



Wild Secrets and Feral Enemies: Werewolves of Salida

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Deep in the Rockies of Colorado – secrets abound, and feral creatures roam free.

When the Alpha of the Salida Pack dies without an heir, a leadership crisis breaks out. Sean Brendon is in town to visit his friend Eamon Cole and walks into the middle of a storm. A pack without an Alpha is dangerous, and the fringe elements of the Salida Pack are seizing the opportunity to stake their claim. What Sean isn't prepared for is to find his very human mate caught in the middle of this pack war. Some of the werewolves are angry that they have to share these mountains and this land with humans and are ready to start a war to achieve their goals. When Sean first lays eyes on Lowell French, wounded after a werewolf attack, his world shifts on its axis. This battle is no longer just a power struggle between rival enforcers, this battle is personal. There is much more to Lowell than meets the eye and Sean is desperate to learn every secret he holds. Soon Lowell is a target of the rival wolves and it will take everything Sean has to keep his mate safe from harm.

Can Sean save his mate and help Eamon secure peace in the Salida Pack?

No one ever said Fate was easy.

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Lowell lay there naked on the bed, watching him enter the room. He was tall, dark, and gorgeous, with a body that glistened in the moonlight shining in from the window. It was glorious, and Lowell waited, his heart pounding and his body aching. He moved slow and sexy like a wicked dream, with his hair hanging slightly over his handsome, chiseled face and his dark eyes bearing down on Lowell.

There was something about him that pushed beyond the normal and into the mystical it was a sense and a power that radiated off that amazing body. Lowell did not know him, but his heart and mind recognized him and opened to him as he approached the bed and ran his hand down the length of Lowell's leg.

The touch was electrifying and sent a thrill up his spine and a tremble covered his body. "You're so beautiful." He said and Lowell warmed sweetly under his praise. His smile brought goosebumps rippling across Lowell's flesh and the moment he joined Lowell on the bed was a moment of utter bliss. "I want you Lowell, I need you." The words tumbling from his stunning lips were doing crazy things to Lowell's body and sparking a need so deep he felt it in his toes.

"I need you too." Lowell gasped the words. This man had Lowell's hard leaking cock in hand and began to caress and stroke the heated flesh. Lowell rolled his head back and forth against his plush pillow, and the man trailed mind-numbing kisses down his chest.

The sensations were rocketing through him, and he didn't know how long he would last. As soon as his dream man took his heated cock into his mouth and down his throat, the finish was upon him. The act, so juicy and raw, pushed Lowell over the edge, and he came in a rush, shattering his thoughts and his mind as the world turned

multi-colored and his vision blurred.

He looked down and saw the eyes of that amazing man staring up at him and then he saw the beast within. The wild heart of his dream lover was on display taking him and owning him. “You’re mine now, all mine.” He said and vanished pushing Lowell back to the surface from the depths of his sleep.

He shook himself awake and sat up looking around his one room apartment and trembled with the lasting effects of his nighttime lover. The dream had been ultra-realistic. He touched his body and felt the heat and the sweat, but he was alone it was only a dream.

“No one is going to just give it to us, if we want it we must be prepared to take it.” He yelled to his handful of followers. “The wise ones are of no use. Their power is outdated we need real leadership someone who is not afraid to fight for what is ours against the human encroachment.”

”What are you saying, Jaron?” One in the crowd spoke up but was shouted down.

”This mountain, this forest is ours, and it’s time we forced out the growing cancer of humans, taking what doesn’t belong to them,” Jaron responded, shouting his plans and his anger. ”This pack needs to be set free to grow and conquer. We are wolves, for fuck sake. We aren’t puppy dogs to be led around and controlled. We are fierce warriors, and it’s time for everyone to become aware of that fact. It’s time we stopped hiding and reclaimed our land; the mountain is ours.”

Some left feeling the hatred and violence too much and outside their tolerance, but others fed into the hatred and stoked the promise of violence. The Salida Pack was on track for a vicious and brutal transition of power.

Sean Brendon came to town at the invitation of his close friend, expecting a laid-back

week of hiking and fishing, but instead found a pack in chaos. He and Eamon Cole often worked together and had just completed an assignment in Boseman, Montana, putting a pack and a coven back on civil, if not friendly, terms. It was what they did as members of the Paranormal Security Council. It was a body that was controlled by the Chamber of Elders.

The Chamber was made up of elected individuals from packs, covens and kindreds from across the land. The elders served for life and were chosen based on their age, activities, achievements and standing in their communities. The Security Council and the Chamber of Elders had been in existence for three generations, so it was a fairly new approach to governing but so far, they were honored and trusted institutions.

Sean and Eamon often worked together due to their friendship, similar backgrounds and outlooks, and the fact that they were both wolves. The Council saw them as a team in many respects, although Sean was from a pack in northern Maine, and Eamon called Colorado home.

"I'm sorry your vacation turned sour," Eamon said as they sat together having a beer at a downtown pub. Salida, Colorado, was a town of about seven thousand souls, both human and paranormal. Usually, it was a town of peace and relaxation, but today, the air was charged with an uncomfortable angst and uncertainty, and everyone could feel it, even the humans.

"Not your fault man the situation was not of your making." Sean drank his beer and took in the clientele seated around him. Most were wolves from Eamon's pack sitting drinking and waiting wondering about the outcome and wondering as to their place as some roles and responsibilities would change.

Eamon was an enforcer in his pack and his work was to maintain control and peace but that was a tall order these days. Fights were breaking out everywhere and keeping the humans unaware of the cause was also becoming an issue in itself. The pack and

the human population had resided together for decades and yet the humans knew nothing of the supernatural forces and paranormal beings that lived literally next door.

“When and how did Alpha Smith die?” Sean knew that was the source of the upheaval, but he was curious as to the details. Leaving a pack without natural succession has always been seen as a recipe for chaos. Alpha Smith was a good man but failed to secure the peaceful transfer of power which went flat against the notion that he was indeed a good alpha.

”Axel was an old wolf. No one knew just how old. He showed some gray and had slowed some in the last few years, but I did not see this coming.” Eamon looked distressed as he relived the death of his Alpha and friend. ”The pack woke up three days ago to the fact that their alpha had died in the night.”

“You weren’t prepared? Alpha Smith had not made any provisions in the event of his death?” Sean asked, still shocked by the lack of preparation.

”No.” He shook his head. ”Axel has been Alpha for the past three hundred years. He was a good man and a good alpha. No one ever thought he’d die, including me. It was stupid, I know, and now we’re all paying for that stupidity.” Eamon ordered another round of drinks, and he invited Noah, a fellow enforcer, to join them at their table.

“They’ve started the selection process but it’s not going smoothly.” Noah announced. “The wise ones are voting on three candidates that they believe would rule effectively.” Eamon had explained before that the wise ones were the elders, the leaders, cultural chiefs anyone over a certain age.

“What happens after the three are determined?” Sean inquired, having an idea of what would take place. Alpha challenges were messy things and most often meant to the

death.

“We haven’t had an alpha challenge in many centuries. Axel took control after his father died very easy transition from what I’m told. I wasn’t there.” Eamon smiled.

“Is it to the death?” Sean visibly winced at the thought of pack members fighting each other to the death.

“I don’t know, and I certainly hope not. It would take a generation or more for the pack to heal from a wound like that.” Eamon’s unease was palatable, and Sean sincerely felt for his friend. This was his pack, and these were his friends and relatives. The upheaval was affecting them all.

”Any ideas who’s being considered?” Sean asked. Eamon shrugged and looked at Noah, who seemed to be in the know.

”Not for certain, but I heard Murphy is a contender, as well as Jaron. I don’t know who the third is.”

”Perhaps O’Malley,” Eamon interjected. ”The man desperately wants the position.” He said this with just the slightest of derision, so Sean figured O’Malley was probably not a good fit.

“What about the pack Beta?” Sean understood that most Betas would take over if there were no sons when an Alpha passed.

”Axel didn’t have a Beta; he preferred enforcers. He was a man who did not like to share power.” Sean nodded, making no judgment. Every Alpha had the right to form their own inner circle.

“That’s too bad.”

“Yes, it is.” Both Eamon and Noah agreed.

Lowell French and his friends John Sims and Patrick Handly had nicely settled into their campsite when Patrick remembered that they’d left their poles and tackle in the Jeep back in the lot. It had been a forty-five-minute walk from the lot to the campsite, and the thought of making that walk all over again at this hour was not appealing.

Lowell couldn’t stop laughing while John and Patrick both stood staring at each other with scathing expressions. “It wasn’t my fault Lowell.” Patrick stated and crossed his arms.

“We were so caught up in our snacks, beverages, and comforts that we forgot the reason for being here at the lake for the weekend,” John stated sharply. “We came here to fish.” He enunciated clearly and with heavy sarcasm.

“Hey, if we were going to forget something, the fishing gear would have been my choice. Snacks, drinks, and a comfortable bed are three of my favorite things. Not to mention this lovely location on the shore of this stunning lake in the company of two of my closest friends.” That had John and Patrick stepping back and each taking a deep breath. “It’s not the end of the world.” Both nodded but were still shooting scathing looks back and forth.

“Let’s get set up and worry about the gear in the morning. It’s too late for fishing anyway. We’ll start early in the morning.” Lowell suggested that John and Patrick agree.

“You have to admit, though, that this is a pretty lame fishing trip,” Patrick admitted and waited for the others to agree.

“In terms of fishing perhaps, but in terms of good times with good friends, it looks like it’s going to be a big win.” Both John and Patrick looked at him and shook their

heads.

"Always seeing the glass half full, aren't you, Lowell." John groused.

"We'll get the equipment in the morning for now let's put up the tents and get dinner started." Lowell grabbed a beer and popped it open. "I'll start the steaks while you two deal with the tents." He handed them each a beer and patted them on the back.

"Medium rare for me," John stated.

"I'll take mine rare," Patrick added.

"Coming right up." Lowell just wanted to have a relaxing weekend and didn't want to deal with John and Patrick bickering the entire time. They'd known each other since high school, and this fishing trip was something they did fairly often. It was usually relaxing and fun. Unfortunately, something was going on between the two that was making itself known through personal attacks and general bad attitudes.

They all worked for John's dad, who owned a lawn care company in Salida. It wasn't what Lowell wanted to do long term, but it gave him a decent paycheck while he thought about what it was he wanted to do. John lived at home with his father, Patrick lived at home with his parents, and Lowell lived alone. Lowell never knew his parents and was raised in care. He was on his own at eighteen, and yet he was the one who could always find the good in any situation.

Once everything was set and dinner was ready they sat back and enjoyed the peace and the quiet of the woods and the lake. "I wish I had a little of your positivity." Patrick commented. The sun was going down and the fire was dying with just the embers glowing in the growing darkness.

"I wish that just once you wouldn't forget something. Our fishing trips would be so

much more enjoyable if we didn't have to worry about what you're going to forget. Your absentmindedness is so irritating." John brought the subject back to the problem, but Lowell did not have time for it.

"Not a problem, John. We have had a nice dinner and a nice evening." Lowell handed them both another beer. "Tell me about that gal from the grocery store you're interested in, Patrick." He attempted to change the subject. "Have you asked her out yet?"

"You mean Cheryl who decided she would rather date John." Patrick snapped and Lowell quickly looked from Patrick to John and back to Patrick. "She's great but it's too bad she prefers the boss's son rather than a simple laborer like me."

"Sorry about that. I didn't know things had taken an odd turn. Let's have some smores." Lowell awkwardly started feeding the fire to bring it back and scrambled in his duffle for the graham crackers.

"I asked her out, and she accepted. If you wanted to date her, you should have asked her out." John defended himself.

