Threshold Shift
by Macx

Summary

It's been over a year since the park reopened, but nothing about working at Jurassic World is routine. Especially when you're the alpha of a raptor pack. Owen Grady would never make the mistake to think every day is the same.

He also didn't want student workers traipsing around his enclosure, let alone interns. Still, he got them for a trial run. Trouble is waiting in the wings. He just knows it.

And then there is the rumor of poachers on Isla Sorna. Wonderful. Just what he needed.

Notes

Okay.

I'm officially blown away by all you guys!

When I wrote Tainted I wouldn't have thought in my wildest dreams what an overwhelming response this one story would garner. The sequel can't really live up to that, I think. But hey, give it a shot anyway. I had fun playing with Owen (who wouldn't!) and the pack.

I doubt this will hit another 100k, but hey…
Chapter 1

Isla Nublar. Twenty-two square miles of jungles, grass land, mountains and cliffs.

Jurassic World. A lifelong dream of John Hammond and the reality that had finally come true.

Twelve years ago.

Running successfully, and continuously open, except for a year after The Incident.

Masrani Global had successfully kept the truth behind the chaos hidden, swept under a big rug, and millions had been paid in reparation, to buy silence and repay for lives lost.

No one but a few people knew about the indominus rex. Even less knew what had really occurred.

Now, close to two years later, the theme park was running smoothly, just as successfully as before, and visitors came in strong numbers.

Like before.

As if the deaths and the destruction had never happened.

They had, though. People had died. Visitors, security troopers, keepers and trainers. So many deaths and so little to lessen the impact on family and friends.

Dinosaurs had died, too. Among them the i-rex, the hybrid creature no tourist had ever seen.

It had been a huge monetary loss for Masrani Global. Twenty-six million down the drain. But Simon Masrani had come back out of this catastrophe, blaming extremist animal rights activists, a gas attack, and whatever else his lawyers had been able to cook up.

The loss had been terrible.

And now, today, everything was like before.

With a few changes.

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A new attraction had been added.

While dinosaurs had become normal in the past ten years, they were still a sight to behold, still not common enough to not draw the masses, and they were fascinating young and old, world-wide.

People still went into zoos to see giraffes, tigers, lions, elephants, even horses, cows and pigs. And those had been around for a lot longer than Jurassic World.

So people flocked.

The park made money.
Masrani had finalized a new attraction, a safe, family-friendly but still thrilling new enclosure. It was actually an extension of the wide plains where the apatosaurus roamed, and it had been constructed especially for them.

A Walkway Among the Giants.

It had taken nearly six months to build the walkways that snaked along tree tops, spanned the river and a lake, and wound down toward the grasslands where the Gyrospheres awaited. The apatosaurus moved freely within the moderate jungle, picking leaves, looking at the excited tourists, almost indifferent to their shouts and cameras clicking.

A special system, not unlike what had been used for the Gyrospheres, kept the animals from actually touching the gawking masses. It was an invisible barrier, a window without glass. It also kept the apatosaurus from accidentally tearing down a walkway. They could only ever enter in a specific way. The animals had been quick to learn that.

Reggie Faulkes, head keeper of the apatosaurus, triceratops and stegosaurs, had worked with his biggest animals tirelessly to get them accustomed to the new attraction, to the people suddenly on eye-level, and to remain calm and at ease. Becky, the lead female, had been essential in that. Where she went, the others did, too. If she declared an area safe, they trusted her and followed.

VIP pass holders who had booked this special option on top were entitled to an exclusive platform where no barriers existed, and under the watchful eyes of the keepers, they could feed and pet the massive creatures. Anyone who was out of line, misbehaved or teased the animals was immediately banned.

Animal welfare first.

Waiting lines were forming every day, just an hour after opening, and VIP pass upgrades were sold out quickly.

Claire Dearing was very happy with the numbers coming in.

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There were mandatory classes for every new employee at Jurassic World, whether they were simply paper pushers or actual keepers. One was the safety drill.

What to do in case of an emergency. What to do should the park need to be evacuated; again. The last was never said, but many thought it.

Then there were additional drills concerning the herbivores and extra, very much mandatory trainings, for the predators. The senior trainers had refreshers, but no one working with the live animals could get even close to the paddocks without this certification.

That went for interns and visiting scientists, too.

A third segment had been added concerning the restricted area: no one went there without the express permission of Owen Grady and Dan Carter.

Both of them.
No exceptions. At all.

Much to Owen’s protest, formal and informal, both times very vocally, interns could now apply for the raptor enclosure. He hadn’t been thrilled to hear that his area was part of a tour students were given, too.

“Live with it,” had been Claire’s simple advice.

“Live with what? A horde of nineteen or twenty-year-olds thinking this is an amusement park? A petting zoo?”

“Everyone applying for an internship or a student workplace at Jurassic World is carefully checked. The ones selected to come here have passed all requirements.”

“Oh, don’t give me the press release, Claire!” he snapped, glaring at her. “I know how it works and it’s all fine for applicants as long as they stay out of the paddocks. They can shadow whatever trainer or worker they want, but the raptors are a whole different ballgame!”

She folded her hands, studying him neutrally. Shields up, as Owen usually teased her.

“We had interns with predators before.”

“You know, I don’t give a flying hoot where you put them, but not with me! I’m running an experiment, right? No one can apply for an assistant’s position, nor do I fall under Carter’s jurisdiction in most matters. I’m outside the whole World area, Claire! For a reason!”

As the Chief Raptor Behavior Analyst he had duties to the park and to Masrani Global, some of them concerning interns, and sometimes the odd group of scientists, though he had successfully warded off most of them. He had had only ever one intern, Peter Kozinski, aspiring vet technician, and that had been an almost-failure. Sure, the guy had come out okay, with all limbs attached, but with a good scare.

“You received Mr. Masrani’s email. You talked to him on the phone in person, Owen,” she reminded him patiently, corporate voice and corporate expression in place.

Simon Masrani saw it as a learning experience. Especially for those students he believed had a bright future with the park of Masrani Global. Only select few could even apply and only one out one hundred got the green light.

Still too many for Owen’s liking.

He wasn’t part of the theme park. Yes, officially he was running a science experiment and yes, he submitted reports, but that didn’t mean he wanted people traipsing around and maybe getting themselves eaten.

Not to mention the whole alpha-pack relationship. That was something he didn’t want to either explain or prying eyes to watch.

Maybe two years ago. Heck, maybe five years ago. But now? What connected him to the pack was not common knowledge. What he did couldn’t be copied. If strangers walked around and watched him work, they might get the idea that the raptors were tame.
They weren’t.
Never would be.
“They won’t last,” he promised darkly.
“Give it a shot.”
He growled something under his breath and stormed out of the office, scaring one of the assistants.
This was such a horrendously stupid idea…

“Six months, Owen,” Masrani told him when they talked again, this time in person. “I only ask for six months. After that, we reevaluate the program.”
“You mean: cancel.”
“I mean reevaluate. This is a unique opportunity, Owen.”
“For what?”
“Learn.”
He blew out a breath. “You better select them very, very carefully.”
“I have staff who know how to pick the most promising.”

Owen refrained from commenting on that. He knew that promising didn’t always mean capable or competent. Just because you went to an elite school and had the best grades didn’t mean you were suited for a job like his. Or to even watch someone like himself do what he did on a regular basis.
“Don’t say I didn’t warn you, okay?”

Masrani only smiled benignly. He had flown to Isla Nublar just to talk to Owen. Others would be tickled, maybe even feel important because the busy CEO of Masrani Global, a billionaire who had the money to run a place like Jurassic World just because John Hammond had asked him to before he had died, wanted to talk to him.

Owen wasn’t impressed. There was little that truly impressed him when it came to the world of politics, finance and powerplays on a corporate level. He liked Masrani. They had an understanding.

And Simon understood a lot.
Especially about talented people, the preternaturals.
“Are those happy winners talented?” Owen asked neutrally.
“You and I know that no preternatural goes around announcing what they are, what they can do. We believe there are some in the groups, but most aren’t. Not all talented are looking into getting a place where they can work with animals. Like dinosaurs.” Masrani smiled a little. “So, yes, there might be one or two.”
Owen shook his head and let his gaze wander. Masrani’s office was actually a penthouse, sprawling across the top floor of the main control building. The windows looked seamless, hardly a smudge on them, and shades lowered automatically the moment the sun’s glare was registered as bothersome.

Soft colors in shades of chocolate brown, vanilla cream and light blue decorated the walls and floor. The huge desk was made lighter through the glass top, the elegant metal legs, and the absence of anything but a slender laptop. There was hardly a personal touch, which figured. Masrani never really lived here. It was a hotel room of sorts.

“Owen,” Simon spoke up, bringing him back to the here and now. “Interns are part and parcel of running any kind of business. I am looking for employees all the time. We will always need handlers, trainers and scientists in the labs. We need technicians, we need engineers.”

“They have no place in the raptor enclosure,” Owen muttered. He suddenly frowned and turned back to the billionaire. “Or are you trying to open a new attraction?”

“Velociraptors?” Masrani shook his head. “No. I have told you before, I believe we can never display raptors, despite the demand of the public. The i-rex was a catastrophe. I take full responsibility. It went out of hand.”

There was a tight line around the other man’s mouth, his eyes darkening with memories Owen shared. He wondered if Masrani had had nightmares, had needed psychological help. Just the sight of the i-rex had been enough to induce those.

“Six months, Owen,” he repeated. “No more. Then we evaluate that test phase.”

Six months.

Too damn long, Owen decided. And still nothing he could fight any longer.

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A new training segment was added within a week: anyone qualifying for the raptor enclosure on paper had to go through a rigorous half-day special, hosted by Owen Grady himself.

The first time Owen confronted a hopeful group of five bright-eyed students from all over the world, one dropped out, feeling sick just watching recordings. One was making eyes at him, flirting the whole time.

She didn’t last the first day the group was out at the paddock. She didn’t faint or scream, but she grew rather pale at the sight of the pack, then edged away from the cage and wasn’t seen for the rest of the day. Delta had taken an interest in her, eyes never leaving the young woman.

“Delta,” Owen warned as she stalked the woman, making clicking sounds.

Delta shot him an almost innocent look.

“What?” he demanded.

She refused to even acknowledge him, just padding along the fence, like she was checking for an
exit to get to the girl.

Veronika, Owen recalled. Veronika Johann.

“Mr. Grady?” she asked, voice weak, sounding like she would throw up soon. “May I leave?”

The other three who had edged away from the fence, were looking at her with either concern, confusion or even pity.

“Yeah, sure.” Owen looked at one of the troopers who had come along as security. “Max? Can you get the lady back to the hotel?”

“Sure thing, Mr. Grady.”

Delta snorted, head cocked, watching. Owen just shot her a look, but she still refused to say anything.

Owen found out later that she was a potentially talented preternatural, but facing the sharp minds of the raptor pack had made her feel so ill, she had actively applied for the petting zoo for the rest of the visit.

“Trices aren’t puppies,” Owen pointed out in a meeting over the first group of hopefuls.

“I know,” Claire replied with a faint smile creasing her lips. “She feels she isn’t cut out to be a trainer. She would rather handle the kids.”

He rolled his eyes. “Riiiiight.”

Claire’s expression was fond. “I heard of the other one.”

“He threw up all over the place when the pack started to tear into their lunch.”

“Tired live lunch. You fed them a pig. You had to start out extreme, didn’t you?”

Owen shot her an annoyed look. “They want to be trainers, keepers, maybe even work in your labs and raise the next generation. They need to be able to withstand blood and gore. Like the rex, the raptors need live food once in a while.”

“Right in the beginning of an internship?”

“You selected them for the raptor paddock, Claire. I take it the ones who didn’t make it are even worse?”

She shook her head. “I didn’t select them, Owen. Masrani Global has a system…”

“Screw that,” he muttered.

“But apparently it is a little faulty. They were selected by their grades and the papers they submitted.”

“Not important. Working hands-on with live animals… they don’t care if you have straight As in whatever you study or whatever you breeze through for extra credit! Half of those kids look at the
animals with apprehension, trepidation and fear. The animals can feel it! Hell, I had to give them an introductory course in animal science! What do they teach them before they get here?”

“I’ll talk with Mr. Masrani.”

“You do that. The pack had way too much fun this time. If anything at all, those students make great entertainment for them.”

Claire chuckled.

Owen looked around the office, then at Claire. “Lunch?”

“Let me check my schedule.”

“Claire…”

“I have a park to run.”

“You have lunch hours as well.”

“I know.”

“So finally take one. Let your assistant handle things for a change.”

“She does already.”

“That’s what she’s paid for. One hour. Sunrio has quesadilla specials today.”

Claire sighed, sounding put upon, but he expression said otherwise. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you’re vying for a date, Mr. Grady.”

“Who says I’m not, Ms. Dearing? I hate eating alone.”

She smiled. There wasn’t a snowball’s chance in hell for them to pick up where they had left off after the one, very much failed date. They were so much better friends than lovers, and Owen was in a relationship already. With a pack of raptors.

No one could compete against that.

No one wanted to.

Except maybe a student or two who thought it was dangerously romantic.

“One o’clock?” Owen asked, putting on the hopeful puppy look, voice a little wheedling.

“Only if you stop looking like a heartbroken teenager.”

He grinned. “Deal.”

The quesadillas were delicious. The company was delightful.

And Claire Dearing enjoyed her extended lunch hour.
tbc...
Sometimes he dreamed about The Incident.

He had been part of everything, had been there, right in the middle, hunted by the i-rex. She had tried to kill the one human who was talented enough to control her, who might bond with her.

Owen Grady had survived, thanks to luck, skill and his pack of four velociraptors. It was thanks to them that he wasn’t experiencing severe post traumatic stress disorder symptoms. When he dreamed, it was like a raptor.


The pack protected his mind, kept him sane, balanced his very soul, and Owen gave them the same stability by being a strong, powerful preternatural who was their alpha.

But sometimes the dreams were strange.

Not like reality.

Not what had happened.

Like last night had been.

Owen had dreamed of violent attacks that had never occurred, about deaths among his pack. Echo, Charlie and Delta dying. Blue surviving.

He had been there, in the dark, hunting the indominus, like it had hunted him, hiding from her violence, her single-mindedness as she wanted to find the human who shone like a beacon in the night. He had taken the pack to find her, had used their scent training, and then they had turned on him.

When he woke it was with adrenaline spiking through him, his mind muddled and confused, seeking out his pack and finding four peacefully resting raptors.

He had to go into the stables, see them for himself, and when he slipped into the semi-dark building, the musty smell of ground-up bark, dried leaves, sand, and his pack enveloped him like an olfactory aura.

Tension slowly slid out of him, the knots in his shoulders loosening a little, and he exhaled.

