.

But no more.

No more being distracted by the way Hamilton's voice drops when he's making a point. By the playful spark in Prescott's eyes, by the genuine passion in Percy's face as he talks about his designs.

"Working with the land,"—as if Wolfstone needed the help of a pig.

My wolf is still restless. She doesn't understand the complications, the politics. She just knows that Wolfstone is home. That it's where my grandmother shifted for the first time, where my mother taught me to hunt, where our pack has gathered for centuries.

And she knows something else I'm trying desperately to ignore: those three brothers smell good. Really good; like, stop in your tracks and savour it, good.

And not the "good" you'd expect from a wolf's assessment. I'm not talking about the

appetizing aroma of bacon sizzling in a pan—though there’s a twisted irony there I’m refusing to examine. No, this is the ridiculous, biology-betraying, make-me-want-to-howl-at-inappropriate-moments kind of good.

Of all the males in all the species in all of Shiftown, I had to get the hots for pigs.

PIGS.

Not even one pig—which would be embarrassing enough—but THREE.

The Brothers Pork. The Swine Squad. The Hamazing Trio.

Maybe it’s just my heat.

Another lie.

I push those thoughts aside as I put on my game-face, although I’m not as confident as I’m pretending to be.

Part of me still can’t believe I’m doing this—inviting three Porkwell brothers into the heart of wolf territory. But if there’s even a chance that seeing Wolfstone through my eyes could change their minds, I have to try.

The land is worth the risk.

Worth the discomfort.

I’ve spent the night rehearsing my speech about fifteen different ways and buzzing with wolf energy. I’m still in yesterday’s clothes—jeans and a tee that smells faintly of last night’s anxiety sweat.

Not exactly power-dressing, but I don't need designer labels to make a statement.

I pause, inhaling deeply. The mingled scents of the three brothers hit me.

My body betrays me with immediate, visceral reactions to their scents.

Percy's earthy aroma makes my chest tighten with something dangerously close to yearning.

Hamilton's dominant, powerful scent triggers a flush of heat that races from my neck to my core.

My body remembering exactly what happened in that stairwell.

And Prescott's clean smell brings a strange comfort I'm not ready to examine.

I force my breathing to steady, my heartbeat to slow. This isn't about attraction or the confusing tangle of feelings I have for these three brothers. This is about Wolfstone.

Focus, Ruby.

Prescott's text from last night burns in my pocket: "Cleared schedules. All at the penthouse tomorrow morning. Now's your chance."

The tech-savvy pig might be my surprising ally in this mess, though I'm still suspicious about his motivations.

Never trust pig-bearing gifts and all that.

The sound of voices leads me through a hallway lined with architectural awards—all with Percy's name engraved in gold—and into their sprawling living room. Three

heads turn in unison as I appear.

“Good morning, gentlemales,” I announce, my voice ringing with false cheer. “Hope I’m not interrupting anything important.”

Hamilton, mid-sip of what smells like black coffee, nearly chokes. “What the—” he slams his mug down on the glass table. “How did you get up here?”

He then looks at Prescott, who’s suddenly very interested in his laptop.

I shrug, “Not important.”

Hamilton growls, standing up from his leather throne of a chair. His tailored suit hugs his body in ways that remind me too vividly of our stairwell encounter.

Not the time, Ruby.

Percy, lounging on the kitchen aisle, still wearing only boxers—looks more amused than alarmed. “Ruby. To what do we owe this unexpected house call?”

Prescott, perched on a barstool at the kitchen island, laptop open in front of him, gives me the smallest nod. His face betrays nothing, but his eyes hold a hint of conspiracy.

“I’m here to make an announcement,” I declare, planting myself in the center of their ridiculously plush area rug, hands on my hips. “We’re going on a field trip.”

Hamilton barks out a laugh. “We’re what now?”

“A field trip. Tomorrow morning. Two days. Wolfstone. All three of you.”

“Absolutely not,” Hamilton says, his voice hard and flat.

“I wasn’t asking, Hamilton,” I say, meeting his glare with one of my own. “You three are planning to bulldoze and develop land you’ve never even properly seen, except for Percy. Land that’s been part of my pack’s territory for generations.”

“I’ve seen the land,” Hamilton replies, “Aerial surveys, topographical maps, environmental impact—”

“Not the same thing,” I cut him off. “You haven’t smelled the air after a rainstorm.

You haven’t heard the creeks that run through the eastern ridge.

You haven’t seen the caves where generations of wolf pups have been born.

” My voice cracks slightly on that last part, and I hate the vulnerability, but it’s the goddamn truth.

“Ms. Wolfhart,” Hamilton says, stepping closer, a dangerous gleam in his eye. “Porkwell Corp. doesn’t make multi-million dollar decisions based on—what was it?—smelling raindrops and looking at puppies.”

I step toward him until we’re just inches apart. The memory of his body pressed against mine in that stairwell flashes through my mind, and I push it away violently. “That’s exactly my point, Hamilton. You’re making decisions based on spreadsheets and profit margins, not reality.”

“Business is reality,” he says, his breath hot on my face. “And progress doesn’t stop for fairy tales, no matter how noble they sound.”

“If you genuinely believe that destroying ancient wolf habitats for luxury condos

constitutes ‘progress,’ then you need this field trip more than I thought.”

Percy clears his throat, breaking the tension. “I’m actually not opposed to seeing the land up close again,” he says, earning a death glare from Hamilton. “Could be valuable for design inspiration, really getting a feel for the landscape.”

“Are you serious?” Hamilton turns on his brother. “We have deadlines, Percy. Board meetings. Investors waiting.”

Prescott finally speaks up, closing his laptop with a soft click. “Actually, I’ve already cleared our schedules for the next few days.”

Hamilton whips around so fast I’m surprised he doesn’t pull something. “You what?”

“Well, it seemed reasonable,” Prescott says with practiced nonchalance. “You’re always talking about due diligence, Hamilton. This is just ‘on-site’ due diligence.”

The vein throbbing in Hamilton’s forehead looks ready to burst.

I bite back a grin.

“When exactly did you clear our schedules?” Hamilton demands, stalking toward his younger brother.

Prescott shrugs. “This morning. Rescheduled the Bennett meeting to next week—they were happy to accommodate. Pushed the zoning committee call to Monday. He adjusts his glasses. “Nothing that couldn’t wait.”

“And you didn’t think to consult me?” Hamilton’s voice has gone dangerously quiet.

“I consulted the efficiency algorithms I’ve been developing,” Prescott replies. “They

suggested a 43% increase in decision-making clarity following direct site exposure.”

I can’t help it—I snort. Prescott’s bullshitting him with tech jargon, and it’s glorious to watch.

Hamilton turns back to me, eyes narrowed. “This is coordinated. You two planned this.”

“Planned is a strong word,” I say, examining my nails casually. “Let’s call it... synchronized interests.”

Percy stands up, stretching. “I think it’s a great idea. How often do we get to take a couple of days away from the office? Plus, I’ve been wanting to sketch some of the natural formations out there.”

“It’s not a vacation, Percy,” Hamilton snaps.

“No,” I agree, my voice hardening. “It’s not. It’s your education. Because if you’re going to destroy something, you should at least understand what you’re destroying.”

“We’re not ‘destroying’ anything,” Hamilton says, making air quotes. “We’re developing. Creating. Building. That’s what Porkwell’s do.”

“And wolves protect their territory,” I counter. “That’s what we do. So either come see what you’re so eager to pave over, or admit you don’t actually care what you’re doing to an entire community.”

Hamilton goes quiet, his jaw working as he considers his options. I can almost see the calculations running behind his eyes—how this looks to his brothers, how refusing might be perceived as indifference or worse, weakness.

“Two days,” he finally says. “No more. And we’re not camping.”

I laugh. “Oh, Hamilton. Of course not. We’re staying at my grandmother’s cottage.”

“Absolutely not.”

“There are no five-star hotels in the middle of Wolfstone Preserve,” I point out. “But don’t worry—I’ve got everything arranged.”

I spent half the night stocking food that would satisfy both wolf appetites and pig palates with lightweight packs with extra water (pigs dehydrate faster than wolves in the woods), and trail maps marked with rest stops every mile or so.

