### James and Seth's Excellent Adventure

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Part 3 of The Black Pack Series

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James and Seth's Excellent Adventure
Summary

James just wants to kill a coven of vampires who really have it coming, and keep Seth safely in one piece so Leah doesn't kill him.

Seth just wants to finally get the vampire to notice him, and make James forget all about his feelings for their Alpha, Jacob.

The Volturi are happy with none of it.

Notes

A/N: Technically a sequel to the JacobxEdward stories Claiming the Wolf and Of Imprinting & Such (in that order), but can be read as a standalone as long as you know that -

SPOILERS BELOW:
- Jacob and Edward are together
- Victoria and James are brother and sister, and are part of Jacob’s pack (and James has feelings for Jacob, who saved his life)
- Bella (also a part of Jacob’s pack despite being human), Alice and Jasper are in the beginnings of a threesome relationship
- Seth and Leah have left Sam’s pack and joined Jacob’s
- Seth is on the road with James to find Laurent and the rest of James’ old coven who tried to kill him, have hunted him, and have somehow brought the Volturi into the mix
- Phoneix Jordan is a human who used to be in love with Jacob and has been turned by Laurent’s nomads
Chapter 1

Not for the first time since they’d started off on what could most definitely be a suicidal mission, James glanced over at his young werewolf companion and wondered just what the hell Seth Clearwater was doing there. Also, why the hell had Jacob thought this a safer option for Seth instead of staying close to his old pack, and why had James agreed to let Seth come along? Sure, the rez pack had beaten Seth viciously after realizing that his loyalty actually belonged to the Black Pack, but Seth really wasn’t any safer on the road with James. Not when James was going to end things with Laurent once and for all, as well as figure out how the Volturi were involved in all of this.

Twice now James had tried to leave Seth behind with more than enough money to catch a bus back to Forks, but Seth was a stubborn puppy and had not only seen through James’ every attempt and foiled them, but on the third try he’d called Jacob to complain. James had then had the Alpha card pulled on him and he’d finally agreed to stop trying to send Seth back to his sister. He was fighting that command though.

Used to being the leader of his own nomadic coven of vampires, James was still getting used to being the Beta in a wolf pack, to not being the Alpha. If someone had told him a year ago that his coven would turn on him and nearly kill him, or that his sister Victoria and he would become members of a wolf pack (which also had a human in it) he’d have laughed. Now though?

He probably should hate or resent his fall from power, but James found himself enjoying everything, especially since it’d meant that he’d met (and befriended) Jacob Black.

His Alpha was important to James. He’d been drawn to him from the first moment he’d seen Jacob, hadn’t been able to understand his attraction to the werewolf, or his annoyance with Jake’s boyfriend - Edward Cullen. James hadn’t understood why he’d stolen Jake’s totem necklace, the one Jake knew he’d stolen and constantly wore, yet the wolf never asked for it back.

And then Laurent and the others had nearly killed James (Victoria was the only reason he’d been able to escape, he’d been at the brink of death at that point) and Jacob had surprised them all by protecting them, by being there for James as his body tried to heal from its horrifying injuries. Jacob had, very much accidentally, started a pack with the two vampires, as well as with his human friend Bella, who would not be left behind despite the fact that she could easily be considered a choice meal for a near feral James, and his sister.

Even before he’d fully learnt to re-use his healing vocal cords, James realized he had feelings for his Alpha, and things had been great until Edward Cullen had returned from his self-imposed exile.

At first James had fooled himself into believing that he had a chance in hell at getting between them, but the day he’d left to finish this once and for all he’d realized and had to accept the truth. Jacob loved James, but was in love with Edward freaking Cullen. It was a hard pill to swallow, and James had been glad for an excuse to be away while those two made up for lost time.

“Leah, I’m fine!” Seth exclaimed for what must’ve been the hundredth time as they sat around the campsite they’d decided to spend the night in. Every single night Leah called her brother and exasperated him. It was hysterical to watch, and was James’ favorite part of each and every day.

“No!” Seth squeaked, looking utterly horrified. “We don’t need you! You two stay away!”

Laying on his side, James smirked and texted Jacob a picture of Seth’s face as he argued with his
overly protective older sister.

Considering James had sent it to a group chat which also included Victoria and Bella, he wasn’t surprised when they answered as well.

**Hells Bells** - Aw! He’s so cute!

**Tor** - For a dog.

**Jake** - I take offense at that.

**Tor** - I can live with that.

Snickering, James put his phone away to conserve the already dwindling battery life. He lay on his back and stared up at the stars lighting the night sky above as he let his mind wander. James had put his tracking abilities to the test and begun to follow the old scent left behind by Laurent when he’d been chased out of Forks by the werewolves. They followed that scent throughout the country, but by the time they arrived in each town (while there was more than enough proof that the killings had been done by vampires… and Laurent’s signature killing style definitely there) the vampires had already moved on.

“Finally!” Seth declared in relief as he threw himself down on his back and stared up at the starry sky as well. “I thought that the battery would never die!”

Unable to keep the chuckle from his lips, James pillowed his hands under his head.

Seth sighed and turned on his side to face James. “What are you thinking?”

“That you’re an adorable puppy,” James teased, as per usual. He didn’t know what it was about Seth Clearwater, but something about him made James want to tease.

Immediately Seth frowned. “When are you going to stop calling me that?”

“When you grow up?” James teased. He knew Seth wasn’t really a puppy, no one was a kid or innocent if they’d already killed, but there was still something almost pure about Seth. It was something James didn’t think he’d ever had, and his gut reaction was always to tease the younger male for it.

“You know, I’m considered a man in my tribe,” Seth informed him. “Kids do not have the ability to shift.”

“You don’t say,” James responded conversationally.

Seth frowned deeper. “I’m walking into a potentially dangerous situation here, how about not treating me like I’m some sort of burdensome idiot?”

Immediately James’ playfulness evaporated. A sigh escaped his lips as he stared up at the stars once more. “I never asked you to come. You should just go back. The rez must’ve cooled down enough by now, and I doubt Jacob or your sister will allow anything to happen to you even if they’re still pissed you switched teams and snitched on them for us.”

There was silence, and then Seth sat up. “You think I’m here just because I’m scared of being around my old pack?”

Hearing the hint of a growl in Seth’s tone, James sat up as well. “You have no reason to be here
“Had no business getting you mixed up in a problem that doesn’t concern you.” He made a face. “Those ungrateful bastards turned on me, nearly killed me, and are still after me. This has nothing to do with you or anyone else. Just me. I’m the only one who should be dealing with this.”

Seth sat motionless, just eyeing James in silence before he finally exhaled loudly. “Get over yourself.”

Shocked, James finally turned to face Seth. “Excuse me?”

“All I heard was me me me,” Seth informed him as he pulled a strand of long black hair out of his face and secured it behind his ear. “I don’t know what vampire covens are like, but there’s no me in a wolf pack. Only us - we - ours. You mess with a pack member you mess with the pack and can expect retribution from the pack. So get over yourself, over your bruised ego, already. This is my problem because it is your problem.” Seth licked his lips. “I still might be a new member of Jacob’s pack, but I am a member, and that means I’m willing to risk whatever, even my life, to help you and make sure you return… in one piece this time.” His face was stone. “So I’d appreciate it if you stopped treating me like some bothersome kid and give me some modicum of respect. You don’t have to like me… but stop acting like I’m a burden, because believe me, having a wolf by your side when you go up against those leeches will work in your favor.” He hesitated, almost as if not sure whether to add this next part or not. “I was born to kill your kind, I have killed them before and will kill more in the future, that’s just how it is.”

James just stared at the young werewolf in silence as he mulled over Seth’s words. He’d never actually seen things that way, but now he understood pack mentality a little better, and it made him feel like an asshole for how ungrateful he must’ve seemed to the other guy. “I apologize.”

Seth’s eyes widened in shock as he dropped all annoyance. “Really?”

Chuckling, James nodded. “You mightn’t believe me, but I never intended to demean you or make you think I believed you a burden. I just know what we’re walking into, I nearly didn’t make it out alive the first time I went up against Laurent. That’s why I wouldn’t let Jacob come - but I knew that if I didn’t allow you to join me on this Jacob would’ve.” James sighed, shoulders sagging. “I guess I’m feeling guilty because I treated your life as if it mattered less than Jacob’s.”

Seth just stared at James for a moment before he uttered out: “But it is worth less than Jacob’s. He’s the Alpha.”

“Jake would’ve hit you if he’d heard that.” It hit James at that moment just how much he’d changed since meeting Jacob Black. Before, the thrill of the hunt had been his life, had been all that’d mattered. He really hadn’t cared about those underneath his control in the coven so long as they didn’t cross him. Other than Victoria there wasn’t one he’d had any sort of feelings or loyalty to.

Now though? He considered Bella Swan to be one of his best friends, when only a short while ago she would’ve been considered nothing more than a snack. Jacob Black, a werewolf, was the person he cared about the most other than his sister. And on top of that, here James was feeling guilty over his treatment of Seth, a werewolf he really didn’t know that well and really shouldn’t care about, but did for some odd reason.

“I’m basically the omega of the group,” Seth informed him. “Jacob showed a lot of faith in me
when he asked me to come with you.” He took in a deep breath, eyes on his own hands as he drew symbols in the dirt. “I know you have no reason to do so now, but by the time this is over and we’re home, I hope I will have earned your trust and respect.”

James eyed Seth and couldn’t keep his lips from turning in a lopsided grin as he reached over and messed the boy’s perfect hair. “Don’t say such adorable things and then expect me not to think you cute, puppy.”

Seth pouted visibly, shoulders sagged as he sighed loudly. He didn’t make a move to push James’ hand away though. “I’m not a kid. I’m a man. Stop calling me puppy.”

“But you’re cute like a puppy,” James reasoned, unable to stop the teasing from returning despite it all.

Seth glared at him hotly.

James grinned and removed his hands, holding them up in the air. “How about a compromise?”

Seth’s glare deepened suspiciously. “I’m listening.”

“I will stop trying to lose you, or convince you to return to Forks, I’ll treat you like my partner in this suicidal mission I apparently can’t convince you to get out of… and in return you let me keep calling you puppy.” James grinned his most innocent grin. “It’s a win-win for the both of us.”

Head tilted slightly to the side, Seth’s glare lessened in intensity as he eyed James in open curiosity. “You want to call me puppy that badly?”

“Yeah.” James leaned forwards, holding his hand out towards the werewolf. “Is it a deal?”

Seth eyed the hand thoughtfully before his brown gaze rose to James’ curiously. “Puppy?”

James’ grin grew. “Puppy.”

Seth made a face, clearly not happy with this, and yet he was losing his determination since he’d be getting his way as well. “If anyone else starts calling me that…”

“I’ll punch him or her myself,” James promised with a chuckle. “That’ll be my personal little pet name for you, no one else’s.”

Seth’s eyes widened and he pulled back a second, his mouth opening and closing before he finally cleared his throat. “Well, if there’s no getting around it I guess I have no choice.” He wouldn’t meet James’ gaze as he reached out and gripped his hand tightly. “Just you. No one else.”

“Just me,” James promised as he and Seth shook hands, cementing their first deal as partners in crime. “Welcome to Team Death Wish, puppy.”

Despite it all, a pleased smile tugged at Seth’s lips.

Seth Clearwater couldn’t sleep, not with the way his heart was racing painfully against his chest. He tried to concentrate on the stars above him, on the fact that there was scent of game in the air, or on the fact that James’ attention was on the moon. Anything to keep from blushing in remembrance of what had occurred a little while ago. James had finally accepted him as a part of this endeavor, and not only that, but the name Seth had detested since it seemed so demeaning only
half an hour ago was now a pet name. And Seth mightn’t completely hate it.

He grinned and then bit down on his bottom lip to keep from grinning too widely. It wouldn’t do for the vampire to realize just how happy the werewolf was at this moment. This was it, he was sure of it. This was the moment that James slowly started to accept him. First as pack mate, and then…”

*One step at a time, Clearwater. Don’t get too hasty. Let him get used to you. Plus, he still has a thing for Jake.*

Grin fading somewhat, Seth’s gaze shifted onto the moon. While it hadn’t taken him long to realize that Sam was not the Alpha for him, that Jacob was the one who had the pack Seth would fit into, the young werewolf knew that going into a pack while resenting your Alpha wasn’t the best course of action. It really wasn’t anything Jacob had done though, it wasn’t as if he knew that Seth had gone and Imprinted on James the first time he’d seen him, no one knew, not even Seth’s old pack due to his and Leah’s ability to shield their thoughts somewhat from the others… a gift which had only started to manifest once Jacob had come into his own as Alpha and they found themselves in the wrong pack. Maybe it was possible because they’d lost respect for Sam as an Alpha, maybe it was because they’d already begun to consider Jacob as Alpha instead, Seth wasn’t sure what, but it had made his acting as double-agent possible until it’d been discovered.

Sighing, Seth glanced towards James to find the vampire continuing to stare up at the moon, not noticing the attention on him. Seth had always thought that, when he Imprinted, it would be on a cute human girl. He’d never expected it would be on a male, much less on a leech! Sure, there was that whole Jacob-wasn’t-actually-Imprinted-on-Edward-even-though-he-sorta-had thing, but Seth knew for a fact that he was Imprinted on James, he definitely hadn’t wanted to be at first, he’d been horrified, but when Sam had put the Clearwater siblings in charge of spying on Jacob’s new “leech pack” Seth had found himself watching James more than anyone else… and damn it… he’d started to forget the fact that he was supposed to resent the Imprint.

James wasn’t a cute girl. He was older and, unlike Edward (who had a more feylike appearance), was most definitely masculine. He was taller than Seth too, and Seth hadn’t quite forgiven the vampire for that. He’d also been in charge of the coven who’d massacred humans earlier on in the year, Seth knew for sure because he’d smelt James everywhere during that time and the scent had nearly driven him insane, although at the time he hadn’t understood why. It was only as he watched the shell of a vampire, one who was so injured his mind had retreated deep within in him, or maybe was too injured to properly function… leaving James a feral-like creature who couldn’t even speak…

Seth hated remembering that. Hated remembering just how vulnerable James had been, unable to even hunt an animal, relying on kills Victoria brought him. Leah had found it amusing to see a leech brought so low, but Seth had felt pity for a leech for the first time in his life, and the feeling had horrified him. And yet he hadn’t been able to stop feeling that way, or from silently rejoicing every time James visibly improved. It was only when Sam had pulled Seth and Leah off of the spying duty and put some other wolves on it, that Seth realized just how much he missed having an excuse to see James daily, and how depressed he was getting because of the distance.

It was only then that he begun to suspect what he should’ve all along.

“Go to sleep, puppy,” James whispered as he continued to stare up at the sky. “We’ve got a lot of ground to cover tomorrow, and unlike me you need your rest.”

Unnerved at how the tracker could sense his gaze, Seth closed his eyes but didn’t sleep a wink that night.
Leah Clearwater stalked into Victoria’s room without knocking. She hadn’t even stopped to think about it, since it was just her and Victoria living in the house the girls had gotten comfortable around each other, and it wasn’t as if Victoria had any parts Leah didn’t so the risk of seeing each other naked wasn’t really that horrifying. This was horrifying though, and the second Leah walked in on it she wished she’d knocked.

Victoria Hunter sat on her bed, staring at one of Rosalie’s romance novels (which she’d stolen), tears in her eyes.

Gulping, Leah reached behind her and knocked on the door, feeling really stupid about it but unable to stop herself.

Having obviously known Leah was in the room (she’d burst into the room for crying out loud!) Victoria wiped at her eyes and gave a huge sigh before she glanced up at her. “Did you know?”

“Did I know what?” Leah wanted to know, not sure if she should even be in the room anymore. She’d come to rant to Victoria about bratty, stupid brothers (something which had helped bond the vampire and werewolf while their brothers were gone together), all she knew was that Seth was being bitchier than usual and that Leah wanted to vent.

“Did you know that Charlie is dating?” Victoria waited a best before adding: “Your mother.”

Leah’s eyes widened in horror. Her mother and Charlie? Really? But her father hadn’t been dead all that long! And… and Victoria was ridiculously, obviously in love with Charlie.

Victoria’s gazed lowered and she nodded her head, her red curls springing with the movement. “I didn’t think you did.”

Closing the door behind her, Leah hesitated a second before sitting down on the edge of the bed together. “Bella found out?”

“Yeah.” Victoria wiped at her eyes once more. “She said she didn’t want me to walk in on them and then… yeah…” She tried for a smile but it was pathetic. “I should be used to this, you know. I always fall in love with men who don’t love me back. He was attracted - boy was he attracted - but in the end he didn’t do anything and tried to be like a father to me. A father!” Victoria’s golden eyes nearly glowed with her suppressed tears.

Leah gulped and then moved closer, sitting on the bed next to her. She placed her hand on the redhead’s shoulder.

Victoria snapped and threw herself at Leah, sobbing.

Eyes wide in shock, Leah rubbed Victoria’s back as the vampire sobbed into her chest.
"Oh great." The moment James realized where the trail was leading them, he ran his hand over his face and turned to look at Seth, wondering exactly how he was going to break this news to him. Sure, they'd made that pact, and he'd had every intention of keeping his side of it, but James also had some common decency deep down inside of him, and that little shred of decency said that there was no way he was bringing the werewolf with him when he went up there. "You can't come."

Seth's face darkened in betrayal. "You promised—!"

"It's not—you don't—urgh!" James rested his hand over his closed eyes as he let out a sigh. "Believe me, you don't want to go to the place that's up there. It's not somewhere that someone like you should go into."

There was a moment's silence, and then a soft: "You mean it's not a place for a werewolf."

"No, I don't mean that at all." James didn't think he'd actually seen a werewolf there before, but that was because werewolves were all holier-than-thou more than actually being barred from it. "You can't go there because you're—and I'm not making dog puns—a good boy."

There was silence, and then a squeaked: "Huh?"

Growling, feeling surprisingly enough embarrassed for some reason, James tore his hand from his face and turned to face the confused werewolf. "Further ahead is a place I know very well, okay? It's… it's a place that caters to certain… hungers."

Seth's eyes narrowed immediately. "It's a slaughterhouse."

James groaned as he rolled his eyes. It almost hurt him. "So. Pure."

Confusion returned to Seth's face. "What?"

"There are different sorts of hunger, puppy." He shouldn't have to be the one to give the boy the birds and the bees talk, he shouldn't be subjected to that sort of humiliation! "You'll understand what I mean when you meet a nice little human girl and decide it's time to settle down."

Suddenly Seth froze, his eyes wide. He opened his mouth, closed it, and when it opened once more he squeaked out: "It's a brothel."

"Kind of," James admitted. "I mean, if you don't have someone with you you can most definitely find someone there." He'd never really had someone the many times he'd gone there with the coven, and he'd definitely never spent his time there alone. "But if you have a partner it can be considered more of a funhouse."

"Somehow I don't think you mean that they have a hall of mirrors," Seth mumbled suspiciously.

"Oh, they do," James corrected, grinning at the memory of that room. "It's just not used for… uh… conventional means." The memory of being able to see him filling his partner… surrounded by the images… had him clearing his throat loudly as he looked away. Right. This was not the time to be getting aroused. "So, uh, you see why you can't come."

"No," Seth sounded, surprisingly enough, annoyed. "I don't."
"If we went together we'd have to get partners, you can't be solo unless you're a voyeur, and as a voyeur we'd be unable to go to the places we'd need to to get the info we need." James didn't know Leah Clearwater well at all, but from her constant calls to Seth and her overly protective nature he knew she'd kill him if she found out that he'd brought her brother to a place like the one that was further up the hill. "So it makes more sense to just let me go by myself, get the info I need, and come meet you in the next town. You can go and watch a movie or do something like that until I come back."

Seth looked not only completely unconvinced, but seriously pissed. "I'm coming with you."

"No, you're not." James frowned. Why couldn't the wolf get this? "You'd be expected to get a partner, and not only would that person be a liability and soon figure out what you're up to, but let's face it, werewolf or not you wouldn't get out of there with your virginity intact."

Seth flushed. "Who says I'm a virgin?"

James just raised an eyebrow. "You reek of purity. It's going to draw all sorts of people. Believe me, your ass will not be safe if you step one foot inside without a partner." He leaned in closer. "And I literally mean your ass."

Seth's blush darkened. "Why can't we just say we're each other's partner?"

James opened his mouth, closed it, and then groaned. "They'd never buy it."

Insult lit up the werewolf's face. "Why not?"

"Because I've never been with a guy there before," James informed him, unable to meet the werewolf's gaze. "Plus, they know me, they know that there is no way I could be with you and not have already been with you." He motioned to Seth's body generally. "There's no way that you'd be any sort of a virgin if you were my partner and I was taking you there. They'd know something was up, and that would be it. Plus, we don't, you know, smell of each other." He hurried on when Seth opened his mouth to no-doubt contradict him. "Sure, we smell as if we've been traveling together for a while, but we don't smell of each other, believe me that it's a different sort of thing all together." James licked his lips, suddenly very self-conscious. "My scent needs to be coming from places on your body that it isn't."

Seth clamped his mouth shut, his face now utterly crimson.

"Exactly." James glanced up the hill.

"Then, uh, put your scent on me."

James turned back to stare at Seth so quickly that he might've given himself whiplash. His voice was scratchy and a little terrified when he squeaked out: "What?"

Seth was scarlet, bordering on purple, and not meeting that rounded gaze at all. "If you're able to follow Laurent's tracks despite how old they are like you are you're one of the best trackers I've ever come across. You've got a nose like no one else." He cleared his throat. "Figure out a way to fake it. Put your scent on me enough to fool them into thinking that we're lovers." His gaze finally rose to James, and while he was visibly nervous there was resolution, determination, in those browns. "I'm going with you. So deal with it." He cleared his throat. "Mark me."

James gulped and then hated himself for how he was acting. He wasn't some high school kid. He was a hundreds year old vampire, and while he'd never been in a male/male relationship before he obviously wasn't against it, otherwise he'd never had been able to develop the feelings he had for
Jacob. But, uh, this was Seth, and James wasn't exactly sure how he could do this. It was dangerous, especially considering Leah Clearwater. "That's a very dangerous thing to say to a vampire." Maybe he should bluff his way out of this. Seth was still inexperienced and would no doubt cave if James pushed too hard, so that was exactly what the vampire would do.

"I'm not scared of vampires," Seth informed him with a slight tremor in his voice.

"You sure about this?" James asked as he began to circle the wolf shifter in an effort to amp up the nerves. "There's no going back once I've started." Considering his plan was to get Seth to back out on this, it was a total lie, but he needed the wolf shifter to believe it.

"Bring your worse," Seth challenged.

James smiled, admiring the puppy's guts. "Last chance to back down." When Seth merely glared at him defiantly, James half-circled the wolf so that he was behind him. He waited a breath, another, letting Seth's mind race with questions before he moved up behind the wolf and brushed all of his long hair over one of his shoulders, baring one shoulder and the side of his neck.

Seth gulped visibly.

Leaning in, molding his body against Seth's, James' hands rested on the shifter's hips as he leaned in and took in a deep breath of Seth's scent, still unable to understand how shifters didn't smell horrible to him anymore. He tightened his grip on Seth's hips seconds before his lips brushed against the skin of Seth's neck.

Seth jerked at the touch, but James' grip on his hips kept him in place and brought him closer against him. The vampire nibbled against Seth's neck, careful not to break skin as one of his hands slipped under the front of Seth's shirt and began to explore his abs, which danced under his touch. The shifter let out a choked sound as his body trembled, yet the soft sounds became a choked cry when James' other hand slipped from his hip to cup Seth's growing erection over the material of his pants.

Instead of pulling away as expected, Seth leaned back hard against James' chest, his eyes closed and his lips parted.

James' mouth was dry but he forced himself to concentrate on his plan, to push, hard, but as he undid the button and zipper of Seth's pants James found no sort of resistance. The vampire attacked Seth's ear with his teeth as he shoved those pants down to the wolf's knees and reached into Seth's boxers to grasp his cock, which immediately went iron-hard. That pale hand curled around that cock and began to move over it at a teasing pace.

Seth let out a sound that was scared and needy as his body tightened.

This was it.

This was the moment that Seth...

…began to buck, the movement causing Seth's ass to rub up against James.

James froze in shock for a moment before closing his eyes tightly and groaning at the feeling. Had the wolf seen through his pretense? Was he calling his bluff? If so, the vampire's pride wouldn't allow him to back down, to concede defeat, especially not to a pup. If anyone was going to back down, to pull away, it was Seth. James wasn't the virgin here! He was a badass vampire! Damn it!

His cred on the line, James undid his own pants with his free hand and as soon as his pants and
underwear slid down to his knees he gripped the waistband of Seth's underwear and fought it down so that he could rub his cock against the cleft of the wolf's asscheeks. Almost immediately Seth whimpered, body arched instinctively. A part of James was surprised that the werewolf wasn't fighting for dominance, that it was submitting so easily to this treatment, but that part of James' brain was quickly shutting down as he continued to rub himself against the shifter's seam. Every time the head of his cock brushed against that puckered entrance he fought the instinct to feed his length into Seth's body. He was only going to cum against that entrance, finger some of his seed deep within, that was all… they were only doing this to pass Seth off as his lover… not actually make him his lover!

And yet the precum dripping from his cock not only made each thrust easier, but seemed to leave him all sorts of overly sensitive.

James groaned as he wrapped his arms around Seth's body, his own leaning completely over the younger male's. In fact, it was only Seth's palms and knees firmly on the ground which kept them up as James rutted against him like a dog in heat. And then his cock somehow slid, went too far, too hard, something. All James knew was that suddenly the tip of his cock was pushing against Seth's puckered entrance, and the head breached.

Seth let out a sound James had never heard before as he seemed to lose all control of the front half of his body. The younger male's front slid down bonelessly, leaving his ass still up in the air, almost reminding James of when a dog was trying to get you to play with him.

"Stop me, Seth," James nearly begged as he hung onto his last thread of self-control. "Stop me."

Seth's hair was in his face, hiding its expression from James as the wolf's body shifted backwards at the hips, a groan long and guttural escaping his lips as he slowly eased James deeper inside of him.

And then, before his mind could catch up with his body, somehow James' hands were on Seth's hips, guiding them backwards with more urgency, and then…and then…

Seth sobbed out a sound which rocketed through James' body to the very cock sliding inside of the younger shapeshifter. The vampire would have a nervous breakdown later, right now he didn't even realize he'd lost out to his own instincts until long after he'd found himself hilt deep inside of Seth Clearwater. Had his mind been even close to working at that moment it would've been hyperventilating with the knowledge that Leah Clearwater was going to kill him when he got back!

But in this moment in time, the only thought that rolled about in his mind was: He feels so good.

Seth was the first… guy… that James had ever been with, so maybe this was just what it was like being with another guy, James had no frame of reference, but all he knew was that while it was absolutely different from being with a girl… he liked it. He liked it a lot.

He liked the slender strength beneath him, loved the fact that it was submitting to him. James draped his body over Seth's once more, covering him in his scent and cool temperature, Seth's skin incredibly warm to his own. Fangs nibbled on Seth's neck, and when the werewolf tilted his neck to grant him more access James' hips bucked harder, quicker, in instinctive response.

The shapeshifter groaned and gasped for breath under him, back arching, body shifting, opening, swallowing James deeper inside of him.

The vampire let out an embarrassing sound as he buried his face in Seth's hair. "Puppy."
Seth hid his face in the ground as his whole body trembled in response.

He wasn't supposed to actually do this, he was only supposed to rub against Seth's entrance, spread his scent, and yet even as James' mind tried to grasp for reason the vampire curled an arm around Seth to hold him still, hold him close, as he rutted inside of the werewolf. Seth was warm and tight and clung to James, his muscles clutching at him, massaging him, urging him deeper, harder. The little noises he made didn't help either, all breathless and needy like a bitch in heat.

The thought did something to James, he didn't like to think himself capable of losing control, but he did. He really did. In seconds he found himself pressing Seth into the ground while his hips slammed into his, his cock carving a home inside of the shifter's body.

"Oh! Uh!" Seth sobbed as he grabbed fistfuls of grass, his body twisting, undulating. Sweat dripped off his body, which seemed to grow hotter and hotter to the touch, yet no matter how strong the heat, it didn't burn, in fact, in was incredibly pleasant to the touch.

Maybe it was because James hadn't been with someone in so long, maybe it was the fact that Seth's body seemed incredibly tailored-made for his own, James didn't know the reason, but he knew he'd be cumming soon. Too soon.

He reached around to find Seth hard and dripping.

"You're so wet," he praised the pup softly in his ear, awed at how Seth shivered with each word. "I'm going to cum inside of you, pup. I'm going to fill you up."

"Oh gods!" Seth was suddenly cumming, his whole body covered in goosebumps as he sobbed into the grass.

It took James so much by surprise that he hadn't even realized he himself was on the brink until he crested over. He rammed himself over and over into the younger werewolf before thrusting himself hilt deep and holding on tightly as pleasure exploded within him. Even as his body shook with completion he found himself holding Seth tightly by the hips while he continued to shift position inside of him, desperate to fill the wolf completely with his essence.

He wanted to fall down on top of Seth and rest a little, yet James groaned as he slipped out of the shifter. And then he watched his seed slowly slip from that pink hole and dripped down. His breathing was erratic, his cock still hard and twitching as he watched his cum slowly make its way down the insides of Seth's thighs.

James just stared at Seth as the wolf lay on the ground, breathing heavily, pants down to his ankles, shirt pressed up to show his back. His hair was long and incredibly messy, far from the perfection it'd always been. The vampire suddenly felt like he'd missed out on grabbing fistfuls, had he been able to last longer he'd have ridden the wolf long and hard, using his hair like reigns.

Suddenly, Edward's love of Jacob's long hair made utter sense.

Jacob.

Golden eyes widening in horror and shame, James hurried to his feet, pushing away his lustful thoughts. Wasn't he supposed to be in love with Jacob? If so, how could he have so easily forgotten about him? Thoughts of his Alpha had been plaguing him throughout the whole travel, and yet the second he'd touched Seth Clearwater, James had forgotten all about Jacob Black.

Uneasy, guilty, confused and a little nervous, James yanked on his own pants and wouldn't look Seth in the face.
The wolf deserved better than this! This had been his first time for crying out loud! It shouldn't have been this way, in this place, with James of all people!

*He has every right to kill me now.*

Gulping, James reached for his pack and pulled out a canister of water he kept as an extra for Seth, as well as one of his shirt. He covered the material with water and went to kneel down next to Seth, who seemed to still be trying to catch his breath.

Relieved, somehow, for the hair covering Seth's face from him, James quietly knelt by Seth and began to wash his body, cleaning him from the cum. Seth had jumped slightly at the touch, yet allowed James to softly pass the makeshift washcloth over his body, even… even against that place where James' seed was seeping from.

"Shouldn't you leave it there?" Seth finally asked in a soft, breathy voice. "The s-scent—."

Guilt continued to grow in James. "Believe me, even if I wiped up every bit of it from your body, the scent's there now." It'd be there for a while given just how thoroughly James had seeded the pup. "We should be fine now. Anyone who smells you…" he cleared his throat, glad he couldn't flush in humiliation anymore. "No one will doubt we're sexual partners anymore."

There was a moment's silence, and then a soft: "Good."

Floor by just how dedicated to Jacob's orders Seth was, James continued to clean him up in silence. James had had his own coven once and yet he'd never engendered this sort of obedience in its members - hell, they'd mutinied against him! Jacob was, far and wide, a better leader than he'd ever been.

It was a sour pill to swallow, but it was the truth. All he could do was learn from everything. He'd already failed Seth, had shown more James-leadership than Jacob-leadership, and that wouldn't do. This self-proclaimed Omega was willing to do anything, go through anything, to prove his place in this pack. James couldn't take advantage of that like he used to as coven-leader. He couldn't continue doing shit like this. Jacob would never forgive him if he did.

And despite being a pain in the ass, Seth didn't deserve to be treated this way either.

Guilt filled James. Things had to change. *He* had to change.

"What you're going to see up there is unlike anything you will have experienced in the Rez, or in Forks," James warned him in a soft voice as he continued his work. "There's magic surrounding the land and the place itself, it will affect you in weird ways."

"How?" Seth asked, voice still breathy, but stronger than before.

"Well, it doesn't allow anyone near to hurt anyone else, to fight, it's a safe zone, so you won't want to kill vampires when you're up there like you usually would," James explained. "It wouldn't do if the patrons all killed themselves, so it's very strong magic."

"Magic." Seth seemed stuck on that word despite being a freaking shapeshifter.

It brought a small smile to James' face. "Don't worry, puppy, I'll look after you."

"And I will look after you." That was quick, short, rebellious.

Relieved Seth was getting back to normal, James smiled at the boy's back as he lowered his shirt to
cover his russet colored skin. "Okay."

"Werewolves and vampires are natural enemies." Caius paced the length of the floor, his features scrunched together in obvious displeasure. "The news brought to us can not be true. No matter what—there cannot be a pack compromised of werewolves and vampires. That is unnatural and impossible!"

"And yet you must doubt that enough to be wearing a hole in my rug," Aro muttered from where he watched the blonde continue to pace back and forth. "Although, your wariness is not unfounded. These reports are too serious to have been brought to us on a whim. We should investigate the claims further." He peered over at the other male in the room. "Do you not agree, Marcus?"

Unlike the others in the room, Marcus did not seem at all affected by the news. He merely stood, arms clasped behind his back, and stared at a portrait of a beautiful woman.

"Marcus," Aro tried again.

Finally, with a sigh, Marcus glanced behind him at the two men. "You already know what you'll do, Aro." He then returned his attention to the portrait of his deceased wife with wistful sadness.

Aro and Caius exchanged looks before the blonde returned to pacing, and Aro remained leaning against the wall, eyeing his fellow nobles. They truly needed to find a new wife for Marcus, and yet none of the vampires they'd presented to him had drawn any of his attention whatsoever. His devotion to the dearly departed Didyme was admirable, but it was also a threat that Aro couldn't allow any longer.

Marcus needed a new bride - posthaste.

But these rumors about a vampire and werewolf pack was also very pressing. They could not be true, and yet, if they were, it would mean so many things for them! It threatened the Volturi just as much, if not more, than Marcus' situation.

Letting out a deep breath, Aro glanced between Marcus and Caius before he nodded, having made a decision.

Alice's eyes widened as she blinked, the vision having finally slipped away, leaving her in her room with Jasper and Bella, where they'd been in the middle of a teasing conversation right before the vision had hit. Things were slowly changing between the three of them in ways Charlie most definitely didn't appreciate, and Alice had thought tonight might be a turning point, and it had, but not in the way she'd anticipated.

"What is it?" Jasper's hand was on her shoulder, squeezing it tightly as he watched her worriedly.

"W-what did you see?" Bella asked softly as she rested her hand on Alice's thigh.

Alice stared between the two of them, dread gripping her chest. "Trouble. Big trouble."
Chapter 3

Seth was walking in a daydream-like way. He knew he wasn’t as alert as he should be, and that annoyed him somewhat, but he couldn’t help it. James had—they had—Seth could still feel where James had been. Thanks to Seth’s superior healing factor the pain had quickly ended, but there was a slight pressure there, his body still remembering where James had been. Just the thought made him semi-hard but he fought that, because, well, sure, all his doubts at how gay sex might be - and his position in it - had been answered in an amazing way - but this wasn’t the beginning of a relationship.

They’d rutted. Like animals. And it was great, but rutting wasn’t the only thing Seth’s wolf wanted. So while it was sated right at this moment he knew it would rear its head again, and soon.

The fact that they were going to some sort of supernatural brothel, one where James had been to before and obviously enjoyed with someone else, well, that was already making the afterglow disappear quickly. What if James’ old partner was there? What would happen if he saw her? Sure, Seth was supposed to be going there as James’ current partner, but he didn’t trust someone to try and get in between that. How was he supposed to act? Because magic or not, he wasn’t going to let James touch anyone in there!

The closer they got to the top of the hill, the more Seth could feel this magic affecting him. He was lulled, less tense, and he wasn’t the only one. He could see James fighting the effects of the magic, and yet, when the vampire reached out and curled a finger around one of Seth’s belt buckles, Seth realized he was being swayed a little as well. The wolf didn’t mind though, allowing himself to be pulled in closer to the cool body.

And then they crested the hill and saw the establishment. It was large and looked like a closed-in carnival, but the scent in the air was strong and let Seth know exactly what was going on in there. Even if James hadn’t warned him about the place they were going to he’d have known just from the mixture of scents.

James’ grip shifted so that he now clutched the belt buckle opposite his body, so his arm now hung around Jacob’s hips. This was probably just the vampire’s way of blending in, there were probably eyes on them, and they needed to portray themselves as lovers - but Seth couldn’t help but shiver in delight at the proprietary touch. He’d thought his inner wolf would fight the obvious dominance James radiated, and yet, so far at least, his wolf seemed more than content with how things were progressing. That was both a relief and kind of confusing.

As they drew closer, the doors creaked open, and a woman stepped forth, a smirk on her face. “James, now this is a surprise.” She eyed Seth over before she held up a stamp in her hand. “Companion?”

“Partner.” James smiled as he held out his hand, letting the woman stamp it, all the while his other hand curled Seth tighter into his side.

The woman, who smelt like something Seth had never smelt before, smirked darker as she stamped Seth’s as well. “This is going to be interesting.” And with that she motioned them to enter.

The second they did, the scent (which Seth had thought strong before) was almost overwhelming. He took a step back but James’ grip on him kept him in place while he tried to accustom himself to the stench of sex that filled the place.
“Find my scent,” James whispered into Seth’s ear as he led him through a long hallway. “Search for it, find it, and concentrate on it. Use it to block everything else out.”

Seth was having serious problems with that. He was usually better at tracking than this, and James was right next to him, but the scents were just so overpowering! How in the world was he supposed to pick up one scent in the midst of this——?

The vampire must’ve noticed Seth’s rising hysteria before he yanked Seth into his body, wrapping his jacket closed around him.

Blinking, Seth found himself with James’ arms around him, his jacket surrounding him. James’ scent was really strong right now, surrounding him, and Seth found his own hands gripping James’ waist, anchoring himself against the blonde as he pressed his nose against James’ skin, taking in deep breaths of his scent. A little choked sound escaped James’ lips as Seth continued to trail his nose against the exposed skin at the vee of James’ shirt.

Wanting more of that scent, Seth’s hands found their way under James’ shirt, his calloused fingers brushing hard against that milky white skin… and somehow… James’ scent got thicker, stronger. The wolf inhaled it desperately until the burn of everything else slowly disappeared, completely dominated by the scent of smoked honey he associated with James.

All other leeches were way too sweet for his nose, but not James. James was just the right amount of sweet, mixed with a smoky, earthy scent that balanced out the usual sugary overload that leeches emitted. Seth liked this scent. He had from the first time he’d smelt it - before he’d ever laid his eyes on James. It was a scent that had nearly driven him wild back then, and was doing a number on him now.

James groaned, his voice low. “You, uh, okay now, pup?”

Suddenly remembering why they were in that position, Seth’s eyes flew open and he nodded, fighting the flush he could feel climbing up his neck. He eased out from James’ hold, and while the scents assaulted him once more he was able to now keep James’ scent in his nostrils, to fill himself with it. A breath of relief escaped his lips. “It worked.”

James stared at him in silence before he cleared his throat and smirked. “I forgot to warn you about that, sorry.”

“S’okay.”

James’ gaze lowered from Seth’s face to his body, resting on his hips. “You okay?”

Seth gulped, still able to feel the ghost of James within him. “Y-yeah. Of course. I heal quickly.”

A moment passed with James just staring at him, before the vampire suddenly nodded and motioned with his head for Seth to follow him despite already grabbing hold of one of Seth’s belt buckles, pulling him along with him. The vampire seemed to be searching for someone intently, ignoring the open doors down each side of the hallway. Seth wasn’t so focused though, his eyes widening as he lay witness to each and every act happening in each and every room.

He’d never seen—not even in porn!

Seth’s wide gaze tore away from the sights to stare at James’ back as the vampire pulled him through the hallway with determined strides. This wasn’t affecting the vampire. Was he used to this sort of stuff to the point where it wasn’t enticing anymore? Fuck! That was terrifying! Seth had always known he’d been overprotected by his parents and sister, and that he might be a little more
pure than other guys his age, and yet never before did James’ ‘puppy’ names seem to make sense!

How in the world could Seth compete with whatever James could get in a place like this with people like this?

James glanced back at him and then frowned, seeming to notice something about his expression before he backed up a step and peered into the room Seth was now staring into. The vampire tilted his head, taking in the sight, before he suddenly groaned and turned to Seth, clearly second-guessing his bringing the wolf here. “C’mon, it’s a little further ahead.”

Allowing himself to be pulled along, Seth noticed the white door up ahead. They seemed to be heading there. What was behind the one white door? Who was behind it?

He didn’t have long to wait, as James didn’t even knock, instead he kicked the door open, surprising the wolf as James strolled into the large room, yanked Seth in, and then slammed the door shut behind them. They were now in a… natural pool area. They were also alone.

James turned and leaned back hard against the door. “You can turn back, you know. You don’t have to go through this. But any further than this and it’s going to get too strong.” He motioned around him. “This is a kid’s show compared to what will be happening further on. The spell’s stronger than I remember it being.”

He was treating Seth like a kid again. After what they’d done, after everything, he was still going to pull this shit?

“You said so yourself, didn’t you?” Seth raised his chin. “I’m your partner.”

James tilted his head. “Not exactly the way I was using it.”

“I know.” Seth cleared his throat before meeting James’ eyes head-on. “But I’m in this with you and I’m not going back - you just have to lead me through this. So let’s do what we came here to do.”

There was a moment’s silence as James eyed him, before he finally nodded and pulled off his jacket and shirt. “Take your clothes off.”

Seth’s eyes widened. They were going to do it again? Here? In the water? He gulped and turned to eye the water, wondering how that would change the feeling.

James kicked off his boots and reached for the buttons of his pants. “We’ve got to swim through.”

“Swim…?” Only now did Seth realize that the pool led through a wall and was the only way out of the room. “Oh. Right. Of course.” He lowered his gaze and tried to pretend his mind hadn’t gone to a naughty place. “Do we take our clothes and things with us or—-?”

“Leave them, they’ll be fine. This is a no fighting - no theft zone.” James shoved down his pants, stepping out of it to leave himself completely bare, wearing nothing but Jacob’s damned totem necklace, which Seth hated with a passion.

But damn it, despite that totem still being there, Seth froze. And stared. A lot. That… that had been inside of him. He gulped and only barely managed to lower his gaze and work on his own clothes before James could catch on. Seth avoided James’ gaze by focusing on his hair once he was naked, gathering it up in a messy bun on top of his head.

The sound of James jumping into the water caught his attention, and he glanced up in time for
James to surface, flinging his own shoulder-length hair backwards while wiping the water from his face.

Seth gulped as he watched him, his hands lowering his cover himself when he felt himself reacting to the sight. It was a good thing he was close to the edge himself, because he was able to jump in before James opened his eyes, hiding his reaction in time. For now.

“Ready?” James asked as he finally opened his eyes.

Nodding, Seth smiled shakily and watched as James took the lead, swimming down towards the entrance through the wall. The wolf just stared for a couple of seconds, head tilted in appreciation, before he shook his head and followed after. He’d never seen anything like this before - a pool which led you to another part of the building, and the dimmer lights on the other side of the wall were only a hint of what was going to happen on the other side.

Groans and moans rose around him, and Seth dog paddled for a second, eyes growing used to the dark to realize that the pool continued through to the other wall, and onwards and onwards. James was still swimming towards the other wall, paying no mind to the people in the room, or the ones who hadn’t made it out of the pool and were pressed against the side with their, uh, lovers.

“Hey, cutie,” a voice purred a little above him.

Seth glanced up to see a tall, rangy vampire with eager ruby eyes and sandy hair kept back with a leather thong. A girl hung on his shoulders, massaging them while rubbing against him from behind, while a guy was kneeling in front of him… Seth’s eyes widened an his blush darkened rapidly as his gaze rose to the guy who’d spoken to him.

“Why don’t you join us?” The guy asked as he held a hand out towards Seth.

Não. No way.

“Fuck off, Garrett!” James was suddenly by Seth’s side, he must’ve returned when he’d realized Seth wasn’t next to him. “This one’s mine.”

The man’s sleek, come-hither expression completely collapsed as he noticed James. “Jamie?” He shoved the girl from him, and pushed the guy away as well. “I thought you were dead!” And then in seconds he was in the water, and had James tightly gripped, not seeming at all conscious of the fact that they were both naked and pressed up against each other. “I can’t believe you’re here!”

Seth snarled, moving and separating both of them rapidly before turning to snap at this Garrett guy. He couldn’t summon his wolf, couldn’t transform, but he could feel his eyes shifting enough to reveal the wolf as he snapped his teeth at him in warning.

Garrett’s eyes were wide. Ridiculously so. “A wolf.” Those eyes turned to James. “You’re with a wolf? And a guy on top of that? Since when were either a possibility? Wolf in particular and guy in general?”

James’ mouth opened and closed a couple of times before he sighed and surprised Seth by yanking him back, wrapping his arms around his body, resting his chin on the top of Seth’s head. “It just is. And sorry about his behavior, Garrett, he’s a jealous lover.”

Seth was in a very uncomfortable situation right now. Every instinct in him wanted to hurt this Garrett guy, but his wolf was very content right now with James all over him, and he was also incredibly distracted with the feeling of that body behind him.
“Let’s put a pin in this right now,” Garrett announced, looking confused yet intrigued. “By the time Riley got to me and brought me—they said you were dead, that Laurent had killed you—and Victoria had fled. We tried searching for her, but with her ability to hide we—you’re alive.”

“Riley looked for you?” James went still behind Seth, his grip on the wolf tightened. “Why?”

“He’d overheard Laurent and the others talking, said you’d never listen to him so he came to find me so I’d talk to you about it. But by the time we arrived it was done.” Garrett ran his fingers through his hair as he eyed James and Seth. “He and I have been traveling together ever since, came when we heard news that Laurent and his goonies—. I never thought—can’t believe you’re okay, brother.” He eyed Seth. “And with a wolf.” He then grinned at James. “You’re going to have to tell me how you managed that!”

“Maybe some other time,” James muttered, clearly rattled by what he’d just learnt, although he was doing his best not to show it. “Seth and I have some business with Murdock.”

“You’re going after Laurent and the rest of those scumbags too, aren’t you?” Garrett’s eyes widened, as did his smile. “We’re on the same hunt! Oh! Just like the past! This will be so much fun!”

“This isn’t your—-.”

“Come now, boy, wait till Riley finds out you’re alive.” Garrett eyed Seth meaningfully. “This will be interesting indeed.”

What did that mean? Who was this Riley guy? He was obviously another vampire who’d been a part of James’ old coven, but it somehow felt a bit more than that. Maybe it was in the way James had reacted to the news that Riley hadn’t been a part of the mutiny, or maybe the way Garrett kept smirking at Seth when he mentioned Riley. Did this Riley guy like James?

The wolf inside of him snarled.

No.

Nope.

A part of him could handle James’ feelings for Jacob considering Jacob and Edward were so clearly perfect together and everyone knew it, but what about this Riley guy?

“Last one’s a rotten egg!” Garrett laughed before beginning to swim towards the next entrance.

James groaned into Seth’s hair. “Things just got overly complicated.” He seemed to lean heavily into Seth.

“Is he not a friend?” Seth asked in confusion, glad the lights were dim, and the water high, so it hid his situation down there as James continued to lean his naked body against his.

“Yes, he is.” James let out a deep sigh nonetheless. “A pain in my ass though. I don’t need him coming along. He’s going to ask questions I’m not sure he should get answers to.”

“You mean - the pack.” Seth frowned as that brought up many questions of his own. “Are you ashamed of belonging to a wolf-pack?”

“No.” James shook his head. “But you don’t get it, Garrett and Riley, they don’t know the me you guys do.”
That sparked another set of questions. “Was the person you were before very different from the person you are now?”

“I used to hunt humans like Bella for fun, Seth,” James whispered into his hair, voice incredibly low. “Don’t you remember what happened in Forks when Victoria and I were there last? We killed people. We turned people. We—-we weren’t people you, Bellsy or Jacob would like. I’m still unable to understand why Jacob helped us, why he accepted us. If I had been in his position I would’ve have. I’d have left us to die, or be killed. I was an actual monster, Seth, not like the me after Jacob.”

Jacob.

Again, this was all about Jacob.

“COME ON YOU TWO!” Garrett waved from the next entrance before diving through.

James groaned loudly. “Just—-don’t tell Jacob anything you might find out about the old me, okay?”

So he cared what Jacob thought about him, but not what Seth would. Great. Just freaking great. …

James knew he was asking a lot of Seth, but he couldn’t keep himself from doing so. He hadn’t been lying when he’d said he’d been a veritable monster before his near death. The person he’d become while weak and dependent on Jacob’s mercy was a far cry from the ruthless killer he’d once reveled in being. The vampire he was now was much closer to the human he’d once been, and that was something he’d always have the shifter Alpha to be grateful for.

This was why he’d wanted to come alone. He didn’t want anyone from his present day life to intermingle with anyone from the life he’d once led. He didn’t want to risk tainting their view of him, and Seth was just all wide-eyes and purity - and James had already ruined part of that already. He’d been unable to stop himself and had taken a part of that purity away, had lost control and taken advantage of the pup’s trusting nature. And yet he couldn’t help but feel depressed at the realization that by the time this mission was over, Seth was going to see the real James, and he didn’t think the wolf would ever look at him again without that look of disgust James knew he deserved.

He wanted desperately to send the pup away, send him back home, before that happened. But he couldn’t, he’d promised, and that promise would come back to bite his ass.

They needed to find Murdock, get what they needed from him, and then end Laurent and the rest of his mutineers - before this mission destroyed what James was trying to protect - his chance of having an actual home and family back home in Forks.

“James?”

Emerging from the other side, James treaded water as he sought that voice, finally catching sight of Riley. Apparently he’d been in the next section but Garrett had found and brought him over, having grown impatient of waiting for Seth and James to catch up.

Riley Biers. James’ last turn. Still very much his fledgling all things considered. James wasn’t sure why he’d chosen to turn Riley instead of letting the rest of his coven eat him, like they had the friends Riley was camping with in Forks. All James had known was that the boy intrigued him, and he’d held Laurent off, instead giving Riley his venom. Three days later Riley had awaken as a
vampire, one with surprising self-control when it came to thirst. He’d seen something in the kid, and had believed that his absence during the mutiny had meant he’d either been killed, or been a part of it.

And yet Riley was smiling hugely, and James suddenly had an armful of his fledgling.

“**Sire.**” Riley held on tightly, his whole body trembling. “When Garrett—I couldn’t believe—**how** are you alive?” He pulled away and stared up at him with wide eyes. “Is Victoria safe?” When James nodded, Riley let out a deep breath of relief before suddenly frowning, his gaze going behind them. “Who are you?”

“If you don’t remove him from you, James, magic or not, I’ll tear him apart,” Seth whispered softly, warningly.

James stared at him in silent surprise before he remembered their cover story. Right! They were lovers! Seth was following this story much better than James was, and he couldn’t help but admire how well Seth was handling the situation. Maybe he’d underestimated the pup’s ability to get into character.

“I don’t know who—-,” Riley stuttered when James eased him away and took a step back. “**Sire?**” Clearing his throat, James sent an apologetic smile Riley’s way before pulling Seth in close, very similar to how he had with Garrett. With his arms around the wolf, his body looming behind him, covering him, he knew his message would be read quickly, easily, especially once Riley suddenly searched—and smelt him in Seth.

His fledgling’s eyes narrowed, darkened, but he didn’t say anything, knowing it wasn’t his place. The other James would’ve never allowed anyone in his coven to question his relationships, and for once he was glad that Garrett and Riley still thought of him as *that* James. Sure, Garrett hadn’t been in his coven, but he’d known the other James long enough to—-. 

“They are searching for Laurent as well,” Garrett announced, proving he knew James well enough to swift the subject. “We can have a hunting party, like the olden days.”

Riley was silent, his gaze dark and displeased on Seth.

Seth returned that look without flinching, seriously impressing James.

“I don’t remember inviting either one of you to the hunt,” James muttered, ignoring their surprised looks. “I’m glad you’re both okay, but stay out of our way.”

Garrett’s eyebrow raised curiously.

Riley’s eyes narrowed on Seth.

Seth smirked back at Riley, the action clearly provocative.

“**C’mon,**” James muttered as he slid his hand down between his and Seth’s bodies to smack Seth’s ass, surprising the wolf into a forwards jolt. “**We’ve got to go.**” He followed behind. “I haven’t shown you the Hall of Mirrors yet.”

Seth eyes him curiously before glancing behind James and smirking. “Lead the way.”

…
Garrett fought the amusement swelling inside of him as he watched James and the wolf shifter disappear from sight. His old friend was playing some game, was trying to push them away because he didn’t want them knowing something, and the realization made Garrett all the more curious. The James he knew would’ve taken any and all help he’d needed to defeat enemies, and the change was fun. Something else was going on here, and it had something to do with James suddenly doing the impossible and rutting a guy, a *werewolf*, sure, but a *guy werewolf*.

“He just… *left.*” Riley stared behind as well, his hands clenched at his sides. “After all I—he just—he can’t—he’s my *sire!*” His eyes were pitch-black in fury. “He just abandoned me! Again! He —!”

Garrett rested a hand on Riley’s shoulder. “Our Jamie-boy is hiding something.”

Riley looked up at him immediately. “What do you mean?”

“The boy? He’s a *wolf.*”

Riley went paler than usual. “*Vampires* and *wolves* do *not* rut.”

“That vampire and that wolf do, and very recently if the scent is anything to go by,” Garrett replied with a chuckle. “Makes you wonder what else is going on in Jamie-boy’s life that’s changed since his supposed death. He’s changed. Did you not see his eyes? They are gold.”

Riley brought a hand to his head, his own scarlet eyes widening. “I hadn’t thought—I hadn’t noticed—.”

“Jamie’s gone and become a *vegetarian,*” Garrett chuckled as he eyed where James and Seth had disappeared to. “We heard about Laurent and his group returning to Forks for some reason before getting halved by wolves. Did we not? And I know of a group of golden eyed vampires in Forks. It is said they also have a truce of sorts with the wolf shifters near them.” Garrett smiled as the pieces of the puzzle began to fall all around him. “I believe the Olympic Coven have answers for us as to what has happened to James.”

“We can’t let him fight Laurent on his own,” Riley announced with a frown, clearly this was the topic that worried him the most - everything else second. Despite his hurt on being abandoned without a thought a second time by his sire, his fledgling loyalty (the same loyalty which had had him going to Garrett for help in the first place) was quickly asserting itself once more.

“We won’t,” Garrett assured his friend and protege. “But for now, it’s best that we let Jamie and his little wolf *think* we are.”
Chapter 4

There'd definitely been back off vibes from that Riley vamp. If it wasn't for the fact that Seth had overheard a conversation where it was revealed Jacob was the first guy James had ever been attracted to, he would've believed Riley some old lover or something for how he'd acted. It made the wolf wonder just how close vampire covens were. He'd never really thought much about it, probably because he'd merely been busy killing them or being instructed to ignore the Olympic Coven - but he figured the vegetarians were different from normal covens anyway, so studying them wouldn't have changed anything.

*This really isn't the time to be thinking about this,* he admonished himself in annoyance as he followed behind James. They'd gotten out of the water in the next section, and followed the door to another hall which opened up into more and more halls. It was like a freaking ant colony down here, and James' ability to track was just fascinating. Seth could only concentrate on James' scent so that everything didn't overpower him, but it was very clear James was sifting through the various scents and tracking the person they'd come here to see.

Whatever this magic was, it was overwhelming. Seth not only had to concentrate on just James' scent, but on James himself. His back, mostly, admiring his subtle muscles as the vampire pulled him along behind him. The wolf felt a little useless, maybe it would've been better to let James come here alone like he'd wanted to in the first place, but the second his gaze flickered to the side Seth remembered exactly why his inner wolf hadn't allowed that.

James grunted, his grip on Seth tightened.

Seth glanced up from their joined hands to see the muscles in James' arm twitching. Apparently he wasn't the only one who was having problems fighting—

"Shit." And suddenly James had him pressed against the wall, his lips a breath against Seth's, yet not touching. 'That guy to the right? The overly muscular one? He's one of the 'bouncers'. They go around making sure people don't fight the spells. Whenever someone resists 'the pull' they appear out of nowhere to throw that person out."

Ah, this was why James had said they couldn't go in without partners. The fact that they'd be alone, and 'thus resisting the pull' would've caused these bouncer guys to zero in on them immediately.

Brown eyes closed at the first touch of James' lips to his neck. Anyone with any sort of self-preservation would've tensed at a vampire nibbling one's neck, yet Seth found himself once more tilting his neck to give the blonde better access. He wondered whether the vampire even realized just how significant that instinctual movement was, how impossible it should be for a wolf to bare his neck to anyone, much less a bloodsucker…

...All thought slipped free from his mind as James brushed against his stomach, hard and ready. Again, it was instinctual to reach out and grab James, to take the vampire in hand. He gloried in the groaned out breath against his neck as James' whole body tensed deliciously. Clearly the vampire hadn't expected Seth to take the situation in hand, the realization gave him a little thrill in the pit of his stomach, as did the soft sounds that escaped James' lips as he stroked him.

This was all really overwhelming for Seth, he'd never expected his first sexual encounters to be this way, it definitely wasn't how he would've planned it if he could've, but a part of him kind of liked how overwhelmed all his senses were. The scent, the sounds, the taste in the air, it all had his inner wolf on edge, and with his inner wolf growing frustrated and agitated it only seemed to make each...
touch, kiss, breath, seem that much more…more.

Despite what everyone seemed to think, Seth wasn't a baby. He had some experience. Just not, you
know, this kind of experience. He hadn't really felt an overwhelming need to, and once he'd found
out that wolves Imprinted he'd slowed down, figuring his first time being his Imprint would be
kind of cool. Never in a million years had he expected to be naked and pressed up against a wall in
a sex den somewhere in the United States with a male vampire very nearly biting his neck.

"Oh gods, Seth," James groaned breathily into his neck. "Don't—you don't have to—-" 

Gripping James' hair with his free hand, Seth tore the vampire away from his neck and did what he
was dying to do - he kissed him. James froze immediately, and while that was somewhat
dishheartening, Seth wouldn't allow his courage to be broken. He'd heard about everything Edward
Cullen had had to go through to win Jacob over, and if the bloodsucker could persist enough to win
Jacob Black then Seth wouldn't lose to Edward's resolve. Somehow, some way, he'd get his
emotion across to James, even if it took him a couple of years.

James let out a sound which was freaking confused.

Seth let go of his hold on the vampire's length to instead grip both hands in those shoulder length
blonde locks. He tilted his head, taking the kiss deeper, and then rolled his hips, thrusting up
against James in a way that caused them both to cry out in each other's mouths as their straining
need brushed together.

Suddenly James' hands were in Seth's hair, gripping fistfuls and pulling tightly, arching Seth's head
back and making it easier for him to kiss him. And he kissed him. It was somewhat bruising if Seth
was honest, but he didn't care. He liked it. Or maybe he just liked the way it felt mixed with James'
thrusts as their bodies rubbed together, James' cold mingling with Seth's heat.

Pleasure slowly coiled inside of Seth's body, everywhere James brushed against tingled almost
painfully. Trails of wet slipped down his abs and he wasn't sure if it was James' or his own.

A whimper, a warning, slipped from Seth's mouth and was immediately consumed by James with
the same viciousness Seth assumed the vampire drank blood. The thought, far from terrifying or
disgusting him, sent the wolf over the edge. He tried to say James' name but before he could he lost
all control, and then James was pressed harder against him, kissing him harder, stealing Seth's very
breath before he too found release.

Despite the groans and cries all around them, when their lips finally parted and Seth could breathe
once more, James' breathy groans were louder than anything else in his ear.

James mightn't need to breathe, but not only was he doing it, he was panting. His nose rested
against the piece of skin behind Seth's ear, and he seemed to be breathing in the wolf's scent every
other pant. It was weird but felt good somehow.

They remained there, pressed against each other, leaning hard against the wall, their bodies nearly
stuck together. Seth pressed his arms back against the wall while James leaned his forearms against
the wall over Seth's head.

This was good.

James wasn't pushing away, in fact, when Seth gathered his courage and rested his hands on James'
hips the blonde leaned in harder.

This was really good.
Suddenly James tensed, his voice low yet audible given how close it was to Seth's ear. "He's near." And with that he pulled away and grabbed Seth's hand, leading the still somewhat disoriented wolf through the maddening crowd. They must've convinced the bouncer they weren't resisting anything because he was no where to be seen.

Seth was about to ask James how much farther, when James turned down an unlit hallway Seth hadn't even noticed, and there, at the far end of the tunnel, was a lone male who looked very much like he'd been waiting on them and was annoyed they'd made him wait this long.

"Murdock." James' voice continued to be low as he pulled Seth behind him, hurrying his pace until they stood in front of the other guy.

"I know why you're here." Murdock rolled his eyes, looking less like some important player, and more like an incredibly skinny guy with stringy hair and a nose a little too large for his face. He was covered in freckles, covered, and the bottom of his feet were so covered in dirt it seemed as if he hadn't worn shoes in a very long time. "Laurent and the remainder of what was once your coven went crying to the Volturi when they realized they couldn't kill you off in Forks. Laurent isn't an idiot, he realized that once you got strong you'd come after him, and even though you're no hundred per cent still you've got strength—one you didn't used to have. One that's not all yours."

Murdock eyed Seth quietly as he leaned against the wall, crossing his arms over his chest, resting them right above his very visible ribcage. Despite his clear annoyance at having to deal with them, the guy (Seth had no idea what in the world he was - was he a vampire?) was very visibly intrigued with the situation.

"You're talking about my being in Jacob's pack," James muttered as he gripped the totem around his neck, the one that made Seth pissed off every single time he saw it.

"Ah yes, the Alpha with the essence of the Original Wolf within him." Murdock finally looked away from Seth and turned his eyes on James. "This wouldn't have happened if not for him, and if not for the fact that you were a very strong candidate to replace the other vampire. The Original Wolf inside of him recognized that, it was why you were accepted as part of the pack so seamlessly, as well as your sister, as she was no doubt a package deal and an asset in her own right."

James' eyes widened as his grip on the totem tightened.

Seth was suddenly very dry-mouthed and angsty. This wasn't what he wanted to hear, wasn't what he wanted James to hear. This guy was basically saying that a part of Jacob felt something for James as well, that James had a chance with Jacob. And if James had even a sliver of a chance with the Alpha he'd never—Seth was defeated before the fight had even begun.

"This happened before, you know," Murdock informed him in a dull tone, as if the topic bored him. "A female wolf, an Alpha in her own right, inherited the essence of the Original Wolf, and believed she'd imprinted on Vampire, only to later find herself attracted to another—eventually choosing this other person. It ended in two deaths, with the one remaining alive choosing to live in isolation."

Seth gulped as he glanced between James and Murdock, fighting his instincts to drag James out of here before the other guy could make Seth's situation even worse. The female wolf hadn't chosen the vampire she'd thought she'd Imprinted on, and by telling them this, Murdock was telling them Jacob could choose James over Edward.

This had been Seth's nightmare ever since he'd realized he'd Imprinted on James. And he
actually had Imprinted on James! Not like Jacob! So why did Jacob's not-Imprint mean more than Seth's true one? Why didn't Seth's feelings, his desires, matter?

Why did Jacob get to have everything Seth wanted?

Even with the magic working in the tunnels, Seth could feel his wolf slowly yet surely reacting. He could feel it pacing, snarling, scratching, inside of him - could barely keep the growl from slipping free from his lips - and knew for a fact that his eyes were glowing wolf-gold.

"The difference is that this Alpha chose his original vampire, without any doubt, and claimed him as his mate. Even when she chose the second vampire, the previous wolf didn't do so with surety, she was full of self-doubt and confusion. Your Alpha, on the other hand, holds no doubt on whether he and his vampire are meant to be together. He will punish the vampire for having left unnecessarily (in his mind) but there is truly none other for him," Murdock suddenly revealed with a sly look in Seth's direction which, to be fair, unnerved him. "They've been bound in a true Imprint, which knocks James - and anyone else - out of the running." His gaze shifted onto James with a smirk. "Doesn't mean you're not still an important part of what is happening."

"Lucky me," James replied, voice dark and bitter, his smile ugly, sharp, his eyes darker than they'd been seconds before. "I get to stand by and watch the person I love be perfectly in love forever with someone else."

Seth clenched his hands into fists as his gaze lowered to the ground, glad he stood a little behind James so he wasn't visible to the vampire. He definitely didn't want James to see him wallowing in self-deprecation like he was right now.

"You did not love him," Murdock replied easily with a roll of his eyes. "You're a hunter, and for too long he's been a prey you've hunted into obsession without being able to catch. There is also your fealty to him, and the love of pack. But you do not truly love until loved in return."

Even though it hadn't been directly aimed at him, Seth felt personally attacked with that. "That's not true. You might know things, but you obviously don't know everything, because that's baloney!" He finally looked up at Murdock, pissed off on James' behalf. "James chose to come on a suicidal mission, alone, because he wanted to protect Jacob from the constant danger Laurent being alive would present. Especially if vamp nobility have been mixed up in it James knows that Forks will not be safe for them, so he decided to come here to do all he can to either stop the threat, or at least gather as much information as he can so the pack can prepare for whatever's coming." He could hear the growl lowering his tone, and he fought it, really, he did, but his inner wolf was slowly beginning to overpower him and the magic. "James has changed from his old self, he went from being some homicidal vampire to Jacob's trusted Beta, reluctant protector of the humans he would've killed before, someone who takes orders graciously when he used to give them, and he even tolerates my presence even though I know I'm nothing more than a source of annoyance for him—all because it's what Jacob wants." Seth swallowed very deeply as he tried to temper his anger before he wolfed out - magic or not. "I really believe James loves Jacob. So please do not underestimate or devalue his feelings or what they mean to him."

Oh gods. That hurt to say!

The wolf glanced up, a little terrified, and flinched when he noticed the expression on James' face. The blonde had turned to look at him sometime during that rant, his eyes wide, his lips parted, and a completely incredulous expression on his face.

Great. Just great. Seth lowered his head and scrunched his eyes closed tightly. He'd made a fool of himself and probably humiliated James on top of everything!
A cool pressure rested on his head.

Blinking his eyes open, Seth glanced up, shocked to realize James was suddenly by his side, petting his head. The wolf blinked, blinked, blinked, and then looked at James to find him frowning at Murdock, and then he followed James' glare to find Murdock smirking knowingly.

"What aren't you telling me, Murdock?" James wanted to know coolly, much more in control of his emotions than Seth.

"I see all, you see nothing." Murdock shook his head at James in as close to reproach as he could while smirking. "How does the puppy put up with you?"

In seconds James was in front of Murdock and had him by the neck, lifting the guy up. His voice was low, emotionless, yet somehow terrifying when he whispered: "Only I get to call him that." He hadn't punched Murdock, yet his fist was clenched, shaking at his side.

Seth blinked in shock. Sure, they'd agreed James would have to beat up anyone else who thought they could use that nickname, but he'd never actually thought James would follow through. Especially not against someone they were looking for help from!

And yet, instead of being annoyed, Murdock merely smirked greater, as if he'd expected this and found it amusing. "Your Alpha has changed the game with his decision, and even if you are too blind to see it now, the consequences of his actions are already rippling out, they will be felt far and wide. Not even the royals will be able to escape."

Putting Murdock back down, James took a step back, his eyes narrowed. "What consequences?"

"The vampire and wolf clans are family, used to be one," Murdock responded evenly. "Now that the essence of the Original Wolf has started to repair the bond which was broken, the rest will follow until what was severed is whole once more."

James frowned in confusion.

Seth, though, knew exactly what Murdock was saying. "More wolves are going to Imprint on vampires, aren't they?"

James turned to look at Seth in utter shock before turning quickly back to catch Murdock's nod.

"James," Murdock chuckled. "I am going to tell you something because I owe my life to you, you saved me and brought me here, where I have been safe." He let out a deep sigh. "You were never meant for Jacob, but you were meant to meet him, meant to go through what you did, so you could become who you are now and be ready for what is coming."

"What is coming?" James asked softly.

Murdock smiled. "You'll realize soon enough. And I'll see you two again before too long."

"Like hell I'm bringing him back to this place," James snapped as he half stepped in front of Seth, surprising the wolf shifter and kind of insulting him given everything. "Tell me about Laurent. About the royals."

"You'll find Laurent and his coven where Victoria first denied him, but you won't be alone, your two vampire friends will be with you and will be of help." Murdock muttered as he eyed his nails. "Do not forget that even though you are Jacob's Beta, you are also Riley's Sire." His eyes rose to meet James'. "Just like you needed to learn from your Alpha, he still needs to learn from you." He
waited until James nodded, and then he continued. "As for the royals, they will come to you. Like I said, they will not be untouched by the ripple."

"They'll come looking for a fight," James predicted. "They will never accept werewolves and vampires forming packs."

"Oh, yes, they will definitely not be happy," Murdock chuckled. "I would make friends with your Alpha's old pack if I were you. It will come in handy when the time comes."

"My old pack will never accept a blended pack either," Seth declared immediately. He, better than anyone else, knew just how prejudiced against the idea his old pack was, and as long as Sam was still the Alpha he would forever lead the pack in animosity against them. "Sam won't ever let it happen."

"Sam Uley has been broken by his own inability to control his temper," Murdock muttered with a little pout of his lips. "He's lost his mate. You will soon find him a different man than the one you once knew."

Seth froze, eyes wide in horror. What? Had something happened to Emily? Panic filled his chest. James seemed to sense his distress because he turned to look at him immediately with concern. "They nearly killed you, Seth."

"Not Emily," Seth responded hoarsely. In many ways Emily had been the best part of being in Sam's pack! Not only that, but Seth had genuinely loved Emily long before she'd gotten with Sam, she was his second cousin! The thought of her being dead - of Sam somehow being to blame - Seth couldn't take it, couldn't believe it. Sam had learnt his lesson after accidentally scarring Emily's face, hadn't he? But what if he hadn't?

"If it helps, it was quick," Murdock mumbled under his breath, not really seeming to care one way or the other, merely stating a fact. "He is unhinged with grief and guilt, but when his wolf does not die, does not wither from loss, he will come to you. He will have questions only you can answer."

"Like we'd help that son of a bitch," James snapped at him, which really surprised Seth because what did James have to be so pissed off about? It wasn't as if the pack had done anything to him! "They turned on you, Seth, you barely—it doesn't matter if you have advanced healing—what they did to you was inhumane."

"We're not human," Seth whispered, realizing he was very much in shock right now.

"They beat me up," Seth clarified, still shaken with the news of Emily's death. He wouldn't believe it, not until he'd talked to Leah. "There's a difference."

"Do not forgive them for that so easily!" James snapped at him, which really surprised Seth because what did James have to be so pissed off about? It wasn't as if the pack had done anything to him! "They turned on you, Seth, you barely—it doesn't matter if you have advanced healing—what they did to you was inhumane."

"We're not human," Seth whispered, realizing he was very much in shock right now.

"Shut up." James grabbed his shoulders and shook him, surprising Seth into looking up into his eyes. "Your pack turned on you like my coven turned on me. I would never forgive my coven, and I will never forgive your pack. Never."

Seth gulped and stared into James' eyes, surprised to realize the vampire really was pissed. "But I turned on them first, I was spying on them for you guys. They were justified in——."

A muscle jumped in James' cheek. "No they were not."
"But—."

James turned back to Murdock, apparently refusing to talk about Seth's pack any longer. "Is there anything else we need to know?"

...

This time Victoria found herself seated on Leah's bed, her arm around the werewolf, who sat hugging her knees to her chest, her dark hair falling in her hair and hiding it from Victoria. But the redhead didn't need to see Leah's face to know she was sobbing.

"I hate him," Leah hiccuped. "First he breaks my heart, then he scars my cousin's face, and now this? She had every fucking right to be pissed at him! Especially given the fact that we're her family! And because of him and his ways we left the pack!"

Victoria wasn't motherly, wasn't even nice most of the time, so she knew the best thing she could do right now for her friend was listen to her. Bella was better at these kinds of things, but considering Bella was intimidated as hell of Leah (something she would never own up to but was very obvious) Victoria was stuck having to do this on her own.

"Sure, he didn't mean to hurt her, was just trying to get her to come back to their house, but he knew those cliffs were there! And he knew Emily wouldn't do what he wanted if she was that pissed off!" Leah angrily brushed her tears away. "She wanted peace between our two packs, and his inability to admit to his own damned mistakes - it's his fault she was out there by herself at that time of the night! He's the reason she's dead! He is! Him!" She gulped in desperate breaths. "I hate him. I've said that before, but I mean it this time. I hate him."

Victoria rested her head against Leah's shoulder.

Leah sucked in a stuttered, thick breath, and then continued to rant and rave.

Victoria listened.

...

"I know, Carlisle, it really has been too long." Garrett looked very much at ease as he grinned and paced.

After realizing that there was something going on, the two vampires had made their way outside, where the magic wasn't strong enough to truly affect them, but the protection was still offered. It'd been a long fifteen minutes while Riley listened to Garrett's side of the phone conversation with Carlisle Cullen, head of the Olympic Coven.

Riley kept glancing towards the entrance.

When Garrett and he had heard that Laurent and what remained of the turncoat coven were seen here they'd headed here for some reconnaissance (and, some fun) but right when Garrett had found him Riley had been coming to find him to let him know that Laurent and his coven had just left, mere hours ago. If they hurried they'd be able to track them down, especially now with James tracking.

But Laurent and his group were getting more and more of a head's start, and Riley blamed the damned wolf. That wolf had to be the reason why his sire was so different. The James he knew would've never been so protective like he was with Seth earlier on. He'd had the wolf's back, his grip around him letting both Garrett and Riley know that he wouldn't allow them to either flirt or
threaten the guy.

For as long as Riley had known James he'd basically worshipped him. It was James who'd come across his coven eating Riley's friends, James who'd stopped Laurent from feasting on Riley, James who turned and waited on Riley to rise, James who'd been training Riley up until the mutiny. Riley had never considered himself gay before he'd met James, hell, he'd probably have been in love with Victoria if he'd never met James, but he'd met James, and James had changed his life, literally. He'd never really pushed his issue, or had an issue with how things were, because James was a staunch heterosexual, but now? Damn it! What did that wolf have that he didn't?

Sure, Riley wasn't in love with James, he'd never allowed himself that last step - to fall in love with his sire and make anything uncomfortable between them, but he'd been pretty damned close ever since his second birth. And now... now he was left wondering what would've happened if he'd been brave enough to make his feelings known.

_Hindsight's a bitch._

"Thanks Carlisle, I agree, we'll work on that." Garrett made a face as he peered up at the night sky. "That's a plan. Talk to you later." He hung up and turned on his heel to face Riley. "My hunch was right. James was in Forks, and while Carlisle said it wasn't exactly his story to tell, it seems James is a part of their coven—or something along those lines. Carlisle's being very vague about it, but I definitely got that James and Victoria barely got away from your old coven and the reports of his death were almost accurate - he nearly died but they were protected and became a part of some coven there. This other group cared for him and got him to his current level of strength - which must've taken forever given the fact that he's apparently been drinking nothing but animals."

"So he's answering to someone else?" Riley made a face at the very thought. James was a leader, not a follower. Just what had he gone through to be forced into something like that? Just how close to death's door had he been? How indebted was James to this other coven? "And how does the dog fit into all of this?"

"I don't know." Garrett somehow smirked despite this. "That's why, once we help that stubborn ass get revenge on Laurent's coven, we're going on a little trip."

Riley stared at him curiously, suspiciously. "Where?"