There was a soft snuffle, then a slender shadow detached itself out of the twilight, coalescing into the almost phantom-like form of a velociraptor, silently padding over to him. A quizzical rumble had him smile and Owen wrapped an arm around Blue’s neck, burying his face against her scaly skin.

“Hey,” he mumbled.

Her scent was familiar. Musky, warm, mixed with the faint odor of earth and dry leaves. Owen breathed it in, felt his mind sink against her almost automatically, and part of his tension flowed away.

The quizzical sense remained. What happened? she wanted to know.
“Bad dream.”

Blue, beta of the pack and three months older than her pack sisters, felt the turmoil in him, distorted images buoying through his mind, crashing against reality. Like her pack sisters she didn’t understand the concept of such vivid dreams. Animals dreamed, but not in the way humans did. Owen had never felt them go through nightmares and when they dreamed, he barely received a blip at the edge of his mind.

*You don’t have nightmares, alpha,* she stated matter-of-fact.

No, he didn’t. He didn’t wake up, disoriented, scared, heart hammering and mind whirling with what he had dreamed of. He didn’t dream surreal things.

Because the pack wouldn’t let him have nightmares.

When he fell asleep, he was automatically ensconced in the pack mind. They were curled up around him, protective and seeking his nearness in one. It had happened gradually, from the babies he had raised to the rambunctious teens to the lethal hunting pack of four grown, fully mature and adult velociraptors.


*She wanted you, hunted you. She wanted to take you from us.*

Blue’s mind-voice, never actually words but more of a sensation Owen’s preternatural brain translated into words, was tinged with anger. Her left arm stretched a little to curl long, dangerously clawed fingers against his so very vulnerable side.

Owen didn’t even feel a prickle of alarm at the razor-sharp talons.

He trusted his beta.

Knowing he could be killed in a flash, he trusted her.

“Shouldn’t have filed the old stuff last night,” he sighed, straightening.

Blue nosed against his neck, warm air brushing over his skin. *Memories,* she agreed.

It could have ended like he had dreamed. His pack injured, crippled, killed. InGen troopers killing them, flames eating their beautiful forms, the i-rex…

They all could have died, including him. Him, Claire, Zach and Gray. All of them. So many had been killed or later died of their injuries, but not like Owen had dreamed.

*We survived, alpha.*

“I know, beautiful. I know.”

Owen closed his eyes and tried to center himself. Nancy had taught him meditation techniques and while he wasn’t really someone to meditate, the methods had been adapted to work for him.

Nothing of this had happened.

They were alive.
Let go.

Blue brushed over his cheek, then retracted her arm, head tilting a little. Taking a step back, Blue cast a look into the almost-darkness deeper in the stables where the rest of the pack was stirring, alerted by Owen’s presence.

Hunt tomorrow?

“Got a meeting, some work, gotta set up schedules, but yeah, we should take some time off,” he said, walking into the darkness, Blue at his side.

She nudged him into the right direction when his human eyes could no longer distinguish where he should walk. Charlie’s huff had him smile and Delta grumbled about interrupted rest. Echo chirruped.

It was an hour till sunrise and Owen spent it with his girls.

He had a quick shower in the morning, then headed straight into the park. Opening hours wouldn’t be for another two hours. Until then the park looked almost deserted. The Main Street appeared impossibly wide and long, but the moment throngs of people moved along the restaurants, souvenir stands and exhibits, it would look too small to accommodate everyone.

Most places were already open, employees airing out the shopping areas, pushing out carts and bins, hanging up displays and securing the sun covers. Tables and chairs were wiped down while others loaded soda cabinets and ice cream stands.

Owen grabbed a coffee and a bacon muffin from one of the stands. It substituted as breakfast for now.

“What are the figures this morning?” Harriet asked as she set up the third coffee machine, ready for the first wave of customers.

“Twelve thousand. It’s an estimate,” Owen read off his tablet. “All in all almost all tickets for today have been sold. Time windows this morning are fully booked.”

She gave him a bright smile. “Busy day then. Good.”

Every day was a busy day. Jurassic World might have been closed for a year, but the business hadn’t suffered after reopening. They were one of a kind in the world, despite attempts of corporate espionage and some companies attempting to copy the cloning process.

Owen polished off the muffin and grabbed the super-size coffee mug. He had a date and he didn’t want to be late.

“Here,” Harriet said and offered him a misshapen muffin. “Can’t sell it and I can’t very well eat all the baking failures. Tastes perfect.”

“Thanks.”
Nancy Hisada was already waiting for him. Dressed in her official park uniform that identified her as the mosasaurus trainer, hair pulled back into the usual ponytail, she stood at the bottom of the viewing stands. She also looked extremely awake.

“Hey!” she called and waved. “Is that breakfast?” She pointed at the last of his muffin.

“No time this morning. You know how it is.”

“Ah, long night, right?”

Owen shrugged.

“Lady troubles?”

“Actually, the ladies helped me, not the other way around.”

Nancy smiled brightly. “Like a pack should. Now, alpha, what do you want to do today?”

Owen sighed at the title, but he let it slip. He had given up on getting his friends to stop teasing him with it.

“The question is what you want to do.”

She shrugged. “M and I have been working on basic commands. I’m getting better with calling her when there isn’t a show or food to be doled out.” Nancy held up her whistle. “She hears that thing, even on the other side of the lagoon. It’s impressive. We have worked on a few hand signals. She seems to get them after a while. Having her keep still for visual checks is still not working.”

“Because you’re afraid you might get too deep.”

Owen knew Nancy had reservations about opening up to her charge. ‘M’, as she called her mosa, wasn’t as aggressive as a raptor mind could be, not as biting and sharp, but Nancy had never dared to get close to any of the animals she had worked with. Getting too close might mean getting lost in the animal’s mind.

They had talked about that specific aspect of Owen’s relationship with the pack. He hadn’t gotten lost. Maybe because of the specific genetic shake Henry Wu had mixed together with the raptors. Maybe because his talent was stronger than anyone else’s. Maybe because of that and something else.

Just because he was the exception to a common fact known in preternatural society didn’t mean Nancy would be as lucky.

She also wasn’t planning to permanently bind herself to a mosasaurus.

“I don’t know where the line is drawn,” she confessed. “What’s the point of no return? Where do you stop before you cross this last threshold and end up forever bonded?”

“I can’t answer that, Nance.”

Not now, not ever. Owen hadn’t known either. It had simply happened.

“But you don’t have to go this deep to get her to listen to you.”

Nancy nodded.
“We got an hour until the final call before opening. Let’s get started,” Owen decided.

The mosa was in a cooperative mood and Owen felt her happiness to work with her trainer. She was eager, followed hand commands, and when Nancy dropped a little deeper into the connection to the massive reptile, nothing happened. M even turned on the side and lifted a fin out of the water, before slapping the surface and showering both humans in water.

M called out, a sound that sounded like a chorus of whales and elephants, and Nancy laughed, dripping wet, eyes sparkling.

“She has fun!” she exclaimed. “I can feel her. She thinks it’s a game.”

Owen grinned and wiped water out of his face. “That’s what we want. Let her associate these trainings with fun. It’s like for the show, just without visitors cheering and clapping. You gotta repeat this over and over. Like everything else.”

“And give her a ton or two of tuna.”

“Food helps,” he agreed. “Well, let’s get dry. We have some time before hoards of tourists descend on this place.”

A spike from the mosa had Nancy chuckle. “Eager,” she commented.

He nodded. The animals were happy here, working with trainers who had a connection to them, a way that no other had, and they liked the shows. An unhappy mosa was a dangerous mosa.

And that went for every other animal in the park as well.

“I should have worn my wet suit,” Nancy said. “Got a spare uniform in my locker.”

Owen spread his arms, water dripping off his bare forearms. “I think I’ll just head home for a change of clothes. Got a camping trip to prepare for anyway.”

“See you when you get back!”

And with that she was down in the catacombs to change.

Owen ran into a few more of his friends, preternatural and non-preternatural trainers alike, who chuckled over his thoroughly drenched state.

“M gotcha, eh?” Reggie teased.

“She swallow you whole?” Josh added with smirk.

Both men had grabbed their coffees for the morning before the rush hour began. A few VIPs were already sauntering around. Early admittance ahead of the regular crowds was one perk of being a VIP.
Owen grabbed himself lunch to go in a bag from Winston’s – steak sandwich with special sauce on the side, chips, and a packaged salad -- and drove back home. His phone pinged, announcing the park was now open and visitors were streaming through the gates. The first ferry had docked just ten minutes before opening time and more were on the way.

Owen was glad not to be part of the official theme park. He liked his job as it was. He liked to work behind the scenes, even if he had to write reports and submit them.

Speaking of which…

He checked the inbox and groaned. Yeah, he had to put in a few office hours after getting changed.

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Owen spent the day going through the important emails, sending off the reports Claire had asked for, then signed off and informed the park operations manager that he would be gone for a few days.

Pack time in the restricted area. There were also a few cameras he wanted to check since they had had blackouts now and then.

He was glad he had already grabbed lunch. His fridge looked decidedly empty and he had to quietly laugh to himself as ‘Zuul’ floated through his head. The last movie night had been both Ghostbusters movies in a row. The hard core of the movie night group had added a few cartoon episodes later on, but Owen had excused himself to grab some sleep.

Chewing on his sandwich, he prepared his shipment list. He needed some supplies, mostly groceries, and then there were the raptors to think of. The meat lockers at the park liked a heads-up on what to order and store for what species. The pack hunted several times a month, unlike the other predators in the park. The t-rex was fed live goats for showtimes and was given medication in chunks of meat fed to her at specific times. Now and then there was a day with less meat, keeping to the diet.

There were ululating calls from outside and the pack was becoming more pronounced in his head.

_Run, run, run!_

Owen laughed softly to himself.

Yes, he had promised time away from the paddock and the daily routine. Now was that time.

He had to pack the saddle bags for Echo to carry, get the sleeping bag and tent, and his supplies. They would be off around dusk, after the park closed.

A wave of excitement came from his girls, nearly overwhelming him.

It had been too long since the last camping trip.

They needed this.

tbc...
Chapter 3

You guys...! I can't express in words how overwhelmed I am by your comments! Thank you so much! The story is growing and it's a slow-build, so yes, there will be more with the interns. A lot more! The poachers are a developing topic, but expect the worst.

:D

So thank you again! I love this fandom!

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Going out into the restricted area wasn’t just for training, though it was one of the main purposes. Owen was still working on shelters; just in case. While the pack was patrolling their territory, hunting birds and monkeys, Owen had catalogued the structural integrity of the old visitor center. It was an ongoing project of his and while the building was falling apart in some areas, the vines and tree roots had actually helped stabilize other parts.

While Owen waded through debris and sifted through old souvenirs that, even after twenty years, hadn’t turned to dust. A lot of that stuff was in perfectly good condition and would get a nice buck on eBay. He would have to keep that in mind, maybe mention it to Claire and hand the stuff over to Lowery. The man loved those kind of things.

He had piled it all in one corner, cleared out what was not salvageable, and made space for the shelter he had planned.

Charlie nosed into the room, sniffing at the heap, whuffling quizzically.

“Nothing you’d need, Charlie,” Owen commented with a chuckle.

She sneezed and shook her head.

The others piled in one after the other, inspecting the place their alpha had chosen as a shelter. Apparently it was good for them, too.

Blue nudged him over the bond, pushing him to join the pack for a run. There were wild, flightless chickens and the girls had stalked them for a while.

Owen looked around the dark, slightly damp room, the light filtering in through the smeared skylight that had miraculously survived until now. The reinforced glass panes were truly a masterpiece.

Safe here, Blue judged, sniffing, listening the chatter among the pack.

Yes, it was safe here. Safe enough for the alpha to stay while they took him with them to hunt.

“Okay, girls, just one hunt. I want to check out the cameras near the ferry landing. They keep going on and off.”

Blue rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. The cameras could wait a day longer. The pack was priority.

Yeah, you are, beautiful. Always.
She hummed, pleased.

Owen settled on his folded sleeping bag, which he had left in its waterproof bag. He leaned back, closed his eyes, letting the calmness before the storm roll over him.

He was immensely grateful to Nancy for teaching him the basics of meditation. It had grown so much easier for him to just sink into the bond and let himself be drawn to Blue, piggy-back along, experience what it was like to be her. To be the pack through her.

The chickens were no real challenge, but they weren’t easy prey either. Owen laughed at Delta’s antics and Echo slip-sliding after a chicken, almost toppling as the flightless bird darted off to the left, which the raptor hadn’t expected.

But Blue had expected it and the chicken ended up in her jaws.

Echo grumbled, miffed.

She caught her own bird a few minutes later, feathers sticking out of her teeth and tickling her nose.

Charlie had found a nest and was scarfing down eggs, yolk dripping down her chin.

They were back, sated, full, pleased with themselves, and curled up for a digestion nap with their alpha. Owen used the time to connect with his surveillance net and check his feeds.

Yeah, he really needed to check on those cameras, which either fed him grainy images or none at all.

But not today.

*

Aside from leisure time in the restricted area, nosing around old, crumbling ruins, exploring leftovers from twenty-two years ago, and playing hunting games, Owen continued his training of the pack in all other areas, too.

It was a never-ending, on-going process.

One of his segments involved scent tracking of him, the alpha, as he tried to hide his scent. And without the use of the pack connection.

His girls were excited to search for him, show him their skills, and it wasn’t always easy to throw them off track. Owen worked with approved methods and also added his own ideas. He started off easy and raised the skill level gradually.
By now they were really experts in singling him out, even among the distraction he threw at them, and they had yet to actually try and use the pack bond.

Jurassic World was more than just the theme park visitors could see and tour. It was more than the personnel areas, the holding pens and stables behind the scenes. It was more than the management buildings, the hotel and the leisure center.

It was a city.

And it was more than just one level.

Actually, it went deep underground. Miles and miles upon service tunnels ran through three underground levels. There were storage facilities that no one but a few select people had ever seen or even knew they existed.

Aboveground was just for show.

Underground was where the product was stored and distributed, where pipelines ran, where people used electric carts to get around. It was where vehicles parked, where massive cooling systems ran with loud hums, where water was treated and waste was reduced to tiny heaps of ash.

Owen hadn’t been down here until recently. He had known about the Maze, as it was called, and it was truly a labyrinth of color-coded intersections and numbered doors.

He had been on an aircraft carrier once.

This was what this felt like.

A city underneath a city.

It was also the perfect place for hide-and-seek with the pack.

Owen hadn’t masked his natural scent, but he had woven a complicated path through the tunnels, using stairs, elevators and the carts. At this time of night, just past one thirty in the morning, there was no one around. The few night shift workers who had shifts in the underbelly of the park had been informed of the training exercise and Owen had requested a specific area to be locked down.

He had run his training schedules by security and also Claire. Everyone knew not to get in their way, and no one really wanted to be in the way of a hunting raptor pack.