Hamilton would rather die than admit weakness, but I know the difference between city fit and forest fit.

These pampered pigs would need breaks, whether they wanted them or not.

I warned the rest of the pack to stay clear of our route, though, Alpha Thorncrest wasn’t happy about “those bacon bits trespassing on sacred ground.” I’d had to promise this was necessary for them to understand what they were destroying.

“Just be prepared for a five-mile trek before we get there. You just need to bring yourselves and maybe a change of clothes. Though I’d recommend something other than Armani.” I gesture to his perfectly tailored suit.

“This is Brioni, not Armani,” Hamilton corrects automatically, then looks annoyed at himself for engaging.

Percy claps his hands together. “Sounds fun! It’ll be just like college. Remember that trip to Lake Oakwood, Ham?”

Hamilton growls.

“I’ve never been hiking,” Prescott says quietly, looking both intrigued and mildly terrified.

“Don’t worry,” I tell him. “Bring extra bug spray and wear comfortable hiking boots.”

“Wait,” Hamilton says, holding up a hand.

“I want to be crystal clear about what this little... excursion... is supposed to accomplish. Are you under the impression that if we see some pretty trees and your wolf relatives frolicking in meadows, we’re going to abandon a development project worth millions? ”

I meet his gaze steadily. “I’m under the impression that if you see what you’re about to destroy, you might reconsider how you’re destroying it.”

“Developing,” he corrects.

“Whatever helps you sleep at night,” I shrug.

“Look, I’m not naïve. I know development happens.

But there are ways to build that will respect the land and the creatures who already live there.

If you’re as brilliant of a businessman as everyone says, surely you can figure out how to make money without obliterating an ecosystem. ”

Something shifts in Hamilton’s expression—just for a second, but I catch it. A flicker

of... what? Respect? Curiosity? Whatever it is, it's gone as quickly as it appeared.

"Fine," he says brusquely. "Two days. We'll see your precious wilderness. But this changes nothing about our plans."

"We'll see," I say, unable to keep the smugness from my voice. "Meet me at the north trailhead tomorrow at 5 AM. Dress comfortably, and maybe try to leave the attitude in the city."

"I'll bring the attitude for free," Hamilton says with a tight smile.

Percy groans. "Please tell me 5 AM is a joke. No one should be conscious at that hour."

"Early bird gets the worm," I say with mock cheerfulness. "Or in this case, early wolf gets the... pig."

Hamilton's eyes narrow at the implied threat, though I meant it in jest.

Mostly.

"I'll prepare the equipment requirements," Prescott says, already typing something into his phone.

"Don't bother," I tell him. "Just bring yourselves and clothes you won't mind getting dirty."

"I don't own clothes that I don't mind getting dirty," Hamilton mutters.

"Then buy some," I suggest sweetly. "I hear they sell them at the Porkwell Mall."

Percy laughs, earning another glare from Hamilton.

“One last thing,” I say, walking backward toward the exit. “No phones.” Before the inevitable protests can start, I continue, “You can bring them for emergencies, but there’s no reception out there, anyway. This is about experiencing the land, not checking your email.”

I reach the foyer, feeling lighter than I have in weeks. “5 AM. North trailhead. Don’t be late.”

I step into the elevator before any of them can raise more objections.

As the doors slide closed, I catch one last glimpse of the three brothers: Percy looking mildly amused, Prescott already typing furiously on his phone (probably researching hiking sites), and Hamilton standing with his arms crossed, looking like he’s plotting my slow and painful demise.

Perfect.

Operation “Make Three Not-So-Little Pigs See the Forest,” is officially underway.

Percy

Dawn isn't my favorite time of day.

Actually, scratch that—dawn isn't even on my list of acceptable times to be conscious.

Yet here I am, stumbling after Ruby Wolfhart's perky ass—her wolf ears fully on display—through dewy undergrowth while my brother's trail behind me, like we're some dysfunctional conga line of pigs.

Hamilton looks ready to commit murder, I'm calculating how many cups of coffee I'll need to feel myself again, and Prescott—the traitor—is practically skipping.

This is what happens when you let a wolf convince three pigs to go “commune with nature.”

Spoiler alert: nature involves bugs, dirt, and an alarming absence of espresso machines.

“Keep up, Porkwell's!” Ruby calls over her shoulder, not even slightly winded despite the steep incline we're currently scaling. “We've got eight miles to cover before lunch!”

“Eight?” I wheeze. “You said five yesterday.”

She flashes a wolfish grin that's entirely too smug. “Did I? My mistake.”

Behind me, Hamilton is huffing and puffing and muttering something that could practically make our mother resurrect from the dead to smack us, and I silently second the sentiment.

I should be in my bed right now, or at least nursing a cappuccino in my kitchen. Yes, it's beautiful, yes I did love my trek last time, but I didn't start my day while the moon was still out. That's just plain idiocy.

"This is amazing!" Prescott chirps, pulling alongside me with irritating energy. My youngest brother's glasses are slightly fogged, but his eyes are bright with enthusiasm. "Did you know this forest has one of the most diverse ecosystems in the region? I was reading about it last night after—"

"Stop. Talking." Hamilton's voice cuts through the morning air like a chainsaw. He's ten paces behind us, the designer hiking boots he insisted on wearing already caked with mud; expression murderous. "It's too early for your nature documentary narration."

"Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed," Ruby calls back without slowing her pace.

I catch Hamilton's eye and almost laugh at the pure affront on his face. My older brother, CEO extraordinaire—used to sleeping on memory foam in Egyptian cotton sheets—is in the wilderness, with bugs.

If looks could kill, Ruby would be a wolf-skin rug by now.

"This is a waste of time," Hamilton grumbles as he catches up. "We could be reviewing the property from satellite imagery in the comfort of our office."

Ruby stops so abruptly that I nearly collide with her. She turns, and there's something

dangerous in her eyes—something primal that makes my throat go dry.

“That,” she says, pointing to Hamilton’s phone, “is exactly why we’re here. You can’t understand what you’re about to bulldoze without seeing it, smelling it, feeling it under your feet. Especially when you’re adamant on turning it into another Shit-town.”

“Shiftown,” Hamilton replies.

“That’s what I said,” Ruby replies sweetly.

For once, Hamilton doesn’t have a snappy comeback. He just glares at her, tucking his phone away.

“Whatever,” he mumbles.

We continue in blessed silence for the next half hour. The forest gradually wakes around us—birds start their morning chatter, sunlight filters through the canopy in golden shafts, and the air fills with the scent of pine, earth and something else I can’t quite name, but it feels ancient and alive.

I catch myself breathing deeper, drawing in lungfuls of the crisp air. It’s... nice.

“Look,” Prescott whispers suddenly, pointing to our right.

A doe and her fawn stand frozen in a clearing, watching us with dark, liquid eyes. We all stop, even Hamilton. For a moment, just the five of us exist in perfect stillness. Then the doe flicks her tail, and both deer bound away in graceful leaps.

“Wow,” I breathe.

“You don’t see that in boardrooms,” Ruby says quietly.

She’s right. There’s something here that no blueprint could capture, no 3D rendering could simulate.

It’s wild.

Untamed.

Real in a way that makes my carefully constructed world feel a little too flat.

We hike for another hour, and I notice something strange happening to all of us.

Prescott is the first to show visible changes—his wavy hair can’t quite hide the pointed ears that have emerged, twitching at every forest sound. Then his tail—pink and curly—pokes out from beneath his hiking shirt, wagging with undisguised joy.

My own ears start to tingle next. I reach up and feel them—longer, pointed, definitely not human anymore. It’s been years since I’ve let my animal side show unintentionally.

In the city, we keep it hidden, except for our tusks. Controlled. Professional. But out here...

“Your ears are out,” Hamilton hisses at me.

“So?” I shoot back. “We’re in the middle of nowhere. Who’s going to see? The squirrels?”

“It’s unprofessional.”

“We’re hiking, not presenting quarterly projections.”