"You knew I liked her," Patrick shouted at him.

"I knew nothing of the kind. You never told me you liked her." John shouted back.

"Lowell knew I liked her, and that's why he asked about her."

"You must have told Lowell, but you never told me." John was lying through his teeth, but Lowell wasn't going to bring it up. He finished the smores and slapped one in each man's hand.

"Have a smore and stop talking." Both men ate and remained quiet, but the side-eye

action was fierce. Lowell was looking forward to going to bed. His quiet and peaceful weekend away was going to be anything but. Maybe he would suggest cutting the weekend short, and they could head home tomorrow.

The bar scene was heating up as questions over who would be chosen as challengers and opinions as to who the crowd felt deserved the honor filled the room. Unfortunately, those who preferred Jaron were going up against those who preferred Murphy, and those who preferred others rounded out the mayhem. No one in the bar had a say in anything, but they still decided it was worth their while to fight it out.

“This is not the vacation you envisioned, I’m sure.” Eamon sympathized. “But with that said, I’m glad you’re here. The mood is getting out of hand, and I fear when the wise ones make their selection, it will only get worse.”

“I’ll help any way that I can,” Sean assured him. “Do your fellow enforcers have a horse in this race, or will they strive to maintain order?”

“I’m sorry to say that apart from Noah, they have all taken sides, so they will be of no assistance in maintaining order.” Eamon shook his head in disgust. “Let’s head back to my place and have a few beers in the peace and quiet of my deck away from these rabble-rousers.”

“That’s a good idea.” Sean finished his drink and followed Eamon out the back door to where they’d parked. As soon as they were outside, the noise lessened, and once they were in Eamon’s truck, quiet took over.

“What a relief,” Sean stated.

“It’s only going to get worse and more widespread the longer it takes for the wise ones to make a decision,” Eamon grumbled, irritated by the lack of foresight of his Alpha and the elder pack members. “None of this should have been allowed to

happen.”

“Your Alpha’s death was a surprise.” Sean reminded.

“He was a leader without an heir.” Eamon explained. “Packs, covens, kindreds they always have a replacement or two waiting in the wings. We were caught with our pants down and now we may tear ourselves apart as we try to pull ourselves back together.” That was very true, unfortunate, but true.

”All you can hope for is a candidate that is strong enough to lead and who the majority will follow.” Sean gave his opinion, although it sounded bleak even to his own ears.

“I fear that will be a very tall order.” Eamon pulled into the narrow drive that led to his home several miles deep into the woods. It was ideally situated with no neighbors for miles and on the edge of a beautiful lake. If it weren’t for the political upheaval, the area would be idyllic.

“I have to ask.” Sean led with a taunting grin. “Who are you pulling for Murphy or Jaron?”

“I’ll support whoever wins the challenge but neither man strikes me as the type to be able to unite this pack. I will never say that to anyone but you.” He glanced over at Sean with a look that was weary. “I just want it over and the rebuilding to begin.”

”I’ll stay as long as you need me,” Sean promised.

“Thanks, Sean.”

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Lowell lay in his tent listening to John and Patrick continue to snipe at one another until finally they fell asleep. They often fought, but this was a new level of not letting things go. The girlfriend was definitely a sore spot and the likely cause of the trouble, but neither would admit that. They were going to fight about the fishing gear the entire weekend.

He'd rather go home and sit on his sofa and watch tv than spend the next two days listening to their bickering. It was just after two in the morning when he first heard it, and it woke him from the restless sleep he'd finally been able to achieve. He sat straight up and focused listening for it again and nothing. The night was still, and the air was silent. Something had awakened him something out of place something concerning.

The hair on the back of his neck stood up and his intuition told him to prepare. He grabbed the flashlight and the bear spray and carefully stepped out of his tent. "Patrick, John, wake up." He called to them. They did not respond so he called out again while shining his light across the edge of the forest. Finally, they came awake and started complaining.

"Shut up and listen." He barked at them, which was unusual, so they became still.

"What is it?" John asked as he got out of his tent and came to stand next to Lowell. Patrick joined them, and he brought another flashlight and more bear spray.

"I don't know, but it feels like something is circling us." They stood still and listened to the night. John and Patrick didn't hear anything, but they trusted Lowell's instincts, so they were alert and on guard. They moved to stand in a circle with their

backs to each other so that whatever it was, it wouldn't sneak up on them. They kept moving in a clockwise direction keeping their ears tuned and their sight focused and then it happened.

A wolf the size of a small horse came out of the woods its head down and its teeth bared. The growl was distinct and signaled its intent. The three of them prepared for the attack and then another wolf appeared and then another four in total and all were bearing down on them.

"Want to go for a run?" Eamon suggested. "The woods are perfect for a late-night run."

"I could use to burn off a little energy. My wolf is aching to explore the area." Sean got up and started stripping, as did Eamon.

"You're going to love it." Eamon boasted and quickly shifted and took off. Sean was right behind him as they tore off into the forest. The scents and sounds filled his mind and satisfied his wolf. Eamon was right, the territory was impressive. It was clear why people were fighting over the chance to rule this land.

He followed Eamon through the woods for miles, and then they made their way back to the lake, racing around the shore. Sean took a dip in the lake to cool off and then caught up with Eamon, who was moving toward what appeared to be a public area. Sean slowed down and took his time through this stretch of land, just as Eamon did.

Humans were wearisome, frustrating, and unpredictable. They didn't want to inadvertently run into one or two. Humans would be fearful of their size and could start shooting, and nobody wanted to deal with that.

They were about to change directions and head back toward Eamon's place when they heard the ruckus coming from the public camping area. Men were shouting and

wolves were growling; they had to intervene and hopefully not get shot for their efforts.

Lowell hit the first wolf with the bear spray driving it backward but the other three rushed them. John used the air horn he'd brought but it had no effect whatsoever and it became clear that they needed a weapon. John grabbed a piece of firewood that was long and thick and began swinging it hitting them but not stopping them.

The four wolves suddenly stopped and just stared at them like they had a collective consciousness or were communicating somehow. They were playing with them charging nipping and then backing off only to repeat.

They were wearing them down rather than just ending it. The wolves had the ability to finish them but instead wanted to draw it out for some reason. This wasn't going to end well. The feeling in the air told Lowell that these wolves intended to kill them but wanted to do it slowly. It was the weirdest thing to watch them watching them and recognizing that they were orchestrating an attack and knowing they were enjoying every minute of it. These wolves weren't hungry. They were angry. They had a score to settle.

One of them broke from the others and ran at Lowell. Lowell covered his head with his arms and turned away, expecting the worst, but at the last minute, nothing happened. The wolf had stopped to scrutinize the approach of two more wolves.

They would never survive this assault. It was impossible, and yet Lowell could sense in his core that death was not going to own them today. The two wolves were larger and began stalking the other wolves, and the tension between them began to grow.

When the wolf charged at Lowell again, one of the newcomers, who looked strangely familiar, took him out, leaping on him and forcing him to the ground. It was fierce; the two were fighting the four, forcing them back and away from them. Lowell ran to

Patrick, who was on the ground, bleeding from a wound on his left arm. John was standing over them with nothing but a piece of wood, swinging it side to side.

Lowell took off his t-shirt and tied it around Patrick's arm to stem the bleeding. Then, he took a stance next to John. He didn't have a weapon apart from his bear spray, so he held it ready. It wouldn't stop them, but it would slow them down.

The scene was unreal, and the beasts fought viciously, tearing at one another, violent and extreme. These were not normal wolves. Lowell's heart surged into his throat when one of the four broke from the pack and turned to them, charging at them with blood in its eyes.

He and John held their ground, standing over Patrick. It seemed like forever before the strike hit, although it was only a few seconds. Everything was happening in slow motion; time seemed to slow. The wolf was on them, raking its sharp, merciless claws across their soft flesh, and then suddenly, he was gone, tossed aside and torn apart.

He and John lay bleeding on the ground, still attempting to shield Patrick. Lowell opened his eyes to see the two large wolves finishing off the others, and then those two wolves turned into men. The one looked straight at Lowell, and when their eyes met, recognition hit, and he knew those eyes, his dream lover, had saved them.

Sean was utterly shocked when he and Eamon broke from the woods into the clearing to see four wolves attacking three humans. The humans were small and without weapons, and yet the three insane wolves were determined to kill them. Such an act was against the laws of the paranormal and was punishable by death. Self-defense or the defense of one's family were the only mitigating circumstances, and it was obvious that neither applied here.

A thick scent of violence and anger filled the air, making it clear that these wolves

would not be reasoned with. He and Eamon went after the wolves, taking them to task and keeping them from the three humans. They hadn't intended to kill the wolves, but they left them no choice.

The rogues had already injured one of the humans pretty badly, and the other two were attempting to protect him. It was an impressive display of courage on the part of the small humans. Sean felt drawn to the little one with the dark hair and big green eyes. He had little to defend himself and his friends, but he did not slow down or falter. He stood tall and held his ground, and Sean thought he was the most handsome man in the world.

The odd attraction took him by surprise, but the draw was powerful. When one of the rogue wolves went after this beauty Sean nearly lost his mind. It was then that he began to understand the significance of this small man.

His blood spilled, and the scent hit the air, and Sean felt rage overtaking him. A swamp of pure fury drowned all other thoughts and concerns. He raced toward him and grabbed the bastard wolf who dared to harm him. Sean ripped him away, but not before the wolf tore into the young man. His pain and suffering drove Sean to the edge of insanity as he destroyed the wolf, tearing him limb from limb and howling to the depths of his despair.

Eamon finished the last of them and stood and watched as Sean annihilated the wolf who had attacked the man. Eamon shifted and called to Sean who moved toward him regaining his senses and then shifted to stand next to him.

"They're finished." Eamon declared. "We need to take care of the humans." Sean turned, and at that moment, his eyes met the eyes of the handsome young human. Surprise and pain filled the young man's gaze before he went limp and dropped down next to his friends.

“Do you think he knew what he was looking at?” Eamon asked as Sean rushed to the little human and lifted him into his arms. This man was his responsibility.

“Call for assistance and stay with them.” Sean indicated the two men still lying unconscious at their feet.

“What about him?” Eamon nodded toward the man in Sean’s arms.

“He’s mine Eamon. He’s my mate.” He said, and shock exploded across Eamon’s face.

”Damn, I’m sorry Sean. I’m sorry he was hurt.” Eamon seemed to think he should have done more, but they did all they could at the time. ”I recognize these four. They’re followers of Jaron.” He pointed to the one Sean had killed. ”That’s Cory, an enforcer mentored by Jaron, and the others are pack members. The man is driving people to do madness.”

“It will likely continue until a leader is chosen. Someone needs to take the helm and soon.” Sean retorted.

“Take him home and I’ll meet you there after I make some sense of this mess.” Eamon began to howl calling for his brother wolves and soon his howl was returned and movement in the forest signaled their approach. Sean took off as Eamon bent to tend to the two humans.

Sean pulled the man tight to his body, holding him secure as he raced through the forest to the house on the lake. He wasn’t thinking clearly and acting sporadic, but that was the effect of meeting his mate in the middle of something horrific. So many problems could arise, not the least of which was the fact that his mate saw him shift.

His mate’s blood was driving Sean out of his mind. He could hear his heart beating

and his breath was slow and steady and it was the only thing keeping him somewhat clear-headed and logical. His mate needed him, and he needed him to be stable and focused, not caught in a frenzy of emotion.

The other two humans would be taken to the hospital, and Eamon would weave some sort of explanation for their condition. Not wanting to raise fears of killer wolves in the forest, he would probably steer them in the direction of bears or bobcats. There were no bear or bobcat shifters in the area, so there would be no danger of one being shot by an overzealous human.