Garrett was far too proud of himself as he replied: "Forks, Washington."
Seth hadn't been the same since he'd come back to camp from talking on the phone with Leah. Guess that meant that this Emily chick was actually dead, not that James was surprised Murdock was right, Murdock was always right, but his timings weren't precise. It could've been a warning of something yet to come, yet it would've come, no matter how much anyone tried to stop it from happening. As soon as the words had left Murdock's lips, this Emily chick's fate had been sealed. Seth didn't know Murdock like James did, so the vampire didn't blame the wolf for his non-belief, for his hope, but he did blame him for the depression clearly wafting off of him.

They were far from… that place… by now. James had wanted to put as much distance between them and it as possible. He hadn't looked for Garrett or Riley, those two were on their tail, trying to stay downwind, and if it wasn't for Murdock's telling James they'd be there for the final showdown with Laurent (and the fact that James was just way too good at tracking - and knew those two better than to believe they'd just give up) well, he might've missed their scent. Might've. Probably wouldn't have. But might've.

It all depended on just how distracted he'd allowed himself to get with Seth's mood. This was not the wolf he was used to. Sure, James didn't know Seth all that much, but he knew him enough. The kid was nice and enthusiastic and, damn it, sweet. Seth had put up with a lot of bullshit from James, a lot, and nothing had broken him. Not his ex pack. Not temporary banishment from Forks. Not dealing with James' attitude. Not anything he'd seen in that place. Not… not what James had done to him.

Nothing. Nothing affected him like the death of this Emily chick.

James broke the twig he'd been holding as he stared at Seth.

Just who was this Emily chick anyway? And yes, he probably didn't need to keep calling her 'this Emily chick' but he couldn't think of referring to her any other way. He didn't know who she was, what she looked like, or what sort or relationship she'd had with Seth. She was just 'this Emily chick' to him.

Whoever she'd been, she'd obviously meant something to Seth, the wolf had been unbalanced ever since Murdock had announced her death, and now that Leah had no doubt confirmed the news he looked very much like an empty shell. He hadn't cried, but he really hadn't done anything.

Unlike the chatterbox who'd annoyed James with his constant conversation, Seth now stared in front of him at nothing, in total silence. He'd been doing this far too long now. It unnerved James. It upset him. Sure, the vampire had prayed to any unholy god all the other nights for Seth to just shut up, but now that he'd gotten his wish he was surprised at how much it bothered him.

"You didn't Imprint on her," was out of James' mouth before he even realized he was speaking.

Seth's gaze jolted up from the ground to stare at him in obvious confusion. "What?"

"This Emily chick was your old Alpha's girl, wasn't she?" When Seth nodded wordlessly, James continued. "So that means he Imprinted on her, which means you didn't." He stabbed the ground with the jagged ends of his sticks. "Which means you shouldn't be this torn up about some girl's death."
"She wasn't 'some girl',' Seth whispered, a hint of menace in his tone.

It really irked James. He'd purposely provoked the wolf for ages during this trip and had gotten no form of reaction from him, and yet now that he was actually trying to help he was getting lip from him?

What was so special about this Emily chick?

"Was she pretty?" James didn't really want to know yet couldn't keep from asking. "I'm imagining some tiny cutey girl."

"Why do you want to know?" Seth was apparently not going to answer. Since when had he become the asshole out of the? "You don't even care that she's dead."

"Why should I?" James wanted to know. "As far as I can tell she was always going to die so Sam can some day bone some poor vampire. No use crying over spilt milk. Or blood, in this instance."

"James," Seth whispered softly. "Shut the hell up."

Normally James wouldn't take that shit, but there was something in Seth's voice, in the flicker in his eyes, that warned him he was on thin ice and to tread slowly. Something in James reacted to that, strongly, and his instinctual reaction pissed him off even more.

"Go home."

"What?" Seth looked up at him, once more in confusion, his voice croaking with the question, with emotion.

"You're no use to me the way you are, all emotional and depressed, distracted," James muttered despite the inner voice telling him to shut the hell up - that voice sounded a lot like Seth. God James really was a sonofabitch to this particular werewolf, and he didn't understand why. That was the worse part, he couldn't rationally explain his reactions when it came to the shifter, and it annoyed him further, frustrated him. "All you're going to do is get us both killed."

"I'm not—-."

"Yes, you are." James cut in as he clenched the twigs tighter. "Look, you're right, I don't care that this Emily chick is dead, but you do. You care a lot. So go back to Forks and mourn her with your sister and the others who do care. I don't need you to stay."

"Laurent—."

"You heard what Murdock said, Riley and Garrett will be there when I face Laurent, I don't need you to be there too. They are more than enough to finish what I've started." James rested his forearms against his knees, refusing to look at the wolf because he knew he was being a hugeasshole right now yet couldn't stop himself for some reason. "You've done good, Seth, you came this far, way farther than I thought you would, especially given how I've been treating you. But it ends here. The next town we get to you're getting on a bus back to Fork."

"No, I'm not." That was said very low, very growl-like. "I'm your pack, James, not them. Just because you're away from Jacob and are around your old buddies doesn't mean you're allowed to conveniently forget that."

"Look, I haven't forgotten anything." James wasn't exactly sure how this conversation had turned on him so quickly. "I'll come back once it's done. So just go back."
"Sure you will," Seth chuckled darkly in a way James had never thought he could. "Now that you know you don't have a chance in hell with Jacob I'm sure you'll be rushing to come back and - what did you call it - watch the love of your life be forever happy with someone else?"

Damn it, that hit a nerve. "That's none of your business."

"Really?" Seth smiled, it was way too cynical a smile to be on Seth's face. It looked wrong on his face. "How I see it, I've been shoved face-first into your damned business, so yeah, it's become my business by default."

Huh? What the hell was he talking about?

Ahhh. Right. Because of everything going on Seth had been sent on this adventure, hadn't he? Jacob had made this potential suicide mission Seth's problem. The wolf was right. If it wasn't for Jacob, and for James, Seth would've been back home, and in his mind he probably would've been able to do something to save Emily. In the least he'd be able to properly mourn. It made sense now.

"Well, I'm doing what I should've done the second Jacob partnered us together," James informed him, feeling even more guilty about the whole situation and that made him pissed off even more. "I'm vetoing your participation." He slammed the jagged ends of the twigs into the ground before looking up and finally meeting Seth's gaze. "Go home, Seth. I mean it. Go home."

"No."

James blinked at the calm behind the word. "What?"

"I said: no." Seth stared at him with wolf eyes, his hands clenched at his sides, both shaking with the force with which he held them closed. "You do not get to throw some sort of tantrum just because I can't take the news of my cousin's death like some emotionless zombie. I'm doing my best here, I'll get myself under control and—-."

And then James realized just how much of an asshole he truly was.

He groaned, instinctively covering his face with his hands as he lowered his head.

"...James?" Seth asked in a confused yet wary tone.

"Cousin." James trailed the hands covering his face up, running his fingers through his head. "She was your cousin."

"Yes." Seth stared at him in wary hesitation. "Emily is, was, my second cousin."

"And you two were close." James closed his eyes tightly.

"Since childhood."

"Oh for crying out loud!" James clenched his fingers through his own hair while tilting his head up to glare at the sky. "I didn't realize she was your family."

There was a pause. "Would it have mattered?"

"Yes." James let out a groan as he finally let go of his own hair and lowered his gaze to meet Seth's, which was less closed off than it had been the last time he'd looked at him. "If anything happened to Victoria..." He let out a deep breath at the very thought as he met those wolf-eyes. "I'm sorry for your loss."
Seth just stared at him, as if unable to believe it, before he let out a soft sigh, a sad smile on his face as he lowered his head and shook it for some reason. His hair fell in his face, hiding his expression from the blonde.

Honestly, just how many times was James going to do wrong by Seth? He was surprised the wolf didn't hate him by now. Or, well, maybe he did. Maybe Seth really hated him but was just that loyal to Jacob to act on his feelings.

James wouldn't blame him if that were the case.

He really wouldn't.

He wouldn't like it, but he wouldn't blame Seth at all.

"Why does it matter that she was my family?" Seth wouldn't look up, his face covered by his hair.

James opened his mouth and then closed it. He did it again, and again, before he groaned once more. Just what the hell was wrong with him? It was a simple question!

"Victoria and I killed our father once we turned," James found himself saying, surprising not only Seth but himself. He didn't know why the hell he was telling the werewolf this, he really didn't want to tell Seth this, and yet he couldn't stop himself. "He was a real sonofabitch. He was the cause of all our suffering from childhood, either first hand or by proxy. Because of our father I was murdered, Victoria—she was worse than murdered. She would've preferred to have been murdered. It's why her special vampire ability is to hide herself, to keep from being found, because the only moments of peace she had were when she could remain hidden." James clenched his fists. "I kept finding her, no matter what he did to her, where he took her, who he sold her to. Maybe that's why my ability is tracking."

Seth was incredibly silent, his face expressionless yet his eyes incredibly wide.

"I know what it is like to have shitty family, and to have beloved family," James sighed as he broke eye contact with Seth and stared up at the stars in the sky. "If you are this broken up about her, Emily was the latter, and I am sorry you had to not only lose her, but that you had to find out about it the way you did, especially given how much of an asshole I am."

There was more silence before Seth cleared his throat. "Thank you."

"I never told Garrett or Riley about what happened to my sister and I while we were still human, no one in my old coven knew about this, only Victoria and I," James added, not sure why he needed Seth to know that. "I know what pack I belong to, Seth."

More silence, then a very emotionally charged: "Good."

"So you should go back home."

"I will punch you, you know."

Despite it all, James chuckled as he faced Seth once more. This was more like the cheeky wolf he knew. "Go home and mourn with your family, Seth. You're allowed this, Jacob wouldn't think any less of you for going. He'd understand. If anything had happened to his sister he would've gone back too. He won't hold it against you."

Seth's face darkened almost instantly. "What does Jacob have to do with any of this?"
"Excuse me?" James blinked, surprised that this was what had annoyed the wolf again, especially when he was trying to be considerate of his feelings. Why was it that whenever he tried to be nice he always seemed to tick Seth off?

"You keep bringing him up, over and over again, no matter the topic," Seth whispered angrily as his gaze lowered to the ground once more. "I'd just like one conversation with you where you didn't talk about him!"

James blinked, and then blinked, and blinked again, because, what the hell? Why would talking about Jacob bother Seth? They were both in Jacob's pack, he was the one thing they actually had in common, it made sense to talk about him. So why did it bother Seth? Especially since Seth had been the first one to mention Jacob's name! Not James! So why was he pissed at him for it?

'I see all, you see nothing.'

Murdock's words had confused James back there, but he'd brushed them off for now as there'd been more pressing matters to attend to, but they came back with full force now. There was obviously something else going on here, something James hadn't picked up on yet. It had to have been important, otherwise Murdock wouldn't have brought the issue up in the first place.

'How does the puppy put up with you?'

Okay. So. Obviously James was at fault here for something. But what? Sure, he knew he was a pain in the neck, that was his character on default, but this had to be more than normal annoyance, right?

What had the puppy on his last nerve? Sure, his cousin was dead, but James had noticed him acting off from before that news had been known. At what point had Seth started acting odd?

Around the time Murdock mentioned I'd been a candidate for Jacob's Imprint.

Now that he thought about it, Seth had gotten more and more angsty as the conversation had gone on. And then he'd made that speech about James and his feelings for Jacob being real, that feelings not being reciprocated didn't make them any less real or valid. James had never really seen Seth in the way he had until he'd heard that speech, and it'd touched him, nothing touched him much nowadays but Seth…

…Seth sounded like he understood what it meant to be in love with someone who wasn't in love with him.

And then it hit James.

Oh gods. How had he not even thought of it as a possibility?

Seth had done the impossible and broken away from his Alpha to join Jacob's pack despite the fact that there were vampires - his sworn enemies - in it. He hadn't even blinked or questioned Jacob's command for him to go with James, and he'd fought going back home no matter how much James had tried to bully him into it. He was coming on this (possibly, but not) suicide mission, wouldn't return, had pushed himself to do things, allow things, so that he could be an equal to James (not only in the mission but in life) and refused to go home despite everything the was going on. He'd reacted defensively to Murdock's story about Jacob, Edward and James - as well as the mention of the possibility of James and Jacob being together. That reaction had only doubled when Murdock hadn't thought much about James' one-sided feelings for Jacob. Seth didn't want James talking about Jacob.
How could I have been so blind?

James hung his head low with a groan, unable to believe he'd missed what had been so obvious.

Puppy's in love with Jake.

"I think I understand you a bit better now," Seth muttered, softly, still unhappily though.

"Huh?" James looked up at him, trying to wrap his head around what Seth must be going through. Sure, James wasn't happy with the situation between Jacob and Edward but he could accept it. He'd had heartache and pain in his life, he was used to it. But Seth seemed to be getting all the blows lately and he didn't deserve it.

"I think I get why you hunted humans after turning," Seth replied, apparently having decided to change the subject from Jacob. Not that James could blame him. He must be hurting something fiercely knowing Jacob had chosen Edward. "Your father was human, and while I don't know the extent of what he put you and Victoria through, from the little you've told me - he was a monster. He got you killed. He hurt your sister. I get why you killed him, I understand why you killed him, and why you wouldn't see anything wrong with continuing to kill humans." He frowned. "I don't like it, I don't like any of it, but I understand it."

James just stared at Seth. This was definitely not where he'd seen the conversation going, especially not after the way Seth had snapped at him earlier. Honestly. He'd thought he'd had the cute, kind Native American pegged but he really didn't. Seth was a whole bag of mysteries.

"That first time you came to Forks I could smell you all the way from LaPush, you know that?" Seth ran his fingers through his long hair in clear agitation. "And then the aftermath - the killings - the disappearances - I couldn't get how someone who'd once been human could do something like this to others. It kept me up all night. I was distracted all the time wondering how someone who smelled like you could do the things you did."

The vampire didn't get the correlation between scent and actions, but he didn't interrupt, fascinated by this view into Seth's psyche.

"I think I get it now, a little," Seth mumbled softly. "And I also get why you wouldn't want to talk about it with anyone, but if you want to, need to, get anything off your chest I'm here." He took in a deep breath and raised his wolf-eyes to meet James'. "You can talk to me about anything, tell me anything, and I won't judge you, James."

It was hard to breathe. James didn't need to breathe, but it helped with tracking so he did, which was why he noticed how hard it was to breathe all of a sudden. He didn't get it. Didn't get Seth. Why in the world was he such a nice person? James had never met anyone like this wolf before. Even Jacob had hesitated to help James and Victoria at first. But not Seth. Seth never hesitated. Seth threw himself in head-first no matter the situation.

He laughed darkly, unable to hold that gaze as he lowered his own to the ground. "Don't be so nice, puppy. You'll only get used and taken advantage of."

Seth let out a deep breath. "I won't get taken advantage of."

"You're too nice to realize guys like me aren't decent, you seem to think I am, but I'm not," James smiled darkly, self-depreciatingly. He didn't want Seth to excuse his behavior before. Sure, James and Victoria had been hurt, but they'd had decades of hurting others as well, many of which he knew weren't monsters of their own making. He didn't want Seth to think he was a monster, but he
couldn't let him think he was just some misunderstood vampire with a sad past. He'd done horrible things to innocent people, he'd become a monster. He'd lived as a monster for many years. It was just something he'd have to come to terms with. "I'm not a good guy, Seth, don't think I am. I might be trying to be better, but deep down inside I'm still the same monster I once was, I just have to fight my desires now." He tilted his head with a sneer. "You were so nice, pouring your heart out and being so accepting, so forgiving of my past misdeeds, not at all knowing that your doing so just made me want to push you down again."

Seth froze, eyes wide.

"So, don't get me wrong. I'm not a good guy, and you should just keep your guard up when you're around me from now on," James muttered as he shifted so he was lying on his back, gaze on the stars.

"Is the magic still affecting you?" Seth asked oddly.

James should've just kept his mouth shut, shouldn't he? "No. We're long out of its reach."

There was more silence, and then: "But you still want to…"

"I'm apparently gayer than I realized," James muttered, still trying to wrap his own head around it. He'd thought it was just Jacob, but after, with Seth, he, uh, he really wouldn't mind doing that again - doing him again. And that just pissed him off even more. This was Seth Clearwater! Puppy! Leah's brother! Jacob's Omega! He should not be imagining shoving the wolf down and having his wicked way with him!

"Then why don't you do it?"

James didn't quite understand that at first, and then he did, and he jolted up, leaning up on his elbows as he stared at Seth in perplexity, sure he'd misheard that. "Excuse me?"

"We're both guys, alone, and in need of, uh, distraction." Seth cleared his throat, his breathing odd as he finally met James' gaze. "If you—I wouldn't mind—I mean—I could use a distraction."

Wait, was the puppy saying what he thought he was saying?

"We both got bad news tonight, didn't we?" Seth shifted onto his knees and crawled towards James until he was right there in front of him, and then, with only a second's hesitation, he straddled James' body. "I can't—when you—my mind went blank." He took in a deep breath as a blush began to climb its way up his neck. "I would really like not to think for the rest of tonight."

James' breath caught in his throat, his eyes wide on Seth despite the chuckle he heard escape his own lips. "The rest of tonight? You really think you could keep up, puppy?"

That blush darkened on his skin as Seth unbuckled James' pants to free him. "How about you, gramps?"

A snorted laugh escaped James' lips, the pup tearing all sorts of reactions from him. "You're socute."

A glare darkened the blush. "I'm not cu—-!" His eyes widened and a gasp tumbled from his mouth as James ripped his shorts from the waist all the way down to its seat. "Did you just—-?" He twisted slightly to look back, no doubt seeing the huge tear down the back of his shorts.

"I'll buy you new ones," James promised as he pulled Seth down to claim his lips. The vampire
swallowed Seth's whimpers as he cold hand trailed teasingly slow down his spine to the territory now exposed by the torn shorts. Seth's skin was boiling to the touch, it was divine. James hadn't felt warm since he'd turned, but the heat wafting off of Seth more than heated him up. It was new, it was pleasant, and it made him shiver for some reason.

"James," Seth whimpered against his lips as he arched his back, raising his hips into the vampire's touch.

The blonde's throat went absolutely dry. He might've snapped a little, because before he even knew what he was doing he'd torn at the remainder of the shorts until it was completely separated, two bits of material gathering at Seth's knees, the wolf bare for him. It didn't hit him that Seth seemed to have lost his underwear somewhere, that the wolf was bare under the shorts. He'd think about it later while reminiscing on what had happened, for right now he was way too lost in the desire burning deep within his stomach.

Despite the fire coursing itself through his veins, James was still cogent enough to worry. Sure, Seth had that werewolf healing factor, but still, his first time hadn't been that long ago. He would still be sore, this could hurt him. The vampire found Seth's quivering core and slid his thumb down and over it, surprised to find it still slick with some of his essence. He'd thought Seth would've used the swim back to wash himself properly.

He tested, slipping his finger inside of Seth slowly.

Seth's body nearly gave out on him. Like before, he let out a sound that made James hurt as he tore his lips from James' and instead hid his face in the vampire's neck. This new position left his body further arched, his thighs further parted. When James shifted his finger inside, and eased another with as well, Seth let out a low whine as he further slid his thighs apart.

"You're so cute, Seth," James praised into his hair, admittedly a little overwhelmed at the wolf's instant submission and his own reaction to it.

"Shut... up." Seth's voice was muffled, guttural, and when James twisted his fingers the wolf's hips trembled in response. "M'not... cute."  

"But you are," James persisted as a third finger teased around the entrance to Seth's quivering core. "So cute." He nibbled on Seth's ear through his long, messy hair, feeling the wolf clench around his fingers instantly in response. "Soft skin, pretty hair..." He slowly eased that third finger inside Seth, loving the sound the wolf made as he did so. "You smell so good." Has Seth always smelt this good? James couldn't remember, all he knew was Seth smelt good, he smelt really good. "And the sounds you make? Those little breaths? Those little whimpers?" He groaned, his cock straining with need just at the thought. "You're so cute." He twisted his fingers, spreading them inside him.

Seth sobbed breathlessly as he gripped James' shoulders, a shudder violently and visibly racing through his body. "I'll only—!" He gasped and squirmed, arching and curling his back instinctively, moving against James' fingers.

"You'll only what?" James was desperate to cling onto anything to buy himself time to ease Seth open and not just take him like he had before.

"Compromise," Seth breathed out desperately, his face somehow hotter than the rest of his body as he hid it in the curve of James' neck. "You can only... call me that... while you're... inside... me.

Something snapped inside of James. It was physical. He could feel it, hear it, snapping. He had no idea what the hell it was, but damn it, it freaking snapped.
Slipping his fingers out of Seth, James grabbed the wolf and pulled him downwards, ready to direct him further down his body, to lower him onto his cock and claim the right given to him through Seth's willingness to compromise.

James' phone rang.

It was the time for their regular 'daily debriefing call', as Seth called it when he was at his most sulky (which usually happened after he'd argued with Leah on the phone for like an hour or so). They both knew who the caller was: Jacob.

Seth tensed immediately and turned to look in the direction of the phone. His face scrunched up and he lowered his head. White teeth were clenched in what was almost a growl. His hair hung in his face, bathing it in further shadow and somehow accenting the near golden glow in his eyes as his inner wolf manifested itself in those orbs.

The reaction was really shocking and jolting, until James remembered Seth's feelings for their Alpha. He was shocked at how kicked in the stomach he felt at that second.

"The ring's annoying," Seth whispered softly as he closed his eyes tightly. "Just answer it already."

"Ignore it," James found himself saying.

Seth's eyes flew open, confusion and frustration were visible there. "What—?"

And then James tightened his grip on Seth's hips and pulled the unsuspecting wolf down, connecting their bodies as one.

Seth's whole body reacted, his back tensing, his thighs spreading, his head thrown back and his hands gripping at James' body for balance as he was speared. That flush was back and darker than ever, his eyelids half closed, his lips parted, his breathing accelerated as he stared down at James in open confusion.

James trailed one hand slowly up Seth's body to cup the side of his burning face. "You so cute, Seth." And with that he thrusted up into the wolf's lean, quivering body. "You're so cute."

Something happened on Seth's face but James didn't have time to really inspect the flitter of emotion as Seth leaned into James' palm and shifted so as to nibble it, his tongue and teeth playing a game against James' skin, one which sent shivers of delight down his stomach.

Seth wasn't cute, he was fucking adorable!

The ringing played out but honestly seemed drowned out in James' ears. By what? No clue. Once they were done he'd call their Alpha and assure him they were fine, but nothing, no phone call, would interrupt right now, not when pleasure coursed down through James' body like lightning. He'd been inside of Seth before but somehow, while that had been great, this felt different. This felt better. This felt, this felt amazing. Intoxicating. This was something James would want to feel again, something he could very easily become obsessed with.

The thought terrified him, especially given the fact that he was incredibly obsessive, it was his nature. If he wasn't careful—.

"Oh g-gods," James stuttered as Seth rolled his hips, slowly, torturously slowly. That lightening was catching fire and burning James from the inside with each movement.

"You like that?" Seth asked softly, almost timidly.
Adorable. Painfully adorable.

"Show me what you like," Seth gasped in a deep breath and shivered as he leaned into his knees, shifting his rolls into a more circular motion that allowed James to carve him out inside.

"What I like..." James shifted his arm under his own head to prop it up so he could better see the werewolf writhing on top of him. "I like watching you blush all over your body, even here." He reached down and trailed his fingertip upwards underneath Seth's shaft. "I like that sound you just made, and how you're dripping even more now. I like how hard you are just because I'm inside you, how your cock trembles with just the barest of touches."

"Touch it more," Seth nearly begged.

"So fucking cute." James took Seth in hand, savoring the sobs that escaped the wolf at his touch. He stroked him, slowly at first, gaining momentum, watching as Seth very quickly unraveled on top of him, losing all control and momentum until he'd lost track of his movements and was merely reacting, his body jerking uncontrollably as goosebumps rippled over his flesh.

And with one last tug Seth was suddenly shivering and sobbing as warmth spurted all over James. The wolf didn't seem to notice, his eyes screwed shut, his body still moving beyond his control.

Not adorable. Sexy. As. Hell.

James grunted as Seth's body clenched around him, clearly begging for him to join in release. His hand shot up and grabbed a fistful of that silky hair, yanking Seth down, surprising the unprepared werewolf by kissing him, hard. Just as hard as he was now thrusting into him.

Seth shifted above him, basically lying on James' body, as he returned the kiss. He arched his back, opened his body as best he could in that position, and took each thrust with a guttural sob which James eagerly swallowed.

The vampire let go of Seth's hair to instead grab his asscheeks, spreading them as his thrusts grew quicker, more urgent.

Seth must've misunderstood somehow because he snarled warningly against James' lips. "Don't cum outside."

James came. He freaking came. The vampire slammed inside of Seth, aching to be further inside, fully inside, deep inside. Pleasure rippled throughout his body like an explosion, leaving him lightheaded and his ears ringing as he filled Seth's body with his seed. Even as he shuddered in aftershocks of toe-curling pleasure he wanted more, more. He wanted it with the same intensity he craved the hunt.

The realization terrified him.

No! No! He had to stop while he still had reason - while he could still control himself! He had to push Seth off of him while he—.

Seth rolled them over so James was now on top of him, nestled between his thighs, still anchored deep inside of the wolf's body. The blush from before was scarlet now as he wrapped his legs around James' body, pulling him deeper within.

That feeling rippled blindingly through James as he lost all control or reason, and leaned down to kiss Seth.
"He's not answering." Jacob listened to James' voicemail and decided at the last second not to leave a message. He hung up the call, texted James a quick message to call them back when he had a chance, and turned to find Edward, Leah, Victoria and Bella all watching him oddly. "What?"

"I'm just surprised he let the call go to voicemail," Victoria muttered from where she lounged on the loveseat next to Bella. "Usually he picks up your calls immediately. I can see him ignoring anyone else, me included, but not *you*.

Edward glanced away, clearly annoyed yet not saying anything.

"Maybe they're in danger," Leah muttered as she nibbled on her thumbnail, her eyes still pink from the tears she refused to admit to anyone that she'd cried.

"I'm sure they're fine," Bella whispered in her soft voice. "Alice would've seen something otherwise and let us know. I—I asked her to keep an eye out for them."

"But you said she's blind to wolves," Leah countered worriedly as she looked up at Bella from where she sat on the ground with her back against Victoria' legs. "Maybe Seth's being there is blinding her to what's happening."

Bella cleared her throat and lowered her gaze to her hands.

Edward looked up at her in surprise. "Really?"

Bella blinked and looked at him. "I thought you couldn't read my mind!"

"I—uh—," Edward faltered as he blinked. "I couldn't. I—I don't know why—-." He stopped, concentrated, and then his eyes widened. "I can hear *every* thought. Before it was really muddy, like there was some sort of shield keeping me from really getting a read of you, your dad's like that too… but now… it's like a door's been open. I hadn't even realized it until you mentioned it."

Bella blinked. "How long do you think it's been since your ability's gotten stronger?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "I know I couldn't read you when I first returned." He ran his fingers through his hair. "Maybe, if I had to pick when, I'd say…" He then went absolutely red, which was shocking given the fact that vampires usually went paler when they blushed. Just what the hell was going on here? What was happening to Edward?

"What is it?" Jacob sat down next to his Imprintee and placed his hand on his, squeezing tightly. "Whatever it is we'll get through it together."

Edward cleared his throat. "I think it started the night James left. You know—the first night I've slept since I turned."

Jacob's eyes widened, understanding what Edward wasn't saying. That was the night they'd—that was when the matching golden symbols had appeared on their bodies. Ever since then things had changed between him and the vampire, they'd thought the whole sleeping-vampire thing a weird side effect of whatever this version of the Imprint was, but had it also enhanced Edward's ability to read minds? If so, what else was changing? And why?

Was Edward okay? Would any of these changes harm him?

"I'm *okay.*" Edward shifted his hand so that he was squeezing Jacob's as well. "And anyway, if
Bella's right, I'm not the only vampire changing."

"What does he mean, Bellsy?" Victoria wanted to know.

Bella cleared her throat. "Alice is starting to see glimpses of the wolves. It's not strong like when humans and vampires are involved, but she's starting to see them nonetheless. They get a little clearer, last a little longer, every time." She bit her bottom lip, clearly wondering just how much she should reveal about what Alice had seen. "She'd know if they couldn't handle what they were going up against."

"The fact that a vampire can actually see our future based on our decisions is terrifying," Leah muttered as she leaned back harder against Victoria's legs. "But thank you for asking her to keep an eye out on them. You didn't have to do that."

Bella suddenly smiled. "You guys are part of our pack, of course I'd want to make sure they were both safe!"

Leah sighed and eyed Bella before finally smiling at the other girl for probably the first time ever.

Bella practically beamed in response.

Jacob smiled as he witnessed Leah finally accepting Bella. He knew how much his best friend actually needed that acceptance from the female werewolf, and he was relieved to finally see her get it. That didn't take away from his curiosity and apprehension about what was going on though. Why were vampires changing? And were wolves changing as well?

He needed answers but who could give them to him?

The Alpha stared down at his phone and sighed.

*You two better be safe, and getting along.*

If only he knew.
“You want to know about my life in LaPush,” Seth echoed in utter shock as they walked leisurely through the forest. Their pace had changed since that brothel place, going from arduous and non-stop to relaxed. According to James if Murdock said they’d find Laurent at this destination then they would, no matter how fast or slow they went, so the vampire decided it was better to go slower and conserve their energy. Seth was shocked at the open trust the vampire had in Murdock’s words, but then again that guy seemed to know a lot. Maybe he was a vampire with some sort of foresight, kind of like Alice.

“I told you things about myself last night that I don’t usually share, at all,” James muttered, hands shucked in his jacket’s pockets, gaze ahead. “Turnabout is fair play.” He suddenly smirked and glanced back over his shoulder at Seth with a smirk. “Plus, I’m curious about what an actual wolf pack is like, I know better than to even think ours is the norm.”

“It isn’t,” Seth quickly assured him as he hurried his pace to match James’ on the road. He’d slowed down in utter shock that James was curious about him, but now he matched James’ stride with ease. A part of him was racing in excitement at the fact that James wanted to know more about him, was actually showing interest in his life, and the other part was warning Seth not to get too excited and blow this, to take his time. “For one, a normal wolf pack can read each other’s mind when they’re in wolf form, it helps them communicate.”

“Right, I remember J—I remember hearing that you and Leah could somehow block your minds from the others, and that was how you were able to be a double agent.” James acted as if he hadn’t just skipped over Jacob’s name like that. “How could you guys do that, anyway?”

Why had James stumbled over Jacob’s name? Why had he quickly reworded the question when there was no need to? Unless… Unless Seth’s jealous snap last night…

A blush worked it’s way up his chest as he lowered his gaze in embarrassment. He’d let hormones and resentment get the best of him last night and had really acted like a spoiled kid, snapping at James like that because he just couldn’t stand that even though they were so far away from their Alpha all James seemed to think and talk about was Jacob. So yeah, maybe he’d snapped about it, but he’d hoped James would forget about it and about how uncool Seth had been. He’d never actually expected James to try and comply with the unreasonable request!

“Earth to Seth.” James waved his hand in front of his face. “I asked a question, you don’t get to pretend you didn’t hear it.”

Inhaling deeply, Seth shrugged. “It just started happening gradually.” Had started since James’ first trip to Forks. Seth had wondered whether the scent driving him insane was damaging his brain, and the werewolf’s connection to his tribe along with it. “Leah and I were put in charge of spying on you, it seemed to make the situation easier somehow.” He made a face, remembering when it’d started happening to Leah. “And then the vampire attacked that party and we were forced to stand down, to let your pack handle it because Sam wanted to observe you.” He gulped and clenched his hands together. “We forfeited our purpose as man’s protector so he could watch.”

James watched him silently, not at all judgmental like a part of Seth had worried. Then again,
James had done awful things in his past, and there was no room for judgment in his eyes, that was more than obvious.

“So this need to fight vampires and protect humans isn’t a calling, it’s an instinct,” James realized softly to himself. “That was why being forced to fight your natural instinct made your inner wolf rebel against your Alpha to the degree where your mental connection with him and the others broke, or at least fragmented.”

“Something like that.” At leads it had been for Leah. Seth’s wolf had started going rogue the second it’d caught wind of James’ scent. But of course he couldn’t come out and say that, at least not yet. Maybe not for a long while. But someday he would. And that was the hope that kept him going.

“Was it hard to come to the decision to change sides?” James wanted to know curiously. “I mean, the Rez was your home. You went to school there, lived with your pack there, hung out with those two weirdoes there, and—-.”

“Two weirdoes?” Seth blinked in confusion.

“Yeah, your two friends, the ones with even bigger baby faces than yours. I swear I thought they were your younger brothers until I realized you were in the same grade. What were their names? Something like Fuller and Littlesea I think?” James shocked the hell out of Seth by admitting that he’d known about Brady Fuller and Colin Littlesea. They’d been Seth’s best friends at school on the Rez but as neither of them had turned yet he’d had to distance himself from them slowly, and that’d caused a strain on their friendship but the other two boys had done their best to try and keep the friendship going.

“How do you know about them?” Seth asked in utter confusion. “I’ve never mentioned Colin or Brady.”

“Your pack was spying on us, so Vicki and I spied on them,” James responded easily. “I’m good at picking up scents and she’s good at hiding them. We figured it was only a matter of time before you guys tried to kill us so we kept an eye on you all behind Jacob’s back.”

Seth couldn’t believe it. How in the world had those two vampires been in LaPush and been able to hide it from the pack of werewolves who made it their home? He was insulted, impressed, and a little terrified of the Hunter siblings now.

“We didn’t believe you’d turned to our side at first,” James admitted with a little shrug. “Figured Sam had realized you and Leah were terrible at being subtle, pulled you from your ‘stealth observance’ role, and had instead implanted you like a spy amongst us.”

Seth’s mouth parted in utter horror. “You knew we were spying on you in our wolf forms?”

“You’re horrible at keeping hidden,” James snickered. “It was so obvious, so painfully obvious.”

The embarrassment from before returned full-force. “What made you change your mind?” He cleared his throat. “Why did you decide to finally trust me?”

James’ snicker faded as he frowned, his eyebrows nearly touching. “I don’t know, actually.” He shook his head and took in a deep breath. “It just happened, I’m still unnerved by it. I don’t trust anyone, but I did somehow realize I trusted you, and then you proved that it wasn’t wrong to trust you when you warned us about—-. He ran his fingers through his hair. “I can never quite get a read on you, puppy.”
That sounded like a compliment.

It also sounded like a complaint.

He liked both.

Seth couldn’t fight his smile so he just let it grow until it became a grin.

“Damn it, stop being so cute already,” James huffed as he ran his fingers through his blonde hair.

*Cute.*

Seth had seriously hated that word up until last night. Now though? Just the sound made his stupid blush darker as it conjured up all kinds of memories. Everyone Seth had ever known had called him cute, and he’d always hated it with every fibre of his being, but after last night all he could think of when he heard that word was James whispering it in his ear over and over, desperately, while thrusting into him.

Heat erupted in Seth’s core and he knew James could hear the way his heart picked up pace, he most definitely should be able to smell the change in the wolf’s scent. Why did Seth’s body have to work against him so much? It wasn’t fair!

“So tell me about Colin and Brady,” James asked oddly, rapidly, his voice strained for some reason. “I’m assuming they aren’t shifters.”

“Not yet, but they both have the gene, so it’s really just a matter on if it gets triggered or not,” Seth responded slowly, confused as to why James’ expression was so pinched all of a sudden. “Colin is Jake’s cousin, and he has a huge crush on Leah. It’s disgusting.” He shook his head at that. “Brady is distantly related to both the Atari and Clearwater families on his grandmother’s side, so he’s *my* cousin.”

“Does he have a crush on Leah?”

Seth made up his face immediately at the thought. “Not that I know of, no.” To be honest, he had a feeling Brady had a crush on Sam, and was more than sure he’d had a thing for Paul before that, but Brady had never come out to them on his sexuality and Seth had never felt the need to push. He was almost sure his friend was gay though. Then again, maybe Brady was just attracted to dominant personalities, which meant he could very well have a thing for Leah.

*Eeww.*

James made a noise.

Seth looked up at him. “What?”

The vampire shrugged. “I was just thinking, Murdock said that more werewolves will Imprint on vampires.”

Seth’s heart skipped a beat. Was James—had he figured it out?

“That means that your old Alpha and some, maybe all, of his pack are going to Imprint on vampires as well. Maybe those two as well once they turn.” He stretched languidly, hands up high in the air. “Maybe even you will.”

Seth fought his impulse to freeze up. “It’s not an impossibility.”
“Murdock says it’s going to happen, means it will happen,” James assured him, once more a devout believer in this Murdock guy. “Have you thought about it? About—about what it might be like to Imprint on someone?”

“Y-yes.” Was this it? Was James going to ask? How should he answer? He hadn’t wanted James to know until he’d managed to get closer to him!

“Me too.” James shoved his hands back in his jacket’s pocket. “I’ve been making up possible matches in my head. It’s actually kind of fun, but don’t tell anyone I said that or I’ll have to hurt you.”

“Huh?” Seth blinked, confused.

“Well, the only coven of vampires around are the Cullens, right?” James asked curiously. “Sure, they’re paired up right now, but an Imprint might get in the way of that like it did with your cousin and Sam. So I’ve been trying to figure out who might Imprint on who.”

This was not where Seth had seen this conversation going. He didn’t know whether to feel disappointed or relieved. “What have you come up with so far?”

“I really want to pair Sam and Carlisle together because that would screw both your old pack and the Cullens, their dynamics would utterly fall apart,” James declared, revealing once more that he could be very mean when he wanted to be. “Since Bella will be a vampire some day, no matter what Jacob wants, I’m giving her to Leah.”

Seth raised his eyebrow. “She and Alice and Jasper have a thing though, don’t they?”

James waved that off immediately. “I told you, this isn’t what I think will happen, it’s just what would make the most trouble should it happen, and thus, be the most interesting in my opinion.”

“Go on,” Seth muttered as he motioned him onwards.

“Victoria needs someone she can boss around, who would best fit that category in the pack?”

“Embry maybe?” At James’ look he added: “If you’ve seen us all in wolf form, he’s the gray wolf with black spots.”

“Okay. Right.” James nodded, apparently having seen all the wolves in both human and wolf form, which was terrifying because that meant he and Victoria had been around the Rez wolves multiple times without being caught or even sensed. “So Vicki gets Embry. Rosalie and Victoria seem very much alike, they like the same raunchy romance novels so they must like the same type of guys too, so I’m putting her with that other guy that hangs out with Embry. The one whose fur is chocolate colored but lighter in his face. Those girls could make those guys utterly miserable.” James’ grin was all teeth at the thought. “They’d make them regret ever having been born.”

*I hope Embry and Quil don’t ever Imprint on Rosalie and Victoria,* Seth decided right then and there. Sure, they’d turned on Seth when they’d realized whose side he really was on, but he didn’t
blame them. He had turned on them first.

“That werewolf with the temper problems should end up with whichever Cullen has a bad temper as well, I’m not sure which it is, but just because he’s huge I’m going to say Rosalie’s mate - I’ve forgotten his name.” James shrugged, obviously not really caring about the people whose lives he was ruining in his imagination. “That leaves the wolf who is always making bets, I think. He’ll be with Esme, she’s the Cullen mama so she’ll have a stern hand, make him behave.” James really was trying to figure out what pairing would make the most miserable couple, wasn’t he? “Jasper could have Brady or Colin - whoever shifts first. Whichever one he doesn’t get Alice can. I don’t really care about them if I’m being honest. They’re boring. I don’t see what Bella sees in them.”

“What about me?” Seth had been waiting for his own name to be called but when James had merely smirked to himself in silence for a couple of minutes he’d realized he’d been forgotten. “Who are you going to use to make my life impossible?”

“I was pairing your old pack and the Cullens together,” James explained with a shrug. “You are a part of our pack, it doesn’t count.”

“You paired Leah with Bella,” Seth reminded immediately.

“Right.” James made a face and wouldn’t look in Seth’s direction for some reason. “I don’t want to do that to you.”

“Why not?” Seth asked in utter confusion. How was he supposed to take that?

“Well, I’m trying to make people miserable.” James shrugged and didn’t comment any further.

Seth paused and stared at his back as the vampire continued walking. Was he saying that he didn’t want to make Seth miserable? Again - how was he supposed to take that? “Well, you’re the only vampire left anyway.” He tried for nonplussed as he rejoined James’ side and stared ahead of them. “Imagine us being Imprinted.”

James snickered, which damned hurt. “You definitely wouldn’t deserve that.”

Seth blinked. “What does that mean?”

The vampire angled a glance in his direction. “You don’t deserve to have me as an Imprintee.”


There was a moment’s pause before the vampire looked away from him with a shrug. “It means you’d be the most miserable out of this whole pairing party, and you don’t deserve that.” James continued to stare ahead of him. “You’re an annoying brat sometimes, but you’re also kind, Seth. You mightn’t see it now no matter how much I keep telling you, but I’m not a good guy. I’m the one who keep pretending he’s not a bad guy deep down inside, and hoping everyone forgets who he really is. I’m going to mess up one day, and no one is going to be able to forgive whatever I do. I’ll end up hurting someone who cares about me, because deep down inside I’m a monster.”

Seth just stared at James in utter shock. “You’re an idiot.”

It was James’ turn to blink as he barked out a laugh and turned to face him, expression darkly amused, voice very teasing. “And here I was pouring out my dark little soul to you. That’s so mean, Seth.”

“You’re really starting to piss me off,” Seth muttered softly, more to himself than to James,
“You were a monster once,” Seth informed him point-blank, staring into James’ eyes as he did so. “You hurt and killed innocent people, you turned them into monsters too. Means you’re responsible for the innocent people they kill from now on. You were fine with that. You didn’t care.” He took in a deep breath. “And then you met Jacob and he changed you, made you see you could be more than what you’d become.” Seth clenched his fists tightly. “No matter what you say, you wouldn’t still have those golden eyes if you didn’t want them.” He took in a very deep breath. “Sure, you can use Jacob to justify it. You want him, and you want to do anything possible to keep him from turning you away—keep him from seeing the monster you are. And who knows. Maybe you have. Maybe Jacob has no clue whatsoever what his Beta actually is. Or what he was. What he could be.”

James gulped and looked like it was a battle to keep Seth’s gaze but the vampire wasn’t one to back down from a challenge.

“Thing is, you’re an idiot… but you’re not stupid.” Seth couldn’t shut up no matter how hard he tried to do so. “Jacob doesn’t love you. He loves Edward. He’s always loved Edward and if Murdock is so all-knowing, he’s just confirmed Jacob will only ever love Edward. That means that no matter how good you behave, no matter how long you stay by Jacob’s side, he’s never going to see you as more than a brother, a Beta. So why are you still planning on going back once this mission is over? Why are your eyes still golden? What do you get out of any of this if he’s never going to be yours?” Seth took a step towards James, and another. “The chase is over and you’ve lost your prey. So if you’re just a monster desperately keeping himself from the hunt, why are you still here if there’s nothing for you to gain by holding it back anymore?”

James continued to share at him before he laughed darkly. The sound caught Seth by surprise and sent a chill down his spine as the vampire shook his head. Wisps of blonde hair had fallen free from where the locks were gathered in a ponytail, and even though they fell in his face, James didn’t even try to push them away. “I don’t know.”

Seth gulped, uneasy with this shift in James’ personality.

“I’ve been asking myself that since I left Forks, and then Murdock went and confirmed it and, I don’t know.” James finally brushed the locks of hair from his face, his smile sharp and unhappy. “Why should I go back? Why should I allow myself to be bossed by someone else? Why should I be forced to drink animal blood when it keeps me weak? Makes me vulnerable? You’re right. I don’t have anything or anyone waiting for me back there. Victoria would leave with me if I want to go, or I could just leave her there if she’s happy. She doesn’t have to go with me. I don’t have to stay.” He then stopped and looked up at the sky as realization visibly hit. “I don’t have to stay.”

Nerves clashed in Seth’s stomach at that look. Why in the world had he said that? He didn’t want James to go! He just wanted him to stop with the self-pity! Wanted him to realize that—that Seth knew, and Seth didn’t care! What did it matter if Jacob didn’t?

“Murdock said I didn’t love Jacob, and if he was right—have I ever loved anyone? Am I even able to understand it much less ever actually experience it?” James was talking to himself by now. “I was so sure, but—-.”

“He doesn’t get to tell you how you feel,” Seth quickly interrupted.

“But I’ve accepted that Jake chose Edward,” James whispered in a clearly tortured tone as he
combed his fingers through his hair and gripped those blonde locks tightly. “Shouldn’t it be harder to accept that if I was truly in love with him? What if Murdock was right? What if it’s my just my obsessive nature mixed with the chase, the hunt, gratefulness and pack loyalty?”

“Would that really be so bad?” Seth asked finally.

“Yes!” James snapped at him. “Because that means the hunt is over, and if I did everything just to get my prey, I won’t have any reason to not be the James I was before! I can already see bits of him coming back! Especially with how I’m treating you!”

Seth’s eyes were wide, shocked at the revelation of what had truly been bothering James.

“And I don’t know why I’m telling you this.” James trailed his hand down his face. “I don’t talk about feelings or problems or worries or… I just don’t do what I’m doing right now. And it’s pissing me off that I’m doing it… And I’m still doing it, right now, despite being pissed off.”

“What do you mean you’re acting like the old you with me?” Seth wanted to know softly. “You weren’t gay before Jacob. You weren’t vegetarian before Jacob. You weren’t in an alliance with werewolves and humans before Jacob. You’d never have even considered sleeping with a shifter before Jacob.”

James didn’t answer, he merely turned around and started walking again.

“I asked you a question!” Seth snapped as he stalked after him.

“And I’m ignoring it!” James snapped right back. “The only thing we need to concentrate on right now is finding Laurent and killing him.”

“And then what?”

James ignored him.

“And then what?”

“I don’t know, Seth!” James snarled as he turned to face the werewolf, who nearly bumped into him at the unexpected move. “Is that what you want to hear? I. Don’t. Know.”

“Last night you said you knew which pack you belonged to,” Seth growled up at him.

“I said a lot of things last night,” James muttered as he clenched his hands at his sides. “Did a lot of things.”

Seth flinched and hated himself for that second’s weakness. “So is that what this is about? You feel guilty about what we did last night?”

“No. That’s the exact opposite of what I feel,” James hissed as he glanced away. “That’s the problem.”

And Seth forgot to breathe for a couple of seconds. “What do you mean?”

James hesitated before opening his mouth, but before he could say anything he went tense, his golden gaze scanning around them. “They’re coming closer.”

“Who?” Seth readied for an attack.

On the other hand, James groaned as he ran his hand down his face. “Garrett and Riley, they’ve
been keeping a certain distance between us to try and keep off of my radar but not anymore. Seems they’re done pretending they are not trailing after us.” He let out a deep breath. “About as good a time as any, I suppose. We’re almost there.” The blonde eyed Seth. “Let’s just continue on, finish this, and when we’re done we’ll pick back up this conversation, okay?”

“Okay,” Seth agreed as they began to walk, the wolf now really itching for the fight ahead of them.

Riley was coming.

Great. Just great.

Seth would’ve preferred Laurent.


The Rez pack were a mess.

Ever since news that the Volturi were making their way towards Forks, Leah had reluctantly advised the Rez Pack (on Jacob’s orders) and the threat of a contingent of vampires headed their way had caused a reaction in the group.

Honestly, Edward hadn’t expected the Rez Pack to show up, or, at least, members of the Rez Pack. Sam Uley, the Alpha, was in a state of inconsolable despair, one which his pack were worried would end in his own death. One of their strongest were with him at all times, watching over their Alpha to make sure he didn’t do anything to hurt himself in this time of grief.

That was why his Beta, Jared Cameron, was the one representing them, backed up by Embry Call and Brady Fuller, the latter of which had only recently turned.

Their minds were completely opened to Edward, allowing him to delve in and see more than he was sure they’d be comfortable with, but it gave him the reassurance that the Rez Pack weren’t planning anything untoward. They were truly in a mess, and had hit rockbottom. There was no one else they could turn to but the ones they’d shunned, and it killed them to have to do so.

“Does your seer know when these leeches are going to arrive?” Jared asked Jacob. “We’ve extended our perimeter and hours patrolling, but it would be good to have a timeline.”

“Alice is my sister-in-law, not my seer,” Jacob announced easily, not at all getting how much that made Edward’s stomach clench happily. He hadn’t even said that to annoy the wolves, Jacob really did feel that the Cullens were his in-laws. Edward seriously loved that. “And she doesn’t have a timetable yet, but she’s keeping an eye out on them and will let us know when she does.”

Jared sighed deeply and nodded. His thoughts were full of his unhappiness with this situation, and he was a bit disgusted with Jacob for being so ‘domesticated’, but he was also curious as to how the descendant of Ephraim Black had settled so entirely into mate hood with a vampire. Jared also wondered about Sam’s surety that there wasn’t actually an Imprint, because according to his thoughts, Jacob and Edward smelt different, smelt unique, and it was a smell Jared’s wolf was telling him meant they were connected as one. The Beta wasn’t happy with it, but he didn’t feel like attacking Edward like he usually would, his inner wolf huffily reminding him werewolf Imprintees were to be protected, not hurt - even if they weren’t from the same pack.

Embry and Brady’s minds were also questioning Sam’s words re the Imprint as their inner wolves were also telling them to be on their best behavior with Edward.

Edward blinked rapidly at that and fought a blush. Wait. So this new form of Imprint - the other
inner wolves not only sensed it but accepted it in their own way?

“I’d offer we team up, but Leah is the only other person you’d accept to team up with to patrol, and she doesn’t want anything to do with your pack after what happened to Seth and Emily.” Jacob’s tone wasn’t condemning but Jared flinched anyway. “And if someone from my pack isn’t going to be there, they aren’t going to trust me there, and Bella’s just going to do something to get herself hurt, so—.”

“Maybe,” Jared began before sighing. “Maybe we could patrol with the Cullens, as well as with your vamp and yourself.”

Edward could hear just how much this hurt Jared to say.

Brady’s thoughts were full of fear and excitement, he wanted to know what real life vampires were like. Sure, he was supposed to hate them, but he didn’t react all that bad to Edward so he was curious if that extended to all other vampires or if it was just an Imprint thing.

Embry was more conflicted, but he too was curious about the idea of teaming up.

“Sam would never agree to that,” Jacob declared slowly, carefully.

“Yes, well, Sam is indisposed right now, and as his Beta I have certain authority.” Jared didn’t want that authority, he didn’t want to be in this position making these decisions, especially when he knew Sam would not approve, but Jared wanted what was not only best for the wolves, but for the humans of Forks and LaPush as well. “Vampires and werewolves have different abilities, different strengths… and we need the numbers.”

Wow. Edward suddenly respected Jared Cameron. It’d taken a lot to say that, to swallow his pride and admit they needed help. “We’ll happily help you.”

Jacob glanced back at him, surprised. “Are you sure?”

“Of course.” Edward joined his mate’s side and smiled when Jacob’s hand found his immediately. “We have a truce, why not extend it to a partnership… even if only a temporary one?”

Relieved thoughts filled Jared’s mind like a tidal wave, he’d thought he’d be forced to beg. “A partnership between the three of our clans is best for Forks and LaPush.”

Jacob shared a look with Edward before nodding. “Yes. For the humans.”

Jared smiled a little more genuinely, thinking in surprise that maybe Edward wasn’t that bad. He knew for a fact that given all the bad blood between Jacob’s pack and his that if the vampire hadn’t been so open and eager to push it this truce would’ve been much harder to cement. Jared was a little grateful to Edward, and was conflicted about that, but decided to accept it and just be grateful. “For the humans.”

Leaning his head against Jacob’s shoulder, Edward smiled.

For our family.

…

TBC
Chapter 7

Seth was distracted.

James cursed himself for letting that whole conversation happen so close to the battle, but there wasn't anything he could do right now, not as they drew nearer. Already it was too late to go back, and he knew that despite everything Seth wouldn't leave. Seth was loyal like that. Stupid like that. Would get killed like that.

Okay, so maybe Seth wasn't the only one distracted.

The vampire was really angsty and didn't get why. He usually lived for the fight, but the closer and closer that they got to the town where Victoria had first denied Laurent, the tighter that ball grew in his gut. No. He couldn't do this. Just the thought of Seth being in the fight made him incredibly uneasy. It wasn't even the thought of what Leah would do to him should anything happen to her brother.

It was weird, James had started off this trip with very little care as to Seth's safety, and then he'd found him a bit of a bother, and then, well, somehow, he'd started worrying a bit more the longer they travelled together. And then, something had happened. It was like after their first time together he'd gone and, he didn't know what, but maybe he was acting like a girl.

Wasn't it a thing somewhere that having sex made girls feel connected to guys and feel a special way for them? What if that was what this was? James had caught some sort of conscience after sleeping with Seth? Maybe? He wasn't sure. All he knew for a fact was that it'd gotten bad after that first time together, and after each subsequent time they'd been together it'd gotten worse.

Maybe it was because James hadn't been with anyone in far too long. Maybe it was his whole emotional turmoil with the whole Jacob and Edward situation - and his own reaction to it. Maybe it was the fact that Seth made him want to protect him as much as he wanted to torment him. Maybe ——.

James' eyes widened in horror as that realization hit.

He wanted to protect Seth.

He really wanted to protect Seth… and some very deep down part of him had always felt that way - it was why he'd been such an asshole trying to get Seth to turn back and go back home. His rational mind had explained it all away by saying Seth would just be in the way, but rationally Seth was his greatest asset and ally. So why try and send your best weapon back home?

Why care? Was it a pack thing? But even then it'd taken him and Vicki a while to truly accept Bella - who they now adored (not that James would ever use that wording). The vampire sides of them had some problem accepting Seth and Leah, and yet James had agreed to try and do so because it was what Jacob wanted. James had found himself submitting a lot to Jacob's wishes during the last few months, and found a sense of loyalty to his Alpha that he'd only thought he'd ever have to Vicki. It'd only made sense that his feelings would be love.

But what if they hadn't been? Because he was beginning to really doubt that. Not only were Murdock's words playing in his mind, but the phone call from last night did as well. Usually James wouldn't let Jacob's calls go for more than three rings, needing to know what the wolf wanted, to hear his voice - but what if what he'd felt wasn't love but a Beta's pull?
And yet, either way, last night he'd ignored Jacob's call, easily, because he'd been too wrapped up in Seth.

The vampire glanced at Seth, who was in wolf form since they were drawing nearer to the town. Seth was, thankfully enough, keeping an eye on their surroundings, sniffing the air, and not at all noticing the blonde's eyes on him.

Memories flashed in James' mind, intermixing their encounters almost dizzily, almost physically. He could smell the scent of Seth's hair, could feel the softness of his skin, could taste the curve of his neck, could hear the rapidly beating heart. Even with his teeth at Seth's neck James hadn't ever considered ripping the wolf's throat out, he'd wanted to bite down, though, and realized he'd wanted Seth to do similarly.

And that was screwed up.

Why would he want his mortal enemy to do something like that? He'd never imagined biting Jacob, so why wasn't the fantasy of his fang marks decorating Seth's neck leaving him? What in the world was wrong with him? Why was he so fixated on Seth all of a sudden?

Honestly, the wolf didn't deserve that. He'd been forced on this quasi-suicidal mission with James, had had his anal virginity taken from him by the vampire, had learnt the worse way possible that his cousin had died, and then had merely sought mutual comfort with James. And despite all of that he'd put up with James' bitching when the vampire had nearly had a nervous breakdown earlier when his ever-evolving feelings and emotions blindsided him with ferocity.

Seth was way too good a person. Not even as a human had James been half the man Seth was. It was humbling and terrifying and all sorts of things the vampire couldn't put to words. James was all kinds of mixed up and confused.

He'd even been unable to add Seth in his game. It had nothing to do with him not having considered lining up the wolves from his pack. Nah. It had everything to do with the fact that every time he'd thought about putting Seth with one of the Cullens - he'd gotten a really unhappy, sickly feeling in his stomach. He'd thought about maybe giving Seth to Victoria in that case, but it had felt worse somehow - and the idea of Seth with Garrett or Riley really made him mad.

And then Seth had mentioned him, had mentioned him Imprinting on James, and James hadn't minded the thought.

And that'd scared the shit out of him.

It was why he'd thrown that tantrum and had gone on saying such idiotic things. It'd all been in an effort not to think about what had just happened. But now, as they drew nearer and nearer to the battle sight, the thoughts returned with a vengeance.

The grove of trees where they'd spent so much time as a coven was not two feet away, and passed it was the town, where Laurent and the others were and where the battle would take place. Where Seth would fight his former, vicious, bloodthirsty coven.

James skidded to a halt.

Oh dear gods.

He couldn't do this!

He couldn't let Seth do this!
Murdock hadn't said Seth would be there for the battle, had he? No. He'd mentioned Riley and Garrett! Maybe James could get Seth to leave! Maybe tell him they needed reinforcements? Or maybe he could knock him out and leave him hidden somewhere safely before the actual fighting happened? But that still left the chance of a vampire stumbling upon Seth while he was knocked out and vulnerable.

There was no choice - they had to turn back!

This could be James' one chance but he couldn't take it. The revelation shocked him but he couldn't. He really couldn't. His mind wasn't on the fight, it was on Seth, and he needed to be a hundred per cent into this fight if he wasn't going to get the wolf killed.

He opened his mouth, only to realize something he hadn't while so distracted. "Seth, they know we're here, they're coming!"

Seth snarled and got ready.

Then the fastest of the vampires arrived yet didn't get far as Seth attacked, tearing into the vampire with surprising ease, not noticing the rest close behind.

James searched - feeling Garrett and Riley close behind and getting closer.

Taking in a deep, unnecessary breath, James intercepted a vampire going at Seth from the side.

The battle begun.

…

Apparently another wolf had shifted today, another one of Seth's friends, and according to the pack more wolves shifted when more vampires were around. That could only mean that some instinct inside of the Rez wolves was reacting to the Volturi procession as it drew closer and closer to Forks. They were definitely headed this way.

Not that he'd needed more werewolves to shift to know that. Alice was keeping an eye on the Volturi and knew from their decisions that not only were they on the way, but they'd sent scouts on ahead to get a view of what was happening. Also, Phoenix Jordan was leading the way back, apparently Laurent had left Phoenix with the Volturi to convince them, and the fledgling somehow had.

Suddenly the scent of dog filled the air, and Edward looked up in time to see Jared (in wolf form) race through the trees.

_Gotta tell them! Gotta tell them!_

"Tell us what?"

Jared looked up, heaving rapidly. _We've caught the scouts!_


Jared's body morphed and he ducked behind the bushes to cover his bottom half as he returned to human shape as Jacob and Bella hurried out, Victoria and Leah strolling behind more casually. "Colin was immune to one of their abilities so we were able to get her, and the others were distracted by that which gave us an advantage which we used. They're being housed in the special containment cells created by the Ancients in LaPush."
"Wait, you're saying you have some of the Volturi?" Victoria asked in utter shock.


"Isn't Colin the one who just turned?" Bella wanted to know.

"He was Seth's friend before the turn," Leah answered immediately with a nod. "He's immune to one of the vamps?"

"This blonde girl, she's got a power that's like a kick in the nuts times 100," Jared muttered and shivered, clearly having been on the receiving end of it. "Thing is, Colin didn't feel it, and she's a small thing, and he's got the whole newly-shifted strength on his side. He barreled into her, she wasn't prepared for it, and somehow he got her restrained." Jared groaned, clearly unhappy. "I'd be really happy right now if it wasn't for the fact that I'm sure he's Imprinted on her."

Jacob's eyes widened.

So did Victoria's. "That sounds like Jane." She let out a harsh laugh. "That poor dog! She's the worse person anyone could've Imprinted on! Much less some kid!" She shivered at the thought. "Not that I've actually met her, but she and her brother are two of the Guard you pray you never get to meet in your whole life."

"The only good thing is she seems insulted Colin doesn't react to her ability, so she's spent most of her time arguing, questioning, and insulting him while he guards her cell instead of doing anything too nefarious, at least for now," Jared mumbled with a shrug. "He's loving all the attention. We've only had our 'guests' for an hour and already I'm sick of it. So are most of the others."

Victoria blinked, clearly confused as she turned to Edward, talking to him without any sort of hostility or annoyance for probably the first time ever. "So does being Imprinted on change vampires? Did you find that you changed a lot after Imprinting on Jacob?"

He thought it over for a second. "I've always thought that it seemed like, at least in my case, I felt like I'd Imprinted on Jacob more than he had on me."

"What?" Jacob asked in shock, which wasn't surprising since Edward really hadn't told him this before.

"All the things I remember being warned about when it came to a wolf's reaction to Imprinting - jealousy, possessiveness, a desire to protect and monopolize - I felt those things way before you did. What kicked in first though was the lack of desire to hurt you, it started that way, and slowly became a need to fight alongside you and protect you from any danger that might arise. I definitely didn't want to hurt you." Edward gave a little shrug despite the embarrassment he felt at everyone's mental response to that confession. "Maybe that's why Jane's power didn't affect Colin, maybe, like me, a subconscious part of her recognizes the Imprint and won't let her hurt him no matter how much the conscious part of her does."

"T-that could actually be true." Jacob ran his fingers through his hair. "We can't hurt our Imprintees, not willingly at least. Sam's hurting Emily was basically unheard of, very rare." He then flinched and turned to look at Leah. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to bring——."

"It's okay," Leah assured him as she folded her arms over her chest. "It's the truth. Usually you can't hurt your Imprintee, or someone else's, it's ingrained in every wolf that an Imprintee is a wolf's life, so his or her life is valued very highly."

"Well, whatever it is, she's not the one that's worrying me," Jared muttered. "There's another girl in
the group and she's—ever since we brought her in things are going wrong, weird, the pack is acting out worse than usual." He sighed and eyed Edward. "I was hoping you could read her thoughts and see if she's got an ability she's using on us."

Edward nodded. "I'll be happy to see what I can find out from her and the others."

"I'm coming with you to protect you," Jacob declared, betraying the fact that he still didn't trust his old pack.

"Us too," Leah motioned between her and Victoria, proving she felt the same way.

Bella cleared her throat. "Well, I am not staying behind."

Edward sighed and smiled at them.

A pack outing then.

Okay.

…

"He's not here." James stood amongst the remains of his old coven. A fire blazed around them, one in which Garrett, Riley and a still wolf Seth tossed the fallen vampires into. The battle had been surprisingly short, not even James had expected it to go this well. He'd searched for Laurent throughout the fight and hadn't found him, expecting one of the others to have caught and killed him, yet he'd now gone through all of the dead and couldn't find his ex-coven member. Laurent was the only one unaccounted for.

"He must have taken off before the fight began," Garrett mumbled as he kicked the last vampire into the fire and surveyed the growing flames with a bright grin. "He'll be all alone. We should go after him now."

Riley smirked, shadows from the fire dancing on his face. "He knows his time is up. Let's find him, James. Let's finish him."

James peered between his two friends before his gaze shifted behind them to where Seth sat by the flames, staring into them. The old James would've taken this all the way to the end, would've gone after Laurent and made him pay for all he'd done.

The new James, though, knew that Laurent had lost already, both he and his former coven mate knew this. Laurent wasn't an idiot, he'd been the only vampire in the coven to sense the shift in James, had perceived it as weakness, and had done what James would've in his position. A part of James hated him for it, but another somewhat understood him. He'd never forgive Laurent, would never trust him, but that desire to track him down (which he could if he wanted to) wasn't there.

"I'm not going after him," James didn't know who he surprised more with that statement, the vampires or the wolf. "He's going to live the unlife he thought he was giving me - one where he'll never be sure if he's safe, one where he's looking over his shoulder. He knows now not to mess with me, I am not weak."

"But Jamie," Garrett declared as he came closer, "there's nothing to keep him from getting more vampires and coming after you again!"

"Garrett, I defeated his clan with one wolf and two vampires, and that is after the first half of his coven died coming after me in Forks." James shook his head. "Laurent is ambitious, but never
stupid. I have a pack back home, he will not bother us again, especially not after we deal with the other issue he brought on my pack's head."

"Other issue?" Garrett wanted to know.

Riley lowered his gaze.

James's gaze caught Seth's wolf-gold and he sighed as he nodded and turned his attention back to the vampires. "I'm the Beta of a wolf pack, guys." He didn't know whether to laugh or flinch at the utter flummoxed look on their faces as they stared at him. "My Alpha is a wolf, and Seth and his sister are other wolves in the pack, while Vicki, my Alpha's mate, and I are vampires." He cleared his throat and realized that that was the first time he'd called Edward that out loud. "There's even a human in our pack, as ridiculous as that sounds." This was the next part, the tricky part. "Laurent took that news to the Volturi and they've shown an interest in my pack. I have to return and help protect them from what Laurent had done."

"A human," Garrett chuckled, seeming more surprised at that than the whole wolfpack or Volturi thing. "So this is what you've been keeping secret from us, why you didn't want us coming along."

He raised an eyebrow as he glanced between Seth and James before he chuckled. "So you said that your Alpha has a vampire as a mate."

"How is any of that possible?" Riley asked in shock. "Aren't we natural enemies?"

"That's changing thanks to my Alpha," James responded before he finally gave into Murdock's words, knowing them to be true. "And if you want to know more you're welcome to come with us back to Forks, Garrett."

Riley looked utter hurt when the invitation wasn't extended to him.

Garrett looked a little surprised too.

"I'm not inviting Riley because, well, he's going to come either way because he belongs there," James declared, surprising the hurt off of Riley's face. "Murdock was right, Rye, you're still my fledgling and I have much I still need to teach you, but I can only do that if you agree to being vegetarian, at least while in Forks. If you can do that, if you can accept wolves and humans are more than enemies and food, then I promise you I will be a much better sire than I've been in the past."

Riley gulped, scarlet eyes wide. "I can do it. It'll be hard at first, but I promise, James, I can do it."

Garrett snorted in amusement. "You sure abandoned me quickly."

Riley shrugged at Garrett, not at all repentant.

James smiled at his friends before a strange feeling came over him. He glanced behind them at Seth, who even in his wolf state, had a strange expression on his face. "Seth, come here. I want to properly introduce you to these idiots."

Seth looked surprised.

"Yeah!" Garrett grinned and waved him over. "I wanna good look at Jamie's wolf now that he's stopped being such an idiot!"

Riley sighed yet turned to glance at Seth.
Seth eyed them before his gaze returned to James, questioning.

"C'mon Seth," James whispered, knowing the wolf could hear him. "Once we get introductions out of the way we can all head home."

**Home?** He could almost hear Seth's worried yet hopeful voice in his head.

Home. He nodded.

Seth grinned brightly and dashed forwards, body shifting in the change as he drew nearer.

…

The Rez wolves were growing restless and arguing amongst themselves. Their loyalties were crumbling and they were a few pushes away from in-pack fighting.

It was all thanks to that other vampire Jared had been worrying about.

From Edward's glimpses into her thoughts he knew the short, hour-glass figured vampire with light brown hair was named Chelsea, and he knew why Aro had sent her along with Jane and Dimitri (the other vampire they'd caught). Chelsea had influence over the emotional ties between people, she could both loosen and secure those ties, and Aro had sent her ahead to weaken not only the wolf pack, but Jacob's pack, the Cullens, and any alliance between the three.

It'd been working on the Rez Wolves, too, until Leah stepped into the containment room Chelsea was being held in.

The second Leah had, Edward heard Chelsea's panicked thoughts as she, apparently, lost all control over her ability. It not only didn't work on Leah, but had promptly *shut off*. Chelsea wasn't saying a word, but mentally she was having a bit of a breakdown.

Already Edward could see the shift in the Rez Wolves, as her control slowly disappeared on them so did their sudden desire to break away from each other and fight.

"No." Leah looked utterly horrified the second Edward revealed the fact that Chelsea's powers didn't work on Leah, and weren't working at all because she was near. Leah was incredibly smart and knew exactly what he wasn't saying out loud - they all did, actually. "No."

"Congratulations," Victoria patted her unlikely pal's back, not at all sympathetic. "It's a girl."

"Nooooooooo." Leah turned to Victoria in an utter whine.

"Leah, if you're keeping her from manipulating everyone you're going to have to stay here and watch her like Colin is Jane," Jacob sighed, knowing exactly the answer that would get from her. "No!"

"Congratulations," Victoria patted her unlikely pal's back, not at all sympathetic. "It's a girl."

"Noooooooo." Leah turned to Victoria in an utter whine.

"Leah, if you're keeping her from manipulating everyone you're going to have to stay here and watch her like Colin is Jane," Jacob sighed, knowing exactly the answer that would get from her. "No!"

"No!" And yet Leah was already eyeing Chelsea with the same wary curiosity the vampire was giving her. Still, Leah pointed her finger accusingly at Chelsea. "NO!"

Chelsea narrowed her eyes and tried to activate her ability, tried to turn Leah's alliance. Nothing.

"I said: no," Leah snapped at Chelsea.

Chelsea blinked, shock filling her as she eyed Leah curiously yet still with rebellion in her scarlet eyes. She was fascinated yet determined to break Leah, seeing her as a personal challenge. Aro had sent her to break pack/coven ties and alliances, and although Leah wasn't exactly her mission.
Chelsea was picking her own for the first time in far too long.

She was gonna break Leah.

As if she were the mindreader, Leah narrowed her eyes on Chelsea and snarled, snapping her teeth at the curvy brunette.

Chelsea smirked, finding it oddly invigorating to finally have an actual challenge.

Edward snorted.

*So it starts.*

…

James had yet to completely explain the truth about his relationship with Seth to his friends.

The wolf was curious about that as they sat around a fire Garrett had convinced James was absolutely necessary 'for ambiance'. Seth was next to James and didn't talk much, mostly being talked to as Garrett filled the silence by laughingly telling Seth all about how he and James (and Victoria) had first met, and the misadventures they'd had.

It was fascinating to see this side of James. Sure, things Garrett told him proved James was right, Seth definitely had no idea just how different the vampire was from his old self, but when Seth merely took the stories with curiosity (and admiration for just how far the vampire had come) James visibly began to relax.

Somehow, during one story about Garrett having to pretend to be the most unconvincing woman in history, James' arm ended up around Seth's shoulders as he finally joined in with the laughter, visibly more at ease than he'd been for a while.

Seth had fought his instinct to react to the touch, knowing James might take it wrong, so he merely laughed at James, sharing his mischievous smile. He could feel Riley's gaze on him, and while the wolf in him wanted to snap at the fledgling, Seth instead ignored him and instead listened to Garrett's never-ending stories.

"Don't listen to him," James ordered Seth as he leaned in closer to him, speaking softly in his ear despite the fact that everyone at this bonfire could most definitely hear him. "Garrett's old age is clearly affecting his memory."

"I am most definitely not remembering that wrong," Garrett assured Seth with a laugh. "He was totally in love with me before he realized it was me. My calves are amazing in heels."

"You mean your very hairy calves?" James shot back, much more at ease than Seth had ever seen him. "How about your chest hair? Which was very visible when you used that low vee-neck dress?" He chuckled. "If you're going to dress in drag you should at least try to do so convincingly!"

Riley made a face as he eyed Garrett, clearly judging him. "Shave at least you beast. Make an effort. Your problem is you never take anything serious."

"Et tu, Brutus?" Garrett gasped with a hand to his chest as he eyed Riley in mock betrayal.

Riley rolled his eyes yet looked amused nonetheless, at least until his scarlet eyes rested on Seth and James. "So, Garrett has spent the whole night revealing his many questionable decisions—."
"—I looked hot in that dress—!" Garrett assured him in insult.

"—so how about we hear something more about you two? How do a vampire and werewolf work together in a pack?" Riley wanted to know. "I remember you, you know. I'd see you and your friends from LaPush in Forks from time to time. I didn't realize you were a wolf, then again, I didn't know vampires and werewolves existed at that time."

Seth blinked in surprise at that. He'd never seen Riley. "You used to live in Forks?"

Riley nodded as he leaned forwards and rested his elbows on his knees. "James turned me the last trip to Fork before they mutinied. The others were going to eat me like they had the friends I'd been camping with, but James stopped them and turned me instead."

Seth clenched his fists, his good mood gone. This was the trip where Seth had first caught James’ scent. He remembered going to the campsite after the police had cleared the area. Sam had wanted the younger wolves to understand just what sort of monster they were charged with defeating. Seth had felt sick at the scent of death everywhere, at the blood, but he'd also felt horrible that that wasn't what had been truly curling in his nose. No. He'd (unknowingly at the time) been nose-open for James' scent, which had been so strong there.

"What about your family?" Seth asked, his voice hoarse. "They think you're dead, don't they? How will they react when you just appear alive? The police will want to talk about you too." He frowned. "Should you really be coming back with us to Forks?"

Riley smirked, something dark and mischievous in his scarlet eyes. "Don't worry about me, I've got this covered."

"We have it covered," James snapped, surprising both Seth and Riley into turning to find him staring at Riley. "I abandoned you when I thought you were a part of the mutiny, but things are different now. I'm going to make it up to you, and my role as your Sire is to protect you until you are ready to leave if you desire. Until then you're still under my protection, Riley, and we'll figure it out together."

Riley stared up at James in open admiration and adoration before smiling and nodding. Seth's fists were clenched so tightly they shook.

Garret snickered.

Seth glanced up at him to find the vampire watching him knowingly. He gulped and lowered his head, eyes wide, heart racing in shock and worry. The older vampire knew. He knew! This wasn't good!

"And while you're with us you'll see first-hand how a wolf and vampire pack works," James continued on as he squeezed a surprised Seth closer. "Who knows, you might end up with a wolf of your own."

Riley made a face. "No thank you."

Garrett blinked as he leaned forwards. "I'm curious at this whole werewolf and vampire mating thing you've mentioned earlier, but before you continue on explaining I need to know if Seth the cutest of the wolves. I might want one of my own depending on what you tell us, but I'll need someone adorable like him."

James snickered. "No wolf would be unfortunate enough to get saddled with you."
Garrett grinned toothily. "That sounds like a challenge." His scarlet gaze returned to Seth. "You got a sister?"

"Yeah," Seth responded, knowing Leah would not be happy to know any of this was going on.

"He's much prettier than she is," James shocked Seth into choking on his saliva as he informed Garrett that in a serious tone.

"No I'm not!" Seth squeaked as he twisted to glare up in James' face, horribly embarrassed.

James snorted at him in a way that clearly asked 'who are you trying to kid here?'. He never got the chance to say that though, because his phone rang. Immediately it was out and open to his ear.

"Hey Jake, how much do you miss me right now?"

Seth's embarrassment shifted to annoyance as he bit the inside of his cheek and fought the urge to sulk.

'You sound very happy,' Jacob could be heard saying thanks to supernaturally enhanced senses. 'Is it done?'

"Yep. We're on our way back." James tightened his grip around Seth. "Puppy's in one piece so you can tell his scary sister to put away any sort of torture device she's got ready for me."

'I'm surprised Seth hasn't killed you for calling him that,' Jacob chuckled good-naturedly. 'And while Leah will be relieved to know Seth's okay, she's a little too preoccupied right now to be planning to hurt you.' He sighed, clearly tired. 'She's Imprinted on one of the Volturi Guard, some girl named Chelsea who seems to be able to control people's alliances.'

"WHAT?" Seth squeaked.

James smirked at him yet spoke to Jacob. "Makes sense the Volturi would try and send her to break our pack. I'm guessing Leah's Imprint keeps her safe?"

'Also seems to have neutralized Chelsea's ability,' Jacob replied. 'It was good too, because she'd already begun to work on the Rez Wolves. We were able to stop her, so the alliance between them, the Cullens, and us still stands.'

"We have a truce with the Rez Wolves?" James' amusement was completely gone as he stumbled to his feet, eyes narrowed. "They tried to kill Seth!"