Hamilton starts to respond, then stops, nostrils flaring slightly. Despite his protests, I notice his breathing has deepened too, taking in the forest scents with an intensity that’s more pig than human. His jaw relaxes, shoulders lowering from their perpetual business posture.

Ruby notices too. She catches my eye and gives me a knowing look that says, See? Told you.

We stop by a small stream for water, and Prescott—now sporting a full pig snout alongside his ears and tail—splashes happily in the shallows.

“Prescott, for God’s sake,” Hamilton calls, but there’s less edge to his voice than before.

I sit on a fallen log, watching sunlight dapple the forest floor. The development plans flash through my mind—the buildings we’d sketched, the roads we’d mapped, the trees we’d marked for removal.

Something uncomfortable twists in my chest.

“You’re quiet,” Ruby says, settling beside me.

“Just thinking.”

“Dangerous pastime.”

“So I’ve been told.” I glance at her. “Is this working? Your little nature therapy session?”

She shrugs, but there's a hint of smugness in the gesture. "You tell me, Porkwell. Your ears are out, you haven't checked your phone in forty minutes, and you just watched a butterfly for a full minute without blinking."

"I did not—"

"Yeah, you did. It was almost cute, in a pathetic city-boy way."

I should be annoyed, but instead, I find myself laughing. "You're really something, you know that?"

"So I've been told," she echoes, standing and dusting off her pants. "Come on, Piglet. Three more miles to go before we arrive."

As we continue our trek, I glance at Hamilton again.

My ever-controlled brother is... different. He hasn't sprouted ears or a tail like Prescott and me, but there's a subtle shift in how he moves—more fluid, less rigid.

At one point, he pauses to examine a cluster of mushrooms, curiosity replacing his usual calculated assessment.

"Pretty incredible, isn't it?" I say, coming alongside him.

Hamilton straightens immediately, as though caught doing something inappropriate. "It's... unexpected," he admits grudgingly. "The biodiversity is more extensive than the environmental impact reports suggested."

Classic Hamilton—turning wonder into data points. But I don't miss how his eyes linger on the forest canopy or how he inhales deeply when he thinks no one's watching.

Prescott bounds ahead with Ruby, chattering excitedly about something technological—probably figuring out how to blend his love of gadgets with this newfound appreciation for wilderness. His tail hasn't stopped wagging since it sprouted.

I'm glad we came.

There's something happening to all of us out here, away from concrete and glass and deadlines. Something I hadn't anticipated when I designed our development plans for Wolfstone, even the new, eco-friendly version.

As we crest a particularly steep hill, the view opens up before us—rolling hills covered in vibrant green, a silver ribbon of river cutting through the valley, mountains rising majestically in the distance. It's breathtaking.

My architect's brain immediately starts cataloging the landscape—assessing grade changes, identifying natural building platforms, calculating optimal sun angles for energy efficiency. It's how I've been trained to see the world: as a canvas awaiting human improvement.

But something else is happening, too. The longer I look, the more I see how perfectly everything already fits together.

The way the river has carved its path through the valley over millennia.

How the trees cluster differently based on subtle changes in elevation; the natural circulation patterns created by the contours of the land.

Nature has already designed this place with an elegance I could never match, no matter how many awards line my office. My buildings, even the "sustainable" ones, would be impositions here—foreign objects disrupting patterns established over

centuries.

“This,” Ruby says softly, “is what you want to replace with condos and parking lots.”

For once, none of us has a ready answer.

Not even Hamilton.

I take a deep breath, seeing the landscape differently now—not as space to be utilized, but as something already perfect in its wild design.

The thought is as unsettling as it is beautiful.

Hamilton seems similarly affected. There’s something almost contemplative in his expression as he surveys the valley. It’s probably the closest thing to wonder I’ve ever seen on my brother’s face.

The moment is shattered when a squirrel suddenly darts across the path, making a beeline straight for Hamilton.

Before any of us can react, it scales his expensive hiking pants, perches momentarily on his shoulder, stuffs what appears to be an acorn into his shirt pocket, and vanishes back into the underbrush.

Hamilton stands frozen, that fleeting wonder replaced by a look of absolute betrayal. “Did that just—”

“Happen? Yes,” Ruby confirms, fighting a smile. “Congratulations, Ham. You’ve been selected as this year’s emergency winter storage unit.”

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

As we follow her down the hill, I find my eyes drawn to Ruby more often than I should. There's something different about her here—more confident, more herself. In the city, she always has an edge of defensiveness, like a wolf backed into a corner. Here, she moves with natural authority.

It's disconcerting to realize how much I know about her—the sound of her laugh when she's truly amused versus when she's being polite, the small scar at the base of her spine, the way she curls inward when she sleeps; intimate details that feel out of place in this professional expedition.

And I'm not the only one watching her. Hamilton's eyes track her movements with intensity. Even Prescott seems drawn to her, though, in a different way—like she's a fascinating puzzle he's trying to solve.

How did we three brothers, who once shared everything without complication, end up here—each circling this wolf in our own way?

After hours of trekking through what feels like every square inch of Wolfstone's wilderness, we finally emerge into a small clearing. I nearly walk straight into Ruby's back again when she stops abruptly.

There, nestled between ancient oaks and partially reclaimed by nature, stands a weathered cottage that looks like it tumbled straight out of a fairy tale—or a horror movie, depending on your perspective.

Moss creeps up its stone foundation, the wooden siding has faded to a silvery gray, and the porch sags slightly on one side like it's tired after decades of standing watch.

It's nothing like the sleek, modern structures I typically design, but something about it makes me pause, ears perking forward with curiosity.

"What's this?" Hamilton demands, finally catching up, slightly out of breath. "Some local landmark we need to preserve?"

Ruby shakes her head, and for the first time since I've known her, she looks... vulnerable. "It's my grandmother's cottage. Or was. It's mine now."

"Yours?" I repeat, surprised. "This is on the development site."

"Yes," she replies, walking toward the building with measured steps.

Prescott bounds ahead, tail wagging furiously as he examines the structure. "This place is incredible! Look at that stonework—that's craftsmanship. And those beams must be original."

"They are," Ruby says, her voice softening. "My grandfather built this place himself. My mother was born here."

I follow her onto the creaking porch, taking in the craftsmanship with new eyes. As an architect, I can appreciate the attention to detail—the hand-carved railings, the way the cottage seems to grow from the landscape rather than imposing upon it.

"It needs work," Ruby continues, pushing open the door without a key. It swings inward with a protesting groan. "I haven't been back here in three years."

"Why not?" Prescott asks, peering inside with unabashed curiosity.

Ruby throws a pointed look at Hamilton, who has remained at the edge of the clearing, arms crossed defensively. "Too busy fighting certain development

companies in the city. No time for maintenance.”

Hamilton has the decency to look uncomfortable, if not quite guilty. He studies the cottage with the calculating gaze I recognize from countless board meetings—assessing value, potential problems, leverage points.

“Don’t even think about it,” I mutter to him, following Ruby inside.

The interior of the cottage is like stepping back in time.

Mismatched furniture draped in dust covers, shelves lined with old books and curious objects, and a stone fireplace dominating one wall.

Light filters through windows cloudy with dust and spiderwebs, casting dappled patterns across the wooden floor.

“My cousins are the only family I have left,” Ruby explains, trailing her fingers over a bookshelf. “They’re scattered across the Wolfstone land and have their own families now. No one’s been taking care of this place.”

I watch her move through the space, touching objects gently as if they might crumble under too much pressure. Witnessing this moment is intimate, and despite her invitation, I feel like an intruder.

“It’s beautiful,” I say, and mean it. “Different from our city apartments.”

She snorts. “You mean it doesn’t have stainless steel appliances and minimalist furniture? Yeah, my grandmother wasn’t exactly a design influencer.”

“I like it,” Prescott declares, examining a collection of old photographs on the mantel. “Who’s this?”

Ruby joins him, taking the framed photo. “My mother. And that’s my grandmother beside her.” She hesitates, then adds quietly, “Both gone now.”

Hamilton finally enters, ducking his head under the low door frame. He looks ridiculously out of place—his expensive hiking gear and perpetual CEO posture at odds with the rustic, timeworn interior.