He dashed up the steps of the deck and entered through the sliding glass doors. He took several deep breaths drawing in the sweet heady scent of his mate and letting it calm and center him. Looking down into the man's face he felt his heart tremble at the exquisiteness even in the midst of this blood and terror, he looked both serene and striking.

He let himself take it in the importance, the difficulty, the magnificence of what lay before him. Human mates were rare where he came from so he was not certain how to move forward but he trusted Fate to show him the way.

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“They’re dead.” The young wolf reported.

“Cory killed the humans trespassing on our land?” Jaron snapped at him.

”No, Cory and the others, four in total, they”re all dead.” Jaron took the cup of coffee he was holding and threw it across the room, striking the wall and smashing it into pieces, and narrowly missing the young wolf.

“How is that possible?” He shouted. “Did the humans have weapons? I was told they were fishing and camping on the shore with no visible defenses.” Jaron moved to tower over the young wolf, intimidating him successfully. He cowered and dropped his head.

“Eamon and another wolf interfered and saved the humans. Eamon also reported the incident to the elders.” The young wolf’s voice grew softer and softer as Jaron’s anger escalated.

”They hid the fact it was a wolf attack?” He questioned, and the young wolf nodded. Jaron was more infuriated by the fact he hadn’t been able to start a war with the humans than he was with the death of his four men. His hand shot out and grabbed the young wolf by the throat and began to squeeze.

He fought and scratched at Jaron’s fingers around his neck but could not remove them and could not draw a breath. Jaron stared crazily into the young wolf’s eyes and continued to tighten his grip. Then, suddenly, he threw the young wolf across the room.

"Get out of my sight." He growled and turned his back on the wolf, who was struggling to get to his feet. He fell several times before making his way out the door. Jaron held no concern for the condition of the young wolf and quickly walked over and slammed the door shut.

"That was unnecessary." An older wolf commented as he walked out of the kitchen and stepped into the living room with Jaron.

"I didn't see you trying to stop me." Jaron shot back, still pissed by the failure last night.

"I didn't say that I cared, I simply told you that it was unnecessary and a waste of your energy. Anger without control is chaos and chaos will never lead this pack." The older wolf stated and took a seat on the couch. Jaron stomped over and sat in one of the chairs. This was an elder and it was prudent for him to listen even if he was exploding with the need to kill something or someone.

"Two of the humans were taken to the hospital, and the third was taken by Eamon's friend, Sean Brendon." The man told him.

"Why would he take him?"

"It's rumored that he saw them shift."

"That could mean death for the human." Jaron flashed an evil smile, suddenly feeling so much more hopeful in his endeavors than he had been a few minutes before. "Is he someone important or well-known?" He could only hope.

"He's a local and well-liked from what I hear."

"Good, that's good." He started to laugh.

Lowell was regaining consciousness by the time they reached the lake house. The man or wolf rather brought him inside and took him into a bedroom and laid him down on the bed. He then went into an attached bath and got a wet washcloth and towel.

When his vision cleared, he could see that the man was no longer naked but was wearing a pair of loose-fitting sweats. He had jet-black hair that hung straight and was swept back from his face. His face was tanned and firm with hard angles and deep shadows. It was his eyes, though, that transfixed. They held the fire and warmth that pulled him closer and kept him staring. This was definitely the man from his dreams, but Lowell wasn't sure what to make of that.

Lowell just lay there watching the activity not sure what was happening. He didn't know where he was, who this man really was or why he was in this house. His panic started to churn slowly in his gut as the man began cleaning Lowell's wounds. He wasn't hurt bad just some deep scratches. He was very lucky, and he knew it.

"Where are my friends?" Lowell croaked out the few words finding it hard to breathe and to speak clearly. The man had been one of the two who had saved them but in his mind Lowell had seen this man as a wolf. He may have been hallucinating or tapping into his dream world.

"They're being cared for don't worry." The man's voice was deep and easy it was a voice Lowell could listen to forever. His look, his scent, his tone and his touch lulled Lowell into the twilight of peace. It was the same feeling of peace and security he felt in his dream.

"Why am I here?"

"I wanted to speak with you about what happened." The voice gently washed over him, much like the touch of the soft washcloth. "The one that lay on the ground the

one you two were protecting is most serious, but he will be okay. The other is in a condition much like you.” Lowell appreciated that he told him the situation rather than trying to keep it from him. ”You were very brave. What is your name?”

“Lowell French.” He saw no reason not to tell him. “We were going to spend the long weekend camping and fishing.” His tone fell with the realization that all their plans had been torched the moment those beasts entered the clearing. “Wolves don’t usually act like that. Were they diseased?”

“My name is Sean Brendon and I’m here visiting a friend we were out in the woods when we heard you and your friends.” He was being very careful with his words and Lowell wondered why.

”Patrick was on the ground, and John stood with me.” Lowell wanted them to have names and not simply identified as his friends.

The man stopped what he was doing and focused on Lowell capturing his gaze and holding it. “None of you ran or panicked you all did your best and you survived. You were prepared to live or die together. It was impressive. You’re a good man Lowell French and you have good friends.”

Lowell found himself blushing under the praise of this man who he did not know and had never truly met. This stranger was eliciting all kinds of feelings and emotions, and they were nice, satisfying feelings. Sean took the washcloth and towel into the bathroom and then returned with a soft t-shirt and helped Lowell put it on.

“Thank you.” He said realizing how good it felt to have a clean shirt on. Lowell went to sit up and Sean instantly helped him into a comfortable position with his back against the pillows. Sean took a seat on the edge of the bed at his side.

“How are you feeling?”

"Good considering what I went through." Lowell took stock of his body and was surprised by his lack of pain and discomfort. "Did you give me anything for the pain?"

"Do you have pain?"

"No, that's why I thought you might have given me something."

"You may still be in shock, and if so, the pain will come later, but your wounds are not deep, so I think you'll be fine overall." Lowell couldn't believe that he had taken on four monster wolves and just got a few scratches out of the effort.

"Thanks again for helping us. I doubt any of us would have survived without you and your friend." Lowell suddenly felt the seriousness of what had happened and how it could have turned out. "When can I go home? When can I see Patrick and John?"

"It would probably be best if you stayed here until morning, and I'll keep an eye on you just to make sure you're okay. Your things are being gathered, and what's salvageable will be taken along with your vehicle to the ranger station." Sean took his hand and held it, which was exactly what Lowell needed. The sensation of strength and support radiated through his body from the simple touch.

"Tomorrow I'll take you home and I'll arrange to have your things returned to you." That sounded fair enough so Lowell nodded and then suddenly without warning he couldn't help blurting out his thoughts.

"You were a wolf. You and your friend were big, ferocious wolves. You tore that monster off me and killed it. I saw your friend go head to head with those beasts. You're a wolf." Lowell paused and stared at the man seated next to him and waited for a denial or an explanation that would make everything seem normal, but silence ensued for the next couple of minutes.

Sean took a deep breath and first glanced away looking toward the door and then turned back to Lowell and caught his gaze once again. “Tell me what you saw.” He said finally. Lowell waited and sat up a little straighter, but he noticed Sean did not release his hand which seemed nice. “Start at the beginning when you first realized you were in danger.”

Lowell started further back and explained their arrival and then the discussion about the fishing gear that Patrick forgot in the car and his use of smores to calm everyone down. That brought a shadow of a smile to the man’s face, and it softened those dark eyes and that firm jaw making him even more attractive.

“We turned in early since the mood was a bit tense. I really had no idea that Patrick and John were interested in the same girl. I would not have brought her up if I’d known.” He explained himself and Sean nodded his understanding.

“It was after two when I heard something outside the tent. It was loud enough and out of place that it woke me.” He fidgeted, feeling a little tension overtake him as he relived the incident. The memory was charged and painful.

“It’s okay, you’re safe. Take your time.” He must have noticed his stress, so Lowell tried to bury the discomfort a little deeper.

”I grabbed the bear spray and the flashlight and stepped out of my tent to look around. Everything got too quiet at that point. The tension was building, and I knew something was watching us I could feel it.” Another pause, but he made it brief. ”I roused out Patrick and John and they joined me, but we couldn’t see anything for several seconds. Then one of those beasts broke out of the woods and we simply focused on survival at that point.”

“They gave you no chance for escape?”

"No, they were going to kill us. That was made very clear." Lowell looked squarely at Sean and continued but was careful with what he said and how he said it. "You arrived, and the power shifted. They were still coming at us, and the bear spray helped, but only temporarily. John's stick kept them off balance a little, but still, Patrick was hit with a set of claws that tore a big slice in his upper arm." The memory of that wound was upsetting, and fear for his friend was renewed.

"Is Patrick going to be okay?" He pleaded fearing that Sean might be sugar coating the truth.

"You got pressure on it in time, he will be okay." Sean squeezed his hand and unexpectedly brought it to his lips and kissed Lowell's knuckles. "Patrick and John are both going to be fine." Lowell needed to hear that. He let out a long breath before continuing.

"We stood over Patrick and did our best to protect him and ourselves, and I watched you." He stopped and coughed, clearing his throat, which gave him a moment to gather his words. "I was on the ground next to Patrick, and I watched you kill that wolf. You were a wolf, but as you moved and walked toward your friend, you slowly turned into the man you are now. Your friend shifted as well. You were wolves and then you were men, and you were naked."

Lowell again expected an immediate denial and explanation, but like before, he got a steady stare and silence. "Let me get you something to drink. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"I'll make it whiskey."

Sean went to the kitchen and poured himself a whiskey. He drank it in one go and then refilled his glass and poured one for Lowell. He loved that name. It was a gentle,

sweet name for his sweet mate.

His desire and regard for the young man steadily increased the longer they stayed in close proximity. The pull was powerful and filled him with the urge to stay by his side. He could see that Lowell was experiencing some of the same.

He held tight to Sean's hand throughout his report of the incident, even though it was clear that Lowell was experiencing flashbacks and should be afraid of Sean. There was no fear in his eyes or his actions. He worried about his friends and struggled with confusion, but he was very clear in stating what he saw.

Sean had to decide what he was going to tell him. He didn't want to start their relationship with lies, but Lowell was far from being in a state of mind to accept the fact that the world isn't quite like he thought it was.

He took the two glasses and headed back to the bedroom. Lowell was still seated leaning back against the pillows and waiting. His wounds were healing rapidly due to his mate, being close by and tending to the injury. His healing abilities were enhanced by Sean's presence, but could he tell him that, probably not right now. There were so many things he wanted to share but Lowell had been through too much as it was.

Sean handed him the whiskey and sat back down on the edge of the bed. Lowell took a long swig and seemed to enjoy the warmth and the flavor. Sean set his glass on the bedside table and took hold of Lowell's hand once again. "You were attacked by rogue wolves." He began and watched Lowell's eyes and expression gauging his acceptance and his grasp of the information.

"Eamon and I were out for a run. I am an enforcer with my pack in Saco, Maine, and Eamon is an enforcer with his pack here in Salida. We often work together on issues regarding the safety and security of our community."

“What is your collective community?” Lowell had been through hell, but his mind was sharp.

“Your eyes did not deceive you.” Sean did not want to overwhelm him, but he didn’t want to insult his intelligence either. “There’s much more going on here than you’re prepared to understand. Just let me say that humans are not the only species existing in this world.” Lowell’s eyes grew and his breath caught as he grabbed and held Sean’s hand with both of his.

”You’re a wolf shifter; both you and your friend Eamon are wolf shifters,” Lowell said with clear conviction, and Sean knew at that moment that he had to be completely honest. Any lies or subterfuge would work against him when he sought to secure Lowell’s love and trust.