Seth stared up at him in shock, never having heard James talk to their Alpha in that tone before.

'Leah and I are not happy about this,' Jacob assured him, sounding odd over the phone, probably surprised at James' reaction as well. 'But if we want to be able to face the Volturi with a force strong enough to get them to pause long enough to listen to us, we need them.' He gave another sigh. 'Plus, Seth's friend Colin also Imprinted on another of their Guard, some girl named Jane. Considering what we know about Imprints it's best we all stay on each other's good side.'

James slashed a look towards Seth before he looked away and ran his hand over his head. "We don't need them, Jake. If we overlook things like what they nearly did to him—."

"Hey, I'm okay with this," Seth interrupted as he jumped to his feet. "If we can be at peace with the Rez Wolves—I don't only not mind, but I'd like that."

James glared at him, and when he spoke his voice was harsh. "They tried to kill you." He seemed
really stuck on that.

Seth blinked, shocked to realize James was seriously pissed on his behalf. He didn't understand it, but he appreciated it. It even made him a little happy. "James, if we have a truce I can see my mother on the Rez without any problem - and I can visit Emily's grave. I can visit dad's as well." He took in a very deep breath. "I'd really like to be able to do that."

James froze, eyes wide, a battle clearly playing on his face before he suddenly let out a deep groan and nodded. "Okay. I get it." He frowned, clearly unhappy with this whole situation. "Doesn't mean I have to like those assholes though."

'No, it doesn't', Jacob agreed, sounding relieved and a little curious for some reason. 'You just can't do anything to break the truce. If anyone breaks it, let it be them.'

"Fine," James muttered as he reached out and messed up Seth's hair a little rougher than needed, but not enough to be painful. "But only because Seth is a freaking saint."

Seth smiled up at James, a little shocked yet proud at the realization that James had backed down because it was something he wanted, not because Jacob wanted it.

Garrett made whipping sounds in the background, even mimicking the action of whipping James.

Riley reached out and slapped Garrett up the back of his head.

Seth bit down his laughter, able to understand why James liked Garrett so much. He was cool - for a scarlet-eyed vampire.

"Jake, Seth and I aren't coming alone," James announced, bringing everyone's attention back to him. He cleared his throat. "A vampire friend of mine, and my fledgling, are coming back. I don't know how long Garrett is going to be around, but I owe Riley to take care of him and teach him what he needs to know. I'm his sire."

There was a pause, and then: 'Do they know the rules?'

"Yes." James nodded. "They've agreed to the terms, and I'll make sure they keep to them."

'I'll want to talk to them when they arrive,' Jacob informed him before sighing. 'But I trust you, James, and I'll trust you to keep them in line, knowing what will happen if you don't.'

James smiled, proving how important it'd been to hear that. "Thanks, Jake."

Jacob chuckled. "Just come back home, okay?"

James' grin was bright. "We are."

Seeing just how happy it made James to hear Jacob order him back, all of Seth's elation from before quickly evaporated.

It would seem that no matter how much this trip had helped him get closer to James - and it had - Seth still had a very long way to go before he could kick Jacob out of James' heart.
Chapter 8

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Jasper didn’t need to to be able to feel and control emotions to know that something was bothering Bella. Alice would’ve picked up on it if she wasn’t always in meetings with Carlisle, Jacob and Victoria, and Jared and Embry. As it was, the six representing their corresponding packs/covens were far too busy with peace talks - and war strategies - to really notice anything else. Jasper wasn’t in that group though, and it was quickly and easily noticeable how Bella slowly pulled deeper and deeper into herself.

At first he’d wanted to respect her privacy and give her time to work things out herself, but time only made things worse. That was why he finally spoke up.

“You need to stop being so angry at being a human,” Jasper sighed. He was seated next to Bella in the Cullen’s living room, they’d been spending more and more time together just the two of them, each seeming to have unknowingly sought the other out even more than usual due to Alice’s frequent and long absences. “No one thinks you’re useless because you don’t have fangs or claws.”

Bella flinched at that as she turned her large brown eyes on him. “But I am useless.” She clenched her fists together. “I wish I was a werewolf.”

That surprised him. He’d thought she wanted to be a vampire, she hadn’t really come out and said anything to him, but he’d picked up on the yearning she felt. “Not a vampire?”

She shook her head rapidly, resolutely, as she pressed her fists into her thighs.

Why a wolf and not a vampire? Alice’s visions might be based on decisions, and could change should a decision change, but all of his wife’s visions saw future Bella as a vampire, like them, with them.

If Jasper was being honest when Alice’s visions first started changing and she’d started seeing Bella less as a threat to Jacob and Edward’s union and more as someone important to their own future, Jasper really hadn’t believed that was possible. He’d gone along with it, mostly to humor Alice, help keep Bella away from Jacob, and because it was a challenge to his lack of control for human blood, but somewhere along the way his feelings had started to change.

Singapore had probably been the complete changing point. Alice had hated the time they’d spent with the wise man away from any sort of human comfort (she definitely would’ve preferred being in the city shopping), but Jasper had loved it. He’d understood what the wiseman was doing - how he mightn’t have been helping them with Edward’s issues but was helping them with their own. The blonde vampire had enjoyed every second of roughing it, of the time in the peace and quiet away from humans and the temptation they’d provided. He’d enjoyed it all, but had been surprised when he’d started wishing Bella was there. Not only would she have helped Alice keep from being so bored out of her mind, but Jasper had known unlike his wife, Bella would’ve enjoyed herself there like he was.

The time away had given him time to really think about everything, and the relief he and Alice had both felt at returning home and being able to see Bella had somewhat convinced him - but not as much as the worry that’d twisted their guts when they’d realized Bella had (understandably)
misunderstood everything and was keeping an emotional distance from them. Bella hadn’t pulled away for long, and the relief when she’d cried and hugged them close - Jasper and Alice had shared a look over Bella’s shoulder and he knew his wife could see the acceptance in his eyes.

The plan had been to slowly earn Bella’s forgiveness and work towards cementing what they’d begun before the whole Singapore trip had put things on halt, but with everything going on a wrench had been thrown in the plan.

“No.” Bella took in a deep breath. “Knowing my luck the second I turned one of those werewolves will Imprint on me.” She gulped, disgust on her face at the very thought. “But if I was a werewolf I might——.” She then blushed darkly, which would’ve really tested his self-control had she been anyone else, but she was Bella, and Jasper was surprised at how well he could control his blood-thirsty urges when it came to her. “I might——.” She pressed her fists so hard into her thighs it must hurt.

Jasper reached out and placed his hand on hers to stop her, and couldn’t stop the small smile from touching his lips when she not only jumped slightly at the touch, but he could sense her emotions quickly shift from dark worry to lightheaded happiness. She was incredibly cute. “Do you want to go and see Alice at the Rez? Would that make you feel a little more at ease?”

“No!” Bella looked very conflicted though, stark worry filling her nauseatingly. “It’s bad enough she’s there - but if you go too - what if—-?” She then flushed crimson and lowered her gaze to her sneakers, embarrassment and guilt filling her.

Ah.

Bella was worried that the werewolves were going to Imprint on Alice and Jasper. *That* was why she wanted to become a wolf - she was worried some wolf would take one or both of them away. That was so adorable.

“You and Alice are perfect together, you belong together,” Bella whispered, her voice thick with emotion, her gaze refusing to rise to meet his. “I don’t want anything to—if you guys—I just—.”

Letting go of Bella’s hand, Jasper eased an arm around her shoulders and pulled her in close. He could hear the way her heart raced, her whole body tensed, her breath caught in her throat, her stomach rolling rapidly, nervously. Guilt mixed with extreme happiness and confusion as she relaxed against him and shyly wrapped an arm around his waist in a half-hug, accepting his comfort.

Jasper sensed them before he saw Alice and Carlisle returning, the television blaring in the background completely masking the sound of their arrival. He glanced over his shoulder as the door opened, Carlisle eyeing his phone, Alice instead meeting Jasper’s gaze with a small smile that became brighter when she saw how close he and Bella were. His wife winked and gave him two thumbs up which he merely smiled at.

Bella’s cheeks were so hot he could feel the heat through his shirt. “I—I really c-care about you t-two,” Bella whispered into the material, apparently unable to look at him. “Just the thought of one of those werewolves t-tearing you a-apart makes me so ang——!” Bella gasped as Jasper eased her face up and pressed a soft kiss to her lips.

Pleasure and happiness and desire radiated from her.

Jasper shifted slightly in the seat, feeling his wife drawing nearer as he slowly deepened the kiss.
Bella’s arousal was strong in the air even as she whispered against his lips. “I d-don’t want to get b-
between you and Alice.”

“But that’s where we want you.” Alice sat down on Bella’s other side.

Bella jolted in surprise as she turned to face Alice, eyes wide, guilt back full-force. “Alice! Don’t
get mad at Jasp—!” And then she gasped as Alice leaned forwards and captured her lips, kissing
her just as unexpectedly as Jasper had.

The blonde vampire watched Alice and Bella kissed, a smile on his face, no jealousy at all within
him. While some vampiric mates weren’t monogamous, he and Alice always had been, and they’d
both believed it would always be just the two of them, until Bella. If anyone else touched Alice
Jasper would kill them, but he only felt content as he watched the brunettes.

Alice pulled away and smiled sweetly at Bella. “We both like you, Bella. We like you a lot.” She
tenderly brushed a strand of hair out of the human’s face. “You’re very special to us.”

Bella’s eyes were wide, her lips parted, her breath hard. “R-really?” She glanced between them,
heart skipping a beat when Jasper and Alice both nodded. “You’re b-both special too—I like you b-
both t-too—so much!” Her embarrassment grew exponentially.

“That makes us both happy, doesn’t it, honey?” Alice smiled at Jasper, crooking her finger at him.

“Yeah.” He grinned and leaned over, kissing her, able to scent Bella’s arousal strengthening as she
watched him and Alice and him kiss. True to her word, Bella didn’t want to break them up at all, in
fact, there wasn’t a bit of resentment or jealousy in her as she watched them kissing, just desire,
arousal, and need.

Chuckling against Alice’s lips, Jasper shared mischievous smiles with his wife as they both
pounced on Bella, Jasper claiming the human’s lips while Alice left lipstick stains all over Bella’s
neck.

Bella seemed to be overwhelmed almost immediately, her emotions going blank, and then
suddenly Jasper was hit with an explosion of happiness and disbelief. And desperate need.

“Jasper!” Bella sobbed against his lips as she gripped at him and Alice both, pulling them even
closer. “Alice!”

*He* might’ve been a little overwhelmed by that moment by Bella’s and Alice’s emotions, as well as
his own. That was probably the only reason he didn’t even notice that they weren’t alone in the
living room anymore. Then again, Alice began to rub them over their pants, and the human
whimpered into Jasper’s mouth, so, really, yeah, his inability to sense anything but his girls was
more than understandable.

…

**Your boyfriend better get used to the fact that Bella’s going to be a vampire soon,** the text
message on Edward’s phone declared, catching Jacob’s attention immediately. It was from Rosalie,
and even in text her annoyance was clearly plain. **They’re basically having a threesome in the
living room right now. There’s no way this doesn’t end in her becoming a Cullen. Or a Hale. Or a
Cullen-Hale. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, DAMN IT.**

Jacob raised an eyebrow as he eyed the text and sighed, glad Edward was talking to Victoria in the
other room and not here right now. It gave Jacob a couple of minutes to think without his mate
listening into his thoughts.

This was a situation he’d known was on the horizon, he just hadn’t thought they’d have to worry about this until after the whole Volturi problem was over and done with. The peace treaty between the pack and the Cullens rested on the fact that the Cullens didn’t feed on, or turn, anyone. The whole Bella, Alice and Jasper thing could easily undo everything they’d managed to do up until now, and yet Jacob couldn’t ask his best friend not to follow her heart. She’d never do that to him, and he couldn’t do it to her.

Bella was in love with both Alice and Jasper, it’d been more than obvious for a while now, and Jacob wondered just what he could do to help her in this impossible situation. If it was really what she wanted Jacob would support Bella’s desire to turn (he wouldn’t be happy, he didn’t want that for her, but he could understand it if she chose it) yet he knew that the Rez Pack would be a different matter all-together.

So, it was with that foreknowledge, that Jacob came up with the decision that either James or Victoria would have to change Bella. It was hard to come to terms with it, and he didn’t like the idea of tempting his pack mates with human blood, but it was the only way to keep the Cullen x Rez Wolves’ treaty standing.

When the time came, when Bella came to him and finally admitted that she wanted to be a vampire, he’d be prepared to not only help his friend transition, but to deal with her change as a vampire, and with any repercussions her turning might have. Thankfully she’d also have Edward, James and Victoria there to help her in the parts that Jacob, as a werewolf, couldn’t.

“You’re a really good Alpha, you know that?”

Jacob looked up to find his mate leaning in the doorway, a tender smile on his face. “And here I thought I’d managed to keep my thoughts off of your radar.”

“Sorry, you were worried, I instinctively picked up on that,” Edward apologized as he pushed away from the doorway and joined Jacob by his phone. “I almost don’t want Bella to turn, I want her to be able to have her own family, children, and grow old surrounded by them, but it’s not my choice to make.” He sighed as he eyed the phone, Rosalie’s messages still on screen. “I know it’s your decision to make, but I think Victoria could do it without backsliding into human consumption. She’s—-she’s stronger than most of the vampires I know.”

“Finally, he speaks some sense,” Victoria declared, now the one in the doorway, expression somber. “And he’s right, James is still recovering from his injuries, and from whatever injuries he’s gotten this time around. I should be the one to do it.” She raised her chin. “I’ll make sure Hell’s Bells’ transformation is as smooth as possible - as long as you okay it, Jake.” She shrugged. “It’s one of your rules, after-all.”

Jacob eyed the vampire acting as his Beta in James’ absence and smiled sadly with a nod. “When the time comes you and I will chat.”

“Good.” Nodding, clearly satisfied with this, Victoria suddenly made a face. “Changing the subject, I’m relieved none of the werewolves in the Rez have been acting weird around me. The idea of one of them thinking they could get their grubby hands on me is…” She shivered. “No insult intended to you, Jake, but those wolves are gross.”

“I thought you and Leah might get together,” Jacob admitted now that he knew it wasn’t going to happen - otherwise the girls might’ve never forgiven him for ‘jinxing’ them in case it did happen. “You’re the only ones who don’t seem utterly intimidated by each other.”
Victoria grinned brightly. “We’d have killed each other in a fortnight. I’d do better with someone like Seth.”

Jacob snickered at the idea of Seth and Victoria together. “Thankfully Seth has time before he has to deal with the issues an Imprint brings, unlike his poor friend.”

“Jane.” Victoria shivered in agreement.

“The Volturi will react when they realize their scouts aren’t coming back,” Edward reminded them of what was actually important. “We’re very close to a war we can’t stop. If they weren’t happy with a vampire/wolf pack before, they’ll definitely not be happy when they realize two high-up members of their Guard are Imprinted to werewolves.”

Jacob nodded as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Jared’s hoping that keeping the wolves with the vampires will speed along the Imprint bond and give us an advantage in this situation, but it’s another problem in its own. From what you’ve told us about these guys they’re not going to like two useful people like Jane and Chelsea staying behind. Especially not Chelsea, she can literally make people loyal to the Volturi.” He wondered which was more intimidating - Leah or her Imprint. “That’s a very useful power to have.”

“How sure are we that they will? Stay behind I mean.” Victoria wanted to know. “They did Imprint on a kid and on Leah respectively. If I were them I’d run to the hills the first chance I got.”

“They’ll either stay, or be drawn back very soon after leaving,” Edward responded without any question. “You don’t understand what it’s like to be far away from the person who has Imprinted on you. It’s like torture.”

“You sure stayed away long enough,” Victoria huffed.

“That was before the Imprint was finalized, completed, and it was hard even then,” Edward defended without any heat. “Now though? It gets literally painful if I’m away from Jacob for too long. I get depressed, moody, angsty. The only time I feel like me, like everything is right in the world, is when I’m near him, with him.”

Jacob looked up in surprise. “It’s like that with me too.”

Victoria looked a mixture of annoyed and intrigued. “Aro definitely won’t like finding that out.” She folded her arms over her chest. “Imprinting sounds like a pain in the butt.”

Edward smiled as he reached out for Jacob’s hand and squeezed it. “There’s some upsides.”

“Some?” Jacob barked in amusement.

“Oh god, when does the honeymoon phase end?” Victoria groaned in utter agony. “You two are sickening.”

“Thanks,” Edward grinned, apparently having learnt not to take anything Victoria said personally.

She huffed, clearly upset he’d learnt that. “Whatever is going on we need a bit of a heads up. More than what Alice can give us, because, let’s be honest, there’s clearly blindspots when it comes to her visions otherwise we’d have known two Imprints were heading this way. If we could know more, something more concrete - like maybe more Imprints - we could be ready.”

“True,” Edward admitted softly. “But we don’t know any vampire other than Alice who sees the future. So we’re going to have to—-.”
“I know someone,” Victoria interrupted oddly. “When I talked to James he said he and the others fought Laurent’s coven where we—-.” She cleared her throat, clearly uncomfortable. “There’s someone close by who could know what’s going on, who could tell us more. James just needs to go and visit him on his way back.”

“If they know of another vampire who can see the future—-,” Edward started hopefully as he turned to Jacob.

“Not a vampire,” Victoria mumbled, clearly getting more and more uneasy. “But what he sees come true, no ifs ands or buts. If there’s anyone who can help us, it’s Murdock.”

“Murdock.” Jacob could clearly see there was more than she was telling him, but chose not to push. There had to be a reason why she didn’t want to say more, why she was acting so oddly, but if this Murdock person could give them an insight on what was to come they’d have to send James there. Wherever ‘there’ was. “You sure he’s still there?”

“Yes, he never leaves, it’s not safe for him otherwise,” Victoria admitted uneasily. “He’ll be there, and James will know where to find him.”

“Okay.” Jacob nodded as he shared curious looks with Edward. “I’ll go call James.”

…

Oh for crying out loud!

The second he’d seen Victoria’s number and realized his sister was calling him out of their pre-arranged time James had known he wouldn’t like what she had to tell him, and he hadn’t! It wasn’t so much the message itself but the complications it’d brought.

“You’re not coming along,” James growled, refusing to put Seth through that again. He’d honestly been doing a crappy job of taking care of the werewolf during this trip, and while at first he really hadn’t cared, the longer he’d been with Seth the more the desire and need to protect had grown exponentially.

“If I’m not going, then neither are you,” Seth declared, shocking James out of his annoyance. Just when had Seth decided he could order James around like that? The insolent pup! “Send Garrett and Riley.”

“Murdock won’t meet with us,” Garrett informed the shifter immediately with a careless shrug. “I mean, sure, I’ll go and have some fun, but the only one Murdock’s gonna allow near him is James.”

Riley smirked at Seth, as if telling him even an idiot would have suggested them going in James’ place. The fledgling was clearly acting like a brat, testing his boundaries, and if it wasn’t for the fact that Seth seemed to be handling his own James would’ve stepped in by now.

Seth ignored both Garrett and Riley, his eyes narrowed on James. “Either I go with you, or you don’t go.”

Internal heckles rising, James stalked towards Seth, silently impressed when the pup held his ground even as James invaded his personal space. “Who the hell do you think you are?” James asked in a soft, emotionless voice that had Garrett’s eyes widening and Riley taking an instinctive step back. They both knew the old him, knew him better than Seth, and knew what that tone meant. “You do not order me around.”
Unlike Riley and Garrett, Seth merely raised his chin and met James’ gaze without even a hint of nerves. “And you do not order me around.” He took a step towards James, basically leaving less than a breath between them as he tilted his head further to be able to glare up at James, maintaining eye contact. “Who do you think you are?”

Garrett’s eyebrows disappeared into his hairline.

Riley actually looked a little worried for Seth.

James grinned, showing teeth.

Garrett reacted instantly, reaching for Seth, with the clear intension of pulling him out of the way of imminent danger, but he was too late—because Seth had moved forwards, somehow, and grabbed James’ shirt as he snarled in his face, eyes wolf-gold.

Riley’s mouth was open, his scarlet eyes wide.

James had killed many for far less, he definitely didn’t like the open defiance, and yet, instead of wanting to tear out Seth’s throat… The vampire grabbed fistfuls of Seth’s hair and yanked back roughly, arching Seth’s neck and forcing his head angled into the perfect position to kiss him, roughly, which he did.

He’d expected to be kneed in the crotch, he hadn’t expected Seth to use the grip on his jacket to pull him in closer, meeting that kiss just as harshly. Instead of battling with fangs and claws they were fighting in their own way. This was a new sort of technique James had never used before, wasn’t quite sure if it was actually a battle technique, but they were definitely fighting each other with each kiss and nibble, with each gasp and throaty growl.

Why was Seth fighting him about this? James was just trying to protect him! Did the werewolf not trust him to get the information that they needed? Did he think James would get distracted by what was going on? Or that James would do what he said before and just leave?

All of those options pissed him off, which meant he kissed the werewolf harder, yet instead of complaining Seth bit his bottom lip and kept it captive.

James’ mouth went dry and he opened his eyes to find Seth staring up at him, defiant, threatening to bite harder.

Sighing, the vampire motioned for Seth to let go, and when the werewolf allowed James’ bottom lip to slip free, the vampire let go of his hold on Seth’s long, silky hair. “Fine. You can come. But you’re sticking to me like butter, you hear me? I don’t want you out of my sight for even a split second.”

Seth merely grinned and nodded.

Riley collapsed into a sitting position on the ground, eyeing them in utter shock. His scarlet gaze shifted to Seth in something that looked surprisingly enough like respect.

Garrett laughed oddly, sounding breathless, as he ran his shaky hand through his hair. “I take it back, kid, you’re not adorable, you’re utterly terrifying.”

Seth looked just as confused as James as they glanced over at his friends in question.

“Murdock is always freaking right,” James mourned as he eyed Seth, wondering why he’d even tried going against it. Murdock had said that he’d see them both again, and he’d been right, as
always. It just didn’t seem right for Seth to be in that kind of place, not someone like Seth. It felt like James was slowly corrupting the werewolf, and while the vampire wouldn’t have cared much about that before, it was bothering him more and more lately.

It didn’t even have anything to do with a healthy respect of Leah’s much-deserved fury, either.

“How big is that place, anyway?” Seth asked, bad mood apparently completely gone now that the issue on who was going back had been resolved. “If I was able to sniff around normally I might be able to get an idea of how far the underground tunnels and rooms go, but all the scents in there were way too overwhelming.”

“I don’t think anyone but the Founder really knows,” Riley admitted as he pushed up to his feet. “I’ve been there a couple of times, and each time I end up in different places, meeting different people. I haven’t come even close to finding the end of any of the tunnels.”

Seth blinked, whether at Riley’s sudden change in attitude, or the information on that place, was unsure.

“It’s said that there are people who never leave,” Garrett declared easily with a glance at James, obviously thinking about Murdock. “It’s a place where you easily get lost and quickly forget about the outside world. There’s many… distractions… to keep you busy.”

“Talking about distractions… we never did get to see the hall of mirrors,” Seth mumbled, almost as if to himself.

James imagined it, for a second, and cleared his throat. “It ended up not being in the direction of where Murdock was.”

“Maybe we’ll see it this time,” Seth declared with a grin.

James cleared his throat and looked away, surprised. So Seth’s desire to go along had nothing to do with making sure James didn’t get distracted? Well, that made him feel a little better, and he even smiled, a little. “If it’s on the way, sure.”

“Cool.” Seth smiled up at him, all teeth, mischievous anticipation in those browns.

James cleared his throat, suddenly unable to meet the wolf’s eyes.

Just what the hell was happening with him?

…

“They should’ve returned by now.” Aro stared out of the window at the city below.

“They wouldn’t have been foolish enough to harm representatives of the Volturi.” And yet, there was clear questioning in Caius’ tone.

Aro glanced over at Marcus, who was facing the direction of Forks, a somewhat confused expression on his face. Marcus hardly ever cared about anything enough to be confused, or affected at all emotionally, so Aro was intrigued by his focus. “Marcus, what has your attention?”

Marcus tilted his head, still staring out of the window. “I sense rapid shifting.” His profile revealed the way his eyebrows arched. “It’s very rapid. Almost… as if it’s being accelerated by something.”

Considering Marcus could see the relationships, connections and bonds between people - as well as
sense the strength of the bond between mates and friends - this was encouraging.

“Good.” Aro smiled as he clasped his hands behind his back. “Chelsea must be working overtime and staying longer in Forks to further break the alliance before we even arrive.” His doubts from before disappeared in a matter of seconds. “They should’ve gotten into communication to let us know the change in plan - to ask our permission - but they are no doubt working zealously in our name. And considering there are also dogs in the area it would make sense that they would remain hidden so as to effect the most damage possible while remaining undetected.” He shared a smile with Caius, who also appeared more at ease with this news.

Aro didn’t like Chelsea being too far away for too long (which was why Corin’s ability made her so important in the Guard), but the allegiance Chelsea had engendered in the others to him should be fine and remain ingrained in them even if not reinforced for a couple of days.

“We will give them a few more days to give the bonds more time shatter,” Aro decided. “Then we move on Forks.”

Marcus turned to him, an ever-increasingly confused expression on his face. He opened his mouth, clearly about to tell Aro something, before intrigue crossed his features and he instead returned his attention towards the direction of Forks.

Encouraged by Marcus seeming to be interested in something for the first time since Didyme’s death, Aro smiled. Things were going their way, and if it continued on this path, he’d have what he’d wanted for a very long time yet had been unable to secure: Alice and Edward Cullen.

Ever since he’d learnt of their abilities, Aro had wanted to collect them, to add them to the Guard, yet time and time again they’d graciously rejected his offers stating family allegiance - not even Chelsea had been able to break the bonds they’d had to the Olympic Coven. Carlisle being a friend of the Volturi had complicated matters even further.

Now though, this whole werewolf situation not only made things easier, but it gave Aro justifiable cause.

He glanced over at their little scout, Phoenix Jordan, who sat in the corner on the room, silent. The boy’s story had been quite unbelievable, but upon touching his hand Aro had seen his memories and knew them to be true. And it had given him all the ammunition he needed.

Somehow, Edward Cullen had become involved in a romantic and sexual relationship with a wolf shifter. Aro had witnessed it all through Phoenix’s eyes, as the lovesick human had stalked the wolf in human form, spying on him both at school and out of it, and thus catching many intimate moments between the wolf and the vampire. He’d even discovered the truth about werewolves and vampires because those two had been too wrapped up in each other to notice his presence.

If Phoenix hadn’t been turned he would’ve had to have been killed for just how much he’d discovered as a human!

But this fledgling was incredibly useful to Aro. He’d given him something he’d wanted, he now knew what Edward and Alice’s weaknesses were: Jacob Black and Bella Swan. Aro was no above using those weaknesses against them, already he was devising how to best use the knowledge to his advantage.

Bella Swan was easy. She was a human who knew things she shouldn’t know, and the Cullens knew that that was against the laws. Either she’d have to be killed or turned, and Aro would insist on the latter, and on her being taken back to Volterra for ‘a proper induction into vampire life’. The
Cullens couldn’t be trusted to raise her correctly, not when they’d already failed so spectacularly. Alice would follow them back to Volterra to ‘protect’ Bella, and thus end up in his clutches as well.

Jacob Black was a different matter all-together. Not only was a werewolf, but he’d already been made a part of a different deal.

Aro once more eyed Phoenix Jordan. Why the boy wanted the werewolf enough to make his condition Chelsea breaking Edward and Jacob’s ties and instead tying the werewolf to him wasn’t something Aro would ever understand. Sure, the idea of a puppy to play with might have some appeal, but Jacob was no puppy, he was all wolf, a danger which Aro wanted to do away with. And yet there were two vampires important to his plans (for different reasons) who would not do as he needed them to if he harmed the mutt.

Marcus rested his palm against the glass.

Caius eyed him curiously, lips pursed.

Aro merely smiled at the two of them and returned his attention out his own window. He’d figure out how to handle Edward when it came to Jacob. It was a good thing he was giving Chelsea a couple of more days to break the bonds there. Maybe, by the time they got there, she would’ve done his job for him.

…

“You do remember that that vampire messed with your bond, right?” Jacob asked, eyebrow raised. He’d sensed Embry and Quil’s arrival long before the two wolves had finally made their presence known, he’d been waiting outside for them, and while he’d known something was going on he hadn’t expected his former best friends to say this.

“That isn’t it,” Embry countered softly as he stood there awkwardly, gripping his arm. “Even before that, before Emily, Quil and I have been thinking about it.”

“Sam ordered us to stop talking to you, to stand by and let those vamps hurt those humans so he could watch your new pack in action, and then he ordered us to beat up Seth! You know we literally can’t disobey our Alpha’s orders no matter how much we want to!” Quil interrupted angrily as he ran his fingers through his hair. “Sure, the brat was spying on us, but Seth was also doing something we all wanted to do - he was actually doing something to help. Sam’s been a mess for a while now, and he’s only getting worse.”

“So just because Sam is out of commission you want to jump ship?” Jacob made a face.

“No.” Embry shook his head, voice low. “We want to do it while he’s still out of commission so he can’t use his Alpha Voice to stop us.”

Quil nodded, clearly very pissed.

Jacob stared between his two ex best friends, seeing the truth on their faces, and that made this even harder. “My pack had vampires in it, my Imprint, my soulmate, is a vampire.”

Embry nodded. “We know.”

Quil shrugged. “Look, how we see it, we’ll probably get some too. So this whole old grudges things has got to change anyway.”
“And we know we did wrong by Seth,” Embry said before Jacob could even bring that up. “We deserve his and Leah’s hatred, we get that, but if we can do anything to make it up to them, to him —.”

“We want to be a part of your pack, Jake,” Quil interrupted once more, this time tiredly. “And we’re more than willing to let them beat us up if that helps them forgive us.”

Jacob stared between them the two of them, the situation truly hitting him. “I will discuss this with my pack.”

Quil nodded. “Just let them know they can hit anywhere but the face,” he chuckled. “It’s too pretty to have bruises.”

Embry rolled his eyes. “Let’s get back, idiot.”

“So jealous,” Quil snickered before turning back and racing back.

“Won’t the others hear your desire to leave?” Jacob asked in confusion as he watched Quil race away.

“Not with how things are,” Embry muttered sadly before turning and running off as well.

Jacob sighed heavily as he watched his two ex-best friends until they were both out of sight.

Just what the hell was he supposed to do now?

…

TBC
“So, I’m intrigued.” Garrett leaned against a tree as he eyed Riley curiously. He hadn’t really known James’ fledgling well when he’d agreed to take him on after James’ supposed death, but he’d learnt enough about him during their time traveling together to know that this was very much out of character for him. “Why are you waiting out here sulking and not in there with them giving the puppy hell?”

Riley huffed as he sat with his back against a different tree, the twosome out of sight of that place but still within the territory and safe within the effect of the ‘harm none’ spell surrounding it. “You’re joking, right? If I was smart enough never to get in between James and Victoria when they argued do you really think I’d get in between James and Seth? Siblings are one thing, mates are another.”

“Mates.” Garrett blinked, taken aback by that. He’d realized that the puppy liked James, and if his friend’s actions were anything to go by the vampire really liked him too, but he hadn’t really thought - okay, sure, he’d toyed with the idea earlier… But James would’ve said something when he’d come clean to them about everything. Why tell them about the Volturi and not about this? It made no sense.

“I’m a fledgling, not an idiot,” Riley assured Garrett with another huff, clearly not happy about the situation yet apparently not hostile towards it either. “I just thought I’d get a stab at him now that he bats for this team.” He sighed, lips pursed. “But, moving on, even though I don’t know much about Imprinting, those two are clearly Imprinted.”

Garrett tilted his head in intrigue at the thought. “I can see why you’d think that given what happened earlier, the old James would never allow someone to step like that to him without knocking them down multiple pegs, but he’s different now. Maybe it’s because he’s a Beta and not an Alpha. Maybe it’s a wolf pack thing.”

“Oh, so all members of a wolf pack smooch it out when they’re angry?” Riley snorted and gave Garrett a look that clearly asked him if he was actually as old as he proclaimed to be (which he was, damn it). “Well, they’re boyfriends,” Garrett reminded him with a little shrug. “Boyfriends smooch.”

Riley made up a face. “It’s not just the smooching, man. Haven’t you noticed it? Even when Seth’s in wolf form they’re in synch. And they’re always looking at each other when they think the other isn’t looking, and James let him be possessive without saying anything. James. Mister Harem. Mister Fuck Boi. Mister Manwhore. Mister—-.”

“Yeah, yeah, I get it,” Garrett assured him because, well, the dude had a point. The only one James allowed to get away with anything cheeky or proprietary was Victoria, but Seth had been getting away with shit from the second Garrett had met him in the cave. Was the difference really because James wasn’t an ‘Alpha’ anymore?

“No, you don’t,” Riley countered in frustration. “He’s not your sire.” He ran fingers through his hair. “I couldn’t understand what I was feeling in the cave, I figured I was being overwhelmed by
everything, but the longer I’m around the two of them, the more I feel like I need to be nice to Seth. And that sucks!” Riley threw his hands in the air. “I’ve been discreetly behaving unreasonable——,”

“Discreetly?” Garrett snorted.

“—just to get some reactions from the two of them, and damn it, after what happened back there I’ve conceded defeat!” Riley palmed his face. “You don’t have to believe me, and James doesn’t have to admit to it, but Seth Clearwater is his mate. I’ve heard what other vampires have said about what they feel for their sire’s mates, and damn it, DAMN IT, I’m slowly starting to feel that for Seth.” His eyes narrowed. “And. It. Sucks. He’s freaking younger than me for crying out loud!”

Oh, wow. Garrett hadn’t even thought of that. He’d never been close to his sire, much less in his coven, but he’d heard about what it was like for vampires (especially fledglings) who were being raised by their sire and the sire’s mate. There was a compulsion (whether the underlying instinct was to please the sire or not) to not only accept the mate, but respect them like you might a parent. The sire and his or her mate (if they were good sires) became the parents of the fledglings.

Amusement welled in Garrett’s stomach.

“It’s not funny.” Riley pouted.

“So you’re just being a misbehaving child with a Daddy Complex?” Garrett snickered.

Riley looked very much like if the hex wasn’t working on him he would’ve attacked Garrett by now. “Seth is his mate. Or he’s Seth’s Imprint. Or maybe it’s a mixture of both considering they’re different species. I don’t know.” He let out a deep breath. “But those two are linked, and I’m going to have to accept it, no matter how embarrassing the idea of ‘Mommy Seth’ might be for me.”

If he wasn’t so close to rolling on the floor with laughter at the imagery ‘Mommy Seth’ provoked in his mind, Garrett would’ve been proud of the fledgling. “It could’ve been worse.”

“Yeah,” Riley surprisingly enough agreed. “James could’ve mated with you.” He immediately shivered and looked disgusted at the very thought.

“Hey!”

Riley sighed heavily. “Why couldn’t Seth have Imprinted on you? It would’ve gotten you both out of the picture.”

“You are seriously ungrateful,” Garrett declared with no heat whatsoever before grinning lopsidedly. “I wouldn’t have minded the cutie Imprinting on me though.”

Riley looked seriously depressed, clearly wishing Seth had Imprinted on Garrett.

The older vampire snickered. “Don’t worry, I’m sure there’s a wolf waiting to Imprint on you in their pack.”

“Jesus, Garrett!” Riley shivered in horror, voice an octave higher than usual with pure accusation. “You asshole - you’ve just jinxed me!”

x-x-x-x-x

That place didn’t have a name, not really. It’d been called many names by many different people, but James had never felt the need to give it a name. It was just that place. Everyone knew what he was talking about when he referred to it that way, and anyway, ‘Deviant Underground Sex
Tunnels’ just sounded really skeevy. If he was going to have to explain to Jake (or gods forbid Leah) where exactly he’d taken Seth (twice) that place had a better chance of not ending up in his untimely demise.

“Back so soon?” Florence smirked as she met him and Seth at the entrance.

James wrapped an arm around Seth’s shoulders, bringing the werewolf in closer. “We never got to the hall of mirrors.”

Amusement and intrigued filled those eyes as Florence stamped them with the Partner stamp. “Have fun.”

James grinned and nodded as he pulled Seth inside. Already he could feel the magic in the place affecting him, his clothes felt too restrictive, and Seth smelt really good. It was easy to blame the magic for the way he moved behind Seth, hands slipping in under the wolf’s shirt, fingertips brushing against his abs as they slowly made their way to the disrobing ‘room’.

“Why is this place free?” Seth’s voice was breathy, the werewolf this time not seeming as interested in what was going on in the rooms down the hallway as he was in getting to the one at the far end. He also didn’t seem as overwhelmed by the scents as he’d been before. “If they charged an admission fee whoever runs this place would make a killing.”

“Charging money would limit how many people came here - stayed here,” James whispered into Seth’s ear, not too sure how much to tell. On the one hand it would only take a couple of minutes to explain that Maximus was an Incubus who not only fed on the sexual energy constantly filling this place but was one of the most powerful of his kind because of it. On the other hand, those were minutes in which Seth’s clothes would remain on.

The vampire gulped, a little queasy at the realization of how eager he was to get Seth out of his clothes, and the little worried voice in the back of his head telling him he wasn’t idiotic enough to blame it all on the sex-magic made the queasiness worse. That gave him the strength to pull away from Seth, clear his throat, and walk passed him into the disrobing room… and thus missed the confused and disappointed expression on Seth’s face due to their sudden lack of physical contact.

What was he doing?

That question distracted James as he yanked off his clothes almost angrily, close to tearing the material. Seriously though, what was he doing? He’d backed down from that argument with Seth ridiculously quickly, was it because he’d figured Seth out enough by now to know that if he’d left the werewolf behind he’d have merely snuck in after him and put his ass in danger while by himself? Sure, there was some of that for sure. But there was more to it than just that, and like his inner voice mumbled over and over again, James wasn’t an idiot.

He was just in denial.

And felt guilty as fuck.

It’d happened suddenly, or maybe it’d been so gradual he’d only really realized it once it was too late, but he had to admit it: he was attracted to Seth Clearwater. And it wasn’t even purely sexual, and that made it even worse. If it was just sexual he could explain it all away easily: he was on the rebound, teed up by the promise of violence, and sexually frustrated - and Seth was hot. But it wasn’t just sexual, because if it was he wouldn’t feel so protective of Seth.

So James not only was attracted to Seth, but he had caught feelings for him. It was sudden, it was
strong, and it was confusing as hell. And it was a problem. A big problem.

What happened when they got back?

His stomach dropped.

Oh gods.

What would happen when they got back?

Leah would take one whiff of her brother and immediately kill James, and Jacob mightn’t even try to stop her because, well, James would deserve it, wouldn’t he? And Seth… Seth… He had feelings for Jacob. Being back would change things for them, he’d probably resent James for his scent on him adding another barrier between him and Jake.

Nausea clenched his stomach, and James jumped into the water just to be able to give himself some distance, some time to himself. He stayed under the surface much longer than necessary, glad that he didn’t have to breathe, and thus could just allow the mute world around him to come to a standstill.

He was feeling weird, was acting weird, he knew it, and knew he had to get that crap in check before Seth actually figured what was going on him. How lame would he look? So pathetic! Seth saw what they were doing with each other not only as mutual comfort, but it was very obviously no-strings attached fun. If he figured out James had some very confusing feelings developing that could ruin their - whatever - they had…

The water whooshed as Seth jumped in, and in seconds James felt a grip around his upper arm as Seth yanked him back roughly to the surface.

“What is going on with you?” Seth snapped the second they broke surface, grip on James tightening. “Are you trying to drown?”

“I can’t drown,” James reminded him, a little surprised at the intensity in Seth’s voice. “I don’t have to breathe, I only do so to track.”

“Oh gods, I forgot you didn’t have to breathe.” In seconds Seth had gone from furious to embarrassed, and a little annoyed. “How is that fair?” He sidled up closer, his grip on James now loose. “So you could go deep-sea diving and be fine! Why haven’t the depths of the oceans been mapped and explored already?” His eyes widened in almost childlike wonder. “Are there vampires exploring space?”

“What kind of—-?” James stopped short and laughed as he shook his head, bad mood completely gone. Oh gods, Seth was cute, he was really cute. This was bad. REALLY bad! “As far as I know, there are no vampires floating around in space.” He couldn’t stop his grin at the utterly disappointed look on Seth’s face at that revelation. “You’ve got to think about the pressure, in both the deep sea and space. Even if it didn’t shatter our bodies, it would not be comfortable. And all that isolation - and lack of food sources - and each situation has other dangers.” James shrugged. “It just doesn’t seem worth it if you ask me.”

“We jump off the cliffs back home,” Seth informed him proudly, his grin infectious. “I used to think it was crazy before the Change, but it’s actually really fun.”

“I’m not jumping off of a cliff with you,” James anticipated where this conversation was headed.

“C’mon, you’d like it,” Seth assured him stubbornly as he shifted closer and closer until James
found his back against the edge, surprised to find a little groove he could somewhat sit on. Seth’s hands rested on the wall on either side of James’ body, caging him in. The werewolf glanced downwards, slowly, before his gaze rose and his smile grew lopsided. “Unless you’re chicken.”

The snicker escaped his lips before he could stop himself. “What are you? In kindergarten?”

Instead of rising to the bait as usual, Seth merely shifted closer. “Did kindergarten even exist while you were alive, gramps?”

Guffawing, James threw his head back, his whole body shaking with his laughter. When had Seth gotten this cheeky? A part of him missed the werewolf’s bashful side, but he’d be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy this new side to him. “A lot of things existed when I was alive, puppy.” He smirked lazily. “I’ll happily school you if you need it.”

“Yeah?” Seth moved, shifted, until he was suddenly straddling James’ lap, facing the vampire, his knees just barely fitting on the small ledge James sat on. The werewolf’s arms wrapped around James’ neck, his hair fanned out around them in the water, his ass pressed and rubbing teasingly back against James’ quickly hardening cock.

“Yeah.” James closed his eyes as he hid his face in Seth’s neck, breathing in his scent desperately as he anchored his hands on the wolf’s slender hips. “It’s a hard job, but someone’s got to do it.”

Seth chuckled, the sound was breathy as he too hid his face in James’ neck, his voice against the vampire’s skin. “You martyr.”

Whether it was Seth’s hair falling into his face, giving him a silky dark curtain to hide behind, or Seth’s breath and teeth teasing his ear, the way Seth’s arms clasped tightly behind his neck, or the way the wolf slowly yet continuously shifted on his lap to brush against James’ length—James was quickly becoming overwhelmed. That little voice in his head was screaming in panic that he was getting way in over his head with the puppy and he needed to pull away right now before he got in too deep to ever climb back out — but then Seth reached back with one hand and found James’ length, silencing that voice in the vampire’s head the second his fingers touched his skin.

Seth leaned back enough to be able to catch James’ fevered gaze, and only once he had did he angle James’ length to his puckered core. The wolf’s gaze burned something deep in James’ body, and the blonde found himself unable to break that gaze as the wolf fed James’ cock slowly into his body. The pup’s lips were parted, his breathes accelerated, and the heat of his skin was nearly scorching as he eased himself lower and lower until he sat completely speared by James’ rod.

And then, as soon as he was fully penetrated, Seth whimpered as he leaned forwards, once more clasping his arms around James’ neck, hiding his face in James’ hair.

“Seth,” James whispered as he trailed his hands roughly down Seth’s back to cup his ass, a cheek in each hand, squeezing hard enough to leave bruises on his bronze skin. “Can I call you cute now?”

Seth’s breath caught in his throat.

“Hmmmm? I’m inside you now. That was the deal, wasn’t it?” James brushed his nose slowly up and down Seth’s neck, taking in his scent. “Can I?”

Seth breathed heavily and nodded, goosebumps covering his skin as James moved within him slowly.

“So cute,” James whispered into Seth’s ear, able to feel the way the wolf shivered at the word.
“Lean back a little.” When Seth shook his head and buried his face harder into James’ hair, James nudged his nose against him softly. “C’mon, I want to see your face.”

That face was hotter than usual as Seth anchored his hands on James’ shoulders and finally shifted his body, leaning back enough that the vampire could now see his flushed face. Seth’s gaze was lowered on James’ chest, a conflicted expression there.

James followed his gaze and noticed it was on Jake’s totem, which still rested around his neck. He could see a mixture of emotions in Seth’s eyes as he stared unblinkingly at the totem, and the vampire felt like an asshole for not even thinking about the wolf’s feelings. He’d forgotten about the totem, had already planned on giving it back to Jake once they returned to Forks—-James yanked the totem roughly, breaking the chain. He could see Seth’s shock grow as James threw the totem behind him carelessly.

Seth’s eyes were wide as they followed the totem’s trajectory until it hit the ground loudly, and then those brown eyes returned to James, zeroing in on his face in utter question. The vampire used the hand he’d thrown the totem away with to cup the side of Seth’s flushed face, and when the werewolf leaned into the touch he had to finally admit to himself that he definitely - utterly - had feelings for Seth Clearwater.

Pup rested a hand over the one James cupped his cheek with, their fingers intertwined as he leaned his head harder into the touch.

Gold eyes met brown eyes and held as Seth and James’ intertwined grip tightened, and James moved inside the werewolf. They didn’t break eye contact, their bodies moving as one. While they’d had sex before, multiple times by now actually, there was something different about this time. Maybe it was the eye-contact, James wasn’t sure, but it felt so much more intimate than all the other times.

Seth’s breath was heavy, shaky, as if it was hard for him to breathe, but he didn’t look in pain or uncomfortable. In fact, the pup’s expression was bliss as he matched James’ slow rhythm.

“You’re so cute, Seth,” James praised as his gaze devoured the scene in front of him. “Just looking at your face makes me want to cum.”

The wolf’s cock twitched impressively at that, tapping James’ stomach. A complaint slipped passed Seth’s lips when James let go of his asscheek, yet the complaint choked in his throat with the vampire’s fingers wrapped around his cock instead.

“Don’t, I’m too close,” Seth begged as he shifted further on James’ lap, using his free hand to gain purchase on James’ knee behind him and better balance himself.

“Me too,” James admitted shamelessly, unable to keep the smirk from his face at just how flushed Seth was. “You have to cum first.” He stroked Seth slowly, matching the rhythm of his cock as it tortured the wolf with its pace within him. “I want you to milk my climax from me.” He grinned as Seth’s eyes clouded over and that flush darkened even further on his beautiful bronzed skin, the pup’s cock twitching needfully. “So fucking cute.”

“Say it,” Seth whispered breathlessly, his lips twitching, his pupils expanding, his gaze never leaving James. “Tell me you think I’m cute.”

“So cute,” James obeyed, the words already on the tip of his tongue anyway. “You’re the cutest fucking person I’ve ever seen in my life. You’re so cute I just want to fill you - cover you - in my cum until it’s dripping off of every inch of yo—-.”
“James!” Seth threw his head back and sobbed as he came, spurting warmth all over James’ chest, his ass clenching around the vampire desperately.

Just like he’d known, the feeling of Seth spasming around him was enough to drive James over the edge. “Kiss me,” he ordered gruffly, and in seconds Seth had shifted to surge forth, kissing James as if he was drowning and James his only source of oxygen.

James grabbed Seth by his hips, slamming his hips down once, twice, before slamming and keeping him pressed down hard as he came deep inside of the werewolf. His groan was swallowed hungrily by Seth, who continued to shift his hips as much as possible, as if desperate to milk as much cum from him as he could - every last drop if possible.

Vampires mightn’t need to breathe, but Seth was doing an amazing job of it himself as they kissed hungrily, seemingly endlessly. Long after James’ body had stopped jerking in climax, and his cum had filled the wolf’s body, James’ hands remained on Seth’s hips, keeping him in place - like Seth’s hands at his face did him - and they were still kissing.

There was something different happening here, usually if he was still buried inside of someone James was only content if he were still moving, but instead he found himself relaxed against the ledge, more than content to merely remain inside of the wolf while kissing him. James hadn’t ever been that much into kissing, especially if it was just kissing, but he could stay there all day just like this as long as Seth never moved. As long as James was anchored inside of the pup, he could happily spend the whole day just kissing him.

As if to drive that point home, it was Seth who finally pulled away, resting his forehead against James as he breathed heavily. His face was flushed hotter than James had ever seen it, but his lips were curled in a smile. “We should—probably find Murdock, huh?”

Right. James had forgotten all about why they were here. He took in a deep breath, and was shocked that all he could smell was Seth. Panic filled him as he wondered what in the world was happening. All he could smell was the wolf still straddling him! That had never happened before in his unlife! All scents were always there available to him, but not at this second, no, his whole world was Seth Clearwater.

Something about that seemed familiar, like there was something he should be remembering, but couldn’t quite put his finger on.

But before James could actually show his panic, the scents returned to him, and he was able to find Murdock’s trail immediately.

Relief escaped his lips loudly, but before Seth could question him on it James kissed him softly, wrapping his arms around the wolf in a near hug, the relief earth-shattering.

A whimper escaped Seth’s lips as his arms wrapped around James’ neck once more, his back arching as he opened his mouth to the kiss. The wolf shifted his hips once, twice, and then a groaned complaint escaped his lips loudly when James gripped his hips and pulled him off of his cock. “James!”

The sound was like heaven, and it took all of James’ self-control not to ram the wolf back down on his cock. “He’s near. Probably waiting on us. Best not to knowingly leave him waiting.”

Seth’s breath escaped his lips in an annoyed, petulant, childish huff as he shifted to lean against the wall. “Fine.”
Chuckling, James shifted and pressed a quick peck to the wolf’s lips, smirking when he realized the pup wasn’t pouting anymore. His hand found Seth’s, fingers curled through his, as he motioned with his head towards the entrance. “Come on.”

Gulping, looking bashful against for some reason, Seth nodded and tightened his grip on James’ hand. He was quiet the whole way, sticking close to James’ hand no matter what tunnel they went through or the distractions around them. Seth remained close to James, a half step behind him, and when James realized the wolf was subtly sniffing him every so often he realized the scents must still be overwhelming him.

Shifting his grip so that his arm was now around Seth’s shoulders, James glanced down in shock when Seth seeming folded into him, making the walking pace a little awkward not only because they had to match strides but because while one of Seth’s hands was anchored around James’ hip, the other was somewhere else altogether. Seth wasn’t stroking him, no, his grip was just on James’ cock proprietarily.

The old James would’ve slapped that hand and its mark of possession away, this James though, was just worried at how much he enjoyed the claiming act - the clear ‘this is mine’ message.

He noted, with a little disappointment, that Murdock was close enough that they didn’t have to go even close to the Hall of Mirrors. That was a real waste and disappointment. If Jake didn’t want them coming back as soon as they got answers from Murdock, James would’ve taken Seth there right afterwards - but then what kind of message would that show?

This was fun for Seth, this was the opening of a new, adult world, and a chance to forget for a while about his unrequited feelings for their Alpha. That was all good and well, and it would’ve been perfect for James if it wasn’t for the fact that he was getting a little too carried away by everything. He needed to reign his shit in. Now. Before he lost control and ruined what was going on here - made things even more uncomfortable and unrequited in their pack.

Thankfully, they found Murdock in another dead-end before James’ mind could truly begin to torture him.

“Hi Murdock,” Seth greeted before James could even think to. “You okay?”

“Seth.” Murdock smirked as he nodded. “I see you’re doing better than the last time you were here.”

Seth didn’t answer but James could feel him chuckling, flushing hotter.

That smirk disappeared as Murdock’s gaze shifted to rest on James. “You need to come and see me when you don’t need things from me.” He pointed a long, thin, bony finger at Seth. “And don’t ever come without him or I won’t let you find me.”

James’ mouth fell open at that, but he quickly recovered before his reaction could truly give him away. “The Volturi are marching on my pack. My Alpha sent me to ask you what we can do to survive this without starting a war with them.”

“That the Volturi are already breaking from within, have been since Didyme’s murder, yet it is only now that the seeds sown so long ago are being reaped,” Murdock informed them casually, as if he wasn’t telling them about the destruction of their ruling family, of the institution which had brought peace (in their own way) and kept a hand on vampires worldwide so that no more slaughters occurred. Sure, they were a danger right now, but their complete destruction wasn’t a
good thing, there had to be someone who vampires feared so as to keep them in check! “More will be Imprinted by the wolves of Forks, and Aro will not be pleased. He is going there with the intention of destroying the wolf packs and even the Olympic Coven, all with the desire of having Edward and Alice in the Guard. To this end, he is willing to use both Jacob Black and Bella Swan.”

James growled, the sound mixing with Seth’s, as the two reacted instinctively to the threat to their pack.

“He will find more opposition than he planned, and from unlikely quarters. Your pack will find itself growing with new werewolves and even vampires, the wolves will be of special importance for what is to come,” Murdock informed James tranquilly. “What lies ahead will not be easy, but if you make it to your new pack before Aro does, all will work out.”

“So there’s going to be a fight no matter what we do, and our pack’s going to need the numbers,” James sighed, deciding not to think about the fact that their pack was going to grow - or that other werewolves would be joining. If he even would allow himself a second to think about it he’d wondered whether these were newly Changed wolves, or whether they were from Sam’s pack and thus some of the wolves who’d hurt Seth - he couldn’t allow himself to think about that, not now. This was the wrong time to get pissed and blast his Alpha. “Fine. We fight. I’ll die by Jake’s side if it comes to that.”

Murdock merely smiled and tilted his head, not denying or affirming anything.

Seth let go of his grip on James he glared at the vampire as if this was all his fault somehow. The werewolf took in a deep breath and turned to Murdock. “May I ask you something, in private?”

James blinked in confusion. “Why in private?”

“It’s personal,” Seth mumbled, not meeting his gaze.

In a second James got exactly why he wasn’t included in this conversation. It had to do with Jacob. Of course Seth wouldn’t want him hearing his questions about Jake. “Fine.” He pushed back his sudden annoyance. “Can you find your way back to the last room we went through to get here?”

A look of utter panic flashed in Seth’s eyes seconds before he grabbed James’ wrist as if to keep him from leaving. “Don’t go by yourself.” His voice was low, breathy. “Just, stand over there with your back to us and don’t listen.”

James raised an eyebrow in incredulity at the request. “You want me to cover my ears?”

“And hum if you have to.” Seth looked highly embarrassed yet tightened his grip on James’ wrist as if scared he’d just leave. “Please.”

“Can you really not find your way back?” James asked in worry, his annoyance slowly disappearing as concern took its place. Was Seth’s sense of smell that compromised in this place? That could be dangerous. He wanted to press the issue, but Seth was visibly mortified, so he dropped it. “Fine. I’ll stay. Over there.”

Unable to believe he was doing this, James covered his hands and began to hum ‘In the Hall of the Mountain King’ as he walked towards the bend in the tunnel. He pressed his back against the bend, gazing off into the other tunnels, really wanting to glance back at Murdock and Seth yet somehow holding back his impulses.

James wasn’t good at inhibition. If he wanted something he usually went after it, but Seth wanted privacy, and damn it, the vampire would do his best to give it to him, no matter how much the
subject matter annoyed him. But Seth needed this, he needed Murdock to tell him that there was no chance with Jacob now that Edward was back in the picture. It’d hurt the werewolf, but he needed to know what James had the second he’d seen the way Jake still looked at Edward despite everything the vampire had done and put him through: there was only Edward for Jake, and it would always be that way.

It’d be hard, but Seth needed to hear it from someone who was never wrong, only once he did he’d be able to start to heal and maybe even move on.

Movement in one of the tunnels ahead caught his attention, and he watched as two pretty girls sauntered down towards him, looking drunk, proving they’d been here a very long time. Murdock was the only one he’d known who could stay here for long periods of time without acting like someone seriously blitzed.

“Hey you!” One of them chuckled as she drew nearer, pulling her friend along. He couldn’t hear her words, but could read her lips. “Do you remember me?” She giggled and leaned in close. “We had fun in the Bouncy Castle that time you were here.” She pulled her friend closer and chuckled when the girl began to kiss her way down her neck. “Why are you covering your ears anyway? You know what? Who cares?” She giggled. “Gigi, this is the guy I told you about. The jackhammer.”

“Ooooh.” Gigi finally looked up at James and reached out to trail her fingers down his chest, but he kept his gaze on her lips to be able to read them when they uttered: “I’ve heard a lot about youuuuuu. Wanna go and have double the fun?”

“I’m good.” James shook his head and then froze, not sure who was more shocked at his easy, instant rejection - the girls or him.

The girls suddenly both looked to his right, eyes immediately widening before they shared nervous looks and hurried away, more sober than they’d been seconds before.

James blinked, curious of what had scared them off away so quickly, but when he glanced sideways he noticed movement and shifted to find Seth arriving, a content expression on his face. Hell, the kid looked exhilarated, like he was trying his best not to smile and yet was unable to. Just what the hell had Murdock told Seth that had left him so happy? James had been ready for a despondent puppy, not for this absolutely delighted wolf.

A glance back towards Murdock proved that, despite it being a dead-end, the guy had disappeared from sight. Typical. Gold eyes shifted onto Seth as a blonde eyebrow raised. “We should go now, Murdock said we have to make it back before the Volturi if our pack has any chance of making it out of this alive.”

Silence fell between them for a moment before Seth nodded. “I’m ready to go back now… although I kind of wish we had time to see that Hall of Mirrors you keep talking about.”

Me too. Sighing, James grabbed Seth’s hand without a moment’s thought, and led the way back out.

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TBC
Chapter 10

Her brother was coming back home. Finally. The bad news was that while he was uninjured, he was basically surrounded by vampires. While James was one thing (he was Victoria's brother) these other two vampires he was bringing back with him were unknowns, most probably human drinkers, and thus dangerous. Leah just wanted her brother back home, safe and sound with her where she could keep an eye on him.

It was hysterical to think that 'home' and 'safety' was in the Hunter Home (vampires! VAMPIRES!) but the Rez had thrown them out and their mother had been forced to agree to the terms. Sue was spending more and more time at Charlie Swan's though, and Leah felt she wasn't only spending time with her boyfriend, but wanted to be closer to them as well - as every time she was down she either came to visit Leah or asked Leah to pop over with Bella.

Still, while there was this truce, things between the Clearwaters and the Rez were very shaky. Even if things got better though, Leah couldn't see herself returning to live there. Seth probably would. His friends were there. He could find a nice girl there and settle down, he was by far a better person than Leah - he probably had already forgiven their old pack while she never would - at least - she'd never forgive Sam, who'd given the orders to hurt her baby brother.

Embry and Quil had volunteered to be beaten just as badly as Seth had been to rectify their actions, and while Leah would no doubt take them up on that offer (not hitting Quil's face be damned) as long as Seth was okay with it, she would find it in her to look passed their transgressions and accept them as pack. Seth would no doubt forgive them, would probably not even want to beat them up (screw that!) so Leah was doing her best to try and get used to the idea from now. She didn't do good with things just being thrust upon her, it was way better to ease her into uncomfortable situations. Otherwise she got a little… hotheaded.

Victoria had promised Leah her room was hers for the rest of her life if she wanted, and while Leah had merely huffed and shrugged when the offer had been extended she'd known the vampire could read just how much that had actually meant to her. That's what she liked about Victoria. She didn't need to be all girly and talk about her feelings unless it was absolutely necessary, Victoria got her. A part of Leah, one that she'd never admit to or say out loud, had figured that Victoria would be the coolest vampire to Imprint on.

Instead, of course, she'd gotten the vampire she'd spent the last couple of days guarding. After the first two the vampire had stopped trying to break her allegiance to the Black Pack, and had instead spent the time quite oddly - she was talking. A lot.

Leah wanted to be annoyed, but the vampire had lived a very long time, and done a lot, and seen a lot, and she'd once had a mate - Afton - who'd been murdered while trying to protect some high up wife named Diddy Me or something pornish like that. Leah had lost Sam to Emily and the Imprint, and Chelsea had lost Afton, so the two of them had some common ground there.

"Have you never actually left Forks?" Chelsea asked curiously as she leaned with her back against the cage's bars, looking very comfortable given the fact she was a prisoner and all that. "Don't you want to get out and travel? See the world?"

"This is where I belong," Leah informed her in a lazy tone as she eyed the carcasses lying around Chelsea. The vampire wasn't happy with her new diet, but the amber tinge in her once scarlet eyes proved that she'd refused to starve during her imprisonment. "I'm not forced to stay here, but this is my home, and this is where I'll live, protecting these people, till the day one of your kind kills me."
Chelsea frowned as she hugged her knees to her chest. "Or you could just die peacefully of old age."

Leah shook her head. "If I keep shifting I'll never grow old. And I'll never stop protecting Forks and LaPush, or its people. So I'll die at the hands of a vampire." She raised an eyebrow tauntingly. "Maybe one of your friends will be the ones to do it."

Eyebrows nearly touching as her frown darkened, Chelsea pursed her lips, looking troubled. "All Aro wants is for Edward and Alice Cullen to become a part of the Guard. If they would just stop being so stubborn—-.

"They have a right to choose what family to be a part of." Leah had never thought she'd be defending vampires, and even as she snapped this her inner monologue was so ridiculous it almost made her smile, almost. "Alice is the girlfriend of one of my pack's members, and Edward's my Alpha's mate. Your boss isn't getting either of them. We'll die first."

Chelsea scratched her arms roughly. "I don't understand - how can a vampire be a wolf's mate? We're mortal enemies." She nibbled on her bottom lip before her gaze rose to Leah's curiously. "Aren't we?"

Leah didn't answer, instead she stood when she realized that Chelsea had scratched her arms raw. "Stop that. You're hurting yourself."

Surprise filtered over Chelsea's face before she glanced down at her arms and flinched. "Oh. I didn't even realize."

"How could you not realize?" Leah wanted to know, reaching for her phone to get in contact with Victoria and ask her to bring some more bunnies for Chelsea to drink and thus heal herself. "It looks painful."

"It's not as painful as the withdrawal," Chelsea shocked her with that sigh.

Leah didn't finish marking in the numbers. "You're a junkie?"

"It's not—," Chelsea defended quickly before stopping herself from scratching once more. "If we're away too long from Corin we get—withdrawals. She and I are Aro's most powerful and important Guard members, I keep her and everyone else loyal, while she keeps me and everyone else content with our lives." The brunette tilted her head up to the ceiling of the cage. "If we're away from her - and her power - too long we go through withdrawals. Demetri and Jane are definitely going through it now too."

Fury churned in Leah's gut as she gripped the bars tightly. "And that's the kind of person you want to force Edward and Alice into serving? Someone who brainwashes people into following his every order?"

"It's not—," and yet Chelsea seemed unable to finish that defense, so she tried another. "Werewolf Alphas have command over their subordinates, so don't act as if you're not forced to do things you don't want to do all the time as well."

"I'm not. Not anymore. Not under Jake." Leah shook her head, able to defend her boss, unlike the vampire. "When I belonged to Sam's pack he used his Alpha Voice on us all the time, and I didn't have a choice whether to join his pack or not because there was no other pack I could join - and wolves need a pack, an Alpha. So I was stuck with him, with the situation. But then Jake started his own pack and I chose him as my Alpha, and ever since I've been a part of his pack he's never
forced me to do anything I don't want to, he's never used the Alpha Voice." She forgot, for a bit, that she was leaning against a cage housing an imprisoned vampire. "I understand what you're going through, I didn't have a choice in Sam's pack but since there wasn't any alternative I just made do and made sure I was important enough in that pack so that I couldn't be thrown away the way I had been for Emily." It hurt to say that. "I was important, and Sam tried to get me back when I left for Jake's pack, but I never looked back. Not once."

Chelsea shifted in her seat to better look at Leah, her expression curious.

"It was scary, and it physically hurt so much to break those ties, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me." Leah was shocked at the words coming out of her mouth. She didn't talk emotions, didn't like it, and yet here she was spilling her guts to some vamp who probably would only try to use this against her, and yet she couldn't stop. "This isn't what I'm used to, my pack has vampires in it as core members, and I can't see my mother whenever I'd want to because of my choice, but this is the choice my brother and I made, and we're happy because of it."

Chelsea stumbled to her feet and slowly, carefully, made her way towards Leah while rubbing her arms. "What's it like?" Her voice was soft, her eyes curious. "What's it like to be a part of a vampire and werewolf pack?"

"Weird," Leah admitted, and the both of them chuckled softly at that admission. "We're supposed to kill vampires, you know? And when I see scarlet eyes that's my initial instinct… but my best friend right now is a vampire, and I'm okay with that." Leah would never tell Victoria she was her best friend, but she figured the damned redhead already knew. "There's some getting used to to be had. For one, there's the fact that you guys smell really sweet, and the bags of blood in the fridge next to the milk, or the frozen animals in the deep freezer next to the steak and stuff." She made up her nose before laughing. "But one of the many points on the plus side is that we now don't waste a single part of the kill any longer - the vampires suck out the blood while the wolves consume the flesh. It's more respectful to the creature that way I feel."

Chelsea was now right there, eyes wide, hands gripping the bars under Leah's hands. "You guys hunt together?" When Leah nodded, Chelsea exhaled loudly. "I'd love to see that. I can't—it's just so impossible to believe!" Her grip on the bars was incredibly tight. "Caius and the other Elders - they said werewolves and vampires could never - that it was dangerous - that it was all a trap - I don't know what to think." She rested her forehead against the bars.

Leah glanced between Chelsea and the phone before she cleared her throat and pocketed her phone. "I can, uh, show you that it isn't a lie. Our kind might've been enemies for as long as we can both remember, but Jake's right, we don't have to continue being enemies. If you didn't drink human blood I'd have nothing against you, and there are ways we can help each other - ways we're only starting to learn."

Chelsea stared up at her, clearly conflicted.

The werewolf cleared her throat. "If you want me to show you, put your arms through the bars." She met Chelsea's wide amber eyes. "I won't hurt you. I promise."

There were clear questions and worry, and fear, but there was also intrigue there. The short, curvy vampire gulped before slowly easing her left arm out through the bars, her whole body jolting when Leah took it. Chelsea's breathing accelerated as Leah eased that arm up to her lips, and a sharp gasp pierced the silence that'd fallen in the room the second Leah's tongue darted out and ran over the blood scratches.

In seconds Chelsea leaned heavily against the bars, a soft cry tumbling from her lips as Leah's licks
carefully tended to the injured skin. The vampire's skin was a cooling chill against Leah's ever
burning skin, and the taste under her tongue should disgust her (this was a vampire's blood) but
Chelsea's skin tasted like honey.

And then the scent filled the air.

It took Leah a couple of minutes to figure out what she was smelling, but when it got strong
enough, musky enough, she knew without a doubt what that scent was. She gulped, refused to look
at Chelsea as she finished licking the self-inflicted wounds on those arms.

Only when she was done with both arms did she take a step back and look up at the vampire,
finding her paler than usual, staring at her arms, which were slowly yet visibly healing.

"It doesn't happen when we do that to ourselves," Leah admitted. "Only when we do it to a
vampire." To one's mate. She was very uncomfortable as she hugged herself, unable to meet those
wide eyes. "Jake and Edward were very hedgy about how exactly they discovered this, but, uh…"
She hadn't even known if it would really work with Chelsea, and yet here it was, further proof that
the vampire she was helping keep captive was her Imprint, her mate.

"It hurts less," Chelsea whispered shakily, looking shocked.

"Of course, it's healing," Leah mumbled.

"No, not—-," Chelsea whispered as she held up her hands through the bars. "I mean
the withdrawal." Her arousal thickened in the air. "Lick me more."

Leah's eyes widened as she stopped skipping a beat. "What?"

Embarrassment wafted off of the vampire almost physically, as did her ever-strengthening arousal
as she subtly rubbed her thighs together. "Please lick me more."

…

"Murdock said that by the time we get back more vampires and werewolves will have Imprinted
and mated," Seth declared as he somehow kept up with the vampires even in his human form.
"Apparently it's like a self-preservation instinct in a sense. In times of no danger you're allowed a
wooing period, but when there's times of danger in which the Imprints and Mates need to work
together and draw from each other and their bond, it's a much quicker, more physical and less
romantic kind of thing. I guess the instinct is that romance can come after the danger has passed or
something like that."

Murdock must've told Seth that during James' 'time out', because this was news to the blonde.

"It makes sense," Garrett declared as he jumped from tree to tree above them just to be a showoff.
"You said that werewolf mates somehow affect the vampires' abilities, right? That they can stop or
amplify? If we're in danger, our instinct - no matter how subconscious - is to protect ourselves. If
it's mating and connecting with the one who makes us most vulnerable - and thus pool our
resources and make us even stronger - any vampire would pick that in an instant, again, no matter
how subconsciously."

"As a species we're also really attracted to power," Riley informed Seth from where he walked a
little slower than usual, matching Seth's stride. "We're the power version of gold-diggers."

"Do all vampires have a special ability?" Seth asked curiously, not seeming to question Riley's
sudden change in attitude.
"Nah, most are useless like Garrett," Riley informed him and easily dodged the branch Garrett sent down at him like a spear. "But there are some of us who do have abilities, like James' ability to track, Victoria's ability to hide from danger, and my self-control."

"Self control is a power?" Seth asked in surprised.

"Yes," James answered, a little amused at Riley's boastful stride. "It's important to be able to control your bloodlust and your emotions if you're a vampire, the more you can control yourself, the less likely you're going to get yourself or your coven discovered or killed. They're also the best to send in as spies." He smirked at Seth's confused look. "Carlisle Cullen is a good example. Who would believe he's a vampire when he's constantly around injured humans - and all their blood - yet doesn't lose control and attack them?"

"I see." Seth's eyes widened. "That's impressive."

Riley's chest puffed out in pride.

Garrett threw another branch at him.

Not sure what was going on, James just decided to be relieved his fledgling had accepted Seth, and not look the gift horse in the mouth.

…

Marcus watched as the bond between Chelsea and Aro finally finished disintegrating with the rapidness of something suddenly set ablaze. Out of the three bonds to the Guard, this was the one that had been (surprisingly) the fastest to dissolve, and now that Chelsea was no longer using her ability to force loyalty between Aro and his Guard, he knew that the other two holding out wouldn't last much longer, especially not with whatever was prompting the rapidly sprouting bonds that were slowly replacing Aro's.

Not only had the link between Chelsea and Aro disappeared, but it almost seemed as if she'd turned her own ability on herself and forged a bond between her and someone else entirely.

He knew he should be telling Aro what was happening, yet Marcus couldn't find it in himself to say anything. For the first time since his sweet Didyme's death, Marcus found himself intrigued by something, focused on something, fascinated by something. He didn't want to lose that, even if his interest ending up losing Aro his Guard.

What was going on in Forks? Was there a vampire there like Chelsea but stronger? One who could break and make bonds? Alliances? Was this vampire the reason werewolves and vampires were forming packs together?

He wanted to go, wanted to see for himself what was happening in Forks. And yet, at the same time, he felt the need to wait, if only for a couple of days more. He didn't understand why, but he listened to that inner voice, to its desire.

Soon he'd know what was in Forks, and why it called to him.

…

"I'm a part of this pack! I'm not leaving!" Bella stomped her foot as she glared between Alice and Jasper. "I won't run away while everyone I love faces——!"

"You heard what James found out," Jasper soothed, no doubt using his power on her to calm her
down since she wasn't half as angry as she knew she would normally be. "Aro is planning on using you against us, and the only way he can do that is by stating our law: no human can know about vampires. You need to leave for a while until the danger has passed, Alice and I will take you to —-.

"No." Bella shook her head, refusing to just turn tail and run away, not when her pack needed her the most. "If my being a human is such a big deal then—-then I'll ask Victoria to turn me. She said she wouldn't unless Jake said she could, but I'll convince him to give her the okay." She raised her chin defiantly. "And don't you dare tell me not to."

Alice shared a look with her husband before reaching out and drawing Bella closer. "We don't want you making any rushed decisions, Bella. You still have so much to do - and Charlie—."

"You think I don't know how important this decision is? Do you think I've only just decided to become a vampire at this very moment? I'm not that rushed and immature." Bella glared at the pixie-like vampire. "I've been thinking about this for a while now, I've weighed the pros and cons, and it's what I want. I'm graduating in a couple of months, and Charlie would've had to—-even if you and Jasper—-," Bella stuttered a second before catching her breath. "Even if you two had never—I would still want this. I always had."

Alice sighed as she tilted her head, clearly trying to gather her thoughts.

Jasper, on the other hand, grabbed Bella's hand. "Okay."

Bella's eyes widened. "Okay?"

Jasper smiled as he nodded, pulling the surprised girl onto his lap and wrapping his arms around her with a sigh. "Okay."

Alice glanced between the two of them before finally smiling as well and leaning forwards, resting her forehead against Bella's. "Okay."

Hands finding theirs, Bella squeezed them and smiled.

A new phase to her life was about to begin.

She couldn't wait.

…

Jane raised an eyebrow, clearly highly unimpressed with the bunny in the cell with her. Unlike the others she was fighting eating animals, and due to that she was very hungry, and due to that she was more bitchy than usual, which meant that Collin constantly found himself at the end of one barb after the other.

"C'mon, it's a cute bunny," Collin urged as he motioned towards the thing wriggling its nose at her. "Think of all of that warm blood rushing through its veins just waiting for you to snap its neck and drink."

Those scarlet eyes narrowed on him angrily. "I refuse to drink from a rodent."

"It's a rabbit not a rat," Collin whined, knowing he was constantly losing when it came to this vampire. When he'd found out Imprinting was a thing he'd always known he'd Imprint on a super cute girl, and he had, but he'd never realized his Imprint would be so difficult - or scary!
The snarl that escaped her lips sent shivers down his spine.

"We're mates, you know," Collin mumbled as he rubbed his arms nervously. "You should be nicer to me. I'm going to be taking care of you for the rest of our lives."

"Does this 'taking care' look anything like you feeding me rodents while I'm being held captive?" Jane wanted to know testily. "Because if it does, just kill me already."

He honestly hated it when she said things like that. A lot of the time Collin did not like Jane, and most of the time he was actually kind of terrified of her, but he didn't want anything to happen to her, and didn't appreciate her making comments about him actually hurting her, much less killing her. "I'd never hurt you."

Suddenly Jane was there, rattling the cage as the blacks of her eyes expanded. "But you are hurting me! You idiot! You're slowly starving me to death!"

"Bunny!" Collin pointed at the bunny with all his might.

"I don't want the freaking bunny!" She snapped as she rattled the cage angrily. And then her stomach growled, loudly, and she groaned as she leaned back hard against the cage and slid back against the bars to sit on the floor, something she'd been far too proud to do all these days since her capture.

Worry filled Collin with the intensity of a lightning strike. "Are you okay?" When she didn't answer, his voice went higher in panic. "JANE! Are you okay?"

Jane shifted to give him her back as her stomach growled again, loudly.

The bunny hopped towards her and twitched its nose invitingly.

Jane turned her back on the bunny even as a soft whimper escaped her lips, one he wouldn't have heard if he didn't have enhanced hearing.

The sound did something to Collin. He hadn't even realized what he was doing until the wet warmth trailed down his arm. "Jane, come."

The scent of blood caused her to stumble to her feet and turn to look at him, eyes wide in shock. "Are you an idiot?" She looked up from his bleeding arm to his face. "I'm a vampire. My venom—-!"

"I told you, didn't I?" Collin interrupted softly as he eased his bleeding arm inside the cage between the bars. "I'll take care of you."

Confusion was open on Jane's face as she just stared at him.

"C'mon."

Jane gulped before she slowly came closer, and then in seconds she was there, gripping his arm. The vampire didn't bite down into his flesh, instead she licked the blood trailing down his arm, chasing it away with her tongue before following it to the wound he'd made with his Swiss army knife. The blonde licked his wound roughly before seeming to realize he was flinching, and then, surprisingly, she went softer.

A sound that sounded close to a purr echoed off of the room as she drank from him, the feeling only a little weird and not painful like he'd thought, and then she pulled away much sooner than
he'd have thought she would. Confusion was visible on her face as she backed away from him, licking the blood from her lips.