“Is this part of your strategy, Wolfhart?” he asks, but the usual edge in his voice has dulled. “Show us the family homestead, tug at our heartstrings?”

Ruby replaces the photograph carefully. “Not everything is a strategy, Hamilton. Sometimes people just want to share something important to them.”

An uncomfortable silence falls, broken only by Prescott excitedly examining a collection of what appears to be handmade wooden toys in a corner trunk.

“There’s more I want to show you,” Ruby says finally. “Come on.”

She leads us out the back door and down a narrow path that winds through dense trees.

After about ten minutes of walking, the trees thin, and suddenly we’re standing at the edge of a lake so clear it looks like liquid crystal.

The surface mirrors the surrounding trees and sky in perfect reflection, disturbed only by the occasional leap of a fish.

“Holy shit,” I breathe.

“Yeah,” Ruby agrees. “Holy shit indeed.”

The development plans flash through my mind—specifically, what we’d designed for this area.

The southeastern lakeshore was slated for luxury waterfront cabins.

The northern edge would become a private beach for residents.

The water itself would be “enhanced” with decorative fountains and a swimming platform.

Looking at it now, I can see how obscene those plans are.

The clarity of the water would be compromised by increased sediment from construction.

The peaceful silence would be replaced by the sounds of recreation.

The wildlife—the fish jumping, the birds swooping for a drink—would retreat from shifter presence.

Our marketing materials had promised to “improve upon nature.” Now I wonder if there’s anything more arrogant than thinking we could improve on something that’s already perfect.

Even Hamilton looks impressed, though he tries to hide it behind his usual mask of indifference. We all knew there were lakes on the land, but seeing one up close like this... it’s breathtaking.

“This is perfect!” Prescott exclaims, already tugging off his backpack. “Can we swim? Tell me we can swim.”

Ruby laughs—a genuine sound that echoes across the water. “That’s why I brought you here.”

Prescott needs no further encouragement. He strips down to his boxers, his tail wagging so hard it’s practically a blur. I catch Hamilton’s eye, and for once, we share the same thought: our nerdy, introverted little brother is happy.

“What the hell,” I mutter, pulling my shirt over my head. “When in Rome.”

“We’re not in Rome,” Hamilton points out dryly. “We’re in the middle of nowhere, about to swim in an unregulated body of water that probably contains parasites and—”

His lecture is cut short by Prescott’s spectacular cannonball into the lake, sending a spray of water high into the air. His delighted squeals echo off the surrounding hills.

“Come on, Ham,” I tease, unbuckling my belt. “Live dangerously for once.”

“I take calculated risks,” he corrects stiffly. “This isn’t—”

Ruby suddenly darts past us both, stripping down to her sports bra and boyshorts with fluid grace. “Last one in is a corporate sellout!” she calls over her shoulder before diving into the water with barely a splash.

I laugh at Hamilton’s scandalized expression. The tension between him and Ruby has been uncomfortable at best, explosive at worst. The fact that they’ve hate-banged each other hasn’t exactly helped matters.

But here, in this hidden corner of Wolfstone, the dynamics feel different. Lighter.

I kick off my boots and jeans, leaving me in just my boxers. “Coming, big brother?”

Hamilton glares at me, but I don't miss how his eyes track Ruby's movements as she surfaces with a triumphant whoop, water streaming from her hair.

"This is highly unprofessional," he grumbles.

"That's kind of the point," I reply, then turn and run for the water, launching myself in with abandon.

The lake is perfect—cool enough to refresh, but not so cold it shocks. I surface with a gasp, shaking water from my eyes to find Prescott already engaged in a splashing contest with Ruby. A pig having the time of his life.

My own ears twitch happily, picking up the sounds of birds, rustling leaves, and my brothers' voices.

"Come on, Hamilton!" Prescott calls. "The water's amazing!"

To my genuine surprise, Hamilton actually begins removing his hiking gear, methodically folding each item before placing them on a rock. Even when letting loose, he can't help being Hamilton.

"I can't believe it," I say to Ruby as she swims closer. "You broke Hamilton."

She grins, water droplets clinging to her eyelashes. "Not broken. Just... rebooting."

Hamilton enters the water with considerably more dignity than the rest of us, wading in slowly rather than diving. But once he's chest-deep, something in him visibly shifts and he tilts his head back to look at the sky.

"It is... pleasant," he admits reluctantly.

Prescott seizes the opportunity to send a massive splash in Hamilton's direction, drenching his carefully maintained hair. For one terrifying second, I think Hamilton might actually murder our little brother—but then something miraculous happens.

Hamilton Porkwell, CEO and notorious hardass, splashes back.

What follows is the most ridiculous, childish, and utterly delightful water fight I've participated in since we were children. All four of us splashing and diving and laughing like we don't have competing business interests and complicated histories.

At some point, I swim to the far edge of the lake, drawn by something I spotted from the center: a stretch of shoreline composed of dark, rich mud glistening invitingly in the sun.

I haven't had a proper mud wallow in years. It's not exactly socially acceptable for the architect of Porkwell Development to roll around in dirt. But here, with the others distracted by their splash war...

I haul myself out of the lake, water streaming from my boxers, and approach the mud patch. It looks perfect—not too thick, not too thin, warmed by the sun to just the right temperature.

Without overthinking it, I let my transformation take over completely. Within seconds, I'm on all fours, my snout fully extended, my entire body covered in short, pink-tinted hair.

I'm a pig.

A full, actual pig.

I haven't shifted in years.

And it feels amazing.

I dive into the mud with a happy squeal, rolling onto my back and letting the cool, slick earth envelop me.

This is bliss—pure, unadulterated bliss.

I roll from side to side, coating every inch of myself in the glorious mud.

“Percy? What are you—” Prescott’s voice cuts off, and then I hear his delighted laugh. “Oh man, that looks AWESOME!”

There’s a splash as he exits the water, and within moments, he’s joined me in full pig form, smaller than me but just as enthusiastic, snuffling and rolling with abandoned joy.

“You two are ridiculous,” Ruby calls, but there’s laughter in her voice.

I peek through mud-crust ed eyelashes to see her watching us from the water’s edge, arms crossed but smiling. Without warning, she shimmers and transforms, her body elongating, fur sprouting across her skin, until a sleek wolf stands where the female had been.

She approaches cautiously—wolves and mud aren’t the natural companions that pigs and mud are—but after a moment’s hesitation; she bounds in, playfully rolling in the mud and nipping at Prescott’s ear.

“This is completely undignified,” Hamilton announces from the water, but his pig’s ears are out.

I roll onto my back, snout pointed skyward, and let out the most contented pig-sigh I

can muster. Then shift slightly back to my human form, “Who cares?” I call. “No one’s watching but us.”

“That’s precisely the—”

“Ham,” I interrupt, “for once in your life, stop calculating risks and rewards and just... be a pig.”

Ruby sits on her haunches and lets out a howl that sounds like a challenge.

Something flickers across Hamilton’s face—annoyance, resistance, and then, finally, surrender.

With a grumble that could mean anything, he wades out of the water, his movements becoming less bipedal with each step. By the time he reaches the mud, he’s a massive boar, larger than both Prescott and me, with impressive tusks and an air of dignity that somehow survives even his transformation.

He hesitates at the edge of the mud pit, clearly conflicted.

“Come on,” I encourage, flicking mud in his direction with my snout. “It’s good for the skin.”

With what can only be described as a resigned sigh, Hamilton steps into the mud—daintily at first, then with growing enthusiasm as the cool earth squishes between his hooves. Within minutes, he’s rolling alongside us, grunting with pleasure.

The four of us—three pigs and a wolf—spend the next hour in a state of animal joy.

We chase, wrestle, wallow, and play with the kind of uninhibited freedom I’d

forgotten existed.

Ruby darts between us, her wolf form quick and graceful, occasionally letting out playful howls that echo across the lake.

In this moment, we aren't business rivals.

We aren't Porkwell's and Wolfhart.

We're just our true selves, enjoying the simple pleasures that have been coded into our DNA since the beginning of time.