The one time a very enthusiastic paleogeneticist had wanted to see the velociraptors up and close, had also been the first and last time this had happened. The man had been terrified to leave his apartment for days after he had run into Delta in a brightly lit corridor. He had been brandishing a camera, trying to record live raptors hunting prey.

He now worked on the mainland, still jumping at specific sounds. Owen had no idea what his dreams were about, but he suspected they contained raptors.

Right now he was inside one of the storage facilities that were used to prepare skeletons for display in the park or to study them for some reason or other. There were all kinds of fossils and those of animals who had died in the park for one reason or other. They had a full skeleton of each species,
fossil and recreated genetic mix-up. There were molds and casts, as well as whole pathological collections.

It was surreal and a little eerie, not to mention creepy.

Owen let his eyes run over the bleached white skeleton of the indominus rex, mounted on metal supports, her jaws open, taloned fingers of her front paws splayed wide, her posture hunched down like she was about to jump. Her long tail balanced her body perfectly.

Even without muscles, tendons and skin she looked lethal. Owen’s mind easily filled the gaps, saw the white skin, able to camouflage her so well. He saw the heavy armor, the spikes and bumps. And the expression in her eyes.

Hungry.

Determined.

Cunning.

And so very, very intelligent.

Something he had seen when the animal had been alive; very much alive and trying to hunt him down to kill the one person meant to control her.

Owen drew a deep breath.

He didn’t dream of her in details, just surreal moments. Like a false reality. And he remembered. He recalled that sharp, biting mind looking for him. He remembered the viciousness, the killer instinct focused on what she had perceived as a leash, as a new kind of cage, and her fury at the very idea of being corralled again.

Part of him, the animal trainer part, had been horrified at how they had created this unique hybrid, how they had treated her. It was no wonder that she had turned into a psychopath. She had never been socialized.

Part of him had just run. He had been prey; target. He had been weak physically, but mentally he had been her match.

Now, dead and gone, the first and last of her kind, the i-rex was nothing but a skeleton on a stick, hidden away from the prying eye, only there to be looked at by the scientists at the park. She was a secret.

Would always be a secret.

The public had never seen her and the incident report from two years ago didn’t mention her. She had never existed.

Wait, no. She had existed. She had just never lived.

Maybe he should mourn her short life.

But Owen couldn’t.

There was a scuffling sound behind him, then the pack slid into the room, snarling and hissing, fanning out and taking up defensive positions around their alpha, narrowed eyes on the skeleton. Blue was closest to him, as always, eyes darting between the skeleton and her alpha.
Owen?

He sighed and patted her side. “Good work, ladies. You found me.”

Echo snarled at the skeleton, prowling closer.

Owen whistled, catching her attention. He head came up and she whuffled at him.

“Nope, no kill. She’s dead and gone.”

They flocked toward him, accepting pats and scratches. Charlie sniffed around the skeleton, disgust coming off her in waves. It smelled wrong, but underneath it was the scent of the i-rex.

Enemy.

Trespasser.

Delta was eyeing the silent display, smacking her lips like she was choosing a bone she liked to crunch on.

Owen clicked his tongue and they perked up.

“Let’s go. I hate this place.”

Blue agreed that it wasn’t feeling good. She herded him out of the room, back into the tunnels. Everything was deserted, though not silent. The hum of the machinery, the buzz of a lamp about to fail, the rumble of cars in a parallel corridor.

“I think we had enough for today. You were amazing as always.”

They chittered, proud and elated at the success of finding their alpha even down here, in the Maze.

Owen took them back the shortest route, encountering no one. He called center management and got the nightshift supervisor.

“All clear,” he told her. “We’re out. No incidents.”

“Roger that.”

Owen gestured at his girls to go, into the trees, disappear into the night. He followed on his bike, weaving his way along familiar paths and toward home.

*

Alan Grant called in the afternoon as Owen checked the gear. There was a lot of wear and tear on some of it, like the head cameras, the harnesses and the saddle bags. He had used leather straps so far, which were not bothering the raptors. The saddle bags were waterproof, made to sustain extreme climates and wear, but no one had ever thought that a raptor might be strapped into them and race through the jungle.

Echo was watching as he patched up a tear with a special glue that mimicked leather. She sniffed and sneezed, disgusted by the smell.
“You better not get it into your nostrils, girl,” Owen advised. “I’m not sure Gary’s going to be happy about having to come out here for that kind of emergency.”

She snorted and padded off, but not too far. This was her gear and she was ready for Owen to put her in it to see if the newly improved harness still fit.

The tablet beeped, announcing the incoming call. He took it and left the stables, connecting the call as he walked toward the house. Owen waved at the image, wriggling his fingers in the old greeting. Alan laughed.

“I know you haven’t lost a finger, kid.”

“Just making sure that you keep remembering.”

“I’m old, but not that old.”

Owen grinned. “So, how’s New York?”

“Loud. Dirty. Too many people. And too many stupid questions.”

“But they all read your latest book, which means they bought your latest book in some way, so…?” Owen trailed off suggestively.

Alan glowered a little.

“They pay the bills, right? You’re the best-selling, famous paleontologist who still fills the lecture halls. Despite live dinosaurs everyone can look at.”

Grant looked moderately tickled. He would be on a prolonged US tour and Owen was happy for his friend. He loved his work, was passionate about the field of expertise, and he had inspired new generations of paleontologists. Hell, Owen had been inspired by him!

“How are your students faring?” Grant now asked.

“First of all, not my students. I get to babysit them, tell them about animal behavioral sciences, something they should have heard throughout their university lectures already. Some have, but some look at me like I’m talking about alien life.”

Alan looked appropriately sympathetic. “I hear you.”

“Six months,” Owen sighed.

“You might get an extension.”

“Hell no!”

His smiled. “Mark my words…”

“Echo says hello,” Owen changed topics.

The older man grimaced. “She doesn’t.”

“Not in so many words, but hey, I’m the alpha. I know. She’s your therapy raptor, so she knows things, too.”

Alan massaged the bridge of his nose with his thumb. “Right.”
The conversation drifted off into daily park matters, Alan’s tight schedules, his moment of terror when a group of ten-year-olds had stormed his table and asked all kinds of dinosaur questions, and his meeting with his old friend Dr. Ian Malcolm.

“He says I’m insane. Told him that you are. I’m just along for the ride,” he said.

Owen chuckled. “Did you invite him?”

“Of course. I dared him. He said thank you, but he won’t ever step a foot back on this island. He reminded me of my own words, that nothing could get me back here.”

“Which you didn’t listen to when you came here a second time.”

Alan shrugged.

“And again when you paid me the first visit.”

“I needed to see the insanity with my own two eyes. Ian doesn’t believe in changes like this. Chaos Theory all over. He kept bringing up the incident.”

“The official version?”

“He knows no other.” Alan’s eyes narrowed a little. “You know I don’t spill your secrets, Owen. None of them. What happened in Jurassic World, what you can do, what you have done and continue to do. That’s between us.”

“You mentioned it to Ellie.”

“You okayed it.”

Owen leaned back, nodding slowly. He had, in a way. He had met Ellie Degler nee Sattler and he had found her trustworthy. It had been the same kind of instinct that had led him to entrust so much to Alan, too.

“I gotta go;” Alan broke into his thoughts. “Three more days and I can leave this hellhole.”

“Aw, it’s not that bad.”

“Says the alpha of Isla Nublar. You haven’t been to the city in years, kid.”

“Not the alpha of the island,” Owen groused.

“Keep telling yourself that. Now go and take care of your girls. See you when I’m back.”

Alan signed off and Owen closed his laptop.

He felt Blue’s presence coming closer, like a silent listener who hadn’t dared to twitch before now. He gave her a little push, smiling, and got a huff in return.

Time to do what he did best.

tbc...
Chapter 4

Claire cornered him after the quarterly meeting Owen had to attend. He had no idea why, but he did it anyway. Sometimes it was interesting what people fought over verbally. Such trivial matters, easily solved with some common sense.

Sadly, common sense was severely lacking

“That’s why I keep you around,” Claire told him when he commented on the behavior of highly paid conservationists, who seemed to revert to sandbox quarreling on a moment’s notice. He wondered if handing out plastic toy shovels would solve the matter faster.

“The voice of reason?”

“The hands-on approach. Now, what I wanted to talk to you about…”

Owen groaned silently. Interns. It had to be interns. His track record so far had been fifty-fifty. There had been one or two promising candidates and two had decided that being a trainer was too physical for them.

“Zach has finished high school.”

“Congrats.”

“He hasn’t enrolled for a university yet. He wants to take a gap year.”

Owen’s shrugged. He had no idea what else to do. He had a suspicion where this was going.

“Here,” Claire clarified.

“I figured when you mentioned gap year.”

“He told me he is slightly talented, that he talked with you about it.”

“In a way. He asked a few questions, said he suspects he is talented, but that was about it. Aside from a few phone calls and emails, we never went that deeply into his preternatural abilities.”

Zach had confided in him when he and Gray had come to their first visit after The Incident, but he hadn’t wanted to pursue the topic. Just talk.

“You knew before his parents did,” Claire pointed out and there was just enough jealousy in there to have Owen on his toes.

“We were in a tense situation together. I think he had decided to trust me.”

Claire didn’t look happy. She might not have been the perfect aunt, but she had polished up her act, had become better at juggling family and work, and she liked her nephews.

“I talked to my sister, and also to Scott, and I cleared everything with HR. Zach is going to spend most of his gap year here at Jurassic World. I’ve arranged for him to rotate through the park, assisting, learning, working with all departments.”

“And you want him to work with me, too?” Owen finished. He had known where this was leading.
“Zach wants to. He specifically mentioned the raptors.”

Owen pushed his hands into the pockets of his cargo pants. “Alright.”

“You’re that easy, hm?” she teased, eyes alight with mirth. “What happened to all the protesting?”

“Hey, I like the kid. And he knows what’s going on here. I don’t have to lecture him on safety and not trying to pet the raptors. Is Gray coming along?”

“Only for the summer vacation time. He’s eager to spend time with Zach and me, and with dinosaurs. Looks like he still likes them.”

Owen smiled.

After the experience the boy had had, it was truly good.

* * *

Owen walked out of his house, his permanent residence on Isla Nublar, and yawned. It was already close to ten in the morning, but last night had ended just around four, with the pack and him coming home from extended night training.

Scent tracking, hunting, hide-and-seek in the jungle. It had been just his luck that it had started to rain throughout that time. Well, it had actually poured down, but Owen had known about the forecast and he had been waiting for something like this.

All five had been covered in mud, head to toe, muzzle to tail tip. Caked, actually. Thick layers.

Owen had hosed them off when they were back at the stables, then cleaned himself as best as possible, before walking into the house.

Naked.

His clothes had been left outside in a soaked heap.

The raptors were just now stirring themselves. Blue was awake, greeting him with a nod and a warm hug along the bond. Owen smiled as he entered the enclosure like it was just another room of his house.

In a way it was.

No other soul but him and the four velociraptors was around. No one to witness the casual treatment of the most dangerous of predators on this island.

There were no security guards. There were no assistants. No one but Owen Grady took care of the raptors, who mostly took care of themselves. He didn’t need anyone, except to get the food and sometimes it would help to have someone muck the stables.

Otherwise: no.

Officially Owen Grady was the Chief Raptor Behavioral Analyst. Among the other trainers, wardens and keepers he was called the Alpha. The girls were either the Raptor Squad or the Grady
Gang, depending on who was asked.

Blue rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, seeking the physical contact, and Owen patted her strong neck.

The warmth spreading through him, that gooey sensation that seemed to run along every cell of his body, had Owen smile.

Touch was important. It always had been and always would be. It was how he grounded himself, how he bound them all together in a way that was beyond normal.

Preternatural.

It was his talent, a gift.

Alpha, Blue murmured over their connection. It was a good night. We enjoyed ourselves.

Of course you did, Owen answered as he rubbed his palm along her jaw, listening to the soft purr rarely anyone had ever heard coming from a velociraptor.

As did you.

Yes, he head. Piggy-backing along their minds, feeling their exhilaration and the fun they had to run at their top speed, no holds barred. Chasing, jumping, seeking, hunting. It was in their genes and it was something that got unleashed in those moments.

“Good morning, ladies,” he called out loud.

Echo was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, eager and like an over-caffeinated bouncing ball. She trilled, padding over to her alpha and Owen scratched her neck. Delta was still enjoying the morning sun, curled up and a bit grumpy. Charlie was just now getting up, yawning, showing off impressively sharp teeth.

“Well, girls, last night was a success. You’re amazing, but you know that, right?”

Charlie snorted. Of course they were amazing.

“Got our weekly schedule. We’re getting two interns and a student today. Best behavior.”

They yipped and rumbled. So far the raptors had been more curious and playful than annoyed and bothered. Owen felt it was a good start.

“Also, Barry’s coming back for a stint. He’ll be my mandatory assistant.”

Delta rose, shaking off the dust, whuffling a little, a quizzical note to it.

Barry Devoe wasn’t an intern or a working student, though he had been hired as an intern for the raptor paddock. Probably to keep up appearances because he was older than everyone else and quite experienced with animal behavior and caretaking. Right now he was taking turns around the park’s different enclosures.

He had started about four months ago as a caretaker, a trainer in training, but he hadn’t been assigned a specific habitat yet. Before going out to Owen’s place, Barry had been thoroughly checked. Like all of them.

He seemed to prefer the predators and Laurel had been full of praise. The rex had been quite taken
by him.

“Not sure whether he’s talented or not, but he’s good. Rather empathic, even if he isn’t a preternatural. He’s good with Sue.”

“Sue?”

She laughed. “That’s what he calls her. Sue. FMNH PR 2081 would be a mouthful.”

Owen chuckled as he got the reference.

Back in 1990, FMNH PR 2081 was the largest, most extensive and best preserved t-rex specimen ever found. It had been nicknamed ‘Sue’.

“I know most call her Rexy, but Sue is nice, too. Aside from your ladies, none of the others have official names. It’s kinda cute.”

“Is he applying for the t-rex paddock?”

“No clue. He has six more months to go, moving from area to area. He likes the predators, but he’s good with all kinds of dinosaurs. He has a very natural way around them.”

When Barry had started his first, week-long stint at the raptor enclosure, Owen had simply stepped back and watched.

Yes, Barry Devoe was good with animals. He gave the pack room, just watched and waited, and he was clearly well-trained in security matters. Unlike a certain former intern he had yet to forget to lock a door or secure a gate.

He asked questions, he followed Owen’s guidelines, and he had a good energy. He would be a good leader in whatever habitat he ended up working.

Delta had also taken an interest in the man, finding him fascinating for some reason that she didn’t divulge to her alpha. She kept watching him intensely, kept stalking him from the other side of the fence, chittering, and Owen found it slightly amusing.

Barry not so much.

“She’s playful,” had been Grady’s reply to his raised eyebrows. “She’s not hunting. Just… curious.”