"I'm… full." Jane stared at him in utter bewilderment. "I hardly drank."

She must've staunched the bleeding somehow, because he wasn't bleeding over himself anymore, which was great. This was going to be hard to explain as it was, but Collin didn't regret it, he'd done what any good Imprinter would've done in his place, he'd provided for his Imprintee.

"Why would you do something as stupid as that?" Jane asked softly, surprisingly enough without the bite every single other word she'd ever spoken to him had carried. "I could've killed you easily by either sucking you dry, filling you with venom, or ripping your arm right out of its socket. It would've been so easy."

"Then why didn't you?" Collin wanted to know curiously as he leaned against the bars and stared at her.

Jane opened her mouth, closed it, and then blinked, clearly disturbed by something. "I—I don't know why."

"I'll tell you why," Collin declared softly. "It's because you're my Imprintee and I'm your Mate, just like I've been telling you for the last couple of days. I'm sorry you're in here, I don't want you to be here, but my Alpha—as soon as I am allowed to let you out I will." His gaze met hers. "And I'm sorry for trying to make you eat bunnies. I should've provided better for you. That's my bad. But now that we know you can drink my blood you won't have to worry about drinking from rodents, okay?"

Jane tilted her head. "You—you're going to let me drink from you from now on?"

"Sure!" Collin grinned brightly. "It's a wolf's greatest pleasure to provide for his Imprintee. I still might be new to all this, and have a lot to learn, so you'll have to be patient with me as I screw up—but I really want to be a good Mate for you." He sighed. "I know it sounds like a whole load of crap coming from someone on the other side of prison bars, but I really mean it. I'll get you out of here as soon as I can, and when I do I'll do my best to make you happy."

There was utter silence, before Jane cleared her throat and bent to pick up the bunny, holding it in her arms as she rubbed it. She licked her lips and raised her chin. "Well, as long as we're on the same page about my meals I mightn't have to kill you when Aro gets us out." She pet the bunny as she sat down regally on the fold-out seat she'd had him bring for her the first day of her capture because she's refused to sit on the floor.

"I'd really appreciate you not killing me," Collin assured her.

Jane just stared at him before shaking her head, the ghost of a smile on her lips for a split second before she cleared her throat and raised her chin once more. "I'm bored." She continued to pet the bunny like a crime boss would the white cat on his lap. "Entertain me."

Smiling, Collin did just that.

…

Jake froze the second he entered the room and stared between Leah and Chelsea. The vampire was seated in the middle of the cage, humming happily to herself while finishing a meal out of a rabbit. The werewolf was seated at the very farthest corner of the small room, studiously ignoring both Chelsea and him.
The Alpha stared at the female werewolf and took in a deep breath, able to not only smell the absolute arousal in the air, but the fact that both the vampire and werewolf had each other's scents on each other. That, and the fact that Leah's scent was inside the cage. He would've snapped at the girl for risking entering the cage while in her human form, but the scent of sex was so strong in the air (and Leah was once more outside the locked cage and looked perfectly fine - if not completely mortified) that he decided not to mention anything right now.

The door opened and Edward stumbled visibly the second the scents hit him. His eyes were wide as he turned to Leah, his tone somewhat petulant when he muttered: "You beat my record."

Leah raised an eyebrow as she glanced between him and Jake, visibly doing her best to pretend this wasn't horribly embarrassing. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Sure you don't," Edward huffed before sighing and seeming to brush off his annoyance. "Bella's here with Alice and Jasper, says she needs to talk to you immediately. "He inhaled deeply. "I didn't try to read her mind, but she was so nervous her thoughts were screaming at me - it's the talk."

"What talk?" Leah asked in confusion before her eyes widened in understanding. "That talk?"

Edward, able to read he thoughts, nodded.

Sighing, Jake glanced between Chelsea and Leah, and wondered just how many 'talks' he was going to have today.

Utterly depressed, Jake turned and followed Edward out.

…

Alec paced back and forth. He hadn't complained yet, but Aro could tell the boy was unnerved with how long his sister had gone without communicating with them. Despite how much the twins tried to pretend they didn't care about each other, it was little tells like this one that let Aro see just how much they truly cared.

"Soon, my boy," Aro declared as he placed a hand on Alec's shoulder, stopping his pacing. "We have to allow Chelsea to continue her work breaking the bonds between the Olympic Coven and the werewolf and mixed pack. The weaker they are, the easier and less bloody this has to be."

Alec nodded and returned to pacing.

Intrigued at the fact that Alec hadn't calmed down, Aro pressed his fingertips together and watched the young vampire pace.

…

"This is humiliating," Seth mumbled into James' neck as the moon light bathed their surroundings with its soft glow.

"You're the one who said we shouldn't stop to let you sleep," James replied as he rearranged his grip on the werewolf, who was very reluctantly taking a piggyback ride. "We mightn't sleep, but werewolves do, so this was really the only way."

"Was it though?" Seth whispered, clearly humiliated.

"We're faster than a bus would be," Garrett explained helpfully. "We have a better chance at making it to your pack in time if we're on foot, than if we took transport." He eyed Seth and James
curiously. "So yes, I'm going to have to say that is the only way."

Seth huffed into James' hair. "Stop smirking, Riley."

"I'm not smirking." Riley smirked brighter.

The werewolf grumbled into James' neck, clearly able to sense Riley's evil enjoyment of his embarrassment. And yet, despite it all, he was very obviously exhausted from constant travel. It was the only reason why he was slowly relaxing against James.

Sending a look to Riley and Garrett which clearly conveyed his desire for them to shut up, James was pleased that even Garrett somehow managed to shut up. It was thanks to that that Seth finally relaxed completely against his back, having lost the battle with his exhaustion.

Garrett waved his hand to catch James' attention, and when he did he motioned whether they could go at their true speed now that the pup was asleep and wouldn't realize just how slow they'd been going to match his pace so he could remain in human form.

When James nodded, Garrett raced off, disappearing into the night.

Riley seemed about to do the same before he appeared in front of James and held up handcuffs, which he slapped around Seth's hands so the wolf wouldn't slip off during the ride. The fledgling could clearly see the questions in James' eyes as to why he had handcuffs, but other than an innocent smile which looked all kinds of wrong on his face, Riley didn't react before racing after Garrett.

Shifting the sleeping werewolf more securely on his back, James was glad no one could see the silly smile on his face before he took off.

...  

"J-Jake." Bella left Alice and Jasper's side, the two standing by Alice's car, while the human hurried towards Jacob when they caught sight of each other. "I know this isn't the best time, and you have a lot on your hands, but I want to talk to you about something urgent."

"I know why you're here." Jake glanced behind her at Alice and Jasper, who were holding hands and leaning against each other, before his gaze returned to Bella as they stopped in front of each other.

Surprise fluttered over Bella's face as her gaze lowered to her feet. "Aro can't use my being a human against us if I'm not a human anymore." She cleared her throat and looked up at him. "With that alone we're upsetting the Volturi's plan."

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"We can do this, stop them, without you giving up your life as a human," Jacob assured her, needing her to know this. He didn't want her to think she had to do this, not for them, not for anyone.

"I know," Bella was the one to assure this time.

"I just want to know you're not doing this for them," Jacob sighed as he motioned to where Alice and Jasper waited.

"I'm not." Bella grabbed his hand and held it tightly in hers. "Jake, ever since I found out that the supernatural world existed I've wanted to be a part of it. I want this, for me. Even if Alice and Jasper and I—I'd still be here, right now." She squeezed his hand even tighter. "I want this, Jake. I
want this with everything I've got."

"What about Charlie?" Jacob wanted to know. "We live with him, Bella. I think he's going to
realize it if you disappear for three days only to return with golden eyes and skin that sparkles in
the sunlight."

"I've got that all figured out," Bella admitted sheepishly. "I'll tell dad I'm studying and staying over
at Victoria's. He wants me to get close to Leah because of Sue, so he'll jump at the thought of her
and I bonding. I'll be turned, and I'll stay there - Victoria will help me. I can use colored contacts to
keep my eyes brown, and when am I ever out in sunlight anyway? This is Forks."

"What about the bloodlust?" Jacob asked softly.

Bella was silent for a moment as her grip grew even tighter. "I am stronger than you give me
credit, Jake."

"Bella, you run with werewolves and vampires," Jake whispered as their gazes met. "You're the
strongest person I know."

Clearly touched, Bella blinked away happy tears.

"I love you, Bella, you're my best friend," Jake told her, voice thick with repressed emotion. "If you
really want this, for the right reasons, I'll be there for you and help you as much as I can. I just want
to know you've thought everything through and that you're making this decision for the right
reasons." He cleared his throat. "I don't want you to ever regret joining this world, I don't want that
for you, I want only the best for you, Bella."

Bella flung her arms around Jake and hugged him tightly. "I love you too, Jacob." She took in a
very deep breath. "But I've made my choice."

Sighing, Jake nodded. "I'll message Vicki."
Emily’s screams echoed hauntingly in Sam’s ear, the vision of her as she fell only to be swallowed by the darkness - her hand outstretched out towards him——.

Sam’s heart raced, his stomach heaved. He couldn’t rest, couldn’t eat, couldn’t breathe without forcing each breath. Guilt for his part in hurting Emily, in being the cause for her being out there at that time of night, for her running in anger away from him only to trip and fall before he could reach her—it ate him alive. But what hurt him most, what truly fueled the guilt-crazed state he was in, was the fact that he was still alive.

Losing one’s Imprint was the worse thing that could happen to a wolf, with the Imprint’s death the wolf was supposed to desire to die as well - should die as well. It was why an Imprint was protected by other wolves. So what did it say about Sam that he’d not only hurt his Imprint by scarring her face, but had unintentionally caused the events which had led to her death - hadn’t been able to get to her on time - and yet was still alive?

Was there something wrong with him? He should be dying now! Why was he still alive? He didn’t deserve to be alive anymore! He should be withering to nothing! And yet he was still here.

Something was wrong. Something was horribly wrong.

*It’s the vampires’ fault.*

It had to be!

They were the ones who’d tricked Jacob into believing that his Imprint was a true one. Sam knew it couldn’t be true - no matter how convivial the mortal enemies now were. Vampires were their one true enemy, were the reason they’d become wolves in the first place! It was their duty to destroy every single leech - there was no way that they could actually *Imprint* - something so sacred - on those bloodsuckers!

That meant that those leeches were using magic or something on them! They were weakening the pack from within, and Sam was the only one who realized it. He’d heard the whispers within his own pack, had felt the confusion, but he’d been too confident that they’d realize how idiotic it was that he hadn’t really paid much attention to it. But now… now he knew what Jared had done while he’d been in mourning.

His Beta had not only made an alliance with the Olympic Coven and Black Pack behind Sam’s back, but he’d captured leech scouts *and let them live.* Not only that, but because of this those leeches were tainting the wolves around them. It had probably been their plan to get captured in the first place!

Emily’s screams echoed in his ears.

Sam pressed his hands hard against his ear.

He needed to do something. Emily wouldn’t rest in peace until he’d made this situation right. These vampires were the reason she’d died. They were at the root of everything.
If Edward Cullen hadn’t wagged his ass at Jacob this whole thing would never have happened. Jacob would’ve never joined forces with those other two vampires, and Seth would’ve never been enthralled by this new lifestyle, which meant Sam never would’ve had to make an example of the boy - Leah never would’ve defected - and Emily wouldn’t have been so pissed off at Sam. She wouldn’t have left that night in anger, and if she hadn’t left he wouldn’t have raced after her to bring her back home only to watch her fall to her death.

Nausea rolled in his stomach.

It was those leeches fault.

THIS WAS ALL THEIR FAULT!

The image of Emily falling backwards into the blackness played over and over again before his eyes…

And he suddenly knew what to do.

This was all the leeches’ fault.

This couldn’t end, Emily wouldn’t stop haunting him, until he’d put it right.

He was going to kill every leech around - starting with the scouts being held on the Rez.

…

Alice gasped in horror, hand to her heart. She’d been sitting next to Bella’s still body, getting to know Victoria, who had been the one to turn Bella. This was probably the first time the other vampire had really spoken to Victoria, and while anyone else would be disillusioned by her barbed comments Alice knew they’d become friends in the future so she wasn’t put off by Victoria acerbic tone.

“What happened?” Victoria asked from the other side of Bella’s bed. “Was that one of those visions you have?”

Alice nodded, head killing her with the ferocity of the vision. “You need to call Leah. Tell her to get her Imprintee out of the Rez right now. Sam’s planning on killing all vampires around him, starting with the three on the Rez!” She was already reaching for her own phone to call Collin, Quil and Embry.

“Shut up, Leah!” Victoria started her conversation the second Leah answered. “You need to get Chelsea out of the Rez right now! Bring her home, you’ve got to hurry! Your ex has gone batshit crazy!”

While the Olympic Coven and the Black Pack were working with Jared and the others, if Sam was truly planning on killing them all Alice knew she couldn’t trust the Rez Wolves. Not when they were forced to do what their Alpha wanted due to the Alpha Voice and Bond.

No.

The only wolves who could be trusted on the Rez were the Imprinters and those who’d already showed interest in leaving Sam’s pack.

They had to hurry.
If they didn’t, the vampires and Imprinters would be in deep trouble.

…

This was wrong. THIS WAS WRONG!

And yet no matter how much he tried to open his mouth to tell Sam this, Jared couldn’t. Sam had silenced him earlier when he’d tried. That, and what he knew was going to be an ugly black eye from when he’d tried to reason with his Alpha - who was mad with grief and guilt - proved that if Jared was going to be any sort of help to his pack, the Beta had to stop fighting, even if only right now.

He had to find a way to get through to his grief-stricken Alpha, had to show him that an alliance with the Olympic Coven and the Black Pack was the only way they were going to survive not only the confrontation with the Volturi, but the future.

Jared hadn’t wanted to believe it, but he’d seen Collin and Leah firsthand, as well as their interactions with their vampires. Werewolves were Imprinting on Vampires, and in their own way, it was causing a sort of Imprint from the Vampires to the Werewolves as well - which was different than normal Imprinting on humans.

Collin was feeding Jane his own blood for crying out loud! She should’ve used that opportunity to kill and escape, but instead she were merely remaining in her cage (which, to be fair, kept getting more and more luxurious and comfortable with all the things she had Collin collecting for her).

If only Sam would just stop and see—he’d realize that there was no way that Jane wouldn’t suck Collin dry and escape if there wasn’t actually something instinctual keeping her from hurting him! Given the fact that they barely knew each other, Collin was young, and Jane was being a captive there was no way this could be something like falling in love. No way. This wasn’t emotional, it was instinctual.

But Jared was beginning to suspect that Sam didn’t want to see it, didn’t want to admit it, because then he’d have to admit something Jared had been wondering given the fact that Sam’s problems were all self-inflicted: Sam wasn’t dead because Emily wasn’t actually his Imprintee.

That would mean he’d hurt Leah and Emily for no justifiable reason, and that was more than Sam was able to handle right now. That was why Jared’s Alpha was redirecting his self-anger and self-hatred into this insane, murderous plan.

If there were no vampires around, Sam wouldn’t be able to Imprint on anyone else and prove to himself what Jared knew his Alpha had to be suspecting.

How can I get him to see? The Beta worried. How do I get him to accept the truth before he does something he can’t take back? Before he ruins the chances of Imprinting and happiness of the pack?

The Beta tried to come up with some sort of plan, some sort of way to stall his Alpha, because if he didn’t, he had a sinking feeling it would be the beginning of the End.

…

Jane looked up from Captain Hops in surprise as the door flew open. Her odd captor stumbled into the room, keys in his hands. He was unlocking her cage, and that should have her full attention, but it didn’t. Collin was terrified, he stunk of it. What was happening? Why was he so scared?
“You need to leave!” Collin shocked her as he flung the barred door opened. “Please go!”

She should escape without a second’s thought, and yet her grip merely tightened slightly on Captain Hops. “Why?”

“Sam’s—our Alpha—he snapped! He wants—-!” Collin looked not only terrified, but utterly sick. “I’ll try and get your friends out as well before he can—but I need you to go! Please! Before he gets here!” His eyes flashed gold in utter determination. “I won’t let him hurt you.”

So the Alpha had ordered them killed. And her little snip of a captor, the boy who kept going on and on about how they were mates and it was his duty to care for her, was actually defying his Alpha. This had to be a trick, right? Wolves weren’t supposed to be able to defy or disobey their Alpha. This had to be some sort of ploy to get her to run and to give them an excuse to hunt and kill her.

“Please.” Collin’s voice broke in emotion. “Please go.”

Staring into those wide eyes, Jane could only see fear, and she realized in shock that he was telling the truth. His Alpha was coming to kill her, and Collin was—he was protecting her. His pack would know he was the one who’d set her free. He’d get hurt.

Collin glanced behind him, the fear in his scent rising, before he turned to look back at her. “Jane! Go!” He entered the cage and grabbed her, being rough with her for the very first time as he shoved her out of the cage. “GO!”

Stumbling slightly, Jane turned to look at him before she turned back to the door. “You’ll never see me again. I’ll never come back.”

“I don’t care as long as you’re safe,” Collin whispered.

The blonde tightened her grip on Captain Hops, took a step back, and another, before she took off towards freedom.

…

“This couldn’t be happening at a worse time,” Jacob groaned as he paced the room. “Quil, Collin and Leah are trying to get the Scouts over to where we are, but even if they manage to get through the forest alive Edward and the others mightn’t have the containment rooms in the basement ready for them. They’re going to get away and get back to Aro and—-.”

“Calm down, Jake.” Even though it was impossible for Jasper to use his ability through the phone, his words somehow seemed to calm the wolf down. “We’ve got Bella safe and sound. She’s been sleeping for almost two days now. We only need one more and then she’ll be a newborn and less vulnerable to attack. Until then Emmett and Rosalie are helping stand guard.” He sighed. “We’ll keep her safe, so don’t worry about her. Concentrate on everything else.”

Jake ran his hand down his face. “Why did Sam have to snap out of his funk only to enter into a homicidal rage right now? This is the worse timing!”

“To be fair, there’s never a good time for homicidal rage,” Jasper muttered in dark amusement.

That was true. “Just—be careful, okay? Those wolves you say he’s got guarding the borders of your lands are to keep you boxed in and unable from coming to our aid, but that doesn’t mean he mightn’t decide to try and attack you guys as well.”
“Victoria got out undetected,” Jasper reminded him. “And Carlisle and Esme are here as well. Carlisle used to be a part of the Volturi, he knew them during the Werewolf Wars, we won’t fight unless we have to - but we’ll be able to protect ourselves - and Bella - if push comes to shove.”

“Hopefully Sam will come to his senses before that happens,” Jake whispered, not liking the idea of fighting his old pack.

“If you are being overpowered Alice will see - we will find a way to come to your aid,” Jasper promised.

“Thank you, but that might be exactly what Sa wants.” Jake ran his fingers through his hair. “Has Alice seen anything about James or Seth?”

“No,” Jasper sighed. “She’s trying though, but for some reason she’s unable to focus on them. She’ll keep trying, and I’ll let you know the second she does.”

“Thanks, Jasper.” Jake stared out the window of Hunter House, trying to will James, Seth and the others to be outside in the driveway, but so far not only weren’t the vampires and werewolf there, but he’d been unable to communicate with them for the last day. There was no way to warn them that Seth’s old pack were now the enemy.

They could be walking into a death trap.

…

“He’s going to kill Dimitri!” Chelsea whispered in terror, trying to dig her feet into the ground, but somehow wasn’t as strong as Leah in human form.

“Quil and Embry are getting him out,” Leah promised her as she hurried through the forest. “If Alice hadn’t been able to get us that heads up—-.” She tightened her grip on Chelsea’s hand. “You’re not allowed to escape to Aro. Just because you’re not in that cage anymore doesn’t mean you can go back to those assholes and their brainwashing. You wouldn’t be able to, anyway. Sam’s got his pack combing the woods for you guys, you wouldn’t make it out.”

Chelsea allowed herself to be taken through the forest towards what she suspected was Leah’s pack’s place. The vampire was shocked, honestly, by the fact that she had no interest in returning to Aro’s side. Now that she knew someone was trying to get Dimitri out, and that he hadn’t been abandoned to be murdered, she stopped trying to get free and instead matched Leah’s strides.

Where did Leah’s pack live? Were there many vampires? Did any of those vampires like Leah?

Chelsea frowned at the thought. Leah had been coming into her cage recently, and she’d been eagerly waiting the werewolf’s each venture, and the way she lingered inside longer and longer. The vampire hadn’t even considered killing her, and while that would’ve normally bothered her, Chelsea hadn’t given it a second thought.

Clearly she was Leah’s Imprintee, and really, that explained everything away for her. But Leah hadn’t exactly come out and admitted it to Chelsea despite everything, which meant a part of her was fighting the fact, and the only reason Chelsea could see for this was if Leah was already in a relationship with someone else.

The thought made her growl softly, but thankfully Leah was too busy trying to get her to safety to notice.

It was a good thing, she supposed, that she’d get to go to the other camp and find this other person
who thought they had some claim on Leah. As soon as Leah turned her back Chelsea would make sure to break those bonds. Aro had given Chelsea a mission, but she’d found her own: block or not, she was going to break up Leah’s current romantic relationship. She’d never thought she’d have another chance of having a mate after Afton’s death, and she wouldn’t let this opportunity slip through her hands.

Edward Cullen had proved vampires could have healthy, happy relationships with their werewolves.

Chelsea wanted in on that. She’d spent far too many years helping Aro get what he wanted. It was time she focused on herself and what she wanted.

And she wanted Leah Clearwater.

Movement off to the side caught her attention, and she noticed Jane standing there next to Dimitri, the two had apparently escaped their captors and were free. Oddly, Jane was holding a bunny. That was weird in itself, but so was the distinct violet of the vampire’s eyes. Chelsea had never seen a vampire with that eye color before, but she didn’t really have time to wonder what it meant.

She caught Jane’s gaze, and when the younger vampire motioned for her to come, for them to escape together, Chelsea shook her head. She could see the shock on Jane’s face when she did that, and the curvy brunette ignored the blonde’s motioning her to come with her.

Instead, she tightened her grip on Leah’s hand and hurried her pace to overtake the surprised werewolf. With a look towards Jane and Dimitri, Chelsea pulled the much taller Leah down to kiss her on the lips.

Leah’s eyes widened and her cheeks flushed as she pulled away. “Now’s not the time, Chelsea!” Her face was utter scarlet in embarrassment. “We’ve got to get you to the Hunter House before my old pack finds us, it’s the only way to keep you safe. So——stop distracting me.”

Proud at the fact that she’d gotten Leah to admit she found her distracting, Chelsea sent a look behind her at Jane and Dimitri - catching their shocked expression.

*That’s how it is, so go if you have to.*

Sure her message had been delivered, Chelsea merely smiled up at Leah and allowed herself to be dragged through the forest by her Imprinter.

…”

“How many new shifters have phased in the last couple of months?” Esme wondered as she peered out of the window. “There are so many that I do not recognize. In fact, I do not recognize any of the wolves I’ve seen out there today.”

“Jared said that more and more wolves are shifting daily, most probably as an instinctual response to the fact that the Volturi are getting closer and closer,” Carlisle responded, expression calm yet she could read the uneasy glint in his eyes. “I’d say Sam has a good twenty or so wolves right now, but many of them are young and untrained.”

Esme sighed as she let the curtain fall back in place. “What are we going to do, Carlisle? If the pack kills any of the Volturi’s Guard there will be no stopping the war Aro will bring upon us all.”

He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into his cool embrace, resting his cheek against the crown of her head.
A scent she recognized all too well shook Jane out of her shock as she forced her gaze away from where Chelsea and the werewolf had just disappeared from sight through some bushes. So—what Collin had told her was true? Vampires and werewolves really could become mates? That was the only explanation she had for Chelsea’s actions. Not only had the brunette believed the story, but she’d accepted it.

Jane gulped.

“We have to go,” Dimitri broke into her thoughts. He’d tracked her the second he’d managed to escape his own werewolf escort, and had been the one to help them find Chelsea. “If we don’t go now I’m not sure we’ll be able to get out of these woods.”

That scent was stronger.

Jane turned to fully stare in the direction it was coming from. “I’m going back.”

“What?” Dimitri asked in utter shock. “Why the hell would you do that?”

“Because I forgot something,” she muttered in annoyance while rubbing Captain Hops’ head.

“What could you possibly have forgotten?” Dimitri wanted to know.

Suddenly bushes shook, and then Collin toppled out of them. He’d clearly been running in his human form and must’ve tripped on something and gone falling. Some other guy who looked around his age was there with him.

Jane just stared at him, unable to believe he was there.

Collin’s eyes widened as he looked up at her, and a large, embarrassed blush crossed his face. “You’re okay! Brady, she’s okay!” He cleared his throat. “Why, um, are you still around? I, uh, I thought you’d be long gone by now.”

“We have no time for this!” Brady grabbed the back of Collin’s shirt and yanked him up to his feet. “They’re on our heels!” He turned his gaze on Jane and Dimitri. “This is your fault! We shouldn’t have to be running from our own freaking pack!”

Collin’s eyes widened. “You have to go. You can still make it out if you go now.”

Dimitri, the Volturi Guard’s Tracker, shook his head after a whiff in the air. “No. We can’t.”

Weirdly okay with that, Jane huffed as she held her head high, “Then I suppose you should escort us to the Hunter House.”

Collin’s eyes widened, as did his grin.

Brady rolled his eyes. “I will never Imprint.” And with that promise he took off.

Suddenly the bushes moved and two older native Americans jumped out, and yet instead of attacking, they raced passed the trio, seeming to be going in the same direction of Brady - overtaking him quickly with their longer legs.

“Get your ass moving, Dimitri!” One of them yelled over his shoulder. “We didn’t spring your pale ass out just for you to get caught because you’re lazy!”
“Why is no one in their wolf form?” Dimitri asked no one in particular.

“Sam can’t use his Alpha Voice on us if we’re in human form,” Collin answered as he grabbed Jane’s hand. “We have to go. Now!”

Jane didn’t know who was more shocked - her or Dimitri - when she allowed herself to be dragged away.

Dimitri, clearly realizing he had no other choice, followed rapidly after.

... 

Leah and Chelsea were the first to arrive. The holding cells in the basement weren’t even close to being completed, but honestly they’d been abandoned halfway in favor of securing the Hunter House, which was on the outskirts of Forks so hopefully they could keep this from involving any civilian. It didn’t appear that they had to worry about Chelsea at least, though, because she kept by Leah’s side, letting the werewolf order her about in assisting preparations. It could all be a trick to make them lower their guard, but Edward had assured Jake that Chelsea wasn’t going anywhere.

“We’ve got another group incoming,” Edward proclaimed after a long silence. He turned to Chelsea. “Your friends are coming with ours.”

“Really?” Chelsea looked utterly shocked.

“Yeah, I hear Jane and Dimitry as well as Quill, Embry, Collin and Brady,” Edward responded.

“Brady?” Victoria asked in surprised. “What’s that pipsqueak doing coming here?”

“Apparently he knocked out two of their packmates who were taking Collin to where Sam was when they discovered that he’d freed Jane.” Edward was obviously listening into the thoughts still, his eyebrows nearly touching in a frown. “He’s just as much persona non grata as the others now.”

“Boss, your pack is getting too full of dogs,” Victoria complained with a glance towards Jacob almost accusingly. “It’s a good thing Riley’s on his way with James, we need some more vampires to help counter the scent of wet dog.”

Leah flipped her the finger. “Screw you, Sugar Barbie.”

“I thought we agreed I was Ginger Spice,” Victoria countered.

Leah snorted and sent her a toothy grin.

Chelsea frowned as she glanced between them.

Jacob ignored this, too many questions and worries going through his mind right now.

Honestly, who said Brady or Riley were going to be a part of his pack? And yet it seemed from everyone’s non-reaction to her words that everyone else thought this the case as well. Jacob had never really wanted to start a pack - had done so by accident - and yet it kept growing against his best efforts.

Vicki, James and Bella had sort of become a pack without him even realizing, and then after Seth had put himself in danger to protect them Jacob had no other option but to accept him and Leah into the pack, and then Edward had slowly become more pack than Olympic Coven member since he’d come back. Then there was Quill, Embry, Collin and Brady, whom he’d have to accept in
order to protect them from the Rez’s wrath - just like he had Seth and Leah. That was eleven people.

Edward motioned very discreetly towards Chelsea and mouthed: *Twelve.*

Oh god.

Jacob was still living at Charlie’s! And James and Victoria couldn’t be expected to house everyone! Their place wasn’t big enough anyway! Just what in the world was he going to do?!?

Edward opened the door seconds before Quill and Embry stumbled through, going at top speed given the fact that they were still in human form.

“They’re behind us!” Quill leaned hard against the wall while Embry collapsed on the ground.

Dimitri and Brady crossed the threshold seconds afterwards, followed by Jane and Collin.

Edward shut the door rapidly and pressed his back against it as his gaze met Jacob’s. “They’re almost here.”

He fought the nausea rolling through his stomach and turned to Jane, whose glare was on him.

“This isn’t an alliance,” she informed him stonily while… petting a white bunny. “This is just a temporary, strategic truce.”

Jacob didn’t have time to respond because a howl echoed close by, and then it was joined by another, and another, and another…

They were surrounded.

This was it.

…

The image of Emily falling back into the nothingness, hand outstretched towards him, her scream—it continued to play like a haunting loop in his head, and now that he was in wolf form, Sam knew that that image, that sound, was haunting the minds of his whole pack as well. It augmented his shame of his weakness, fueled his fury as he stood tall, staring down at the Hunter House.

There were multiple leeches in that house, leeches that had no business being in Forks.

*Kill every single leech,* he ordered his pack through their mental bond. *And cut down anyone who tries to stand in your way.*

And with that, as one, the pack attacked.

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TBC
Chapter 12

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…

What exactly had been used to reinforce this house? It was being assaulted on every side by a pack of werewolves, and yet while the walls and the panels over the windows shook (the glass on the other side breaking loudly) the walls were holding up. The pack outside didn't seem close to giving up though, if anything their attacks were getting stronger and stronger. They'd get inside eventually, and what exactly would happen then?

Chelsea couldn't affect the bonds of the werewolves, not with Leah so close. And she was trying, she really was. If she could just break free of whatever hold Leah's presence had on her powers the vampire would be able to start working on breaking apart the Rez Wolves' pack. It wouldn't stop the attack, but it might cause some to leave – or at least weaken the attack, disorient the wolves outside and give those inside the advantage they sorely needed.

Maybe if she put some distance between her and Leah she could get enough control over her own power to be able to --- and yet as soon as she shifted to move away Leah grabbed Chelsea's arm and yanked her protectively behind her. The vampire gulped and remained where she was, both cursing Leah's apparent protective nature, and reveling in it. She glanced over at the redhead vampire to smirk her with superiority, only to notice the amusement on the redhead's face as she gave Chelsea a thumbs up.

Okay, apparently the bond Chelsea had felt was platonic. It was still strong though, so while she wasn't going to make enemies of the redhead she'd still keep a close eye on her.

A particularly loud thud hit the door, causing a small crack to appear.

It was starting.

They were going to get in.

Suddenly Edward looked up, eyes wide. "Jake."

"Yeah?" The Alpha asked from his side, standing right in front of the cracking door, preparing to take on whoever broke it down and came through first.

"It's James and Seth," Edward quickly explained.

Leah turned to Edward in horror. "TELL me my little brother isn't--!"

And then a wolf cried out in pain, and then another, and another, and a fight broke out outside the door.

"Stay in here!" Jake snapped as his clothes and skin tore away, revealing the wolf beneath, and yet he wasn't the only one, Leah had shoved Chelsea away and was in the middle of shifting as well.

This was the first time Chelsea had seen Leah's transformation. It was awesome.
Edward undid the locks and opened the door, allowing Jacob and Leah to race out, quickly followed by Victoria, Embry and Quil (also in wolf form) – it would seem none of Jacob's pack were obeying his order to stay behind because suddenly the door was shut closed, and the Volturi vampires – as well as Colin and Brady – were the only ones remaining.

"We need to help them," Colin whispered as all out war broke out behind the door.

Jane, who had been petting that rabbit, reached out and grabbed him by the nape of his neck. "No." She sounded as if she was speaking to a badly behaved puppy.

Chelsea felt Leah's ability to shut down her powers weakening, and the second it did she raced up the steps and yanked off the boards protecting the windows in the bedroom which smelt of Leah. The vampire ignored the sounds of Jane and Colin arguing down below and instead peered down at the pack below. Leah's pack was outnumbered, even with the newcomers, it was an unfair fight, so Chelsea was going to have to do something about it.

*Time to even out the odds.*

Narrowing her eyes, she leaned as far out of the window as she could while letting her weakened power work, targeting the wolves that did not belong to Leah's pack, and working on breaking their allegiance to their Alpha and to each other. Normally she'd be able to do this quicker, but with Leah still around Chelsea was forcing every little speck of her power out.

Another wolf, this time younger, raced out of the house and into the fray.

Despite never having seen Colin in his wolf form Chelsea was more than sure that this was him, partly because the arguing had stopped downstairs, and partly because Jane now stood next to her, glaring down into the battlefield. A huge wolf turned on the much younger wolf but didn't manage to pounce on him because he was suddenly rolling on the ground whining.

Jane's stone silence dared Chelsea to comment on what she was doing, but to be honest Chelsea really didn't care, she had her own wolf to look out for. Demetri appeared behind them, and peeked down at the battle with mild interest. He was also smart enough not to comment when he realized that any wolf that came after Colin ended up rolling around in the ground in pain. It wasn't to the degree that Chelsea knew Jane capable of, so that meant Colin had to affect her powers like Leah did Chelsea's – which only confirmed her suspicion about the vampire x werewolf Imprinting being true.

Below, another young wolf – most probably Brady – jumped on top of one of the other newly changed wolves who'd been about to pounce on Victoria from behind.

Chelsea and Jane didn't acknowledge each other's presence or activities as they stood at the window, protecting their wolves.

-_*-

Half of these wolves must've Changed while he and Seth were on the road, because James didn't recognize most of them. He didn't get what was going on – why they were attacking his home and pack given that the last he'd heard they were supposed to be in alliance, but honestly he didn't really care. These assholes had hurt Seth, and the idea of not getting back at them and giving them the same treatment once he got back had really rubbed him the wrong way. So he was more than glad that he was able to fight and get some of his pent up aggression out.

**DON'T KILL THEM!**
Somehow he'd heard Jake's command in his head, which was freaking weird and unexpected, but he had heard it, which was why he'd been forced to just hurt the wolves yet keep from actually killing them. That sucked.

Suddenly the wolves started to run away (or limp away in some cases). It was all sudden and incredibly unexpected. James looked around him, wondering what could've prompted it, but Garrett, Riley and Victoria all looked just as confused as he felt. Edward though? He looked shocked.

"You're amazing!" Brady told Victoria breathlessly, eyes wide, clearly in awe of her. "You're a thing of nightmares on the battleground."

"Are they getting more reinforcements?" Riley asked in confusion as he ran his hands through his hair.

All around them, the Black Pack (which also seemed to have grown since James and Seth went on their road trip) slowly began to morph back into their human bodies.

"What happened, Edward?" James asked instead. "What did you hear?"

Edward cleared his throat. "I think---."

Suddenly James had an armful of Victoria, who hugged him tightly for a second before pushing away and slapping him.

"What kind of idiot are you?" His sister snapped, apparently very pissed. "You were clearly outnumbered! You don't attack wolves when you're clearly outnumbered!"

"I would like to point out that I said the exact same thing when he pitched the idea to us," Garrett muttered, the traitor.

"Garrett! Riley!" Victoria grinned and hugged them both. "I'm glad you two are safe."

James rolled his eyes and turned to Edward, about to ask him, once more, what exactly he'd heard----when suddenly a wolf barreled into James' chest and knocked him down. His eyes widened in horror, unable to believe he'd forgotten about Leah, who was now standing on his chest and snarling down into his face, teeth showing and very ready to tear his neck out. James closed his eyes tightly and readied to meet death--again.

Suddenly the weight was gone and he opened his eyes in time to see Leah hit the ground next to him. She'd apparently been thrown off of James by Seth, who was not only still in his wolf form, but was standing over James' body and growling at his sister.

Leah hurried to her feet and snapped her teeth at her brother, growling and barking, Seth's hair stood on end as he snapped/barked/growled right back at her.

Leah snarled.

Seth growled.

Leah went still, eyes wide. She turned her eyes on James for the longest time before looking up at Seth and whining.

Seth huffed, sounding tired and defeated.
Edward's eyes were wide, and as usual, the useless mind reader wasn't sharing anything of what he was gleaning with the rest of them.

"Leah?!" A female voice could be heard asking as a vampire James didn't recognize hurried towards Leah's side, clearly confused and worried. 

Leah huffed and sat on her hind-legs, motioning with her head towards the girl who was currently running her fingers over Leah's pelt in worry, clearly looking for injuries.

Seth wagged his tail before sitting down on top of James.

Edward bit his bottom lip, clearly amused.

"Seth." James tried pushing the wolf off of him to no avail. "You're really heavy in this form!"

"Seth, honey? Can I have my brother back please?" Victoria asked in a sickeningly sweet tone, which proved she was up to no good. She smiled with the purity of a Disney princess to Seth when he got up from James, and that smile belied the strength of her grip as she grabbed James by the back of his jacket and not only yanked him to his feet, but dragged him behind her as she stormed into the house.

"What the hell, Vicki?" James complained as Victoria yanked him to her room and turned on the volume on her music ridiculously loud.

The second she was sure no one could hear them, Victoria turned on him and punched him, hard. "How dare you?"

James had expected the punch from Leah, not Victoria. "What the hell--?"

"SETH?" Victoria through her hands in the air. "How could you?" She didn't allow him time to defend himself. "I get it, you were on the rebound from Jake choosing Edward, I get it, but why in the world would you be this stupid? Riley has always been more than willing so why the hell couldn't you have just made his dream come true? Instead, my stupid brother went and messed with my best friend's pure, sweet, innocent little brother!" She swung at him again and he only just managed to avoid it. "Just how dumb are you? Leah had every right to kill you! Your scent is all over him! ALL over him! Seth left with you in beautiful, mint condition you bastard!"

Best friend?!? "I thought Bella was your best friend," James squeaked in confusion.

"She's Jake's best friend," Victoria informed him immediately in a huffy tone. "Leah is my best friend."

"Since when?" James asked, utterly confused.

"Since we've become bonded worrying about our idiotic brothers!" Victoria balled her fists, which warned him not to continue pissing her off because she was very close to hitting him again. "I didn't think even you were capable of something like this! That poor boy! If I had known you would take advantage of---!"

"I didn't take advantage of him!" James snapped, far more annoyed at that assumption than he was at the blows. "If anything it was mutual consolation, okay?" He cleared his throat. "Seth's in love with Jake."

Victoria blinked, some of her ire now visibly confusion. "What is it with Jake? Does he have super-powered pheromones or something?" She ran her fingers through her red curls. "At least that
answers my many questions as to why Seth would give up what he had in the Rez to spy for Jake and our pack. It didn't make any sense before now." She sighed heavily. "So he's in love with Jake and you both rebounded on each other while out on the road." She made a face. "It doesn't make it better, but I can understand it a little more now." She groaned tiredly. "Is this going to be a problem? I mean, you both being all unrequited for Jake while watching him and Edward be all lovey-dovey and mushy with each other?"

"Not for me," James assured her with a sigh as he leaned his back against the wall. "I gave up on Jake when I left for the mission – I wasn't even sure I'd survive it so I wasn't going to let something like that distract me."

Worry and conflict brewed on her face as she whispered softly: "As if you'd have the balls to die on me."

He couldn't help the small smile on his lips at that. "I'm never going to be Edward's best friend, but I've accepted his place in this pack as Jake's mate. I'm good with this."

Victoria's worry showed a little more. "Are you sure?"

James nodded, not blaming her for her doubt. "I had a talk with Murdock and it really helped me see things a bit clearer." He thought back to his conversations with Murdock, and couldn't help but feel a little blind, and stupid. "My feelings for Jake were never supposed to end in he and I being together, they were supposed to help mold me into what I'm supposed to be, readying me for something else." He sighed. "Maybe… someone else." He really had a feeling Murdock might've been trying to tell him that he was going to get Imprinted on, but he really hadn't made the connection until Seth had realized that more wolves would Imprint on more vampires.

"You're really taking this well," Victoria declared with visible shock. "I mean, when you left I was half worried your depression would be the death of you but, well, you look---."

"I feel like it cheapens my feelings for Jake," James admitted, hating that. "I was so sure what I felt for him was love, but I guess I've never been in love before so I didn't know the difference. I guess the fact that I didn't immediately kill Edward when he returned should've been a big clue, huh?"

"You do not like to share," Victoria admitted with a nod. "Knowing this… why would you seduce Seth?"

"I didn't seduce--!" James huffed as he let out a sigh. "I'll tell you things more in depth later, but I didn't actively seduce Seth. If anything, he seduced me."

Victoria blinked. "He seduced you?" When James nodded, Victoria blinked again. "Seth seduced you?"

"Yes," James replied testily at her utter disbelief that he could be the seduced and not the seducer. "I don't regret it, but I didn't start it."

Intrigue built on her face as she eyed him. "I want the details later." She then cleared her throat. "I'm still annoyed at you, but---."

The door flew open to reveal Embry. "Demetri escaped during the commotion, he's probably headed straight to the Volturi." He let out a deep breath. "We need to prepare for their retaliation once he tells them what happened here."

"You're saying Jane stuck around?" Victoria asked in confusion.
"I think she's been too busy insulting Colin to realize she's missed a prime opportunity to escape," Embry admitted.

"So the two Imprints stayed behind like Edward thought they would," Victoria muttered before turning to James. "Leah Imprinted on Chelsea and Colin Imprinted on Jane."

That poor boy.

"We also have to prepare for when the Rez Wolves return," James reminded, trying not to imagine the horrifying future that boy had awaiting him as Jane's Imprinter.

"No, we don't," Embry countered in confusion before his eyes widened. "Right! You weren't there!" He straightened. "The Rez wolves won't attack again."

"How can you be so sure?" Victoria asked as she made a face. "Their alliance has been wishy washy at best lately."

"Yeah, but something changed, something monumental," Embry informed them. "Sam's Imprinted on one of the newly arrived vampires, Edward couldn't tell who it was, just that Sam Imprinted and reacted really badly to it, calling a retreat. There's no way he can deny it now that it's actually happened to him. Even if he doesn't want to admit to it for now, Sam won't sanction a hit on this pack anymore because of the danger an attack could pose to his Imprintee."

"You're telling me that the rival alpha Imprinted on Riley or Garrett?" James didn't know whether to snicker or wince.

"Yeah." Embry nodded before suddenly eyeing James curiously. "Then again, it could've even been on you for all we know. It's not like you two have ever met before."

James froze as horror flooded into him at the realization that the werewolf could be a hundred percent correct. Oh dear gods. Was that what Murdock had been trying to tell him in the cave?

Victoria's eyes were wide as her head swung in James' direction, her curls bouncing all around her. "Do you think this is what Murdock meant?"

It would make sense! He'd fallen for an Alpha in order to be prepared to be the Imprint of a different Alpha! It made all kinds of horrible sense!

"He did say things would work out as long as I made it back before the Volturi attacked," James muttered queasily.

Embry seemed to realize they were having a mini breakdown because he left immediately, leaving them together in the room.

"I don't want to be a part of the Rez Pack!" Victoria whined almost immediately.

"I don't want to be Imprinted on by that guy!" James snarled at the very same time. "Do you even know the crap he put Seth's family through? I mean, first he's with Leah, then he's with her cousin, then he's their alpha – and a shoddy one at that – and then he used his Alpha Voice to force Seth to do things he didn't want to! And when Seth finally tried to make things right, he made his minions attack Seth! And then because of him and his careless actions Seth's cousin died and Seth had to find out about it through Murdock!"

Victoria eyed James curiously.
Realizing his temper was rising when he caught a glimpse of his reflection to see his eyes jet black, James exhaled deeply and tried calming himself. "Seth might be ready to forgive Sam and the other assholes, but I’m not." He breathed in and out slowly. "He's a far better guy than I am, clearly."

"There was never any question about that," Victoria informed him with slight amusement in her tone.

"I wanted Sam to Imprint on Carlisle," James bemoaned as he covered his face with his hands.

"What?" Victoria laughed at the very thought.

"Seth and I talked about who should imprint on who, my bet was on Sam and Carlisle," he admitted.

"It would cause the most chaos between the Rez Pack and Cullen Coven," Victoria acknowledged, proving they did think alike. "Who did you want for Esme?"

"The one that's always betting and misbehaving," he confessed.

Victoria threw her head back and laughed, all her previous negative emotions completely gone. "You deserve this Imprint, you beast!"

"Shut up," James muttered, yet couldn't help but feel deep down inside that yes, he deserved the horrible fate of having Sam Imprint on him.

_*_*

What had her brother ever done to deserve the horrible fate of having Imprinted on James Hunter?

The question dogged Leah as she helped the others try and fix the damage done to the Hunter home. At least her Imprintee was useful, and helpful, and nice. And not hung up on someone else! James, on the other hand? Ever since he'd returned from wherever he and Victoria had disappeared to he'd stuck to Jake like a leech. Well, he is a leech. But that didn't excuse him for his behavior! If he was her brother's Imprintee then, damn it, he should be sticking to Seth like Chelsea did Leah (and Jane did to Colin to a lesser, more judgmental and controlling, degree)! Leah hadn't even found the right way to tell Chelsea she was her Imprintee but the brunette was still acting the part! So why couldn't James?

Stupid, undeserving leech.

"The Volturi would never just stroll into this town and massacre you," Jane declared in disgust at the very thought as she rolled her eyes. She was seated upon the seat Colin had brought out for her to sit in the shade cast by the roof. "That is not how it's done. We operate in the shadows – keeping the knowledge of vampires’ existence from humans is one of the core principles we live by." She petted her rabbit thoughtfully. "They'll send a liaison, most probably my brother, to either keep everyone out of commission until you can be taken somewhere more remote and killed in private – or to get information out of me."

"Would he use his ability on you?" Colin asked, eyes narrowed, clearly unhappy with that thought.

"I don't know," Jane admitted in a curious tone. "Will you, Alec?"

Leah's eyes widened and she turned with the others to see the bushes move and for a young male vampire to emerge from the bushes. He had dark hair, scarlet eyes, and had been turned very young, like his sister had.
Colin growled as he turned to stand between the newcomer and Jane protectively.

"When Demetri said you chose to stay behind I did not believe him, sister," Alec declared as he straightened his clothes and brushed leaves from himself yet kept the hood over his head still in place. "And yet you look far too comfortable to be a prisoner." His scarlet gaze took in the house's condition and the people in the front yard. "Am I to assume Chelsea is also here of her own free will?"

Chelsea smiled and waved at Alek in hello. "The reports are true, Alec. The werewolves are Imprinting on the vampires." She reached out and grabbed Leah's hand. "This is Leah."

Leah fought the blush on her face as she glanced down at Chelsea. How had the vampire worked it out so easily? Leah had been trying to figure out a way to break the news!

Alec's gaze shifted immediately to Jane and the human growling at him while in front of her.

Jane let out a heavy sigh, as if the world were on her shoulders. "Will you stop that already, Colin? You've giving me a headache."

Colin glanced behind him at her and stopped growling, stepping aside so she didn't have to glance around him at Alec.

Jane met her brother's gaze and rolled her eyes. "That's Colin. He's a work in progress. Definitely a long-term project."

"I don't know how to feel about that," Colin muttered to himself.

"Are you saying---?" Alec looked between Colin and Jane, eyes widening in horror.

Jane sighed, once more clearly put-upon.

Alec turned to Chelsea, voice accusing. "Are you doing this to her?"

"No." Chelsea shook her head, expression blank as she met his gaze. "I've been unable to truly control my powers since Leah and I---so if anything I've stopped using my powers to influence Jane---and all you guys---like I've been doing all these centuries for Aro. I'm sure you must've felt something different, off, these last couple of days since I haven't been around to strengthen the artificial bond."

"You've been using your abilities on us for him?" Alec asked in a slow, dangerous tone.

"Just like Corin was using her ability on us for him as well," Chelsea responded.

"It's true," Jane muttered. "I've felt the withdrawal associated with Corin's power."

"Jane, if they haven't done anything to you since you've been here why are your eyes purple?" Alec wanted to know as he turned to his sister once more.

Jane sighed, stood, and trailed her hand up Colin's shoulder to pull down the neck of his shirt and reveal her bite mark against his skin, surprising Leah and everyone else. "Because, unlike Chelsea, I don't like the taste of animal blood." She tilted he heard. "Other than wolf blood, which is much better than human blood." She tilted her head, expression curious. "Or maybe it just tastes that good because it is his."

Colin beamed proudly despite blushing.
"But I've seen vampires die from ingesting wolf blood during the Werewolf Wars, it's toxic to our kind--unless--," Alec's eyes widened. "You've let her drink from you of your own free will?" He stumbled back a step when Colin nodded. "So freely giving the blood must make it non-toxic--or maybe it's like vampires in which our venom isn't toxic to our mates." He stopped breathing in his shock. "It has to be true." He looked a little lightheaded before shaking his head once more, taking in a deep, unnecessary breath, and then smiling as he finally yanked off his hood. "Hi, I'm Alec."

Colin eyed the hand held out towards him and warily took it, blinking when Alec shook it vigorously.

"My emotionally stunted sister and I are a package deal," Alec assured him with a huge grin, revealing then and there to everyone that he was the charismatic one of the two siblings. "So, welcome to the family."

"Uh, thanks. I'm Colin, and I've always wanted a brother." Colin beamed at him before frowning and turning to Jane. "Wait - if you knew vampires who died from ingesting wolf blood why would you still drink mine?"

She shrugged, apparently apathetic with the topic. "I was hungry." She eyed him. "Plus, you kept going on and on about us being mates, and I figured, if it was true, your blood wouldn't be toxic to me, the same way vampire mates are immune to each other's venom."

"You couldn't have known that for sure though!" Colin squeaked.

Jane shrugged halfheartedly in response.

"She's a handful," Alec sighed tiredly.

"So it's not just with me?" Colin looked utterly relieved.

Alec snorted. "Gods no, even as a human--." Considering everything was working out on this front, Leah decided to ignore Alec, Jane and Colin as she turned to Chelsea. "So, uh, you knew?"

Chelsea smiled sheepishly. "It wasn't hard to figure out once I was given enough pieces to the puzzle." She tightened her grip on Leah's hand. "And the good news is that -- not to brag or anything -- but Alec, Jane and I are kind of the Volturi's top guns, so even though they will no doubt outnumber us whenever they arrive, they're going to think twice about actually starting a fight with us."

"Us." Leah tried not to show just how much she liked the word.

Chelsea smiled and blushed. "Us."

Leah couldn't help but smile like an idiot, completely forgetting whatever had had her in such a poor mood mere moments ago.

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James wanted to puke.

Jane had Colin wrapped around her little finger, and from the way Leah was goofily smiling at Chelsea they were in the same boat.
At least Jake and Edward were classy about it – and he'd never thought he'd ever think that in his life.

"So, uh, who would've thought this would be the day's outcome?" Seth asked from behind James, surprising him into jumping.

James had intentionally been busying himself so as to avoid Seth, and he fought the urge to suddenly 'remember' he had something to do, because, damn it, that was running away, and James Hunter did not run away!

Seth cleared his throat. "You okay? You look a little weirded out."

He was trying to imagine himself smiling besottedly at Sam Uley… and the idea made him want to puke even more. He very vaguely remembered the Alpha from his and Victoria's reconnaissance missions, and while Sam was in no way unattractive, the idea of being with him seriously, honestly, made James nauseas.

"James." Seth touched his arm, concern clearly sketched over his features. "Are you okay?"

"Uley Imprinted on a vampire," James informed him, even though he was sure Seth knew by now. "That means the guy who just tried to kill us will soon be at our door looking to rut."

Seth made up his face. "I'm sure he'll be more tactful than that."

"He doesn't seem like the most tactful person," James countered. "I'm sorry to be an asshole, but that's the asshole who cheated on your sister by saying Emily was his Imprintee, only to scar Emily and then get her killed by his actions, all for it to be proven that she actually wasn't his Imprintee." He shivered at the realization that he was close to seriously hating Sam. "If he Imprinted on me I'd tell him to go and die."

Seth flinched. "I don't think anyone would want to hear that, especially from someone they've Imprinted on."

Oh. Great. So Seth thought Uley might've Imprinted on James too.

"What's the appeal of Imprinting anyway?" James wanted to know, not exactly sure why he was so pissed. "Everyone I know who has Imprinted or been Imprinted on act like idiots."

Seth paused, his gaze lowered to the ground before he cleared his throat. "I think the appeal is in knowing without any bit of uncertainty that not only does your soulmate exist, but you get to be with him or her for the rest of your immortal lives."

James did not feel that way at the idea of being mated to Sam Uley. The idea was not only terrifying, but repellent. "Or you could just be stuck with someone you not only don't care about, but are disgusted with. Someone you end up being forced to be with even if that's the last thing you'd ever want because some damned wolf instinct says you have to."

"You wouldn't get someone who disgusts you, there's no way someone so fundamentally wrong for you could ever be your soulmate," Seth responded in an oddly hurt tone.

"Look, I don't give a shit whether Sam Uley shrivels up and dies," James snapped at him. "But I'm not going to be his mate!"
Seth's pained expression quickly turned into obvious shock as he stared up at James with wide eyes. "You think Sam Uley Imprinted on you?"

"Maybe? It's a distinct possibility given everything!" James stormed away and somehow wasn't surprised when Seth caught up with him in time for him to start venting – and possibly hyperventilating. "Murdock said some stuff back there on how I was supposed to care for Jake to prepare me for what was coming, right? What if it's because I'm supposed to be mated to a different Alpha?" He shivered in disgust. "It makes terrifying, creepy sense. I hate it. I hate it."

"You haven't been Imprinted on by Sam Uley," Seth assured him as he somehow kept in pace with the taller, longer-legged male.

"You have no way of knowing that!" James snapped, definitely closer to hyperventilation now.

"Yes, I do."

There was such certainty in those three words that James turned on his heel to stare Seth down. "How?"

Seth's eyes widened as he stumbled to a stop, clearly not having expected this change of events. "B-because I---," he hesitated, mouth opening and closing. "I---I----."

Disappointed at the obvious truth in the stammering, James sighed. The guy clearly didn’t know what he was talking about. "Oh gods, I’ve been Imprinted on by Sam Uley."

A little growl escaped Seth’s lips as he bristled. “No. You haven’t. He wasn’t even looking in your direction when he called a retreat.”

James felt hope peek its head at that. He grabbed a surprised Seth by the shoulders and held on tight. “Tell me you’re not just saying that to make me feel better.”

Those brown eyes rolled in annoyance before meeting his gaze. “James, I swear to you on my mother that Sam Uley did not Imprint on you.”

“I could kiss you!” So, he did. It probably wasn’t the smartest thing considering Seth had only just managed to keep Leah from killing James, but the vampire really wasn’t thinking very straight at all. Relief spread through his body like liquid fire, and before he even realized what he was doing, he’d backed Seth against the house’s wall.

Seth didn’t seem to be complaining if the way he was pulling James closer by his jacket was anything to go by. The wolf groaned into James’ mouth, his back arched, his mouth open, and his tongue dancing with James’. That liquid heat warmed James and caused shivers of delight to trail down his spine as he pressed Seth harder into the wall and straddled his thigh between his. He rubbed his body against Seth’s, delighting in the soft moans this elicited from Seth’s mouth, the moans James hungrily devoured, refusing to let anyone else hear Seth make those sounds. They were sounds only he knew.

His cock throbbed at the reminder that he was the only one who’d ever heard Seth make those sounds. Seth kept making those sounds as his hands found James’ jeans and began unbuckling them, yanking down the zipper enough to shove his hand into James’ underwear and grab him.

James now made the sound as he kissed Seth harder, his tongue battling the wolf’s as Seth took him in hand and showed him how much better he’d gotten. Despite not truly needing to breathe, James quickly found himself breathless. He tore his lips from Seth’s to whisper against his ear:
“Do you think anyone will notice if I fuck you right now?”

A squeak sounded loud to their right.

James pulled away from Seth and peeked to his right to see one of Seth’s friends, Brady, starring at him with wide eyes. The dude had clearly turned the corner and had unexpectedly walked in on them. *Screw you Brady, screw you.* Sure, it was their fault for doing this just around the corner, but still, the guy had really messed with James’ fun!

Brady glanced down at James’ crotch (and the hand Seth still had stuck inside James’ underwear gripping his cock) and gulped, loudly.

Anyone else would be embarrassed at having been caught, but James was more evilly amused at the fact that Brady looked like he’d forgotten how to breathe. The guy’s eyes were wide like saucers, his lips parted, and the whiff in the air proved he didn’t exactly feel disgusted with what he was seeing.

Just to tease the dude further, James winked at him.

Seth snarled, causing his friend to jump and finally look up from James’ crotch area at him.

“I, uh, I should, uh, I—.” Brady turned and ran.

James snickered and rested his forehead against Seth’s shoulder. “You have no idea how relieved I am that he wasn’t your sister.” He sighed and pulled away out of Seth’s grip as he buttoned back up his pants, unable to look at Seth. “I’m sorry, I got carried away. It’s not like we’re on the road anymore so those rules don’t apply.” His mouth was dry and it was surprisingly hard to say this while smirking. “I won’t jump you like this anymore.”

“You might’ve kissed me, James, but I’m the one whose hand was down your pants,” Seth declared in an odd, surprisingly annoyed tone. “If anyone did jumping, I jumped you.” A muscle ticked in his cheek as he leaned hard against the wall. “And stop acting as if you’re forcing me into something. I followed you back here. I let you push me against the wall. I - and I can’t stress this enough here - shoved my hand down your pants. If I didn’t want to touch your cock I wouldn’t.”

James felt, surprisingly enough, a little embarrassed yet amused at this whole thing. “I see.”

“So you do?” Seth asked testily. “Because I really don’t think you do.” He groaned and ran a hand down his face. “Although, that’s my fault, isn’t it? I should’ve just spelled things out for you the second things started happening between us, just like any normal person would’ve. Because you’re clearly not getting any hints.”

Okay, Seth must really be sexually frustrated right now because he was being super testy all of a sudden.

“No, I get it,” James declared with a smirk as he leaned with his forearm on the wall right above Seth’s head. “You want to be friends with benefits.”

Seth let his hand fall from his face as he eyed James in what seemed like utter consternation.

James’ assurance from two seconds ago floundered. “You don’t?”

Another voice cleared his throat. “As much as I absolutely love the entertainment you two bring to my life,” Garrett declared from where he was leaning against the side of the wall, “Your Alpha’s asked me to call you two over, apparently something is going on and they need you both.” He
turned his amused gaze on Seth. “Mama Seth.” And with that he chuckled and left.

Mama Seth? What the hell was Garrett going on about?

Seth sighed before his eyes narrowed on James. “Before this day is over, you and me are going to have a very long conversation.” And with that he stormed away.

James looked after him with a flinch.

Nothing good ever came from those words.

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Jasper looked up from where he was sitting at Bella’s bedside and smiled tiredly at his wife. “Everything okay?”

“I just had another vision about the Volturi,” Alice sighed as she sat down next to him and rested her forehead against his shoulder. “I couldn’t understand it very well, there were a lot of different images vying for center stage, but I do know one thing.”

“What?” Jasper as softly as he brushed her hair tenderly.

Alice let out a shaky breath. “The day they arrive in Forks is the day our Coven ceases to exist.”

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TBC
“Seth.” Leah blinked as she tried to digest the news. “Seth?”

“Seth,” Victoria assured her. “I saw it with my own two eyes.”

“Seth Clearwater?” Leah stressed the last name, and when the redhead merely nodded her head with a mischievous smile on her face, Leah still couldn’t believe it. “My baby brother?”

“It might look like James was in charge there, but Seth is clearly topping from the bottom,” Victoria informed her, apparently not at all shocked by this revelation. “When James said Seth was the one who seduced him I found it hard to swallow, but after seeing them together? Seth definitely knows what he’s doing.”

Leah’s eyes narrowed. “He was in mint condition when he left, your brother is the one who—-.?”

“—-is being dragged around by his cock?” Victoria snickered. “Yes. Yes he is.”

“I don’t want to hear about your brother’s stupid penis,” Leah muttered as she covered her face with her hands in utter horror. “You could’ve seen things wrong.”

“Nope.” Victoria’s voice was devilishly amused. “I’ve been keeping an eye on them since they came back smelling of each other and James told me what he did. Seth’s been glaring nonstop at the fact that James has been a real coward sticking around Jake and giving him all his attention, when, come on, Edward’s amusement and lack of jealousy should’ve been enough to let everyone realize that James wasn’t trying to actually get with Jake!”

Leah hadn’t thought of that. She hadn’t noticed Seth’s reaction to James’ behavior either. She’d just been busy with her work, busy mentally cursing James, and making sure she kept Chelsea in her line of vision at all times. With how things were it wasn’t safe for the vampire to be anywhere by herself. The only reason she was in this room chatting to Victoria was because, well, this was about her little brother - and about Victoria’s brother - and there was a sisterly code of honor.

Also? She could smell Chelsea and knew she was very close. Like real close. Like, almost outside the door close.

“And the second he could get James alone, Seth was there, like the roadrunner,” Victoria continued on, not seeming to realize just how confused and scarred she was leaving Leah, who refused to believe her baby brother was anything but a pure little cinnamon roll in desperate need of his big sister. “And then he used James’ out of character mental breakdown to steer him away from the others to a more secluded spot on the other side of the house. He also kept either touching James or moving closer to him, and when James kissed him he backed into the wall and pulled James with him. Also? He’s the one who undid James’ pants and shoved his hand inside to—-.”

“Okay!” Leah covered her ears with her hands as she tried not to whine yet knew she failed. “I don’t know what happened! I raised him better than that!”

“Clearly James’ belief that Seth is in love with Jake is way off,” Victoria declared with a snort.
“Wait.” Leah frowned as she removed her hands from her ears. “He thinks what?”

“Yes.” The redhead made a face as she tilted her head. “He told me all about it earlier too. He thinks Seth has unrequited feelings for Jake which he’s using James to rebound from, and it kind of made sense to me too until I actually saw them together. Also, Riley and Garrett keep referring to Seth as ‘Mama Seth’ amongst themselves, which really just means the reason Seth was so sure Sam Uley didn’t Imprint on my brother is because he had.” Her golden eyes met Leah’s. “I dare you to deny it.”

Leah’s mouth opened and closed multiple times before she groaned. “Don’t tell your brother, okay? I promised Seth when I didn’t kill James that I’d let him be the one to tell him!”

“Oh, I have no plan on telling James,” Victoria assured her. “Let this be a lesson that his instincts have gone dull. I mean, for crying out loud! He’s usually smart enough, and in control enough, to know it is not a good idea to screw someone out in the open when there are a crapload of supernaturals on the other side of the house! He’s distracted by Seth! He should’ve sensed me or Brady before we arrived, but clearly his tracking skills are affected by Seth, probably overwhelmed with Seth’s smell or something like that. A tracker’s mind and sense are his sharpest asset—and I think they’ve both been clouded over and dulled by overloading on Seth or something like that.”

“Talking about that - Edward’s ability to read minds only got stronger when he got with Jake so what gives?” Leah wanted to know curiously. “When will that change for, you know, Chelsea, Jane, James—?”

“I’ve been wondering that myself,” Victoria admitted. “I think it happens after the connection does.”

“Huh?” Leah blinked in confusion.

“Well, Jake and Edward used to screw all the time right? And nothing big changed. But after Jake and he got back together and truly got together something changed. That was the first time Edward ever slept.” Victoria tapped her fingertip against her lips. “I think it has to do with both partners truly claiming the other or accepting them as their soulmate without reservation or something like that.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Leah muttered softly to herself, wondering how that would apply to her and Chelsea. They still barely knew each other. How exactly would things proceed from here? At least, well, Chelsea didn’t seem to mind the whole being mates thing, and Leah mightn’t admit it out loud but she really didn’t mind it either - but she wondered how long it would take for them to reach the point where Chelsea magically slept again.

“I wouldn’t worry too much about it if I were you,” Victoria assured her with a hand to her shoulder. “With the way Chelsea is stalking you around, and spying on us like some psycho, I don’t think you’re going to have any problems on her front.” She snickered. “You can come in, Chelsea.” She turned to the door. “And for your information, I am super straight. Leah is as sexy to me as corn on the cob.”

“Hey,” Leah gasped.

The door opened and Chelsea had the grace to look contrite. “I wouldn’t exactly call it stalking.”

“Reconnaissance?” Victoria offered up the word.

Chelsea nodded.
“Now that you know for a fact that I would rather hump a groundhog than Leah,” Victoria began.

“That’s pushing it!” Leah cried out.

“What do you think about the situation you no doubt found out about while doing your recon?” Victoria motioned Chelsea in and for her to shut the door. “Seth is totally more in control there than James, isn’t he?”

“I’m sorry, Leah,” Chelsea whispered apologetically as she closed the door behind her. “But have you noticed the way your brother’s been sticking around her brother? Especially while around your Alpha? I mean, he keeps scent marking him, too.”

“See!” Victoria crowed. “And I’d forgotten to say that part! He totally is touching or rubbing against James subtly.”

“Not too subtly,” Chelsea corrected. “If your brother does one more flirtatious thing to someone else her brother might just hump him in front of them all.”

“I would pay money to see that!” Victoria snickered and shared an evil smile with Chelsea which proved that Chelsea would no doubt also pay to see that horrifying spectacle. It proved to Leah that she was surrounded by weird and terrifying people. Not even her brother was sweet and innocent anymore!

There and then, as she realized Victoria and Chelsea were on the way towards friendship, Leah understood the meaning of true fear.

…

The Hunter House was filled to the brim, which was partly why Jacob was outside by himself, staring out into the forest. It was a good thing most of those inside were vampires and didn’t sleep (except Edward, of course) because there was no place for everyone to actually get some rest. It only drove home the realization that things needed to change. Jake was the leader of a pack now, one that was growing at a ridiculous pace, and that meant he had to provide for others. How exactly could he do that when he wasn’t even able to provide for himself?

Ever since the Rez had kicked him out he’d been living with Charlie thanks to his kindness, but with graduation soon coming what exactly was he going to do? He couldn’t expect to live off of Charlie’s charity forever! And how could he take care of his pack? Where would they stay? How could they afford—?

“Jake, don’t borrow tomorrow’s problems,” Edward whispered as he wrapped his arms around Jake was behind and held on tightly. “Right now let’s concentrate on the fact that Alec says the Volturi will be arriving tomorrow, and I’ve read his mind, it’s the truth. Let’s get through this, then we can think about the Sam issue, and then we will figure out the rest of it, together.” He nuzzled his forehead against Jake’s ear. “You might be the Alpha, but I’m your mate, you know. I’m here so you don’t have to worry about these things by yourself, so you have a support.”

Despite the thousands of worries in his mind, Jake couldn’t help but smile as he turned around to wrap his arms around his boyfriend’s waist, pulling him closer. “I like it when you refer to yourself as my mate.”

Edward’s lips twitched. “I liked it when James referred to me as your mate.” He shook his head. “I didn’t think it would be this easy, or quick.”

“And here I thought you two were classy,” James groaned as he turned the corner, expression
clearly queasy as he eyed them.

Edward rolled his eyes as he pulled away and turned to face the newcomer. “Did you have to interrupt right now?”

“No, but while I accept you’re Jake’s mate, I still love messing with you,” James replied truthfully with a smirk as he moved towards them. “Anyway, Eddie, this will only take a second.” He reached inside his jacket and pulled something out of his inner pocket, which he held out to Jake in his clenched palm. “This is something I should’ve given back to you a long time ago, Jake. I’m sorry for keeping it hostage as long as I did.” He looked uneasy yet a little embarrassed. “We both know I’m not the one who should be wearing this.”

Curiosity bubbled inside Jacob as he held his hand out and blinked when the necklace with his wolf totem fell into his palm. “You’re giving this back?” He asked in surprise. James had never explained how he’d gotten the necklace in the first place, or why he’d never given it back, and just when Jake had gotten used to the fact that he probably would never know, James went and surprised him again.

“How I see it, letting some other vampire wear your totem is disrespectful to your missus,” James snickered with a glance towards Edward. “Especially when I’m clearly the better looking vampire.”

Edward folded his arms over his chest, eyebrow raised.

James shook his head and turned his attention back to Jake. “So I’ll leave you two to get back to your thing. I just wanted to give that back to you before I forgot, Jake.” He nodded to Edward. “Missus.” And with that he strolled away, apparently happy as a clam.

“I really don’t like him,” Edward announced with not heat in his tone, if anything he was a little amused yet very obviously against his own will. “I feel sorry for Seth.”

“Why do you feel sorry for him?” Jake asked curiously as he attempted to put back on his necklace, only to have Edward snatch it away and put it on instead.

“Being stuck with an Imprintee like James is going to be a pain in the—-tell me you realized they were Imprinted!” Edward gasped halfway through his sentence.

Jake just stared at his boyfriend. He’d realized that Seth and James had been intimate during their time on the road, their scent had made that more than obvious, but with the way James was acting Jake had dismissed the idea of Imprinting. Look at Edward, Chelsea and even Jane for crying out loud! And then look at James! His beta had barely said two words to Seth since they’d come back! That was not standard Imprintee behavior!

“Jake?” Edward looked worried.

“So that is why Leah didn’t kill him,” Jake realized as he let out a deep breath. “That makes sense now.”

Edward chuckled and nodded as he drew closer, trailing his finger over the buttons on Jacob’s shirt. “So. Now that we know for a fact that we don’t have to worry about the pack or Volturi for tonight… how about we slip away for a little?”

“We still have a lot to plan though,” Jake said, yet could definitely hear the temptation in his own tone. “You heard Alice’s visions, tomorrow’s going to be—-.”
“We’ll come back afterwards, obviously,” Edward assured him as he began to kiss his way down Jacob’s neck. “But it’s precisely because we don’t know what will happen tomorrow that I want to spend a little time alone with you.”

“How little?” Jake asked as his hands lowered to the vampire’s hips, bringing him closer.

“Maybe not too little,” Edward whispered before racing out into the forest.

Deciding to be a little selfish and steal some time away with his mate, Jacob smirked and took chase.

…

“Hey, do you have any idea where Jacob is?” Embry asked as he glanced around. “His sisters have been calling him like crazy.”

“He was outside last I checked, but I don’t think he’s there anymore,” Quil answered with a shrug from where he was watching Leah and Chelsea with a little smirk, clearly enjoying the view of them together. “He’ll see the missed calls when he gets back.”

“Should we answer?” Embry wondered. “Take a message or something?”

“Dude, we’re still on probation, let’s not get in hot water by answering the Alpha’s phone without his permission,” Quil responded immediately, finally tearing his gaze away from Leah and Chelsea. “Do you think my vampire will be super hot like Leah’s?” He grinned. “Or she might be one of those cutesy types.”

“Or she may be a guy,” Embry countered immediately. “Other than Colin and Jane, same sex pairings seem to be dominating this vampire and werewolf imprinting thing.”

Quil made a face. ‘I’m a hundred per cent heterosexual though.”

“I’m sure Leah and Jacob would’ve said the same thing before Edward and Chelsea came along,” Embry pointed out.

Quil flinched, clearly never having even considered that to be a possibility, and visibly shaken.

Embry, looking far less bothered by the prospect, sat down next to him and patted the devastated werewolf’s back.

…

Everyone were either preparing for tomorrow or doing their best to put it (and what was to come) out of their minds. James, on the other hand, had escaped the company and gone to the roof to just relax and think about everything that had happened in what seemed like a ridiculously short amount of time. He’d changed, a lot, the old him would’ve never allowed Laurent to live, and yet now that he’d proven to everyone that he wasn’t weak and to be hunted, James was very happy to just let Laurent live his unlife never quite sure whether James was still after him or not.

The old him never would’ve given back the totem either, even if only to spite Edward. And yet he’d done so without even thinking of it. Why? Because it bothered Seth.

And now that he really sat down and thought about it, a lot of his changes had to do with Seth in one way or the other. Being on the road, and hunting Laurent, and then worrying about getting back in time to help his pack - they hadn’t given him much time to really think, and now that he
had, he was a little uneasy at just how much the runt had affected him.

Like, right now? He wanted Seth there. He’d nearly turned to him a couple of times now to comment about something or the other like they would on the road, and had felt twinges of disappointment every time he realized he was up there alone. He was acting like some stupid, lovesick little girl. Hell, he was acting like Edward. And he’d never——.

James froze in horror as he went over everything once more and realized that, yes, he was acting like Edward. He sat up quickly and breathed rapidly, going over Seth’s cryptic words and actions, and his own behavior, and… and Seth’s absolute surety that Sam Uley had not Imprinted on James.

He thought back to the cave, to the way his ability had stopped working for a couple of minutes. The vampire ran his fingers through his hair in utter shock as suddenly everything made so much sense.

It was almost as if he’d needed to be away from Seth to be able to put everything together, to follow the clues and hunt down the truth.

*Seth Imprinted on me.*

It made sense. IT MADE SO MUCH SENSE! Much more sense than all of his other hypotheses!

Seth’s comments! His reaction to James talking ill about Imprinting - to James wearing Jake’s totem - to his refusal to allow James to go to that place without him! There’d been his extremely convincing behavior in the tunnels as well when they’d first met Garrett and Riley, and his behavior ever since.

*How did I miss it?* James couldn’t understand it. *I’m sharper than this! I’m MUCH sharper than this!*

And yet it hadn’t even been a possibility in his mind until right now!

*That’s why Leah didn’t kill me!*

How had THAT not tipped him off immediately?

“Since when am I an idiot?”

“Is that a trick question?”

James jumped and stretched around to see Seth climbing up the small trellis up to the hidden little semi flat space on the roof. If his heart beat it would’ve skipped once or twice from the sheer shock. “Hey.”

“I was wondering where you were,” Seth admitted as he finished climbing and glanced around. “The view is great from up here!”

“Yeah. I figured I could get away from the mob downstairs and act as a lookout all at the same time,” James admitted.

Seth’s smile slipped. “Should I go? If you wanted to be alone——.”

“No!” James hated himself for how quick that had slipped for his lips. “I, uh, I keep turning to the side to tell you something and keep forgetting you’re not there.” He shrugged, feeling very lame. “I guess I got used to having you around all the time during our road trip together. It was weird not
having you next to me.”

“Oh. I see.” And yet Seth was grinning ear to ear as he came to sit down next to the vampire, but his smile disappeared almost as soon as his butt hit the ground. “So… Alice says that the Volturi coming is going to end in her coven’s destruction… so that means there’s going to be a fight with casualties tomorrow, doesn’t it?”

“According to Jake, Alice’s visions aren’t certainties, she sees decisions or something like that,” James tried to explain, but he really didn’t get it himself. “So tomorrow’s fate - or that of the coven - isn’t fixed.”

Seth nodded silently as he hugged his knees to his chest and gazed towards the shadow covered forest.

The blonde took the opportunity to actually look at Seth. He’d seen him millions of times up to this point but he’d never actually allowed himself time to really study the younger male. Seth was very attractive, very, his body slender yet well defined, his hair long and lustrous silk, and his eyes were pools of darkness. Moonlight bathed him in an ethereal glow which only made him even more alluring.

James usually had a high self-worth and self-regard, but even he could admit that Seth was way too pretty and too nice of a guy to be stuck with an asshole like himself. He hadn’t been joking when he’d said that Seth wouldn’t deserve to be stuck Imprinted to him, and he hadn’t even realized that had been the case at the time! Now, as he thought about it, he honestly felt like he’d cheated the brat. Seth was the nicest person he’d ever met, everyone liked Seth - hell, even Riley liked him - so why in the world had he gotten saddled with someone like James? What had the brat ever done to deserve that?