And as I watch Hamilton—straight-laced, rule-following Hamilton—roll onto his back in the mud with his eyes closed in bliss, I know Ruby's plan is working.

Maybe there's more to Wolfstone than property value and development potential.

Maybe there's something here worth preserving, not just for Ruby's sake, but for our own.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

Ruby

I never thought I'd see Hamilton Porkwell covered in mud with a genuine smile on his face.

Not the corporate polished smile he wears in boardrooms, but an actual, honest-to-god, happy expression.

It's unsettling.

Like catching a shark taking swimming lessons.

And yet, here we are—three mud-covered pigs and one slightly cleaner wolf—all laughing like idiots on the shore of my family's sacred lake.

"Admit it, Hamilton," I call out, shifting slightly, watching him roll around with his brothers. "You're having fun in the dirt like a common farm animal."

Hamilton looks up, mud plastered across his chiseled jaw, and for once, there's no angry comeback. Just a snort and another roll.

Percy is practically swimming in the stuff while Prescott is creating what appears to be a mud castle with his snout.

He's methodical, even in filth.

"Alright, mud monsters, I'm going to clean up," I tell them as I walk back to the

lakeside and wash off the mud.

Water drips from my fur as I wade in deeper, letting the cool liquid rinse away the mud that moments ago had us all laughing like kids.

There's something about being covered in muck that breaks down barriers—even between wolves and pigs who should be at each other's throats instead of rolling around together like lifelong friends.

I shake myself vigorously before I shift, my human form emerging from where my wolf had been. Behind me, I hear the distinctive sounds of the Porkwell brothers doing the same.

I don't turn around right away.

Not because I'm suddenly shy—hello, I've been naked in front of two of them already—but because something in the air has shifted.

The playful energy that had us squealing (well, them squealing, me howling) in the mud just minutes ago has morphed into something heavier.

Something electric.

"Much better," Percy says, his voice closer than I expect.

When I finally turn, they're all there—three very naked, very well-built pig shifters with water cascading down their bodies. And they're all staring at me like I'm the answer to a question they've been asking their entire lives.

"Speak for yourself," Hamilton replies, but his usual sharp edge is soft, almost teasing. "I was just getting used to being filthy."

Prescott doesn't say anything at all. His eyes are wide behind water-splattered glasses, which he finally remembers to remove and clean on a relatively dry patch of his arm. It's adorable and weirdly hot at the same time.

I should say something witty.

Something cutting about how we need to get dressed and go back to the cottage. Instead, I'm transfixed by the sight of three very different, very aroused males.

Hamilton's cock stands proud and thick—no surprise there. Percy's is elegant like the rest of him, perfecting his leaner eight-pack frame. And Prescott... well, who knew the quiet ones really packed a surprise?

"See something you like, Wolfhart?" Hamilton's smirk should irritate me. It usually does.

"Just calculating the odds of three pigs satisfying one wolf," I shoot back, but my voice comes out huskier than intended.

Percy wades closer, water swirling around his hips. "Those are calculations I'd love to test empirically."

"For science," Prescott adds with unexpected boldness, adjusting his glasses.

"For science," I echo, a laugh bubbling up that doesn't quite make it past my throat because Hamilton is suddenly right in front of me, close enough to feel the heat radiating from his skin.

"I think we all knew this was inevitable," he says, reaching out to trail a finger along my collarbone. Water droplets scatter from his touch; tiny cold shocks against my overheated skin. "From the moment you barged into our lives, all fanged conviction

and stubborn ideals.”

“Inevitable?” I arch an eyebrow, refusing to show how his touch affects me. “That’s a convenient rewrite of history.”

“Is it?” Percy slides up behind me, his hands settling on my hips. “Because I remember feeling something that first day at the committee meeting. Even when you were telling me exactly how wrong my designs were.”

I open my mouth to argue, but Prescott has joined our little water circle, completing the triangle of Porkwell’s surrounding me.

“The statistical probability of all three of us being drawn to the same female—especially one who represents everything we’re supposedly against—is astronomically small,” he says, pushing his wet hair back from his forehead. “Yet here we are.”

“Here we are,” I agree softly, then I wonder when I started agreeing with Porkwell’s.

Hamilton’s hand slides up to cup my face, surprisingly gentle for a man I once smacked across the cheek in a boardroom. “Still hate me, Wolfhart?”

“Absolutely,” I whisper.

“Liar,” he murmurs, then his mouth is on mine, and it’s nothing like the angry, biting kiss we shared in the stairwell.

This is deep and consuming, his tongue exploring my mouth like he’s mapping territory.

I hate that I’m moaning into it, hate that my body arches toward him instinctively; but

not enough to stop myself.

Percy's lips find my shoulder, trailing toward my neck as his hands slide up to cup my breasts from behind. I gasp into Hamilton's mouth as Percy's thumbs circle my nipples, teasing them into tight peaks.

"She likes that," Percy murmurs, a smile in his voice. "Remember how sensitive you were that night in my bed?"

"Shut up," I manage to break away from Hamilton long enough to say, but my body clearly hasn't gotten the memo.

Hamilton chuckles, and a deep rumble falls against my chest. "Still giving orders when you're outnumbered three to one. That's my fierce little wolf."

"I'm not yours—" I start to protest, but then Prescott steps forward, his hand tentatively touching my waist, and the words dissolve on my tongue.

"May I?" he asks, so different from his brothers' confident hands already exploring my body.

I look into his earnest eyes and nod. "Yes."

His kiss is nothing like Hamilton's dominance or Percy's playful expertise. It's curious and exploratory. I find myself melting into it, my hand rising to cup the back of his neck.

We're all thigh-deep in the lake, cool water swirling around us, creating a delicious contrast that heightens every sensation.

Hamilton's hand slides between my legs from the front while Percy continues his

ministrations at my breasts.

Prescott breaks our kiss to trail his lips down my jaw and neck, his hands roaming tentatively at first, then with growing confidence.

“Should we move this to shore?” Percy suggests, his breath hot against my ear.

“Too far,” Hamilton growls, his fingers finding my clit, circling with maddening precision. “I’ve waited too long to be inside this wolf again.”

His possessiveness should offend me, but my body betrays me, pushing against his hand. “The great Hamilton Porkwell, impatient? I’m shocked.”

He nips at my lower lip in response. “You bring out the worst in me, Wolfhart.”

“And the best,” Prescott adds quietly, his hand joining his brothers between my thighs, exploring different territory.

I gasp as his finger slides inside me, quickly joined by a second. “You three are going to be the death of me.”

“What a way to go,” Percy chuckles, then guides us all toward the shallower part of the lake, where a small sandy beach offers more stability than the water.

I should feel self-conscious—one female surrounded by three males with very obvious intentions—but I feel powerful.

Wanted.

Hungry.

Hamilton pulls me down onto the soft sand at the water's edge, positioning himself between my legs.

"I've been dreaming about fucking you again since that day in the stairwell," he says, his voice rough with desire.

"Thinking about how you fought me every step of the way until you were screaming my name."

"I didn't scream your name," I protest, though the memory of our hate-fueled encounter sends fresh heat pooling between my legs.

"No?" He positions the head of his cock at my entrance, teasing. "Let's see if we can change that this time."

Before I can retort, he pushes inside me in one powerful thrust that has me arching off the sand with a cry that echoes across the lake. He feels impossibly huge, stretching me in the most delicious way.

"Fuck," he grunts, holding still for a moment as we both adjust. "You're even tighter than I remember."

Percy kneels beside my head, running his fingers through my damp hair. "Don't hog her, Ham. We agreed to share, remember?"

Hamilton's response is to withdraw almost completely before slamming back into me, wringing another cry from my lips. "She can multitask."

Percy's laugh is warm as he guides my hand to his erection. "What do you say, Ruby? Care to show a pig how talented wolves can be?"

I wrap my fingers around him, giving an experimental stroke that makes him hiss with pleasure. “I think I can manage that.”

Prescott watches us with hungry eyes, stroking himself slowly. “Is this... is this okay?” he asks, and I’m reminded that while his brothers and I have crossed this line before, Prescott and I have only shared that one kiss on the terrace.