“You brought me back here instead of sending me with Patrick and John because you knew I saw something that I shouldn’t have.” Lowell was extremely sharp, and Sean found himself both proud and conflicted.

”I brought you here because I wanted to speak with you.” Sean was going to tell him everything and hope for the best. ”What do you know about the town that you live in. I know you were born here, and you grew up in care here in Salida in three different foster placements. According to all reports, you’re a civic-minded, well-rounded, and well-liked individual. You care about your city, and you care about your neighbors.”

”I worked on a ranch in Wyoming for one summer and couldn’t get used to the dryness of the land or the cold nature of the people, so I moved back. I like this town and most of the people in it. You seem to know a lot about me, but it’s just the surface. It’s what’s written in reports and stored in files. It’s just the parts of me that people see.” That response brought Sean’s attention to a keen focus.

”I know you’re concerned about sharing your secret with me, so I’ll share one with

you. I have a heightened sense of perception, insight, and sensitivity.” He began, and Sean was intrigued. ”I usually see things for what they are and can predict outcomes with staggering accuracy. My friends call it my gut feelings, and they never question it, but it”s more than that.”

Sean looked at Lowell closely and scented him, taking in every air and nuance, having an idea as to what he was eluding. There was something there, something he”d missed before. Lowell”s eyes held an ethereal ring that was very light and barely there but noticeable if you looked closely. ”Your eyes, they have the obscure ring.”

”You”re only the second person to ever notice. The first person was an old man who I met in the park downtown when I was twelve. He explained a lot of things to me, wished me luck, and then left.” Lowell was blowing his mind at the moment. Instead of Lowell being the one to have to process and catch up, it was Sean who was suddenly in the middle of something he had never imagined.

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Sean couldn't believe what he was looking at, but it made everything clear. Lowell's wounds had started to heal before they'd left the clearing, and his instincts while fighting were spot on. He fended off the wolves longer than should have been possible, but clearly, he could see what was coming and reacted accordingly. Nothing was blatantly obvious, but it was there, and Sean had written it off to being near his mate and simple adrenaline.

"You're part of a legacy of magic."

"The old man said I was charmed but only lightly so." He smiled but it looked grim.

"You knew shifters lived here?"

"No." He said quite definitively. "I knew there was something strange in town; I could feel it. I suspected there were mystical beings by the energy I sensed coming off some people, but I knew nothing for certain until tonight when I watched you shift."

"There's a situation happening in Salida of which the human population is blissfully unaware, and it has the potential to blow this town apart." Sean took a sip of his whiskey before he continued. "It would seem that you, Patrick, and John found yourselves in the middle of the nastiest parts of the upheaval."

"Is it a fight for dominance? I felt a power rush when the wolves attacked us not the true organic kind that can stop you in your tracks but rather it was a forced sense of supremacy the kind that bullies employ." Lowell interjected and again Sean was impressed with his shrewd awareness. "I would add that the rush of power dissipated

when you and your friend Eamon arrived.”

Just then, the front door opened, and Eamon called out to Sean. ”In the guest room.” He called back and did not let go of Lowell’s hand; rather, he moved closer to him when Eamon entered the room.

Eamon took in the scene and nodded to both Sean and Lowell before taking a seat in the chair off to Lowell’s left against the wall. Eamon understood the relationship between him and Lowell and was careful not to get too close.

“How are Patrick and John?” Lowell asked eagerly for an update.

”John is doing fine. He’s awake and moving around. Patrick had some deep wounds to his upper left arm, but the doctors have him stitched and bandaged, and currently, he’s asleep.” Eamon told him, and Lowell was visibly relieved.

”Thank you,” Lowell said, and Eamon smiled with a nod.

Sean then went ahead and gave Eamon a rundown of what he and Lowell had discussed so far. He, too, was surprised by Lowell’s link to magic. Sean didn’t blame him when he leaned forward and looked deep into Lowell’s eyes.

”That’s so cool,” Eamon commented as he sat back.

“I was just explaining the trouble that has come to pass and that more than the paranormal will be effected by it.” Sean could feel Lowell’s struggle to process and keep up and he wished he could take this slower. Unfortunately, most of the information was already out of the bag so it was necessary to complete this explanation and persuade him to keep their secret.

”What is happening?” That’s a logical question from Lowell.

”The Salida pack alpha recently died and left no heir. There is a challenge for leadership coming up, and many are positioning themselves for a chance to become one of the three chosen by the elders to compete.” Sean explained and then handed it off to Eamon for further detail.

“The wise ones are taking their time coming to a decision, so my people are becoming restless, and some are looking to cause trouble or chaos in order to push their candidate to the forefront. It’s messy and violent, and I’m sorry that you and your friends got caught up in it.” That was clear and concise.

The discussion went on a little further, with Eamon answering all of his questions and explaining the leadership challenge and the factions involved. Sean continued to hold Lowell’s hand and reassured him throughout. Then, the time came to make their point. Sean took over, and Eamon provided backup as he approached the subject of secrecy.

“It is vitally important to us and to the human population that you keep this secret that you now hold. If even a theory of the existence of paranormal beings got out into the mainstream, it would be devastating . . . for everyone.” Sean made his pitch. ”We are asking you to tell no one what you saw. Don’t allude to it, don’t write about it, don’t joke about it, and please tell no one.”

”It could blow up this town and this world if the truth got out,” Eamon added in a dire tone. Lowell stared at the two of them for several seconds and then shook his head vigorously.

“I would never share this information with anyone. It would be disastrous and I don’t need magics to see that.” He continued to shake his head. “You have my word I will say nothing.”

“Thank you sweetheart.” Sean leaned over and took Lowell into his arms and pulled

him close. He didn't balk or resist, which was a wonderful feeling. Eamon took that moment to leave and closed the door behind him. They held each other quietly just drinking in the significance of this minute. Sean knew that bonds and connections were forming, and he was certain that Lowell felt it too.

"Why don't you stretch out and try to get some sleep? You've had a night and then some. Give yourself time to relax and get used to your new reality." Sean finished with a smile as he stood and began tucking Lowell into bed. Lowell grabbed Sean's hand and looked up at him with concern, as if he were apprehensive.

"Where will you be?"

"I'll take the sofa in the living room. I won't be far away." He told him sensing that a fear was rising. "You're safe here, Lowell."

"Stay, please stay." Lowell pulled at his arm and then reached for his other arm, grabbing hold and trying to pull him closer. "Don't leave me." Sean could not ignore those words. His mate was begging for him, and he would not deny him. Lowell moved over and pulled back the comforter. "I won't bother you; I just want you close. I need you near me, please."

"There is no way in which you could ever bother me, Lowell. You are a lovely young man, and I will stay with you if that is what you wish."

"I need you Sean your touch soothes me, and your smell makes me feel relaxed and safe." Lowell had closed his eyes but opened them when Sean switched off the lights and got into bed beside him. "Thanks Sean, thank you so much."

"My pleasure, love." Sean gathered him close and tucked Lowell's head against his shoulder. There was nowhere on earth he'd rather be.

Lowell snuggled into Sean's side and wrapped his arm around him. He was resting his head on Sean's shoulder and could feel the steady beat of his heart and the rhythm of his breath. He'd never felt this safe and secure in the whole of his life, and he did not understand it at all.

Even though he did not understand what he was feeling it did not stop him from taking complete advantage of this man. Sean was pure perfection, and he'd give his left arm to have a chance with a man like him. He was a wolf shifter that had to be taken into consideration but in Lowell's mind it just made him sexier and more mysterious.

Sean was the man from his vivid dreams, there was no doubt, and his dreams were usually messages. The wolf was meant to be. He could feel it in his bones, and Lowell would not deny what he felt, but did Sean feel the same.

His touch was gentle, and his treatment was kind, but Lowell lamented that the only heat being generated was from him. His dream lover was just that, only a dream. It was time to clear his head and his feelings and focus on getting through this new reality of wolves and conflicts.

It was time to buck up and begin to handle himself in a more masculine manner. He should never have begged him to stay. It was so unlike him and left him feeling a bit cringy. His overthinking got the best of him, and he started to pull away, realizing that Sean probably wanted some personal space but would be too kind to say so under the circumstances.

He no more than lifted his head and began pulling back, and Sean tightened his hold on him, preventing him from moving away. "I like you right where you are." He mumbled under his breath and placed a kiss on his forehead before settling back against the pillows. Now, Lowell didn't know what to think, so he settled in and closed his eyes. He'd think about it later.

Eamon prepared breakfast the following morning. Sean had arranged for some clothes to be dropped off for Lowell, which he greatly appreciated. He offered to pay, but Sean was adamant that he accept the gift, and after a little back and forth, Lowell accepted with a heartfelt thank you.

He didn't like being in anyone's debt, but this was small, considering he owed Sean for saving his life the night before. He was feeling like himself again, except the memory of the wolf attack remained on the edges of his mind, along with the fear that more was to come for this community.

Sean was a perfect gentleman the previous night and had not pushed beyond a few kisses, chaste kisses. Lowell wasn't sure how he felt about it. The dream had set him up for expectations that were not a part of reality, unfortunately. Sean was attentive and caring, but he didn't get the sense that he was interested in the way Lowell was interested.

They sat down, and Eamon served steak and eggs, a favorite of Lowell's but something he rarely indulged. Sean took good care of him, pouring his coffee and helping him get comfortably seated before taking his own seat next to him.

Eamon sat across from them. Eamon was a nice guy, serious and intense but a nice guy. He didn't interest Lowell the way Sean did although he was handsome and strong he did not give off the sexy vibe that radiated from Sean.

Sean and Eamon were discussing the shifters from last night and theorizing their intent and what they hoped to gain by it. "They were probably drunk or high or both and using the turbulent time as an excuse to hurt people." Eamon threw it out there, and it sounded plausible.

"But that doesn't account for the level of hatred that I felt coming off them as they went after their human targets. They were angry and they wanted those men dead."

Sean gave his opinion.

"The one you call Cory wasn't angry; he was gleefully cutting us to ribbons." Lowell joined during a pause. "He felt satisfied like he was completing an assignment, and he was going to get a gold star." Sean and Eamon stopped and considered his words for a moment while Lowell finished his coffee.

"He was working for someone," Eamon said, and Sean nodded his head in agreement. "But why the humans? It would result in a bloodbath if it got around town that there were rabid wolves in the mountains killing people."

"Maybe a bloodbath is what they were aiming for."

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Sean was freshly amazed at his mate's astute abilities. His magic may be light, but it was still effective. "Did you happen to get a read on any of the other wolves?" He asked.

"They were following Cory blindly. Cory was not angry, but his companions were plenty angry. They wanted our blood, and they wanted it to be painful. Somehow, they felt justified in what they were doing as if we had affronted them in some way." Lowell was much calmer and seemed to be handling everything quite well, or perhaps he was burying it.

Sean couldn't get a clear sense of Lowell's feelings or understanding. Fate always blurred things a little in an attempt to balance the relationship. He seemed okay, and Sean would have to go with that for now.

"Who do you think Cory was working for?" Sean turned to Eamon, hoping he had a name that they could pursue.

"Could be anyone." He said and that was not what Sean wanted to hear. "Some of the elders are lobbying for individuals as well as locals pushing for their own desires."

Eamon stared mindlessly at his coffee cup for a few seconds, deep in thought, before looking up and capturing Sean's gaze. "There are those that are already considered contenders who may be looking for an advantage. It's just too many possibilities. We need to be able to narrow it down in order to end this particular madness before all hell breaks loose."

They discussed the many possibilities further and made some theories regarding the

challenge. Lowell asked if Sean would drop him at the hospital so he could visit his friends, and although it was an innocent request, Sean felt a tightening in his stomach at the thought of being separated from his mate. It was ridiculous, and he had to deal with it, but still, it was going to be damn difficult to let him go.