“Not all Imprintees and Imprinters have to be romantic, right?” James forced himself to ask for Seth’s sake. “I mean, they could be friends, and it would free the Imprinter to be in a romantic relationship with someone who deserved him more.”

“You are not Imprinted to Sam!” Seth rolled his eyes and threw his hands skyward.

“I wasn’t asking because of that,” James muttered.

“Is that what you’ve been doing up here? Looking out at the woods and wondering when Sam’s going to come for you?” Seth gripped at his hair tightly, glaring at the woods as if they were to blame in all of this. “He’s not coming. Not for you at least.”

“I know that.”

“Because he didn’t Imprint on you.” Seth’s voice was stony.

“I know that,” James repeated just as calmly as he had the first time.

“You’re just saying that to appease me.” Seth’s voice was frustrated as he finally turned to face James, his face betraying he was two breaths away from a sulk.

“I’m just saying that because you Imprinted on me,” James responded calmly once more, eyeing Seth’s face for any reaction.

“No, you don’t get it! I——.” Seth’s eyes widened. “Wait. What did you just say?”

He’d be amused if this wasn’t so serious. “It’s what I realized while I was up here thinking.” He
shifted to face the wolf. “You Imprinted on me, didn’t you?”

Seth stared at him in wide-eyed shock before he lowered his head with a groan and covered his face, but not quick enough that James hadn’t caught the red blossoming on his cheeks. “I was supposed to be the one to tell you!”

So. It was true.

James took in a deep, unnecessary breath. “You should’ve told me.”

“When exactly?” Seth asked sulkily from behind his hands. “While you were pining after Jake? Or while you were fighting for your life?”

“How about while I was fucking you?” James snapped despite not having planned to. He tried to force himself to calm down but it was really hard when his emotions were haywire like they were right now. “Didn’t that seem like a fucking appropriate time?”

Seth flinched as his hands fell from his face, which was impassive. “I wanted to tell you when you actually started to care about me. I didn’t want you to feel forced into being with me because of the Imprint. I wanted you to like me for me so that when I told you it wouldn’t freak you out as much as it is right now.”

“I gave Jake back his totem for you!” James couldn’t shut his damned mouth apparently. “Doesn’t that seem like I fucking care about you?”

Seth’s impassive mask dropped away to reveal his shocked expression, his eyes wide. “You—-you actually gave it back?”

“She gave it back.” James muttered, a little taken aback by Seth’s open vulnerability.

“Yes, but I didn’t—-I figured you’d wait a bit to—-I don’t know—-you gave it back.” Seth glanced downwards, seeming lost in his thoughts and completely unaware of just how wide he was smiling.

*He’s so happy he can’t even hide it.*

James felt all kinds of conflicting emotions - the strongest being his need to talk this situation through versus his need to push the werewolf down and have his way with him. Honestly, this was the wrong time to be aroused for crying out loud! This was a conversation that desperately needed to be had, so even if he had to beat his penis with a stick to get it to go down he would.

“Look,” Seth finally said as he raised his dark gaze to meet James’. “I get that this is weird, and it’s something we both have to come to terms with, but I’m all in. I want this. I’ve wanted you before I could even stand you, and now that I know for a fact that not only are we very sexually compatible but you care enough about me to give Jake his totem back - I’m not backing down.”

“Excuse me?” James choked out.

“I want you,” Seth informed him in utter seriousness. “You can try and fight it saying we wouldn’t work or I deserve better or some crap like that, but one way or the other I’m going to have you. I’ve worked far too hard to get you to notice me to stop even if I could. And now that it’s out there I am not going to hide what I want or feel anymore.”

James didn’t know whether to laugh or scoff or just gape at Seth Clearwater. “You sound like the villain in some old movie telling the damsel in distress she’s marrying him whether she likes it or not.”
“The difference is, you like it,” Seth responded immediately before a slight blush touched his cheeks. “You like me.” The corner of his lips twitched into a smile he couldn’t quite erase. “And soon you’ll like me more and more until I’m what you like most in the world, I’ll work very hard to make sure of it.”

James just stared at him. “You’re incredibly manly right now.”

The wolf beamed. “I don’t think anyone’s ever told me that before.”

James continued to stare at him before he cleared his throat. “Look, let’s live through tomorrow and then… and then we really sit down and talk about what this means going forwards. How about that? Because I feel like once we get started this conversation could last for days.”

Seth nodded rapidly. “Yes. I’d like that.” He opened his mouth to say something else, but a huge commotion broke out downstairs. The wolf sighed as he peered down. “We should probably go see what’s going on, shouldn’t we?”

James nodded and watched as Seth got up and made his way towards the trellis… only for the werewolf to turn around, storm back towards him, and straddle James’ lap. Before the vampire could react, Seth gripped his hair and held him tightly in place as he kissed him.

The vampire held out for merely a second before his hands disappeared up the back of Seth’s shirt, the wolf’s skin pleasantly hot against the touch. James’ hips moved of their own volition, rubbing against the seam of Seth’s pants, his previous erection raging hard. His mouth found the wolf’s neck, his lips sucking and his teeth nibbling, quickly getting lost in the taste.

This wasn’t the time, this wasn’t the place, but just like earlier James was quickly finding all reason fleeing. All he knew was that Seth was in his arms, and making such cute sounds while touching him just right. All he wanted was to kiss him harder, to tear the barriers between them and sink inside Seth’s willing body. A part of him realized Seth really wouldn’t have to work all the hard because the second he touched James, all the vampire wanted was to be buried inside of him.

“You’re so cute, Seth,” James whispered into his ear.

Almost immediately Seth’s skin raised in goose bumps as he groaned and rubbed his ass against James’ cock. He kissed James harder, his grip on the blonde’s hair tighter, his breaths slowly growing erratic. His skin was burning against James’ contrasting cold.

James trailed a hand down before slipping it past the waist of Seth’s pants, his fingertips brushing against the wolf’s entrance. He rubbed that puckered entrance slowly, enjoying the way Seth melted into him, gripping him tightly and pressing back with his hips needily. His middle finger slipped in, and he was surprised to find Seth moist within.

Seth’s back arched as he groaned, reaching behind to stroke James’ hand as James added another finger inside of him.

“How are you this wet?” James whispered in bliss, imaging his cock replacing the fingers he now had scissoring inside Seth, preparing him for what would follow.

“I don’t—-,” Seth’s voice broke as his whole body trembled when James’ fingers brushed against something inside of him.

A howl sounded in the forest, followed by another, and another.

Seth rested his forehead against the vampire’s shoulder. “Oh for crying out loud!”
James was right there with him when another howl could be heard close by. Apparently Sam’s pack were coming back, and were letting those in the house know in advance.

Great.

Just great.
On any other night James would be wholeheartedly enjoying the way Sam Uley was brought low, returning to their doorsteps mere hours after declaring war on them—but no matter how much he wanted to enjoy the sight of Sam speaking to Jake (gaze lowered in shame) James couldn't truly concentrate on it. There was something distracting him, something in the air. It smelt familiar yet not at the very same time, and he couldn't pinpoint what exactly it was or why it was distracting him, because it was distracting him, it really was.

Sam Uley glanced quickly over to where James, Riley and Garrett stood a little apart from everyone but Alec, Jane and Colin, before his attention returned to Jake. Sam's pack remained in the woods in their wolf forms, clearly not trusting the vampires or pack to forgive them that easily or without some sort of retribution.

Garrett snickered as he threw an arm around Riley's shoulder, bringing him in close. "So, when I said that there was most probably a werewolf waiting to Imprint on you, I didn't expect it to work this quickly."

Riley glared at him and shrugged his arm off. "Stop trying to jinx me. He made up his face at the very thought as he folded his arms over his chest. "And why do you automatically assume it's me? For all we know, it's you."

"Fat chance," Garrett snickered. "He's not a cutie pie like Sethie. If that Brady guy didn't Imprint on me, no one will."

"You say that as if you have a choice in the matter," Riley pointed out all huffily. "From what Victoria's filled me in on while we've been back, the vampires have no say in it. Unlike us, their Alpha, and Seth's sister, were both straight. So I doubt their Imprintees were their first choice." He raised an eyebrow. "Thus, he's yours."

"Oh please, by that definition he's most definitely yours," Garrett chuckled, clearly amused with the argument.

Normally James would hush the two of them, or join in (it all depended on his mood, to be honest) but that scent was killing him. What the hell was it? Where was it coming from?

"—right, sire?"

Realizing he'd zoned them out, James turned his gaze on them. "Sorry, I wasn't listening."

Riley huffed. "I said: even if he did Imprint on me you wouldn't force me to actually be with him, right?"

"With him?" James snorted in disgust as he slashed a glance in Sam's direction. "If he's Imprinted on you, Riles, you have my permission to treat him like shit and make him spend the rest of his life as a miserable ball of mangy, matted fur."

Riley beamed and turned that smile on Garrett as if saying: so there.
Garrett rolled his eyes. "Sire's boy."

"You say that like it's an insult," Riley snickered.

Messing up Riley's hair affectionately, James opened his mouth to back up his fledgling, yet the scent assailed him once more. It was stronger this time, more saturated. There was blood. Lots of it.

"What is it, Jamie?" Garrett suddenly asked, all amusement gone. "Your eyes are black pools."

"You don't smell it?" James asked softly, not looking up from the direction the scent was coming from.

"Smell what?" Riley wanted to know the same time Garrett answered: "No."

"Jake!" James yelled, surprising his Alpha, who jumped and turned to look at him. "Something's not right!"

Jake's eyes narrowed on Sam. "What game are you playing, Uley?"

Sam was suddenly wide-eyed and paled, shaking his head and holding his hands up in a surrendering motion. "I don't know what he's talking about! Whatever it is, it's not us."

"James, what is it?" Edward was suddenly by his side.

*Blood. Lots of it.* James turned to him, not sure why his body was reacting so badly to this. *Something's wrong out there.*

"Can you track it?"

Despite the ants crawling under his skin, James forced himself to smirk. "That's like me asking if you can use hair gel."

Edward looked very much like he was trying not to roll his eyes as he turned to his boyfriend. "Jake, someone's hurt out there, hurt badly. James' senses must be better than even I thought because I can't pick of hint of the whiff but it's driving him insane."

Victoria stepped forwards. "We'll scout out ahead, if it's the Volturi coming before we thought they would James and I have the best chance of finding them, and staying hidden."

James nodded his agreement.

Alec and Jane exchanged confused and questioning looks.

"I'm coming too," Seth declared as he hurried from where he'd been standing next to Leah.

James opened his mouth to tell him to stay, but realized he'd have to take Riley along as well, and he doubted Seth would take well to the fact that he'd bring his fledgling and not his Imprinter. "Stay behind us at all times, Vicki can't mask your scent if you're ahead of her." He turned to Riley. "We might need your self control."

Riley grinned and shot Seth a look which clearly reminded him of their previous conversation of whether self control truly was a vampire super power or not.

Jake took in a deep breath. "Be careful you guys, don't take any stupid chances."

Victoria snickered as she turned to James. "It's almost like he doesn't know us."
James snickered back before racing towards the scent, feeling his sister easily keeping pace. The closer he got, the more the scent became less of an olfactory thing and James could almost see the scent, the trail. Never before had the tracker ever experienced something this strong before, and he couldn't help but feel a little exhilarated by it, the hunter in him rejoicing over this stalking of the scent. It was almost like the old days, where they'd lived hunting down any scent that caught James' fancy, and yet the trail had never been this physical before.

They passed the outskirts of Forks, and yet James continued. The scent extended passed it.

"How good has your scent gotten?" Victoria called in confusion. "Because I still don't smell anything."

James shrugged, deciding not to think too much about it, as he pressed on, trying to figure out why that scent was so foreign yet familiar at the same time. What was this? WHO was this? Were they even still alive? They were really injured if the amount of blood was anything to go by.

He pushed on until suddenly skidding to a stop once they reached the bridge. One of the guardrails was missing, and down the dark ditch below is where the scent was coming from.

Victoria skidded to a halt next to James, her eyes going black as she covered her nose and turned her back on the scent. "I can't—it's—it's strong!"

James nodded, fighting his own instincts, which screamed for him to go for the kill.

A warm hand touched his arm.

He looked up to realize Seth was back in human form, standing in front of him, worried.

"Are you okay?" Seth asked as he reached up to brush a blonde strand from James' face. "Is the scent of blood too strong for you?"

Humiliation and shame filled him for showing this weak side to Seth. Given the fact that Seth's mission in life was to protect humans, seeing James so desperate to feed must disgust him.

"I've got it, Sire," Riley assured him with a pat to his shoulder as he eased his way down the side of the cliff towards what had to be a vehicle which had run off of the bridge.

"You should help him," James whispered to Seth, unable to look him in the eye. "I can hear heartbeats, even if they're faint. People there need your help."

"SETH!" Riley could be heard yelling from down below. "GET DOWN HERE NOW!"

Seth hesitated, staring up into James' face.

"Go." James cleared his throat and moved around James, putting more distance between him and the scent. He could almost feel the distance growing between them as Seth finally made his way to the edge and made his descent.

"I don't know how much more of this I can take," Victoria admitted, her hands clenched into fists at her sides. "We should just call an ambulance and leave this to the humans. I'm about to snap and —."

"VICTORIA!" Seth yelled from down below. "GO GET DR CULLEN! BRING HIM TO THE HOUSE!"
"Huh?" Victoria and James shared confused looks as they turned to face the cliff once more. "But why not call an ambulance?"

"He's got to have his reasons," James muttered. "Vicki, how quickly can you—-?"

"I'm already gone!" And with that, Victoria disappeared from view.

The sound of shuffling up the cliff’s side caught James’ attention in time for Seth to appear over it, dirty.

"James, we need your help."

James took a step towards him before the scent hit him and he nearly crumbled. He covered his face but the scent was heady, and strong and all around him. His predator's drive kicked into high-gear - he could feel the black spreading in his eyes.

Suddenly Seth was there, flinging his arms around James. "Remember back in that place?" He drew James closer, holding him tightly to him. "It's your turn now, just, concentrate on my scent, okay? Just focus on me."

Any other time James' pride might've kept him from complying, but he was so desperate he didn't even think to do so. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Seth and buried his nose in the curve of Seth's neck, breathing in the musky scent of his skin. Like he'd instructed Seth in the underground tunnels, James inhaled the shapeshifter's scent deeply until it dominated everything else. Normally, for a tracker to be unable to pick up the scents around him would be panic-inducing, yet with each deep, lung-filled breath, James found himself calming little by little.

One of Seth's hands was under James' shirt, his calloused fingers moving soothingly against James' back.

It was almost terrifying just how calm James felt all of a sudden. "What do you need me to do?"

Seth gave him one last squeeze, digging his fingers in almost as if to leave a mark, before he finally let his hands fall free. "We can't move the vehicle and get them out at the same time, not with just Riley and I."

"THE VEHICLE IS SLIDING DEEPER INTO THE WATER, TOO!" Riley yelled from down below in a 'sure, take your time' kind of way.

Snorting, James followed behind Seth and together they made their way down towards where the vehicle was half submerged in the waters under the bridge, water which ran red with blood. This wasn't good. He was shocked whoever was in there had survived as long as they had.

As soon as James got close enough he realized there were two girls in the car, two identical girls, both clearly of Native American heritage.

"Seth, the water's rising!" One of the girls sobbed, barely keeping her head above the water, and visibly trying to keep her unconscious sister above water as well.

"We're going to get you two out," Seth promised her. "Just stay calm. It won't help us if you freak out and lose control."

Lose control?

And then James realized why Seth had told Victoria to get Dr Cullen. There was a huge slash in
the unconscious girl's cheek, a slash from which fur could be visible. And now that he looked at the other one, he realized her skin was rippling and gold flickered in her eyes.

*Werewolves. They're werewolves.*

Was that why they'd smelt so oddly familiar?

He didn't stand around questioning that, though as Seth joined Riley into the river, each stationed on one side of the vehicle's front. James followed after, fighting the surprisingly strong current and going to Riley's side before diving under the water to grip the submerged part of the truck. From this vantage point he could see the front had capsized with the fall, trapping the girls' legs.

The vehicle shifted with the current around it, heading a little deeper into the water. James could see the water now up to just below the girls' noses. If they didn't do something soon they'd drown.

Being a vegetarian meant he was weaker than he'd be on human blood, but James tried not to contemplate that as he grabbed purchase of the vehicle and began to pull up. Riley and Seth must've felt the vehicle give under the strain because they started pulling alongside him.

Suddenly the current picked up and the ground shifted under the truck. James barely managed to shift his position and grab hold to the door and lift his feet, only just managing to keep from being run over by the truck as it slid deeper into the water, taking the girls and him with it.

The conscious girl's eyes were wide in terror.

It was a true testament to the change being in Jake's pack had made on James that he actually felt fear for the girl. He slammed his fist over and over again into the window of the vehicle which was being taken down the river, until finally the glass broke and he managed to crawl inside of the vehicle as it shifted in the water.

Reaching the girl, James grabbed her head and brought her close, pressing his lips to hers and letting her have the oxygen he didn't need, had only inhaled prior to submerging in the water out of reflex.

Having bought them a few more minutes, James began to fight with the caved in dashboard. He doubted that the others would be able to track their progress underwater, so he worked desperately without the hope of help. This was all on him. The old him would've laughed at his helping werewolves, but for some reason he had to do this.

Even with her borrowed oxygen the girl was beginning to flail around desperately.

Something hit the vehicle, and James looked up to see Seth in wolf form, on top of the hood. The wolf gave a vicious tug yanked a section of the dashboard free, yet like the girl, the lack of oxygen was visibly getting to him. James was about to try and force Seth back when he realized that the unconscious girl was now loose enough that he could pull her free, which he did before easing her out of the broken windshield towards Seth.

The werewolf eyed him in clear worry before biting into her shirt and taking off towards the surface.

James turned to the other girl, realizing she was close to passing out. He took a risk and pushed up, surfacing long enough to gulp in another deep breath of air before going back down. During that time the current had taken the vehicle further away, but he swam hard, finally managing to grab hold on the window and pull himself in once more, where he quickly shared the air with the desperate girl, giving her a couple minutes more.
Turning his attention to the dashboard, James pushed with all his might, not giving up, refusing to… and then suddenly something gave way, and the girl yanked her bleeding feet free while reaching for James.

The second she was free, James curled an arm around her and helped pull her out of the window, the both of them free of the vehicle as it continued to be sent down the river by the current. James kicked harder and harder until they finally broke surface.

Breathing in loudly, the girl sobbed as she gripped James tightly, arms wrapped around his neck. "Thank you!" She cried over and over again, holding onto him as if to dear life. Even when James finally managed to get them to the bank, the girl wouldn't let go, she merely held on for dear life and sobbed.

James was incredibly awkward, wondering when the werewolf would figure out he was a vampire and attack, or push him away. As it was, she should notice his 'sickly sweet' scent (which was what he'd been told vampires smelt like to werewolves).

"James!" Seth hurried towards them, eyes wide in worry, apparently in human form once more. "Are you two okay?"

The girl looked up at Seth's voice, her eyes wide in tears. "Where's my sister?"

"I sent her with Riley," Seth answered immediately. "We have a doctor waiting at the house."

"Thank you." She hid her face in James' neck and sobbed, shaking. "I thought we would die! I thought—- thank you!" She pulled closer, shivering, probably in a mixture of fear and the cold.

She was clearly in shock and would be of no use to them.

Sighing, James pushed to his feet, and when she didn't let go, he not only pulled her up along with him, but pulled her into his arms bridal style. Given her feet she wouldn't be walking anyway.

The girl merely kept her face in his neck and cried.

"I—-uh—I should probably take her," Seth said oddly. "I mean, the wolf's obviously out of the bag so if I shift she can ride on my back."

James raised an eyebrow at him. "I doubt the jarring of riding your back will help her injuries." He shifted her better in his arms. "I'll take her."

"Her blood—-," Seth began.

"I can handle it." He could. With Seth so close to him the wolf was all he smelt. If he hadn't been there with him James didn't think he'd have been able to do this.

Seth lowered his gaze before nodding. "Let's get her back." His gaze shifted to her. "Just hold on a little longer."

They climbed up the cliff slowly give everything, with Seth assisting whenever James had problems keeping balance given the fact that his hands were both full. When they arrived at the top Seth shifted, and as soon as he was his furry self they took off, racing back towards the Hunter House.

Everything was a mess in the house when they arrived, but thankfully Carlisle was already there tending to the other sister. Jake was pacing back and forth, a phone by his ear, clearly calling
Edward stood over the girl, staring down at her. "I hear thoughts. I think her brain's fine. Either she didn't receive any brain damage from the lack of oxygen, or her wolf genes are healing any damage she's sustained."

"Since when are they wolves?" Jake whispered to himself angrily. "Why didn't I know?" He turned to Sam, who was surprisingly still there, although he'd just gotten off his own phone. "Why didn't the pack tell me? No matter what happened between us I deserved to know!"

"We didn't know," Sam assured him. "I talked to our shaman and he said that these injuries should heal faster if they shift into their wolf forms."

"Rach," Jake whispered as he noticed James and Seth. He hurried towards them. "Are you okay?"

"Jake!" The girl sobbed as she reached out her hand, grabbing his rapidly, tightly, yet still held on tightly to James.

Apparently, whoever these girls were, they were still friends with Jake despite him having been banished.

Dr Cullen got up and came towards them, surprisingly enough causing the girl to pull away and grip James tighter, hiding her face in his neck once more.

"Rach," Seth repeated her name oddly. "You've got to let Dr Cullen look after you."

"Papa says not to trust the Cullens." Rach shook her head.

James frowned. "If you don't trust the Cullens then you should let go of me, because the reason your dad doesn't want you near them is the same reason he wouldn't want you near me."

She pulled away enough to look up at him with tear-filled eyes, there were clear questions there, but she finally nodded and turned to Dr Cullen with a weak smile.

Carlisle smiled kindly at her. "Come, James, put her down here so I can look at her feet."

Following the doctor to the other side of the bed, James lowered Rach and would've left to allow the doctor do his thing if the girl hadn't grabbed his hand tightly. James stared down at their joined hands, confused and a little annoyed. If it wasn't for the fact that Jake was clearly worried for and close to this girl, James would've shaken her off already. As it was, his Alpha was close to a nervous breakdown, so he nodded to him that he'd stay here and keep an eye on this one, and the look of utter relief and gratitude Jake gave him made him certain he'd made the right decision.

Rach's whole body shook, her grip on his hand nearly painful as she visibly tried to keep from crying in pain as Dr Cullen examined her feet.

"They're not broken," Carlisle muttered after checking each one carefully, "but you've sustained some bad injuries. Sam's shaman says it's best if you shift so that—."

"Shift?" Rach asked in painful confusion.

Carlisle glanced up and met James' confused look with his own before he cleared his throat and turned to Rach. "Into a wolf."

Rach blinked. "Are you high?"
James froze. Could the girls not know? But the unconscious one had been about to shift! But would Rach even realize that if she was just desperate to keep the both of them above water? Hell, the stress of the crash could've triggered the twin's dormant genes and caused the shift for the first time!

"Didn't you see Seth helping free you guys?" James asked curiously.

Rach looked a little confused. "I blacked out a couple of times, if I'm being honest."

James tried to catch Jake's eyes, and when he realized his Alpha was too busy trying to make that phone call, he sought Seth out. "This is more your territory than mine."

"You look like you're doing just fine," Seth muttered darkly. "You've got the situation in hand."

Huh? What could possibly make any of this seem like he was in control here?

And then he noticed the way Seth's eyes darkened as they lingered on where Rach had James' hand gripped tightly like a vise. The young wolf clenched his hands tightly and a muscle ticked in his cheek.

He was close to a sulk.

*He's jealous,* James realized in shock.

The vampire looked between the werewolf holding his hand prisoner, and the werewolf glaring poisonous daggers at them.

Oh for crying out loud!

He motioned Seth to come closer in annoyance.

That muscle continued to tick in Seth's cheek, and the wolf looked incredibly defiant, yet he still did as told.

As soon as Seth was within reaching distance, James' free hand shot out and grabbed him by his wet shirt, yanking the surprised wolf up to him and kissing him. He could feel Seth's whole body freeze in shock, yet when James let go of Seth's shirt to wrap around the wolf's back, pulling him tightly against him, Seth let out a little sound that almost sounded catlike as he melted into James' touch.

Seth was now the one to grab James' shirt as he arched into his hold, molding against his body as he opened his mouth to the kiss, taking it deeper. He finally pulled away once he needed to breath, and beamed up at James while blushing.

"*Mint condition,*" Leah bemoaned somewhere to their right.

"*Real life yaoi,*" Rach whispered in awe.

James glanced down at her to see her eyes wide, her lips parted, and a blush on her cheeks.

"Oh god, not another one," Edward whispered in horror. "One was enough. She must *never* meet Jessica!"

"Edward, now is *not* the time," Jake muttered. "If my sister is a yaoi fangirl I don't see how you have any right to complain given how many ideas you *gave* Jessica for her doujinshi based on us!"
"I didn't give——," Edward began.

James completely phased out their arguing as suddenly it fell into place. These girls smelt so smilier because they were Jacob's sisters! He'd thought Jacob had mention a sister before, he hadn't realized he had two - and they were twins!

And with active werewolf genes!

Noticing Garrett motioning with his head for him to join him, James failed to notice that this time Rach let him go without any fight. He escaped the house and slipped outside after his friend, who was waiting for him in the shadows. "What is it?"

Garrett looked around before leaning in closer. "I'm going to be very angry if you don't finally admit that Seth Imprinted on you." He raised an eyebrow. "It's not that I haven't figured it out already - but, c'mon Jaime, it's so obvious! And I thought we were friends! Why hide——?"

"I just figured it out like an hour ago," James admitted quickly, realizing this really was annoying Garrett.

Garrett blinked. "You lie." And then he blinked again. "You don't." He then laughed, all annoyance gone. "How did you not realize it sooner?"

"I have no idea, it's not something I'm proud of," James admitted with a sigh as he ran his fingers through his hair.

"Well, I'm jealous of you, Seth's a cutie," Garrett congratulated him with a grin and a hardy pat on the back. "You couldn't do better. He could. But not you."

James rolled his eyes. "Why are we friends again?"

"Because you love me?" Garrett laughed, clapping James' back a couple more times. "You're mated to Sethie-poo and Riley's got the big bad growly one." He sighed. "Now all that's left is for little ole me to find a pretty guy or girl to make lucky."

"You actually want to Imprint, don't you?" James realized in shock.

Garrett looked surprising serious all of a sudden. "Traveling with Riley these last couple of months has made me realize just how lonely I've been, Jaime. The idea of having someone as an eternal partner isn't something I've ever scoffed at, but I just hadn't realized how tempting the idea is until now." He then grinned, looking like his old self again. "And anyway, how kinky would it be, getting with a werewolf?"

"I should've known this was a kink you hadn't realized you had till now," James bemoaned.

Garrett merely grinned. "What can I say? They look so fluffy."

"You're disgusting," Riley muttered as he joined them in a blink of an eye, standing between the two of them.

"You must've felt them while we were fighting!" Garrett defended himself immediately. "It doesn't look it, but their fur is soft."

"Of all the——," Riley began.

A voice cleared behind them.
All three turned to see Sam Uley standing behind them, stepping off of the last step leading up to the house. "Can I speak to you?"

Garrett snickered and elbowed Riley closer. "Go on, Rye-Rye, don't be shy."

"I swear—-," Riley growled at him.

"No." Sam shook his head as he clasped his hands in front of him, his gaze squarely on Garrett. "I meant you."

Riley burst out laughing.

James’ lips parted.

Garrett blinked, eyes wide. "Well shit."

…

**TBC**
Chapter 15

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…

Jasper knew that his wife was on edge, what with Bella still in transition, the Volturi attack on the way, and the hazy vision she’d received which promised that when the Volturi left they would’ve done so having destroyed the Olympic Coven. Yes. He knew she was on edge, and yet there was something more to this, something else she wasn’t sharing with him, was shouldering alone.

The feeling of despair and confusion poured from her pores in a sharp, pungent scent. He’d tried getting her to speak to him, had tried influencing her mood, and it’d helped somewhat, but she was resisting any form of help he tried to offer. That worried him more than anything.

“You need to give her a little space,” Carlisle offered his fatherly advice when he’d come to check in on Bella, and had found Jasper there alone, a worried expression on his face. He’d easily gotten the issue out of Jasper, and after listening, he’s placed his hand on Jasper’s shoulder and imparted his wisdom. “Alice’s power is a very big burden, one that weighs heavily on her.”

“I know that, it’s why I want to be there to help her shoulder it,” Jasper interrupted in frustration. “She’s always allowed me to do so until now, so why won’t she?”

“Maybe you taking care of Bella gives her the peace of mind she needs to try and sort out what she’s been seeing.” He ran slender fingers through his blonde hair. “Now that the issue with the Rez Pack has been resolved there’s one less thing for her to worry about, concentrate on.” He smiled tiredly. “You know better than anyone, Jasper, that sometimes Alice just needs to be alone to sort through her visions and what they mean.”

“She’s so sure the Volturi are going to destroy our family,” Jasper whispered worriedly.

“I won’t let anyone harm this family, Jasper,” Carlisle swore as his grip tightened on Jasper’s shoulder. “I promise you this.”

Jasper sighed, rested his hand on the one on his shoulder, and hoped that whatever Alice saw changed, and soon.

…

“What are you doing?” Leah asked in confusion as she watched Seth stuffing two pillows and a blanket into a duffel bag he’d found in one of the rooms.

“James isn’t going to come down for the rest of the night, he’ll want to stay up there where he can get a whiff of the Volturi the second they come into range,” Seth responded without even looking up. “I’m going to keep him company.”

“Just because he stays up there in the cold doesn’t mean you have to,” Leah reminded her brother. “He’s your Imprintee, not your master. You don’t have to do everything he says.”

“You think he told me to do this?” Seth snorted. “Please, you obviously don’t know him. Right now he’s using that time to try and figure things out, and since he doesn’t sleep he’ll spend the whole time trying to come up with reasons why he’s not good enough for me, and crap like that. I’m not going to give him the opportunity to think too much about this when it’s all so simple. He’s
stuck with me for the rest of our lives so he’ll just have to get used to it.”

Leah opened her mouth, closed it, and then cleared her throat. “Were you gay before meeting him? I have no problem with you being gay, obviously, I mean, Chelsea, I’m just wondering whether I didn’t notice something and you were going through that alone.” She’d have really been a shitty sister if that was the case.

“I don’t think I really had a ‘deal’ before him,” Seth admitted after a moment’s silence. “I thought girls were pretty but I never really felt much for them, but I wasn’t lusting after guys either.” He shrugged. “But with James? It was instant, but I didn’t understand what it was for a long time because I hadn’t actually felt it before.”

Leah nodded before she stopped, and sighed. “He didn’t, you know, take advantage of you any time during the trip, right? I mean, I know you’re Imprintees, but you’re really innocent and I know you’ll be angry I asked this - but I want to make sure he didn’t ever force himself or use the Imprint to make you do anything before you were a hundred per cent ready or comfortable to do it.”

Seth finished filling the duffel bag, swung the strap over his shoulder, and turned to his sister with a grin. “Leah, if anyone came on a bit strong, it was me.”

Leah just couldn’t see it. He was her innocent, sweet, little brother.

And yet, as Seth patted her shoulder on the way out of the room, the smirk on his face was one she’d never seen before.

Damn it. Her little, baby, brother had grown up.

…

Rachel Black was a werewolf.

The college girl just stared at her reflection as she tried to digest that fact. She’d thought Carlisle Cullen insane when he’d told her to shift - but then Jake had taken her aside and told her he was a werewolf and his boyfriend a vampire - and then she’d thought Jake was either on drugs, or a part of some weird cult.

And then her little brother had turned in front of her.

Rachel Black was a werewolf.

Rebecca too, which was probably the only reason she was still alive.

That was terrifying. How could the twins have been something for all their lives without having ever known? Sure, according to Jake girls didn’t shift - Leah Clearwater was supposedly the only girl to have ever shifted - but still. This was in their genes! Even if they had never shifted if they’d had sons they would’ve! The girls should’ve been told!

Don’t get angry, this all happened because Rebecca couldn’t keep her temper under control!

Rachel’s twin had appeared at her dorm, completely soaked and terrified, not telling Rachel anything except that they had to go back to the Rez - now. She’d tried explaining things to Rachel during the drive but it had all been very confusing - and no one answering Rebecca’s many constant, urgent calls - had made her temper fly - as did Rachel not quite getting what her twin had tried to tell her.
Next thing she knew, Rebecca had done - something - and then Rachel had lost control of the truck and - well - they would’ve died if Jake’s hot Beta and Seth Clearwater hadn’t yanked them out of the river. And yet that wasn’t the end of her weird night.

*Vampires exist, and my brother’s boinking one.*

That was a hard one as well. Not the gay part, but the vampire one - and apparently they *sparkled.* Bram Stoker would be rolling in his grave if he’d realized that he’d left out such an important part of that mythos.

“He was actually a friend of a vegetarian coven,” a surprising voice declared as Edward Cullen appeared by her side. “He wrote all that nonsense to throw people’s scent off of them.”

Rachel’s eyes widened as she stared at the cute guy. “Vampires can read minds?”

“Just me,” he responded sheepishly. “Some vampires have special abilities, mind-reading is mine.” He cleared his throat. “It’s a pain in the butt. Most people merely are thinking about sex or money.” He rubbed his hands over his skinny jeans. “I’ve never officially met anyone in Jake’s actual biological family, I’m Edward Cullen, your brother’s mate.” He cleared his throat. “I know vampires and werewolves don’t usually get along, but I love your brother.”

Rachel took a moment to look the vampire up and down. Her father had warned her and her sister to stay away from the Cullens but had never said why, so to be honest the twins had wondered whether the ‘family’ were some weird sort of sex, Manson-esque cult. Yet instead of that, they were vampires, and one of them was totally getting boinked by her brother. At least he was seriously cute, although she’d have to help him with his style. No brother-in-law of hers would wear that much hair gel.

Decision made, Rachel put her hand in his and shook Edward Cullen’s hand. “I have access to Jacob’s embarrassing baby pictures.”

Edward’s smile grew as his grip tightened on hers. “I think you’re my new favorite person.”

Rachel returned his smile before sighing. “Look, I don’t pretend to understand all of this, or any of it if I am being truthful, but my father was wrong for cutting Jake off for having a boyfriend, or a vampire lover - I’m honestly not sure which it is. How I see it, and I know Becs will feel the same - if you’re Jacob’s mate there’s nothing to argue about.” She pursed lips. “What I *do* want to know more about is this vampire royalty WWE smackdown happening tomorrow. Jake was really cagey, not wanting me anywhere near it or to know anything since ‘it wasn’t safe.’” She planted her hands on her hips. “So how about you be a good mate and keep me from pummeling my infuriating little brother by telling me what exactly is going on here? What’s happening tomorrow and why?”

Edward sighed, looked around, and then returned his gaze to her and did just that.

…

Sam and Garrett had gone for a walk in the woods, and James had made his way back up to the roof, watching them until they disappeared from sight. Honestly, James had no idea how to feel about any of this. While he was glad that his fledgling wasn’t the one that Sam had imprinted on, he had mixed feelings about poor Garrett getting the wolf. Sure, his friend was a pain in the ass most of the time, but James knew Garrett was a loyal friend, and wouldn’t ever really wish anything bad on him, and Sam was *the worse.*

What exactly did this mean? Would Sam leave when Garrett took off? Would Garrett try life
staying in one place? Would this work? Would Garrett make Sam less sucky or would Sam changed Garrett? James had very few people he knew he could trust unconditionally, and while Garrett was a total idiot most of the time, James had never doubted him or his loyalty. Even when he’d doubted Riley, James had never doubted Garrett. The idea of losing that to Sam was—-.

“What are you growling about?”

James peered over his shoulder, eyebrow raising in surprise and amusement when he noticed that not only had Seth joined him once more, but he was lugging a duffel bag filled with… something… inside of it. “Was I growling?”

Seth nodded, looking amused as well as he sat down next to him. “It was real guttural too.” Opening the duffel bag’s drawstrings, Seth yanked out two pillows, stuffing one behind James’ back before putting the other behind his own so they were ridiculously comfortable on the rooftop. “So what were you growling about?”

“Sam and Garrett,” James admitted, intrigued when Seth yanked out a blanket and proceeded to cover them with it. Neither of them would be cold really, vampires didn’t feel the cold, and Seth was like a water heater always burning hot, but as Seth shuffled closer and leaned his head against James’ arm, the vampire realized this was more ‘setting the mood’ than anything else.

Intrigued and slightly fascinated by this side of Seth, James found himself shifting and wrapping an arm around Seth’s arm, allowing the wolf to cuddle into him, finding a comfortable position for the both of them as they stared out in the surrounding forest.

“What would happen to Garrett if I killed his Imprinter?” James wanted to know, only half serious in the question.

Seth let out a little scoff. “I know you don’t like him, but Sam isn’t as bad as you seem to think he is.”

“Bullshit,” James declared immediately. “He treated you like shit while he was your Alpha. He got your cousin killed. And then, on top of everything, he led an attack which could’ve killed you.”

There was a pause, and then he felt Seth smile against his shirt.

Sighing, James stared out into the darkness surrounding them. “Maybe if I do it before they actually get to know each other—-.” He grunted when Seth slapped his stomach, and then frowned, petulant. “I refuse to have Sam as a best-friend-in-law!”

“I’d be saving Garrett in the long run,” James reassured Seth, only to grunt when Seth slapped his stomach, again, harder. “Fine.” He glanced down at the top of Seth’s head, watching the younger male shifting until he found a more comfortable position. “You really planning on sleeping?”

“Not everyone lives eternally awake,” Seth muttered, sounding a little jealous of that. “You’re not going to want to go downstairs because there are too many people, and since someone has to make sure you don’t do something stupid…”

James scoffed, yet couldn’t help the smile on his face. Honestly, what the hell was going on here? Had anyone else done something like this James would’ve not only felt boxed in, but he’d be almost itchy with the desire to get away! And yet, with Seth’s breathing growing deeper, his body growing heavier with each breath, James merely shifted enough to make Seth more comfortable as
the wolf fell asleep.

Was this what Imprinting did to you? Did it change you so fundamentally? Before Seth James would’ve never tolerated this kind of clinginess, and yet it not only didn’t bother him, but felt right. And that was scary as fuck. Had anyone told the version of him before he’d met Jacob that this would be happening in his future he’d had burst out laughing, just the idea would’ve been ridiculous, unthinkable, and yet here he was.

He didn’t know how long he sat there, listening to Seth’s breathing and keeping an eye on the surrounding forest. Nothing but Garrett’s footsteps returning could be heard in the distance. Garrett was coming back alone, and James had no idea if that was a good thing or not. Hopefully Garrett had murdered Sam and buried him out in the forest, but he honestly doubted that had happened. Damn it.

Finally Garrett appeared and noticed James immediately, using the trees closest to the cabin to jump back and forth, higher each time, and finally land on the rooftop. He looked pensive, which was really odd on Garrett’s usually always grinning face. The vampire eyed James and Seth, head tilted to the side, before he sighed and came to sit down across from them.

When he spoke, his voice was low, clearly trying not to disturb Seth’s sleep. “He’s so cute.”

James raised an eyebrow. “I’m the only one allowed to call him that.”

Garrett rolled his eyes and shifted to lean forwards, elbows on his knees. “So, I think we both know what Sam told me out there in the creepy forest. Dude has no sense for setting the mood.”

James made a face. “I was kind of hoping we were wrong, that he just wanted to know where you got your jacket.”

“Yeah… that wasn’t it.” Garrett made a face. “It’s complicated, Emily just died, and there’s this war, and he only believed the whole vampire and werewolf imprinting because of it happening to him. I think a part of him still doesn’t want to believe it - the part that feels guilty because of what he did to Emily probably.”

Even though he wasn’t exactly the type to talk relationships, James figured he owed it to Garrett to at least listen while his friend visibly tried to work the situation out himself.

“Also, on my part, he’s not exactly adorable.” Garrett frowned at that. “You know my type. I like guys like Seth. Even Riley is too uncute for me.”

“So while you were traveling together you never——?”

“With Riley?” Garrett brought a hand to his chest, looking incredibly scandalized at the very thought. “He’s a pain in the ass! Definitely kills any sense of attraction his face and body might bring out in me. It’d be like screwing a gnat while it chews painfully on my balls. The dude’s as fuckable as a botfly.”

Trying to figure out the logistics of that imagery, James tilted his head before shaking it, deciding to let it go. “Want me to kill Sam for you?”

Garrett snorted, clearly amused with the offer. “No.”

James flinched. “Oh god, you’re going to give him a chance, aren’t you?”

Garrett shrugged. “I’m curious to see how this plays out.” He then grinned and leaned back.
“There’s always the whole Volturi thing tomorrow, we might all die, and then I won’t have to worry about this whole thing.” His gaze shifted onto Seth. “So… you two are looking pretty cozy all of a sudden.” He grinned teasingly. “Dish.”

Rolling his eyes, James shook his head. “Make yourself useful and help keep an eye on our surroundings.”

“Stingy,” Garrett snickered before getting up and jumping back down, using the trees to help soften his landing.

James sighed, glanced down at Seth, and then cleared his throat as he looked away. “Hey Jake.”

There was a little chuckle and then Jake finished coming up the same way Seth had. His Alpha paused a second as he noticed Seth and James, and then shook his head and came to sit down where Garrett had been seconds before.

“I was trying to give you and your friend some privacy.”

“I know.” James nodded.

Jake cleared his throat. “So. You and Seth.”

Oh wow. This was awkward. Even more awkward than he’d thought it would be! Here he was, with his Alpha, and honestly one of the most important people in his life - and then he was also here with Seth, who was his Imprinter and, well, damn it. He’d thought it awkward when he’d given Jake his necklace back, but this was so much worse.

“I only just realized it was Imprinting,” James admitted with a look towards Seth. “We’re trying to figure things out.”

“Seth’s young,” Jake reminded him. “But once we shift we’re considered men in our tribe.” He ran a hand through his short hair. “And once we Imprint - James - I need you to understand just how important this is - how…” He cleared his throat. “If anything happens to you, Seth isn’t going to want to live anymore. You’re basically the reason he lives now. I know this mightn’t be what you were expecting, or maybe even want, but you need to understand just how grave this could be.”

“I know I’m not a wolf, so I’ll never be able to fully understand what it’s like to Imprint on someone,” James admitted, “but I’m not taking this lightly.” He chuckled darkly. “Seth wouldn’t let me even if I wanted to, he’s surprisingly determined once he’s put his mind to something.”

Jake’s lips twitched. “He sounds like Edward.”

James scoffed immediately. “Dude. Take that back! He is so not Cullen! He’s, you know, no offense or anything, but Seth’s like a hundred per cent better.”

Jake bit his bottom lip. “I disagree, but that’s an Imprinter for you. Your Imprintee is the best person in the whole world to you.”

“Seth would never leave me the way Edward left you.” And then James not only realized just how disrespectful that was to his Alpha… but the fact that that was a hundred per cent true. Seth wouldn’t leave him. He wouldn’t. Not for anything. Seth had basically told him it straight to his face earlier. James was stuck with Seth… and that didn’t bother him.

A sigh escaped Jake’s lips as he leaned back on his elbows. “I haven’t forgiven Edward for that yet, not fully.”
“You should make him suffer,” James advised.

Chuckling, Jake shook his head.

James sighed, not sure why in the world he was doing this, saying this. “I planned on stealing you from him, you know. I really had feelings for you.”

Surprise widened Jake’s eyes.

“Yeah.” Honestly, why was he telling Jacob this? It was better to just let this embarrassing failure die, and yet… “I don’t know a lot about what’s going on now, with the Imprinting and everything, but Seth’s the only reason I can be around you guys and not want to kill Edfart and myself.” He ran his fingers softly over Seth’s hair. “Don’t get me wrong, I still don’t like your boyfriend, probably never will, but I don’t want to kill him anymore for taking away someone I wanted with all my being and changed myself so much for.” He chuckled darkly, thinking back to what he’d been like before Edward had come and destroyed any hope he’d had of being with his Alpha. “I’ll admit a bit of it has to do with not feeling good enough, but I’m beginning to get the pull an Imprint creates in you.”

“I don’t know if I should say this or not,” Jake admitted oddly after a moment’s silence, “but I need you to understand, and know, that you’re not only important to me, but to my pack. You’re my beta, James. That means I depend on you, my pack wouldn’t be the same without you.” He inhaled deeply. “If it wasn’t for you both of my sisters would be dead - I’d love you even if only for that.”

James nodded, awaiting his Alpha’s attempt to let him down softly.

“It doesn’t matter now because Seth and Ed——,” he hesitated. “But had Ed not come back… I’m really oblivious about a lot, especially when it comes to romance, but I’m not going to lie and say I wasn’t attracted to you.”

It was surprising to hear Jake admit that. The attraction itself wasn’t surprising, James had known, given time, he and Jake would’ve drifted together. He’d been expecting it. Eagerly awaiting the time his Alpha would realize James was the one there for him, that betahood was just the very least James could, and wanted, to offer him. But the fact that Jake would admit to it, out loud, especially after Edward had come back and they’d cemented their bond - was really the shocker. To be honest, James kind of respected him way more now, and he’d already respected Jake more than he did anyone else.

“I know,” James admitted, not sure why it meant so much that Jake had actually said that. “I also know I was the alternate Imprintee for the Original Wolf’s essence. But I also know you had a choice, and you chose Edward, and I’ve been told you chose him with all your heart—without a hint of doubt.” That really stung his pride, but it was probably because Edward was really stupid, and annoying, and not as attractive as him. Honestly, all Cullen had going for him was that weird hair of his. “I’m just going to say this once: I would’ve been a way better Imprint than Edward. I’m hotter too. Hell, I’m the best Imprintee ever.”

Jake looked amused, as always, whenever James let his ego show. “I’m sure Seth agrees.”

James sighed and looked down at the sleeping wolf once more. “I think I’m a bit over my head with this one.”

“How so?” Jake asked curiously.

Was there really a need to say anything? He didn’t think so. Not when Seth was sleeping against
him while wrapped up in the blanket. Did Jake really think James was the type of guy to tolerate this sort of stuff? If so, he was completely wrong. This was so not James, or his style, and yet…

“He really deserves better than me.”

The smile on his Alpha’s face was disgusting. “Didn’t you just finish telling me about how great of an Imprintee you are?”

“Shut up,” James muttered before sighing and leaning his head back against the pillow Seth had brought for him. “I know what a good Imprintee I would be for you, I’m a perfect Imprintee for you, but I’m not sure what a good Imprintee for him would be.”

Head tilted to the side, Jake eyed him curiously. “If you weren’t perfect for him as you are, you wouldn’t be his Imprintee.” He seemed assured in his logic. “I see why you’d be a perfect Imprintee for me, you’re my beta, my second, the person I’ll depend on for most things in the pack - having you be my partner in life as well would make sense.” Those brown eyes danced over James and Seth before his lips twitched in amusement. “But I can also see how Seth is the perfect Imprinter for you.”

James didn’t want to show just how intrigued he was to hear this, so he merely asked nonchalantly. “How so?”

“Well, I haven’t really seen much of you two together, but I’ve known Seth for years, and I know you.” Jake went silent for a moment, as if gathering his thoughts before continuing. “Seth has always been a good kid, you know? He’s sweet, considerate, mannered, and manages to make friends with everyone no matter how unlikable the person might seem to be.”

“Jake, it sounds like you’re about to insult me via contrast,” James only half joked.

Holding his hand up to stop James, Jake continued. “Like you, he’s really close to his sister, although unlike you he’s been trying to find his own footing, away from her protectiveness, for a while now. It’s half of the reason I sent him with you, as well as the fact that I knew you’d keep you from doing something stupid and getting yourself killed.”

That was kind of sweet. James had been annoyed by Seth’s inclusion, and then by the fact that Jake had just sent Seth on what could’ve been a suicidal mission, but hearing his Alpha’s reasoning made it all make sense. And in its own way, Jake had gotten what he’d hoped - James had changed his gameplay - hadn’t taken the risks he would’ve if he’d been alone - in order to keep Seth as safe as he could.

Hell, he’d almost called off the whole thing right before the actual fight, all out of a fear of putting Seth in danger!

“So what, I was the Grinch and he was Cindy Lou?” James raised an eyebrow, hating himself a little for remembering the damned movie Bellsy had forced them to watch once.
Laughter escaped Jake’s lips as he most probably remembered the night the pack watched the movie, as well as James’ and Victoria’s endless bitching about it. He then froze, hand over his mouth, clearly afraid that he might’ve woken Seth up, before finally relaxing when he realized Seth was still very much asleep.

Despite that, when Jake spoke again, his voice was much lower. “Look at how the two of you were with my sisters. You actually let Rach hang on like that, when I know you wanted nothing more than to brush her off. Instead, you were there for her. Seth on the other hand? The Seth I know would’ve never acted so obviously possessive and, well, jealous - selfish when it comes to someone else.”

A part of him was ridiculously proud of that. “So you’re saying he made me nicer and I made him meaner.”

“Kind of, but that’s not it exactly, it’s actually really obvious in my mind but when I try and put it to words it jumbles up,” Jake bemoaned before he let out a deep breath and met James’ gaze with his own. “I want you to know that you’re my beta, I’m here for you, and I only want the best for you. If Bella were here she’d be telling you the same things as me - you deserve to be happy. If Seth Imprinted on you it means he’s what will make you happiest.”

Uncomfortable with these heart to hearts, James cleared his throat. “Have you heard from Alice and Jasper on how Bella’s doing?”

Able to read James like only an Alpha could, Jake allowed him to change the subject. “Jasper keeps sending me updates. He said the venom’s still working its way through her body.”

“Three days is, what, tomorrow?” James made a face at the memory of his own turning. It hadn’t been an easy one to say the least, at least Bella wasn’t alone. Then again, he hadn’t been alone. “Did I ever tell you about the wolf that watched over me during my turning?” He didn’t let Jake answer. “For a while I figured it was a sign that you and I were meant to be together.”

Jake kept silent, eyeing his beta curiously.

James exhaled deeply. “Maybe it was just the spirit of the Original Wolf watching over me, maybe it’s why I felt so connected to you.” He tilted his head to the side. “I was told that I met you, that I felt what I did for you, to prepare me for what I am supposed to do, who I am supposed to be, and I guess, who I’m supposed to be with.” He let out a dark chuckle as he softly ran his fingers over Seth’s hair. “If I hadn’t felt what I did for you, I never would’ve been able to accept the feelings I have for——.” James froze, eyes wide. What the hell had he been about to say?!?!

As always, Jake read him, and the smile on his Alpha’s face was brilliant as he got up and clapped James on the shoulder. “Try and rest, we’ve got a big day tomorrow.”

No answer escaped James’ lips as he was left alone with a sleeping Seth. What had he been about to say to Jake? *I would never have been able to accept the feelings I have?* He’d been talking without thinking - so what did that mean? Did that mean that, even if only subconsciously, he’d not only accepted the fact that Seth had Imprinted on him - but had feelings for the wolf as well? He —he knew he’d grown to care for Seth - and *fucking hell* - he wanted him - but this was *different*. Reaching out, he untied the leather strap holding Seth’s hair in a loose ponytail, and when it fell away, his hair falling around like black silk, James found himself fingers-deep in the wave of black. Seth’s scent seemed thicker somehow, and James raised a handful of that soft black to his nose, taking in a deep breath of it.
Golden light sparked around his fingertips, visibly encircling Seth’s hair.

James removed his hand as if burnt, but when he looked at his hand the golden light was gone. Confusion filled him as he reached his hand out to Seth once more, and the second he touched the wolf the golden light, that glow, returned, covering his hand and bleeding into Seth.

“Seth.” His voice was soft as he pulled his hand away. “Seth, wake up.”

Seth complained slightly before yawning as he sat up, his hair falling in his face, forcing him to brush it away, revealing his tired eyes. “What?”

Instead of answering, James placed his hand on the wolf’s arm, letting the instant golden glow speak for itself.

Immediately all sleep left Seth’s eyes as he sat up straighter. “What is that?”

“I don’t know,” James admitted as he let his hand fall, revealing how the glow stopped the second he did. “It only seems to happen when I touch you.”

Seth’s brown eyes rose to James in surprise at that, and then lowered to James’ hand. Licking his lips, Seth shifted a little closer and reached out to slide his fingers through James’, both vampire and werewolf watching as the glow sparked fiercer than ever from their touching palms like a ball of living, golden life which quickly covered their hands and entwined its way up their arms, an intricate cord of gold which slowly enwrapped Seth and James.

“Does it hurt?” James asked softly, watching the way the light continued its dual entwining of their bodies.

“No, does it hurt you?” Seth sounded worried.

“No.” James shook his head, although it was tingling.

“What is this?” Seth asked softly as he observed the light encircling them. “And why is it happening now? What’s different?”

James froze, eyes wide. It couldn’t be! Right? But what if that was what was happening? What if - was if this was something to do with the Imprint? What if - what if it was happening because James had finally realized—–?

Surging forwards, James cupped Seth’s face with his free hand and kissed him, swallowing Seth’s gulp of surprise and confusion. Yet, in almost seconds, that confusion seemed to melt away from Seth as his scent got deeper, muskier, and the wolf’s free hand not only found James’ shirt but yanked him closer to him with it while deepening the kiss.

Even as James’ eyes closed, even as he let go of Seth’s hand to urge the wolf up onto his lap, James could feel the golden light still surrounding them, clinging to them, and, oddly enough, binding them together.

Seth slipped onto James’ lap, his hands losing themselves in James’ hair as his hips moved. He swallowed James’ groan and sobbed one of his own when the vampire grabbed him by the hips, pressing him down hard so James’ suddenly desperate cock rubbed his ass.

While every logical part of James’ brain screamed that this was not the time to do this, especially with Leah Clearwater within hearing distance, every instinct in his body wanted him to tear away the material between him and his Imprinter and bury himself inside of Seth’s body.
He nearly lost it when Seth began frantically undoing his belt and buttons.

James grabbed Seth’s hands to stop him. “Your sister’s downstairs.”

“And?” Seth asked despite the blush forming on his face.

The vampire removed Seth’s hands from his belt and buckle, and when Seth opened his mouth to no doubt complain, James kissed him, chasing away each complaint with his tongue. When he finally pulled away, he stared into Seth’s flushed face, and the words just came out. “Let’s do this.”

Seth grinned eagerly, and his hands went to the belt once more.

Once more, James stopped him.

“But—-,” Seth complained.

“No, I didn’t mean *this,*” James explained awkwardly as he caught Seth’s confused gaze with his own embarrassed one. “I mean *this.* Let’s do *this.*”

Seth went still, his eyes wide, his heart racing, his voice surprisingly soft when he asked: “*This* this?”

“Yeah.” James nodded as he reached up to cup Seth’s face. “Honestly, I think you’re getting the crap end of the stick, but the more I think about it or talk about it, the more I realize that although I have no idea what I’m doing or how this will end up going - I want you.” He cleared his throat. “I not only *want* you, but I like you, I really like Seth.”

Seth’s cheeks warmed hotter and hotter as he pressed his face into James’ palm. “I really like you too.”

James couldn’t keep the grin off of his face. “So, after we deal with the Volturi, and we don’t have to worry about any of that anymore…” he cleared his throat. “How about we move your things into my room?” He hurried to quickly explain when Seth went absolutely red. “Don’t feel pressured or anything, we can take as long as you need before we—-.”

Seth surged forwards and kissed him, deeply, before whispering against his lips: “No take backs.”

James chuckled against those lips, all nervousness gone as he kissed Seth harder, and harder, battling his desire to take the wolf right then and there, but able to do so knowing that they didn’t just have tonight… Seth was his Imprinter… They had forever.

Warmth like nothing James had ever before filled his body like a damn fading away to normality, and when he felt Seth shiver he opened his eyes to question if the wolf was okay - only to realize the glow was absolutely gone now. It’d been there mere seconds ago, but not anymore. If Seth noticed he didn’t seem to care as he smiled down so happily at James it was unfairly adorable.

James opened his mouth to tell him that, when suddenly millions of different scents hit him at once like a shot to the face. He let out an unmanly bawl as he covered his nose and leaned his forehead against Seth’s chest, trying to calm himself, trying to bat those scents away, but they were endless and assailing.

“James?” Seth sounded terrified. “James, what’s wrong?” He wrapped his arms around James’ body, surrounding him in his scent, and somehow, somehow, James was better almost instantly. “What can I do? *James*?”
The vampire let out a relieved breath, and was about to let Seth know that whatever it was had passed - when suddenly horror filled him and he pushed away from Seth. “Go find Jake.”

“Why? What’s wrong?” Seth wanted to know, worried as he hurriedly stood up along with the vampire.

“The Volturi,” James responded as he looked around the forest. “They’re here. It’s faint, almost as if their scents are being masked, but they’re here. And close, very close.”

Seth’s eyes widened and in a second he was rushing down to warn everyone in the house.

James walked to the edge of the roof, stared out into the darkness, and took a whiff.

His perception of the world, and his ability, changed forever in that second.

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TBC
Chapter 16

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The Volturi were here.

Victoria had told James how Jake and Edward’s Imprinting had enhanced Edward’s ability, and had even admitted that she thought it was brought on by an emotional connection more than a physical one - and that was the only explanation he had for what had happened to his ability to track. James had been good before, hell, he’d been great, but what was happening with his ability now surprised even him.

The Volturi were definitely masking their presence via someone with an ability, and because of that James shouldn’t have been able to know they were drawing nearer, but he could. There were hundreds of scents, all undead, all on the outskirts of Forks and drawing closer. He could almost make out vague images, as well as track approximately where they were. There were vampires he’d smelt before, who he knew, and those he could picture as if their image was projected holographically above the treetops.

Jake had sent word to Sam, but the wolf hadn’t answered his phone, so they might be on their own wolf-wise. The Cullens had been called, warned.

As the Volturi were headed towards a large meadow on the mountainside of Forks, a place Jake and Edward apparently knew very well, the Black Pack were going to meet them there and stop them before they could get any closer to the people of Forks.

“You’re not going to fight to go with us?” Jake asked his sister in surprise.

Rachel shook her head from where she sat next to Rebecca, who was still asleep but looking much better than she had the night before. “Go do what you have to do.”

Jake shot her a relieved smile as he hugged her.

James noticed the look Edward shot Rachel, obviously reading something in her mind that made him pause.

Jane was arguing with Colin about his plan to join the other wolves, while Alec just looked on in amusement, clearly enjoying the fact that she made someone else’s life miserable as well.

Seth was silent, yet remained close to James. The wolves were all wearing large shirts with leggings underneath, which looked amusing yet were to give them the ability to shift rapidly without having to take their clothes off, the ones they were wearing would give easily while they were turning.

As they left and began making their way towards the meadow where they planned on cutting the Volturi off, James couldn’t help but wonder whether they were idiots for allowing the Volturi amongst them to join. Sure, Chelsea seemed utterly enamored with the terrifying Leah for some reason, but Jane and Alec were the Volturi’s two biggest weapons, and they were allowing them to be amongst them seemingly without a second’s thought. Who was to say that Jane Imprinting on Colin was enough to keep her from killing them all outright via headache? Or her brother numbing them enough to make their deaths easy peasy?
He could see the same questions in Victoria’s gaze as their eyes met, and when Victoria nodded and moved to stand a little closer to Jake, James relaxed. His sister had a way of not only feeling danger before it hit her - but escaping it - so should the Volturi in their midst turn on them she’d be the best chance his Alpha had. Riley noticed the looks and then caught James’ gaze, motioning discreetly with his head towards Jane and Alec before nodding towards Garrett.

Proud that his fledgling was not only understanding the tension, yet figuring out a way to best handle it, James nodded discreetly, watching as Riley and Garrett fell behind the rest before finally making their way behind Jane and Alec, ready to intervene rapidly.

With as many of his basis covered as possible, James found his arm encircling Seth’s shoulders, hanging there languidly, yet the muscles in his arms were taut. While he knew that Seth could handle himself in a fight, he felt a surprisingly intense desire to protect, to make sure he had Seth in his gaze or in touching distance as long as he could. They weren’t going up against Laurent’s coven, they were going to meet with the Volturi, who no doubt weren’t coming here for anything good.

Seth leaned into James, arm around his waist, yet while he clearly enjoyed the attention the wolf was still very alert, especially as they finally made it to the meadow.

“I don’t smell anything,” Embry admitted from where he stood a little behind everyone else, taking in deep whiffs.

“Me neither,” Jake admitted from the front.

“They’re here,” James assured them, able to ‘see’ the scents all around them, hidden in the trees, cloaked by whatever was keeping them hidden from the others.

“They are,” Edward agreed as he looked around discreetly. “I can hear very faint thoughts, they don’t understand what we’re doing here or how we knew they’d be here since they only decided their route last night. They know Chelsea, Jane and Alec couldn’t have told us since they didn’t know.” Edward cleared his throat after a moment’s silence. “James is right, I think there’s someone with some sort of cloaking ability helping them.”

James could ‘see’ (which he guessed was almost similar to heat signatures in how it appeared) three of the strongest scents drawing to the forefront, making their way towards the edge of the trees. “Three are coming out, I think it’s the Unholy Trinity themselves.”

Everyone tensed, readied, and then the outline of three vampires could be seen emerging from the woods, slowly followed by a large gathering only James had been prepared for given he could see the scent markings, as well as some of the vampires themselves.

Aro was, not surprisingly, at the forefront, with Caius and Marcus on either side, after which the Guard appeared, and then the others following after. Aro smelt confused and a little uneasy, yet his expression did not reveal that at all as he smiled and came closer, fingertips touching in front of his body. “Edward, your ability to read minds shocks even me. To think you heard us coming from so far away.”

Edward tilted his head and merely smiled at Aro.

A part of James was annoyed Edward was taking the credit for his discovery, yet the other got what the vampire was doing. It was best to keep James’ ability in secret just in case it could come in handy later. That was the only reason why he remained silent and eyed the vampire he’d heard so much about.
Edward snorted in amusement, clearly having heard and agreed with that.

“Welcome to Forks, Aro,” Edward finally spoke. “Although I do not believe your trip is all that friendly given your entourage.”

“One can never be too careful whilst traveling,” Aro declared smoothly while his scarlet eyes went from Chelsea (who was holding onto Leah’s hand) to Jane (who looked bored) and Alec (who was visibly amused and intrigued with everything). “I grew worried when my Guard did not return, especially Alec.” His scarlet gaze shifted onto the vampire in question. “You just disappeared.”

James blinked. Had Alec gone rogue?

“Yeah, sorry about that,” Alec replied almost sheepishly. “I had to make sure my sister was actually okay, and that Dimitri wasn’t lying to save his ass for having left her behind.” He motioned towards Jane and Colin, as well as Leah and Chelsea. “The stories are true, Aro. Vampires and werewolves are mating.” He reached over and clapped Colin on the shoulder. “This is my brother-in-matehood, Colin Littlesea.”

Caius’ eyes widened in horror as he moved closer. “Impossible!” He looked both scandalized and disgusted. “Werewolves and vampires are mortal enemies! They cannot be—-!”

Alec yanked down Colin’s shirt’s neck to reveal Jane’s teethmarks. “It can be.”

Caius took two steps back, as if the sight utterly terrified him.

Marcus tilted his head, an odd expression on his face as he looked around, as if trying to find someone in particular.

“Fascinating.” One could see the wheels turning in Aro’s head as he tapped his fingertips together, stalling for a second, before continuing. “We’ve also been told that our rules have been broken, and a human has been told of our kind.”

“Bella has been turned,” Edward answered immediately. “She is coming upon her third day since being injected with venom. She is not a threat to our kind, and as she has been turned, no laws have been broken.”

“How… fortuitous.” A muscle ticked in Aro’s cheek despite the smile on his face. “I have been told that my messengers were taken prisoner by the wolf packs in this town. That could be taken as an act of war.”

“We also saved their lives,” Jake finally spoke from where he’d been standing by Edward’s side, allowing his mate to take the reins of communication given the fact that he actually knew the threat personally. “They were also given food, and were not treated inhumanely, which is really more than could be asked given the fact that Chelsea’s task was to destabilize the bonds within both packs so that you could come in and destroy us easier.”

Aro’s gaze shifted to Chelsea, and the vampire instinctively leaned harder into Leah, who growled warningly at Aro, drawing his intrigued attention to her immediate defense of Chelsea.

The leader of the Volturi kept his gaze on the two females before asking curiously: “Marcus?”

Marcus eyed the group silently before letting out an intrigued: “Her loyalty is completely towards the female wolf, it is almost as if her ability has bonded the two together. And as the female wolf is
loyal to the one besides Edward Cullen - as is that of most of the group - Chelsea’s secondary
loyalties have shifted to him as well.”

“Most?” Aro asked immediately, clearly trying to zero in on what appeared to be a chink in the
armor.

“Those two.” Marcus pointed towards Riley and Garrett. “Their loyalties are to him,” he pointed
towards James. “But just like with Chelsea’s mate, that vampire’s loyalty is to the Alpha, so the
Alpha has their loyalty too.” He then tilted his head and eyed Seth. “I am assuming the wolf next to
him is his mate, as their bilateral bond is so strong it’s shining gold, like Edward Cullen and the
Alpha’s. I’ve never seen something that looks like that before. Chelsea and the female wolf, and
Jane and the young wolf, have a bilateral bond as well, but it isn’t gold and burning like the other
two - but that doesn’t mean it is something to underestimate.”

That muscle was practically jumping off of Aro’s cheek by now.

James and Seth shared a quick surprised look, remembering the golden light that’d appeared
earlier. Had that been a physical manifestation of the Imprint? Of, maybe, it being finalized and
binding them together?

“This is a pack, Aro,” Marcus decided after another moment’s silence. “The reports were true.” A
small, intrigued smile tilted the corner of his lips. “Somehow, nature and nurture have been bent,
shifted, evolved, and once mortal enemies are not only strange bedfellows, but joined by bonds of
family, much like covens would for vampires.”

Aro’s smile was genuine, his face otherwise didn’t reveal anything other than bemusement at this
news, but his scent was furious. Thing was, James doubted that their meeting all the requirements
would change anything. From what he’d heard, Aro was known to find excuses to decimate entire
covens because he coveted one or two of their members for his Guard. If Alice was right, and Aro
wanted her and Edward for his Guard, he would do his best to find a way to justify the actions he
so desperately wanted to do.

“Evolution?” Aro finally asked genially. “Or deformation? Not all the time are nature’s works
flawless. Sometimes there is a gruesome amalgamation that should never have existed.”

A growl escaped Brady’s lips that went ignored.

“As it is, you did not truly believe we could allow something so dangerous like this to remain
unchecked, did you?” Aro continued in that genial tone, as if he wasn’t threatening their very
existence. “We have to protect the future, and wellbeing, of vampires - and this unholy alliance
with werewolves can only end badly.”

“As long as vampires don’t kill the humans of Forks or the surrounding areas, your kind shouldn’t
have much to worry about,” Jake informed Aro with a snort. “Given the small area around Fork
and the Rez I don’t see exactly how big of a dent you seem to think our pack could actually make
in the numerous covens of vampires worldwide.”

“And what if other vampires see your example and try to enter into such abominable, unholy
unions with wolves? Not all your kind are as — reasonable. Most of your kind are monsters.” Aro
raised an eyebrow. “We have spent centuries fighting the Werewolf Wars, battling the monsters
who have always been our sworn enemies. Our kind will be slaughtered because they were led
astray by your foul example, mixing with werewolves and becoming——.”

“Shapeshifters,” Jane droned out in visible boredom.
Aro’s scarlet gaze shifted to her. “What was that?”

“Colin isn’t a werewolf, not exactly, werewolves can only shift during the three nights of the full moon, and when they do they do not retain their human minds, merely a ravenous hunger and desire to kill,” Jane recited with a sigh, looking so very unbothered by the danger but annoyed with the situation itself. “That isn’t Colin. He can shift whenever he wants, and he not only retains his human brain, but can control his urges. I think of them as shapeshifters because they seem to be an evolved form of the werewolf.” She raised an eyebrow. “I agree, vampires should go no where near werewolves. The shapeshifters, on the other hand, I see no reason not to associate with.”

Aro’s gaze went to Alec expectantly.

Alec shrugged. “I’ve killed tons of werewolves for you, and all that experience with them has led me to believe, a hundred per cent, that Colin’s a freaking puppydog. If I’m being totally honest with you, the one I’m worried for is him.”

“You should be,” Jane drawled.

Colin looked between them, looking increasingly more and more embarrassed.

“She already treats him like a chewtoy,” Alec reminded with a motion toward’s Colin’s neck.

“He tastes amazing,” Jane mumbled, as if that made it better.

“Can this conversation shift onto someone else, please?” Colin whined.

Alec motioned to Colin again, looking at Aro as if saying ‘See? She’s going to eat him alive!’

Aro’s mouth opened and closed, multiple times, clearly trying to figure out where to go from here, and obviously not having expected Alec to take the others’ side in this argument.

“Shapeshifters or not, they are wolves, and wolves have always been our enemies.” This was Caius, who swept back in, apparently having gotten his second wind after his utter scandal at the realization that vampires and werewolves were definitely getting it on on the regular. “This is wrong. It is unnatural. How could a vampire and a werewolf truly form a cohesive pack or coven with functioning equality for all?”

James wasn’t too surprised at Caius’ anger, it was well known that Caius had a great hatred towards werewolves. There was a persistent rumor that said hatred was actually a manifestation of his fear as he’d apparently nearly been killed by a werewolf once. Whether this had been during his time as a mortal, or after turning to a vampire, had never been specified, but it explained much.

“Ask the vampire over there,” Marcus surprised them all by announcing as he pointed to James once more. “Cullen might be the Alpha’s mate, but that one is the Beta, is the most important member of the pack other than the Alpha - and there are other wolves in this pack.”

Caius’ mouth opened and closed several times, similarly to Aro, yet he let out a little squeak for a second before he cleared his throat and leaned closer, eyeing James. “Marcus’ ability is to sense bonds and such, and while I do not have reason to doubt him, I want you to confirm what he has just said.”

Not having expected to be talked to directly, James stood straighter yet smirked. “Yeah, I’m Jake’s beta.”

Clear confusion scrunched Caius’ features. “And you trust a wolf as your leader? You’d…”
submit... to the will of an animal?"

Quil, Embry, Brady and Colin all snarled. Leah and Seth didn’t seem all that insulted for some reason.

“My Alpha is a wolf, and my Imp—my mate—is a wolf.” James hated himself for stumbling over ‘Imprinter’ but figured Caius would understand the vampire term better. “In many ways, I’ve become a better and stronger vampire since having met them.” He couldn’t help the smirk that tilted the corners of his lips. “So, other than the occasional bout of fleas, I have no issue with them.”

Seth elbowed him in the stomach while Jake sent him a ‘that was only one time’ look.

Caius was clearly incredibly disturbed by this yet he didn’t say anything else as he eyed the pack.

Aro, on the other hand, eyed them with open intrigue. He opened his mouth and said something to Edward and Jake, but James ignored it as he noticed one of the scents getting stronger very quickly. He took in a subtle whiff and followed the scent, turning slightly to the side to see a scent racing out of the woods to their left at them, but for some reason he couldn’t actually see the vampire the scent belonged to, just the scent signature. Not only that, but no one else was reacting to this charging vampire either.

It was only when he realized that Edward was looking around, very nervous yet confused, that he was sure his new ability wasn’t playing tricks on him. There was a vampire, most probably the one cloaking the Volturi’s scent this whole time, charging Jake and Edward - obviously with bad intent if Edward’s reactions were anything to go by.

Seconds before the cloaked vampire reached Edward, James let go of Seth and moved, racing towards the scent signature and—grabbing the surprised (and still invisible) vampire by the neck, lifting him up into the air. The vampire clawed at his hands and fought with the strength of a fledgling, yet James somehow managed to keep a good hold on him.

“What are you doing?” Garrett asked in confusion.

Remembering the others couldn’t see this guy, James began ramming his fist into the vampire’s stomach over and over again, until he finally let up on his ability and revealed himself. Whoever this guy was, he looked oddly familiar.

“Phoenix?” Jake asked in shock.

“He’s the one who was cloaking them,” Edward realized softly.

“How did you know he was there?” Aro whispered to James, scarlet eyes open wide, intrigue and fascination written all over his face. “Anyone and anything he cloaks is invisible and undetectable, even by our greatest tracker, so how did you—-?” And those eyes widened even further, if possible. He laughed as he turned to Edward, who was scowling at him. “You did not hear us, did you, Edward? He is the one who sensed us drawing near.” He turned to James with feverish intent. “What is your ability? Precognition?”

“No.” James threw Phoenix away so hard the fledgling left a slide mark in the meadow. “I’m just an ordinary tracker.”

“You are far from ordinary,” Aro whispered as he held a hand out towards him.

Oh no. Nope. He knew Aro’s power and he wasn’t going to let the guy touch him. There were a lot
of things he needed to keep hidden, and one he needed to keep safe: Murdoch. No way in hell
would he allow Aro to touch him and thus have the ability to go through each and every one of his
thoughts, gleaning the knowledge of so many things he kept secret for a reason.

“Sorry, but I’m not allowed to touch other guys unless I’m beating them up,” James raised his
hands up as he returned to Seth’s side. “This one is really jealous.”

“I thought a vampire who could cloak anything and anyone from detection fascinating, but think of
all the things one who can track even that which is cloaked could accomplish,” Aro said in an odd
tone as he zeroed in on James with a growing smile. “It would seem that this dreary little town has
a way of attracting vampires with such marvelous talents.”

Seth growled warningly at him.

James nearly growled at Aro himself.

Oh for crying out loud! Aro had just decided James was a collectable, just like he had with Edward
and Alice, hadn’t he? That would not do. The more Aro wanted James, the more Seth was in
danger, and James wasn’t having that one bit. “My ability wasn’t ever anything to scoff at, but it
sure as hell wasn’t ‘marvelous’ until Seth and I became mates,” he informed the vampire king in a
drawl. “Edward’s ability is stronger as well because of Jake.”

Aro’s smile dropped. “What do you mean?”

“You want powerful vampires as allies? Then you want vampires who have wolf mates,” James
responded easily, having dealt with many other power-hungry vampires in his long lifetime and
knowing how to handle them to a degree. “Something about having a wolf as our mate makes our
ability stronger, it doesn’t happen immediately, but it does happen. If anything should occur to our
mates our abilities would lessen, maybe even be completely destroyed, because our abilities are
now tied in with our matehood.”

He had no idea if he’d lose his ability if Seth was killed, but he needed Aro - and the rest of the
Volturi - to believe this. Two of the three vampires Aro had shown interest in were mated to
wolves, and two of the Guard had been Imprinted on wolves, so the best way to keep those wolves
alive was to make sure the vampire royalty believe it was in their best interest.

“This is what you meant when you said he made you a stronger vampire,” Caius realized from a
couple of steps behind Aro.

James nodded yes, although Seth had changed him in other ways as well, but that wasn’t relevant to
the Volturi leaders. All James knew was that Aro was power hungry, and James had to show him
that it was in his best interest to keep the wolves alive - especially the mates - most especially Seth.

“He’s right,” Edward agreed, visibly surprising Jacob, but not James. It was obvious that the
vampire had heard his thoughts and agreed with his plan. “My ability has grown since Jacob and I
mated as well, but we’re not just mates, we’re Imprints - and due to that we’re subject to new rules.
Their animal power fuels our abilities and eventually strengthens them in ways we never would’ve
otherwise - but losing that new power source will shatter our abilities.”

Aro was visibly troubled by this as he stared between James and Edward, clearly looking for some
deceit. “Jane. Is your ability stronger due to that wolf?”