I reach for him with my free hand. “More than okay. Come here.”

The brothers exchange looks over my body, some silent communication passing between them. Then Hamilton slows his thrusts to a torturous pace while Percy positions himself so I can take him in my mouth. Prescott kneels beside me, and I guide his hand to my breast.

“Touch me,” I encourage him. “I want you to.”

It should be awkward, this tangle of bodies and desire; enemies turned lovers on the shore of a lake meant to be fought over, not fucked on. But somehow, it’s perfect—primal and honest. I guide Percy’s cock to my mouth, licking and sucking his tip before he slides himself deeper.

Hamilton’s pace quickens again, his hands gripping my hips. “This wolf pussy was made to be fucked by us,” he growls, his voice dropping an octave. “Made to be stretched and filled by Porkwell’s.”

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

It's crude. Vulgar—making me moan around Percy's cock, taking him deeper as Hamilton pounds into me with increasing fervor.

“Look at her taking it,” Percy says, his voice strained as he fights to maintain control. “So fierce in the boardroom, so eager for cock out here in the wild.”

Prescott surprises me by leaning down to capture one of my nipples in his mouth, his earlier shyness apparently forgotten. His tongue swirls and teases as his hand explores the curves of my body with increasing confidence.

I'm overwhelmed by sensation—Hamilton filling me below, Percy in my mouth, Prescott's clever hands and mouth learning my body's responses. It's too much and not enough all at once.

I want all of them; want to be claimed by each Porkwell brother.

Hamilton suddenly withdraws as if reading my mind, leaving me whimpering at the loss. “Your turn, Percy. Show our wolf what that architect's precision can do.”

Percy doesn't need to be told twice. He flips me over so I'm on all fours and moves between my legs, replacing his brother with a smooth, deliberate thrust that has me gasping.

Where Hamilton is all raw power, Percy is finesse, angling his hips to hit spots inside me that have my toes curling into the sand.

Hamilton takes Percy's former position, his still-slick cock pressing against my lips.

“Open up, Wolfhart. Taste yourself on me.”

It’s filthy and so fucking hot that I comply without hesitation, the tangy taste of my own arousal mingling with his unique flavor as he slides between my lips.

Prescott watches us all with wonder, as if he can’t believe he’s part of this tableau. “Beautiful,” he murmurs, trailing his fingers along where Percy and I are joined. When his thumb finds my clit, pressing with just the right pressure, I nearly buck off the sand.

“She’s close,” Percy announces, increasing his pace. “I can feel her tightening.”

Hamilton grins down at me, his cock still in my mouth. “Not yet. I want her to come on Prescott’s cock. Fair’s fair.”

Percy groans but complies, withdrawing despite my muffled protest. Prescott looks startled, then determined as his brothers guide him between my legs.

“I’ve never... not like this,” he admits, positioning himself at my entrance.

I release Hamilton long enough to say, “neither have I. Not with three... not with anyone like this.”

Something passes between us then—a moment of connection amid the raw lust—before he pushes forward, filling me in one slow, deliberate movement that has us both gasping.

“Oh god,” Prescott breathes. “You feel incredible.”

“Move,” I urge him, pushing back forcefully on his throbbing cock. “Please, Prescott, move.”

He does, finding a rhythm that builds on the foundation his brothers laid. Hamilton reclaims my mouth while Percy moves to tease my breasts, all three working in concert to drive me toward the edge.

“Fuck this is too much. I can’t... I’m going to...” Prescott’s pace becomes erratic in the best possible way.

“Let go,” I encourage him, breaking away from Hamilton. “Come for me, Prescott.”

He does, with a shuddering cry that seems torn from deep within him. I can feel his cock twitching as he fills me with his load. The sounds of his pleasure, combined with Percy’s fingers on my clit, send me tumbling over the edge, my body convulsing around Prescott’s still-pulsing cock.

Hamilton doesn’t wait for either of us to recover. As soon as Prescott withdraws, he’s there, flipping me back on the ground and plunging into me with a growl that’s more wolf than pig. “My turn again,” he says, his eyes locked on mine. “And this time, you’re going to scream my name.”

He’s relentless, driving into me with a fury that borders on punishing. Percy and Prescott take positions on either side of me, hands and mouths exploring every inch of skin they can reach. It’s sensory overload in the best possible way.

“Hamilton,” I gasp as he hits a particularly sensitive spot. “There, right there.”

His smile is triumphant. “Louder, Wolfhart. Let the whole forest know who’s fucking you.”

“Hamilton!” I cry out as he increases his pace, the pressure building inside me again with shocking speed.

“All of us,” Percy corrects, his lips at my ear. “Say all our names. We all want to hear it.”

“Hamilton, Percy, Prescott,” I chant, each name punctuated by a thrust that drives me closer to the edge. “Please, I need...”

“We know what you need,” Prescott says, his fingers joining where Hamilton and I are connected as I take Percy’s cock back into my mouth. “Come for us again, Ruby.”

That does it—the combination of physical stimulation and the tenderness in Prescott’s voice shatters me. I come with a cry that probably echoes through the forest, my body clenching around Hamilton with rhythmic waves of pleasure.

He follows moments later, his release triggering Percy’s as he sinks all the way to the back of my throat and I eagerly swallow him. The three Porkwell brothers collapse around me, a tangle of sweaty limbs and labored breathing on the sandy shore.

For long moments, none of us speak. The only sounds are our combined breathing and the gentle lapping of the lake against the shore.

It’s strange how quickly opposition can transform into something else entirely. Just weeks ago, I viewed these three as enemies—obstacles to overcome in my mission to protect Wolfstone.

Hamilton was the arrogant tyrant, Percy the sell-out artist compromising his talent for profit, and Prescott the tech genius was enabling their destruction.

Now I see the nuances I’d missed before.

Hamilton’s drive masks a deep sense of responsibility for his family legacy. Percy’s designs actually do try to honor the environment in his own way. And Prescott’s

innovations could potentially serve conservation as easily as development.

When did they become individuals to me? Not just “the Porkwell’s,” not just “the opposition,” but three distinct beings with their own strengths, flaws, and unexpected depths?

Somewhere between that first confrontation in their office and now, lying here with sand clinging to my back and their heartbeats surrounding me, something fundamental has shifted.

“Well,” I finally manage, staring up at the patches of sky visible through the canopy above. “That wasn’t in the environmental impact assessment.”

Percy chuckles first, then Hamilton, then Prescott, until all four of us are laughing, the sound bouncing off the water and surrounding trees. It should be awkward—enemies turned lovers, naked and sticky with evidence of what we’ve just done—but somehow, it’s not.

“I think we need another swim,” Hamilton eventually says, pushing himself up on one elbow to look down at me. His usual arrogance is tempered with something softer, almost affectionate.

“Mmm,” I agree, making no move to get up. “In a minute.”

Who am I now?

For years, my identity has been defined by this fight—Ruby Wolfhart, fierce defender of wolf territory against Porkwell encroachment. It gave me purpose, direction, a clear moral position. The world made sense when it was us versus them.

But now the lines have blurred beyond recognition. I’ve literally and figuratively

embraced what I was supposed to be fighting against.

Does that make me a traitor to my cause?

Or is there a way to be both Ruby the wolf advocate and Ruby who cares for these three pigs?

My grandmother always said that the strongest wolves were the ones who could adapt without losing themselves. Maybe this is my adaptation—finding connection where I expected only conflict.

Maybe understanding the “enemy” is the first step toward a solution that serves everyone.

I can’t help but wonder what my pack would think if they could see me now. I’d convinced Alpha Thorncrest to let me bring the Porkwell’s onto our land, promising it was just a strategic move to show them what they’d be destroying.

My plan worked—the brothers are seeing Wolfstone differently—but the twist in the plan was how I’d come to see them.

This intimate connection wasn’t part of the strategy I’d presented to the pack.

Would Alpha Thorncrest see this as a betrayal of trust?

Would the elders who reluctantly agreed to my plan question my loyalty, my judgment, my very place among them?

The pack has been my foundation, my family, my identity since birth. We protect each other, stand together against threats. And the Porkwell’s have always been the biggest threat.