“Oh-huh.”

Owen slapped his shoulder. “It’s a good thing.”

“If you say so.”

He never made the mistake of wanting to touch her. Or walk into the paddock area while one of the raptors was there.
Owen taught Barry basic training, like hand signals and whistles, to project an assertive, calm energy, and to never let his guard down. He showed him clicker training, how to reward good behavior, encourage it, and how to teach the animals what bad behavior was.

“You’re talented, right?” Barry asked one evening over a beer before he would leave for his own lodgings.

Owen just raised an eyebrow. Preternaturals didn’t talk openly about such things and direct questions were hardly ever asked. Barry apparently wasn’t fazed by such unwritten etiquette. Maybe it was a French thing.

“No one said anything, but I can see it. My cousin is a preternatural. Works with horses. She does amazing things. I can see some of her in you, but with you it’s a lot more intense. And complicated.”

He didn’t comment.

Barry smiled, a flash of white teeth against dark skin. His eyes danced. “You are, Owen. Like I said, I can tell. The way you train with them, signals and all. You lead them to track and hunt and herd and whatnot. They accept you, no quarrels, no stalking, none of them trying to overpower you. Your beta is way stronger than you, could kill you in a heartbeat and she never tried to take the alphaship from you.”

“Training keeps the boredom away. A bored animal is dangerous. They find a way to do something that ends in pain and maybe even death.” Owen wiped his hands on a rag. “As for the alpha position: I have their respect. It’s conditioning. It’s vital for a human alpha. They accept me not because I’m the stronger raptor. They follow me because I have their respect. It’s energy.”

“No, man. I give you that energy, but it’s more.” Barry nodded to himself. “You want to keep it a secret, sure. My cousin never told anyone but family what she can do. Many suspected, some seemed to know, but it was an open secret no one confronted her with.” He looked at the pack. “I understand you don’t want everyone to know.”

Owen gave him a hard look and Devoe held up a hand.

“I won’t tell. Anyone.”

Delta chuffed, like she was vouching for him.

Owen knew it was hard for many to understand how the pack worked. He was the alpha; human. Blue was his beta; velociraptor. She was his anchor, the pack was his safety net. What all five of them had was intensely personal and special; unique. They could only function together.

It was also something only few people knew more about.

Barry wouldn’t be one of them.
Blue nuzzled against Owen’s neck, pulling him out of his reverie, and he smiled.

“I think I need a coffee first. Then we can deal with the interns and everything else.”

She whuffled, pushing him back toward the gate.

*Coffee*, she agreed. Because an alpha not on his toes was a useless alpha.

“Hey,” Owen grumbled, catching those thoughts. “It was just a long night.”

Her amusement was clear through the connection and the other three agreed that Owen was useless when not caffeinated enough.

“I get it, I get it. We have an hour until we get our visitors.”

With that he walked back to the house, Blue shadowing him as always. The others milled around, playfully wrestling over an old bone or, in Echo’s case, chasing a wild chicken that had dared to come close.

None were hungry. Last night had been a good hunt.

They had maybe half an hour before Owen would have to get them back into the paddock area. Until then he gave the pack the freedom to roam.

None would leave the immediate area. Their alpha hadn’t told them it was okay, so they stuck around.

Blue assured Owen that they would hear anyone who came in too early and would be inside the paddock in flash.

“I know,” he told her, rubbing over the bluish scales of her neck that had given her her name. “You’re the best guard dogs.”

No one was early.

Actually one of the interns was half an hour too late.

*

“So, on a scale of one to ten, how bad was I compared to that bunch?”

Owen chuckled under his breath as Peter Koszinski snapped his bag shut. He wrote something into his tablet.

“You’re ranking around an eight compared to them,” he told his former intern who was now a vet technician.
“Wow, high praise.”

Blue paced closer the bar and huffed her agreement. Kozinski might have been a walking encyclopedia with no hands-on experience, who had also made a few mistakes in his time with Grady, but he had shown talent. He had had a steep learning curve.

Now he was an assistant to Gary Themming and he was very good at it.

“They all get the same speech and the rules are easy.”

“Don’t go into the paddock,” Peter listed, holding up a finger. “Never. You’re an outsider and the pack will defend themselves,” he continued to quote smugly. “Don’t touch them or try to feed them from hand.” Another finger went up, then he added a third, “Always make sure the gate to the outside is locked when you enter the stables.”

Owen had to laugh out loud. “Well done, grasshopper, well done.”

“Hey, it only takes a little stalking by your girls once to drive that home. Oh, and I forgot: ask if you have questions. Remember that they are dangerous predators. No matter how they behave around you, you’re a stranger. They don’t trust you.”

“Did you make a recording and listen to it at night?”

Peter grinned widely. “Kinda. Like I said: being terrorized by a raptor helps.”

At Owen’s pondering look he quickly added, “No way, Grady! You wouldn’t!”

The alpha chuckled. “No, I wouldn’t, but I should.”

“Claire will kick your ass from here to Sorna.”

“And back again, I know. No, I won’t. I’m just counting the days until this is over and done with. I want my paddock back.”

“That bad, huh?”

“I had one girl tell me she was a straight A student with well-to-do parents and she didn’t scoop up dinosaur shit. One guy came right up and said he wouldn’t take any orders from a guy who never went to a prestigious university with a degree to show.”

Peter winced. “Ouch.”

Owen had several degrees from his time in the military, but he didn’t feature a Ph.D.

“Yeah. He’s on stable duty for the rest of his time here. Which won’t be much longer if he keeps complaining to the right people. Claire said there’s a spot in the Aviary.”

Kozinski groaned in understanding. “Flyer poop. Worse than what your girls can do.”

“Much worse.”

They shared a knowing look.

“The girl is trying to land a spot in the paleobotanical labs. I spoke with Serena and she’s rather gung-ho about showing her the fun to be had with landscaping and working in humid environments that are very bad for your elaborate hairstyle.”
“Now I know why I’m an eight,” Peter commented.

“If this keeps up, you might be my best intern yet, Pete.”

“Oh, high praise.”

Blue hummed, talons clanging against the metal bars. Peter gave a quick once-over.

“They all look very good. Healthy. All limbs attached. You good on supplements?”

“All ordered, shipped out today and stored an hour ago.”

Peter nodded, satisfied. “Well, I’m off to see the suchomimus for their annual vitamin shots.”

“See you around.”

Peter waved and got into the vet mobile.

Yes, Owen mused, Kozinski had been close to ending up as raptor chow, but he had learned from his mistakes and he hadn’t repeated them. He also hadn’t thought he was better than those who taught him about dinosaurs and how to handle and take care of them.

It would remain to be seen how many of the new students and interns would be the same.

tbc...
Claire was excited like a kid before Christmas when her nephew arrived. She had taken a whole afternoon off, had arranged for the hotel apartment room he would have for the duration of his stay to be ready, and then had dragged a promise out of Owen to have dinner with them.

“You are already their favorite aunt,” he teased her as Claire smoothed her skirt and looked through the crowds to find Zach.

“I’m their only aunt,” she answered automatically, then broke out in a smile and waved.

Owen bit back a laugh. It had taken a genetically engineered hybrid dinosaur on the rampage to have Claire take a step back, evaluate her life, and decide that family was important. She might not be looking for children of her own, but she was getting so much better at being an aunt.

Especially after her sister’s divorce.

“Zach!” she called and waved again.

Zach Mitchell, lugging a huge suitcase and carrying an equally big backpack, smiled at her. “Hey, Aunt Claire. Owen, hey,” he added in Owen’s general direction.

One of Claire’s assistants took the luggage and put it into a car while Claire hugged her nephew. Owen gave him a sympathetic look, which Zach answered with an exaggerated eye-roll. He was a male teenager. He didn’t want an aunty hug. But hey… lifesaver and all. He suffered through it.

Dinner was a bloody steak for Owen, with salad and fries. Just a salad for Claire. A huge burger, fries, no salad, and a milkshake for Zach, who wolfed it down like he hadn’t eaten in days.

Owen stayed with a lite beer and Claire had water.

They talked about nothing too serious. Zach’s high school graduation, Gray, moving to Isla Nublar, vaguely about what he wanted to become one day, which he didn’t answer, really. Owen let Claire do the talking, but he caught on to Zach’s glances in his direction.

Now was not the time.

Not yet.

*

Zach visited him two days later.

“Settled in?” Owen asked.

“Yeah.”
“Heard you got one of the cool apartments.”

It got Owen a half-shrug. “It’s okay.”

“Okay?” Owen raised both eyebrows in mock-horror. “They are the best the Hilton has to offer aside from the penthouse.”

Another half-shrug. “TV’s cool.”

Owen looked at him, taking in the slumped posture, the stubborn line to his mouth. He had grown a little more, had filled out, but otherwise he was the same teenager Owen had met two years ago. He had his arms on the rail running around the catwalk above the raptor paddock.

“So, what’s up?” he asked lightly.

“No one gets it. No one can.”

“Aside from your brother, your aunt…” Owen raised his eyebrows.

“Tina broke up with me.”

“Ouch.”

“She says I changed.” He looked almost sullen; angry.

He had evaded the topic of a girlfriend when they had had their welcome-to-Isla-Nublar dinner spree. Now Owen knew why.

“People change, yeah. And you definitely changed, kid. No one came out of the i-rex disaster unscathed. But you and your brother bounced back. It’s normal that some stuff sticks to you, though.”

Zach chewed on his lower lip, eyes on the pack below as they milled around, playing or mock-fighting, chasing insects or small lizards.

“How’s your sense of them?”

He looked surprised, eyes on Owen for a second, then he watched the raptors again.

“I get them. As a pack. No individuals. Not like the herbivores either.” He hesitated for a moment. “Uhm, not like the rex.”

Owen felt his eyebrows climb higher. “You are receptive to the t-rex?”

“She’s kinda… strong.”

“That she is.”

Zach looked at him again, curious, the sullenness gone. “You can perceive her as well?”

Owen could. He had been able to for a while now. He never made much out of it. He also never actively sought out any other dinosaurs. They were a background noise, coming and going, and he had learned to ignore it all. When he went around the park he could home in on them, but he wouldn’t. In that way he was like Nancy: he didn’t want to get lost.

And then there was the not so small matter of his pack being viciously jealous and proprietary.
They were proud of his abilities as an alpha, that he was powerful, because it gave the pack strength. That other dinosaurs intruded into all of that was not appealing to them at all.

"Yes, like you apparently feel the pack," Grady now said slowly. "She’s there. So is the mosa. So are the others. The mosa and the t-rex are a bit stronger, because they’re the only ones of their kind here. I could call them, but I’m not intruding into the connection they have with their trainers."

Zach looked suddenly horrified. "You think I’m intruding?!" he exclaimed.

"No, I don’t think you’re intruding. I doubt you are that strong, Zach," he calmed him. "Laurel has talent, but she’s not really getting through to her. The rex follows basic commands because of the training, but otherwise she’s a stubborn old coot."

The teen laughed. "She’s set in her ways, yeah. I think she’s seen enough to be allowed to be stubborn. She’s the oldest dinosaur here. She belonged to the Park, was born and raised there, right?"

"Technically she was born on Isla Sorna."

"Site B." Zach nodded, grinning. "Gray talked my ear off about that."

"And you listened," Owen lauded.

"It’s hard not to. He talks dinosaurs all day. Still does."

"So you want to work with them now."

Zach turned to the raptors again, who were digging around a bush. Owen sighed. It was a new game: dig up the shrubbery. Charlie found it highly amusing, as did Echo. Delta got pulled into the fun and games, and Blue just went along, dragged along by her pack and the enthusiasm over the shared connection.

The teen shrugged.

"Your aunt gave me your schedule. You’ll be dropping by now and then, watch me work with the girls, learn some things."

Another shrug.

"When’s your brother coming?"

"Summer holidays. He’s trying to wheedle the winter holidays out of Mom, too."

Zach and Gray’s parents had still divorced, even after the scare of possibly losing their sons to whatever had occurred at Jurassic World. Owen understood that differences that had been there before couldn’t be magically mended over The Incident. It had been an amicable divorce and both boys spent equal time with each parent. They lived with their mother, though.

"Okay. Ready to get the first tour?"

"The restricted area?" Zach asked hopefully.

Owen chuckled. "Yeah, right. No way, kiddo. We’ll start with the basics."

It got him a grimace, but Zach was there one hundred percent, attentive, listening to his safety instructions. He would be with Owen for three days, getting the general intro into the theme park,
an orientation how to get from A to B without having to use the tourist pathways, and then he would be off to the gallimimus first.

Owen thought he had potential. More than some of the twenty-plus years old students he had had the dubious honor of showing around already.

He wasn’t made for handling interns, trainees and students, he decided. He was an animal person. Give him a dinosaur any day.

* * *

Three months into student workers trial, Masrani had asked him personally to accommodate a group of seven very promising men and women, people Simon Masrani thought would make good future employees.

“Don’t start with ‘It’s for a good cause’, Simon. So far I’m dreading humanity’s future.”

“We adjusted the selection process,” Masrani promised him.

“Right.”

“Keep in mind that they are young.”

“And stupid. I’m not running a sideshow entertainment here. Some don’t get it. Some don’t even know a raptor from a gallimimus!”

Masrani chuckled. “Age has been adjusted, too. We’re not sending out the first and second years. The group has graduating students, about to finish university. All have been interning at Masrani Global’s labs and we think they are a good choice for Jurassic World.”

Owen so did not want to hear how promising they were. He had found that most of them were just looking for another extra credits note in their collection on the way to greatness. The ones who were truly, earnestly interested were the ones who stood out.

Like Barry.

Who hadn’t been part of the elite Masrani Global tour group.

The seven arrived around noon, looking chipper, well-dressed, some in brand—new outdoorsy gear that wouldn’t help them in the field at all. But it looked good, Owen had to hand it to them.

The girls were curious about the new visitors, actually mischievous to a degree, looking forward to scaring some of them. It had become their favorite past time. Everyone was different, some with faint talents, one with a stronger preternatural side, and all reacted differently.

Owen let them.

As he always said: he hadn’t tamed the raptors. They were wild animals and behaved as such.
It had gotten them a few nervous giggles and a few more aborted screams in the past. Charlie in particular had taken to showing off her wild side whenever a student came too close.

*Keeping them on their toes,* had been Blue’s comment.

He answered questions. Some were deep and with an understanding of the topic. Others were so completely inane… Not even Gray would have been able to answer them with a straight face.

“The leader of the pack is not determined by size or species,” he told one group. “A Chihuahua can lead a pack of Pitbulls, unchallenged. It’s the energy that determines who leads and who submits to follow. Animals can read your energy and the way you communicate is not with words but your body.”

A few had frowned at him, sneaking looks toward the enclosure.

“I’ve seen the feeds from the first raptors,” a twenty-something boy sneered. “They eat you alive.”