"Of course." He responded tightly. He heard Eamon's phone go off, and he took the call right there since it was from his friend who was overseeing the vote.

"Who did they choose?" Eamon asked. Sean was confused by the sudden look of shock on Eamon's face that then turned to aggravation. "Thank you and keep me posted." He closed the call and after a few seconds of a very heavy silence he spoke.

"They've named three contenders for the position of Alpha, and they are Jaron Micheals, Murphy Lewiston, and Eamon O'Hara." The last name caught him by surprise, but it was the best choice, in Sean's opinion.

"Congratulations, man. I couldn't imagine anyone better suited to the position." Sean patted him on the shoulder. Eamon just kept shaking his head.

"This is going to be a fucking mess." Eamon stated. Sean turned to Lowell, who was silently taking it all in.

"I'll take you to your friends, but I'd like for us to have lunch downtown when you're finished. Call me when you're ready, and I'll pick you up." Sean couldn't leave Lowell without securing another point of contact. His wolf was already upset that he hadn't pushed to claim Lowell last night, but Lowell wasn't in a headspace to tolerate a claiming. But now, in the clear light of day, he was questioning his decision to wait.

"Oh, okay." He was too noncommittal for Sean's liking. They had shared some close and tender moments last night and he was under the impression that they were

working on a relationship. Suddenly it seemed that Lowell was attempting to step back. Sean would have to make himself clearer in regard to their relationship and where he saw it going. He would leave no questions in terms of his regard and intentions.

"If you have time this morning," Eamon spoke to Sean. "I have to go to the council building and meet with the elders, and I'd appreciate it if you could accompany me. I don't know what to expect and I'd like to have someone I trust there with me."

"Certainly, of course. I'll drop Lowell at the hospital and meet you at the Council building." Sean agreed.

"Thanks."

"How in the hell was Eamon O'Hara brought into the mix? No one mentioned his name to me." Jaron shouted at no one in particular, but everyone in the room cringed. He grabbed one of his men by the shirt collar and brought him up close face to face. "Did you know they were considering Eamon?"

The man shook his head. "I did not know, sir." Jaron released him and shoved him out of his way.

"He won't be as easy as Murphy, but we'll deal with him." Jaron seemed to be talking to himself now. He walked over to the window and stared out. "Get me everything you can on Eamon, including his daily schedule. We'll deal with him, and he won't be a problem." He then stopped suddenly and turned to regard the men standing behind him. "Find those humans who escaped death last night and kill them. Make sure everyone knows it was a wolf attack."

"Two are in the hospital, and the third is with Eamon and his friend Sean." One of the men pointed out. Which would make a wolf attack rather difficult.

Jaron looked like he was about to explode. "Don't tell me what you can't do, Harold; tell me when you have it done." Everyone quickly exited the room.

Lowell was eager to see his friends, but he was sad to leave Sean. The drive to town was uncomfortably quiet, and Lowell wondered what Sean was thinking. Unlike with others, he was finding it hard to get any sort of sense of the man. His mood and emotions were clouded.

"Thank you for everything, Sean. My friends and I will stay out of the woods until the pack issue settles, and you have my word. I will never breathe a word of what I know." Lowell wanted to get that out there before he was to be dropped off. He doubted if Sean would follow through on lunch since Eamon was finding himself in a situation.

Sean will have to give the majority of his time and energy to his friend and Lowell completely understood. Lowell knew he needed to give him the space to walk away. He pined for his dream man, but it didn't look too promising. That thought brought on additional sadness and Lowell was getting fed up with all his unwanted emotions.

"What's wrong Lowell I thought we were getting on together quite well. I thought we had a connection. Why are you pulling away from me? Are you afraid?" The sudden questions and the fact that Sean pulled to the side of the road and parked had Lowell wondering once again what was happening between them. He felt a constant growing attraction and respect for someone he knew very little about.

He knew he was a shifter from Maine, and he was an enforcer in his pack but he knew very few details and yet it felt as if he'd known Sean Brendon for years. He knew him on a level that was not just basic information it was spiritual, and he shuddered to say the word because it was so fake in most cases. But what he felt for Sean could be described in no other way.

"I'm afraid of those crazy wolves, but I'm not afraid of you." Lowell turned to him, and Sean reached over and took his hand while looking deep into his eyes.

"I won't let anything happen to you." He swore and squeezed Lowell's hand.

"I know." Lowell nodded his head.

"No, I don't think you do know." Sean glanced away for a moment and then turned back to regard him with an intensity that had Lowell catching his breath. "What's going on, Lowell? You've been pulling away from me. I felt it this morning when we woke, and I felt it at breakfast, and I'm feeling it now." Lowell was taken aback by his statement.

"I didn't want to impose on you. I was, a lot, last night. . . and I know it. Normally, I'm more pulled together, less grasping, and needy, but I just lost my head and was all over you. I had no right to make demands on you." Sean attempted to speak, but Lowell kept going.

"I am trying to give you space and let you know that I'm not your responsibility. I appreciate all that you have done for me and will never forget it, but I also understand that you have a life, and you need to get on with it." Lowell took a breath and dropped his gaze.

"Don't pull away from me, and you have every right to make demands." He said firmly and then continued by detailing his own feelings on the subject. Lowell realized he'd read it all wrong. "I don't need space, and I'm not afraid of a little responsibility. There is much more to my concern for you than simply being a nice guy." He stopped and appeared to be contemplating his next words. Lowell could see the strain on his face.

"I thought I was making myself clear last night. I know now that I should have put

my feelings into words and not assumed that my action would be interpreted correctly.” He paused again as Lowell held onto every word. He didn’t want to make any rash assumptions, but this sounded serious.

Sean stared at him silently and then suddenly pulled him into his arms and kissed him. Sean wrapped Lowell in his arms and took his mouth in a kiss that was intense and powerful and so deep Lowell could feel his body trembling to his toes. It was exactly like the sensation he felt in his dream with his dream Sean. His dream had not been a fantasy, it was a prediction.

The kiss went on and on and got more and more intimate, going deep and ravenous. Lowell had not known a kiss like this, but he loved it. His body reacted, and he tried to calm himself, but it was impossible as long as this gorgeous man was touching him.

”Don’t resist, my love. Feel it, know it, and know that it is me who is making you feel this way.” Sean slid his hand down Lowell’s chest and cupped the hardness pressing against his jeans. The thrill was instant. Lowell caught his breath with a gasp and closed his eyes as Sean took his lips once again.

This was not the actions of a man who wanted space or saw him as too much trouble. This was a man who wanted him, this finely tuned sculpted warrior, this wild man wanted him, and Lowell was melting on the spot. The taste and the touching and the sexy words and desires flowing from his lips were making Lowell pant with a raging need that grew larger by the second.

Slowly, Sean eased it to an end, pulling back but still holding Lowell in his grip. He trailed kisses down his neck and across his shoulder before taking a deep breath and sitting back in his seat.

”You drive me crazy, baby. Everything about you calls to me, pulls me near, and

makes me want to ravish you. Last night was pure hell, lying there holding you and having to control myself. I wanted you so badly I barely slept, and my wolf paced in my mind all night long, demanding that we claim you.” His gaze remained trained on Lowell, and those eyes were piercing right through him.

“I thought it was just me and I didn’t want my attraction to make you uncomfortable. I didn’t know you felt the same I can’t read you like I can other people.” Lowell admitted his feelings but still kept it low key. Sean started to chuckle softly and turned his head to look at Lowell.

”I can’t read you either.” He said and then paused as if he were considering something. ”It’s Fate’s design.” He paused again. ”We are a fated pair, and you are my mate. When Fate brings a couple together, she keeps the playing field level so that neither partner has an advantage over the other. I can’t touch your mind, and you can’t touch mine. Something that works on everyone else will not work on your mate unless it’s a positive ability like healing.”

”I’m not sure I know what it is you’re talking about,” Lowell spoke haltingly as some of it made sense, but his involvement in it all was not clear.

“You’ve read people around town.” He said and Lowell nodded. “You’ve read shifters.” Again, he nodded. “Have you encountered shifter pairs, Fated shifter pairs?”

”I’ve seen people who were bonded in a way that was beyond what I would describe as normal. Their bodies and their minds and everything about them were in tune with one another. The emotional connection was off the charts. These were people with strange auras and energies, which I now attribute to being paranormal.” Lowell explained as best he could.

“What you witnessed was bonded, fated pairs. They are called mates because they are

predestined to be together and recognize one another by sight and scent. It is amazing, and every wolf shifter has a mate out there somewhere, and they are called Fate's gift.

Not everyone finds their mate, but the majority do, and some settle for someone they care about rather than wait to see if their mate will come to them. I was waiting for my mate; no one would satisfy me but my true mate." He smiled, and it touched Lowell's heart.

"Usually, the mates are both wolves but sometimes a mate is human or another shifter species, but we won't go into that right now. You, Lowell French you are my mate. I knew you when I entered the fight in the clearing." Lowell sat there stunned and confused but he did not doubt him, he believed the things that Sean was telling him.

"I can see why you didn't try to explain this last night." Lowell attempted to lighten the moment. "I recognized you as well once you shifted. I'd seen you in a dream, a very provocative dream." The broad smile returned to Sean's face, and Lowell blushed just a little under the heat. "What does it mean that I am your mate?" He asked.

"It means that you and I are meant to be," Sean stated and then pulled the car back onto the street and continued to the hospital.

"That sounds really nice, but you barely know me."

"I know you. Wolves know their mates. Like I said, I recognized you in the clearing, and I took you home with me because I needed to make sure you were safe and well. It was a driving need." He enunciated each word for effect. "Seeing you attacked and injured was terrifying to watch. I could not lose you." Sean was so serious, and emotions were running high. He was trying to make himself clear, and he wanted Lowell to understand.

Lowell thought back to the couples that he'd observed who were absolutely meant for each other, and it had always amazed him that such couples existed. Now, it would seem that he was part of such a couple, and the thought of it filled him with warmth and excitement.

They pulled into the hospital parking lot, and Sean parked near the door. He squeezed Lowell's hand and leaned over, stealing a kiss that thrilled him to the bone. The man had skills, and he could play Lowell like a fine instrument. The discussion they'd just had was unreal, but Lowell could detect no lies, and Sean's regard for him came through clearly with every touch and every kiss. His instinct was to believe, and his instincts were never wrong.

"Give me a chance, Lowell." He said. "You know we belong together; you can feel it."

"I feel it." He readily admitted. "It was obvious in the way I acted last night. The need for you to be close and to be touching me was burning through me. Nothing satisfied me except having you hold me close." Lowell offered some truths since Sean was being very open. "I don't comprehend everything you've said but I trust you and that's all I need to make my way through it all."

"Thank you, sweetheart." Another kiss and Sean stepped back. "Visit your friends and call me when you're finished."

"I will." Lowell watched him walk away. He looked back at him over his shoulder several times, and Lowell could see the affection. It was real.

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Sean and his wolf did not want to leave their mate, but he had to let him go for a while and let him visit his friends. The pull was fierce, and he knew he wouldn't be able to stay away long. He wondered if the pull was as bad for Lowell. His expression when he dropped him at the hospital looked sad, but he might be reading more into it than was there.

He arrived at the Council house and saw Eamon waiting for him out front. He parked and jogged over to meet him. "I just received some upsetting news." He said when Sean came up to stand beside him.

"What is it?" Sean inquired.

"Murphy's body has been found on the banks of the river deep in the woods. He was murdered. His throat was torn out, but he was drugged first, according to the doctor." Eamon was both angry and saddened.

"Do they have any leads?"