Yet lying here, I realize that if building bridges rather than walls could save our territory, wouldn't the pack eventually understand? Or would they see only betrayal in my intimate connection with their historic enemies, regardless of the outcome?

The thought of potential rejection by my pack creates a physical ache in my chest. But, I feel the possibility of a new kind of pack forming.

"Well," Percy finally says, breaking the silence. "That was unexpected."

I snort with laughter. "Understatement of the century, Porkwell."

Prescott chuckles, his fingers idly tracing patterns on my arm. "I believe that qualifies as a team-building exercise."

Even Hamilton laughs at that, the sound unfamiliar but not unwelcome.

My life has officially gone off the rails.

But as Percy's hand finds mine, as Prescott's gentle breathing warms my shoulder, as Hamilton's arm drapes almost protectively across my waist—I can't bring myself to regret it.

Epilogue

Color me shocked—and mildly turned on. I never thought I'd see the day when Hamilton Porkwell, CEO of Porkwell Corp.

and general pain in my ass, would be standing on my grandmother's porch with actual pig ears sprouting from his head, arguing with his brother about the correct way to install a porch swing.

Yet here we are, three months after I dragged three city-slicker pigs into the wilderness, and somehow ended up with all of them as... what? Boyfriends? Partners? Co-conservationists?

Whatever label you want to slap on this weirdness, it's working better than anyone—especially me—ever expected.

"You're drilling it too deep," Hamilton snaps, his curly pig tail twitching with irritation. "The structural integrity will be compromised."

Percy, sporting similar porcine features but with a more relaxed set to his shoulders, just rolls his eyes. "It's a porch swing, not a skyscraper. Your control issues are showing again."

"My control issues are what keep this family from total chaos," Hamilton retorts, but there's no real heat behind it.

Not anymore.

I lean against the doorframe of the cottage, my wolf ears twitching at every sound from the forest surrounding us.

My sanctuary.

Our sanctuary now, I suppose.

The place that changed everything.

“You’re both wrong,” Prescott calls from where he’s setting up some complicated-looking tech system at the end of the porch. His pig snout wrinkles as he squints at his tablet. “According to the specs I pulled up, you need to offset it by another two inches if you want optimal swing trajectory.”

I can’t help the laugh that bubbles up. “Optimal swing trajectory? I just want somewhere to drink my coffee while watching the sunrise.”

All three brothers turn to look at me with varying expressions—Percy’s amused, Prescott’s earnest, and Hamilton’s... well, Hamilton’s still got that intensity that makes my fur stand on end in ways I’m not entirely mad about anymore.

“The wolf has simple needs,” Hamilton says, his tone sliding into that teasing register that would have made me want to bite him three months ago.

Now, I just want to bite him in completely different ways.

“This wolf,” I correct, strolling out onto the porch, “has very specific needs. And right now, they include watching three supposedly sophisticated business pigs fail at basic carpentry.”

Percy abandons the swing project to wrap an arm around my waist, nuzzling my neck

in a way that sends a delicious shiver down to my toes. “We excel at other things,” he murmurs against my skin. “As you well know.”

I push him away playfully. “Focus on the swing. I’ve got plans for it later.”

“Do these plans include all of us?” Prescott asks, abandoning his tech to join us.

“That depends on how well you install it,” I respond with a wink. “I’m not risking a concussion for any of you, no matter how cute those ears are.”

Hamilton huffs, but there’s the ghost of a smile playing on his lips.

Three months ago, I wouldn’t have believed he could smile like that—genuine, unguarded.

Three months ago, I was storming into Porkwell Development, ready to shred their project.

Three months ago, these three were my enemies.

Now they’re... mine.

In ways I’m still figuring it out.

The transformation didn’t happen overnight.

After our... encounter by the lake during that fateful hiking trip, things were complicated.

Messy.

Hamilton, in particular, fought the inevitable as if it were his job (which, in a way, it was).

The Project was his baby, his revenge against wolves, his obsession. Giving it up meant admitting he was wrong, and Hamilton Porkwell didn't do wrong.

Except, apparently, he does when presented with the right motivations.

"I'm still amazed you actually canceled the Wolfstone project," I say to Hamilton as Percy returns to his swing installation with renewed determination.

"That press conference might have been the happiest day of my advocacy career. The great Hamilton Porkwell, announcing a conservation initiative instead of luxury condos."

Hamilton's ears twitch backward—a pig tell I've learned means he's feeling defensive. "It was a business decision. The public relations benefits alone—"

"Bullshit," I interrupt cheerfully. "You fell in love with the land. And possibly with a certain inhabitant of said land."

His eyes narrow, but the corner of his mouth ticks up. "I thought wolves were supposed to be intimidating, not delusional."

"Admit it, Ham. You went swimming in a lake, rolled in some mud, and your cold pork heart grew three sizes."

"What my brother is failing to articulate," Percy interjects, looking up from his work, "is that we found something more valuable than another development project."

"Preservation has substantial tax benefits," Hamilton adds stubbornly.

I roll my eyes. “Romantic as always.”

“The wildlife monitoring system is almost complete,” Prescott interrupts.

“We’ll have real-time data on migration patterns, breeding seasons, and everything needed to maintain the reserve properly.

” His enthusiasm is infectious. “I’ve even designed special cameras that adjust for different light wavelengths to capture nocturnal activity without disturbing the animals. ”

“And this information helps us how?” Hamilton asks, though his tone lacks the dismissive edge it once had.

“It helps us protect what matters,” I say simply.

Something shifts in Hamilton’s expression—it softens, just for a moment. “Yes. It does.”

Percy stands, dusting off his hands. “Swing’s installed. Who wants to test it?”

“Not yet,” I warn. “I need to check your work first. Last time I trusted a Porkwell engineering project, I ended up with a collapsing bookshelf.”

“That was Prescott’s design,” Percy protests.

“I’m a tech engineer, not a carpenter,” Prescott defends himself. “And you insisted on ‘improving’ my specifications.”

I leave them bickering and walk to the edge of the porch, surveying what was once just my grandmother’s old cottage and surrounding woods.

Two months ago, Porkwell Development officially announced that it was abandoning plans for the luxury resort complex and instead dedicating the land to a protected conservation area.

The press had a field day.

“Pigs and Wolves Unite: Historic Enemies Turn Conservation Partners.”

“Porkwell Heir Abandons Development for Wildlife Preservation: Love Behind Business Decision?”

“Interspecies Dating: Taboo or Progressive?”

That last one had made me throw the newspaper across the room, but Hamilton had just laughed.

I’m still getting used to that sound.

My pack’s reaction was more complicated than the simplified headlines.

Alpha Thorncrest initially saw my relationship with the Porkwell’s as a betrayal—until the conservation announcement.

“You’ve used unconventional means,” she told me during a tense pack meeting, “but you’ve protected Wolfstone more effectively than generations before you.

” The younger wolves embraced the change immediately, while some elders still maintain a respectful distance from my pig partners.

“You’ve always been the weird one in the pack,” my cousin Mara teased when we visited last week.

There's still distance to bridge, still suspicions to overcome, but when the pack gathered for the last full moon ceremony and allowed my three mates to observe from a respectful distance—a first in wolf-pig relations—I knew we were making progress.

“Penny for your thoughts?” Percy asks, appearing beside me.

“Just thinking about how much has changed,” I admit. “Three months ago, you designed a resort that would have destroyed my home.”

“And now I'm designing eco-friendly observation platforms that blend into the natural environment,” he finishes. “Much more challenging, actually. Anyone can build another soulless resort complex. Creating something that works with rather than disrupts nature? That's artistry.”

“Your modesty continues to astound me,” I say dryly, but I can't help smiling. Percy's passion for design hasn't diminished—it's just found a new, better direction.

“Come look at this,” Prescott calls from his laptop. We all wander over to where he's sitting on the porch steps.

“Is that a wolf?” Hamilton asks, pointing to a grainy image on one of the screens.

“Red fox,” Prescott and I say simultaneously. I shoot him an impressed look, and he grins.