“And yet here I am.”

“You tamed them,” was another argument. “You have them imprint on you right from hatching.”

“You’re correct that I let them imprint on me. Otherwise the pack wouldn’t follow. I can’t fight them over my rank. This is all energy, a calm and assertive nature, and leading that way. In that regard, a pack of dinosaurs is no different from a pack of dogs or wolves.”

From the seven, only those two were more of a problem, trying to undermine his position, interrupting explanations.

“How about you show us what tricks you trained them to do?” the first one challenged.

Mason Green, it read on his name tag.

Owen looked at him, calm, unrattled, like he was facing Delta when she was having one of her more moody moments.

“This isn’t a circus, Mr. Green. I’m not a performer, nor are the raptors.”

Green glowered at him, then muttered something under his breath.

In the paddock, the pack watched the visitors with sharp eyes, taking in their scent, cataloguing them into threat levels. Delta was already commenting about the weaker ones, the ones they would be able to easily separate and take down.

The alpha looked at her, eyes sharp, mind even sharper, and she huffed.

It was just a game.

But one she would have liked to play anyway.
Delta felt Owen’s misgivings about the group, about two of them especially, though the alpha tried to be as neutral as possible. He was infallible, and he had likes and dislikes. The pack didn’t automatically share them, but Delta could see where the arrogant one would be troublesome.

She was just hoping for him to get close enough to nip at his clothes; just once.

Sadly, Owen didn’t let the visitors come too close. The catwalk was fine, but he collected bags, cells and keys first. No one threw anything into the enclosure.

Delta looked at the troublemaker, satisfied when his eyes darted away, fear coming off him. He was posturing for the others, but the whole pack felt his weakness.

Charlie was studying a boy who had been almost silent so far, his eyes wide, watching them with fascination. His energy felt good, though not strong enough to be alpha to even a pack of prey.

When they left, Delta huffed, disappointed. The troublemaker flinched as she barked a challenge at him.

Yeah, that was fun.

The alpha didn’t even give her a warning look.

*

“My condolences.” Reggie raised his glass. It was filled with a bright orange, semi-frozen liquid.

2-for-1 margaritas were always a sure way to fill the tables in the evening. Margaritaville couldn’t complain anyway. They were always busy. The crowds thinned out around six and grew a lot less around nine. The park closed at ten and announcements were made at nine, which had a lot of people head for the ferries or the hotel, or that last show or last glimpse.

“You get that from most of them,” Josh agreed. “They know all the theory, have next to no practical experience, and one or two think they’re destined to get on your nerves. Laurel nearly kicked one of them in the nuts.”

“I did not!” she protested as everyone present laughed.

Both were sharing a pitcher of raspberry margaritas.

“I could see it in your eyes. He was running King Kong analogies, with Sue and Laurel in the main roles.”

Owen suppressed a laugh. He had switched from one strawberry margarita to so-called mocktails. No alcohol for him after the first drink.

“Now that you mention it…”

Laurel gave him the evil eye. He held up his hands as Josh sniggered.
“Hope he isn’t on the raptor tour group,” Owen muttered.

“Oh, they get weeded out. You only get the prime examples.” Reggie sipped at his drink. “We get all the rest.”

“If that’s the rest, I have to give my condolences to you,” Owen replied. “I’ve had some prime idiots myself.”

“I have no idea who at HR is responsible, but they need to really look at the stock they’re sending us.”

“It’s not a breeding program, Reg,” Josh commented.

“Oh, it is, in a way. This is the future generation of DNA mixers, paper pushers and maybe our new trainers and gamekeepers. I’ve talked to a few promising talents, but some couldn’t care less for the animals. They just look at the DNA strands and start their shakers. A few have been running hybridization theories.”

Owen groaned. “Great.”

“Told them it was a bad idea. The argue that if we don’t do it, a competitor will.”

“Masrani patented the hell out of anything on this island,” Nancy spoke up. “There isn’t a DNA strand he hasn’t all the rights to. He also has a pack of lawyers who are as vicious as Owen’s girls. He sics them on anyone who dares to even mention dinosaur cloning.”

“Do tell,” Reggie raised his drink. “You got an inside man?”

“Woman, actually. She was the main lead on the mosa project and we connected over raising M. She transferred back to Corporate after the incident. We talk sometimes.”

“Good to know,” Owen said, nursing his mocktail. “No hybrids, no other weirdness.”

“Masrani has eyes everywhere when it comes to that. Nadeshda told me he closed down more than one attempt already.”

Another round of margaritas came and conversation turned to a different topic. Owen leaned back, relaxed, enjoying the human company. Enjoying the close circle of friends he had.

He came back to the paddock and four dozing raptors after dusk. They greeted him sleepily, curled up and not inclined to move.

Owen gave them a smile, then climbed the stairs. He walked into the dark house, winding his way through the living room by memory.

Today had been a long day.

Just two months, twenty-nine days and ten hours left in this experiment.

If all went well, no one got eaten and he would be rid of his visitors forever. If it didn’t go well, he would be rid of them, too.
Win-win situation, he mused.

Sounded about right.

tbc...
Chapter 6

Their level of communication was higher than ever before. His awareness of the pack had always been intense after he had created the bond, but it had grown in leaps in the past months.

Especially since they were effectively pushing back the other dinosaurs, keeping Owen’s mind free of clutter. When he trained with Nancy and the mosa they left him alone, but the moment the background chatter got too much, the pack moved in.

So it changed them, too. They had to become more active to protect their alpha, in turn learning how to handle the bond.

Blue, as his beta, had always been closest to him. Delta wasn’t openly thrilled to feel their alpha that close, but Owen had discovered that it was more of a smokescreen. She was right there when it came to shoving intrusions aside. Charlie accepted his presence, almost indifferent sometimes, and Echo was a very eager-to-please pack member. She was of the lowest rank and always wanted her alpha to be happy with her.

“Blue keeps getting deeper,” Alan Grant remarked, looking faintly worried about that.

He had just returned from a lecture stint in New York, San Francisco and Houston. The next four months he would be on the island and Echo had been very excited to hear it. She had been at the front gates, trilling happily when he had pulled up.

Alan had given her suspicious, still rather apprehensive looks, then walked into Owen’s house. He looked exhausted, like he needed a good night’s rest, no jet-lag and no demanding audience.

“She’s always been with me, Alan. Nothing new there.”

“Looking at you, and her, and the pack, things got… more intense?”

“I work with them, Alan. I’m their alpha. They learn from me. I want them to learn, to grow.”

“To read signs? To understand words?”

They had discussed that in their talks lately. Yes, the pack was learning, at different speed and different levels, but Blue had mastered reading signs early on. She had been just a few months old when she had studied the park signs and managed to make the right connections between a word and what it meant. When Owen had opened up, she had actually started to associate more and more, until she remembered it like a child learning reading and writing would.

The pack, as an extension of the alpha-beta relationship/partnership, had managed a few basics. Charlie was quite good at Pictionary-style reading. Echo and Delta were unable to memorize much when it came to writing, but they were pretty damn near-perfect at maze-running. Orientation runs, blind runs, and anything to do with having to figure out the target’s location through memory of a maze was their favorite kind.

“I recall a paleontologist who wrote a book and several papers on the intelligence of velociraptors.”

Alan pulled a face. “Yes, I did.”

“And you said they have above-average intelligence.”
“This is more than above-average.”

“Wu and Keller did a lot of things to their DNA, mixed it all in a way that got them new results.”

“Like the i-rex.”

“Less malicious psychopath, but yes. The pack is a new breed. Unlike any of the prior raptors.”

“And because of their direct link into a human brain, your brain, Owen, they learn at an accelerated rate. They read signs, they understand written language. English written language! They can tell apart numbers!”

“Which all might come in handy.” Owen shrugged. “Your point being?”

“It’s scary.”

Of course it was. They were animals. But Owen had studied long-term experiments like Koko the gorilla or Alex the African gray parrot. Animal psychologists, behavioral analysts and trainers had documented the learning ability in these animals. Koko was able to speak in sign language, expressing emotions, wants and needs.

Yes, it was scary that velociraptors could do this, but it wasn’t uncommon.

Alan Grant wasn’t exactly going into this without a nightmare or two to hinder his acceptance. Looking at his success when it came to raptors, Alan had gotten better in leaps and bounds when it came to actually getting closer to the dinosaurs.

There had been one memorable moment of him touching Echo, giving her a pat, with no fence between them, but it had been adrenaline spiking in a stressful situation. That he could live and work at Jurassic World was a far better indicator of his healing mind.

Echo was doing her best to help, in her own way, and while she was his therapy raptor, she was far from a dolphin, puppy or kitten.

“I’m happy with the result that they won’t attack anyone who looks at them wrong, that they give the interns a second chance when they make a mistake, and that they help you with raptor therapy.” The last was said with a bright smile.

Alan glowered at him. From outside Echo’s yips could be heard.

“She likes you, Alan.”

“Tell her I don’t taste that good, kid. Too stringy, too old. Not really a lot of vitamins.”

Owen smiled fondly. “She’s a lady, like all of them. They don’t eat my guests, my friends and those who are pack allies.”

“And I’m what of those?”

“All of it. They respect you. They see you as an ally who would protect them.”

Alan looked out the window, even though all there was to see were high fence walls. The pack was in the enclosure, locked in, and they hadn’t even grumbled about it.

“Don’t ask me, Owen.”
He raised his eyebrows. “What? Ask you what?”

“You told me about your deal with Simon Masrani, about how you will be on this island for as long as the pack and you live. Because the alpha can never leave. I know you worry about what will happen if something happens to you before them.”

Owen’s face was a mask, lips thinning.

“You want a beneficiary, someone you can trust, who won’t take advantage of the pack or just shuttle them off into a lab to be experimented on. Or worse.”

“Alan…”

“I can’t be that person, Owen.”

“I would never ask you to be.”

“But you’ve been thinking about it.”

“At first. Then I considered other options. Right now… there is no one I can think about who I can truly trust.”

“Claire?” Alan offered.

He shook his head, not elaborating.

“The other talented keepers?”

“We’ve been through that. The pack won’t accept them.”

“Have you been discussing the problem with them?” Alan sounded almost disbelieving.

“I have.” The alpha smiled slightly. “It’s something that concerns them, too.”

“And their opinion?” Alan looked like he didn’t believe there was an opinion, that they could have one.

“Still not formed.”

“Ah.”

Owen leaned back. “How about you go and meet your biggest non-human fan? She’d be heartbroken if you didn’t even say hello before leaving.”

Alan stilled. “Therapy?” he asked, a slight tremor in his voice.

“No, just a friendly visit. She likes you, Alan. Just go over and say hello, the fence between you two.” Owen raised his eyebrows. “If you want to.”

“I should, shouldn’t I?” Alan looked a little pale, but rather composed. “Just say hello. From the other side of the fence.”

Owen kept his silence, watched his friend, then Alan finally opened the door and walked out, heading toward the enclosure. Owen followed, keeping back and just in the role of the watcher. Not the alpha.
Echo was there, trilling a greeting as Alan stopped in front of the fence. She tilted her head, looking at her favorite visitor, then at her alpha. Owen smiled and nodded almost imperceptibly. Echo blew out warm air, but stayed still otherwise.

Velociraptors had been his specialty for all his paleontological career. They had been the focus of his research, his papers, his books. He knew their physiology, had theorized about their way of communication long before he had witnessed it in reality on Isla Sorna, and he had repeatedly said that such creatures did not belong in any theme park.

With Jurassic World, his warnings had been heeded.

Except for the fact that a pack of velociraptors existed and their alpha was a human being. Owen Grady. Talented preternatural, alpha raptor and Chief Raptor Behavior Analyst.

Cold yellow eyes regarded him from the heavy bars and Echo trilled again. She looked almost expectantly at him. Not like a dog happy to see him. More like… a velociraptor… interested in… seeing him?

Echo cocked her head, blowing out warm air.

Alan studied her, his primal instincts telling him to just walk away. Go. Never look back. Don’t even think about this strange behavior toward him.

He was prey.

He wasn’t pack and he wasn’t a preternatural.

Echo was curious, but given the chance she wouldn’t hesitate.

She hummed and pushed her nose through the gap between the two bars. The gap was just big enough for her nose, but the rest of her snout didn’t fit, let alone her whole head. She had curled one taloned front paw over the horizontal bars.

Echo whined a little when Alan just stood there, frozen.

She stood back, head swiveling and looking at her alpha, who had almost noiselessly come closer.

“You channeling your inner raptor?” Alan asked, his own voice alien in his ears. He sounded a little too strangled for his own liking. “Wear a bell around your neck.”

Owen smiled and scratched Echo’s long nose. She whuffled, pleased.

The rest of the pack was not too far away, watching matters from the distance.

“She just wants to say hello, Alan.”

“Well, thanks. Hello back.”

Echo perked, head coming up, and she hummed at him, ending it with a rumble.

Alan felt something inside him tremble.
The raptor huffed like she didn’t know what else to do.

“She promises not to move, not to even breathe, if you want to touch her, Alan.”

Owen’s voice sounded like from very far away.

“You did it before, Alan.”

“Spur of the moment. Adrenaline.” His tongue felt a little numb and adrenaline was pulsing through him.

Echo whined.

Alan looked into those yellow eyes. Reptilian. Not human.

Yes, he had patted Echo, months ago, when they had freed Delta from the wire that had wrapped itself around her leg. She had been extremely helpful, had let him take the necessary equipment out of the saddle bags.

And he had touched her.

He had stood next to the pack and not felt afraid.

But Alan had had the time to think about his actions and looking back at that moment, he knew he had been completely out of his mind.

Echo rumbled, looking crestfallen, and Owen reached through the bars, placing a hand against her neck. She sought his touch like a cat wanting nearness.

Her wailing cry when Alan stepped back and turned away had the tremor turn into a knot of guilt.

She is a raptor! he told himself firmly. And you’re not pack.

“Alan?” Owen queried softly.

“Who else has ever touched them?”

“No one. You were the first.”

“Who didn’t lose a hand?”

“Alan,” he sighed, almost chastising.

“Are you trying to pair up your girls?” he demanded, hands balling into fists.

“No. This is nothing but respect and acceptance on her side. You’re not prey. You’re not a stranger. It’s a greeting and an offer. She understands you are wary because of prior experiences. She understands you were attacked by other raptor packs, hunted by them.”

Alan turned back, looking at the raptor who held the lowest rank in the pack. His therapy raptor, as Owen called her. By now Blue had prowled closer, watching proceedings with sharp eyes, while Delta and Charlie couldn’t care less. They were exploring a bush, digging for something that had apparently made up a burrow underneath.

Bad idea.
She’s a raptor. One of Owen’s pack. Owen’s girls.

Echo perked up again, trilling hopefully, and she pushed her nose against the bars once more. Alan felt like he was about to jump off a cliff without a parachute.