If James’ heart beat it would’ve been racing at this moment.

Jane, for her part, continued to look bored as she eyed Colin. “I haven’t used my ability since I was
informed of our matehood,” she admitted. “But just drinking his blood alone has made me physically stronger and faster than I was before.” She brushed an imaginary lint off of Colin’s shoulder. “So their assertion that eventually their abilities strengthen as well seems reasonable to me.”

“I see.” Aro tapped his fingertips together. “That changes things.” He let out a deep breath. “Kill everyone but the mated vampires and wolves. We’ll need them alive.” His Guard and his armies moved.

“Don’t do this, Aro!” Edward yelled as the werewolves began to shift instantly, readying for the fight.

“Aro,” Marcus hissed.

Aro smiled, ignoring Marcus as he instead addressed Edward. “I am doing this for your own good. Vampires need to be with their own kind. But don’t worry, we won’t kill your wolf, we never planned to.”

“We won’t ever join the Guard!” Edward snapped as Jacob’s muscles began to visibly ripple under his skin.

“Chelsea will change your minds,” Aro assured them.

“No, I won’t,” Chelsea promised him with a firm shake of her head.

“You will once Corin’s power has its grip in you once more.” Aro motioned for his troops to move, not noticing the disturbed expression on Jane and Alec’s faces at that omission. “Attack.”

The numerous vampires under Aro’s command raced towards the clearly overwhelmed pack and were about to close in and attack when suddenly, out of the woods, behind them, howls could be heard. The Volturi froze, looking around them as their people were forced out of the woods, fleeing from the multitude of wolves who appeared behind them, growling and blaring their teeth.

The sound of a truck VROOMED, getting closer and closer, as suddenly Jake’s truck sailed through the bushes, hitting the ground heavily while racing through the vampires who were forced to jump out of the way to keep from being run over.

“Mom?” Seth squeaked.

James followed his gaze to see Sue Clearwater in the driver’s seat, with Billy Black sitting in the backseat, a shotgun in his hand, and Rachel Black holding onto the back. The truck sped and turned, slamming on the brakes as it slid in between the Black Pack and the Volturi, sending dirt flying on the royal three and those closest to them.

As soon as the truck came to a stop Rachel pumped her shotgun and aimed it at Aro. “I’ve been told this won’t kill you, but it sure as hell will hurt.”

Caius held his hands out and looked at his dirt covered self in returned scandal.

Marcus stared up at Rachel with wide eyes, not even attempting to remove the dirt from himself.

Aro sputtered out dirt, his face utterly infuriated as he wiped the dirt off of him.

Jake snarled, clearly unhappy his sister was there.
Aro’s scarlet eyes shifted over the truck before landing on Rachel, and then he moved, rapidly.

“Rachel—-!” Edward yelled and tried to move, but Aro had dodged Rachel’s shot and grabbed her, yanking her back down and throwing her gun to the ground.

In seconds Aro had Rachel using as a human shield, her neck painfully bent, and his grinning mouth against her neck.

Jake snarled and jumped up onto the truck, about to jump at Aro, but the vampire stopped him by shaking his finger and pressing his teeth against Rachel’s neck.

“Go ahead, you asshole!” Rachel snapped, impressing James with her valor given the fact that while her scent was terrified it was much more pissed than scared. “Go ahead! I’m not scared of you!”

James and Victoria shared worried looks, neither coming up with an idea that ended up with Jake’s sister getting out of this alive.

“Enough!” Marcus yelled, shocking none more visibly than Aro, who jolted around to look at his second in command in time for Marcus to slam his palm into Aro’s forehead, sending the shocked king sliding a couple of steps backwards and freeing Rachel from his clutches. “I apologize for Aro’s actions, he gets carried away sometimes,” Marcus said softly as he loomed over Rachel, brushing her hair out of her face with one hand and passing her her fallen shotgun with the other.

Rachel, for her part, clutched her shotgun tightly to her chest, and blushed up at Marcus.

“My name is Marcus,” he introduced himself, looking so very gentlemanly and regal despite being covered in dirt.

“R-Rachel Black,” she responded immediately, shifting her grip rapidly on her gun so she could wipe her palm against her jeans before offering it to him.

Marcus brought her hand to his lips.

Rachel turned scarlet.

Jake jumped down from the truck to his sister’s side while growling warningly at Marcus.

“Hush, Jake,” Rachel whispered while not looking away from Marcus.

Edward brought his hand to his mouth, his expression half shocked and half amused.

James turned to Jake’s mate. Don’t tell me she just—-

Edward nodded.

James blinked. But she hasn’t even turned once yet!

Edward shrugged, clearly confused by this as well.

"You don’t seem like a total dickbag like he does," Rachel declared with a little flutter to her voice, not seeming to realize her hand was still in Marcus' hand. "So, um, you know, we could totally talk things out instead of, you know, me having to shoot that dude in his greasy hair."

"I think a conversation would be more agreeable to a fight as well," Marcus informed her with a small smile.
"See? I knew you would, you have a really handsome face – nice face – nice person face." Rachel's blush was getting scary as she stumbled over her words. "You look like a nice person."

"And you are very brave," Marcus informed her. "I smell a hint of wolf on you, but it's not strong enough – you have not shifted yet, have you? And yet you came to the forefront with a weapon you knew would not kill your enemy." There was shocking respect in his eyes. "That bravery is sorely lacking in today's society, I find it an incredibly admirable quality."

"Rachel, come inside the truck," Billy Black called out for his daughter.

"Not now, dad," Rachel hissed to him before smiling up at Marcus. "Where are you from, Marcus? You have a really lovely accent."

Aro's lips were parted as he stared between the two.

"Are we still fighting them?" Riley whispered to James, who shrugged in utter confusion as to this point as well.

"Where I come from no longer exists as I knew it once," Marcus responded with a soft, sad sigh.

Aro cleared his throat. "Marcus." He waited for Marcus to finally look up from Rachel to continue. "We are in the middle of something."

"We are in the middle of a course of action only one of the three has agreed upon," Marcus responded calmly before turning his gaze on Caius, who was still just looking at how dirty he was. "I am sure Caius would appreciate a bath."

"I would," Caius agreed almost immediately, seeming to have come alive at that one word.

"Then our home would be open to you as a neutral place for peace talks," a new voice declared as Carlisle Cullen emerged from the woods with Esme, Emmett and Rosalie behind him.


Carlisle smiled yet remained where he was. "We want peace for all involved, and as we have had years of truce with the wolves we will be able to answer any questions you may have about vampires and wolves living in peace."

Aro was silent, that smile still on his face, but his scent was dangerous, deadly.

Caius tried flicking a bit of dirt off of himself, only to almost whine when he noticed how much dust was floating in the air from that small action. "Aro, we should accept this offer of neutral ground." He looked up and smiled at Carlisle. "A small entourage for ourselves, as well as the wolves – and a bath for myself. I cannot be expected to continue any sort of talks while in such a barbaric state."

"Of course," Carlisle agreed. "As long as Jake and Sam both agree to the terms."

Jake turned and jumped onto the top of the truck once more, staring at Edward before returning his narrowed gaze at Aro.

"Jake agrees to the terms," Edward answered for his mate.

"And I agree as well," Sam's voice boomed as the wolves parted to reveal the shirtless Alpha standing there in jeans shorts with a stern glare for everyone involved.
Garrett eyed his shirtless chest appreciatively.

Riley rolled his eyes.

"Then it has been, apparently, settled," Aro declared, his smile bright, his scent more deadly than ever. "Peace talks it will be."

James clenched his fists at his sides, tensing up further even as those around him relaxed somewhat.

Despite the call for peace talks having been answered, the glowing, vibrating scent surrounding Aro promised that peace was far from what he desired, and this fight for survival was far from over.

Aro glanced over the group, seeming to take in their reactions to the news, and then his scarlet eyes landed on James, and James knew that the other vampire knew he knew. It was obvious in the way that that smile grew innocently, yet that scent shifted slightly, amused, intrigued, desirous. Aro knew that not even his own co-leaders knew his plans, but that James could somehow sense them the same way he could sense those that were cloaked to all others.

Edward flinched and looked behind him at James in worry, but James didn't notice because he was holding Aro's gaze with his own, glaring at the tactile telepath and true king of the Volturi.

Victoria, the danger sensor, tensed and took a step towards James, her movement enough to draw James' attention from Aro to her – unknowingly tipping Aro to Victoria's own tension. His scent shifted, further intrigued. The smile grew.

A shiver raced down James' back.

This was going to be a very long and treacherous night.

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Keep an eye on Aro's mind, Jake's words echoed in his mind, but Edward had no way of letting him know that Aro must've ordered Phoenix to use his full power on his mind should this situation happen, because Edward couldn't hear anything other than very very soft half words that he couldn't make out no matter how hard he tried. Maybe if he got closer he'd be able to pierce through the cloak better, but he figured Aro would see that coming and try to stay as far away from Edward without making it obvious.

He was also sure Phoenix would be a part of the Volturi's entourage to make sure that Aro's mind was completely cloaked all the time from Edward's telepathy ability. It was surprising that he hadn't seen Phoenix coming. Even as a human it had been obvious that Phoenix liked Jake, and even now Edward could hear his lovelorn thoughts about Jake, but like before when Edward hadn't ever been able to put a face to the thoughts he'd keep hearing, Phoenix's ability to cloak himself made him a formidable enemy now more than ever.

He's so handsome, but not in a pretty boy way, but in a manly man sort of way. And he’s so tall! And he’s the only vampire who doesn’t look ridiculous with a bit of sparkle, why does the world glitter so beautifully around him? I thought vampires sparkled, not their surroundings? Rachel’s mind was a treasure trove of questions as she stared up at Marcus.

For the first time since Didyme’s death, I care what happens, Marcus was realizing in surprised confusion. Why do I care? Why has this girl made me care?
This was definitely something they could use to their advantage. The Volturi were a three-in-one kingship, with their decisions made as a whole, so Marcus not wanting to destroy the packs would definitely help them in the long run.

*To think if James hadn’t saved Rachel last night we wouldn’t have had this opportunity.* Also, if James hadn’t brought Garrett they mightn’t have survived Sam’s attack either. Edward hated to admit it, but James was, however *indirectly*, instrumental in them having survived two attacks so far.

*Things could’ve gone very different if he hadn’t arrived before the Volturi did.*

Not that he’d ever admit that to the asshole.

*I don’t like how that Aro dude is looking at James,* Seth thought with another low growl.

Edward eyed Aro and agreed.

He didn’t like it.

Not one bit.

…

*TBC*
Bella Swan opened her eyes to find Jasper Hale looming over her, brushing her hair out of her face. The panic, confusion, and the sounds and smells all hit her at once, causing her to jolt up in the bed, yet in seconds she calmed down. This was definitely Jasper's doing, dulling her terror and the overwhelming difference in her senses. She smiled up at him, relieved and comforted by his presence, and yet when she looked around for Alice she didn't see her anywhere.

"Alice is trying to sort through the visions that have been assailing her," Jasper explained, not having to be a mind reader like Edward to know what was going through her mind. "The Volturi are on their way to our house for peace talks with the wolf packs, and Alice's visions are saying that by the time they leave they will have destroyed our coven."

Fear raced through Bella's body, heightened by her shift, yet almost immediately it was dampened once more. "What can I do to help?"

Jasper smiled softly, tenderly, and passed her a blood bag. "You can eat until you're full. You'll be a bit delirious unless you do so, and we can't have you around the Volturi in that state. Aro will use whatever he can against us, so we cannot give him anything to use."

Bella eyed the bag curiously as she took it from him. "You're okay with this? It's human blood. Don't you, you know, crave this a lot?"

Jasper nodded truthfully. "Yes, it's taking every bit of my self-control to not rip into these bags myself – but you need this right now – and then later we'll wean you off of it and teach you to hunt animals. You need me to be strong for you right now, Bella, and I can be that for you."

Bella clutched the blood bag to her chest tightly and smiled at him before looking at the blood bag hungrily. The human part of her was icked out at the idea of drinking another person's blood, the vampire part of her was quickly growing ravenous. "What if the person has a disease that's transmitted through blood?"

A smile tickled Jasper's lips. "Carlisle got that blood for you himself, it's fine."

Deciding to trust Carlisle, Bella undid the seal on the corner of the bag and took a sip. It was heaven. She threw her head back, her throat working as she swallowed gulp after gulp after gulp of blood. The blood bag was finished embarrassingly fast, yet by the time she was done Jasper took the bag from her and passed her another full one, both continuing that routine until Bella slowly, finally, found herself full.

Only then did Jasper finally sit down on the side of the bed, examining her eyes (which were most probably scarlet now) and smiled. "How do you feel?"

"You mean when you're not making this easier for me by dulling all the overwhelming emotions?" She cheeked with a smile back at him. "I'm okay. I'm not going to say that this is going to be easy and I'll handle everything amazingly, because that's naïve, everything changed and I'm basically a baby learning to walk again." She could see the relief on Jasper's face that she knew and accepted that. "But I know that you, Alice, Edward, James and Victoria will be great teachers and help me figure out what my life is going to be like now and how to live it the best way possible. I'll stumble, and I'll probably have some issues, but I'm thanking you in advance for your patience, Jas."

His smile turned more amused as he nodded. "We'll be there for you every step of the way, Bella."
You might be a part of the Black Pack, and so James and Victoria have more right to train you (especially Victoria since she is your sire), but Alice and I are going to be there for you – anything you need, we'll be there."

"I know." Reaching out, Bella slipped her fingers through Jasper's on the bed and leaned her head against his shoulder. "I'm a little worried that the Volturi are coming here, especially with what Alice has been seeing." She tightened her grip on his hand. "What if they hurt you two?" She then blinked, flustered as she sat up immediately and turned to face him. "Not that I wouldn't care if they did anything to the rest of your family! I just—you know---."

Jasper's smile turned adoring as he reached out and cupped her face with his palm, leaning in to kiss her.

If Bella's heart beat anymore – oh, wow, it didn't beat anymore – it would've been racing. As it was, her breathing (which, if she remembered right, wasn't necessary anymore) was erratic as she kissed him back. She wished Alice was here with them, but Alice needed her space, and they needed to respect that right now.

A sound tickled her ears, causing her to pull away and blink, concentrating on it until she realized it was footsteps.

"You can hear them too," Jasper noted as he pulled away and stood. "We don't have much time. We have to respect the Volturi and not give them a reason to strike at us, which I know they will be looking for." He might be keeping her calm, but she could see the nervousness in his face. "They won't be happy with you being turned, because they wanted to use your status as a human against us, so Aro will definitely expect to see you to make sure that you really have turned. He'll want to touch you, he's a tactile telepath."

"So he can only read my mind if he touches me?" Bella scoffed. "Doesn't that make Edward more powerful than him?"

"No exactly," Jasper admitted nervously. "While he might have a handicap in that he actually needs to touch his subject, once Aro touches you he can go much deeper than Edward can. He can shift through your thoughts and memories, all of them, even ones you mightn't remember. He's extremely powerful."

"So, don't touch him?" Bella asked.

"No, that could be seen as disrespectful," Jasper sighed, clearly unhappy with this. "Try to avoid it, but if he insists you'll have to allow it."

"Well, I don't have anything I particularly want to keep secret," Bella muttered, deciding it wouldn't be the end of the world if push came to shove.

The door flew open and Alice appeared there, looking both relieved and worried to see Bella awake. "Bella." She raced forwards and hugged Bella tightly with one hand while reaching the other out for Jasper, who encircled them both in his embrace.

Bella knew that she should be terrified given all that was going to happen, but she didn't feel scared with them both there – and that wasn't Jasper's power talking.

Alice pulled away, held both Jasper and Bella's hands tightly in her own, and led them to the front room, where they awaited the arrival of the Volturi. Bella could smell an odd scent coming from the same direction, it was wet, earthy, and wondered whether that was what werewolves smelt like.
Victoria and James had told her many times that the werewolves smelt weird, and Jacob had told her the same about vampires, but this was the first time she'd actually smelt it herself.

**Wow, my senses were really weak as a human.**

Bella straightened when the door opened, and Carlisle entered with Esme, stopping for a moment before smiling when he saw her there. "Bella." He stepped aside to reveal three dirt covered vampires. She was shocked to see them so dirty. That was not what she would've expected from vampire royalty. "Welcome to our home, Aro, Caius, Marcus."

"Alice." Aro glided inside to smile at Alice, giving Jasper a curt little nod before his gaze landed on Bella. "And you must be the human I heard so much about." He took a whiff. "Forgive me, fledgling." A smile was on his face as he held his hand out towards her. "Let me be the first to welcome you to our world."

**I don't want to touch him, I don't want him in my mind!**

Despite not having anything particular she wanted hidden, Bella just didn't like the idea of having him rummaging through her memories.

What if he tries to hurt my father or mother?

The thought suddenly terrified her as she was forced to slip her hand free from Alice and place it in Aro's. She didn't want him in her mind. She didn't want him in her mind!

Aro's eyes narrowed and he tightened his grip on her hand, resting his free hand over the back of her palm, just staring at her.

Get out of my head! GET OUT OF MY HEAD!

"Fascinating," Aro whispered to himself, almost seeming out of breath. "Tell me your name, my dear."

"Bella," she answered, wondering what he found so fascinating. Plus, shouldn't he have already known her name by going through her mind and memories? Or did it not work that way?

"Who is your sire, Bella?" He pronounced her name oddly, exaggerating the L's. "Alice or Jasper? Or maybe Carlisle?"

Again, shouldn't he have known this already by merely touching her? How exactly did this tactile telepathy work? Did he have to be touching her for a long time for it to work or something?

"No, that would be me." Victoria pushed through the crowd to enter the home, looking very much alert and clearly tracking the danger they were in despite the smile she sent to Bella. "Sorry I couldn't be there when you woke up, Bellsy, but Jasper assured me he wouldn't leave your side."

"It's okay, he didn't," Bella smiled at her sire. She'd always liked Victoria, but their friendship was deeper now, she could tell just from one look. This must be the sire bond that she'd heard so much about.

"Welcome to immortality, hon." Victoria's gaze went from Aro's grip on Bella to Bella herself, and smiled, holding her arms out. "You are my first fledgling, but I promise to do right by you."

Realizing what Victoria was doing – giving her a way to remove herself from Aro's touch without it being insulting – Bella slipped away from him happily and ran to her sire, hugging Victoria
"Thank you, Victoria," she whispered in her ear, not only for helping her with Aro, but for having sired her in the first place.

"You're welcome, Hells Bells," Victoria whispered back, pressing a kiss to her hair before pulling away and leaving an arm around Bella's shoulders in a clearly protective manner.

Relief was visible in the look Alice and Jasper shared at that, which intrigued Bella.

"Bellsy!" James was suddenly there, hugging Bella and twirling her around, breaking the tense silence thankfully.

Bella hugged him tightly, surprised to see him, and relieved as hell. "You're back! You're safe!" The second her feet touched the ground she looked up at him in worry. "What about Seth? Is he back okay?"

"Hey."

She turned towards the voice and then grinned as she hugged the surprised young werewolf tightly when she realized he'd entered in after James unnoticed. "We were all so worried, Seth! Why did you two stop answering our calls?" She didn't let him answer, squeezing him tighter, and the boy eventually hugged her back with a chuckle and a soft 'sorry, it got hectic at the end'. The brunette pulled back and was about to say something when she smelt something odd. Bella looked between the two of them, wondering why they smelt something odd. Bella looked between the two of them, wondering why they smelt identical, or, well, they smelt like a perfect mixture of their own scents. The others here didn't smell like that, so why did they---? And then her eyes widened and she flushed. "You and James?"

Seth grinned and nodded.

Embarrassed yet hugely pleased, Bella hugged him tightly once more. "I know we're family because of the pack, but we're now in-laws too! I'm not sure how the sire dynamics work, but Victoria's like my vampire mother which makes James my vampire uncle, so, you know…"

Seth was nearly laughing while he nodded, and Bella would've blushed if she could, because she realized she'd forgotten all about the seriousness of the moment and had just gone off on an excited tangent.

She looked over her shoulder to see the three royals eyeing her oddly, but then she forgot all about them when she saw Jacob, who was rushing towards her, his utter relief in his scent. Tears filled her eyes as she pushed passed everyone and threw herself at her best friend, hugging him tightly, whispering a 'hi' to Edward over his shoulder as she merely clung to Jacob, so relieved he was still there and okay – just like he was for her.

"Best friends," she heard the very tall royal whisper to the greasy haired Aro.

Aro's eyes were narrowed, clearly in deep thought at this news.

The blonde royal merely shrugged to Carlisle and asked: "Which way is the nearest shower?"

Hanging on tightly to Jacob, Bella closed her eyes tightly and prayed to anyone listening (other than Edward, of course) that Alice's visions didn't come true.

…

Aro made sure to keep Phoenix Jordan next to him at all times. While the boy's powers weren't strong enough to mask the whole army from the Black Pack's Beta (which he believed was named
either James or Rhames), it did seem enough to block out Edward Cullen when only focused on masking Aro’s mind. That meant the boy was still very useful, and a powerful and important new addition to the Guard when it came to mental-based attacks or threats.

The royal three had bathed before the meeting could take place, and Aro had gone last because only Carlisle's bathroom was suitable for them, and because he'd wanted to get in as much observation of the group gathered in the room as possible.

Now that he was bathed and had returned, he sat at the largest seat, clearly Carlisle had given him his own seat in deference, and Aro couldn't fault Carlisle's manners. Honestly he didn't know what Carlisle was still doing in the beatniks like this, especially when he'd once been offered a seat as a royal. It truly bothered Aro that he was planning to destroy Carlisle's vegetarian coven – as they were one of the only one who never caused problems – and with the issues the Volturi had been having of late they needed more covens who knew how to keep such a low profile. Carlisle was not only very well liked amongst their kind, but had many friends globally, and not only had strong vampires in his coven, but apparently his truce with the packs had given him even more power.

This couldn't be allowed to remain unchecked any longer.

The group in Carlisle's roomy study consisted of the following…

In the Volturi's group there were not only the three royals, but Phoneix Jordan, Corin, Dimitri, Felix, and a couple more of his more ruthless Guard. Jane and Alec were also on his side, yet they were not paying as close attention as usual, in fact, if anything they were more off to the side, exchanging looks only each other could decipher. Chelsea wasn't there, having stated very firmly that she no longer considered herself a part of the Guard, a fact that still rubbed him very raw. Another annoying thing was Marcus, who remained seated slightly behind Aro's seat like Caius, yet whose attention kept on going towards that unturned werewolf girl who kept sending Marcus cow-eyes. That would not do, would not do at all. He'd had to do away with his own sister to keep Marcus with the Volturi, and he wouldn't allow the female dog to get away with what he hadn't even allowed his own beloved sister to.

In the Rez Pack was, not surprisingly, the naked chested Alpha (Sam?), and his equally naked chested Beta (Jarett/Jared). There was a hotheaded wolf Sam had called Paul, as well as a few others that Aro hadn't overheard the names of. This half-naked pack made him uneasy, as the wolves just made his instincts jump between fight or flight, but he refused to look weak in front of them, plus, Caius was visibly tense and nervous as hell enough for the both of them so he had to stand strong and set an example for his two (honestly floundering) co-royals.

On their other side were the Black Pack, which (obviously once more) was represented by Jacob Black and his Beta (James, he was going to go with James, the blonde didn't look like a Rhames), who was seated by the wolf named Seth. Interestingly, Edward Cullen was also in this group, which made Aro realize that while Edward was currently considered a member of the Olympic Coven, he was most probably transitioning to become a part of Black's pack. Alternatively, while Bella was clearly involved with Alice and Jasper, she was also seated in the area for the Black Pack, between her sire, Victoria, and one of the many male wolves also in this team (someone who had a quill or something if a whisper Aro had half-heard was right). The wolves didn't quite interest him, not truly, but the vampires in this pack seemed magnificent. There was, of course, Edward, but then there was James, Bella (whose mind he hadn't been able to pierce through at all), and her sire Victoria, who clearly had an ability of her own because (during their journey to the Olympic Coven’s house) every time Aro had considered a course of action and its playing out, he’d peer over to see her shift to make that plan a little more difficult. Then, of course, there was Chelsea, who Aro wouldn't just let go like that, but she wasn't at the meeting, instead waiting
outside with the rest of the groups' members who weren't a part of the actual talks.

Finally, rounding up the 'Peace Talks' were the Olympic Coven, headed by Carlisle with Emmett as his second, which was quite interesting because that spot had once belonged to Edward. Alice and Jasper sat together, as expected of the pair, while Rosalie and Esme sat on the other side. Of them all, the Olympic Coven was the much smaller group, made that much smaller by Edward's obvious defecting to the Black Pack, and thus had no one on the outside like the other three did.

The girl giving Marcus the cow eyes wasn't sitting with any of the others, but was leaning against the wall next to a man in a wheelchair who also smelt of wolf.

"We have had a truce with the Uley pack for a very long time, and while it has had its ups and downs, as long as we both abide by our pre-stated rules we have been able to live in relative peace," Carlisle was explaining to Caius, who'd asked something about how Carlisle could live so closely to their mortal enemies. "With Jacob's Pack, we have had a much closer, more relaxed relationship – which has been facilitated by his and Edward's relationship."

"So you do not care that your son has joined with a wolf," Caius asked slowly, as if needing to hear this confirmation himself to be able to truly believe it.

Carlisle grinned brightly, openly. "We love Jacob, had he not started his own Pack and moved in with James and Victoria we would have asked him to move in and join our coven. As it is, we see the Olympic Coven and the Black Pack joining in a brotherhood akin to the type fellow covens share."

Caius looked blown away – and a little light headed.

_hold it together, Caius._

Taking in a very deep, very unnecessary breath, Aro kept his facial features trained to utter blankness. He opened his mouth to ask Carlisle how he could act as if the wolf packs weren't a threat to him if he'd already lost Edward to the Black Pack and was in danger of losing both Jasper and Alice as well.

"Are there not enough seats?" Marcus asked confusingly behind him as he stood from his seat. "Please, have mine."

Aro turned to his second in utter confusion, only to notice Marcus was moving his seat over to the cow-eyed wolf girl.

Rachel Black blushed darkly and shook her head. "I'm fine, I chose to stand."

"Are you sure?" Marcus pushed. "This may take a while, and your legs will tire." He motioned towards the half naked wolves. "You should join your pack."

"I'm packless," Rachel assured him while shaking her hands in front of her. "But if I have to join one, I'm sure as _hell_ not joining Sam Uley's."

"Rachel!" the man in the wheelchair hissed.

"I will _not_ join a pack who cast out _my brother_," Rachel hissed right back at him, clearly not one to cower at anything. "Unlike you, father, I have family loyalty."

"We will talk about this later," her father promised.
"We already did this morning when I went to find you guys on the Rez since you were in meetings and wouldn't answer your damned phones," Rachel informed him in a low tone, seeming to change from a cow-eyed girl to a super pissed, kind of dangerous woman in two seconds flat. "Not only is Jake my brother, but his pack saved Becky's and my lives, not Sam's." She smiled, and it had a hint of malicious intent. "I'm Rachel Black, I'm definitely Team Black Pack." And with that she snorted, shook her head, folded her arms, and turned her attention back to the goings on, effortlessly dismissing her father and the conversation.

Jacob Black looked between his father and sister, clearly caught in a weird position there. He then shook his head, visibly put it behind him for now, and returned his attention to Aro. The guy was young, and definitely was very new to this whole Alpha/Leader thing, but Aro liked the way that Jacob did his best to keep Aro's gaze at all times. It wasn't in a threatening way, but he proved that he wasn't worried of confrontation if Aro should provoke it.

Aro wondered what it was about the wolf that made Edward and Phoenix both like him so much. There had to be more to this wolf than met the eye. A part of him wanted to dismiss this wolf and concentrate on the vampires he was so intrigued with, but some instinct in him warned him that it'd be a very big mistake to dismiss Jacob Black, and he always listened to that instinct, so he met Jacob's gaze with his own, giving the Alpha a small smile in response to the casual way the wolf eyed him.

Interestingly enough, Edward reached out and grabbed Jacob's hand, and visibly relaxed when Jacob squeezed it. The one nervous here was Edward, Jacob was tense, but not nervous, and that intrigued Aro. Then he realized what Jacob was doing – it was the very same thing Aro was – putting up a façade for his pack. He needed to be strong, to be the stalwart face, just like Aro, and like Aro, he was doing his best to keep all his worries and insecurities undetectable.

Aro liked Jacob a little more after realizing that, and he didn't like that. It was surprising, actually… and then he eyed Jasper Hale and wondered… was the vampire using his power on him? The thought was intriguing. He'd never really thought much of Jasper's ability to influence emotions, but suddenly a lot of things, like Caius' utter on edge reactions, and Marcus' incredibly relaxed ones, made sense – as did his own ones.

**Maybe I should not have dismissed his ability before.**

A look towards Jasper revealed he was tense, no doubt using his ability. He kept glancing at Bella, as well as the leaders one by one, his eyes meeting Aro's for a split second before looking away, clearly realizing he'd been discovered.

Amused, Aro decided to disregard any emotions he might feel during this mission. He could call Jasper on his use of his power, and use it as a show on how this meeting was a falsehood, a trick, but he decided to let it go out of pure curiosity. Plus, it wasn't as if his own vampires weren't using their own abilities – namely Phoenix – also, that little devious maneuver was both amusing and impressive.

Alice, for her part, looked like she was constantly fighting a headache. Clearly the visions she'd been having about this day weren't going well for her side, and that just cheered Aro greatly and contributed to his magnanimous mood.

"As mentioned before, my pack is sworn to protect the Rez, Forks, and the surrounding areas," Sam Uley answered a question Caius must've asked, because Marcus was still distracted thanks to the Black girl. "As long as any vampires in the surrounding do not feed on humans in our area, we don't care what your kind do, and will not actively hunt or harass them." He motioned to Carlisle. "Cullen made a pact with our ancestors, and they have kept their part, so we have kept our own."
He cleared his throat. "I will admit, in full disclosure, that recently there were… misunderstandings… and we broke our side of the pact, but now that we understand the truth we are not only prepared to make restitutions for our actions, but eager to do so." Sam's gaze shifted to Carlisle and Jake for a moment, meaningfully, before returning it to Caius. "This is still a work in progress, but with understanding and time this will not only work, but we anticipate our pact to be deeper, our interworking relationships better."

"Why would you even want to be in alliance with vampires?" Caius wanted to know, surprising Aro with how chatty he was given he was talking to a wolf. "I understand the Black Pack given their… unique situation… but why would you be eager to enter into this sort of relationship? Because it seems as if you want to make this more than just a truce and instead have more of an alliance like the Black Pack and the Olympic Coven do."

Sam took in a deep breath, once, twice, and then admitted in a steady voice: "It is because I have very recently also Imprinted on a vampire."

Aro fought to keep his reaction to this a mere blink. Was this wolf and vampire pairing off... contagious? He'd thought it a weird anomaly merely contained to the Black Pack, partly due to a wolf (a pack animal) being separated from his own kind and the drive for a pack having created the abomination. But what if that wasn't it? What if this was actually a thing? A very weird, very dangerous thing?

"How many of you are there?" Caius' voice was squeaky, clearly just as unnerved as Aro was by this news, but unable to hide it half as well. "Black and Cullen, his Beta and the wolf, Chelsea and the female wolf, Jane and the younger wolf, you and this other vampire... how many more?"

"As of this moment those are the only ones that I know of," Sam responded carefully. "But I do not expect us to be the last."

"You expect... more?" Caius looked utterly terrified.

"I understand your feelings towards this," Sam explained to Caius, visibly surprising him with this news. "When I heard about werewolves and vampires become mates I believed it a lie, an abomination, and in my darkest hour I tried to destroy them all."

Aro turned to look at the Uley Pack Alpha in shock at this.

"Before you attacked the Black Pack, I attacked them, with full intention of killing them all," Sam Uley admitted bluntly. "I would not have stopped until they were all dead... and then, in the middle of the battle, I Imprinted on one of the vampires battling on their side, and had to call an immediate retreat, as well as return to the group I had tried to kill, with my tail between my legs, and beg forgiveness for my actions."

Aro was a little dizzy from this revelation. This business was more dangerous than he'd realized.

"Imprinted," Marcus said the word, but it was with a hint of question.

"It is our version of Mated," Sam informed him coolly. "It happens the first time we set our eyes on our soulmates after having had our first shift, or, in some very rare cases, very close to our first shift. The world shifts, turning incredibly bright around our soulmate, and immediately we not only feel a physical attraction to the person, but a pull towards them, emotion, mental, everything. We find ourselves unable to think of anyone other than that person, obsessed with them almost, drawn to them in every way possible. After this happens, we are forever tied to that person. We not only care about them over our own good or safety, but we put everything about them above ourselves,
and will never be able to love anyone else again. They become our world, our sanctuary, our very life. Even if that person is a complete stranger to us up until the moment of Imprinting, they will immediately become the most important thing in our lives, and will stay that way for the rest of our lives."

"Shit," the Black girl hissed softly under her breath, eyes wide in utter shock.

Aro eyed her curiously. She was a wolf, clearly on the eve of her first shift if her scent was anything to go by (the wolf quickly beginning to dominate the human one more and more) so shouldn't she already know this?

"And how would the one being Imprinted on feel or react?" Marcus asked oddly.

"I am not quite sure, not when it comes to a vampire at least," Sam Uley replied after a second as his gaze shifted from Marcus to Edward. "I believe you are better to answer that question than I, Cullen."

This was getting very off topic, but Aro found himself too intrigued with the answer himself to try and get the conversation back where he wanted it. Anyway, any great leader knew that to fight something, you truly needed to understand it.

"I can only answer how it affected me – James or Jane can contradict me if it was different for them," Edward announced after a second's thought. "My situation is also a little different from theirs as I realized before Jake that we were mated."

Aro blinked, utterly confused and intrigued.

"Alice had seen that I would be with a wolf, which I couldn’t believe or accept," Edward declared with a chuckle, "and then we moved here and I actually met Jacob. It was like a switch clicked in my brain the second I first laid my eyes on him. I found myself concerned about him despite not knowing him at all, he dominated my mind, and I felt the need to not only be near him physically, but in every other way possible. I felt like I needed to breathe again, and being away from him, especially if for extended periods, makes it feel like I'm slowly asphyxiating."

"Colin smells really good," Jane interrupted, surprising them all with her self-inclusion. "The rest of them smell tolerable, but he smells very good."

"Same with Seth," James agreed immediately. "At first it was just that he smelt better than the others, but now I believe it's because our scents started to mix slightly from the second that we Imprinted."

The wolf in question blushed darkly.

"I hadn't thought of that, but you are correct," Jane admitted, eyes slightly wide, which was more emotion than Aro had seen on her face in centuries. "That would make sense as to why it is more agreeable."

"Also," Edward continued, "like Sam with his vampire Imprintee, I am unable to hurt Jacob, mentally or physically, at least on purpose. I might've hurt him by leaving for a little while, but that was – I was trying to strengthen our relationship. I could never actually hurt him, would never want to, couldn't."

"Just as I am unable to hurt him either," Jacob finally spoke. "I'd rather die than ever hurt him. If I hurt him I probably would die. It's the Imprinter's way."
Sam flinched and looked down, surprisingly looking guilty as hell for some reason.

"And if anything happens to Jacob, I will die," Edward responded very calmly while staring into Aro's eyes. "His actual death might not kill me, but I will die, and make sure to take down all who were responsible with me."

The royal didn't need to be telepathic to receive the message loud and clear. If anything happened to Jacob Black, Edward Cullen would not only end his own life, but would make sure he'd taken down Aro with him. The threat was... fascinating. Edward was usually much more mannered and careful than this, but the threat had been incredibly direct given he'd stared into Aro's eyes while saying this.

Things were becoming more problematic the longer this conversation happened. Aro had expected to play along while finding chinks in their armor, information to help further his cause, but something deep in his gut got more and more uneasy the longer this conversation went along.

"Rachel?" The man in the wheelchair asked in worry seconds before she grabbed herself by the stomach and doubled over in visible pain.

In seconds Jacob vaulted to his feet and was by his sister's side. "You're burning up!"

"Jakey, what's happening to me?" Rachel asked in scared confusion as she stared up at her brother, muscles rippling visibly under her skin.

"What is happening to her?" Marcus echoed her question immediately, leaving the Volturi side of the room and appearing at Jacob Black's side.

"She's starting her first shift," Jacob Black hissed as his sweating sister leaned hard against him. "Stress will bring it on faster." He hissed as she collapsed against him, apparently having fainted. "I need to cool her down, quickly, it'll help delay the shift long enough for us to get her away from here and back home."

"Do you have ice?" His father asked Carlisle Cullen, who shook his head in worry.

"Pass her to me," Marcus surprised Aro into nearly choking on his saliva as he held his arms out. "I am naturally cold, I can assist in cooling her down."

Aro was not only shocked by the offer, but by the fact that Jacob Black actually accepted it, passing his sister to Marcus after the Volturi royal slipped off his cloaked hood, baring his arms. Marcus gathered Rachel Black in them, allowing his bare skin to touch and further cool her down.

"She is scaldingly hot."

"She will only get hotter," Black's father declared as he turned his wheelchair around. "We need to get her to the Rez. Sam---."

"No." Sam shook his head calmly. "She is Jacob's pack, it is he who must help her ease through this transition." He turned to Jacob. "I helped you through yours, you know what you need to do."

Jacob looked visibly distressed for the first time since the talks had begun, clearly needing to be with his sister during this transition, as well as with his pack for the negotiations.

Aro smirked, seeing an opening here.

"We can postpone the talks," Marcus declared immediately. "Where is your house? Where do we take her?"
Jacob stared up at Marcus in surprise. "You would do that?"

"Marcus---," Aro tried.

"Yes." Marcus shifted a glare to Aro that shocked the hell out of him and robed him of anything he would've said. "You are needed for these talks, and you are needed for this. A few days with you will allow us to better judge what is happening here." He didn't even ask Aro or Caius – but especially Aro – for their opinion on this matter! Instead, very unlike Marcus, who was usually very apathetic about everything, he turned to Jacob. "You have my word that no action will be made until your sister is safe and you are able to rejoin the peace talks."

Aro couldn't help it. His lips parted as his jaw dropped.

What the hell was happening with Marcus?!?

Jacob looked behind him at them, visibly seeking confirmation that they would abide by Marcus' promise.

Caius further surprised Aro by sighing and nodding. "The word of one of the Volturi is binding to all three," which was true, but usually it was Aro's word that bound Caius and Marcus! "We will suspend the talks for now." He looked very bored and eyed the group before turning to a very surprised Carlisle. "I assume there is a room prepared for us in case of something such as this?"

Carlisle, for his credit, reacted quickly. "Of course. Please, come this way."

Caius eyed the wolves cautiously once more before motioning for Felix to follow him, most definitely as added protection, as he followed after Carlisle.

Aro watched him go before turning to Marcus, only to find the door open and both him and Jacob Black gone. He was alone with the others, and not quite sure how to handle this situation. The Volturi king cleared his throat, nodded to Sam and the others, and then turned to Jane. "Jane, a moment if you would?" It wasn't a request, it was an order, and a part of him was relieved when she obeyed it.

He walked them out of the room, motioning for Phoenix, who was his living shadow, to cloak both their voices as he spoke to her. "I will be lying to you if I said I was happy with how things have gone so far. You, Chelsea and Dimitri were supposed to keep all of this from happening, but, If anything, both you and Chelsea have made things more difficult." A muscle ticked in his cheek. "I am not happy with this at all."

Jane strolled with her arms behind her back. "I know." She didn't sound very bothered by this, which bothered him.

"You have had a longer time amongst these wolves and vampires, you must have learnt things which can help our cause, which we can use against them." He raised an eyebrow when she remained silent. "Well?"

Jane continued walking before twirling on her heel and stopping, bringing them face to face with each other, surprising him as her purple gaze met his scarlet one. "You are being too stubborn by holding onto old desires to recognize the great opportunity offered here." She raised an eyebrow. "Your ambition has always been admirable, Aro, but it is blinding you."

He was both intrigued and infuriated by her words. How dare she speak to him like that? She was his Guard! "Are you defying me, Jane? Has this wolf of yours blinded you to who your true family is?"
Her expression was annoyingly blank. "This has nothing to do with Colin." She raised her chin with a clearly defiant glint to her unnerving eyes. "Forgive me for saying so, Aro, but the Volturi's power and reach is not what it used to be. Things are changing, but we are remaining stagnant, and like everything stagnant, we will rot away to nothingness if we do not go with the flow – pun, disgustingly enough, intended."

What was it with everyone all of a sudden? It seemed as if stepping foot on Forks had caused all his people to go insane and act completely unlike themselves!

Marcus was suddenly very involved and had incredibly strong views of how this 'peace talk' should go. He was making decisions on his own in a very un-Marcus way, and his attention on the wolf girl was unnerving to say the least.

Caius's hatred of wolves was something Aro had been quite sure he could count on to back him up towards finding any excuse to destroy these abominable alliances – and yet Caius was not only going along with Marcus, but actually asking questions and talking, willingly, with wolves! He'd also shrugged and seemed not at all against prolonging these talks.

Alec had abandoned his post and disappeared to Forks, remaining here and not reporting back to Aro to let him know where he was and what he was doing. And when they'd arrived Alec had not only not asked forgiveness for going rogue, but had, in his own way, defended the wolves and their unholy union with vampires! If anything, he seemed to have, quite quickly, not only accepted the fact that a wolf had mated with his sister, but had become friends with him.

Chelsea had somehow completely gotten over Corin's addictive power during the time she was gone, and was now on his enemy's side because of some wolf. She'd not only denounced Aro in front of the others, but clearly was keeping away enough to make sure that Corin's powers weren't able to affect her, and yet was keeping close enough to keep an eye on the bonds of those around to make sure they weren't somehow being affected.

And to top it all off Jane – his most trusted and loyal Guard – was talking back to him, was calling him stubborn, stagnant, and blind. This had never happened since her creation, and Aro honestly didn't know how much more of this he could take before he broke enough to reveal just how uneasy he was with how quickly this was getting out of hand.

Aro was so off his game he was getting nervous. This should be a walk in the park, and yet his own people were making this difficult for him!

Was there something in the air surrounding the crappy little town of Forks?

He paused, terror suddenly making its way through his gut.

What if there was something in the air?

And, what if, it really was contagious?

...}

Rachel was so hot the ice they were piling on top of her in the bathtub was not only quickly melting, but also letting out little hints of steam. If this hadn't happened to him during the three days of his turn he would've been terrified, and even as is, Jacob fought to keep calm, knowing that Rachel's wolf would start exerting itself, and it would reach out for the Alpha – like his had to Sam back in the day – and it needed to find his inner wolf calm and calming, reassuring. This couldn't have happened at the worst time, but Jacob understood how emotions could bring this on quicker,
and this was definitely a very stressful time. Not only that, but on the way to Carlisle’s house Edward had told Jacob something he hadn't wanted to believe, but hadn't been able to disregard the longer he'd been in their company – and when Marcus had stepped up to help the second Rachel became ill he'd realized he couldn't ignore those words or what they meant any longer.

His sister, ever the difficult one, had Imprinted on Volturi royalty. This could end up being a good thing – or nightmarish – it really would be decided by the next couple of days.

"Is this normal?" Marcus asked as he reached his hand in to feel the melted ice already warming around her hot body.

"Yes," Jacob answered. "You actually helped a lot by keeping her cooled down on the way here, my body was boiling the water at this point when it happened to me."

Marcus looked worried as he glanced down at Rachel, who'd been changed into one of Victoria's swimsuits by Leah. "She's still melting the ice terrifyingly quickly."

Jacob nodded as he watched the cubes rapidly melting all around her. "Embry's gone to buy more bags of ice from town, he'll be back soon enough." A moment's silence passed between them as they stared down at Rachel, before he cleared his throat and looked up at the Volturi royal. "Thank you."

Marcus turned to him in surprise. "For what?"

"For postponing the talks," Jacob responded. "The first shift is a very dangerous time for a wolf, so I would've had to put my pack in danger to be here for her." He took in a very deep breath. "I appreciate you doing what you did both back there – and at the meadow. You've saved my sister twice in one day, and I am forever in your debt for that."

Marcus eyed Jacob thoughtfully before seeming introspective. "You do not have to thank me, Mr Black, I do not understand why, but I do not want anything bad to happen to your sister." It was as if saying the words out loud surprised him into realizing that that was actually the case, and Marcus tilted his head in thought, blinking in surprise when he noticed Jacob hold his hand out towards him.

"Please, call me Jacob," Jacob offered his hand, and his friendship, to this vampire.

The Volturi royal eyed the hand thoughtfully before placing his own in Jacob's and shaking it. "Then you must call me Marcus."

"I was right, we have three more bags in the extra freezer we keep for the meat from our hunts," Victoria announced as she appeared in the doorway with Bella by her side. "We'll be able to keep her nice and cool even if Embry takes a while to get back with the extra ice she'll need."

"Thanks." Jacob smiled at the both of them before turning his gaze on Bella. "You should probably rest, you were just turned and I don't want to overwork you so quickly."

"I'm fine, Jake, and so is Becky, Sue and your father are with her," Bella assured him. "Don’t worry about us, me especially. I’ve fed, and I have a lot of energy, plus, remember, Edward is the only vampire who sleeps, and even then he doesn't need to sleep, he just can."

Marcus' eyes widened. "Edward Cullen can sleep?"

Bella flinched, probably realizing she maybe shouldn't have said that in front of a member of the Volturi.
Considering Rachel had already involved this member by Imprinting on him, Jacob didn't really mind the slip up. "It only happened a while after we Imprinted," he explained to Marcus. "We think it's a result of the cementing of our emotional bond, as it is also when his mind reading ability grew in strength." He cleared his throat, not sure why he was adding the following: "He's also losing his sparkle."

Bella's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

Victoria nodded, apparently having noticed the same thing as Jacob. "It's very gradual but I've noticed it as well, he's losing it, probably will lose it altogether after a while."

"You should tell Aro that," Marcus muttered after a second's thought, clearly digesting this news. "The best way to convince him not to touch this pack, and that of the reservation, is to convince him that not only is it in his benefit for you to remain untouched — but that he has come up with the idea himself." His scarlet gaze rose to meet Jacob's brown. "We vampires have to remain as hidden as we do because the sparkle does not allow us to truly blend in with humanity, but if this is true, if Edward Cullen is losing that which marks our existence to the humans, it would be an advantage that Aro could not pass up."

"The problem with your friend is that he will want to use us," Victoria surprised them by stating very seriously. "We're Jacob's pack, we will never belong to Aro or be a part of his Guard, no matter what he does or tries." She must've noticed Jacob's surprised look at her brazenness, because she put her hands to her hips and admitted: "My danger sensors don't flare up around him."

Marcus looked between them and returned his gaze to Rachel. “I do not understand why I want to help your pack, and her.” His scarlet gaze shifted back to Jacob. “But I do.” He took in a very deep, very unnecessary breath. “And for now, that is all that matters.”

Jacob stared up at Marcus and realized they may have just made the most unlikely of allies.

James once more found himself on the roof of his house, staring out at the world around the Hunter residence. With each breath he could see the scents of those he was tracking all around him. The Volturi’s Guard and armies (including Jane and Alec) were remaining around the Olympic Coven’s house. They seemed, so far at least, to be abiding by their word to allow Jacob to help Rachel shift before they continued on with what they were doing, but he wouldn’t trust them to keep it for long, which was why he knew he’d be spending most of his time on this roof.

Sam’s pack were at the Rez. Garrett must’ve given Sam his phone number though, because he kept getting text message after text message which he was very obviously ignoring, because that was how Garrett operated. If Sam was anything like Edward or Seth, James knew he’d soon see his scent coming to the house to make sure Garrett was just ignoring him and not because he was actually in danger of any kind. So that just annoyed James and he decided to just ignore Sam whenever he arrived.

The Black Pack, plus Billy Black, Brady and Colin, and Sue Clearwater, were at the Hunter House. Billy Black was pulling double duty, wheeling himself from Rebecca’s side (she was still sleeping) to the bathroom door where Jacob was trying to help Rachel, and back. The man hadn’t really broken breath with his son, but James could smell the regret mixed with stubbornness that emanated from him. He wanted to talk to Jake, wanted to make peace, but was a stubborn old goat filled with pride which wouldn’t allow him to. At least not yet. He seemed to be working himself up to it though.
I hope the old man gets it over and done with, it would give Jake one last thing to worry about.

“Why are both you and Victoria avoiding my mother?”

Glancing over his shoulder, James raised an eyebrow at his Imprinter, as the wolf fully climbed up to the roof. “Victoria has been in love with Charlie Swan ever since she met him.”

Seth’s eyes widened, suddenly realizing why Victoria was avoiding his mother. “I didn’t realize…”

“Don’t worry, Victoria won’t act like a psycho ex and attack your mother because Charlie is dating her,” James assured him as he returned his attention to the woods surrounding them. “But she needs to keep herself busy, and needs to stay away from her. Victoria is still very much in love with him.”

“I’m so sorry,” and Seth totally meant it. He was ridiculously sweet and considerate like that. “Is that why you’re avoiding her too? Out of solidarity for Victoria?”

“Nope.” James shook his head, not at all embarrassed to admit that even if he didn’t have to keep an eye on everyone around him he’d have found an excuse to escape to the roof anyway. “I devirginized the angelic son of a human willing to drive head first into a fight between vampires and werewolves, the woman terrifies me.”

Amusement covered Seth’s face. “She’ll really like that.”

“I’m sure she will,” James agreed as he pulled Seth into him and stared out at the woods in time to hear Rachel screaming. She must’ve finally woken up. “Is it always this bad?”

Seth nodded. “It’s really bad for around three days. You feel like you’re dying.”

James opened his mouth to ask more info, when he noticed Colin outside, staring longingly towards the direction of the Cullen’s house. The boy was smart enough not to go there though, but he clearly looked heartbroken Jane had decided to stay there.

The vampire concentrated on the scents surrounding the Cullens’ home. Holographic images of the Guard, of the Royals, of the Cullens, popped up, pinpointing where they were.

Aro was standing looking in the direction of the Hunter residence.

A growl rolled escaped James’ throat as he pulled Seth even closer.

That bad feeling in the pit of his stomach grew worse.
Chapter 18

When it rained, it poured.

Becky had finally awoken, yet Rachel's screams echoing off of the walls had tipped her off the cliff as well, and before he could blink Jacob found himself trying to help both sisters as they went through their first shift together. He could get a little out of Becky: she'd apparently realized something was wrong with her for the last couple of days, and had figured the legends of their tribe might be real, but the fact that she was a werewolf and turning was terrifying her and making her transition worse.

Honestly, the only thing making Rachel's better was the fact that she'd had a day or so to get used to the idea of what was going on – as well as the fact that she had Marcus' presence to help keep her somewhat calm.

Imprintee or not, Jacob was impressed that Marcus was so hands on considering that the first transition was not only traumatizing to a werewolf, but dangerous as well, especially for vampires. Also, no one had actually told Marcus he was an Imprintee. Yet despite this, Marcus remained by Rachel's side of the tub, talking to her, distracting her from the pain, from the intense heat causing her to sweat buckets despite living within the tub of ice, feet to feet with Becky.

Becky clearly had no idea who Marcus was or what he was doing there, but his helping Rachel allowed Jacob to be a little more invested in Becky, which she seemed to prefer so she didn't really ask much about Marcus or his presence, merely screamed and cried and generally suffered alongside her sister from the heat, nausea, and pain as their human bodies slowly gave way to the wolf awakening within them.

"They should've told us!" Becky breathed very similarly to a woman giving birth, as she gripped Jake's hand with viselike strength. Her brown gaze shifted to where Rachel was breathing similarly while forcing herself to listen to Marcus tell her about what his homeland had been like growing up. Becky shook her head and turned to Jacob, her wolf rising desperately.

He forced his own essence out, covering both, sweating at the effort, yet seeing both visibly calming enough that their breathing grew less intense. This was a lot for his first time assisting a shift – two at once – but Jake couldn't let his sisters down. He couldn't. He was letting so many people down but he couldn't think about that right now, he needed to concentrate on his older sisters and making sure they survived the shift.

The door opened, and Chelsea appeared in the doorway, glancing between the two wolves apprehensively before she turned to Marcus. "Sorry for interrupting, but you need to feed." She seemed to notice Jake's visible distress and fear at those words, and held up a blood bag. "Carlisle Cullen sent it for him as he hasn't returned to the Cullen residence."

Marcus stared at the blood bag and them looked back at Rachel, patting the top of her palm, which he held in his other hand. "I can wait."

Chelsea blinked in surprise before clearing her throat. "I apologize, Marcus, but we cannot have you starving yourself." She was visibly nervous to press the issue. "That could prove dangerous."

"I can handle it," Marcus replied, his voice a little darker.

"It's okay," Rachel assured him, voice forced in pain. "You need to feed."
Marcus took in a deep breath and would not meet her gaze. "If I am being truthful, Miss Rachel, I do not want you to see that side of me, especially considering your pack's stance on consumption of human blood."

"No human was harmed for that blood," Jacob interrupted, and was a little impressed Marcus was taking their stance on this so at heart. "We do not allow vampires to prey on humans, and the vampires in our packs hunt animals for sustenance, but you are not our pack and you are not feeding from a helpless human." He motioned to the bag. "If you would feel more comfortable drinking in privacy, Chelsea can take you somewhere for that, right Chelsea?"

Chelsea looked surprised at this, but smiled and nodded eagerly. "Of course, Jacob!"

Marcus hesitated.

"Dude," Becky hissed painfully through her teeth. "You drinking blood from a bag is the least weird thing happening right now, I'm going to grow a freaking tail." She then sobbed as a series of ripples raced under her skin, her eyes taking on a golden hue as she stared at Marcus. "So, honestly, if you think you'll gross us out – don't – my skin is going to split open and fur is going to tear its way out. Out of the three of us, Rachel and I are going to be the gross ones."

"Don't say it like that," Rachel begged, looking incredibly pale at the very description. She then let go of Marcus' hand to grip the edge of the bathtub she shared with her sister, bending over it and vomiting all over the floor, barely managing to keep from covering Jacob and Marcus' feet.

Chelsea's eyes widened. "I'll get the mop." And with that she raced away.

Rachel sobbed, her scent horrified, mortified, as she kept bent over, not willing to look anyone in the face. "I'm so sorry."

Marcus shushed her softly while rubbing her back in slow, soothing circles, not seeming to care the muck was all around him.

Brady Fuller arrived with a large bag filled with ice, which was probably a good thing considering all the ice cubes had melted at this time. Seth's friend (like Colin) wasn't exactly in Jacob's pack, and was technically Sam's pack, but ever since the attack they had yet to return to the Rez. Jacob wasn't sure why given the fact that Sam no longer wanted to kill them, but he didn't complain since Brady and Colin were both pulling their own weight, helping in any capacity with no question asked.

Smart enough not to mention the puke, Brady tiptoed into the bathroom and avoided the mess on the ground so as to get close enough to the tub to tear open the bag and allow the ice cubes to cover the girls, who both cried out in relief at the feeling. He then tiptoed towards the window, opened it, and made his way towards the door.

He paused in the doorway and cleared his throat as he turned to Jacob. "When I was turning mom helped keep the fever down by making me eat a lot of shaved ice, you know, like those that kids eat at carnivals and stuff?" He cleared his throat. "They're both melting the ice really quickly so I was thinking it could, you know, help cool them down from the inside."

Jacob was desperate to try anything. "Thank you, that sounds like a great idea. Could you please be in charge of preparing something like that for them?"

If Brady was in wolf form his ears would've perked up and his tail wagged, as it was he was clearly surprised and pleased at this. "Sure! Right away, boss!"
Boss? Jacob's eyes widened as he watched the guy rush away. Oh boy.

Becky reached over with her free hand and grabbed Rachel's the twins squeezing each other's hands and giving each other silent strength and encouragement.

Marcus watched the twins with a small smile before his scarlet eyes rose to Jacob. "You should not be as insecure as to your ability as Alpha as you are. I sense bonds, among other things, and I can tell you that those in this house do not question you, or your leadership, so you should not questions yourself. You are young, and without many recourses, but you are doing admirably well, especially as you are growing into your leadership role."

Jacob let out a deep breath. "Thank you, Marcus, but I know I need to be a great many more things to be the Alpha this pack deserves."

"You have the qualities needed," Marcus assured him. "The rest will come in time."

"Thank you." Jacob wasn't sure why it meant so much to hear that from Marcus, but it did. "It's a little funny because I never wanted to have my own pack, I did not set out to form my own, and if I'm being completely honest, I fought it every step of the way." He chuckled darkly at the memory of the early days when he naively thought he could take James and Victoria under his wing and yet somehow keep things from turning into what they had. "You say you see bonds." He sighed. "The wolf that just came in, do you see a pack like bond coming from him to us?"

Marcus looked surprised. "Is he not already a part of this pack?" When Jacob shook his head, Marcus blinked. "You have a larger pack than you are aware of, Jacob Black." He gaze shifted to Rachel and Becky, who were whispering passive aggressive 'Butch up, you can do this!' type of encouragements to each other while squeezing the other's hand so tightly it had to hurt. "And growing."

That was what he was scared of. He was still in his last year of high school, and didn't have time for a part-time job, not with everything going on. He wasn't even in his own home, instead spending most of his time between Charlie's and James and Victoria's houses. As Alpha that couldn't do. He was supposed to provide for his pack, and he was already falling short on that when it was small – what could he possibly do if it continued to grow the way it was?

"Does Sam have a job?" Marcus asked curiously, shocking Jacob into realizing that he'd actually said that out loud in his stress.

"Sam and the pack are, for lack of a better word, sponsored by the Rez. They are the protectors of the lands and the people, so the people look after them in return." Jacob smiled up thankfully at Chelsea when she returned with a mop and began to mop away Rachel's vomit. "Also, Leah was the first ever female to shift – Rach and Becky are the second and third in all our history, so the spouses of the wolves would usually have jobs or help contribute by other means." He sighed. "That won't exactly happen here."

Marcus eyes Jacob silently, watching Chelsea mop before his scarlet gaze returned to the young Alpha. "One can also imagine, as each pack grows, that there will be less and less space for both your packs. I would assume that wolf packs are territorial."

"They are," Jacob admitted after a second's thought. "Usually the pack would guard over the Rez, Forks, and the surrounding areas, but for now we've decided it into them tending to the Rez and us Forks, but you're right, as both packs grow the boundaries will become a greater problem." He hadn't even considered that issue, which proved just how out of his depth he was.
Unlike Sam, who had the elders to consult, Jacob had no one he could go to for guidance, and while it had always been hard he now realized just how crucial that lack of counsel was becoming.

"Have you considered leaving Forks?" Marcus surprised him by asking.

Jacob blinked in confusion. "And go where? And start over with what money? Anyway, I'm still in high school and couldn't go anywhere until graduation in a couple of months. And even then, I won't have the time to get a job as well as being the Alpha, and wouldn't be able to provide a roof for my own pack. Leaving Forks, and the little we have here, would be akin to killing those in my pack."

"Not if you were sponsored," Marcus replied softly yet seriously.

Jacob frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Aro would never sponsor us, Marcus," Chelsea whispered as she stopped mopping, yet gripped the mop tightly.

"He would have to if the Black Pack moved to Whittier, which I am sure is what Marcus was getting to," a new voice declared, causing everyone to swing their heads in surprise to find Jane standing in the doorway, Captain Hops in her arms, while Alec smirked and leaned in the same doorway. Jane, who'd been the one to speak, petted Captain Hop's head tranquilly.

"Whittier?" Chelsea whispered, her eyes wide open at the thought.

"What's the big deal with Whittier?" Jake wanted to know, sensing a strange undercurrent at the very name.

"On the outside it's just a 200 population town that's incredibly isolated in Alaska," Alec responded easily. "But, truly, it's populated by some very important people that Aro wants protected by any means."

"From who? Or what?" Jacob asked in confusion.

"The Volturi are not what they used to be," Jane informed him stone-facedly. "We've been losing ground, rogue vampire covens are starting to run amok, but none as bad as in Alaska, where night lasts months and they can go about slaughtering whole towns without ever revealing a sparkle. And even during the day months they're so bundled up," she sighed slowly, her violet gaze on Jacob. "We've barely managed to hide the massacres, or at least the cause of them, but Aro knows it will soon be out of the Volturi's control. And when that happens, vampires and their existence will be common knowledge – and we will be in danger of being the ones hunted to extinction."

"Aro would never be able to send the Guard to protect Whittier, it would leave him and the rest of Volterra vulnerable to attack from not only the same rogues, but from the many other powers who wish to replace the Volturi, such as the Romanians," Marcus informed Jake as a matter of factly. "But if the Black Pack were to be sponsored and moved over there to guard over the territory, and the people within… it would not only solve your housing and sponsorship problem, but Aro would be assured of the constant protection of Whittier from the massacres that keep occurring closer and closer to it, and will no doubt soon reach the people of that town sooner rather than later."

"His desire to grow the Guard has been, in part, to finally have enough powerful vampires around him to send some there, even if only on a semi-permanent basis," Alec declared with a raised eyebrow. "It would be a very hard point for him to argue against the Black Pack offering to become protectors of that area should this be brought up during your talks."
"He'd be unable to truly justify his actions should he refuse this offer," Jane agreed with a dark little smile on her face that was somehow more terrifying than her usual emotionless expression.

"They're right, Jacob," Chelsea whispered after thinking it over, her golden eyes wide in visible shock. "Whittier is important, not only to Aro, but to Volterra. This could be the leverage you need."

"I understand that you would need to speak to your pack, this is a monumental decision that will need to be made together," Marcus acknowledged. "But should you choose to pursue this, I will back you."

Jake inhaled deeply, staring in shock at the vampires who might've just helped save his pack.

…

Alice's eyes flew open.

That was it — that was it!

This was the only way—.

*And he's going to need my help.*

Taking in a deep, unnecessary breathe, Alice opened the window to her room and slipped out.

…

Bella had never been torn as she was right now. Jake had only managed to tear himself away from Rachel and Becky's sides to tell the pack of an opportunity that might save them, but he'd told them they all had to agree, that it was something the group had to consider, and had asked them to take the time he'd ben helping his sisters through their first turn to come to a decision of what they wanted to do. He believed this could be the only way to not only save them from a war with the Volturi, but an eventual one with the Rez Pack, and Bella understood that, and despite not wanting to, she agreed with it.

The more she thought about it, the more moving to Whittier made sense for the Black Pack, but what about her? If Bella left with her pack she might never see Alice and Jasper again, and even if they visited each other frequently things wouldn't be the same. Everyone had questions, were contemplating how this might impact their lives, and this was the most traumatic impact the move would have on her.

"Jake wouldn't force you to do anything, you know," Victoria declared.

Bella looked up, surprised to see her sire there. She'd gone back home to try and clear her thoughts, but being in her father's house for the first time since her turn had made everything a bit more emotional and harder for her to think clearly, objectively. She was relieved Victoria was there, she needed someone unbiased to go through this with, and she knew it had to be hard for Victoria to be here given the fact that she was still in love with Bella's dad and hurting from him getting with Seth's mom.

"I overheard what Jake told you when he took you aside," Victoria admitted as she entered the room and sat down on the bed next to Bella. "You could come with us long enough for me to help train you to live your life amongst the humans without being discovered, the isolation of this place would make it perfect for your fledgling training, and then, when you're ready, you could come back. We' be happy as long as you're happy."
She'd thought being a vampire would make her badass, but as soon as the tears came to her eyes Bella realized she was just as emotional as before, if not even more. The brunette hugged the redhead, holding onto her tightly.

"I always knew I'd have to leave here once I became a vampire," Bella admitted softly. "I'll sparkle, and won't grow old, and dad would definitely notice that after a while." She sighed. "I figured I'd just say that I was going to go college on 'scholarship', and then, after a few years, have an 'accident' so that dad wouldn't discover what I am and become in danger."

"You don't have to make any long time decisions right now, Bellsy," Victures assured her. "And, to be honest, I think your father might just die if you fake your own death, and Charlie doesn't deserve to live with that pain."

"I can't tell him the truth, Vicky, you know that will put him in the Volturi's crosshairs like I was," Bella whispered, trying her best to keep from crying. "I knew this would happen and I made the choice still, and I don't regret it, Victoria." She pushed away and looked into her sire's face resolutely. "From the moment I found out vampires and werewolves were a thing – and that you had to be born a werewolf – I knew I would be a true part of this pack and that I'd one day become a vampire."

"Bella-,

"No, let me finish this," Bella whispered. "I didn't ask to be a vampire because I—because of my feelings for Alice and Jasper." She cleared her throat when her voice croaked on their names. "I wanted to change because I'm a part of this pack, because this was the family I chose, and I wanted to be a part of for the rest of eternity. I chose to be a vampire because it not only made it so that the Volturi couldn't use my life against you all, but because I will be able to help you guys and protect you just as much as you have helped and protected me. You're my family, Vicki, you all are." She reached out and gripped Victoria's hand tightly, staring into her sire's golden eyes. "And, given everything, I think Alaska is a good idea—the best idea."

Victoria was silent for a moment before squeezing Bella's hand. "I think it is too."

"I mean, it isn't a done deal yet, that Aro guy is icky and I doubt he'll agree without some sort of fight," Bella muttered, making a face at the mere mention of Aro. "But this could be the only way to not only save our Pack from bloodshed – but save the Olympic Coven as well." She tightened her grip on Victoria's hand. "Alice keeps seeing that this is going to end in their coven's destruction, and this is the only way I can see to protect them from that happening. Aro can't destroy them if they've helped him get something he not only wants, but needs."

Victoria stared at Bella before smiling sadly. "You really love them, don't you?"

Bella couldn't find her voice, it was too thick with emotion. Instead she closed her tear-filled eyes, nodded desperately, and allowing Victoria to cup the back of her head and bring their foreheads together.

The front door opened and Bella smelt her father, heard the blood racing through his veins. Her eyes widened in horror as she brought her hands to her nose to try and fight the sudden hunger the scent awoke in her.

Victoria's eyes widened as she realized what was happening, and covered Bella's nose with her hand, bringing those scarlet eyes to look at her. "You don't have to breathe, stop breathing, it'll help you with the hunger since you won't be able to smell him."
"How does someone stop breathing?" Bella squeaked, freaking out in terror as she heard her father moving around downstairs. "And my eyes-!"

"One thing at a time," Victoria instructed her as she quickly reached out and slammed one hand over Bella's mouth while using the other to squeeze her nostrils shut. "Look at me, Bellsy, don't fight it."

Bella was used to breathing, as was her body, which fought instinctively against all avenues of oxygen having been sealed shut, yet while fledglings were strong, so were sires, and Victoria fought back, keeping Bella's nose and mouth shut… until suddenly… suddenly… Bella realized her body wasn't twitching or suffocating. Her body had stopped breathing, and it was… okay with it. It was the weirdest thing since realizing her heart no longer beat, that she'd experienced since turning.

Seeming to sense when Bella was over her freak out, Victoria made a show of removing her hands. "Better?"

Bella was still hungry, but it wasn't that desperation from before. She could control this, and trust she could, as long as Victoria was near. "Yeah."

"Good, because he's coming up the stairs," Victoria muttered as she messed up Bella's stairs. "If he says anything about your eyes, tell him you've been trying contacts for Halloween."

"October is still months away!" Bella hissed in panic.

"This is your father, he'll just be happy you're back home," Victoria hissed before wincing. "He's heard our voices. His heart speeds up happily whenever he realizes you're home and safe."

That touched Bella and helped calm her by the time there was a knock on the door and her father peeked his head in, clearly relieved and happy to see her there. "Bella! You're back! Hey Victoria. How have the two of you been enjoying the last couple of days of Girl Time?"

"Hey Charlie, they were really fun, thanks." Victoria smiled up at him awkwardly before clearing her throat and motioning to Bella. "What do you think? I'm saying she should be a vampire for Halloween but she doesn't like the contacts. We know it's early, but with these things you have to prepare in advance."

"Halloween does seem to be a big thing nowadays for some reason." He entered and eyed his daughter curiously before chuckling. "Hmmm… that color really doesn't really suit you, Bella. Maybe try a different color?"

"I will," she promised, fighting all her instincts to attack when he hugged her awkwardly, as were all their hugs, but she loved them all.

"Victoria, you should stay for dinner, it's pizza night," Charlie chuckled, clearly in a very good mood. "When's Jake getting back from Edward's? He should bring James, I haven't really seen him since he got back from his trip, we should make this a family night."

It couldn't be more obvious that Charlie didn't see Victoria as a woman, and a part of Bella really hurt for her friend and sire.

"Are you saying he shouldn't bring Edward?" Victoria tried for a teasing laugh. "You're going to have to accept Mr Hairstyle sometime, Charlie!"

Charlie pulled a face. "Sure I have, I mean, I've had to accept Edward, but between the three of us
I've always been rooting for James. I figured if I'm going to have a son-in-law through Jake, it should be him."

"About that…." Victoria chuckled deviously. "You'll get James as a son-in-law, but because of Seth, not Jake."

Charlie's eyes widened in scandal. "Does Sue know?"

"Yep." Victoria nodded, clutching her hands behind her back. "It's still new but I think she's okay with it." She cleared her throat and smiled brighter. "Why not call her over for the dinner? James and Seth are busy, as are Jake and Ed, but Bella and I can bring you both up to speed on the new couple in town."

"Sounds like a long night," Charlie chuckled as he nodded. "I'll call her." He was still chuckling as he left the room.

Victoria's smile disappeared from her face the second he left, and she looked incredibly tired.

"You don't have to stay," Bella whispered in worry.

"Of course I do, I'm not leaving you, you're my fledgling and you'll need me here tonight," Victoria whispered before letting out a deep breath and squaring her shoulders. "Plus, I've decided to forget about your father. He's a good man, who clearly cares about me, and I can be happy with the fact that I have even a little piece of his heart." She tried for a smile. "Anyway, he's clearly got terrible taste in women if he chose someone like Sue Clearwater over me."

They both knew Sue Clearwater was gorgeous, but Bella let her sire get away with this little bout of petulance because, overall, Victoria was being magnanimous and adult as fuck given everything.

Still, this time, when Bella reached out and grabbed Victoria's hand, she was the one comforting her sire.

This was going to be a very long night.

…

Chelsea pulled the cloak around her tighter as she glanced towards the darkness of the forest, before glancing back at the house, where Leah was with her mom. The vampire wanted to go back to the werewolf, but instead she took in a deep breath and stepped into the darkness of the forest, letting the pitch black consume her from all sight.

…

Colin really wanted to hang around Jane, that was what his instincts were telling him to do, but he instead gave her her space. When she'd come by she'd told him she'd done so because 'this is a house of vegan vampires, Captain Hops isn't safe', so basically she cared more about the rabbit than she did about him. Now that she was back with her own coven, and Dr Cullen was procuring them bags of human blood, she didn't even need Colin for sustenance anymore, so his utter worthlessness was really making him feel useless and depressed.

It was why he was helping Brady with the shaved ice thing the guy was doing to help Jacob's sisters keep their body temperature down. He had to keep busy, keep his mind off of what a failure he was as a man and as an Imprinter. Then again, his and Janes' relationship hadn't exactly begun on the best terms, had it? What could he really expect? Leah was just lucky her Imprintee hadn't held that against her.
Lucky Leah.

And now, he had to think about the move as well. He wasn't exactly in the Black Pack, but like Brady, he realized his place in the Uley Pack was gone. They'd shifted since the peace talks, and they didn't feel that connection to the pack anymore. Their only hope was to get accepted into the Black Pack, and that meant moving. Colin's brother was his guardian, and while Connor has never actually turned he abided by pack law. Connor had threatened to come to the Hunter residence if Colin wouldn't go home to the Rez, and then he'd made that threat a reality when he'd appeared on his motorcycle with tons of shit thrown in his sidecar, and had made himself busy doing something or the other somewhere around the house.

Brady came from a one parent household like Seth, and he'd spoken to his mom, telling her what was happening, and told her to stay away. Like Connor, Mrs Fuller had completely ignored Brady's wishes and was currently in the kitchen cooking as (according to her) everyone in the house were way too skinny. Brady's younger brother, Max, was there with her, visibly psyched and excited to be around vampires, and was particularly enamored with Chelsea, which made Leah's obvious jealousy funny.

"What do you think about Alaska?" Brady wanted to know as he stirred the juice they'd use to lightly flavor the ice once they'd shaved enough of the cubes. "I mean, there'll be a lot of space to run around in wolf form, and since we're always hot the cold won't bother us." He made a face. "I heard my mother talking to Seth's mom about it, asked her if she knew whether there were any schools in Whittier since it's so small."

"Wait, is your mom considering going with?" Colin's eyes widened.

"I'm too scared to ask," Brady admitted woefully. "But it seems like that might be the case. Connor would probably want to come back too, I mean, he's your guardian and like me you're still in school."

"They're not pack," Colin reminded softly. "Neither are we."

"Yeah….." Brady nodded hesitantly. "Col, wolves without a pack don't survive long, and let's be honest, we've burned our bridges with Sam. We have to make this work." He motioned to his ice. "I'm pulling my weight so you better start stepping up too, because neither you nor I have Alpha-ish qualities to start our own pack."

Just the thought was terrifying. "I'll figure something out."

Brady cleared his throat. "What about Little Miss Terror?" At Colin's look Brady rolled his eyes. "Oh come on, she's your Imprintee, and she apparently lives in Volterra, wherever the hell that is. What are you going to do about that?"

"Look, she—Jane—I helped Sam keep her in prison already, I'm not doing that to her again," Colin muttered as he concentrated on the task at hand. "I-as long as she's happy I'll be happy—even if I never see her again." Even he could hear the depression growing in his tone at that though. "I'd never—I can't—I have to think about what's best for her, you know? And what's better for her is to be with her coven, I get the need for a pack, for belonging, I can't—I couldn't-."

Brady sighed and patted his shoulder. "Women."

Colin chuckled darkly.

"I hope I don't get one," Brady muttered worriedly under his breath as he shook his head. "A
vampire is bad enough."

Not surprised given what he'd always suspected about his friend, Colin snorted and clapped his friend on the back. "I hope you don't either."

"Thanks, man," Brady sighed.

"What's with the dejected faces?" Seth wanted to know as he came to join them. Ever since he'd gotten back the only one of the three who was actually an official part of the Black Pack had been too busy to really having out and talk, this was probably the first time they'd been in the same room together without something huge happening and keeping them from actually talking.

"How do we become a part of this pack?" Brady wanted to know bluntly. "We've burned bridges at our old pack, so this is the only one we've got left. We can't be left behind when you guys move to Alaska."

"You act as if that's a given," Seth snorted as he joined them at the table. "In the end, the Volturi royalty have final say, and while Marcus seems to be on our side that leaves two other ones who can easily outvote him. This could still end up in a battle, in a war, don't go planning anything just yet."

"Look, whatever happens, Alaska, Miami, here, we've got to be a part of this," Brady insisted, apparently very much decided on this. "You've got an in, you're mates with the Beta of the pack, that gives you some sway." He paused. "Well, James has sway, and given what I keep accidentally overhearing or walking into, you two are close, so, you know, maybe you could wag your tail at him or something?"

Seth looked comical, his lips parted in outrage yet his face incredibly pink. "I won't wag my tail—"

"Seth, shut up, I'm jealous enough of you as is," Brady interrupted with a no-nonsense kind of growl. "Your vampire is hot. And I don't mean hot. I mean hawt." He grinned lecherously, seeming lost in thought. "Nuclear."

Seth's eyes narrowed. "You compliment him one more time and I'll castrate you with my own claws."

Colin bit his bottom lip, amused. While he'd always figured Brady was into guys, he'd never really gotten a handle on what Seth was into, so it'd been a little surprising to find out that Seth had Imprinted on a guy, but Colin didn't care. As long as his friends were happy — that was all he cared about.