Eamon shook his head. "The scents in the area were obscured by bear scent, which, as you know, is very pungent. They spread it to cover their own scent after they killed him." He glanced down at the pavement beneath his feet and then back at Sean. "Who are these people that could do such a thing? They aren't the people I know. They aren't the people I grew up with."

"What about Jaron and you are they planning to protection for you both?" Sean saw them both as targets.

”Jaron has a few soldiers he hangs around with who volunteered to keep an eye on him, and he is stronger and better capable of fending off an attack than Murphy.” He grunted in disbelief. ”Jaron will lean on the soldiers, I”m sure. As for me, I told them I would prefer to look out for myself. I don”t want soldiers or enforcers tailing me right now. I don”t trust any of them at the moment except for Noah.” Eamon sighed and took a look around. “This mess just keeps getting messier.”

“We”ll figure it out.”

”The meeting with the elders has been postponed. I”m going to meet Noah at the coffee shop over there.” He pointed at the Coffee Cup, a small shop across the street. I”d appreciate it if you came along.”

“Absolutely.”

”I know you have a mate to tend to, and I”m sorry for taking your time, but I don”t have many here that I can trust.” Eamon apologized.

”I”m glad I”m here, and I”ll do everything that I can.” They headed over to the shop when they noticed Noah had arrived.

“They found him, and they have no idea who did it.” The young wolf reported to Jaron.

“Was the Sheriff notified?” Jaron barked.

”Yes, but he is keeping the information on a need-to-know. The locals aren”t aware of the murder.”

”What are you doing to make them aware?” He snapped, walked over to his desk, and sat down. The young wolf was getting increasingly uncomfortable under the scrutiny

of this man. His office was intimidating all on its own with the weapons firearms, knives, swords, and even spears hanging from the walls, along with a few stuffed trophies. It was a dark and ominous place.

“There are people in town asking about Murphy and putting out the theory that he is missing. They are also planting stories of wolf attacks happening in the woods and tying that to Murphy’s disappearance.” He stated, slowly starting to go back toward the door.

“Good.” He said and leaned back in his chair. “Where is Eamon?”

”In town with his friends Sean and Noah at the Coffee Cup.”

”Have them continue to follow him, and if the opportunity arises, they have my permission to kill him. If his friend or Noah gets in the way, kill them as well.”

“Yes, sir.”

Lowell went straight to Patrick’s room after being told that John had discharged earlier that morning. Patrick was still in bad shape and receiving care and Lowell felt bad that they hadn’t been able to do more to protect each other. He was also saddened that Sean and Eamon hadn’t arrived sooner to have spared Patrick his torment.

When he entered the room, he was surprised and delighted to see John seated there. Patrick was still unconscious, with plenty of tubes and needles attached to him. ”How is he, John?”

”He”s been asleep since they brought him in. The doctor said he would probably wake soon, but his body needs time to heal.” John spoke quietly, and his grief was real. ”He”s going to be alright, but it will take time before he gets full use of his arm back.”

"I'm glad he's going to be okay, and I'm glad you weren't seriously hurt," Lowell remarked.

"What about you? How are you doing?" John asked.

"Just a lot of scratches but nothing too bad."

"Yeah, me too." They fell silent for a while and just listened to Patrick's machines working. "Do you remember anything about the attack? I have just fleeting recollections but most everything is a blur until the medics showed up."

"Wild animals are all I remember." Lowell offered, and John nodded his head.

"Where did they take you?"

"I was the most coherent, so I was taken for questioning. Unfortunately, my memory of the attack was not clear." Lowell tap-danced around that question as best he could.

"I remember the two guys at the end. We wouldn't have survived without their help." John remembered Sean and Eamon, but he remembered them as men.

"They're really good guys, and you're right. We were lucky they came along." Lowell stayed for about an hour and excused himself once Patrick's parents arrived. He told John he'd be back tomorrow and said his goodbyes.

Seeing Patrick so vulnerable and so injured was hard and left him with a feeling of guilt for escaping with just minor injuries. Patrick had a loving and supportive family, and they would see him through this. Lowell went down to the cafeteria and got a cup of coffee.

He sat outside on one of the benches and pulled out his cell phone and thought for a

minute. His apartment wasn't far from the hospital, it wouldn't be difficult to walk, but Sean had made him promise to call when he was finished. Lowell decided he had to call and besides he was keen to see Sean again and explore their new relationship.

Sean checked his watch a couple of times, expecting Lowell to call, but nothing has come up so far. He'd promised to call, so Sean had to trust that he would. The meeting with Noah was a strange one. He'd been on the scene shortly after Murphy was found, and it was obvious to him that Murphy had been killed elsewhere and dumped by the river.

"The Sheriff is one of ours, so he's managing this incident in a way that does not alarm the human population. But someone is going around town spreading rumors about the case and implicating rabid wolves." Eamon told Sean.

"Someone is sewing chaos in order to assume control of the pack." Sean speculated, and both men agreed.

"Jaron has some shading fucks working for him who might be okay with clearing the field for their boss." Noah shared. "The Sheriff is looking into it, but it could take days to build any sort of case, and in the meantime, people are dying and being attacked."

"The attack on the fishermen last night was a setup," Eamon told him. "The wolves went in prepared to do maximum carnage."

"This Jaron, is he capable of trying something like this?" Sean asked.

"He's on the list to be considered for Alpha, and he's one of the older enforcers who have been on the job for over a century. I couldn't imagine him lowering himself to killing his opponents or hurting innocent humans just to get ahead." Eamon defended, but there was uneasiness in his eyes.

“What about the shady fucks he’s hired?” Sean reiterated Noah’s comment.

“That was strange.” Eamon admitted. “He hired them from a pack out east he never gave a name. Jaron sponsored them so they were considered okay on his word alone.”

”Avoid Jaron and his men until we figure this out,” Sean asked, but Eamon had other ideas.

“I can’t just sit by and do nothing.” He stated. “Noah and I will go out to the scene and see if we can discern anything maybe the Sheriff and his men missed something. We will go deep and wide and see if we come up with anything.” Eamon was adamant so Sean did not comment. “You go take care of your mate and I’ll call you if we find anything.”

“Call if you need me, Lowell will understand. He’s a smart guy.” Sean bragged a little.

”Go be with him.” Eamon insisted. ”I can feel your angst from here.” He chuckled, and just then, Sean’s phone went off. ”There he is now. We’ll see you when we get back.” Sean waved them off and answered his phone.

“Hello baby, are you ready for me?” He said sweetly while walking to his car.

“I’m ready for you.” Lowell shot back with a giggle that was music to Sean’s ears.

Lowell could not believe that he’d giggle on the phone. It just came out as a thrill shot through him at Sean’s playful banter. The man was digging deeper and deeper into the recesses of Lowell’s heart. He sat on the bench and waited impatiently for Sean to arrive.

Suddenly, the need to be near him again was on the rise, and he felt his heart begin to

pound with expectations. There was a connection. He could not deny that, nor would he. The draw he felt was body, mind, and soul, and Sean's description of Fate's hand at work in their relationship was making more sense by the second.

He kept his eyes on the street out front, excitedly watching for Sean's arrival. The desire to see him, touch him, and hold him again eating him up. It had only been a little over an hour or so, but it felt like they'd been separated for days.

"Aren't you Lowell French?" A man he did not know walked up to stand in front of him, blocking his view of the street. Lowell did not answer immediately. He was getting an odd vibe from the man. "You and your friends were attacked by wolves yesterday at the campsite by the lake." He spoke as a fact, not a question, and he was loud enough to garner the attention of several people standing nearby.

"I don't know what you're talking about. I think you are mistaken." Lowell went with his gut and attempted to back out of the conversation.

"No, it's you; I know that it's you." He insisted and took a step closer to Lowell, who was still seated on the bench. "Wolves, rabid wolves, nearly killed you all and put your friend Patrick in a coma."

"It was a wondering bear who came looking for food and we got in the way. Nothing more. It was unfortunate but not a crisis next time we will store our supplies more carefully and Patrick is not in a coma." Lowell explained so everyone around could hear.

The man was becoming agitated when I became clear his version of events was not being taken seriously and took another step toward Lowell. Lowell leaned back on the bench unable to get up and leave with the man standing so close.

"What's going on here?" Lowell was relieved to hear Sean's voice and the man

quickly took a step back and pasted on a fake smile.

“Nothing going on.” He said. “I was just asking him about the attack yesterday at the lake, but he doesn’t seem to have any real information.” The man nodded to Lowell and walked away.

“Do you know him, Lowell?” Sean seemed tense.

”No, and I could sense he wasn’t being honest,” Lowell told him what the man had said and how he had responded. ”I thought the bear made the most sense.”

”You did well, my love.” Sean put his arm around Lowell’s shoulders and began walking to where he’d parked just down the street.

”Before we go to lunch, do you mind stopping at my apartment for a few minutes so I could freshen up?”

“No problem.” He responded easily. “I’d love to see your place.”

Sean did not go into detail about the man accosting his mate so as to not upset Lowell, but he recognized him. He was a pack member one who has been supporting Jaron for the position of Alpha. Obviously, he was one of the people Noah spoke of who were trying to stir up trouble between the humans and the pack.

Once they were seated and on their way, he reached over and took Lowell’s hand. He enjoyed touching his mate, feeling the life and vitality beneath his fingers and knowing with just a touch that his mate was well and secure.

He also knew that the regard and the growing love he felt for this small human was reciprocated. Lowell was not hiding his feelings and although he couldn’t see everything, he could feel Lowell’s passion and desire.

“How were your friends?” He asked.

”Patrick is still unconscious, but the doctor said he is recovering well. John has been discharged, but he was sitting with Patrick when I got there.” Lowell paused for a second before adding. ”I think he feels guilty.”

“For what reason? You all did your absolute best. There is nothing to feel guilty about.” Sean didn’t see it.

”The girl,” Lowell stated. ”They were fighting over a girl, and then we almost died.” Sean nodded his understanding. ”But Patrick will get better, and their friendship will go on, and Cheryl will probably be forgotten. From what I understand, she didn’t visit either of them in the hospital, so the attraction couldn’t have amounted to much.”

“They’ll work it out and there will be many more fishing trips in the future.” Sean added. Lowell agreed and the gloom he was feeling regarding John soon dissipated. They soon were parked out front of Lowell’s apartment. It was three floors with the bottom being commercial spaces and rented to several different shops the top two floors were apartments and Lowell’s was on the second floor.

“How did you know where I lived? I don’t remember telling you.”

“It was on your license.” He said with a smile.

“Are my things at the ranger station?” Lowell remembered what they’d discussed.

“Yes, I thought we’d go pick them up after we have lunch.”

“Sounds good.” Lowell was an easy human to be around, he was intelligent and low drama with an open mind Sean couldn’t ask for anything better.

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Lowell's apartment was small and sparse, but he made the most of what he had. The kitchen was in one corner, the bath was to the left and the living room and bedroom were one and the same. But with that said it was clean and organized. A few pictures on the walls and a nice rug on the floor made it feel somewhat warm and cozy.

"It's small, but the price is right, and I prefer not to have to deal with roommates." Lowell instantly fell into explanations.

"I like it." He stated. "Easy to clean and maintain with all the comforts you need." Lowell seemed pleased by the support. It didn't matter anyway because if things went Sean's way, Lowell would be moving to Maine with him in the next few days. That was another discussion they needed to have but he'd wait till after the claiming.

"There are drinks in the fridge and cookies in the cupboard, so help yourself. I'm going to clean up." With that, he disappeared into the bathroom and closed the door. Sean wasn't thirsty, but he wanted to check out the cookies, so he went to the corner of the room, which was the kitchen, and opened the cupboard.