Head on. Don’t think. Therapy to help. You can do it, Alan. Stop thinking about Malcolm. Don’t compare this to the Park. It’s been two decades. Into the fire you go.

And his hand was suddenly on her nose, soft skin, warm air brushing over his naked fingers, and the low vibrations of a hum.

Everything froze for a second, then the tension leeched off him and he almost gasped for air. He hadn’t been aware of holding his breath.

It was Echo who moved back after a few second, tail whipping, eyes alight with something Alan refused to see as human emotions, as happiness. Then she darted off, snapping at Charlie who tried to intercept her.

“Hey,” Owen said softly.

Alan turned to look at his friend.

“Not too bad, hm?”

No, not too bad at all. “Therapy,” he said slowly, mouth a little dry, heartbeat a little too fast.

“Therapy,” Owen agreed.

And from within the paddock came the excited call of a raptor.

* * *

The holidays were always a time when visitor numbers spiked and the park was at maximum capacity. The hotels had been booked solid a year in advance. Ferries ran in fifteen minute intervals. Security was doubled and everyone was working long, hard hours.

They were busy with lost children, sometimes lost adults, heat strokes, scabbed knees and elbows, the occasional misplaced bag or backpack, and one memorable occasion with a pocket thief who had ended up getting head-butted by a young pachy as he had tried to run away, right through the petting zoo.

Owen was out patrolling the backroads together with the pack, who always stayed out of sight. They rounded up lost tourists and the adventurers who thought it was a thrill to sneak behind the scenes.

Then there were the occasional break-outs from the enclosures. The raptors took care of that, herding back the rogues, nipping at heels and flanks, but never drawing blood.

Owen was proud of them. They reined in their instincts and adhered to their training.

Blue barked at the pachycephalosaurus, which bleated and lowered her head, ready to fight against the perceived predator. The pachy was slightly larger than the raptors and actively looking for a
brawl.

Owen whistled sharply, then sent Charlie and Echo off to distract the pachy while Delta mock-attacked and got her to step back. Blue darted forward, feigning a bite, and the herbivore took another step back.

The game continued until the pachy finally had enough of the agile hunters, turning with another bleat and sauntering over to the damaged fence. The pack stayed with her, working diligently, until the object of their mission was achieved: the pachycephalosaurus was trotting off toward the trees, looking for her family pack.

Blue barked, looking at their alpha, and Owen smiled widely, nodding. He whistled, gave the order to stand down, and the pack was awash with pride and a job well done.

“Great work, ladies!” he told them.

They flocked toward him, seeking physical contact and getting it. Owen grinned more as their minds pushed against his, enveloping him, letting him feel their rush of adrenaline, their pride, their very energy.

His own pushed back, calming them, asserting control, giving them their own control. It was this deep bond that had ignited an evolution far outside the possibilities of an extinct animal. None of the dinosaurs in the park were pure-bred. None were what the science text books wrote about.

They were all cooked up in a lab, genetically engineered and modified. They were all different, but the four velociraptors more than any others.

Owen checked them visually for any injuries, though each one had assured him that they were fine.

“I know,” he told Blue as he ran careful fingers over the soft skin of her throat. “Just checking.”

*We’re fine. You know we are. You would feel it.*

Owen smiled at her, briefly resting his forehead against her nose.

Yes, he would.

He straightened and grabbed the radio, calling maintenance to get the fence repaired.

“Off you go. Home,” he told the pack.

They yipped and barked, then darted off, disappearing like shadows in the trees.

He dropped by the Aviary on the way back. The pack had listened to his command, not shadowing him. The raptors didn’t think of the Aviary as something dangerous, unlike the T-Rex Kingdom. The flyers were of no interest to them. Possibly dangerous, fellow predators, but nothing else.

The building was huge. It had to be, to house fully grown pteranodons and have them truly fly. Repairing the damage done had taken a while. The glass plates had been specifically made for Jurassic World and replacing them was where the experts came in. It had taken close to seven months to make the dome secure again.
The botanists had been busy taking care of the plants, working together with the engineers who were responsible for the water collection and rain system.

Repopulating the Aviary had been the biggest project. It had been on-going for a year now and they were still not back to their old population numbers. The pteranodons were just now growing into their wings and the dimorphodons had suffered from several failed hatchings.

“Hey, Owen, my man!”

Owen smiled, greeting the new head keeper of the Aviary. Eddie Molina had worked at Jurassic World before, the senior keeper of the gallimimus valley, and he had now been saddled with a new duty and a big project. He was working hand in hand with the conservation zoologist, Thierry Beaumont, to reestablish the flyers in the theme park.

“Just dropping by to see how you are doing,” Owen said.

“Training exercise in the restricted area?” Molina hazarded a guess.

“Close. Escaped pachy down in the valley. You were on my way home, so I thought I’d have a look around.”

“Well, by my guest. Still not much to see, but Thierry and I have high hopes for the latest batch of dimorphodons. They all survived the critical first month and are growing really well.”

“Good to hear.”

When the i-rex had crashed into the Aviary and freed the pteranodons and dimorphodons, most had been shot down by InGen security, later by the military as they had tried to escape the island. Owen still remembered the numerous bodies all over the park. It had been a tragedy. The flyers had been innocent, had just followed instinct, and stun guns would have been enough.

“We still have restrictions for visitors. Not too many a day. They have to buy special tickets, book ahead. The grumbling is still there and we had complaints and threats, but it’s how it works.”

Eddie gave him a quick guided tour, showing him the teenaged pteranodons who screeched and flapped away or watched him warily. Molina was moderately talented, but he had told Owen he wasn’t looking into expanding what he could do. Owen had replied that he wasn’t looking for people to take classes with him. He wasn’t teaching. Nancy was the only exception because she had asked, and Owen had learned from her, too.

He spent an hour at the Aviary, enjoying the rambunctious, teenaged and young adult flyers. The new hatchlings were still tiny, but their teeth and beaks were already sharp and dangerous.

*

Owen didn’t lock the gates that evening. He let his four girls roam. There was rustling in the trees, birds screeching, a bewildered wild pig darting out of the underbrush and squealing as Charlie
chased after it. Delta and Echo were off somewhere, having fun, and Blue had curled up next to Owen, seeking out her alpha.

The alpha in question had shrugged into a jacket against the cooler night air and was leaning against his pack beta like Blue was nothing but an overgrown dog with scales instead of fur.

But Owen would never make the mistake to think of any of his girls as docile, tame or under control. Nothing he did could be copied and what they did, how they behaved around him, was for him only. There had been times when one of them had accidentally hurt him, bitten, scratched, pushed away. They were animals, they had instincts, and pain or fear could trigger reflexes that ended with Owen featuring a new scar or an assortment of bruises.

Blue rumbled, small trills underneath the humming noise, and she rested her head on his lap. A soft huff escaped her as Owen started to pet her. Her own affection for her alpha enveloped his mind, eased his tension, let him relax into the bond.

Let him fall into them.

The others were there, not at the fringe, but also not crowding in. All were still prowling around the jungle and the tall grass, skilled hunters and stealthy predators.

Owen closed his eyes, his breathing slow and almost in synch with Blue’s, a near-meditative state that let his mind spread to his pack, split him into five personalities, all different and yet all connected.

Because of him.

Alpha.

They echoed the word, giving him strength and taking their own from his.

He loved them all. No exception.

He trusted them all. No exception.

And they echoed those emotions, that trust. No exception.

Owen had trained fracturing his mind. It had been difficult at first, but he had started out with the familiar mindscape of Blue, then adding the others one by one. It wasn’t so hard to spread out; the difficulty was finding his way back home. So far he hadn’t managed that without Blue’s help.

Trust exercise, he called it.

Foolish, Alan would argue. Hare-brained and suicidal.

No, it was trust. Simple as that.

tbc...
“Good morning, Nance! Heard you and your girl got the hang of communication.”

Nancy smiled as Owen jogged up to the trainer platform of the mosa lagoon, two steps at a time, carrying take-out from Starbucks. He held it out to her and Nancy dug out an egg salad sandwich. A large chocolate and walnuts cookie was hidden underneath.

“Oh, you know how to make a woman happyhappyhappy, Owen Grady.”

He offered a bunch of napkins. “I know.”

“And so modest.”

“So how are you and M?”

“We had a moment. Woman to woman.”

“About whether or not to eat a stupid tourist?”

She chuckled. “Kind of. Our training paid off.”

“I heard. I’m proud of you.”

Nancy looked flushed with the praise, her eyes alight, and there was a bounce to her that hadn’t been there before.

“So, spill. I only got the memo about a guy jumping into the lagoon.”

“He thought it was a nice way to show off and cool down,” Nancy told him. “Show was over and M was backstage, so to speak. Someone hadn’t locked the gates to the pools. That’s how he got in. And took a dive.”

Owen looked grim. He knew how badly that could have ended. M was a predator, a hunter. Everything that went into the pool could be possible prey.

“I didn’t really think,” Nancy confessed. “I just told her to back off, to leave him alone, then jumped in to get him out.”

“Whoa,” Grady murmured.

“It was instinct. She was heading for him. I felt her curiosity.”

“You stopped her.”

She shrugged, but the pride was still there. “She was playful, not hungry. Sure, she can always snack on something, but it wasn’t a real hunt. I doubt I could have gotten her out of that with just a slap.”

“How did you get him out?”

Nancy blushed faintly. “I was so angry at the guy. He kept yelling at me that he was fine, had everything under control, didn’t need a girl rescuing him. I think I somehow sent that to M. She just catapulted him out of the water. He’s bruised but alive.”
Owen laughed, shaking his head. “Good work nevertheless.”

“Your work. I wouldn’t have been able to communicate with her if we hadn’t started training my talent.”

Owen bit into his muffin. “I’m not a teacher, Nance. This is learning by doing, mostly. Trusting your charge.”

“You taught me that, Owen.”

“She got you out as well?”

Nancy smiled so broadly, so happily, Owen just knew that that had been the case.

“She didn’t throw me out. She went under me, surfaced, had me on her head. It was so surreal!”

Owen could believe that. He would have to look at the security videos. He wanted to see M’s behavior, how Nancy had worked. It was such a huge leap in her abilities and her trust into the mosa.

He leaned against the safety rail, eyes on the water. There was no disturbance on the surface, but Owen felt her, the massive mosasaurus not far from them. She was calm, relaxed, almost playful, and she didn’t shy away from his inquisitive search.

“You got to wonder about the stupidity of people. The guy thought he could swim with her, like she was a super-sized dolphin.” Nancy shook her head and took a bite of her sandwich, chewing.

“Some people never learn. It’s been too quiet lately.”

She snorted. “I didn’t mind the quiet. It’s like in every other theme park, zoo or exhibit. Friend of mind works in Berlin. She said someone climbed into the tiger enclosure because he wanted to pet the cute kitty. Someone else got over the fence in a zoo in Copenhagen and into the buffalo paddock.”

Owen silently ate his muffin, watching the dark shadow in the water swim closer, then breach the surface. M’s jaws were wide open, then snapped shut, and she was gone again.

Nancy smiled happily at the brief interaction. “Well,” she announced and brandished her cookie. “Dessert, then it’s almost time for the next show.”

“Have fun.”

“I always do. So does M. See you around.”

Owen took the underground tunnels to evade the waiting masses, the excitement to see the massive mosasaurus. M followed him through the observatory as he took the personnel-only route, her hums resonating against the glass.

“You’re one curious animal,” he told her as he stopped near the door that would take him out of the tunnels.

She regarded him with one eye, her bulk blocking out the rest of the aquarium from his sight.

Owen met her gaze, felt her presence ebb and flow around him. Mosasaurus were loners, not pack hunters or herd animals. The concept of an alpha was alien to her, but M felt him, knew he was powerful, and that he could touch her like Nancy could. Maybe even more so.
“Not your keeper, girl. Go and get ready to show the people what a fantastic creature you are.”

Her fins brushed against the reinforced glass, her mind a distinctive whisper against the background murmur.

“Yeah, you did really well. Trust your trainer. Let her trust you.”

She streaked back toward the lagoon. The long tail whipped behind her.

Owen watched her until there was nothing but empty water all around him.

*

Aside from the students and interns, visiting scientists sometimes managed to get permission to go out to the raptor paddock.

It was even almost like winning the lottery in five different countries simultaneously.

Owen wasn’t keen on having anyone around he couldn’t fully trust, which meant intense background checks run by security. It was double for visitors not affiliated with Masrani Global or Jurassic World. Anyone was dangerous to him and his pack. The depth of his preternatural ability was a tightly kept secret. If anyone found out what he was, how deep this went, scientists would be clamoring for him to be studied.

No, he didn’t want outsiders here.

Alan Grant was an exception. A welcome, known and very trusted exception. When he asked Owen to think about possibly letting a colleague from Australia spend a day or two studying the pack, Owen said yes for the first time.

“Mick Dundee?” he asked, brows rising, as he shook the older man’s hand.

“Yes. And I know the name is a bit… stereotypically challenged. Might have been the reason to tack a doctor to it.”

Owen laughed. “Crocodile wrangler?” he asked, amused.

“Nope, but I studied them, too. Don’t have a TV show, not making any movies, not communing with nature. I just drone on to the bored masses about paleontology and how it isn’t like in the movies. Sweat, grit, sand in your eyes, sun, and hardly any fame.”

Blonde, sunburned, in his mid-fifties with bright blue eyes, Dundee did kind of look like his namesake from TV and movies, but that was where it ended. Two doctorates, a world-renowned paleontologist specializing in flyers, he was as famous as Alan, though his professional exploits had never contained running away from live dinosaurs, getting almost eaten, and surviving two hair-raising stunts on Isla Nublar and Isla Sorna.

This was his first time behind the scenes of Isla Nublar. He had been to Jurassic World three times
already.

“Welcome to the raptor enclosure then.”

“Thank you. I’m not going to be in your way. This is just a friendly visit from a very curious guy from Down Under. Alan and I have a study date later this afternoon.”

Owen laughed. “He told me. You and him have co-written a paper, right?”

“The Impact of All-Female Members on Group Hierarchy and Group Behavior in Genetically Modified Dinosaurs.” Dundee smirked. “A mouthful. I’m on a spot for the next team going to Isla Sorna to study a mixed group and their hierarchy.”

“Raptors?”

“No, too dangerous. We’re studying parasaurolophus groups.”

“Good choice.”

There as a scuffle inside the paddock, a screech of outrage coming from Charlie, then something shot through the bars and into the jungle.

“Wild chickens,” Owen commented, smiling as he watched his girls look mournfully after their prey. “Not the most intelligent of animals. Some get into the enclosure for some reason.”

“And get eaten?”

“Most of the time. Right now they’re more playful than hungry.”

Dundee studied the four raptors, nodding to himself. He froze a little when Blue fixed him with a cool, calculating look.

“She’s the beta,” he stated slowly.