"I'm just saying, you've kind of have everything right now," Brady pointed out immediately. "And I'm not saying you don't deserve it, I'm just saying - well..." He slumped over the table with a groan. "I want my own vampire!"

Colin patted his friend on the back. "I'm sure you'll get one soon."

"I'm the only one of us who doesn't have one!" Brady complained, clearly in a sulk. "You've got Scary Barbie, and Seth's got -," he noticed the warning look Seth gave him and pouted. "I think we all know what I think about what Seth's got!" He leaned his forehead against the surface of the table. "I want my own! I haven't even been able to get a good look at any of the Volturi people's thugs. One of those big, burly assholes could be mine and I wouldn't even know because I can't even get close to them!"
Seth raised an eyebrow and exchanged a surprised look with Colin before returning his attention to Brady. "You can have Riley."

"I don't want Riley," Brady muttered. "I'm going to be the only Twink in my relationship thankyouverymuch."

Colin bit his lip to keep from laughing at the petulance in that tone. He wondered why Brady suddenly felt so comfortable to talk to them about this, when he'd never addressed his sexuality or preferences like this before. Was it because Seth was in a gay relationship and Colin was taking it so well? Did Brady finally feel comfortable enough realizing that nothing was different for Seth?

"Honey, stop sulking, it's not attractive," a voice declared, surprising them all to see Mrs Fuller in the doorway, a bowl and fork in her hands, beating the contents of the bowl furiously. "If you're meant to Imprint on some burly vampire hunk it'll happen, from what I understand about it, it's fate or something like that. So, whether you bitch about it or not, it will happen when it's supposed to happen." She raised an eyebrow at his sulk. "Until then, stop pouting, you'll give yourself premature wrinkles."

Brady looked horrified at the thought as he palmed his face.

Clearly pleased with herself, Mrs Fuller went back to the kitchen, humming to herself.

Colin bit back the desire to laugh, always having thought Mrs Fuller was both awesome and terrifying.

Seth chuckled softly before sighing. "I'll talk to Jake myself and ask him about your situation."

Brady, who was still feeling his face for wrinkles, smiled. "Thanks, Seth." He then blinked and looked down at his plate. "Shoot! We need to get these to him before they melt more than they already have! C'mon Colin!" He grabbed his plate and raced away.

Colin shared an amused smile with Seth, grabbed his own plate, and followed after.

…

Phoenix Jorden was quickly becoming Aro's favorite, not only because his ability was increasingly useful, but because, like Aro, Phoenix was grounded in his plans. It seemed that Phoenix was the only one who seemed to remember that they'd come here prepared for war.

Marcus was over at the Black Pack's home, had been ever since the cow-eyed girl had gone into her first turn.

Caius was laughing and visibly enjoying his stay at Carlisle's, getting caught up with their old friend.

Jane and Alec had gone over to the Black Pack's home as well.

Everyone were acting as if this wasn't war.

Everyone but Phoenix… and Alice… who was sequestered in her room and refused to come out, clearly going through her many visions. Her distress soothed Aro, it meant he kept coming out on top of every outcome she saw.

"We should attack while they've got their guards down, while they're vulnerable," Phoenix growled as he stared out of the window of Aro's bedroom during his stay at the Olympic Coven's home. He
was staring out in the direction of the Black Pack's home, his hands digging deep into the window's wooden frame. "Why are we giving them this time to regroup?"

"Normally I would agree," Aro admitted as he came to stand next to the window with the fledgling. "But Marcus and Caius' attitudes are troubling. Normally I could have Chelsea fix things, but with her having defected to the other side I am finding myself having to improvise." He clasped his hands behind his back. "There must always be the pretense of unity in the royal three, it must always appear that we are in agreement."

"I just—he's right there." Phoenix let out a deep, unnecessary breath. "I've wanted Jake for so long as he's right there. I—I don't know how much longer I can be patient."

"What is so special about this Jacob Black?" Aro wanted to know curiously. At face value Jacob Black really wasn't much, but there was a little voice in the back of his head telling him not to underestimate the young male.

"So much." Phoenix smiled softly as he stared unseeingly out at the darkened forest. "He's strong but compassionate, patient yet encouraging, handsome yet unpretentious. I fell in love with him the moment he joined our school and I first saw him. I hoped—," his smile disappeared into a frown. "But Edward Cullen had his fangs in him way before I even knew him. It's—if only I could've gotten him alone—but Cullen was always there!"

He still didn't get it. He heard more laughter from Caius. "Jasper really is overworking."

"Hmmm?" Phoenix looked back at him in confusion.

"Jasper Hale can control emotions, he is using it on Caius, I'm surprised he isn't using it on you," Aro explained.

Phoenix looked surprised. "Why don't you think he's doing it to me? You I get, I'm cloaking you, but me?"

"Maybe he can't, maybe your ability somehow protects you as it does me," Aro wondered out loud. Phoenix thought silently before nodding. "Maybe." He frowned. "That other vampire still knew I was there though, even when I cloaked myself to the point where I wasn't visible to the naked eye."

"Ah yes, James," Aro chuckled as he thought back to the blonde vampire. "He's special."

Phoenix made up a face. "He's trouble."

"He is," Aro agreed with a dark smile. ""

James didn't even look up from his nails when a twig broke in the darkness around him. "I've made sure she was kept busy, but she's starting to wonder where you are."

Chelsea emerged from the darkness, pulling the hood from her face. "I don't like not telling her."

"I don't like not telling Seth, or Jake for that matter," James countered. "But considering Edward hasn't ratted us out, he has to agree with this too, even if he won't acknowledge it." He sighed deeply. "If this goes south, Jake can't have known about it. It's the only way we keep him, and this pack, safe from retribution." He tilted his head. "Are you rethinking—?"
"No." Chelsea shook her head. "I know Aro better than anyone else, I know what he's capable of doing when he really wants something, and he wants too much from both this pack and the Olympic Coven to just give in, even if it's for Whittier." She took in a deep breath. "I don't understand Imprinting, but I can't explain it - I barely know Leah and yet, if she died..." She gripped her heart and looked up at James. "I'm more than willing to do this, even if it ends up biting us in the ass... as long as she's okay."

"How long does it take for that lovey dove stuff to kick in?" Garrett wanted to know from the other side of the tree as he made his appearance with a swing around to face them. "Because so far I don't have any sort of inclination towards Sam."

Chelsea smiled sweetly. "For me it was instantaneous, really."

Garrett raised an eyebrow and turned questioningly to James.

The blonde thought about the question for a moment. "It wasn't instantaneous for me, I thought Seth was annoying." He felt a little guilty for saying that, but it was the truth. "Before I knew it, though, he'd weaseled himself into my affections."

"Enough of the gooey crap, aren't we here to potentially get into a lot of trouble?" Riley wanted to know from somewhere up in the tree James was leaning on. In seconds he'd dropped from the tree and landed gracefully between Chelsea and James, standing up and flinging his hair out of his face. "I mightn't be a connoisseur of all things wolf pack, but I know going behind a coven leader's back like this is a big no-no. I'm sure it's not that different for wolf packs." He raised an eyebrow as he sent a sideways glance in James' direction. "I don't care any way, I'm your fledgling, you're my sire, whatever you want I'll do, but are you okay with the fact that you might get kicked out of the pack for this?"

James took in a deep breath and nodded. "I'm the Beta of the pack, that means that while Jacob is out of commission with his sisters' situations I have to step up and do what he can't."

"If you're so sure you're doing the right thing, why isn't Seth here?" Garrett wanted to know, eyebrow raised, only to smirk when James flinched. "Exactly. You're going rogue and you know it."

Riley cracked his neck. "If you told him I'm sure he wouldn't rat you out. He is your Imprinter."

"He's also a part of the Black Pack, and I don't want to mess with his loyalty, he already lost enough to become a part of this pack, I won't do anything to risk his place in it." James raised an eyebrow. "That's why it has to be done by you guys, you're not members of the pack, at least not officially, so nothing can be held against you."

"Well, I'm not a member either," a surprising voice declared, causing them to jump in surprise and see Colin emerge from the bushes with Brady next to him. "Neither's this guy." He raised an eyebrow. "So how can we help?"

James eyed the two. "How-?"

"We could be attacked any minute by an army of vampires, it's kept us super aware of what's going around in our surrounding," Brady huffed, chest puffed out. "There isn't a bug in that forest who could chirp without us hearing."

Colin rolled his eyes. "Garrett was acting really sketchy so we decided to follow him and see what he was up to."
Brady pouted, clearly disliking the air of mystery having been dispelled.

Garrett flinched at the look everyone gave him. "Sorry."

"We can help," Colin assured the group.

"Yeah, and it's better than sitting down and doing nothing but shaving ice," Brady agreed. "Plus, you're going to need wolves for added protection."

"I am an independent vampire who does not need a wolf," Garrett assured them.

"As the only vampire here not paired off with a wolf, I'm the only one allowed to say that," Riley informed Garrett conversationally.

Chelsea eyed them both before turning to James with a 'it couldn't hurt' kind of look. "It's not like I can go, I have to stay here so I can, uh, you know, fulfill my part of the plan. So does Garrett. Riley could use the backup."

"Your mother and his brother are here," James pointed out to the werewolves. "This plan hinges on everyone being so busy they won't notice a few missing. Your people will miss you and that will bring up red flags."

"If he does this, he's a part of this pack," another voice declared as another body emerged from the bushes, surprising everyone.

"Mom?" Brady squeaked.

"Okay, I get a werewolf sneaking up on us, but a human?" Garrett squeaked. "We should all feel very ashamed of ourselves right now."

Mrs Fuller had a wooden spoon in her hand and was pointing it at James. "I want your word, James Hunter."

James blinked and stood up straight, not sure why he was somewhat scared of this human woman. "Ma'am, to be honest, I could very well get kicked out of the pack for what I'm about to do, so I can't really promise anything."

Those mascara framed eyes narrowed on him. "Then if that happens, you will let them be a part of your pack." That wasn't her asking, that was her telling. "Wolves need to be a part of a group. Colin and Brady have to be a part of a pack, and if the Rez is out of the question, and the Black Pack won't work, you will accept them."

James' eyes widened. "I don't—I-" He had no plans of leaving the Black Pack, but that could very well be a consequence for what he was about to do. It hurt, it really did, but he had to do what he had to to keep them safe. "Okay." He nodded, seeing the surprise on Garrett and Riley's faces when he did so. "If we get kicked out of the Black Pack for what we're about to do, I'll form my own Coven and Colin and Brady will be a part of it. You have my word."

Mrs Fuller kept her eyes narrowed at him, before seeming to see his sincerity because suddenly she grinned. "Good. Don't worry about Connor, I'll keep him busy fixing up the damages from the attack he won't have time to realize Colin isn't around." She looked angelic while saying that, but there was something terrifying in her eyes. "Oh, and by the way, Max and I are package deals with Brady."

"Mom," Brady whined.
James nodded. "I figured. But about the Connor thing, you don't have to worry about keeping him busy because Colin has an Imprintee who will no doubt notice he is gone no matter what distraction is going on, so he's going to serve me better staying here."

That smile returned brighter. "Noted." She leaned against one of the trees, apparently not about to leave. "So, I heard enough from my little hiding place, but I have a question."


"Yours can wait," she assured Garrett before turning to James. "Are you the Original Vampire?"

James blinked in confusion. "Excuse me?"

"How do you even know about that?" Riley asked, sounding entirely too impressed right now.

"People tend to ignore human women, and they underestimate us, which is why we tend to know more than they give us credit," Mrs Fuller scoffed. "I know Jacob Black is supposed to be the reincarnation of the Original Wolf or something like that, and in many ways that makes sense, especially given the fact that he comes form a very long line of chieftains and Alphas, but there's no way Edward Cullen is the reincarnation of the Original Vampire." She eyed James up and down. "So is it you?"

James paused, really thought it through, and then shook his head. "I don't think so."

Mrs Fuller nodded curiously. "Makes you wonder who she or he is, doesn't it?"

Honestly James hadn't even thought about it before, but the woman made a good point. This whole reincarnation thing was supposed to help heal the divide between wolves and vampires – so it would make sense that the Original Vampire would be as involved as the Original Wolf, so where exactly was he or she? Shouldn't they be smackdab in the middle of everything as well?

Mrs Fuller eyed them all before turning and leaving without a by-your-leave.

"Your mom's kind of scary," Riley told Brady.

"You're telling me?" Brady scoffed.

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James eyed them all before nodding. "Everyone but Brady, get out of here, we don't need more people stumbling into this supposedly secret meeting." He ignored the looks he got as everyone but Brady left in their own direction to keep from attracting more attention than they already had.

"Look," Brady started as soon as the others were out of earshot. "I can't control my mom, okay? She's-well—she keeps that spoon on her for a reason. You know? She's dangerous with it!"

"Noted." James motioned for him to walk with him, and waited for the wolf to fall in line before he continued. "I need you and Riley to work in unison on this operation, no matter how hard he may make that with his attitude."

Brady cleared his throat, looking incredibly uncomfortable. "I really don't want Riley. He's not my type."

"Huh?" James looked at him in confusion before snickering when he got what the guy was trying to tell him. "No, I know that, and that's exactly why."

Intrigue shone in those brown eyes. "Go on."
"Garrett and Colin are both going to stay behind because of their Imprintee and Imprinter." James still didn't like talking about Sam in that way, but it was a fact he had to get over for now. "You and Riley, on the other hand, don't have those instinctual issues, and will be able to think clearly unlike the other two had they gone. You'd be able to pick up on things they don't."

"I get it," Brady declared as he nodded his head and grinned, clearly boosted by this. "I'm not exactly sure what we're doing, but I'm sure you didn't explain anything just in case we were being overheard by someone else."

Yeah, his pride had been hurt by how many people had snuck up on them. That's what he got for stopping breathing so as to stop getting so distracted by Seth's incredibly delicious scent. "Garrett and Riley will let you know more later, but I just wanted to tell you this from now. Also, I need you to do something when you get there." He sighed and hugged Brady tightly, bringing the guy in extremely close while resting his head on the top of his head.

"James?" Brady squeaked.

"You need to have my scent on you for this to work," James muttered with a sigh, realizing he'd have to do something about the scent on himself by the time he got back or Seth and everyone else would be very confused and suspicious. "Okay, so listen very closely, this is what I want-," he paused, remembering how a human had walked in on them, and leaned in to whisper the rest in Brady's ear.

...

Seth froze.

He'd been trying to figure out where James was, and had been surprised that he could pick up James' scent in the forest. The vampire had been spending most of his time on the roof, so this was a new development. Seth had followed the scent into the woods and had finally seen James there with… Brady. And then James hugged Brady. And then he—from this angle it really looked like he was…

Seth didn't know he'd shifted until after he'd slammed into the vampire and wolf, and had Brady pinned to the ground, snarling viciously into his shocked face.

"Heyheyheyheyhey!" Suddenly James somehow managed to grab Seth by his waist and yank the wolf off of his so-called-friend seconds before Seth's fangs could snap Brady's damned face off.

Again, Seth didn't wasn't sure when his body shifted back to human, but he honestly didn't care, as he struggled to get free and—.

"What are you doing?"

The wolf snarled and kicked out, tying desperately to get free, all reason clouded by anger and jealousy.

"Get out of here, Brady," James ordered.

Brady stumbled to his feet and glanced worriedly towards James.

"Stop looking at him!" Seth snapped as he fought harder.

"Go, it's time," James ordered Brady as he kept Seth's back pressed hard into his chest. "Find Riley. Go."
Brady nodded and ran.

Seth growled low in his throat and went still, the wolf rippling under his skin, barely contained within.

"I know what that must've looked like to you," James admitted carefully after the silence had dragged on between them. "But despite how cliche this sounds: it's not what it looked like."

"It looked like you were purposefully covering him in your scent," Seth accused.

There was silence, and then a sheepish: "Okay, so it looked exactly like it was."

It was very hard to not scratch free and go after Brady now that he had that confirmation.

"I have no interest in him like that," James muttered as he tightened his grip around Seth as if able to feel his murderous intent growing. "I can't tell you why I was doing that with him, but at least give me some credit by not believing I'd cheat on you this quickly and this carelessly."

Some part of Seth knew James hadn't been cheating on him, he hadn't even smelt aroused while that close to Brady (who wasn't hideous), which was probably the only reason the vampire had been able to hold Seth back the way that he had. There had to be something else going around, and now that his wolf had stopped freaking out Seth's human mind was yelling this very loudly.

"He's also your friend," James continued to mutter, as if insulted. "If you can't trust me, trust him."

"He's so into you he'd go into heat if it were possible!" Seth snapped while glaring over his shoulder at the blonde.

"Really?" James was visibly shocked at this admission before he smirked. "Well, I can't blame him, really. I am the best looking guy here."

Seth agreed a hundred per cent, and that annoyance tore another snarl out of him.

"You weren't included in that list." James assured him, clearly misreading the reason for the snarl.

Seth huffed, his blind fury from before slowly fading, leaving behind extreme annoyance. "Why would you provoke me by putting your scent all over someone else? Do you know how lucky we all are that you pulled me away when you did? I could've, and would've, really hurt him out of pure animal instinct."

"You weren't supposed to know that I did that to Brady, it wasn't provocation," James countered.

"I wasn't supposed to—-how is that supposed to make it any better?" Seth snapped, voice squeaking in his indignation.

"Seth, I can't tell you anything for now, okay? It's for your own good." James sounded, and looked, tired. "You'll find out soon enough, so just for now, please just forget what you saw and let it go."

Suspicion filled Seth's body once more. "what aren't you telling me?"

"Seth." James sighed once more.

Suspicion turned to worry immediately. "What's happening, James? What are you conniving?" He then froze. Without jealousy clouding his mind—-. "Who are you sending Brady to see? If he's supposed to go with Riley obviously Riley knows where this person is, and Brady's covered in your scent to prove that he's actually coming from you." He saw the way James flinched. "I'm
right, aren't I?"

"Seth, just, trust me."

"You need to trust me!" Seth snapped as he fought his way out of James' grip to turn around and face him. "What are you planning? It's obviously behind Jacob's back, otherwise you wouldn't be acting all cloak and dagger like this."

"That's enough, Seth!" James snapped, surprising him.

"So... It's dangerous," Seth realized, a dark sensation in the pit of his stomach. "And you trust Brady with it, but you don't me."

James ran his fingers through his hair. "It has nothing to do with trust. I just don't have a terrifying need to protect Brady, and he doesn't have to answer to an alpha like you do."

"Like we do." Seth frowned in confusion at that wording. "Why—-?" And then he got it. "What you're doing - Jake won't agree with it, might kick you out of the pack because of it... won't it?" He saw the truth on James' face, which only served to refuel his ire. "Do you really think I'd stay in this pack if you left?" He grabbed James by his jacket's lapels and pulled him in close, standing up onto his tiptoes to bring them nose to nose. "If you're kicked out, or leave of your own accord, I'm going to be with you. No matter where or how. How many times do I have to tell you that you're stuck with me for you to--."

Suddenly he was pressed with his back against one of the trees, but his words were stolen by the lips on his. Seth struggled very halfheartedly for about a split second before wrapping his arms around James' neck, drawing him in closer. "I'm still annoyed with you," he whispered against those lips. "You said we'd do this, we'd be this, but you're already leaving me out and preparing to potentially leave me behind if whatever you're planning goes sideways."

"I'm not—-Seth—you've given up so much to be a part of this pack," James whispered back.

Seth pulled away enough to glare up into his Imprintee's face. "I gave up so much to be with you." James' wide-eyes were both insulting and shocking. "Was I unhappy with Sam's handling of the pack? Of course. But despite that, the reason I left my old pack was to be in the same one as you." He reached up and sank his hands into James' golden hair, clenching his fingers in them tightly, but not tight enough to hurt, only enough to keep the vampire's face tilted to him. "In this pack, in a coven, or just roaming the world with no home... I'll be there with you."

He could see the shocked realization on James' face. Honestly, it shouldn't have been such a revelation, and it just showed Seth that he had a way to go to get James to understand the bonds of Imprinting. But that was okay, James was starting to slowly figure it out, and they had the rest of their lives for Seth to continue showing the blonde just how much he actually cared, how much the vampire mattered.

James' lips twitched before he glanced over his own shoulder at something and chuckled. Those golden eyes returned to Seth and then, as he moved a step away, lowered to stare at his body. "I'm going to have to keep a spare set of clothes on me at all times, aren't I?"

Seth went red in two seconds flat, remembering all too late that when he'd shifted he'd torn up his clothes, leaving him butt naked now that he'd returned to human form. "It would probably be best."

A hum escaped James' lips as he leaned down, his lips touching Seth's neck, his teeth nibbling teasingly.
Almost immediately Seth felt a shiver trail down his spine, his lips parting as a soft gasp escaped the second James' hands began to trail down his body.

"I don't want to leave this pack," James whispered against his neck seconds before Seth found himself turned around, gripping at the tree with his hand as he was urged forwards, James now behind him, breathing in his ear, hands making rough circles on his hips. "But I'd be lying if I said that the thought of starting our own coven isn't appealing, just you, me, and the world as our bed."

Seth's fingertips dug into the bark as he arched his back instinctively. Those hands on him were almost electric, and then James' right hand trailed from Seth's hip to the middle of his back, shifting to palm his ass as suddenly that forefinger circled, seeking entrance. Seth welcomed it with embarrassing eagerness, a thick sob escaping his lips as that digit sunk in shockingly easy all the way to James' knuckle.

The vampire tensed and groaned, leaning with his forehead against the back of Seth's head. "I'm going to end up spoiled if you keep preparing yourself in advance for me like this."

*Huh?* But Seth couldn't voice that question because it was chased away by another groan as James added another finger. James never added another finger this quickly, and even after preparing Seth for it, it would burn its way inside of him, but inside of the burn Seth's body broke out in shivers of incredible pleasure that left him leaning hard against the tree, knees trembling.

"You're blushing all the way down your neck," James chuckled as his fingers worked in and out of Seth.

The werewolf would've bitten back some smart comment but he really couldn't do anything but hold onto the tree with all his might and pray he didn't collapse. He didn't know what was happening, what was different, but it was as if his insides had somehow become coated in incredibly sensitive pleasure receptors. Each little movement of James' fingers inside of him had Seth's insides itched with growing need. Those fingers brushed against what felt like millions of nerves, each deepening the hazy fog that was slowly coming over him, keeping him from really questioning anything, merely aware of the pleasure, of the need, and of his growing want.

"*More,*" was all he managed to gasp out as he moved his hips, desperate for more contact. "It's not… enough!"

James sucked in a harsh breath. "Oh, it's not enough, is it?" He added another finger, three deep now, those fingers caressing the inside of Seth's body teasingly. "Is this enough?"

It should be uncomfortable, sore, with the stretch, especially this quickly, and yet Seth's insides itched with growing need. Those fingers brushed against what felt like millions of nerves, each deepening the hazy fog that was slowly coming over him, keeping him from really questioning anything, merely aware of the pleasure, of the need, and of his growing want.

"*No,*" Seth moaned in response.

James froze. "No what?" He slipped his fingers free. "Is this hurting you? I knew I should've prepared you better but—-."  

Seth whined loudly as those fingers disappeared, leaving his insides feeling almost painfully empty. "*No. It wasn't hurting.*"

"Oh." And back again was the smirk he could just hear on James' lips. "I see. I apologize." He grabbed Seth's left cheek in his hand, squeezing it playfully before his lean middle finger circled that puckered hole.

"James." Seth nearly snarled as he twisted as best he could to grab James' wrist, glaring up at him.
"I don't want your fingers."

In seconds James had caught his chin, holding him in that twisted position as he kissed him deeply. "So fucking cute," James whispered.

A jolt of pleasure raced down Seth's spine, unable to understand how a word he'd hated so much for so long now made him hard and needier than he'd been seconds ago. His body seemed on fire, every nerve overly sensitive, his whole being suffering from an itch he couldn't scratch. The wolf was about to pull out of the kiss and snarl for James to fuck him already, but then he felt that pressure against his entrance.

It was much bigger than fingers, and yet as it pushed its way passed his sphincter, the burn was somewhat present—yet it only served to magnify the sensation of those billions of new nerve-ends he'd seemed to develop spontaneously.

Seth sobbed into James lips, pulling away to grab hold of the tree's trunk and lean his forehead against it, incredibly disoriented. He arched his back, pushing back with his hips, impaling himself completely on that rod.

James curled his arms around Seth's waist, bringing their bodies pressed together as his hips rotated slowly, carving Seth out and touching even more things inside of him that made the wolf sob, the shake in his knees starting to affect his legs as well. The vampire hadn't even thrusted yet, and yet desire dripped from the tip of Seth's trembling cock.

"What the hell have you done?" James groaned into his hair. "I feel like I could cum from just being inside you." He chuckled darkly, ruefully. "I'm scared to move. I don't think my ego could take it."

At the thought of James filling him with his seed, the sensitivity in Seth's body seemed to amp up to 100, which nearly had him jumping out of his skin because he'd already thought his sensitivity at its max. "James," he begged while shifting his hips. "Give it to me."

The vampire sounded choked as he hid his face in Seth's hair. "Dammn it, Seth, don't—-." But then he let out a groan that almost sounded like a sob when Seth's hips undulated slowly but deeply. "You little tease." He grabbed a fistful of Seth's hair, wrapping it around his fist and holding it tight like a horse's reigns, forcing Seth's back to further arch, and the wolf to let out a throaty cry. "You like that?"

Seth tried to nod but his hair was held too tightly, so instead he managed a gargled: "Yessss.

"Good boy." James slapped his right buttcheek, stinging it, yet causing everything inside Seth to tingle in this amazing way that he didn't even try to hide his lustful sob when James slapped him again. "Move your ass, Seth. If you want my cum this much work for it."

His inner wolf was not only winning pitifully, but Seth knew if it could manifest itself visibly it would be front down and ass up—just like he wanted to be right now. There was nothing he wanted more than to be pushed down to the ground and mounted, pounded mercilessly into the ground like some bitch in heat.

"There you go," James praised as Seth fucked himself on his cock, the vampire's free hand caressing the werewolf's stomach slowly. "When this is all over, we're going hunting, just you and me." He laid open mouthed kisses to Seth's neck, his teeth scraping Seth's skin teasingly. "It'll be like our trip, except I'll spend the whole time filling you with cum." He chuckled at Seth's sob, rubbing the werewolf's stomach almost lovingly. "You'll be so full of my cum this flat stomach's
Pleasure radiated throughout Seth's body almost painfully at the thought. It was as if he were on fire, and everything James said, did, stoked the flame until it was threatening to burn the wolf alive.

"I'm going to cum," Seth cried out, but exhilarated and disappointed.

"I haven't even touched you yet," James hissed out, voice strained and almost accusing seconds before he tightened his grip around Seth's body and...

Seth bit down hard on his bottom lip to keep from screaming. He'd always loved the feeling of James' cum filling his body, but if James' cock had made his body feel amazing, the moment his cum filled him it was as if every nerve in his body exploded all at once. His body shook violently as the feeling of James' completion ripped his own out of him, and Seth found himself fucking back hard into James' cock while his own spurted gushes of white onto the tree.

James sagged against him, breathing accelerated, before grabbing Seth's chin and twisting his head back around for another kiss before suddenly tensing. "Someone's coming."

Seth snarled, the sound all wolf, surprising even himself.

James's lips twitched as he surprised Seth by pressing a quick peck to his lips before slipping free and pulling his pants up. "As much as I love seeing you naked, I'm not keen on anyone else seeing you like this." He eyed Seth up and down, his gaze as physical as a touch. "Shift and go back home."

Seth glared as he turned around to face him. "But you said someone's coming. I'm not just leaving you—-.

"It's friend, not foe, don't worry, the only reason you snuck up on me was because I wasn't breathing, but I am now," James assured him, as he slipped his arms around Seth's body and pulled him in closer for another kiss, and another, seeming to momentarily forget what they'd been saying.

Seth liked the fact that he could do that to his mate, and groaned in complaint when James obviously remembered that someone was on their way, because he sighed and pulled away from Seth.

"Go," James motioned him away, and then chuckled when he saw the way Seth hesitated. "I'm not leaving you, puppy. You're right, if I leave, no matter what the reason, you're coming with me."

Seth couldn't stop the smile from spreading across his lips.

James groaned. "Go before my boner comes back. Please."

Amused, Seth reached forwards, caressed his mate's cock through his jeans, and swallowed James' cry with his lips before chuckling. Winking mischievously, he turned into his wolf's form, swatted James in the face with his tail, and then was off, able to hear James' fond laughter long after he'd left.
Chapter 19

What he'd just learnt still swirled in his mind, but James didn't have time to process it or what it could mean, because he could detect a faint signature making its way towards the Hunter Residence. The scent signature kept getting closer and closer, and James realized it was headed directly to where Jacob and Edward's scents were. James had noticed the couple's scents leaving the house, and since he couldn't hear screams anymore he figured the shifting was either done or the girls had fainted from the pain. Either way, Jake had left the house and Edward had followed soon after. James had kept a nose open for them in case of something like this happening, and it was why he was able to intercept as quickly as he did.

Or, well, he allowed the scent to get closer and closer, keeping himself down wind to be able to follow and keep an eye on it without the vampire realizing. He quickly texted someone before turning it off so that the light nor any sound could give away his presence.

From his position, James could not only see James and Edward as they talked softly to each other, but he could also see Phoenix Jordan, who watched them intently from his own hidden place.

"At least they're sleeping right now," Edward was saying, a hand on his mate's shoulders.

"Yeah, but when they wake up the worst part will start," Jake whispered while running a hand through his own hair. "I think the added stress of the potential war we have on us is accelerating the process. Once they wake up the actual shifting will happen - it'll be very dangerous for everyone. I—-." His voice cracked for a second as he covered his face with his hands. "If I mess up — they could—-."

"Hey." Edward wrapped his arms around Jake. "You're doing great, especially given all the crap that's happening at the same time. I know this isn't easy for you, but no one's doubting you."

"This is somehow my fault though," Jake hissed as he removed his hands from his face. "You said that Phoenix is—-."

"Hey, Phoenix's actions are his own, you're not to blame for the fact that he's obsessed with you," Edward interrupted immediately.

"The thing is, I don't even really remember him that much. I mean, I vaguely remember seeing him in the hallways now and then, but the only reason I even remembered his name was because Bella said it made her miss her hometown in Arizona whenever she heard it," Jake admitted, and sounded incredibly guilty as he did so. "He cared enough about me that he did so. "He cared enough about me that even after he turned... but I don't remember ever actually meeting him." He let out a deep breath. "Maybe if I hadn't been wrapped up in my own little world, and had made an effort to be friends with him, this wouldn't have happened, he wouldn't have even been turned."

"He could've talked to you, he could've done a lot of things," Edward declared with little to no sympathy. "You had no reason to realize what he felt, and he had every reason to tell you, but he didn't. Instead, he chose to become part of the people who are coming here to destroy us. He might think he loves you, but you don't do this sort of thing - threaten destruction and annihilation of family - if you love the person, you do this if you're obsessed with them and want to own them. He doesn't love you because obviously he doesn't even know what actual love is, so don't waste any second feeling sorry for him because he's an immature asshole who doesn't deserve it. This is on him, Jake, not on you. You had a lot to deal with back then, and then I went and left you, making you have even more to worry about." The guilt was now on his face. "Hell, if you want some
outside force to blame, blame me, because I actually knew someone was obsessed with you. I could hear him thinking about you all the time but it took forever for me to figure out who it was, and even then I did I didn't do anything about it."

"It's not like you could've done anything about it," Jake whispered.

"And neither could you," Edward reminded softly as he cupped Jake's face.

There were so many visible emotions on Jake's face as he wrapped his arms around Edward's body and pulled him into him, resting his forehead against the vampire's with a deep sigh. "Thank you for being here with me, I don't think I could get through this without you."

Edward's lips twitched in a tender smile as he shifted his face to rub the tip of his nose against Jake's in an eskimo kiss. "I'm not going anywhere."

"You better not," Jake muttered darkly, clearly pouting. "If you even think about ever leaving me again I'm gonna shackle you to a wall."

A snicker escaped Edward's lips. "Kinky."

"Idiot," and yet Jake was clearly less stressed than he'd been seconds before. He tightened his grip on Edward, pulling him tightly into him, and buried his nose in Edward's hair, clearly inhaling his scent. "Can we just stay like this for a little?"

"You're not going to get any complaints from me." Edward's arms wrapped around Jake as he rested his cheek against the werewolf's heart. "It's been too long since we've been able to just… be."

"Once this is over, no matter what happens, let's go on a vacation, just you and me," Jake declared.

"You mean as soon as we graduate," Edward countered almost immediately.

"Given how little time I've had to study with all the crap that's been going on lately, and the fact that I've been having so many absent days, I'll be lucky if I graduate at all," Jake muttered ruefully.

"Shut up, I'll tutor you myself, you'll be fine," Edward tut-tutted like some old schoolmarm. "That isn't something to worry about right now, I'm not Phoenix, I'm not here to make your already stressful life even more hair-pulling-out-y."

He pulled away enough to look up into Jake's face, expression very serious. "I meant it, you know. I'm here for you, and I'm not going anywhere. So I know you're the alpha and have to be strong and everything for your pack, but I'm here for you, and my shoulders are strong enough to help carry some of your burdens."

Jake's expression as he stared down at Edward was so lovesick it was disgusting. "God, I love you." And with that he kissed Edward, pulling him tighter - as if that was even possible.

James was super relieved when Phoenix turned and started leaving. Honestly, just because the blonde didn't want Jake anymore didn't mean he actually wanted to witness the alpha and his mate being all lovey-dovey. Ek.

Seth and I are not lame like that, he assured himself as he followed Phoenix throughout the forest, making sure to keep downwind from him. He stopped right at the border between the pack lands and Forks, surprised Phoenix had chosen to go this route, then again, he could almost completely hide himself and keep from being detected so this wouldn't be as dangerous for him as it would be for anyone else.
Phoenix had stopped up ahead and was pacing, clearly agitated and mumbling to himself as he walked back and forth, back and forth, over and over again.

James leaned against a tree and folded his arms over his chest. "So, I'm guessing that's not what you wanted to see."

Phoenix cursed and turned to face him, eyes narrowed. "How do you know I'm here? No tracking ability should be that strong!"

"Like we said before, getting Imprinted on by werewolves makes our abilities stronger." James looked him up and down. "I guess my ability to track everything just nullifies anything that would try and stop me from doing that."

"How long were you tracking me?" Phoenix wanted to know as he stormed over to James, clearly angry.

"Long enough to know you got to see Jake and Ed being so nauseatingly mushy together," James replied provocingly, watching the way Phoenix's face showed his anger and hurt so very openly. "So, changing the subject, I'm surprised Aro let you leave his side."

"Alice is missing, and Jasper left to find her. Edward's here." Phoenix shrugged.

"Ahhhh." James understood. "All the vampires who could take advantage of Aro if you weren't around were gone so he let you off his leash." He tilted his head. "Although, I'm sure he told you to stay close."

Phoenix's expression was one of absolute 'duh'.

James looked the redhead over and made a face. "Who was your sire? Was it Laurent?" He'd gotten the core details from Edward and realized that one of the reasons Phoenix had seemed so familiar had to be because he'd been one of the few fledglings from their time massacring the people in Forks and the surrounding cities. He'd only really paid attention to Riley, as he was his fledgling, but there'd been others.

A strange expression covered Phoenix's face and then he laughed darkly. "You don't remember me either." He ran a shaky hand through his hair. "I didn't make an impression on the guy I'm in love with, or with the leader of the coven I was a part of." He sneered. "I knew I had no form of presence, but this is a real kick in the balls."

"I wouldn't take my not really remembering you personally," James announced coolly. "Before I became a part of Jake's pack I was a huge asshole. I barely paid any attention to Riley, and he was my fledgling. I didn't care about anyone but Victoria and myself. I deserved to lose my coven." He still couldn't believe the person he'd once been, especially not in comparison to who he was now. "Jake… we could both tell how guilty he felt."

"I don't want him to feel guilty," Phoenix hissed. "I want him to——."

"To what?" James asked when Phoenix let the sentence drag on. "Love you?" He sneered in dark amusement at the very thought. "I know you're eternally a teen now, but freaking grow up. You saw them, you don't have a chance. No matter what you do, or who you have on your side, you'll never be able to get in between those two. Take it from someone who tried and failed miserably." That was still embarrassing as hell. "Even if they weren't Imprinted, I don't think there'd be a force in heaven or hell that could tear Jacob and Edward apart."

"Just because you failed to break those two up and had to settle for that unimpressive little——,"
Phoenix suddenly cried out in pain.

James hadn't even realized he'd moved until he blinked and found that he had Phoenix by the neck and pinned so hard against a nearby tree it was cracked. "Don't you ever talk about Seth that way." He could do it now, he could break this vampire's fucking neck, and a part of him really wanted to, but he merely kept him there.

Phoenix flinched in pain, clearly realizing the diamond-like skin around his neck was one tight squeeze away from breaking. There was clear terror in his scarlet eyes as he gripped James' hand but didn't move out of self preservation.

"Listen very well to what I'm going to tell you, because I'm not saying this twice," James warned in a low voice. "You and the rest of the Guard are going to leave Seth out of all this, out of everything. Forget he even exists. I will fucking kill you and anyone else who even looks at him wrong, who say his name or even make reference to him. As far as you all are going to be concerned, he's untouchable." He tightened his grip on Phoenix just a breath short of breaking him to pieces. "I'm not Jake. I don't care if this starts a war, or if people get hurt. Pat my arm if you understand." He waited and got the rapid pat. "Good. I know you and Aro aren't going to want to honor any treaty, you because you're a spiteful stalker with emotional issues who can't get that he can't force someone to love him, and that even if you could... that's not love!" He leaned in closer, so Phoenix's scarlet gaze was unable to look away from his golden one. "Aro is a greedy son of a bitch, and this is going to be the best excuse he gets to get what he's wanted for a very long time. Again, I'm not Jake. Jake is a nice guy, he'll want to resolve everything without violence, he'll strive for something amicable." James smiled. "Whereas me? I'm trying to remember why I haven't torn you apart already."

Phoenix looked up at him in utter terror yet was smart enough to keep still despite the fact that he must be in a lot of pain.

"I've made it clear I can find you, and Aro, no matter what powers you use or where you hide. I will find you." That was a promise, a dark, deadly one. "And if you do anything to hurt anyone in my pack, or even look in Seth's direction, you will make you suffer." He smiled down at Phoenix. "Tap my arm again if I've made myself clear. If not, I can make it much clearer." When Phoenix tapped his arm desperately, James smiled brightly and let go of his hold on Phoenix, watching the vampire drop to his feet, yet didn't move away to give him his space. "Did you hear about what I did to the members of my old coven?"

Phoenix, hand to his neck, nodded silently.

James slammed his hand onto the tree next to Phoenix' head and leaned in to whisper: "I did that before my power got upgraded." He could sense the shiver that raced down Phoenix's spine. "You're lucky you weren't with them or you'd already be dead."

Phoenix was trembling.

"Your old coven members aren't so lucky you know." James brushed a strand of red out of Phoenix's face in a move they both knew was not only intimidating, but menacing. "If I were you, I wouldn't make the same mistake twice."

"T-the Volturi are better than that coven ever could've dreamed to be," Phoenix whispered, voice harsh. "You won't be able to just—."

"To just what?" James wanted to know as his hand trailed down the redhead's neck once more,
feeling Phoenix tense beneath him. "You're not the only vampires with powers in these woods, Red. And we've got wolves."

"We've got the numbers," Phoenix whispered rapidly.

"Do you?" James asked as he tilted his head in question.

Confusion clearly wafted off of Phoenix as he cleared his throat. "You saw our army. We outnumber your combined troops at least thirty to one. When this goes to battle your side will be outnumbered, out-powered, and defeated."

They'd clearly been going over this possibility, assured in their victory. That was enough to prove to James that they weren't truly considering the truce.

James smiled and trailed his finger over the darkening bruise around Phoenix's throat that would remain there until he drank blood and healed up. "Will we?"

Phoenix trembled as he stared up at James with wide eyes and bated breath. "What do you mean?"

"You know…" James leaned in so close his lips nearly touched Phoenix's ear as he whispered. "I don't think you really want Jake."

"How dare—-?" Phoenix growled.

James chuckled darkly, the sound clearly shocking the redhead, who jerked in reaction and brought his hand to his ear as goosebumps erupted on his skin. "You don't want Jake, you want the relationship he has with Edward."

"I don't want Edward," Phoenix snarled oddly.

"Jake's the only one who'd want Edward," James assured him as he pulled away enough to now be staring into Phoenix's face, leaning into him. "What I meant is you want a relationship like the one Jake has with Edward. You're an immature, selfish little creature who is obsessing over the one person you thought could give you the romance you've wanted but felt you couldn't have, especially in a little backwards town like this which is typically so incredibly homophobic." He tilted his head as he raised his hand and trailed it down Phoenix's cheek. "It must've been lonely, being all alone in the back of the closet like that, and then you see Jake, and you see the open, loving, completely fearless and dedicated relationship he had with Edward. And you wanted that. And since Edward had been going to the school and never acted that way before you figured this was all Jake's doing. So you wanted him." James smiled as he chucked Phoenix's chin upwards. "It doesn't hurt that he's hot."

Phoenix gulped loudly, eyes wide.

A twig snapped somewhere behind them, drawing Phoenix's attention away from James towards the source of the sound.

Cursing internally, and somewhat panicking, James gripped Phoenix's chin and pulled him towards him, surprising the redhead by kissing him. It had definitely been a tactic Old James would've used, but unlike Old James, New James apparently couldn't find enjoyment in anyone who wasn't Seth. It was somewhat terrifying, and he used this excuse to pursue this scientifically, opening his mouth to the kiss and pulling Phoenix tightly against him as he used his centuries of knowledge to kiss the hell out of him.

Phoenix struggled the first couple of seconds, slamming his fists into James' arms, before slowly
those struggles stopped and he was instead gripping James' jacket tightly.

James honestly didn't notice, his body completely unaffected, and his mind more than a little turned off. Seth breathed and James got turned on, but this cute guy did absolutely nothing for him, and James was more than a little sure that no one else ever was going to be able to do it for him.

*It really is just Seth for me from now on… and I'm more than okay with that.*

*He pulled away and eyed the wide-eyed redhead curiously, intrigued, like a scientist whose hypothesis had been confirmed yet who was still trying to digest the confirmation and what exactly that meant.*

"What the hell was that?" Phoenix asked oddly, clearly with a million questions going through his mind, and very close to a mental breakdown.

"That was to prove a point," James replied candidly. "You don't want Jake, you want someone who feels for you the way he does for Edward. And let me tell you something, if that's what you truly want, you want your own wolf."

A strange expression danced over Phoenix's face. "Having your own wolf didn't keep you from just cheating on him."

"That wasn't cheating, I was making a point, which we both know I did." James then frowned, realizing it might still seem like cheating to Seth though, and he didn't like that. James had never had an actual relationship before, and he was still learning the ropes while with Seth. But the more he thought about it, this definitely wouldn't be something someone in a relationship would do even if to make a valid, life-saving point. He really would have to explain everything to Seth when he went back, as it would be the only thing which would explain why he'd had to kiss Phoenix. Everything would've been ruined if he hadn't. *"If you help destroy what's happening here, you'll destroy any chance of having what you want so badly. What you obviously need."

Phoenix had very visibly forgotten he didn't need to breathe, his breaths not only loud but erratic as he leaned very hard against the tree.

The blonde, pleased with having so very thoroughly rattled the redhead, pulled away to smile at Phoenix in a laidback way. "Hurry on to grandma's house, little Red, it's dangerous out here at night." He grinned brightly as he took a step back, and another. "Beware the big bad wolves in this forest, they'll eat you up." Another step, and another, as he channeled the old him. "Oh, yeah, I nearly forgot… Red? Give granny a message for me."

The redhead's gulp was loud from where he remained with his back against the tree. *"W-what do you want me to tell him?"

"Tell him this." James then winked, smirked, and then turned and strolled away.

"What does that even mean?" Phoenix called after him, clearly completely befuddled and unsettled by everything, just like James had planned. "You can't just tell me the message is a wink and smirk! What kind of message is that? It's so ambiguous it can be taken in all kinds of contexts!" When he got no answer, Phoenix's voice squeaked as he surprisingly risked detection by the wolves in the area by yelling after him. *"James! James! Jesus James, what does that message mean?"* When he yet again got no response except for James continuing to stroll further and further away, an exasperated "Un-freaking-believable!" could be heard.

While he felt relatively dirty, and would no doubt have to explain everything to Seth the second he
got back, James couldn't help but grin. This part of the plan had worked brilliantly, it'd nearly been destroyed by that snapping twig, but he'd managed to salvage the situation and keep Phoenix so utterly confused and distracted and off his game that he'd never realized there'd been another vampire amongst them who'd been using their ability the whole time.

…

Bella kept glancing down at her phone throughout the family night at the Swann House. She'd texted both Jasper and Alice earlier, and neither of them had responded as yet, and she hoped that just meant they were very busy keeping an eye on the Volturi. Thankfully she was very busy, keeping an eye on her father, as well as the tension Victoria tried to pretend wasn't there on her side when it came to Sue.

"I don't mean to be insensitive," Charlie assured them all over dessert. "But was Seth always gay? It seems like, if I'm being very honest, Forks is starting to have a lot of queer couplings and I was wondering whether it was a new thing or if I was just very out of it? Because I can't afford to be blind like that, I'm the Sheriff of this town, I'm supposed to know everything that's going on in it."

Victoria, who'd been fielding questions left right and center all night, leaned back in her chair and eyed Sue curiously.

"I don't think Seth was into boys before James," Sue admitted after a second's thought. "I honestly wasn't sure he really liked anyone. I mean, Seth is a sweetie-pie, and he was always nice and friendly to everyone, but he never actually seemed to favor any girl or boy except for Colin and Brady." She tilted her head in thought. "Margo and I knew Brady was gay from the time he was in primary school, and I wondered for a bit whether he and Seth… but nothing ever happened until James came to town."

"So have they known each other since all the way back then?" Charlie asked in confusion. "Because I never saw them together, and Vicki and James basically live over here and have become my third and fourth children."

Victoria lowered her gaze and gripped her thighs tightly.

Bella reached over and placed her hand on Victoria's.

"No, they're recent," Sue explained to him. "But I believe my son was in love with him from the moment he arrived in town. I didn't understand what was going on with Seth at the time, it was confusing and worrying me a lot, and then when I finally realized that he'd Im—-fallen in love—-I was so relieved that that was what had him acting all un-like himself!" She leaned forwards and smirked. "Leah's also got a girlfriend."

Charlie choked on his bite of food and ended up having to pound his fist into his chest.

Sue bit her bottom lip in amusement at him. "She's this cute adorable little brunette, the sweetest thing. I love Leah, but you can't call her sweet. Chelsea is basically the living embodiment of sugar. I just want to braid her hair and hug her and tell her to give Leah hell once in a while." She sighed and glanced sideways at Victoria before returning her attention to Charlie. "I really haven't even met James yet, but I want to. He's a part of my family now." Those brown eyes returned to meet Victoria's gold. "And so are you. I want you to know that."

Victoria just stared at Sue, clearly dumbfounded and not sure how to handle that.

Sue smiled beautifully at her. "When the time comes, I'll be counting on you to help me convince
them to adopt. I want grandchildren."

Victoria pulled a strand of her own fiery hair out of her face. "Riley is basically James' kid so you technically have one already. He calls Seth 'Mama Seth' behind his back all the time, and not all of the time is he being teasing about it."

Sue's eyes widened as she grinned and brought her hands to her lips.

"Wait, James has a son?" Charlie squeaked.

"It's a long story," Bella assured her father, who looked like he was becoming overloaded with all this new information. And there were very limited ways in which they could explain things without revealing any of the multitude of secrets they were hiding from him.

Charlie eyed them all, clearly realizing there was more than he understood, yet he tiredly didn't push for answers. In fact, he changed the subject back to a previous one. "How is Brady, by the way?" He added ketchup to his fries. "Margo made him help me out at the police station last year when Cynthia went on maternity leave and no one was answering the ad. I haven't seen him since then," he seemed to realize before smirking. "Don't tell him or Cynthia this, but he's the best damned secretary I've ever had."

Sue grinned brightly. "Margo said he enjoyed his time there, said being a part of the sheriff station was so interesting." She reached over and fluffed his hair. "She also told me he wouldn't stop talking about how cool you were."

Charlie puffed out his chest in pride. "I do have my moments."

Bella chuckled, shaking her head at her father.

A ringtone pierced through the air and Charlie sighed as he picked up his phone. "This is Sheriff Swann." He listened to the person on the other side of the line before getting up with a nod. "I'll be right there." He hung up and stood. "Sorry, but I've got to go. That's the third intruder that's been spotted around the houses of people who live in the outskirts of Forks."

Bella, Victoria and Sue all shared nervous looks.

"Dad," Bella called as he was already leaving the table. "Maybe you could just send a deputy and stay here yourself?"

"They're all busy with other reports," Charlie replied with a chuckle as he grabbed his guns, badge and hat. "So while I enjoy having you ladies to myself, I need to get out there and see what's going on."

"Be careful, Charlie," Victoria whispered and he walked passed the table on the way to the front door. "Don't be a hero."

"But it comes so naturally!" Charlie joked as he opened the front door. "Don't worry about me, just make sure all the vegetables have disappeared by the time I get back! That's being a real hero!"

Sue wanted the door as it closed, and then turned to Victoria and Bella. "Are the vampires from the Volturi skulking about? If they attack any human in Forks or on the Rez that will violate the temporary peace treaty."

"I don't like this," Victoria muttered as she got up and had her phone out, clearly calling either Jake or James.
Bella got up and went to the window, staring out, watching her father's vehicle driving away, a bad feeling welling in the pit of her stomach.

Victoria's phone beeped, and she looked up from it, gaze going from Bella to Sue and back. "We need to go back home, now."

…

"Why are you not answering my calls or texts? I thought something had happened to you." The voice was low and very displeased.

Garrett ignored him as he continued to walk around the woods to burn off his excess energy. "I'm on patrol."

"You're obviously not doing a great job of it," Sam muttered as he caught up to him quite easily. "You didn't even know I was there for the longest time."

"Oh, I did," Garrett assured him flippantly.

Sam narrowed his eyes at him. "So even in this you ignore me."

"Yep." Feeling no shame in admitting it, Garrett glanced down at his phone when it beeped with a message, and read it before answering and putting away his phone the second he was done. He did not feel bad at shoving in Sam's face the fact that while he'd ignored him, he'd been keeping in touch with everyone else who'd been texting or calling him.

Sam was quite clearly in a sulk at this point as he kept pace at Garrett's side.

"If you're just going to pout why don't you go do it back at your house?" Garrett wanted to know once the silence had dragged on so long.

"Why am I so distasteful for you?" Sam finally asked.

Garrett let out a loud sigh. "Oh, I don't know. Let me see. Not only are you not my type, but you told me, straight to my face, that being Imprinted to me was the last thing you wanted and you were being forced by your instincts. So maybe I'm crazy, but that doesn't make me want to fucking hear your voice, much less be in your presence."

Sam flinched. "I might've misspoken." At Garrett's death glare, he flinched harder. "I did misspeak." He ran his fingers through his shortly cropped hair with a growl. "This isn't easy for me, you know."

"You think this is easy for me?" Garrett wanted to know, also growling. "You're the one who did this to me! Don't forget that! If there's anyone to blame for this miserable pairing it's you, not me."

Sam lowered his head. "I know I'm not the easiest person to get along with, and I don't make it easy for people who are trying to. I—I've got a temper. I'm stubborn as hell, and I say and do shit when I'm in a snit that I regret almost instantaneously."

"You fucking blamed me."

"I know." Sam turned to him. "It's not you, okay? It's me. I'm the problem."

"I never thought I was the problem," Garrett assured him before letting out a deep breath. "Look, I get it okay. You thought Emily was your Imprintee, and maybe she was until her death cancelled it
out. I don't know how Imprinting works, I'm still really new to this. But I get that you feel guilty, not just for her death but the fact that she might've had to go through all that for no reason. You put her through all that when you didn't have to. When the burden wasn't hers to bare." Garrett raised an eyebrow. "So you lash out at me, because even though I have no blame in this, my mere existence and your Imprinting on me are what have strengthened the guilt and the doubts. I get it. I'm gorgeous, not dumb." He stopped and turned to slam his hands into Sam's shoulders, sending the unprepared wolf skidding backwards. "But just because I understand it doesn't mean I'm going to allow you to be a sulky bitch or treat me like that."

Sam opened his mouth.

"Shut. Up." Garrett's voice was low, dangerous. "I don't know Emily, never did and never will, but I feel she let you get away with these snits. According to Seth she was super motherly and sweet and wonderful. Understanding. That isn't fucking me. I'm selfish and hedonistic and won't put up with this shit. It don't grit and bare things, I leave without a second's thought to find my next adventure, and I never look back." He jabbed his finger in Sam's direction. "I won't put up with your shit. So either get that shit in order, or get out of my fucking way, either way, I'm aces." He smiled darkly at Sam. "Because, like I said before, I didn't Imprint on you. I can live the rest of my immortal years just fine without you."

With that he stormed away to continue his patrol.

Sam remained there, head bent, hands clenched tightly at his sides.

…

"A wink and a smirk?" Aro blinked as Phoenix recounted his experience with Jacob Black's Beta. "What sort of message is that?"

"I don't know." Phoenix rubbed his bruised neck. "But I think they've got people on their side that we don't know about, at least enough to match our numbers. He kept smirking and repeating my assertions back at me with a questioning and super condescending tone."

"They would've shown those forces if they had them." Aro muttered to himself, and then paused, realizing that keeping the actual numbers of their army a secret would be a great tactical move. It was what Aro had planned on doing before those plans were dashed by his army being intercepted at the meadow. That meant it could be true. Hell, they'd already faked them out about the numbers before by having the other part of their pack bd as yet, and that made him pause.

With this new information he might have to change up his plans, and that was both daunting and intriguing. He'd been assured that the mere difference in army sizes would work to his advantage, but with the possibility that there were reinforcements awaiting command to appear made him re-evaluate his previous plans.

It didn't help that Marcus had yet to leave the Black Pack's residence, or that Caius was, as usual, too into trying to tempt Carlisle into having some fun with him like 'the good old days' to be of any use. Honestly, it wasn't as if Caius was in love with Carlisle or anything like that, but he definitely was one of his favorites, and it showed. Marcus' favoritism towards the female wolf, and Caius' towards his dear friend Carlisle, was making this all so much more difficult than it should be.

"…cool," Phoenix muttered, clearly unhappy with something.

"What was that?" Aro asked, although he really didn't care.
"I said, he was always so cool," Phoenix repeated, face scrunched in a glare. "He's such an asshole! Always was, and that hasn't changed! I don't get why Jake would make him a part of his pack—beta at that! They're so freaking different." He paused. "It has to be the fact that he's so cool."

Ah, well, while James' fashion sense was not exactly Aro's taste he supposed he could see how the younger generation could find him 'so cool'.

Phoenix suddenly sighed and leaned hard against the wall. "What if they're right about me? What if I don't know what it's like to be in love?"

No no no no no no! He did not need the only one other than him who wanted this to have doubts! Not now! Not on top of everything else!

"You will know what it is when that wolf is yours," Aro promised him. "I do not know why you want a dog, but I promised you him." He didn't point out that, given what they'd earn about Imprints and how they affected vampire powers, that might very well might not end up being the case, but for now he needed Phoenix completely on board. Once he had Chelsea back he'd have her work on Phoenix so that he didn't need the promise of the wolf to stay with them. Up until then, he'd have to use the Alpha as his trump card.

…

Why did he care so much?

Marcus sat by the bed the twins were sleeping on, his gaze solely on Rachel. Even though the girls were identical, and they'd been changed and brought in here before he'd arrived, he'd known exactly which one was her immediately.

A part of him wanted to feel this was Chelsea's doing, but he sensed bonds and such, and he would've sensed Chelsea trying to tamper with him. She hadn't. This had nothing to do with her. This was all him.

But why?

He reached over and brushed a couple of unruly black strands out of Rachel's face, only for her to groan and lean into his touch in her sleep.

Something inside of him clenched, and a dark suspicion began to bloom within his gut.

…

Caius had not had this much fun in a very long time. Now that he thought about it, it had been centuries since he'd been able to have fun. They'd spent so much of their time fighting war upon war, establishing dominance, ruling from Volterra… that it had been a long time since he'd been able to just do… nothing. It wasn't that Caius was tired of ruling, being proactive, ambitious, and a leader, was in his DNA, and his natural cunning made him ever craving more. He knew Aro had the most intimidating reputation, but Caius was truly the most ruthless of the three, had gloried in the battles and the bloodshed, in their glorying dominion over all of their king. But it'd been a very long time since more had stopped giving him pleasure.

The blonde watched Carlisle in his little home with his little family, and couldn't help but feel his dear old friend might've made the right choice not to become a part of the Volturi Royals when he'd been offered a place with the Three. Carlisle was not living like a king, but he exuded happiness and contentment. Sure, he was also wary and a bit nervous given all things, but this was a family. The Volturi hadn't felt like a family for a very long time now.
His scarlet eyes went from Carlisle and Esme to Emmett and Rosalie. He didn't quite understand their relationship, his with Athenadora was not like this. She was an acceptable vampire to call a wife, and being with him gave her the money and influence she'd craved. But they didn't care for each other much, and had never looked at each other the way these couples did. Marcus was truly the only one who'd been in love, captivated, by his wife. He'd though Marcus weak, and that belief had seemed cemented when Didyme's death had so utterly crippled him, but for the first time in too long Caius began to question himself, his actions, his choices.

...

The wolf was murderous.

Seth's humanity, on the other side, was winning by a thread. The only way he was able to really keep a hold on himself was the fact that James was washing the scent off of him in the river while telling him everything that had happened to lead to him actually kissing some other guy, and why he'd had to. Honestly, Seth wanted to kick the shit out of James before going to murder Aro's cloak, but he remained where he was and waited until James finished telling him everything. He hated it. He really did. But he understood why James had done what he had. He didn't like it at all, but he understood why.

"The last thing I need is for him to switch his obsession from Jake to you," Seth finally managed to grit out what was really bothering him.

"I doubt that would happen," James scoffed, seeming not to remember (if only for a second) that he was basically the hottest guy in all existence. "I told him the truth - he needs his own wolf. If he's so desperate he's willing to be a part of a war because he wants a relationship like that, once I've implanted that thought in his head it's going to bury itself in his subconscious and bloom, whether he wants it to or not."

"First you hug Brady, then you kiss Phoenix." Seth narrowed his eyes on James. "I swear to god, if you do anything else I'm going to really hurt you."

James opened his mouth and then closed it, looking very disturbed.

Intrigued, Seth tilted his head. "What is it?"

"I was going to offer to allow you to hug and kiss someone else to make us even, but the second I thought about it I felt really sick and angry." James looked very confused as he ran his fingers through his wet locks. "I've never really been in a real relationship before, especially one where concepts like monogamy were even considered. This is all very new territory for me." His golden eyes rose to meet Seth's brown ones. "But I want to make this work more than I've wanted anything."

The smile that touched his lips wasn't anything he could control, especially when he realized that the thought of him kissing someone else had very clearly distressed James. Hell, the blonde still very visibly hadn't gotten over it, and was still very much tormented by it.

He sighed. Honestly, things were going much easier than he could've ever hoped for given everything, and Seth understood that while he was younger (and definitely wasn't a relationship expert) he didn't have centuries of misguided experiences to twist him into someone who had to learn to be normal. In many ways he would have to teach James, and he didn't mind. In fact, a part of him really loved the fact that James had never had someone he'd cared about. Sure, there'd been the whole Jake thing, but Seth would be dumb or really blind to not have realized by now that he was a 'special existence' to James. It sounded cheesy as fuck but it was the truth.
James waded towards him in the water, somehow managing to look so effortlessly cool as he came to lean against the boulder Seth was seated on, his arms on either side of Seth's body, his face incredibly close to his. 'I'm sorry. I acted without thinking how it would affect you.'

"Just… don't do it again," Seth warned.

"I can't offer to let you kiss someone else," James repeated his earlier discovery. "But if you want, I can offer something else." His lips touched Seth's softly before he pulled back. "I've never done it before — never would've ever thought I'd ever offer, not for anyone, not even for, it's just not my thing — but if you want to I'll — I'll do it for you."

It took Seth a couple of seconds to figure out exactly what James was offering him, and when he did, he went absolutely puce. His whole body electrified at the offer, and yet while he went ridiculously hard at the prospect, his body felt incredibly hollow at the same time. There was a part of him more desperate for attention than his cock, and the realization shocked him into having a mini mental breakdown.

James' expression shifted as he pulled away. "I'm not trying to solve our problems with sex, if that's what you're thinking." He glanced away, clearly out of his depth and not sure how to proceed. "I just thought—-.

"Hey, I know that." Seth reached out and managed to hook his fingers around James' waist before he could pull away completely, using his grip to pull the blonde in closer once more. "It wasn't that. I was—I—any guy would love to, I mean, look at you." He then flushed. "Not that I'm objectifying you or anything, you're much more than just an incredibly hot body and handsome face, I mean—.

James now looked both flattered and amused instead of uncomfortable. "Me being hot notwithstanding…"

"Shut up," Seth grumbled, now the one embarrassed. "What I'm trying to say is… I'd like to take a rain check on that offer."

Intrigue grew on James' face, looking both amused and a little worried. "Are you waiting for me to screw up even more than usual?"

Seth snorted. "No. That's not it." He took in a very deep breath. "I just… really… like how things are right now." He gulped and shifted nervously on his seat. "Like… really really like it."

James stared at him for a second before suddenly he was on him, causing Seth to fall backwards onto the boulder. Hell, Seth would've hit the back of his head on the rock had James not cupped it with his hand and cushioned the fall. The wolf could barely breathe as James kissed him, nearly seeming to attack his lips.

It was terrifying and amazing at the same time.

James' hand reached between them, slipping inside of Seth's shorts and wrapping his fingers around the proud wolf, stroking the already hard member in a torturously teasing manner while rubbing his own naked erection against his thigh.

Seth fought his own shorts down desperately, kicking it down and off before eagerly spreading his legs for his mate. Almost immediately he felt that cold length pressing against him, seeking entrance, and just as immediately his body opened up, desperate for its invasion.

The second James began to move inside of him, Seth sobbed into his mouth. The pleasure from
before was back in droves, electrifying his body and sending jolts of lightning through out his body with every slick thrust. He wrapped his legs around his mate, drawing him in deeper while his arms hugged James close, the wolf able to taste the need and desperation in his mate's kisses. James reminded him of an addict getting a fix, and Seth was the drug.

*He's mine*, Seth could hear his inner wolf howling. *Mine mine mine. No other bitch can have him!* *MINE!*

Seth agreed one hundred per cent. His fingernails dug deep into James' back, and when James hissed against his lips, Seth whispered. *"You're mine."*

The blonde let out a sound he'd never let out before as his thrust grew urgent. "And you're mine."

The werewolf didn't care that his back was getting scratched up by the boulder with each thrust. The pleasure completely overpowered any discomfort. This was *heaven*.

James suddenly snarled and not only pulled away from Seth, but threw himself back into the river. An aggravated "Oh for fu—-!" Could be heard right before the splash.

Seth remained on the boulder in shock before sitting up, his body crying out at the lack of attention. Just what the hell was that damed vampire playing at? He was about to dive in after James when the blonde resurfaced. "What the *hell*? Get back here!"

"We've got incoming," James muttered as he trudged to the shoreline and grabbed his pants, beginning to pull them on. "We don't have enough time to finish before she reaches us."

Why couldn't people just leave them the hell alone? Seth couldn't count how many times this had happened recently! Couldn't a wolf be bred by his vampire in *peace*?

He pulled his shorts back on very sulkily. It did nothing to hide his boner though, no matter how hard he tried to rearrange himself it was noticeable.

Leah broke through the foliage a couple of minutes later, glaring right at James. "What do you have Chelsea mixed up in?" She stormed right up to James, seeming to not even notice that Seth was there. "First she disappears by herself and then with Victoria when she, Bella and mom arrive? And she said she couldn't tell me. And since your sister is involved in this, and Jake is obviously busy, this has *you* written all over it, James Hunter!" She poked her finger into James' naked chest. "So what the *hell* are you using Chelsea to do and why are you keeping me out of it? She's my Imprintee! *Mine*! Not Victoria's! If anyone should be protecting or helping her it's *me*! And *ANOTHER thing*——!"

"Jesus, Leah, will you give it a *rest*?" Seth snapped, annoyed as hell that not only had his and James' moment alone been interrupted, but that it'd been by his *sister*.

Leah jumped at the sound of his voice, clearly having not noticed him at all. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you *think* I'm doing here?" Seth wanted to know in irritation. This was very unlike his usual self, but honestly, there was only so much he could take in the course of one night, and being left wanting was really pushing him over the edge. He had no idea how James had managed to keep his composure so far. "Use your nose."

Leah blinked and then went red. "Out *here*?" Her voice squeaked in scandal. "Why would you——?"
"He won't do me if you're in hearing distance," Seth surprised them both by growling this very.
embarrassing truth. He jumped off of the boulder and landed on the shore with them. "But even
when I get him away from you you still end up appearing!"

Leah blinked once, twice, and really looked like she was having a heart attack. "This isn't the time,
Seth. Jake's got his hands full with his sisters, and we've got the royal leeches to think of. You need
to—."

"How about you stay out of my sex life?" Seth asked very low and emotionlessly.

"She's just worried about her Imprintee, Seth," James annoyed him by taking Leah's side in this
matter.

"And that's another thing—!" Leah turned her attention on him and poked his naked chest once
more. "You don't—."

"Stop touching him." Seth was shocked at his own voice. "Just stop it. If you have an issue, fine,
but stop touching him. Everyone just needs to stop touching him!"

"Why—?" And then Leah squeaked and took a couple of steps back. "I'm not interested in him!
Don't be ridiculous! I have Chelsea! Who is adorable. I don't want—you know I don't want—so
why the world would you?" She shivered in utter disgust. "I don't get the appeal at all."

Seth was feeling incredibly overwhelmed by tons of different emotions right now, he was like a
volcano about to explode, and he would've if James hadn't suddenly appeared behind him,
wrapping his arms around his body and pulling him in close.

"What's wrong?" James asked softly into Seth's ear. "This isn't like you. Is it what happened
earlier?" He gripped Seth tighter. "I'm sorry, Seth."

It wasn't that. Not really. It was a bit. But not it. It was everything. Everything was crappy and he
couldn't even enjoy the only good (great) part about his life right now. And it felt like everyone
were getting in the way. If this were a normal Imprinting process he and James would've had a
couple of months 'honeymoon phase' where they could just stay in bed and… and… but that wasn't
the case and it might never be the case… and… and… and something was wrong with him.

This really wasn't like him, but he couldn't help the urgent, vicious need inside of him which was
bubbling out into a horrible out-of-character attitude.

It terrified him how much he actually needed James. Hell, just having James' arms around him like
this was making him feel better!

"You're acting a lot as if…" Leah suddenly froze, eyes wide. "But that's impossible. I mean, you're
a guy. And yet…" She then seemed to list things in her mind on her fingertips before she looked up.
"Are you in heat?"

Seth's eyes widened in embarrassed shock. "What?"

"Oh my god," Leah whispered as she pressed her palm against her forehead. "When Sam had that
hella uncomfortable talk with me after I turned… they'd never really had to worry about something
like that before because all wolves were males and males don't go into heat… but… you're
uncharacteristically temperamental, stick close to your mate like glue, keep scent marking him and
keeping his scent on you… and the girls said you're basically acting cock-hungry for James all the
time."
"Let's not call it cock-hungry," Seth pleaded in embarrassment.

"But I like the sound of that," James admitted, flicking when Seth elbowed him in the ribs.

"You're also being way possessive given the fact that you two have obviously soul-bonded by now," Leah added. "Imprinters become whatever their Imprintee needs, so if James is a slut you should be okay with it on some level, but you're clearly not. Sam warned me that should their theory of my being able to go into heat proved correct… Seth, you're checking all of the boxes, bud. I mean, how out of it do you have to be to think I'd be attracted to him?"

"HEY!" James scoffed.

"You poor thing." Leah was all momma-bear mood. "I thought it was just a myth because it never happened to me!"

Seth stared at his sister as what she was saying digested. What exactly did it mean to go into heat? He, of course, knew of the phenomena in the animal life (they'd had dogs and cats growing up) but he wasn't attracting guys from all over who wanted to screw him. Hell, if there was anyone who had that happening right now it was James. Maybe James was in heat… and yet that just seemed off somehow.

"It doesn't make any sense for him to be in heat," James mumbled after the silence had dragged on between the three. "You're just clutching at straws because you can't imagine your brother as a sex god."

"A sex god?" Seth squeaked along with Leah, both with varying levels of embarrassment.

"Yeah, we like sex, a lot," James replied easily as he rested his chin on the top of Seth's head. "I've kissed someone else since him and the guy was cute and yet I felt nothing. Like, nothing. My lower body was dead. But your brother can just inhale his breath in a certain way that drives me mad with desire and it's all I can do to get him naked enough to fuck him."

Leah looked horrified.

Seth was both horrified and very turned on, and horrified that he was very turned on.

"I was going to try and be respectful of you, but you've brought this conversation on, and you're the reason I had to pull out before we could even cum, so my brain's probably a little fried right now," James admitted as he subtly rubbed his hard on against the seam of Seth's pants in so discreet a way the wolf knew his sister had not noticed it. "I really just want you to leave so we can get back to… before."

Seth's blush lowered down his neck as his body heated up deliciously. Yeah. He really wanted his sister to leave as well. Why the hell was she still around again?

"I think… the heat's only affecting you," Leah finally got out. "It would make sense that it would only target the mate in shapeshifters given it's supposed to be all about, you know, and that obviously isn't the endgame here but still, the parameters are the same so, well, I can't believe I'm having this conversation about my baby brother."

James phone rang, and he let go of Seth to go and get it.

Seth bit back his complaint because his sister would never let him live that down.

"Is it done?" James asked as he answered his cell, listening to the other end before nodding. "Okay.
We got it. Leah's with us, so the three of us will make our way back to the house."

Seth couldn't stop his desperate whine at that.

Leah just stared at him as if he was a total stranger.

"We have to go back, something happened," James announced as he grabbed the rest of his clothes and pulled them on, finally not being half naked in front of Leah.

"What happened?" Leah pushed. "Is Chelsea okay?"

"Yes, but there were four murders of locals in Forks which are being labeled as rogue animal attacks." James raised an eyebrow. "The Volturi have broken the peace treaty."
Chapter 20

James kept looking at his phone, waiting for some sort of update, yet his messages were completely empty. It should be happening right now, which meant that he needed to keep an eye on his inbox. The message would influence how things were handled from hereon out.

Rachel and Rebecca (who were still in their pre-shift slumber) had been left back home with Marcus, Colin, Embry, Bella and the humans. While the two wolves had obviously wanted to come along, they'd also understood the duty to protect those weaker than themselves back at the house and had accepted the task with surprising grace. It was obvious that leaving his sisters, especially when they'd needed him most, had taken a toll on Jake, but he stood there in the front of the pack next to Edward, staring passed the Cullen house to where Sam and his werewolves – already in their bestial forms – were emerging.

A warning cry echoed up through the Volturi's guard as the two wolf packs became visible, quickly alerting those inside to what was happening.

The door flung open as Aro stormed out, followed closely by Caius, Phoenix, a few of the Guard, and the Cullens. "What is the meaning of this treachery?" He sneered. "I should have known dogs would not honor a treaty."

Sam snarled as he moved closer, his pack drawing up behind him.

"He says it is you who have broken the treaty," Edward translated, obviously reading the Alpha's mind.

Surprise flittered over Aro's face before he trained it into emotionlessness. "Lies."

"Four humans have been murdered by vampires tonight," Jake spoke, voice low and dangerous. He was the only wolf in his pack (other than Seth) to not be in his bestial form. "This is not the time to play games with us, Aro."

True confusion flittered over that face before Aro shook his head. "It is not one of my own, we were supplied with sustenance, and my orders are never disobeyed."

"Are they?" James asked curiously from where he leaned against one of the trees, eyeing the Royals. "What exactly would you have us believe? That a group of nomad vampires have chosen this exact moment to attack the humans of Forks? How ridiculously convenient." He tilted his head. "Either you have ordered this move, or your control over your own men is weakened."

Aro’s eyes burned at the implication.

"There must be some sort of misunderstanding,” Caius muttered to himself as he glanced around at the large group of werewolves in growing concern. “We have made no move against the humans, and had we done so, it would have been covered up immediately. Our greatest rule is that humans cannot be allowed to know of vampires’ existence, we would not be sloppy like this - not even the stupidest of our army would dare behave thusly.”

“Unless it was done on purpose to draw attention to the killings,” Jane declared from somewhere inside the house. James hadn’t noticed her, but apparently she’d been inside with Alec, as both now emerged from the house, drawing more attention on them.

“It would make sense,” Alec agreed in a jovial way. “This is not the first time they have done
something like this.”

Felix’s eyes widened. “You mean Moldova.”

Caius flinched before turning to look at Aro. “If they had discovered what we are doing here, as well as the danger we’d face should the local wolves believe we had hunted on their lands…”

Aro’s eyes widened and he cursed in a language James did not understand, while spitting in disgust on the ground. The wheels were clearly turning in his mind as he looked around them at the pack surrounding his vampires. This was clearly the brains of the Volturi, and that brain, that ambition, was to be feared. “It is obvious that we are being framed.”

“No, it is not,” Jake responded in that low, graveled tone. “People were murdered tonight, innocent lives taken, while we believed in your word.” He took a step towards Aro, and another, leaving a visibly nervous Edward behind as he did so. “It is in our right to end you right now on those grounds alone.”

“My army will never allow you to touch us,” Aro replied calmly as he snapped his finger.

Immediately, Felix pulled out a phone and pressed a pre-dialed number, which rang out. The vampire looked confused, tried it again, yet when it once more rang out he dialed a different number.

Aro, who’d been smirking as he snapped his finger, slowly lost that smirk as he cleared his throat and snapped his finger again.

The phone call ended with the call ending up going to voicemail.

As he had before, Felix tried a different number, and then another, and then another.

The leader of the Volturi continued to hold Jacob’s furious glare. “Felix.”

“No one is answering, my Lord,” Felix responded as he tried a different number only for that one to go straight to voicemail.

“How can no one be answering?” Caius’ eyes were beginning to reveal his panic. “We have an insurmountable army.”

James, who had been fighting his laughter, tilted his head, catching Caius’ scarlet gaze as his grin widened to reveal teeth. “Do you?”

Phoenix’s wide gaze shifted to James in awe, a small, disbelieving smile tilting the corners of his lips. “So cool.”

Next to James, Seth snarled deep in his throat.

Edward’s eyes widened. “Jake, be care—!”

Aro had obviously been panicking more than he’d wanted to show and was purely acting on impulse, because no one (but Edward) saw what happened next coming. He grabbed Jacob by his neck and raised him off of his feet as his scarlet gaze shifted on everyone around them. “Stay back! All of you! I will break his neck if you do not—-.” His voice faltered, trailed off breathily. Those scarlet eyes widened as he looked away from everyone else and turned to stare at Jacob in what looked like utter horror.
Seth made to rush to help, but James grabbed his mate and pulled him back, wrapping his arms around his waist to anchor him close. He didn’t know what Aro was seeing by touching Jacob’s skin, but whatever it was causing him to openly shiver.

Jacob, for his part, remained staring down at Aro, his hands on the vampire’s wrist, not trying to break free, obviously not lacking oxygen. There was something odd about that, yet what was odder than even Aro’s reaction to him, was the slight glow to Jacob’s skin. It almost looked like dawn’s first light beginning to shine upon exposed vampire skin, and yet instead of millions of diamonds, it was more of a reflective flame.