It became instantly clear that his mate enjoyed cookies. There were probably twenty packages of different kinds of cookies filling the cupboard, and every package had been opened. He would have to remember that and keep plenty on hand. He went through the offerings and ended with one peanut butter and one chocolate chip.

It wasn't long before Lowell came out of the bathroom shirtless and drying his hair. The image of his perfect body and that wet hair struck Sean as infinitely sexy, and he was hard in seconds. His body reacted, and his mind went into overdrive. How could he have him and have him immediately? The driving need was so intense he felt his

heart practically beating out of his chest, and most of all, he was speechless.

He popped the last of his cookie into his mouth and stared as Lowell towel dried his hair and his upper body. This was too much for anyone to endure. He walked over to Lowell and took the towel from his hands.

“What’s the matter?” Lowell looked surprised at first.

“Let me help you,” Sean whispered against his bare shoulder and then trailed a few kisses up his throat to his cheek. Lowell laughed softly and began to sway with Sean’s movements. He was definitely not against the idea. Sean unsnapped Lowell’s jeans and loosened them while slipping his hand inside to cup one firm round cheek and squeezing it tightly. “Oh, yes, a perfect handful.”

Lowell responded by unfastening Sean’s jeans and, with breathless determination, pushed them down to his thighs. It was clear that his desire was matching Sean’s, so he helped him by kicking off his boots and then his jeans and quickly pulling his shirt off and tossing it aside. He stood naked in front of Lowell, and the effect was magnificent.

“Oh my God you’re gorgeous.” Lowell groaned. And reached out to run his hands down Sean’s front stopping just above the waist. “I dreamed about this before I ever met you. I knew you when I saw you yesterday you were my dream man.”

“Fate was preparing you.” Sean wasn’t surprised by the dream, considering Lowell’s ability. Fate had used it to feed their connection.

“You’re just as amazing as you were in my dream.” Sean chuckled

“Let’s get you out of these jeans,” Sean told him and then grabbed the waistband and pulled them to his ankles in one. Lowell kicked them off. He was now wearing only a

pair of thin blue briefs. Sean cupped Lowell's growing bulge through the thin fabric and massaged it vigorously. It hardened in a heartbeat, and Lowell moaned, sudden sensations rushing through him. Sean quickly removed Lowell's briefs, leaving him naked and wanting there before him. It was a gorgeous sight.

Sean tossed Lowell backward, and he fell onto the bed, sprawling his arms and legs. "Stay just like that baby." He said while retrieving the tube of lube from his pants pocket. He then dropped onto one knee on the bed strategically between Lowell's thighs. He then bent and took his lips in a deep, voracious kiss. He couldn't get enough of him, and he wanted Lowell to get every inch of him.

Lowell was panting loudly, and it fed Sean's own need for more and faster. He lifted Lowell's legs up and held them while searching out his tantalizing hole. "Yes, there you are." He teased the area and then abruptly thrust two lubed fingers inside, causing Lowell to rear off the bed and then slowly settle himself back down.

"That was explosive," Lowell mumbled as words started to get difficult, and his body began to tremble. Sean took the opportunity to move forward, dropping Lowell's legs to the side and using his other hand to gently begin to stroke that hard, leaking cock. He stroked himself a couple of times, covering his cock in plenty of lubricant, and then back to Lowell while stretching and teasing his tight hole. Lowell kept reaching for him mindlessly, begging for more. He was becoming lost in the throes of desire.

"Soon, baby, soon," He crooned. Lowell juttied his hips, trying to get Sean's fingers to go deeper, so Sean thrust hard and fast, pumping in and out, sensitizing the area and bringing Lowell to sexy moans and gasps. "I love the way you react to my touch. So responsive, so beautiful."

Lowell closed his eyes and opened his mouth on a sharp intake. "I need you so badly, Sean." He stated and Sean noticed a fine sweat forming on his brow and upper lip. The room was heating up. He was a vision and Sean would not deny him.

“I need you too.” Sean was serious, and his body was about to burst into flames. The power of Fate was staggering, and when she put two people together, she wasn’t kidding around because this was mighty intoxicating. He rained kisses across Lowell’s lips along his jaw and down his neck, stopping to whisper in his ear. “I’m going to claim you, Lowell. You are the wolf’s mate, and you will wear his mark and feel the bond. Are you ready?”

“I’m ready, Sean. I want to be your mate, and I want to be yours.” Lowell began to stroke his own cock and continued to thrust, taking Sean’s finger deep in his channel. “I’m ready.” He repeated wantonly.

Sean removed his fingers, and after just a moment’s hesitation, he plunged his hard cock deep inside Lowell. He felt the tightness gripping him and the warmth enticing him as he buried himself to the hilt. The sensitive flesh burned with a rush of sensations, and he held himself still for just a moment while Lowell adjusted to the invasion.

Lowell had cried out tight and sharp and then fell into a salacious moan that signaled his pleasure and satisfaction. Sean pulled out and then slammed in once again, bracing his elbows on the bed and hovering over Lowell, watching his face, gauging his delight and approval.

He steadily picked up speed, hammering his lover’s hole mercilessly, stretching and filling him full. Lowell was panting and gripping Sean’s arms and digging in his nails. The slight bit of pain put Sean instantly on the edge of release.

“I’m going to claim you, my love,” Sean stated again in order to prepare his little lover for what was to come. Lowell’s cock was rock hard, red, and throbbing. It wouldn’t take much. Sean continued a steady rhythm of rapid thrusts, stretching Lowell’s tight hole and pushing them both even closer to the edge.

"Yes, Sean, yes." Lowell's words were clipped and tight, but they said everything Sean needed to hear. Sean thrust his cock hard, going deep, and held his breath as his climax overtook him. It was a thunderous release coming in powerful streams, filling his little lover full of his hot seed, claiming him as his own. Sean wrapped his arms around him, holding him tight, and sunk his teeth into Lowell's shoulder. He bit him marking his lover, his mate, for all time.

He felt the moment Lowell came; he stiffened and jerked, and a tangy warmth spread between them. The scents filling the room were mind-blowing. The air was thick with love and promise. His future flashed before his eyes, and it was wonderful. Their hearts and mind connected, and their souls touched the bond was complete and their lives would forever be one.

Sean licked the wound until it was healed and left a small but noticeable scar. It would tell everyone that Lowell was the wolf's mate. He slowly pulled out and rolled to lie next to Lowell, pulling him close and dropping warm, wet kisses on his face and chest.

"You taste incredible. I love kissing you, and I love making love to you. Your body was made for me, baby." Sean rambled, and Lowell moved close, tucking his face into the crook of Sean's neck. He took several deep breaths and announced how sweet he smelled.

"Your scent makes me tremble like an aphrodisiac," Lowell stated and kissed Sean's shoulder. "That bite was painful at first, and then it exploded into the most titillating experience I've ever had. It made my entire body sizzle with a sexual sensation. It was fantastic."

Lowell's hands were everywhere, and Sean was loving every minute of this easy, unrestrained and loving interaction. "I feel you in my mind so clearly now. Your emotions and moods are coming through, and I feel as if you can read me too."

"I can, but not specifics. Fate would not allow us to read each other's minds. She puts limits on intrusive behavior between mates, but she allows us to know one another, and in time, we will be able to transmit feelings and thoughts to one another. It's a process and grows as time goes on." Sean pulled him tighter to his side and pushed his dark hair back from his face.

"Your beauty takes my breath away, Lowell." He said and then added. "Fate was too generous you are more than I ever expected or earned, but I am so glad that you're mine."

"You say such sweet thing." Lowell demurred and Sean thought it was charming. "I'm still not sure about everything but I'm sure about you and I'm sure I never want to lose you and that's all I need right now."

"Your beauty is only exceeded by your kindness and intelligence. I love every inch of you." Sean placed another kiss on those kiss-swollen lips, drinking in the flavor and essence that was his Fated mate.

"I have so many feelings running through me right now," Lowell confessed. "What does it mean?"

"Our bond is complete, and we are now one in our hearts and minds." Sean began his explanation, covering the points he had not touched on earlier. "Werewolves and other paranormal beings have longer than average life spans, and that is one of the reasons Fate gifts us with mates. Now that we are bonded, your life span will extend to match mine. Also, your healing abilities will improve, and you will experience little or no sickness." He paused, and Lowell turned to look up at him.

"Those are some serious perks." He said and then added. "How old are you?"

"I'm one hundred and twelve years old."

"One-hundred and twelve," Lowell repeated, a little shocked, and Sean nodded.

"Shifters live very long lives. I'm considered a young shifter."

"How long?"

"My Alpha is over five hundred years old, and he is still strong and vital."

"That's astounding."

"You'll get used to it all. I'm sure I'm forgetting some things, but we have a lifetime to figure it all out and to get it right." Sean smiled and rolled on top of Lowell. "You look lovely, all naked, wearing nothing but my claiming mark." He nuzzled his nose into the crook of Lowell's neck, bathing the sensitive flesh with this warm breath.

They lay holding each other for several minutes and relax. Sean had promised Lowell lunch, but he would so much rather stay where they were and make love the rest of the afternoon. He was just about to suggest such when his phone rang. He reached over the edge of the bed and retrieved his phone and saw that it was Eamon.

"Hello," he answered, "What did you find?" But it wasn't Eamon on the line. It was Noah using Eamon's phone.

"Eamon is missing." He got right to the point.

"What?"

"We were investigating the area and split up, but now he's gone."

"Are you sure?" That was stupid, but Sean needed to say it. Noah was a skilled tracker, so yes, he would be sure before he called.

"There is a sign of a scuffle but no scent, just the bear scent again, like with Murphy." That had Sean's heart surging into his throat.

"Stay where you are; I'll be right there." Sean closed the call and turned to Lowell.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I have to leave you." He sat up and quickly got dressed.

"I heard," Lowell told him. "Go, I hope he is okay." Lowell's kind heart was always on display.

"It pains me to leave you." He said, bent to take Lowell's lips in another heart-stopping kiss. The man was so pure and lovely and the sexiest thing alive.

"Go, hurry." Lowell insisted.

Lowell could see the anger and concern clouding his lovers' eyes. He could not place demands or complain. He needed to go to his friend and Lowell completely understood. With that said he started missing him the minute he walked out the door.

He looked down at himself and decided a shower was probably the first order of business and then he'd go find some lunch. He wasn't in the mood for fast food so he would probably go to the café across the street. He was trying to keep his mind off whatever was happening with Eamon and the pack and how it was going to affect Sean. Fear of something happening to the man started to take root along with the fear of losing him.

This bonding situation really heightened his feelings of love, commitment, and worth. This relationship was becoming the forceful center of his life as his heart and mind wrapped around that beautiful wolf shifter, Sean Brendon.

He would have to tell John and Patrick about Sean all at some point and he hoped that

they accepted him since they all work together. He couldn't imagine not liking someone as wonderful as Sean, so he put the concern aside.

It was then he remembered Sean saying he lived in a small town in Maine and was a member of a pack there. This relationship was solid, he knew that right down to his bones. He had no doubts about him and Sean and the together forever chant that Sean had whispered, so one of them would be expected to move. He grabbed his towel and headed for the bathroom. They had a few things to discuss but that was just details for the heart of the matter was already secured.

He was all showered and dressed and sitting on the edge of his bed, tying his tennis shoes, when he heard someone at his door. They didn't knock, but this was an old building, and he could feel the movement on the floorboards when someone walked by his door. Whoever they were, they were standing there, shifting from one foot to the other but not bothering to knock.

There was no peephole, so he got up and walked carefully and quietly closer to the door to see if he could hear anything. The second he got too close to the door, it burst open, cracking him on the skull and knocking him backward onto the floor. It was a setup.