“Yes, that’s Blue. The others are Charlie, Delta and Echo.” Owen pointed out each pack member.

Mick was silent as he kept watching them, then his eyes were on Blue again, who hadn’t moved and was still fixing him with her eyes.

“She doesn’t like visitors,” he said.

“She’s careful.”

“Good in a beta.”

“I agree.”

Blue huffed, as if it was obviously something to agree with.

“You trained them from hatching?”

“Yes. Blue was the first. She is three months older than the others, who are nest sisters.”

“How did you train them?”

“Hand signals, whistles, vocal commands.”
Dundee nodded. “Textbook. No one would have believed it possible. Until you happened.”

Owen didn’t look at his Australian visitor, just watched the pack play, pouncing at whatever they were hunting.

“They accepted me as the alpha.”

“Not because of hand signals and whistles.”

Owen finally turned and looked at the other man. “Animal training involves a lot more and you know it, Mr. Dundee.”

Dundee smiled, showing even teeth. “Yeah, I do. Takes some talent. You seem to have it in spades.”

He refused to fall for the broad hint.

The rumble of a car had them turn, interrupting their talk, and Owen smiled widely as Alan got out of his company issued SUV. Dressed in jeans, a blue button down, boots and wearing his usual hat and carrying a khaki jacket, Alan Grant looked like he was going on his next dig.

Echo barked in happy recognition and Alan looked over to the fence, slight tension creeping into his features.

“Ah, the fan,” Mick remarked. “He mentioned something along the lines.”

“Mick!” Alan called, keeping Owen from saying something.

Dundee accepted a welcome hug from his old friend and fellow paleontologist. “Good to see you here, Alan. Your friend Owen already gave me a tour and showed me a few things. So this is your fan?” He nodded at Echo, who was near the fence, watching Alan hopefully.

“She… probably is. For some obscure reason.”

“Which only she knows.” Dundee nodded.

Owen refrained from saying something about Echo being Alan’s therapy raptor. It was something his friend would have to talk about with Dundee if he wanted to.

Echo happily trilled some more when Alan approached the paddock, looking at her as she looked back, head tilted.

“You ever been inside with her?”

“What? God no! I’m not suicidal!”

Echo’s response was a whuffle, her reassurance that she wouldn’t touch him clear across the connection. Owen knew she would defend her chosen friend against the rest of the pack of Delta or Charlie came too close, but Alan wouldn’t ever go inside without dire need.

“We got some work to do,” Grant decided, turning away from the fence, but not before giving the raptor a nod that she answered with an excited hum.

“That we do. C’mon, Alan, let’s not keep the Raptor Whisperer from his work.”

“Great,” Owen groaned. “It gets around.”
Dundee clapped his shoulder. "'Course it does."

Of course.

Fantastic.

Owen grabbed his smart phone, checked his schedule, found nothing of importance, and just headed for his bike.

*

He had made sure to be on the good side with the troopers patrolling the island and protecting the park. Like them, Owen and the pack were protecting the park and guarding the island against possible dangers.

He and Dan Carter, the chief of security, were on the best of terms. Actually, he called the man a good friend. They had a similar background, though Carter wasn’t talented; not even a bit. But they had been shaped by the military. They met outside Carter’s shifts and had talked about life and everything more than once.

Carter wanted to understand the pack and the pack didn’t actively dislike him. They were actually very accepting of him. His energy was the right one and his behavior around the four raptors was right on spot, without him probably knowing it.

When they were out and about, patrolling or training, they ran into the odd trooper here or there. They were apprehensive and never got too close to the pack, always had their guns at the ready, but no one had accidentally shot at one of his girls just yet.

A few asked questions, but most just accepted that the pack was a special kind of guard, and left it at that.

Running a hand over Delta’s striped back, Owen checked her skin and muscles as he did every pack member on a regular basis. Delta watched him as Owen looked for bumps or infections, growths or skin mutations. She nosed at his hair when he trailed over the old scars and huffed.

“Sensitive?” Owen teased.

She rumbled and shifted her weight a little.

He chuckled. “You’re good.”

Always am.

He patted her side, then straightened and watched her trot off toward where Charlie was playing with the leftovers from an old meal. The carcass had long-since been picked clean, but they found the bones interesting.

“You sure have a way with them.”
Owen raised his eyebrows at Barry, who gave him a bright smile.

“You’re really good. Not just because you have a connection. It’s all of you all the time. Like you always say to the students: energy. Calm and assertive energy. The alpha of the pack.”

“There’s no difference between talented and non-talented trainers. We all have to work with our animals the same way.”

“You just got a better insight?”

Owen walked through the gate and locked it, checking whether or not the lock was truly in place.

“Talent is one thing, Barry. It can give you an in, yes, but it can’t get a pack of predators follow you. I established myself as the alpha. I have a strong beta who respects me as much as I respect her. That’s how it works. Respect. Mutual respect.”

Barry held out a bottle of water and Owen took it gratefully. “Something some of the students don’t have.”

“You got to wonder what they teach them nowadays.”

Devoe chuckled, eyes straying to the paddock. The pack was busy with the carcass. There were chitters and barks, the occasional hiss.

“You still don’t take on assistants?”

“Nope. Sorry, Barry.”

The other man shrugged. “No problem. Mick and I talked pteroranodons. And dimorphodons. I think it’s an option. I still got a few months to go.”

Owen nodded. He emptied the bottle. “No hard feelings?”

“No way. I know what you do here isn’t for the public and while I’d find it challenging and interesting, and something I’d love to do, you’re a pack. You’re their alpha, not a trainer. Everyone else is an intruder.”

Blue agreed. Delta wasn’t too thrilled, but she wasn’t as attached to Barry as Echo was to Alan Grant. She found him an interesting human, one who was different from the many humans who had passed through the paddock in the last months. He wouldn’t be eaten, but he also wasn’t pack.

“They’re dangerous, whatever you make it look like,” Barry went on. “All animals are.”

Owen gave him a small smirk. They walked over to the stables where Barry grabbed the shovel and started on mucking. Owen went to check on the gear and then on the camera feeds from the restricted area. There had been some problems lately, with feeds getting grainy or cameras switching off like a plug had been pulled. He would have to get out there and take a look. Most of the cameras in question were located in the coastal area.

* * *

Serena Gomez-Smith, one of the many paleobotanists working at Jurassic World, gave Owen a
bright smile as he dropped in on her in one of the many greenhouses. This one wasn’t accessible by the public. Others could be toured, though rarely were, and a good few were used as research stations by universities and individual scientists.

“Hey, Owen! How is my favorite Raptor Whisperer?”

He grimaced. “I’m not.”


“Not really.”

“The other is a mouthful.”

Owen rolled his eyes. “You done?”

“Nope, but I’ll leave the rest for next time. You’re here for the scent bags, right?”

He nodded.

While training with live bait, dried meat or fresh pieces of cow were one thing, and the pack was very successful at it, they also needed to train with other scents. He had used various clothing dipped in different liquids or covered liberally in sprays. There had been actual hunts, using the scent of an individual person or a dinosaur. That had been fun.

Especially for the pack.

Not so much for Lowery Cruthers, who had happened to be one of the first candidates. He had volunteered when he had heard about Owen’s experiments. Cruthers loved dinosaurs, had always loved dinosaurs, but he didn’t work directly with them. He was in the control room, like he had always been, keeping an eye on park operations from another point of view.

Lowery had been just about to have lunch when he had been faced by four raptors, who had yipped at their success and circled him with excitement. Owen had found him five minutes later, trapped by the pack, who were watching him closely, but they hadn’t touched a single hair on his head.

Serena walked over to a locked cabinet and undid the lock. She opened the doors and got out a box. She plonked it down in front of Owen.

“Have a look at it. If you need more, let me know.”

The box was full of sealed bags. Each contained a different kind of plant, be it leaves, blossoms or roots.

“Looks like this is plenty. Thanks, Serena.”

“You’re welcome. In case you want more live subjects for targets, let me know.”

“It’s not for the faint of heart.”

She smiled. “I talked to Lowery. He said it was okay the moment his heart stopped trying to escape his chest and Charlie was no longer eyeing him like her next meal. I’m not a martyr, but I trust your girls not to eat the target.”

“They know to just pinpoint the target, keep it from moving away, and call me. And thanks, but for now it’s plants and specific dinosaurs. I’m want to know how much they can distinguish between
individuals.”

“Well, have fun. Don’t be a stranger, you hear? We missed you at the last two movie nights.”

Owen shrugged. “Interns and students and work, oh my.”

Serena laughed. “Yeah, we heard you had them, too, now.”

“You make it sound like the plague they are.”

“Aw, Owen, honey…”

He grabbed the box and started for the door. “Thanks again. Gotta go.”

She waved and went back to her plants.

* * *

The call from Carter came in as Owen dropped Zach off at his temporary home on Isla Nublar to spend some time with his aunt. Gray would be coming in tomorrow and even though he didn’t really show it, Zach was excited to see his little brother. Gray had sent a schedule he had created, had marked what he wanted to do and see, and Owen had just wished him luck. Zach would be busy. As would Claire.

They met in Carter’s office. It was a rather decent-sized room off the main control room, with actual windows and a nice view of the jungle and the monorail.

Owen whistled. “You got first dibs on this?”

Dan shrugged. “Came with the job description. Direct access to the main control room, nice view, strategically placed right around the corner from a coffee machine.”

“Ah.” Owen watched the monorail whisk by below. It was packed with people.

“Not all of us can ditch an office and live the outdoorsy life off the raptor paddock.”

“Don’t tell me you’re jealous,” he laughed.

“Nope. Far from it.” Carter typed something into his tablet, then placed it onto his desk. He looked suddenly serious.

Owen felt his own mood shift accordingly. “That bad?” he asked.

“Possible. And no, it’s not a new dinosaur or a new attraction. This concerns Site B.”

He frowned. “Isla Sorna isn’t part of Jurassic World.”

“Thank you for that news update, Grady. Never would have guessed.”

Owen just gave him the evil eye.

“We might have a problem at Sorna. Poachers.”
“Poachers?”

“Or some really unlucky tourists.”

Owen looked at Carter, who gave him a half-shrug. A slow smirk crept over the chief of security’s lips.

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” he added.

Yes, it wouldn’t be. Isla Sorna was filed as off limits, do not enter, hands off, stay the fuck away. The Costa Rican government and Masrani Global together with InGen had invested a lot into making the island secure, a biological reserve, right down to regular patrols. Scientists came and went, all with permission and after a thorough screening of each candidate and extensive background checks. Studying dinosaurs in the wild was unique and only happened on Isla Sorna.

Owen had been there once, before getting his pack of four, and he had been fascinated.

This was where dinosaurs flourished, lived and died under natural conditions. There was no trainer, no warden, no keeper. There was no feeding time, there were no shows. There were packs and herds, lone hunters and groups that came together for mutual protection. Male and female genders, rearing their young, defending their territory.

And sometimes people thought they could make a quick buck by trying to steal a dinosaur. Or those unlucky tourists, as Carter had called them. The adventurous types who thought they had something to prove.

“The latest group of scientists reported some weird occurrences. One thought he had seen people at the beach. Another said he found a male raptor with a broken neck. Seems like he was pushed off a cliff.”

Owen frowned.

“Yeah, my thought exactly,” Carter commented. “I sent a team to investigate already. I’ll get word back in twenty-four hours. Thought you should know.”

He nodded. “Appreciated. Let me know what gets back?”

“Sure thing.”

tbc...
The word that came back was that adult and juvenile animals had been found injured or killed. Five deaths, ten with severe wounds that hadn’t come from pack fighting or predator attacks.

Bullet wounds. Burns. Cuts made from wires that were still embedded in the flesh of legs and necks. One triceratops had a splintered left horn and a deep v-shaped wound in her neck crest that was crusted with blood and looked infected. A pachy was missing two fingers and the eyes would probably stay blind.

Owen felt sick looking at the intel, the images sent back to Carter and the report from the men and women who had gone to Isla Sorna. He had gone to the command center when the other man had called him, had been there for the debrief, and he felt like he wanted to hit something.

Someone.

Anything at all.

Who had done this to all the animals? And why? It looked like senseless violence, inflicting pain on the adults as their babies were stolen… Maybe hunting for sport. Killing the adults, feeling the momentary thrill of bringing down a rare animal.

But there was no sign of the perpetrators.

“No ship located near Isla Sorna,” had been the report. “Nothing has moved in the past three weeks. The wounds are too fresh to be from longer than that.”

“They’re hiding,” Carter growled. “Find them, Rodriguez. Turn over every stone of that island, but find them!”

And don’t get eaten, was Owen’s thought. There were raptor packs roaming the preserve. A family of t-rexes, as well as a carnotaurus. Not to mention the spinosaurus, who had been seen now and again. Quite prominently.

Carter closed down the feed and looked at him, pale blond brows rising over gray eyes.

“Thoughts?”

“Give me a gun and a target,” he answered coldly. “Or the pack and ten minutes alone.”

“Other than murder, Grady. I know how you feel, but right now we need to find them first.”

“How good is the intel?”

“Pretty much one hundred percent. Patrols haven’t picked up anyone leaving. Since they also haven’t seen anyone coming in, there’s that margin of error.”

“Going in is easy if you know how to hide.”

A nod. Cruise ships came and went. There were freighters and fishing vessels, the occasional tourist with his hellishly expensive, floating toy.

Now, leaving after everyone was on high alert, that was the problem.

“Sorna was never completely mapped down to the last dotted i and crossed t,” Carter continued.
“We have the general lay-out and we know where not to go. The raptors have a pretty big territory, intersecting with the rex, the carnotaurus and the spinosaurus sometimes. They never mingle, and so do the scientists. No one’s been eaten yet.”

“Lucky.”

Spending so much time in the wild, with wild dinosaurs, a good portion of them cunning hunters, was risky. It wasn’t something Owen would do voluntarily.

Sure, yes, he was the alpha of a raptor pack and spent almost all his time with them, but that was different. On Isla Sorna they would be just another part of the whole puzzle that made up this biological niche. He had been there once to study wild raptors long before he had attempted to raise and train a pack.

It was exhilarating and terrifying in one.

A stroll through the woods. Sixty-five million years ago.

Nope. It wasn’t. Not a stroll. It was a constant on-your-toes sensation, being watched from cunning eyes, sized up and stalked.

“We pulled out the science teams for safety reasons,” Carter told him. “As long as we don’t know what killed the animals and whether or not they’re still there, no researchers are allowed on Isla Sorna. Dr. Ubry did a fast-track autopsy just before we pulled the plug on this research stint.”

He handed over the tablet and Owen scrolled through the findings. The sick feeling was back again. The kills had been planned, probably to chase away the adults from the precious nests and the babies. Those who had received burns had died from infections. One had been put out of his misery by a bullet to the head. Another had been strangulated with barbed wire, probably getting caught in a trap.