James’ breath escaped him as he realized that glow was rising from all above Jacob forming a faint shape all around him.

Caius stumbled back into Carlisle as he stared up in horror at Jacob Black as if having seen the devil himself.

Even in wolf form, Sam’s shock was quite visible on his face.

Aro let go of Jacob, who transformed into a wolf in mid-air, landing on all fours on the ground. His wolf was large, snarling, showing teeth, his eyes nearly glowing fiercely, but while that would be a most terrifying sight for any vampire, it wasn’t the most terrifying part of it. No. That glow was still surrounding Jacob’s body and was very clearly an ethereal wolf which covered his physical body with its spiritual one. It was as if Jacob’s soul had become his body’s armor, and that soul was pissed.

James’ eyes widened. *Wait, is that a manifestation of the First Wolf?*

Phoenix looked utterly terrified. So did the rest of the Guard. Many of the remaining Volturi escort were backing up instinctively as if to flee, only to hear the growls of Sam’s wolves to remind them that their path was blocked on all sides.

Aro looked a mixture of horrified and fascinated, the slight tremble both scared and excited, but those eyes were most definitely traumatized. Whatever he’d seen when he’d touched Jacob had shaken him to the core and had, for the first time since he’d arrived in Forks, managed to slap his royal bearings right off.

Jacob took one step towards Aro, and another, very slow, very deliberate, until he was looming over the Vampire King.

“Jake, Jake,” Edward called in a worried tone. He didn’t seem worried for Jake anymore, more like worried because of him.

Seth gripped at the hands James held him tightly with, his body a million tension knots.

James, instead, was watching the ash blonde vampire a little behind Caius, who was, unseen by all, grabbing at her hair. Ah, yes, Corin. The one with the ability to make others docile and complacent with their situation, be whatever it might be. While Alec and Jane were the powerhouses of the Guard, it was this vampire who’d terrified Chelsea as it was her drug-like and addictive power which had kept the brunette bound to the Volturi for so long. He grinned, watching the confused pain playing itself soundlessly on her face, but of course, with all the eyes on Jacob, no one noticed.

Pleased, James leaned in and nipped Seth’s ear as a reward to himself, pleasure growing when Seth immediately lost all tension at the action. Honestly, that just made James very smug at how well
this was going. Sure, he hadn’t exactly planned for Jake to go supernova, but so far things were going marvelously. He’d have Seth to himself and bent over some tree in no time.

Edward, clearly having heard that whole line of thought, glared over his shoulder at James, his eyes clearly telling him this was not the time.

James grinned unabashedly back at Jacob’s mate, who really needed to get that stick out of his ass.

“Jacob, please,” Carlisle interfered as he moved closer towards the danger. “Aro is our guest, this is neutral ground, we promised them protection.”

Jacob turned that snarl on Carlisle, the First Wolf extending itself forwards to snap its fangs terrifyingly close to Carlisle’s face.

“Jake!” Edward yelled out.

James’ smile disappeared in two seconds flat. What the hell? Why would Jacob—he’d never threaten Edward’s dad like that!

“Hey, don’t do that to Carlisle!” Emmett snarled and would’ve gone at Jacob had Rosalie (with a stone face) kept him back.

James turned his head and searched through the crowds before pulling out his phone and staring at it. Still no message. C’mon. C’mon. Where are you? It should be done by now!

“Jamie,” Garrett hissed as he pushed his way through the pack to stand next to them. “This won’t work if he kills him!”

“I know that,” James hissed before he cleared his throat and whispered ‘Don’t you dare come after me’ into his mate’s ear before letting him go. He moved around Seth, who looked horrified and tried to grab at him, but he danced out of his reach and thanked Garrett with a look when the vampire grabbed Seth to keep him from disobeying James’s order. Relieved that Seth would be safe, James forced a carefree smile on his face as he moved towards the large, fiery and glowing wolf clearly readying to kill. “Jacob, hey, Jake.”

The wolf turned his head to glare at James, the First Wolf seeming to grow in size as it bared its teeth at him.

“James, his mind’s frazzled in this form,” Edward warned him immediately. “He doesn’t recognize you, or me, or anyone.” He took in a rapid breath. “He just sees leeches.”

“I never thought I’d ever have to do something as unpleasant as what I’m about to do right now,” James admitted out loud before reaching over and grabbing Edward’s hand, clutching it tightly. “I’ll never get rid of the scent. I’ll have to cut my hand off after this is done.”

Edward looked down at their joined hands in disgust. “What are you—?”

James held their clasped hands up, catching Jake’s attention as the wolf turned to fully face them. “Lookie here Jakey, it’s your two favorite vampires, Mr Hairgel and the Hot One.”

“Jake, it’s us,” Edward said in a soft, calm voice, clearly having gotten over his shock enough to have actually read James’ mind and figure out the gameplan here.

Honestly, Edward was just going along with a lot of James’ plans recently, which only went to show that while he was definitely an idiot for leaving Jacob and giving James an opening when he
had - that he had moments where he wasn’t a total idiot. There might actually be some hope for him.

Edward sent him a quick glare, and then shook his head as he returned his attention back to Jacob. “It’s us, baby.”

Jake now stalked slowly towards them like a predator coming for the kill.

“James if you get yourself killed I’ll never forgive you, you asshole!” Seth sounded like he was struggling. “I’ll hate you forever! James!”

James hoped his nerves weren’t showing on his face as he glanced over his shoulder quickly. “Love you too, babe.” He hadn’t actually meant to say that, but the shock had stilled Seth, so, uh, he’d count his blessings and deal with what he’d unexpectedly said later—-if there was a later. He breathed out and stared up at Jake, fighting his instinct to run from the danger in every movement.

The First Wolf roared, saliva dripping from its fangs, the force of the roar sending shivers through James’ body.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Edward told the wolf in a surprisingly calm voice. “I won’t run away ever again.”

It loomed over them now its fangs closing in on their joined hands.

James closed his eyes tightly and waited for the pain, feeling the pressure of burning, sharp heat touching his skin.

“James!” Seth screamed.

James’ eyes flew open at the sound, and that was when he realized that the First Wolf might have his and Edward’s joined hands in its mouth, held steadfast in its jaws, but it wasn’t actually biting them.

Edward smiled up at the First Wolf as he raised his free hand to caress its face. “Welcome back, baby.”

The First Wolf let go of their joined hands and leaned in to rub its face against Edward’s.

Pulling his hand free from Edward’s, James rubbed it against his pants leg and then groaned when he realized his favorite pants now smelled of Cullen. Great. Just absolutely wonderful. He’d have to cut his hand off and burn his favorite pants. Could this night honestly get any worse?

“You asshole.”

*I just had to go and jinx myself, didn’t I?*

James turned on his heel to see Seth was right there. He smiled his best seductive smile. “See? Everything’s—.” He didn’t see the punch coming, and damn, but his mate packed a punch! It hurt, but damn, that was a punch! Especially given the fact he was in human form! Was it weird that he was kind of proud?

Leah, in bestial form, clearly snickered.

“Why does Edward get face rubs while I get a punch?” James nearly whined as he rubbed his sore cheek.
Seth opened his mouth only to frown as he eyed something behind James.

The blonde glanced over his shoulder to see Aro was watching them with the same wide-eyed alarm he’d watched Jacob upon touching him. Jacob inducing terror in Aro had made sense, but why in the world did he have that shaken look when it came to them?

Turning to fully face Aro, James stood protectively in front of Seth, shielding him from Aro’s view. “Hey, my eyes are up here, buddy.”

“Do you even know what you have become—will become?” Aro finally spoke, visibly rattled as he brought a shaky hand to his forehead as if checking to see whether he had a fever and was hallucinating. “…will create?”

Caius frowned at his friend. “Aro?”

“I saw—I saw things—things so deep within that wolf—I saw—I saw—the First.” Aro looked incredibly agitated. “I saw what we once were.” His eyes widened. “I saw impossibilities.” His hand trailed upwards as he ran his fingers through his hair and gripped it at its roots. “I saw what we will become.”

“Aro, are you ill?” Caius continued to stare at his friend in fear. “You’re a telepath, not a psychic, maybe the shock—.”

“He’s a reincarnation, I saw. I saw the previous incarnations all the way to the First,” Aro interrupted breathlessly, almost feverishly. “Those weren’t visions, those were real, those were hidden, forgotten memories, those were… knowledge, ancient, more ancient than…” He let out humorless, almost manic chuckles. “The rules of nature are broken, brother. Impossibilities are not only probabilities, but they will happen. Jacob Black’s union with Edward Cullen has started it, has changed both of our races, and nothing we can do will stop it…” his breath stuttered out roughly. “It cannot be stopped.”

Movement out of the corner of his eye caught James’ attention, and he smirked when he saw a split second view of Chelsea and Victoria, the girls giving the signal seconds before they disappeared from sight into the woods, clearly returning home, as previously agreed upon.

“We have lost Marcus,” Aro whispered brokenly at that. “He has been Imprinted on by the Alpha’s sister. I’ve—what I’ve seen through the Alpha’s eyes—I know Marcus will not return with us to Volterra.”

“You say that as if you believe you will leave here alive,” Sam’s voice surprised them, revealing he’d turned to his human form, and was very much naked at this moment. Honestly, this night would hold nothing but terrible memories for James. Sam - damn him - was clearly at ease with his nakedness as he glared at the Royals. “You forget, your lives are forfeit due to the humans you killed tonight.” His eyes glowed with his inner wolf as he began to shift. “Even if Jake doesn’t end you, we will.”

James turned to glance behind him at Garrett, his glaring eyes clearly saying: This won’t work if he kills him either!

Garrett glared back at him with an obvious: I know that, damn it! He looked incredibly put upon as he sped to James’ side and yelled out: “Sam!”

The large black wolf stopped in mid-step towards the Volturi and looked up at him in question. Garrett sent a sideways glance to James that clearly told him he owed him one, before grinning
flirtatiously at the still paused werewolf. “You’ve got a great cock!”

The wolf’s eyes visibly widened as he looked down at himself and then quickly up at Garrett in open question, his tail wagging slightly behind him, his previous fury seemingly forgotten.

Crisis momentarily diverted, James nearly crowed when his phone beeped.

Freaking finally!

Reading the text, James held up the hand that he wasn’t holding the phone with. “Uh, guys? You’ll want to hear this.” He tried for a most confused and shocked expression as he looked up. “Apparently, the Volturi didn’t kill anyone.”

In seconds Jake shifted in a flash of fire and crackle of bones, standing naked in front of them all but looking a bit more self-conscious than Sam had. “What are you talking about? Charlie said there were bodies. People who lived in the outskirts of Forks—-.”

“Got their houses broken into, and their clothes stolen,” James interrupted as he pretended to read through the email. “Apparently, upon closer inspection, the bodies that were found were from a mortuary in Port Angeles, and were later put into those clothes and their bloody deaths staged, their bodies mutilated so they weren’t immediately realized not to be the townspeople. The deputies just assumed it was because of their clothes.” James looked up and tried to appear as innocent as he could. “It would seem Lord Aro was right. They were framed.” He couldn’t keep himself from glancing over at the Royals, and noticed not only Aro’s eyes on him, but Phoenix’s as well. He smiled at them both angelically. “Imagine that.”

Sam was naked and human was more. “Paul, go, find out if this is true.” He watched one of the wolves race away before turning to the Royals. “Who would frame you?”


James merely smiled at him.

“Those accused Romanians,” Caius hissed under his breath. “They did something similar in Moldova two centuries back, tried to have a mob—-.” He bristled at the very memory. “They must have tampered with our army as well.”

“They must have,” James agreed congenially.

Phoenix’s lips twitched, his eyes filled with awe.

“I’m leaving,” Corin declared, surprising everyone around her as she headed down the steps.

“Where are you going?” Caius called after her. “Corin! Return here immediately!”

“No.” She shook her head. “I nearly died tonight, and for what? A lost cause?” She laughed darkly. “I’m done fighting your battles.” And with that she sped away, somehow managing to slip by the werewolves while doing so.

“I do not understand,” Caius whispered to himself, clearly more than rattled at her departure. “Aro, why—?”

A howl filled the air. They must’ve had a phone somewhere in the forest for Paul to have gotten any sort of answer that quickly.
Sam’s eyes widened. “He tells the truth.”

At that, Dimitri raced down the stairs and into the forest, leaving the Volturi like Chelsea had.

“Felix?” Caius asked in confusion as the giant followed Dimitri at a more sedate pace. “I do not understand—what is happening?”

“It would appear your people are deserting you,” Jacob responded in an even tone.

Jane visibly nearly gave Caius a heart attack as she moved passed them towards the stairs. “Colin was pouting all day, he sulks easily.” And with that explanation she left, Alec grinning as he joined her.

There were a few of the Guard who remained, but many of them disappeared into the forest, leaving the Volturi alone and defenseless.

Caius was so visibly confused and scared James almost felt guilty. Almost.

“I have underestimated not only you, Jacob Black, but your pack,” Aro surprised them by admitting as he turned to the Alpha. “A man who can command this sort of loyalty without using a cheat, such as Chelsea’s ability, is to be admired, and feared.” He looked a mixture of angry and depressed as he eyed Jacob. “I saw your mind, I saw your hopes and your ambitions, and now… now I cannot go against them, not now that your pack has rendered us more vulnerable than we have been in centuries. You have destroyed my Guard, and my triad rulership - all with a blameless conscience.”

Jake’s eyes narrowed in suspicion, but he merely listened.

“Marcus spoke to you of sponsorship,” Aro sighed. “I would also wish to speak of it, and of a truce.”

Jacob stared into Aro’s face before holding his hand out.

Aro, visibly tired, clasped that hand.

…

Charlie stared at the dead bodies and just could not understand what was happening. Why would someone go through the trouble of stealing bodies from a mortuary and trying to pass them off as citizens of Forks? Why mutilate the bodies to make it appear as if some sort of animal had killed them?

Rubbing his head, Charlie wondered why his town kept getting weirder and weirder. At least the girls were home safe and sound, and the boys were over at James’, far away from all this weirdness.

Charlie sighed, eyeing the bodies in the half-zipped bodybags. “This just doesn’t make any sense.”

“Yes, it does not.”

He jumped and turned to see a man he did not recognize standing in the doorway to their makeshift mortuary. “This place isn’t open to civilians, friend.”

“The Original has awoken,” the man declared confusingly. “When I had heard that the spirit returned once more I did not dare believe it, yet I felt it when The First ripped itself out of the
darkness and propelled to the forefront.”

Sighing, Charlie shook his head. “Why don’t we take you to sleep off whatever you’ve drunk? Or smoked?”

“It failed before, so many times, and I lived each and every one to see each failure, each death,” he whispered, sounding broken. “And yet I have now lived to see the Original Wolf returned to us, and having found his mate - truly bonded. I both love and hate him for it.”

Charlie ushered the man out of the room calmly, used to dealing with drunk men in this town. Other than the occasional animal sightings or attacks, what really took up his time were the drunkards.

“Rules are forever changed, Sheriff Swan,” the stranger declared with great assurance. “No one truly understands, they did not live the life I did, saw what I did, know what I know.”

“Sure, sure,” Charlie agreed, because it was always better, easier, to just agree with drunkards.

“You will not be untouched by this,” he warned him. “The ripple will reach you as well, you must be ready when it occurs.”

“I’m the sheriff, I must be ready for everything,” Charlie responded amicably.

“You are not ready,” the man declared solemnly, clearly disappointed.

“Of course I am,” Charlie assured him.

“Your guards are lowered,” the drunkard accused him.

“Nope. All up,” Charlie muttered as he led the man closer and closer to the cell where they let all the drunkards sleep off their vices.

Suddenly the man moved with the swiftness of one sober, and before Charlie could stop him… he was kissing him.

Charlie’s eyes widened in utter shock, his whole body stiff in confusion. He doesn’t actually taste of alcohol.

The man pulled away and glared at him as if Charlie were the one who’d kissed him. “Your guards are down, Sheriff. What will you do when he appears?”

“When who appears?” Charlie squeaked, hoping none of his deputies had actually seen that. “It better not be someone else who wants to kiss me!” He looked around quickly, to make sure none were in sight, yet when he looked back it was to find the place where the man had been completely empty. Charlie’s eyes widened as he hurried to the door and looked around outside, but the guy was completely gone. Wiping his hand over his mouth, Charlie’s mustache twitched in his utter confusion. “What the hell just happened?”

…

“I’m not apologizing,” Seth growled as he sat on the same boulder he had earlier that night, hugging his knees to his chest. “You’re lucky I didn’t knee you in your freaking balls.”

James was in the river, washing his pants, hoping to get Edward’s scent off of it and himself. Honestly, this was his second bath of the night, he’d really have to stop getting other guys’ scents
all over him like this.

“Phoenix kept watching you,” Seth snarled. “He’s obviously transferred his crush from Jacob onto you, you idiot.”

Nah, James didn’t think so. Phoenix might’ve been staring up at him in awe, but that was really more like a fascinated puppy than a bitch in heat. James was cool, and obviously Phoenix could appreciate that, so who was James to be bothered by that? Plus, Phoenix had once belonged to his coven - even if he’d probably helped in the uprising - so he figured the kid had some leftover emotions from the whole James being his coven’s leader for a while there.

“If he starts to stalk you next…”

James looked up as the scent signatures got closer. “Seth, can we talk about this later?”

Seth glared at him yet sighed. “They coming?”

James nodded and looked up, waiting for the holographic images to get closer, and then they did, and Riley and Brady emerged from the forest. “Well done.”

Riley smirked. “Of course.”

Brady chuckled. “I’ve always wanted to break into people’s houses. This has probably been one of my favorite nights ever!”

Seth’s eyes widened. “Who have I been friends with my whole life?”

“Mama Seth’s such a wet blanket,” Riley snickered.

Brady giggled while Seth glared at them.

James ignored the threesome and instead eyed the forest. “Are you going to come out or are you going to continue skulking?”

“I was wondering whether you were truly going to hold up your end of the bargain,” a voice declared as Laurent stepped out of the woods and onto the shoreline with them. “How you even knew I’d followed you back to Forks… I do not understand.”

“Let’s just say I’ve learnt to master my ability in a way that was completely unexpected,” James declared as he pulled on his pants and emerged from the water, soaking wet, once more. “When I realized you were in the outskirts of Forks I immediately knew why.”

“Living an unlife looking over your shoulder is no way to live,” Laurent agreed. “If your scent had not been all over the wolf boy I would’ve believed Riley merely working to entrap me with that flirty friend of yours like they have been trying ever since the uprising.” He eyed Riley. “He never liked me.”

“I wonder why,” Riley mumbled.

“You were the reason we had a problem with the Volturi in the first place,” James reminded Laurent with a sharp smile. “It was only fair for you to help get them off our backs by wedging them into a tight corner they couldn’t possibly weasel their own way out of.” He’d known that Laurent’s had many connections who got rid of bodies, and would be able to procure what he needed thanks to that. “You bought us time we needed for Chelsea to not only finish removing all bonds between Aro and his army causing them to leave - but gave her time to work on Corin and
the others as well while Victoria kept her undetected and out of danger.”

“You’ve effectively dealt a fatal blow to the Volturi empire without shedding any blood,” Laurent whispered, sounding terrified. “I used to believe you ruthless before, but now you’re terrifying.”

James grinned. “Good.” He motioned to the woods. “You’re free to go, Laurent. Now that you’ve helped I will keep my word, I won’t come looking for you. Our debts are squared.”

Laurent eyed the foursome before returning his attention to James and nodding. “Tell Victoria I said hi.”

“I won’t,” James assured him as the vampire disappeared back into the woods.

Riley made a face. “I still say we should’ve killed him anyway.”

Brady shrugged, clearly not that interested in Laurent’s ultimate fate, and instead turned to Seth, suddenly seeming to remember something. “You don’t still want to kill me, right? Because, well, James is super hot, but you’re my friend and I wouldn’t ever make a move on him.”

Seth eyed Brady before pouting. “You’re not the one I’m worried about. He’s got Phoenix Jordan all over him.”


“That’s a bit of an exaggeration,” James assured Riley, who’d given him an immediate and disapproving look. “Do you remember him, by the way?”

“Of course I do,” Riley muttered as he made up a face, looking confused at the question. “He was always going on and on about how cool you were, he hated the fact that you sired me. He used to hang around you all the time, hell, I think he was a part of the mutiny out of pure spite because you ignored him all the time. Called him Peter.”

Seth glared daggers at James. “And you don’t remember this?”

James just stared at Riley in shock. “You’re making that up.”

Riley’s expression turned comical. “Wait, do you really not remember him?” He then snickered. “Man. Did you tell him that? If not, I wanna be around when you do! He basically worshipped you, James. Wanted to be a ruthless vampire like you and tried to wear clothes like you and everything!”

“No, no, the mutiny happened too soon after his turning for any of that to be true,” James assured Seth. “Plus, he was ‘in love’ with Jacob during that time, so even if he looked up to me, it would just be hero worship.” He then smirked. “I am admirable you know.”

“I really want to punch you again,” Seth muttered under his breath.

“I’m telling you, Riley’s making all this up to mess with you,” James declared confidently. He’d definitely have remembered Phoenix better if he’d actually spent any time with him. Plus, during the time Phoenix would’ve been with them, James would’ve been too busy leading the coven and trying to understand his obsession with Jacob to have any time for the redhead, hell, he’d hardly had any time for Victoria or Riley much less someone not of his bloodline!

“I can’t believe you don’t remember it,” Riley muttered mostly to himself. “When you found out he was a virgin you promised to take him to the hall of mirrors and everything.”
Seth’s glare could kill. “You promise that a lot, don’t you?”

James turned his own glare on Riley, slapping him up the back of his head. “Stop riling him up! He believes you!”

“But it’s true!” Riley snickered, rubbing the back of his head. “Seth, honestly, I wouldn’t be too worried if I were you, I mean, James has become really lame since he hooked up with you. No one else is going to want him anymore.” He then laughed and dodged James’ second swipe. “C’mon Brady, let’s go back home and leave these two alone so James can make up for his past as a whore to Mama Seth.”

“Mama Seth?” Brady asked in confusion as he willingly followed.

James turned to Seth the second they left. “You know he was making all that up, right? Right?” At Seth’s continued glare, James groaned. Damn it, Riley!

…

Alice Cullen stared at the message on her phone from Bella which read: Sam, Jake and Aro have come to an agreement. A peace has been reached. We’ll stay here until Jacob graduates, and then we’ll be moving to Alaska and settling the area there, protecting Aro’s ‘assets’ with the Volturi’s financial backing. The Rez Pack can have Forks and the Rez again. Everything’s fine now, Alice, you don’t have to worry about anything. Just—come back—you and Jasper both. Please come back.

She wanted to respond, she really did, but she couldn’t.

Jasper leaned forwards, his eyes on the message. “You need to tell her.”

“With what he’s seen now that he’s looked inside of Jacob, Aro will want my ability more than ever,” Alice declared softly. “He’s terrified at what he saw, and what it means for the future of vampires and werewolves alike. I have to do this, Jaz, I have to disappear for a while, I—I have to see him. He’s the only one who—.” She closed her eyes tightly. “This is the way we protect her. Protect our family. Protect everyone.”

Another message came in, once more for Bella: Please come back. I’m really worried about the both of you.

“We didn’t say goodbye to her last time,” Jasper reminded Alice softly. “I do not think she will be able to forgive us if we do it to her a second time.”

“This is the path that keeps her safe,” Alice whispered softly, clearly battling tears as she leaned against him. “That’s all that matters.” She closed her eyes and, when he wrapped his arm around her shoulders, broke into tears.

…”

“You have to be a little nicer to him,” Alec chastised softly as they watched Colin with his brother, the boy clearly depressed, having been so since earlier thanks to Jane.

“I do not have to be anything,” Jane informed her brother as she petted Captain Hops.

“You walked out on Aro because you thought Colin was sulking,” Alec pointed out. “And yet you haven’t let him know you’re here.”
“He knows I’m here,” Jane assured him.

“Then that’s even worse,” Alec muttered. “Look, he’s a nice kid. I get that you and I are bad when it comes to relationships with others, but we’re both stuck with him, and I don’t want you making him miserable.”

“You only just met him,” Jane pointed out curiously. “Why do you care?”

Alec glared at her. “Even as humans no one loved us, Jane. The villagers treated us terribly, they tried to kill us, and Aro only changed us and saved us because he knew we’d have powers as vampires and be useful to him. He had Chelsea and Corin use their abilities on us to keep us there. You heard him back there, he would do it again, force us, force everyone. We can’t go back after having heard that.” He pointed in Colin’s direction. “You have the opportunity to know that you’ve got a soulmate, you’ve got someone who actually loves you. I will not let you mess that up.”

Jane didn’t answer, merely continued to pet Captain Hops, yet the disturbed expression on her face proved he might’ve made a valid point.

...

“Do you think the Volturi will keep their word?”

Victoria made a face as she turned from the window to eye the woman who’d come to stand next to her. “I don’t think they will have much of a choice.” James’ sinister plan had really left them with none, not if they didn’t want to be fighting wars on all sides while with diminished numbers and few allies. Accepting the wolves had been the only way to replenish the army that’d been decimated in the course of one night and to keep face amongst the vampire covens worldwide.

Sue Clearwater nodded, relief visible. “The negotiations went by very quickly. I am surprised Jacob was able to get here before his sisters woke up.”

Victoria returned her gaze out of the window, where Jacob and Marcus had helped the crying girls out into the woods with them. She was still shocked Marcus was going along with all of this, but she had a feeling he’d already begun figuring things out. With his ability, it would make sense that he’d do so quicker than most, if any.

“I will be coming to Whittier with you when you leave,” Sue surprised her by saying.

Victoria turned to face her once more, eyes wide, red curls bouncing with the force of her twirl. “You’re going to leave Charlie?”

“Charlie is a very sweet man, but he would understand and agree, more than anyone else, that my children will always come first, and if I can help them in any way, I will be there to do so,” Sue responded softly. “It will be very hard for him to let Bella go though, harder than it will be to let me go.” She smiled tenderly. “He is a very good father. It is one of the things I have always liked about him.”

“Yes,” Victoria admitted, a little disturbed by this revelation. “I’m actually a little worried how he’ll take it.”

“Me too,” Sue agreed. “If only he could be told what Bella is—-.”

“The Volturi would never allow a human in the know to live,” Victoria was quick to explain. “The only way for him to remain safe is to remain oblivious.” She tilted her head and swallowed around
the lump in her throat. “That’s probably why I always knew, deep down inside, that my one-sided feelings for him were always going to remain that way.”

Sue eyed her in silence before sighing and reaching out and squeeze Victoria’s shoulder.

The redhead had no idea why she allowed that comfort, she just did.

…

Peace had been brokered.

Caius still could not believe what had happened. The Black Pack would go to Whittier in a few months, upon the Alpha’s graduation, and it would all be sponsored by the Volturi, or what was left of it. The blonde could not believe that they’d been brought so low in one night. He still honestly couldn’t understand how it had happened, but in the course of one night they’d not only lost their army, but most of their most important Guard.

As it was, they desperately needed the alliance with the wolves, and even then, it would be a hard battle should their many enemies realize just what was happening to them.

Once the peace had been brokered, Aro had gone into the room he’d be using, and had locked himself inside. Honestly, Caius had never seen Aro look so traumatized before, he honestly looked terrified. Sure, there was that glint in his eyes that proved he was already coming up with ideas, with answers to his problems - and there was more than a little fascination - but overall Aro had definitely been scared. Just what had Aro seen when he’d touched Jacob Black?

What could possibly make him stand down like this? Aro had killed his own sister to keep Marcus in the Volturi, and yet he was allowing Marcus to leave like this for the Alpha’s sister?

Whatever Aro had seen, it must be horrifying. He also kept asking about Alice, about where she was. It was obvious that her talent with sight was even more essential to him as now, but Caius had a feeling Alice would know that. He’d also overheard Esme mentioning Rosalie that Alice had sent a cryptic message to them, one that made her think she might not be coming back.

Yes, she would be smart not to, Caius admitted as he leaned against the wall and stared out of the window.

“Alice and Jasper have left our Coven.”

Caius turned to see Carlisle standing behind him, bathed in shadows, reminding him of the good old days when Carlisle had lived with them. Those had been happier days.

“She called me to say goodbye,” Carlisle sighed as he came to stand next to Caius, staring outside, his face sombre. “She said we will see each other again some day, but that does not make this parting any easier.” He took in a deep breath. “I had prepared myself to lose Edward, not her and Jasper.”

Well, Caius had lost tonight as well, so he was somewhat sympathetic to Carlisle’s situation, but to be truthful he was more annoyed and frustration at how Aro would react when he discovered the news.

“She also warned me about some things which will change, things I cannot repeat or want to believe.” Carlisle grasped the edge of the window and held on tightly. “But Alice’s visions… I know better than anyone to ignore them.”
Caius eyed his fellow blonde. “I would offer you comfort, but I doubt Esme would be very pleased with my methods.” Despite stating this he reached out and trailed his hand down Carlisle’s chest to his abdomen, running his finger against his belt buckle. “Athenadora is more… understanding… of certain things.” His hand slipped and purposely caught itself on Carlisle, cupping him through his cotton pants as his slender wrist shifted with a stroke. “Do you ever think about the old days, Carlisle? I do.” He tilted his head and grinned. “You and I had so much fun back then before you became so… stuffy.”

The leader of the Olympic Coven grabbed him by his wrist. “My wife is in this house.”

Disappointment filled the vampire, he’d wanted to have some fun, and Carlisle had once been a very fun companion. Marriage and coven-hood had made him boring. He didn’t even seem to be enjoying his coven-members the way many covens did, and should (in Caius’ opinion). It was this petulance that had him smirking. “It was probably for the best that Alice and Jasper left, Aro might’ve made peace with the wolves, but had she stuck around he’d have fought for her even more.” He tilted his head, feeling Carlisle’s grip on him slacking slightly at the revelation. “As it is, he’ll probably send the minions we have all over the country chasing after her to find and bring her to him now that she does not have the protection of the Olympic Coven.”

Carlisle, surprisingly enough, did not react to that the way that Caius had expected him to. He didn’t tense, didn’t sputter, didn’t demand they leave Alice and Jasper alone. Instead, Carlisle merely stared at him in stone-cold silence, which really made this no fun whatsoever.

It spurred Caius into provoking the vampire further, grin taunting. “Don’t worry, Carlisle.” He wondered whether his fellow blonde had even realized he was stroking him once more, or that his scent was not one of disgust, or that he was hardening rapidly in his grasp. “Aro will treat her like a precious treasure, especially now that he’s lost so many of the Guard.”

Carlisle slammed his fist into the top of the window frame, leaning in towards Caius, forcing the shorter, thinner blonde to press himself up against the glass.

Finally! A reaction!

Caius grinned up at Carlisle ruthlessly. “The only way I see where you could protect Alice and Jasper now would be if you could tie them to the Volturi but not to Aro.” He tilted his head as stared up at Carlisle through his lashes in mock coyness. “If only you hadn’t thrown away our offer to become one of us.”

Carlisle stared down at him in silence before speaking. “If you had loved me I would have stayed, but we both know you have no idea what love is. You know about games, you’re constantly bored and expect people to become your entertainment, to cater to your whims. But you do not know how to, and maybe don’t even have the capacity, to love someone else.”

The Royal gulped as he stared up at Carlisle’s golden eyes. “Don’t pretend like you still love me.”

Carlisle looked away. “I don’t, but I did.” He then cleared his throat and returned his golden orbs to Caius. “Do you know what Alice saw?”

“How could I possibly know what she saw?” Caius asked with a chuckle despite the odd sensation in his stomach.

“She saw the destruction of my Coven due to your presence here,” Carlisle responded accusingly. “She said once you leave, my Coven will have been destroyed along with it.”
Despite the fact that he enjoyed riling Carlisle up, Caius frowned as he removed his hand from Carlisle’s body. “I have no intention of touching your coven. I don’t care for your lifestyle, and I don’t care for your coven, but it is yours.” He cleared his throat and met those golden orbs. “I mightn’t know how to love someone, Carlisle, but the only reason why Aro has not attacked your coven up until now is because I stopped him. I held him back as much as I could, and when I couldn’t any longer, I made sure to come here and try to protect your coven as much as I could.” A muscle in his cheek jumped. “Why do you think I even entertained the idea of a truce with wolves?” Scarlet eyes glared up at gold. “That was for your benefit, not mine.”

Carlisle stared down at him in silence.

There was something oddly intimidating about that, and for once, Caius wasn’t in the mood to play games. “It doesn’t matter whether you believe me or not though, believe whatever you want. I do not care.” He pushed passed Carlisle and walked away, able to feel the vampire’s gaze on his back until he turned the corner and disappeared from sight.

…

Garrett looked up at the sky from the meadow. He’d gone over there to make sure there weren’t any of the Volturi armies remaining, which he hadn’t believed there would be, but it was good to double check. Honestly, too much had happened in one night, and it would take a while to digest all that’d gone down, and what it meant for everyone involved. Hell, was the least involved of all the parties, and yet it affected him somewhat as well.

“Are you leaving?”

This time Sam had actually snuck up on him, and Garrett was damned proud of himself for not jumping with a very unmanly squeak, especially given how close that voice had been. He cleared his throat and looked over his shoulder to see Sam behind him, shirtless but wearing slacks.

“What do you care?” The vampire asked a little spitefully before allowing himself to fall back into the grass. It hurt a little, but he liked that, it helped ground his thoughts as he looked up at the stars.

Sam didn’t answer, merely moved to his side and sat down next to him, hugging his knees to his chest.

The silence that dragged on between them was unnerving, and when Garrett couldn’t hold it anymore, he turned his head to peer at the wolf. “Why exactly are you here?”

“I thought you might be leaving,” Sam admitted, staring ahead of him.

“So what? You decided to stalk me?” Garrett made up his face. “How creepy.”

Sam didn’t react.

That actually worried Garrett as he sat up. “Why are you really here, Sam?”

The wolf sighed and turned his head to finally look at him. “All the things you said to me, about me, before, were true.”

Oh, he already knew that.

Sam seemed to be trying to find the words to say. “I’m the Alpha of my pack, and I’m supposed to lead by example, yet I’ve been doing such a shitty job of it - Jared even went behind my back because even they knew I was—-! I—-I’ve lost members of my pack over and over and over again
because I’m stubborn and pigheaded and so very difficult!”

Intrigued, Garrett listened to the pack leader.

“Emily—she—you’re right, she let me get away with a lot, and I put a lot of burdens on her, expected so much, was such—.” Sam stuttered out an uneven breath as he looked away from Garrett and returned his gaze to the darkness in front of them. “I loved her, you know. I really did think she was my Imprintee, maybe she was before she—,” he paused, taking in a deep breath, “and I’m always going to be guilty for the part I played in all her suffering.”

“Good, you’d be a piece of shit if you didn’t feel that way,” Garrett replied.

Sam chuckled darkly yet kept his gaze ahead of him. “You’re really not going to take any of my shit, are you?”

“Nope.” Garrett shook his head, uttering the gospel truth. “But if I’m your Imprintee, maybe that’s exactly what you need.”

There was silence as Sam turned his head at that, looking at Garrett silently, clearly thinking a million thoughts while eyeing him. When he finally spoke, his voice was so soft it was almost intelligible. “Are you leaving?”

Something tugged in Garrett’s gut clenched at the sound, so he cleared his throat and looked out at the trees. “Not tonight.”

Sam’s grip on his knees tightened. “But you will leave.”

“Maybe. I don’t know.” Usually he’d string along a potential lover, but Garrett didn’t feel like playing games tonight. “I plan on staying around a bit longer, I want to hang with Jamie, make Riley’s life impossible, and tell Sethie all the stories Jamie doesn’t want me telling him. I’ve been told as long as I stick to the vegetarian diet I’m allowed to stay as long as I want with them.” He grinned. “So I’ll probably be around for a bit.”

“Will you go with them when they leave for Whittier after Jacob’s graduation?” Sam asked softly.

“Maybe.” Again, that was his instinctive reaction. “I don’t know what might have changed by then.”

“Okay.”

Okay? Really? That was all he was going to—?

“That gives me a couple of months then,” Sam said, apparently to himself.

Garrett blinked as he turned his head towards the wolf. “A couple of months for what?”

Instead of answering, Sam turned those dark eyes on him and leaned towards him, cupping Garrett’s cheek as he pressed a soft, chaste kiss to his lips before pulling away and staring ahead of him once more, this time with a tiny smile on his lips.

Garrett stared wide-eyed at Sam, a strange sensation somersaulting in his stomach.

Well damn.

...
“You two are leaving again, aren’t you?” Bella couldn’t keep the words from falling from her lips the second she saw him. When she’d gotten the message from Jasper to slip away and meet him at the school’s parking lot she’d known something was up, and upon seeing his face, she’d known her fears were becoming a reality.

Jasper sighed and nodded as he stood there. “Alice has seen—this is the only way to keep everyone safe from Aro for right now.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “She wanted to go without telling you, but I didn’t—I didn’t want to do something like that to you again, and I know she didn’t really want to either.”

“Then why isn’t she here?” Bella asked softly, hurt.

Jasper smiled sadly. “I don’t think she would’ve been able to go through with it if she saw your face, Bella.”

The sob lodged in her throat, but Bella refused to let it out. Instead, she raced into his arms and held onto him tightly.

Jasper rested his chin on her head as he held her just as tightly. “I want to ask you to come along, but you’re still in your father’s care, he’d be sick with worry and there’d be a manhunt.” He sighed. “And you’re also a new born who can’t be put under pressure, you’re holding up remarkably as is, but this is the time you need to become stronger, to learn self-control, and to become the vampire you’re meant to be.”

Bella nodded her agreement. It hurt her to admit that it was best for her to not go with them, for them to part and maybe never see each other again, but it was the truth. Circumstances were horrible, but it had to be this way. “Promise me, when the danger’s over, that you’ll come to see us in Whittier - or you’ll get word for me to meet you two somewhere.”

“Of course,” he promised in her hair. “The second the danger has passed, you’re the first one we’re calling.”

Bella held onto Jasper tightly, tilting her head up when his hand urged her, and accepting his kiss desperately. She wished Alice was here, she wished she could say goodbye to her as well, but she was so incredibly grateful Jasper had come to her, that they hadn’t left her without a word.

Even now she could feel him working on her emotions to keep her from breaking down, and she loved him even more for it. Tears flew down her face as she held on as tightly as she could, fighting that terrified feeling in her stomach that things were about to change forever.

…

Howls echoed loudly in the air.

James looked up at the sound, surprised as he saw the scent signatures romping around a little distance away. There was definite pain in two of their scents, but excitement and happiness were there as well.

So did Seth, his eyes wide. “I think—it’s the twins.”

“Yep. Marcus is there too. I know he’s Rachel’s mate, but I’m still surprised he took the risk of being there.” There was a pause as he watched the two newly turned wolves play with each other. “Anyway, all’s well that end’s well… I’m just glad Jakey got back right on time to help them shift.” James took the opportunity to sidle up next to Seth in his distraction and wrapped his arms around him, pulling the wolf face-first into his chest. It surprised him that Seth went without any
fight, especially given just how annoyed the wolf had been thanks to damned Riley and his (had to have been made up) stories.

Another howl, and another.

“What do you think Aro saw when he touched Jacob?” Seth asked softly as his hands rested on James’ hips. “He looked terrified. A part of me wants to think it was the whole First Wolf jumping out at him, but I doubt it. It’s—whatever he saw was terrifying.”

“Maybe he saw Edward naked,” James only half joked as he trailed his hands down to cup Seth’s ass through the material of his shorts, squeezing and kneading each cheek greedily. It was shocking he was getting away with this, to be honest. Seth must be really distracted by his pondering to not have remembered James was supposed to be in the dog house.

“Oh would you go and say that?” Seth mumbled in obvious embarrassment as he hid his face in James’ chest.

“Sorry, that’s an image I wouldn’t dare put in the mind of even my worst enemy,” James apologized.

Seth chuckled, shaking his head, before suddenly he groaned when James squeezed him extra hard. “Stop.” His fingers dug into James’ hips. “You’re not going to do anything because they’re too close so don’t tease me.”

“I’m not teasing you,” James assured him. “I just really like to touch you.” He nuzzled into Seth’s hair. “Are you saying I can’t touch you?”

“No, I’m not—,” Seth whimpered when James licked his cheek. “I’m not s-saying that, I just—-.”

Just what, Seth?” James asked absentmindedly as he found his hands slipping under the elastic waistband and grabbing those bare cheeks. “What were you saying?”

“You’re cheating,” Seth complained breathlessly as he leaned into him. “You’re mean.”

“How am I mean? Does this hurt?” He knew it didn’t because while he was squeezing and kneading, this was nothing compared to his actual strength or what the wolf could handle. “Am I hurting you, Seth?” His finger slipped between Seth’s cheeks and rubbed against him. “Hmm?”

“You know exactly what I—-!” Seth let out an unintelligible cry when James’ index finger slid effortlessly inside of him all the way to the knuckle.

James bit down on his bottom lip to keep from uttering something just as embarrassing. Like before, Seth was soft inside, warm and wet, his finger slipping in as easily as it would a glove. He’d believed previously that Seth was preparing himself for James, and that had been an ego boost, but what if that wasn’t the case? What if—-what if this was the heat?

It was hard to take that seriously, and yet some part of James reveled at the thought. There were other questions though, such as: why was Seth in heat? What had brought it on? Why would his body actually have the ability to go into heat? How long would it last?

Seth shook, a soft sob escaping his lips despite the way he grit his teeth.

The sound stopped James. “Does this actually hurt?” When Seth closed his eyes tightly and merely shook his head rapidly, blush darkening, James was relieved, yet a little curious at the same time.
“Are you tender? Sore?” He moved his finger cautiously, slowly, still in awe at how wet Seth was for him. “I started playing with you roughly a little while ago, I didn’t even prepare you before attacking you.” His free hand gripped Seth’s hip, pulling him in closer, feeling Seth’s hard cock pressed up against him, the tip dripping with pleasure. “You need to tell me if I’m pushing your body too hard.”

Seth’s eyes flew open at that as he angled his head up to look up into James’ face. “I’m not fragile.”

A small smile tugged on the corner of James’ lips but he didn’t let himself actually smile because Seth looked like he’d punch him if he did. So, instead, he flicked a second finger at Seth’s opening before slowly slipping it in as well, holding Seth’s gaze the whole while. He could almost see the progression of his finger entering Seth’s body, the wolf’s eyes darkening, his gaze losing some of its sharpness as his lips parted and a groan escaped.

A shiver raced down Seth’s body as goosebumps rose, and he leaned James, arching his hips into the touch, encouraging the journey deeper inside of him.

Honestly, James had only planned on touching Seth - he really did like touching him - but this sort of response was really tugging on his self-control. He gulped and glanced over his shoulder in the direction of Jake, Marcus, and the twins. They weren’t exactly that close by, but given that they were magical beings with extra-strong senses it might still be too close. He did not want anyone to realize what was going on here, or to come across them if they—-there was no way he wanted to risk anyone else seeing Seth in this state! Seth was adorable and cute just as his normal self, and James might have to kill whoever saw him all covered in this lustful blush, so out of breath and needy.

If anyone else saw this there was no way James wouldn’t suddenly find himself with rivals!

A low growl warned him of Seth’s displeasure, but by the time he turned back to look at his mate he’d been shoved with enough for to land him in the water. James stayed under for a couple of seconds, a little confused as what exactly had pissed Seth off so much. Then again, hadn’t Seth told him to stop ‘teasing’ him?

He hadn’t considered it teasing, but maybe Seth—-. James sighed and sat up, surfacing to find himself in chest-height water, definitely had fallen into the shadows, which was why the blow had hurt a bit more. He looked up, about to apologize, when suddenly Seth was straddling his lap in the water, his lips on James’, his kiss angry and punishing.

He’d be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy the aggression.

“Pay attention to me,” Seth ordered against James’ lips as he rubbed himself against James’ cock, reaching behind him to grab it. “I don’t want to share you, especially not now.”

Understanding filled James, but before he could explain Seth had aligned the vampire’s cock to his entrance and lowered himself down onto the blonde, spearing himself completely with that rod. The pleasure that rocked through James’ body stole his breath and his voice. Oh gods—-Seth was—he felt even better than usual! It was as if there was something inside of him that made James super sensitive, and even breathing elicited a delicious tickle, tremble.

Arms behind him, finding purchase against James’ somewhat bent knees, Seth arched his back and slowly began to undulate his hips, fucking himself on James’ cock. His eyes lost more and more of their sharpness as that lustful blush covered his body, his lips parted in ragged breaths, in whimpers and sobs.
Holding his weight up on one hand, James stared at his mate, a lump of emotion stuck in his throat. He wasn’t sure what he was feeling right now, it wasn’t actually anything he’d experienced before, but he found himself mesmerized by Seth. Looking at him, observing his flustered beauty, was breathtaking and very overwhelming. That disoriented pleasure in his eyes sent an actual quiver through James’ cock.

“I l-love the feeling of you i-inside me,” Seth admitted breathlessly as his movement began to slowly increase. “It’s so—the best—ah!—so good—I ever—ah! James!”

Oh. Wow. James’ ego would never deflate ever again.

Seth opened his mouth to try and finish what he’d been trying to say, but all that escaped him were unintelligible cries. He looked desperate, his gaze lowering to their connected bodies before rising up to meet James’ golden gaze and then back again, his sobs turning needy and anguished.

“Damn it, you’re too fucking beautiful.” James hadn’t even realized he’d said that until Seth’s eyes widened, a little sharpness returning to them as he stared at the vampire in shocked awe. The blonde reached out with his free hand, forgoing Seth’s cock to instead tease his nipple. “What the hell am I going to do if someone else realizes that?”

“N-no one e-else—,”

“For now,” James interrupted with a little growl. “But what happens when they realize just how fucking irresistible you are?” He glared at the reaction those words received in his mate. “That is not something to smile about, damn it! I’m pissed just thinking about it!”

“It doesn’t m-matter if they do,” Seth responded with a quiver as he shifted on James’ lap, one eye closing and his face contorting in pleasure as he effectively shifted the angle of penetration. He licked his lips as he leaned forwards, hands on James’s shoulders as he stared into those blue eyes. “My body, my soul, my, my heart, are only yours.” He flushed scarlet. “I love you.”

James buried his hand in Seth’s hair, bringing the wolf’s forehead to his. “I’m not a good man, Seth, and I’ll never truly be one. You saw tonight what I’m capable of if it means getting what I want. And that wasn’t even—if it was about you I—.” He tightened his grip on Seth’s hair. “If I allow myself to fall any further I—I might never be able to let you go if you change your mind, even if you want me to, even if you beg me to. Do you get what I’m trying to tell you? Do you get what I’m trying to warn you about”

“James…” Seth pulled his head back against James’ hold enough to look into the blonde’s eyes. His expression was blank, but his eyes dark flames. “If you think you can ever leave me…” His grip on James’ shoulders tightened as his movements became sharper, his breath escaping him erratically. “Me change my mind?” He chuckled darkly before sobbing when he shifted in a way that James’ cock hit something inside of him. “Just—shut up. St-stop saying such stupid—don’t you know I want—what I need—James! I want you to call me cute.” He whined breathlessly. “Please James.”

“By the gods, Puppy…” Staring up at Seth’s needy, pleading face, James was utterly shaken as he realized: “I’m so in love with you it’s terrifying.” He surged forwards, wrapping his arms around Seth and straightening him on his lap, causing Seth to sob in his mouth as he gave him no time to get used this new angle, instead ramming himself up inside of the wolf. “You’re fucking stuck with me for the rest of our lives, Seth, you can’t change your mind, you hear me?” He nibbled roughly on Seth’s ear, eliciting sobs and shivers, his thrusts growing more violent in response. “You’re mine now. You got that? Mine!”
“I—James—ah!” Seth seemed to have lost all words as he held onto James’ shoulders in an attempt to ride the bucking bull beneath him.

“I’m gonna filled your body with my cum over and over again until there’s not a piece of you that’s not claimed and covered in me,” James threatened, and then laughed darkly when Seth’s body reacted instinctively, clenching around James like a tease. “You think you might really in heat, baby?” He bit his way down Seth’s neck. “Because your body seems to really like the idea of being full of my cum, you’re squeezing around me so tightly it’s as if you’re afraid even a little drop might drip out.” He grinned into Seth’s neck when he felt the wolf’s cock twitching like crazy against his abdomen. “So fucking cute.”

Seth hiccuped a cry as he let go of James’ shoulders to instead wrap his arms around James’ neck, plastering himself against the vampire, hiding his face in James’ hair as he gasped wildly, his hips meeting the thrusts eagerly. “P-please J-James.”

“Yeah, baby?” James purred as he ran his hands up and down that back before lowering them to grab Seth’s ass once more, kneading each cheek before pulling them slightly apart so he could better watch himself spearing into the wolf’s body over and over and over again.

“I’m so empty,” Seth whispered into his ear. “Fill me.”

Something might’ve snapped in James at those words, because the next thing he knew he was using his grip on Seth to repeatedly lift and slam him down onto his cock so violently he’d think the wolf would be in agony if it weren’t for the ‘yes yes yes more more more!’ being whispered encouragingly in his ear. “I’m gonna cum, baby.” And with that warning he thrust once, twice, three times, and then he hit home, burying himself as deeply inside of his lover as he could as he found completion inside of him.

Seth let out a choked sound, his whole body twitching as his cock throbbed against James’ abdomen, spilling out into the water just as James spilled out into his body. “So good,” Seth whimpered as he tightened his hold around James’ neck, pressing soft kisses into his wet hair. “Need more.”

Chuckling darkly, pleased, James wrapped his arms tightly around his mate before slowly beginning to rock their tightly embraced bodies, moving them as one.

Seth’s heart was racing, his breath rapid. “Go faster. I need your—.”

“Shhhh,” James whispered into Seth’s hair as he slowly rocked their bodies, the movement languidly fucking him into his lover. “I’ll give you everything,” he promised. “Just let me enjoy the feeling of being so deep inside of you.”

Seth’s whole body shivered in response, allowing himself to be loved slowly, tenderly, even though it was obvious the slow, teasing pace tortured him. Still, when James found his completion inside him once more, Seth let out a sound that was so content James rewarded him by dragging him up to the shoreline and giving him that harder, faster fuck he’d begged for.

It wasn’t the honeymoon they deserved and wanted, but it was a very promising first step.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Carlisle says Volterra’s changed a lot since he last lived there,” Edward declared as he threw himself down on the bed despite all the packing that still had to be done. “Apparently Rosalie is loving it so far, but Emmett not so much.”

“What about Esme?” Jacob asked as he looked up from the box he was taping together in his bedroom in Charlie’s house. Somehow, with Edward’s help, he was able to graduate from Forks High School and, as agreed with the Volturi months back, the Black Pack were readying to move to Whittier. Marcus, Rachel, Rebecca, Jane, Alec, Colin (and his brother) as well as Embry and Quil were already in the town itself, helping setting up in advance. Brady and his mother and brother were supposed to have left with them, but his brother had caught a cold so they’d had to wait for him to get better, and would instead be traveling with Sue, Leah and Chelsea tonight. Leah had insisted Seth join them, but since James was sticking around for another day or two, Seth had refused to budge, and in the end he’d won the siblings’ war of wills.

Doesn’t mean she was happy about it. Leah, for some reason, still found it hard to see Seth as anything but her baby brother.

The official story was that everyone were headed to Alaska for college and job opportunities. Jacob knew that while he hadn’t exactly said it, Charlie was both confused by the mass exodus and tempted to join. Thankfully Bella had (as subtly as she could) reminded him Forks would be nothing without him, but still, Jacob was beginning to worry that they’d arrive and Charlie would’ve already gotten a job there as well. He’d asked his father - with whom he was now on awkward (yet better) terms - to keep an eye on Charlie for him while they were gone.

Edward tilted his head after a second’s thought. “Carlisle said Esme’s spending a lot of her time with Athenadora and Sulpicia, who are Caius and Aro’s wives, and seem to do their own thing in Volterra.”

“Oh.” Jacob grabbed the box and put it on top of the last one he’d filled, before grabbing another empty one. “I still can’t believe he agreed to join the Volturi. It doesn’t seem like something Carlisle would be interested in.”

“He did it to protect us all, but Alice and Jasper especially,” Edward told him without a sliver of a doubt. “It’s also convenient for Aro and Caius, as through him they can build bonds with the other vegetarian covens around the world. With how… decimated… the Volturi ended up when they came here, Aro really had no other choice, especially not with Caius backing Carlisle taking the position Marcus left.”

There was definitely more to this whole story than anyone was telling him, but Jacob felt like he really didn’t want to know. He had a feeling his Beta might’ve had his hand in what had gone down that night, but considering no human had actually been murdered (already dead corpses merely mutilated) and the night had ended without any bloodshed, Jacob was just going to let it go. That was exactly what a Beta was there for, to be a backup and help the Alpha lead - to be there and do things when and if the Alpha could not - and Jacob understood just how lucky he was to have a Beta who was not only versed in the problems of leading - but in vampire issues as well.

Didn’t mean he wouldn’t rein James in if he got too out of hand though. Not that he really thought
James would get too out of hand - whenever his Beta wasn’t doing his pack duties he was doing his Imprinter, so, really, Jake didn’t really have to worry about James at all. Seth, on the other hand? Definitely. Jake was shocked the boy could still sit properly given the way James hounded after him all the time like some sort of sex maniac. He was also surprised Leah and Sue hadn’t beaten James up for being a perverted horndog towards their angelic ‘baby’. Heat or not, James was seriously overdoing it.

Edward snorted, clearly having heard that. He then tilted his head to the side as he eyed Jacob. “How come you haven’t gone into heat?”

That was a good question. When Jacob had discovered (thanks to Edward’s mind reading) that Seth was apparently going through heat, he’d at first thought his mate was pulling his leg, but then he’d really allowed him to pay attention to Seth and James and realized that yeah, James kind of did act like a male dog trailing after a female in heat. It’d really got Jacob wondering, really, about what exactly was going on, and worried that this might happens to others, but it didn’t seem to have, at least not yet.

“Maybe, once Vicki and Riley come back from visiting that all-knowing, mysterious friend of James’, they’ll have some answers regarding that,” Jacob answered after a moment’s thought. “Because I’d really like to understand how that’s possible, and if we’re going to have a case of the pack going into heat… we don’t get anything done if that’s the case!”

“James and Victoria keeps their minds very blank whenever it’s about that guy, but I’ve managed to glean that his name is Murdock,” Edward informed him dutifully. “He’s not a vampire, but he’s definitely not a human either.” He shifted to lay on his back, his shirt riding up to reveal his stomach, his head tilted to the head. “How annoyed would you be if I admitted I kind of want you to go into heat?”

Jacob dropped the box, and then flushed as he picked it back up. “As if we need me to go into heat.”

A smirk touched Edward’s lips, as did a blush, the both contradicting yet adorable. “True. But I’m a bit… miffed… you haven’t.”

A snort escaped Jacob’s lips as he put the box down and threw himself on the bed next to his mate. “Oh, is that so?” He trailed his fingertip over the skin exposed by Edward’s raised shirt. “Y-yeah,” Edward pouted. “I met you before James did Seth, I claimed you before he did Seth, so if there should be anyone enjoying estrus, it should be us.”

Jacob snickered as he grabbed Edward and rolled him onto him so the vampire was straddling his hips. “Why are you and James so competitive with each other?”

Edward pouted even harder. “Bad habits are hard to break?” He then groaned when Jacob thrust languidly up against him, rubbing his ass through the material of their pants. His eyes fluttered shut for a second, a shiver visibly racing through him.

Jacob rolled them over again, so that this time he was on top of Edward, kissing him before the vampire could even open his eyes.

Purring contentedly, Edward wrapped his arms around Jacob’s neck and pulled him closer as they kissed.

A knock sounded on the door. “Hey! You two! You’re the ones who told us not to get distracted!
We’ve still got loads to do before tonight!”

“Leah!” Chelsea whispered, clearly embarrassed.

Jacob groaned and pulled away from Edward, who was pouting once more. He grinned and leaned in, pecking his lips before pulling away before yelling through the door: “I will cockblock you later for that!”

Leah could be heard huffing before leaving with Chelsea.

An alert beeped on his phone, and Jacob pulled it out, reading the curt message with a snort. “Sam’s cursing me again.”

Edward grinned a bit evilly as he turned to lay on his stomach. “Garrett really doesn’t make it easy for him, does he?”

“Nope. I guess he figured Garrett would move out of James’ home now that we’re leaving, that he’d go to the Rez and live with them like Alistair has with Jared.” Jacob really didn’t know the new vampire very well, all he knew was that Alistair was Carlisle’s friend, and he’d come to visit only to find out that Carlisle was heading back to Volterra. The blonde was British, a tracker (although definitely not as good as James) and had punched Jared the second he’d met the wolf because he’d thought Jared about to attack him. Somehow (and Jacob wasn’t at all sure how) that had ended up with Alistair moving in with Jared in the Rez as it’s first vampiric resident. Despite being happy for his Beta, Sam was very visibly resentful as hell of ‘how easy’ it was for Jacob and Jared. “He wants me to order James to not allow Garrett to stay at his house after we leave.”

“Like that’s going to happen,” Edward snorted. “James will never do anything to make Sam’s life easier. Plus, he enjoys the way Garrett makes his Imprinter’s life impossible, James really will never forgive Sam for what he put Seth through.”

Jacob nodded as he texted Sam back. “Sam should just be happy he’s convinced Garrett to stay behind and continue working on whatever they have instead of trying to push him to move in with him. Garrett is not the type of person you can bully into doing anything he doesn’t want to.”

“I really wouldn’t worry that much,” Edward informed Jacob with a chuckle. “Garrett’s not as unimpressed as he likes to make Sam believe.”

Happy to hear that, Jacob grinned. “Maybe having the house all to himself will help him and Sam have some time to themselves, time they wouldn’t have if he moved to the Rez, where they’d be surrounded by the pack all the time.”

Edward grinned mischievously. “That’s what Garrett’s figuring, too.”

Catching a scent in the house, Jacob sighed, all amusement gone as he turned to face his mate. “Have you heard anything from Alice or Jasper yet?”

Edward, also looking at the door, obviously able to scent Bella as well, shook his head. “She hasn’t either.”

“I hope they’re okay, for the both of you,” Jacob whispered.

Edward smiled tenderly as he reached his hand out towards his mate, and pulled him closer when Jacob put his hand in his. He rested his forehead against Jacob’s, and breathed in his scent, clearly calming himself. “I really love you.”
Jacob pressed a kiss to Edward’s forehead before wrapping him in his embrace. “And I love you.”

Edward snuggled in.

Jacob smiled.

…

“How are you doing with the whole Sue thing?” Bella asked as she looked up at her father, who was helping them pack up things up. Most of the others’ things had already been packed and sent on ahead, but some of Sue’s and the other’s things would be in the vans as well.

“I’m fine, kiddo,” Charlie replied as he looked at the picture frame in his hand. “If I’m being honest, I’m more choked up about you and Jacob leaving. I got used to having you both here, it’s going to be very silent when you leave.” He sighed, looking much more tired than he had seconds ago. “Washington has a lot of good places to study too, you know.”

“I know, dad,” Bella sighed, feeling really bad for the stress and sadness she was putting her father through. “But we’re getting full scholarships, and there’s all kinds of opportunities there.”

“I’ll be coming to visit you all,” he threatened.

That would be both something she’d look forwards to and worry about. “Good.”

“What about you, Bellsy?” Charlie sighed as he looked up at her from the picture of her, Jacob and him grinning happily. “You’ve been a little down since Alice and Jasper went to live with Carlisle’s brother.” He eyed her. “You must miss them a lot.”

She did. So much. And yet she’d understood why things had to be the way they were. It was this understanding, this peace that she’d made with the situation, that hinted to her that she might finally be growing up. “I think my feelings about that are similar to yours with Sue.”

Charlie looked up at her, an odd expression on his face before he nodded to himself, as if something had just been confirmed. He put down the picture frame and reached for her, hugging her tightly. “I know I am a bit awkward, and I could have been more touchy-feely, more emotionally available, more—.”

“Dad, you’ve been the best father in the world,” she assured him softly as she turned in his embrace and held him tightly.

Charlie cleared his throat, unable to speak for a moment, before he forced out: “I wanted you to feel comfortable to tell me about… Alice… and Jasper. Just like Jacob with Edward, it would’ve been a very big adjustment, but I would have been able to accept it if they made you happy.”

Her face burned in embarrassment.

“All I want is you to be happy, Bellsy.”

Bella hugged her father tightly. “And I want you happy too.” She sighed. “I’m scared you’re never going to love someone again the way you loved mom. I thought maybe Sue, but…”

Charlie nodded silently and held his daughter tighter. “The next time you find someone to love, no matter who it is, please let me know.”

Not for the first time, Bella realized just how lucky she was to have him as her father. “I will… and
you have to do that too, okay?”

He chuckled. “It’s a promise.”

Victoria was surprised Riley was able to control himself enough to stay on the mission and not get side tracked, then again, Riley’s power was self-control. She admired how level-headed he appeared to be given the fact that she herself was somewhat distracted by everything.

“If you want a simple answer, then: yes, the other wolf and vampire couples will, at some time or the other, experience their own estrus. It’s a physical manifestation of the strength of their connection, it betrays that they are ready and have already started evolving in preparation for what comes next.” Murdock looked down at his fingers as if he wasn’t telling them something monumental. “And before you ask why your Alpha’s mate has not entered into estrus given they have been together longer, the reason is that, unlike James and Seth, they have had a rougher journey to get where they are. Jacob is still somewhat hurt Edward left him, and Edward is still trying to figure his position in the pack. Once they have finally, truly, settled into their mate hood and are ready to face what will come, only then will the estrus happen.”

Victoria blinked, opening her mouth.

Riley beat her to the question. “Wait, Edward is the one who’ll go into heat? Not Jacob? But Jacob’s the wolf!”

Murdock tilted his head, eyeing Riley curiously. “And? What does that have to do with anything?”

The two vampires shared shocked looks before Victoria returned her golden gaze on Murdock. “Murdock, what ‘comes next’?”

Murdock eyed her for a moment before smiling toothily. “The future.”

“Leah’s been giving me the stink eye all day,” James informed his mate as they filled the back of the two U-Hauls the women and Brady and his brother would be driving to Alaska. Leah and Chelsea were in charge of one of the U-Hauls, while Sue, Margo, and the boys would be in the other. Honestly, he didn’t know why they wanted to do the drive themselves instead of just getting a service to do it, but Sue was talking about scenic wonders, and Leah just seemed to like the idea of having Chelsea to herself for the whole drive, so he just left it at that without bringing it up, especially since Leah was already pissy with him as it was.

“She’ll get over it,” Seth assured him good-naturedly from inside the first U-Haul, arranging the boxes James kept bringing him. “No matter how much she pouts, I don’t plan on sitting there between her and Chelsea in the front seat for 47 freaking hours.” He peeked out from behind one of the boxes. “Plus, you’re not going, and if I’m not around who knows what will happen.”

James’ bit her bottom lip to keep from smirking at the teasing tone in his mate’s voice. “I really like this possessive streak you’ve developed.”

Seth hummed, not denying it as he continued to work. “You still owe me a switch, so don’t make me have a reason to use it.”

“I knew it! You’re using it as a punishment!” James pointed his hand accusingly at Seth. “I offered that out of the goodness of my heart and you’re just corrupting the purity of the offer!”
The giggle that escaped Seth’s lips was contagious as he shook his head. “You’re so ridiculous. Why did I use to think you were cool?”

“Used to?” James huffed. “It didn’t seem a thing of the past last night when you made me change my clothes because I looked too good.”

“Please, that wasn’t because you were cool.” Immediately a pout pursed his lips at the memory. “You dressed like some sort of kinky gigolo purposely because you knew it would bother me.”

Well, yeah. That was half of the fun.

His phone rang, and when he noticed the caller ID James bit on his bottom lip to keep from barking a laugh when he answered it. “Hi Phoenix, what’s new on your side of the world?”

Immediately Seth’s gaze was narrowed on him, the wolf stomping to the edge of the truck to glare at James. “What does he want?”

Mouthing ‘behave’, James turned his back on his mate and ran his fingers through his hair.

‘Seth still hates me, huh?’ Phoenix asked, sounding amused by that.

“He’s really possessive,” James thrilled in telling Phoenix. “I think he’d put a collar on me if he could.”

Seth sputtered in embarrassment behind him.

Phoenix snickered. ‘Shouldn’t you just tell him why we’re always talking? Put him out of his misery?’ There was a pause, and then an amused: ‘You like his possessiveness, don’t you? You’re freaking unbelievable.’

James merely smirked and shrugged. “How can I help you?”

‘Right,’ Phoenix cleared his throat. ‘Remember that thing you asked me to keep an eye out for? Well, it’s happened.’

“Are you serious? So soon?” James’ eyes widened as he walked away from Seth, putting some distance between them as he ran his hand over his face. “Where?”

‘South America, the Andes,’ Phoenix responded. ‘Aro’s in a snit because he thought it was accelerated as well, but confirmed reports of a wolf shifter there having a vampire mate were confirmed earlier today. You were right, this shifter is of Mapuche bloodline, he’s not related at all to the Quileute tribe. Whatever Jacob started when he got together with Edward, it’s crossing borders.’

He had no idea how to feel about that. On one hand it proved that what was happening here in Forks wasn’t an amazing fluke, and yet… “What are Aro’s plans for something like that?”

‘As soon as you guys have settled in Whittier, he wants to send one of your bonded pairs to track them down and broker an alliance.’ Phoenix made an odd sound. ‘Considering your tracker skills, I’m very sure he wants to send you and the puppy.’

Thing was, once Jacob found out, he’d want to reach out towards this other wolf and his pack as well, so James had a feeling he definitely would be making that trip to South America with Seth. A small smirk touched his lips at the idea of being on the road with his mate again. There were quite a good memories associated with that.
‘I’m sure Carlisle will get in contact with Edward once things are settled and decided, but I figured I’d give you the heads up,’ Phoenix mumbled.

“Thanks for that, I really appreciate it.” He combed his hand through his hair.

‘Yeah, well, we made a deal, didn’t we?’

“And I’ll keep my end of the bargain,” James assured him. “As soon as we’re settled in Whittier I’ll talk to Jake about it.”

There was a pause, and then a: ‘Good. Now we should probably hang up before your mate starts planning my demise.’ And with that he hung up.

Chuckling, James shook his head, turned around, and jolted in surprise to find Seth standing there, eyeing him suspiciously. “Are you a ninja? I didn’t hear you move!”

“What bargain?” Seth glared at him, eyes narrowed. “Why exactly would you be talking to Jake about Phoenix once we settle in Whittier?”

It was wrong to tease Seth, it really is, but James couldn’t help it. Phoenix was right, he really did like to provoke Seth’s possessiveness. “Well, Seth, I didn’t want you to find out this way, but—-.”

“Oh shut up,” Seth huffed, not at all jealous, surprising James. “There’s no way you’re interested in him, or any other guy or girl for that matter. You don’t even realize when people are hitting on you anymore, you’re that disinterested in anyone who isn’t me.” There was a smirk tilting those lips and a look of pleased and utter superiority on his face as he stated that with utter confidence. “So whatever you’ve got going on with Phoenix, at least from your side, is totally professional.”

James’ lips parted as he put his phone away. “Then why do you act up every time he calls?”

“I just said why,” Seth mumbled in annoyance. “At least from your side it’s totally professional.” He huffed once more, this time more annoyed. “I don’t like the thought of anyone wanting what’s mine.”

Amusement filtered through James’ surprise. “You know, you’ve gotten really cocky lately.” He gripped Seth’s hips and pulled him in intimately. “I’m supposed to be the arrogant one out of the two of us. You’re the adorable one.”

Long ago that might’ve annoyed Seth, but now he merely grinned up at James and played with the buttons of the blonde’s shirt teasingly. “But I am adorable.” His grin grew a little mischievous as he pressed his pelvis forwards with a teasing rub. “Just only when I’m alone with you.”

James gulped. It seemed like more and more it was harder to keep from bending Seth over something and having his way with him - all day. Honestly, it was embarrassing. James might’ve always been impulsive, but he’d also had some self restraint - sometimes - when he absolutely had to - or when he wasn’t bored - or -. He huffed. Okay, so maybe he’d never really had self-restraint before, but it’d gotten a hundred times worse since he’d gotten with Seth!

“A wolf shifter not of Quileute blood has been confirmed to have mated with a vampire,” James admitted with a sigh, trying to keep his mind on work because otherwise the next time Leah and Chelsea came to bring them things they’d find him screwing Seth inside of the moving van - and Leah was already looking for an excuse to beat James up as it was. “Phoenix called to give me the heads up, and let us know Aro will probably be sending you and me to go and track them down and try to broker an alliance with them.”
Seth’s eyes widened. “Oh.” He tilted his head in intrigue. “What does this have to do with the bargain you two were talking about?”

This was embarrassing. “It’s like… remember the night I kissed Phoenix?”

Seth’s eyes narrowed in two seconds flat. “I do recall something about that, yes.”

He hurried on because this was turning dangerous quickly. “Remember what I told him? I knew it’d get through eventually, and it did, and, well, he’s got a point. And now that this has happened in the Andes it makes more sense.”

The annoyance was bleeding out of Seth slowly, turning into curiosity. “You mean about how he needs to find himself a wolf, right?”

“Exactly!” James nodded, happy Seth was back on the right track. “Well, Phoenix wants one, an Imprinter, I mean. Well, he wants the sugary romance Edward and Jake force on everyone around them, and he realizes I was right, if he wants that, he’s going to have to get Imprinted on. But it’s not like there’s a huge quantity of wolf shifters in Volterra. There’s actually none. He’s triple checked.”

Seth’s eyes widened in sudden understanding. “Is he trying to get you to set up a wolf and vampire speed dating service?!?”

Oh god, it sounded embarrassing when Seth put it that way! “More like a neutral ground where vampires and wolves interested in something like that can go and, you know, see if something happens.” James made a face. “Alaska’s huge, and there’s so much open space surrounding Whittier that it makes it a prime location. It would also be Volturi sanctioned, which would mean alliance with the Volturi, and that in itself is a draw for a lot of vampires, especially nomads or those without a coven.”

Seth blinked, once, twice, and then looked up at James with growing intrigue. “That’s a really good idea, actually. I could even see the wolves from the Rez taking turns trying it out, I mean, they’re all bitching because of Alistair—Jared’s lost a lot of popularity due to how ‘annoyingly happy’ he is all the time now.”

James snickered. He liked Alistair, even if the guy was always anxious and preferring to stay by himself. They were both trackers, and it was nice to talk to talk to someone who understood James’ world, even if Alistair’s ability wasn’t to the degree that James’ was.

“They all know Sam’s to blame for why him and Garrett aren’t all cozy and lovey-dovey, so they don’t really bother with him, but they’re really resentful of Jared - or so I’ve heard while going to visit mom there,” Seth continued with a snicker. “Apparently Paul’s the worse one, which I thought was surprising. He doesn’t exactly strike me as the type of guy all gung-ho for romance.”

“Good, we can give him Phoenix and just get the two of them out of the way,” James half joked as he drew Seth closer so he could nuzzle his hair, which was held up in a messy ponytail. “Have I told you today how good you smell?”

“Only four or five times so far,” Seth answered as he trailed his hands up to curl around James’ neck and draw his face down closer to his. “That’s not nearly as much as you usually do.”

James’ lips twitched, his voice lower in want as he lowered his hands to grasp Seth’s ass, pulling him hard against him so the wolf could feel how hard he was. “Sorry Puppy, I’ve been busier than usual. I’ll have to find a way to make it up to you.”
Seth licked his lips, his breath heavier as he rubbed his own proof of desire against James’. “I have a few ideas if you’re interested.”

Oh, he was interested alright!

“Oh for—-you two are outside in a neighborhood for crying out loud!” Leah cried behind them. “For the love of decency!”

James looked over his shoulder to glare at his sister-in-law.

Chelsea, the poor, sweet thing stuck with that rabid bulldog, looked completely apologetic. “Sorry guys, but, uhm, there are neighbors who are looking at you both from their windows.”

“How some respect for Charlie’s home and neighborhood,” Leah harrumphed as she stormed passed them and shoved the box in her hands between him and Seth. “Make yourself useful, you pervert.”

Yanking the box from her, James would’ve taken it to the truck, but Seth grabbed it from him and shoved it right back into his surprised sister’s hands. “Se—-?” And then he had a handful of Seth Clearwater, the vampire finding himself kissing his mate back instinctively as his arms found their way around the thinner, smaller body, pulling him in close, swallowing Seth’s delectable little whimpers.

Leah let out a series of choked, scandalized sounds.

Chelsea giggled at her side.

Seth finally pulled away, pressed a quick peck to James’ lips, and whispered: “Make it up to me.” With that command Seth then turned to his sister, took the box from her, and returned to the van.

James just stared after his mate with what was the most uncomfortable of boners. “Y-yes sir.”

Leah slugged James’ shoulder, clearly distressed. “He used to be so adorable.” And with that she grabbed the box from Chelsea and shoved it into James’ arms, grabbed Chelsea, and dragged her back into the house, looking close to sobbing.

James watched her go, before he turned his gaze to where Seth was. “He still is.”

Seth, who must’ve heard that, glanced over his shoulder at him with a smirk before beckoning him towards him with a crook of his finger.

Like a fish on a hook, James could do nothing but be drawn towards Seth, jumping up onto the back of the van and dropping the box haphazardly on top of another before following Seth, who was backing into the darkness until he hit the wall. James found himself there, plastering Seth against the side, pinning the wolf’s hands over his head as he kissed him hungrily.

“Love you,” James whispered as he fought with Seth’s pants.

Seth smiled against his lips as his own hands worked on James’ belt buckle. “Love you.”

They became one, once more, inside of the moving van, desperately, needily, gripping each other close and trading words of love so intense to anyone else they would sound like threats. It was impossible to think with passion risen so uncontrollably, but had they been able to, wolf and vampire would’ve laughed at how things had changed from what had once been.
When they’d both started on James’ ‘suicidal mission’ neither would’ve dreamt that in a few months they’d be there, readying to leave Forks behind to start their life together in Alaska while working with Vampire Royalty. Neither would’ve believed they’d be there, inside that van, hissing words of love and clawing marks of ownership all over each other, none more claiming than the release James found inside of Seth.

“Move in with me in Whittier,” James whispered into Seth’s hair, his body still connected with Seth’s. “I know you’re supposed to live with your mother and sister, but you’re my mate, you should be with me.” He knew Leah would be up in arms about the whole thing - probably more than Sue would - but Victoria was completely supportive of this decision. James wanted this more than anything he’d ever wanted. “My place isn’t that big, but it would be ours—.”

Seth gripped him tighter before nodding. “Yes. Of course.” He chuckled in happiness yet embarrassment. “I was starting to worry you weren’t going to ask me.”

James stared down at Seth, his heart twisting like it only did with him, as he rested his forehead against Seth. “It’s you and me, puppy, forever. You ready for that?”

Seth’s smile competed with his blush for adorableness. “Yes.”

James meant to just peck his mate on his lips, he really did, but like usual, he was greedy when it came to Seth. But that was okay, because as Seth opened his mouth to the kiss and pulled him in closer with a shift of his hips, his mate proved he was just as greedy for James.

A smile turned James’ lips as he kissed Seth harder, beginning to fuck himself slowly into the wolf’s eager body.

Eternity had never looked so appealing.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank everyone who stuck around all the way to the end. I started this pairing out of pure curiosity to see if I could write something that wasn't Jacob/Edward as the main pairing - and somehow I think I fell in love with Seth and James more? I'm still trying to get over that...

Well, I hope you enjoyed this story, and thanks for taking the time to read! :)

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