Two men rushed inside and grabbed him, holding him between them, and hurried him out of the building and into a waiting vehicle. Lowell tried to resist, but he was half unconscious from the blow to his head. They threw him into the back seat and sped off.

"Who are you?" He managed to verbalize a few words.

"Shut the fuck up, or we'll kill you right here." The one driving shouted. The other one leaned closer to the driver and spoke.

”Too bad you hadn’t kicked that door a little harder. That door would have killed him, and we wouldn’t have to be dealing with him now.” The driver nodded.

”That would have made things easier, but Jaron wants the human alive, so he wouldn’t have been happy.”

”He would have gotten over it, but as long as we start the war, he won’t care how we got there.” The guy snickered.

“You do make a lot of sense.” The driver was seriously considering offing him right now. Lowell decided to stay still and quiet until he could think of a way out of this mess.

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"It smells like some of Jaron's men," Noah stated when they circled the rock ledge by the lake. "Eamon was here trying to pick up a scent, and he probably scented those bastards, and they knew it." Noah exploded. It was obvious he held Eamon in high regard.

"Or they were simply waiting for him, knowing he wouldn't be satisfied until he investigated the area himself," Sean suggested.

"Waiting for him the way they waited for Murphy?" He snapped.

"I hope not." Sean was seriously worried for his friend. It didn't look good coming on the heels of Murphy's murder. "We need to speak to Jaron. These are his men, so he must know something."

"Eamon's a powerful wolf. They wouldn't take him easily, and they wouldn't be able to hold him for long." Noah added as they headed for the Range Rover.

When they arrived at Jaron's home further up the mountain, no one was there, not even his assistant Shelly, who was always there, according to Noah. They went inside and looked around, but there was no sign of Eamon or any indication that Jaron himself was involved.

"Hide the Range Rover so our presence isn't blatantly obvious and let's follow their trail." Sean stated and started across the back yard toward a dense crop of trees.

"Do you think they've already killed him?" Noah asked.

"I don't know, but like you said, he is a tough son of a bitch and wouldn't go down easy." Sean reminded him, and Noah nodded.

"I should have stayed with him."

"Don't second guess yourself. No good will come from it. Besides, Eamon does as he pleases, and I don't think he would have allowed you to simply follow him around." Sean gave a grim smile. He was starting to feel a little on edge and wasn't sure where it was coming from. It could be coming from Lowell, but he was safe and secure in his apartment.

"I just feel so stupid for having this happen right under my noses. I feel like they're laughing at us." Noah responded.

"They won't be laughing for long, that I promise." They continued for several miles deep into the woods before coming to a small clearing. Jaron and several others were there, and they looked to be waiting for something or someone.

Noah and Sean stayed back, hidden in the trees and far enough away that they would not be scented. The wind was blowing towards them so their scent would not be picked up easily. They considered confronting them and asking about their involvement with Murphy and Eamon, but something about the scene made them hold back and wait to see what was happening before making a move.

All their plans changed in an instant when a Jeep pulled up and two men got out. They spoke with Jaron and then opened the back door and pulled Lowell, his Lowell, from the back seat and threw him to the ground at Jaron's feet. Sean was incensed and immediately charged the group standing over his precious mate. Noah was right behind him; he understood the situation when he recognized Lowell.

Jaron grabbed Lowell by the throat and held him in front of him with a gun pointed at his temple. Jaron swung around to face Sean as he raced to his mate's defense.

Lowell was scared, and it was tearing him up and sending his wolf into a frenzy.

"Come any closer, and I will blow his brains out." Jaron taunted.

"That wouldn't look much like a wolf attack, Jaron." Noah cut in. "I thought you wanted a war between the wolves and the humans. If you shoot him, it will just be straight-up murder. Your master plan has a lot of flaws, has since the beginning."

Jaron laughed. "Well, then, I guess I'll just have to tear out his throat then, won't I." He dropped the gun and held the claws against Lowell's throat. The others formed a half circle behind Jaron. "Now, why don't you two come a little closer." They both took a few steps going as slowly as possible, as Sean worked on a plan to save his mate and kill these fucking bastards.

"Lou, tie them up and make sure it's tight. You two are going to simply disappear like Eamon." A large wolf behind him started forward. "Face them this way. I want Sean to watch as I gut his sweet little mate."

He pulled Lowell up close. "I'm going to kill your little friends too. You cost me several good soldiers, and you will pay." He laughed again and gave Lowell a jerk by his neck for effect, but Lowell did not react. His eyes were on Sean. The second that Jaron shifted his gaze, and it was no more than a split second, Sean was on him, pulling Lowell from his grasp.

Lowell was sure he would wet his pants before this was over. The guy with the claws was not playing with a full deck, so there was no telling what he would do. He was glad the gun was gone, but he wasn't out of the woods yet.

He kept his eyes on Sean aware that the man was planning something, and he wanted to follow whatever moves he made. The look in his eyes was calculating as he took in everyone in the small clearing. He saw his lover take out a pack of wolves so this bunch would be no problem. His only real concern was this guy, the guy with the

claws.

Sean acted and was on them so fast it was a blur. Lowell felt himself being lifted and tossed backward away from the brawl, and as soon as he hit the ground, he started scrambling. He wanted to help, he wanted to do something, but he knew the best thing to do was to get out of the way, so Sean's attention wasn't split trying to take care of him.

He did manage to grab the gun that his captor had tossed aside and ran with it. He crouched down behind a few stumps. It was not that they gave him a lot of cover, but it was some. The gun would be of no use against a shifter. He remembered what Sean had told him. Shifters were hard to kill, and it required removing body parts. But a bullet could sting and could hamper so he kept it trained on the action in front of him in case an opportunity presented itself.

He watched his amazing lover shift into one of the largest and fiercest wolves he'd ever encountered. Everyone had shifted, and the fight was brutal. The viciousness was off the charts. Blood was everywhere, and to Lowell's dismay, it appeared that Noah, a beautiful white wolf, was losing ground against his three attackers. It looked bad, but his heart was telling him everything would be okay.

Suddenly someone burst from dense wood on the other side of the clearing. It was a wolf, a black wolf even larger than Sean and Lowell recognized him, it was Eamon and there were others with him. They surrounded the group and in a very few minutes no one was left except Jaron and Sean had him pinned to the ground.

Eamon shifted back to human, as did Sean, who released Jaron and stood backing away. Lowell wasn't sure what he was looking at, but it appeared that Jaron was not half as cocky as he was a few minutes ago. His goons lay dead strewn around the clearing, and now he had to face Eamon.

Sean and the others positioned themselves in a wide circle around the two men.

Everyone remained silent except for Jaron. "What's your plan, Eamon? I'm not alone in this; you know I have been sanctioned by one of the elders. I am the new Alpha of this pack, and you're just going to have to get used to it." He was talking crazy.

"You tried to have me killed," Eamon stated calmly as he started circling his prey.

"I thought you were already dead. I wouldn't have moved on the others if I knew you were still a threat." He wasn't making much sense.

Eamon turned to the crowd and raised his hands. "I formally challenge this wolf to a fight to the death for the position of Alpha of the Salida Pack." He made it formal and binding, and Lowell saw Jaron shrink just a little before he suddenly shifted and leaped at Eamon. But Eamon was nobody's fool and shifted before Jaron was off the ground. They slammed together in mid-air, and the fight was epic. Fighting to the death really brings out the absolute monster in a man.

He noticed Sean glancing back at him, making sure he was safe and urging him to stay where he was. Lowell set the gun aside and stood up, realizing he was no longer in any danger. He could see everything clearly from where he stood, and it was damn ruthless, and the viciousness was reaching new heights, and he found himself looking away when Eamon went in for the kill.

When he looked up, Eamon was in his human form, torn and bloody, but he was a champion. Eamon Coles was the new Alpha of the Salida Pack.

Sean kept his eyes on both the challenge taking place and his mate, who was standing a mere few feet away. His heart nearly died when he saw him being held by that lunatic and even now, he and his wolf still feared for his safety. An Alpha challenge was no place for a little human, but he was handling himself well and Sean could not be prouder of his young mate.

Jaron was a beast, and he personified the true meaning of that word. Eamon shifted

and held him off the ground with one hand and tore out his throat with the other. Sean enjoyed watching him die. Eamon threw his remains to the ground and turned his back, signaling his utter disdain for the wolf.

Sean wrapped his arms around Lowell, his little love, when he came running to him. So glad to have him safe in his arms. "Don't ever do that to me again." He said to Lowell and then kissed him senseless right there in front of everyone.

"I'll try not to get abducted again; I promise." Lowell smiled, and that smile was a balm to Sean's soul.

"I need to get you home where you are safe and protected. My wolf is frantic that more danger may come your way." Sean felt his wolf pacing nervously.

"I think the danger has come and gone, Sean." Lowell teased. "And you and your wolf handled it wonderfully."

"Eamon handled it. Eamon Coles, the new Alpha, and a fine one he will be too." Sean announced loudly, and everyone heartily agreed. Sean dropped his right hand to cup Lowell's gorgeous ass needing the assurance that all was as it should be. He gripped him hard, squeezing him tight, and pressed Lowell's body to his. The feeling of his mate trumped everything in life. As long as he had this beauty by his side, he would be forever satisfied.

"We're in public, Sean." Lowell demurred but still pressed himself to Sean.

Sean bent and whispered in his ear. "I don't care, Lowell; wolves are not prudes. I could fuck you right here in the clearing in front of everybody, and they probably wouldn't even watch." He declared and then amended. "Well, maybe they wouldn't watch. We are pretty spectacular, and they would be compelled to watch. Want to give it a try?" Sean laughed when Lowell vigorously started shaking his head.

"You two need to get a room," Eamon announced as he walked over to where they stood. He glanced back over his shoulder at the others who were cleaning the area and discarding the bodies of the traitors. "It's been a hell of a few days." He declared.

"Thanks for the save. I appreciate your timing." He told Eamon. "I'm so glad you're not dead."

Eamon chuckled. "Yeah, me too. Fortunately, Jaron did not send his best. Underestimating others was always his greatest weakness."

"He mentioned having the sanction of an elder. Do you think he was speaking the truth, or was it part of his insanity?" Sean asked, remembering Jaron's boast.

"I believe it was truth. Jaron was a good fighter but a lousy thinker. He couldn't have put together this plan or hoped to carry it out on his own. He had help, and I will find them." Eamon made that a pledge.

"If you need me while you transition to Alpha, I am more than happy to stay and help." Sean offered.

"What I want is for you to agree to be my Beta. Will you join me in building the Salida pack into the strong and solid pack I know it can become." Sean was taken aback for a moment, but he knew that there wasn't anything he would enjoy more than serving his friend. Staying and joining the Salida Pack would also allow his mate to remain in his hometown among people he knew. He looked at Lowell and saw the hope in his eyes.

"I accept and thank you."

"Now go and take time with your mate. I've monopolized your time long enough."

"Will do." Sean swung Lowell up into his arms and headed back toward the tree line.

”You’re naked, Sean.” Lowell pointed out.

“Does that bother you?”

“No, but I don’t want others looking at things that belong to me.” He clarified. “I’ll give you my shirt and you can wrap it around your waist.” Sean was touched by the ownership Lowell was already exhibiting it was lovely and it showed the bond was perfect and their future would also be perfect.

”There”s a Range Rover a few miles away, and I have some clothes in the back. I”m all yours, baby, and only yours.” He stated, stopping to press another kiss on Lowell”s lips. He forced his tongue inside and ravaged him completely, leaving him breathless and shaking.

“I love you Sean.” He proclaimed on a shaky breath with his heart pounding out of his chest.

”I love you too, sweetheart,” Sean answered and then took his lips in another hard and wild embrace.

THE END