“I've been studying,” he explains. “Did you know they can hear rodents under the snow from up to two feet away?”

“Amateur,” I scoff playfully. “Wolves can hear prey from up to six miles away under the right conditions.”

“Is that how you always knew when we were coming?” Hamilton asks, a hint of his old suspicion creeping in.

“You three have the subtlety of a fireworks show at a silent retreat,” I reply. “Especially you, Ham. Your cologne announced your presence half an hour before you did.”

“I no longer wear that cologne,” he says stiffly.

“I know. You smell better now.” I lean closer, inhaling deliberately. “Like forest and earth. It suits you.”

His ears twitch again, but in a different way, a way I’ve come to recognize as pleasure.

Prescott clears his throat, “anyway, I’ve set up thermal imaging across the main trails. We can monitor without disturbing. And look—” he points to another screen showing what appears to be a clearing—“I’ve identified three potential sites for the educational center.”

The educational center was Percy’s idea.

“A place where children can learn about conservation and shifter heritage,” he’d explained, eyes bright with vision. “Where they can see that wolves aren’t the villains of fairy tales, and pigs aren’t just helpless victims.”

It had been that moment—seeing the genuine passion in his eyes for changing perceptions—that made me realize these brothers weren’t just going along with this to placate me or for PR.

They actually cared.

Source Creation Date: July 20, 2025, 5:34 pm

“The north clearing makes the most sense,” Hamilton says now, pointing to one of the sites. “Better access to roads, less disruption to wildlife corridors.”

“But the eastern site has that amazing view,” Percy argues. “Imagine watching the sunrise through those trees.”

“I like the western site,” I chime in. “It’s where my grandma used to bring me to practice howling when I was little.”

All three look at me with varying degrees of surprise. I don’t often share pack memories.

“Then western it is,” Hamilton decides, surprising me. When I raise an eyebrow, he shrugs. “Cultural significance should be preserved. That’s... important.”

Coming from Hamilton, that’s practically a love sonnet.

No more condos, parking lots, or golf courses. Wolfstone—aside from the observation platform, a small eco-friendly education center, and Prescott’s preservation tech—will remain untouched.

The Lightning Oak and Echo Valley preserved. Wild and perfect, just as nature intended.

“How’s the funding coming along?” I ask, changing the subject before things get too mushy.

Hamilton straightens, shifting into business mode—a mode I once found insufferable, but now recognize as his comfort zone.

“We’ve secured commitments from three major conservation organizations.

The tax benefits of the land dedication offset much of our initial investment loss.

And the positive publicity has increased investment in our other ventures by nearly twelve percent. ”

“Translation: we’re doing fine,” Percy simplifies with a wink.

“Better than fine,” Prescott adds. “Our new eco-friendly tech subsidiary is already attracting major interest. Turns out, there’s a market for technology that works with nature instead of against it.”

“Who would have thought?” I say with mock wonder.

"You would have," Hamilton says unexpectedly. "You did. That's why we're here."

I stare at him, genuinely speechless.

Three months ago, Hamilton Porkwell would rather have gone to a luau as the guest of honor than admit I was right about anything.

"Well," I manage after a moment, "even stubborn wolves occasionally stumble onto good ideas."

“You’re exactly what we needed,” Percy says softly.

“Okay, enough with the sentimentality,” I protest, my ears flattening slightly in embarrassment. “I’m starving.”

“I’ll go get the picnic basket,” Prescott says, reappearing a few minutes later. “I grabbed some sandwiches and drinks from the fridge. Thought we could eat by the lake.”

“Perfect,” I say, my tail swishing behind me with anticipation. “Race you there?”

Without waiting for an answer, I take off running, hearing shouts of protest behind me. I could easily outpace them in full wolf form, but I stay just human enough—just wolf-eared and tailed enough—to give them a fighting chance.

To my surprise, it’s Hamilton who catches up first, his expensive shoes abandoned somewhere along the trail, pig ears standing straight up with exertion.

“Cheater,” he pants, grabbing for my waist.

I dance away, laughing. “Can’t cheat if there are no rules, Ham.”

Percy and Prescott arrive moments later, carrying the picnic basket and looking equally winded.

“You two are ridiculous,” Percy complains, but he’s smiling.

We settle by the lake’s edge—the same spot where, three months ago, everything changed. Prescott lays out the food while Percy uncorks a bottle of wine.

I watch them, marveling at how each has transformed since I first stormed into their office.

Hamilton, once rigidly formal and coldly calculating, now occasionally lets his pig ears show even during video conferences. “It keeps competitors off-balance,” he claimed when I caught him, but I know better. He’s finally embracing parts of himself he spent decades suppressing.

Percy's transformation has been subtler but no less profound. The passionate energy he once poured into luxury developments now fuels educational spaces. His eyes light up differently now—not with the pride of imposing his vision, but with the joy of enhancing what already exists.

And Prescott—quiet, brilliant Prescott—has perhaps changed the most visibly.

Once hiding behind screens in climate-controlled rooms, now spends hours tracking wildlife, his technology serving as an extension of his curiosity rather than a barrier between him and the world.

I caught him last week in full pig form, watching a racoon family from a respectful distance, completely transfixed.

“A toast,” Hamilton says, raising his glass once we're all served. “To unlikely partnerships.”

“To conservation,” adds Prescott.

“To new beginnings,” says Percy.

I look at these three males—these three pigs who were supposed to be my enemies—and feel something warm unfurl in my chest.

“To breaking the rules,” I offer, clinking my glass against theirs.

“So,” Percy says eventually, “now that the cottage is almost done and Wolfstone Preserve has been preserved... what's next?”

It's a good question. One I've been asking myself lately.

“There's the North Campus development,” Hamilton says.

“I was thinking more about us,” Percy clarifies. “This... arrangement.”

Ah. That.

“What about it?” I ask cautiously. We’ve been existing in a strange, wonderful limbo these past months—working together by day, exploring each other by night, but never really defining what “this” is.

“I like it,” Percy says simply. “I want it to continue.”

“As do I,” Prescott adds, taking a bite of his sandwich.

Hamilton is silent, and my stomach twists.

“I’ve purchased the adjacent property,” Hamilton says abruptly. “Thirty acres, including the ridge overlooking the valley.”

We all stare at him.

“Why?” I finally ask.

His ears twitch in that defensive way again. “It seemed prudent for the expansion of the reserve.”

“And?” Percy prompts, clearly sensing there’s more.

Hamilton sighs. “And I thought perhaps we might want a more permanent residence. Something with enough space for four shifters.”

My heart skips a beat. “Are you suggesting we all live together?”

“Not in this cottage,” Hamilton clarifies quickly. “It’s charming but impractical. I

was thinking something custom-designed.” He glances at Percy. “Something that blends with the environment while providing adequate space.”

“You want to build us a house,” I say, stunned. “A home.”

“It’s a practical consideration,” Hamilton insists, but his ears give him away. “The commute from the city is inefficient, and monitoring the reserve would be easier with a permanent residence, and—”

I cut him off by leaning over and kissing him soundly. When I pull back, his expression is dazed.

“Yes,” I say simply.

“Yes, what?” he asks.

“Yes, to whatever you’re really asking beneath all that practical business talk.”

Percy laughs and drapes his arm around my shoulders. “I think she’s saying yes to us, brother. All of us.”

Prescott is practically beaming.

Hamilton clears his throat, regaining his composure. “We should discuss logistics. Schedules. Boundaries. There are practical considerations—”

“Hamilton,” I interrupt. “Shut up and enjoy the moment.”

It won’t be simple. Nothing worth having ever is. There will be challenges, disagreements, and moments when our fundamental differences clash.

But as the sun shines over Wolfstone—our Wolfstone—I find myself thinking that

the best fairy tales are the ones you write yourself.

Sometimes, the Big Bad Wolf gets to keep all three little pigs.

Sometimes, happily ever after looks nothing like the original story.

Sometimes, they just need a forest, a lake, and the courage to see each other for who they really are in their hearts, regardless of the package they come in: wolf or pig.

And sometimes, they all live happily ever after.

Or at least, happily for now.

Which, honestly, is enough for this wolf.