“Big gun, but a slow death,” he growled. “They executed some of them!”

“I know,” was the soft reply. “Believe me, after working here for two years, I share the sentiment. And I’m not bonded to a pack of raptors.” Carter raised an expressive eyebrow.

Owen handed back the report.

“So we have a group of poachers going after wild dinosaurs, possibly for the eggs, and they are extremely well organized and hidden, it seems.” Carter’s expression was unreadable as he thought out loud. “Patrols have been doubled. We’re checking every ship heading away from any of the isles. I called in air support, but it’ll take until tomorrow. Masrani pulled some strings.”

Owen smirked. “Money can do that.”

Carter gave him a humorless quirk of the lips. “And connections, which he has. Anything you might want to add?”

Owen studied the images of the dead dinosaurs, shaking his head.

“Keep me updated?”

“Sure.” Dan nodded.

“I’m heading back home. When you get those assholes, leave one for me.”
Carter chuckled. “No promises.”

Owen gave him a sloppy salute, then headed out. He needed some fresh air.

The forecast had been for stormy weather and when the bad weather front hit, it was almost cleansing.

Owen sat on his porch, underneath the roof, watching the rain form puddles, beat down the grass and run in small rivers around the paddock.

The pack wasn’t fazed by the weather. They had either sought partial shelter under a tree, full shelter in the stables, or just enjoyed the warm water running over the skin and washing away grit and grime.

Poachers.

Who had killed some of the wild dinosaurs.

It angered him on a very basic level. It was like a primal instinct, the fury close to animalistic. Blue understood the anger, but she was less emotionally involved. The dead animals hadn’t been pack. She hadn’t known them. They were fatalities, like others at the park had been before today.

Someone who did understand was Alan. He had dropped by Owen’s place just before the threatening dark clouds had dumped their gallons of rain water on the island.

“Dinosaurs rank up there with other rare animals, like big cats, elephants and rhinos, for a private zoo,” Grant said, drawing his attention back to their conversation.

The sound of the rain beating on the roof and the rush of water was a background noise.

“It’s the new pet to have when you’re too rich to even know how much money you really have. They beat even the rarest of the mammals nowadays. Because you can only get them from two places: Isla Nublar or Isla Sorna. At least those who are healthy and will live longer than a few days.”

“So they kill the adults?”

“You and I know it’s how this operation works: babies and eggs. The adults cannot be tamed. They get in the way of the theft, so they die. Same with every animal ever caught in the wild and displayed in a zoo until governments and politicians passed wildlife protection acts. Now zoo animals are either orphaned youngsters or bred in captivity.”

“Dinosaurs are not buffalos or giraffes or antelopes!” Owen argued. “And they can’t be tamed! They’ll die! The wrong food, the wrong medical treatment -- if there’s any kind of treatment at all. They die from infections, from bacteria or a simple flu virus!”

Alan gave him a pointed look. He knew all of that better than many of his profession. “When you want something, and you have enough money, you’ll get it. Even if it eats your staff. Raptors and rexes are the most sought-after black market animals.” He contemplated his beer for a minute or two. “Twenty-two years ago, when the first Jurassic Park failed so spectacularly, dinosaurs escaped. There were even raptors stowing away on ships.”
“I know.”

“Did you know that not all were put down? No? Well, some entrepreneurs sold the sedated raptors to wealthy buyers. You can probably imagine how that ended.”

With screams and death, Owen thought.

“Reports are Eyes Only, but we both know that raptors are very intelligent, learn fast, and aren’t keen on being locked up. The buyers didn’t realize what they needed to just keep themselves safe, let alone take care of a dinosaur.”

“How do they do?”

“I have no idea, but the business is profitable because to get a dinosaur you need to go to Isla Sorna and survive the experience. Even with firepower and a troop of rangers, soldiers and guides, you’ll be nothing but prey for some of those animals.” Alan gestured at the laptop. “There are some sites that have other reports. About dinosaur bodies found in graves, buried in a hurry. Some died of malnourishment, some of heat or cold, some of a sickness commonly found in cats, dogs or birds. InGen is informed of all of these finds. All bodies are recovered and they’re trying to trace it back to who might have bought the animal. Those who get caught are usually only the fallguys.”

“You know a lot about this, Alan.”

“John Hammond’s idea might have been foolhardy and I still think that an animal that was once extinct shouldn’t be brought back into an environment that is no longer capable of dealing with it, but I care about those dinosaurs, Owen. They are living, breathing beings who have no idea how they came back to life. They don’t know they’ve been extinct for millions of years. They follow instincts. They’ve been genetically altered. They’re not even close to some of the findings we have made. Paleontology is still a very active field, despite live dinosaurs. We discover so much more every day.”

There was a light, a passion, in Alan’s eyes. He loved his work and he had never let any of the nay-sayers get to him. He might be someone who worked only with bones, but he was looking at the originals. Jurassic World held only copies. Sometimes the wrong copies.

Owen nodded slowly. “We’ll get those guys.”

“Never the ones behind it,” Alan murmured, shaking his head.

In the distance, thunder growled and rumbled across the sky. The rain increased in ferocity.

“No a good day for the park,” Grant commented.

“Most will be either inside, flooding the Labs, the Innovation Center, the movies, or the restaurants, or they’ll be at the hotel until the shower’s over. A few hardy souls don’t mind. They grab the opportunity to be first in line for an attraction that hasn’t temporarily shut down for safety purposes,” Owen explained with a small grin.

The pack had by now sauntered into the stable to wait out the worst of the rain and thunder.

“You can’t make Site B secure enough that this won’t happen again,” the professor said. “It’s an island. You can find a way to get there. That’s never the problem. Stealing babies or eggs, getting away with that… much more of a problem, let me tell you. If they managed to grab raptor eggs, the pack would follow them wherever they went.”
Experience, up close and personal, had taught him that.

“Looks like they killed part of that pack.”

“And maybe they got killed themselves, which is why your friend Dan Carter can’t find them.”

Yes, maybe.

Owen stretched out his legs, tried to forget about Isla Sorna. Carter would keep him posted on anything new. There was nothing he could do personally. He had his own pack to take care of.

But it was hard.

* * *

“Owen!”

Owen was nearly bowled over by the small whirlwind who wrapped his arms around his middle and hugged him. Gray Mitchell beamed at him, eyes alive with happiness.

“Hey there, kiddo. Wow, you have grown!”

Gray preened. He still featured the longish mop of hair, but he had truly gained some height. He was wearing a dinosaur t-shirt. It showed that despite everything he was still in love with the animals.

“Where are Zach and Aunt Claire?”

“Waiting for us over at the hotel. C’mon. I’ll drive.”

Gray bounced ahead of him, racing toward Owen’s bike, grinning widely. “Your bike?”

“My bike.” Owen grabbed a helmet and held it out to Gray. “Suit up.”

They were on the way to the Hilton minutes later, Gray whooping with joy.

*

Claire was hugged by her nephew and Gray was talking a mile a minute what he wanted to do, what he wanted to see, what he had read on the updated website about new attractions.

Owen chuckled and shook his head. Zach looked a little pained, Claire just incredible happy, close to overjoyed.

“Can we go to the Walk Among the Giants?” Gray begged.
“Sure. VIP bracelets as usual.” Claire brandished the blue bracelets. “And your personal tour guide.” She spread her arms. “Me.”

“Cool!”

“And you brother can tell you about all the things he has been doing.”

“Like working with the raptor pack?” Gray demanded.

Zach grinned. “Kinda.” He glanced at Owen. “But I’m not yet cleared for it. I’ve been with the gallimimus and the triceratops, though.”

Owen watched the three walk toward the Main Street. Claire shot him a wide smile and he waved. She waved back, then her attention was on her nephews again.

He decided to take advantage of where he was, drop in on a few friends, get updates, maybe catch a session with Nancy between shows.

Yep, sounded like a good plan.

* * *

For the last three days it had rained, keeping most visitors away. There wasn’t exactly a lull in activity. People always came, especially those who had pre-booked and couldn’t return their tickets just because of the weather.

With close to ten thousand people the park was still full, but waiting lines were down to just a few minutes and there was a lot less of a crowded feeling in some places.

The students weren’t thrilled to be out in the wet and wild, but Owen had told them clearly that this job was glamorous and non-stop fun. He couldn’t just wait out a rain shower. The animals weren’t bothered by the rain and their enclosures didn’t clean themselves.

Today he had challenged them to come up with training methods or entertainment for the raptors, to keep them from digging around or scuffle amongst themselves, hurting themselves, because they were bored. There had been a few interesting results, all of which had been raptor tested.

Echo had been delighted as she had torn into an old carpet that smelled of stegosaurus, shredding it with such gusto, Owen had had to laugh. He had felt her exhilaration shoot through him.

The velociraptors were honest in their response. There was no faking interest or refusing to play along. For them the interns were entertainment. If the entertainment got them even more interested in a game, they were all for it.

Delta was less than impressed with the remote controlled car that had ended up in a ditch and whirred its wheels helplessly. It didn’t smell right and it had easily given way under her foot.

The tennis balls had been quickly chewed up and spit out by Blue, who had given the young woman who had tossed them in a challenging look. Charlie had nosed at them, had been rather gentle in picking them up between razor-sharp teeth, and she had collected them in a corner, hissing and growling at Echo who had come to explore.
Tessa had been disappointed by Blue’s quick destruction of her tennis balls, but she had diligently taken notes and let Owen correct her, explain raptor teeth and jaw strength again.

“Why does Charlie collect them?” she asked.

“Good question. You find out. Watch the pack, note their behavior. You have to draw the conclusions.”

Owen had let one of the younger students, Gregory Tomasz, take a stab at training. Charlie had signaled that the boy might be talented and seeing him work, his posture, the way he seemed to fall into this as he tuned out the real world and just focused on Charlie, was proof enough.

“Wow,” he murmured. “They really relate to me.”

Owen smiled and clapped him on the shoulder. “You’re doing it right, Gregory. Animals don’t work with a trainer out of pity. If you don’t give the right signals, especially with your body, they’ll take over. An animal will lead if it thinks you’re too weak.”

He nodded. “I worked with a dog trainer. It was so simple when you finally grasped the basics. I wouldn’t have thought it worked with dinosaurs.”

“All animals react to that energy. It’s how they communicate. Not just sight or ears.”

He nodded again, earnest and fully there. “I’d like to work here. Maybe even over on Isla Sorna, study the family structures. I know it needs a special permit and that I need a lot more experience, but it’s something I’d love to do one day.”

Owen decided he would talk to Claire about giving him a chance. Not with the raptors, but he might be a good addition to Reggie’s team. Triceratopes were bull-headed and cantankerous. They needed a talented caretaker.

“You’re right that you need to learn a lot, kid. I’ve been to Sorna and it’s not a beach vacation. It’s dangerous and needs your full concentration.”

Gregory smiled. “I’ll work on everything. I have a few more months and Masrani Global already told me that they would consider me for a park position.”

“Good for you.”

He had two more reviews to write, Tessa and Gregory. Good choices, in Owen’s opinion.

The pack echoed that.

He called it a day before the next shower came down, getting muffled complaints from Mason Green, who had been jealously whispering about Gregory whenever he thought Owen wasn’t watching.

“Monday morning, eight a.m. sharp!” he told the group, getting some grumbling about the early
time.
They shuffled off and Owen took a deep breath.
Just a few more weeks, then it would be over.
He couldn’t wait.

*  

“There is nothing to it! Look! Nothing at all! Bad-ass, my ass! He’s got them tamed and we get
told how dangerous they are.”

Mason spread his arms, exaggeratedly mimicking Owen’s gestures and smiling winningly at Blue,
who was standing like frozen to the spot. Yellow eyes tracked the unwelcome intruder into their
territory, but no sound escaped her.

Charlie was a few steps behind her, curious, keeping her distance, but the tension in her frame was
there. She spread her taloned fingers, ducking slightly, and a hiss escaped her lips.

From the corner, Delta and Echo approached, growling and hissing, warning the trespasser off.

“Whow, heyheyhey, good raptors,” Mason crooned, the triumphant smile still there. “You’re good
little dinos, right? He just wants us to think you’re so dangerous. Good girls, right?”

Blue snarled, lips pulling back over pointed teeth.

“Mason, get out of there!” Patricia called, frantically looking around.

What they were doing was not sanctioned. Students weren’t allowed in the enclosures without a
trainer present. And no one, no one at all, was allowed in the raptor paddock. Not even with Mr.
Grady.

“This is too dangerous! Please get out!” she begged.

“They’re not dangerous, Pat! They’re tame and he just wants to let anyone think they’re not.”

Echo was no longer to be seen, but Delta was stalking closer, while Blue and Charlie simply
watched.

Patricia felt her heart hammer in her chest, her lungs constricting in fear. Unlike her friend, she saw
the warning signs clearly. She had studied the hunting patterns of pack predators. She had listened
to Mr. Grady’s explanations about raptors, about their specific hunting, how they were more
intelligent than other hunters.

Mason had been an ass right from the beginning. He had been annoying, trying to get a reaction out
of the Chief Raptor Behavioral Analyst going as far as bad-mouthing him in front of other students.
Mason was a straight-A student, he had an influential uncle, his parents were rich enough to pay
for all his private schooling, but he was an ass.

Plain and simple.
“Mason!” she begged.

Green chose to ignore Patricia. He knew what he was doing. He would show everyone that Owen Grady was working with smoke and mirrors. He was a show master, not a scientist.

“Hey, dino.” Mason grinned like a maniac now. “I’m just going to show my friend Patricia what a tame little thing you are, right? Anyone can be your alpha. You probably have a chip that keeps you in place.”

Delta tilted her head, eyes unreadable and cold. She wasn’t hissing or snarling, but she didn’t look like a friendly puppy happy to see a new visitor either. Blue had padded around Mason and he turned his head, holding out a hand like he had seen Grady do.

It was easy.

They were tame. They listened to hand signals, to the right commands.

“Mason!” Patricia cried. “Please! Get out!!”

She had a cell in hand and Mason glared at her. She was calling for help. Couldn’t she see that this was easy? Grady had those animals trained and they just needed the right commands.

No sane person would go into an enclosure to a wild animal and survive the experience, right? And he could do this and prove Grady a fake. The man didn’t even have a university degree. He was ex-military. He had worked with dogs! Dogs!

Mason was next in line for a big Masrani Global stipend and a position here at the park if he kept up his grades and all. All Grady had to show were degrees achieved through his service.

This would prove that he could do what a dog trainer did, and more. He would be able to get his own batch of raptor eggs.

“Mason!” Patricia screamed suddenly. “She’s behind you!”

A clicking sound had him freeze.

It had come from right next to him.

“Fuck!” someone else cursed.

He turned his head and gave a gasp of surprise as Charlie was suddenly in his line of sight and then something heavy threw him to the ground, air pushed out of his lungs, and he barely had time to cry out when a foot landed on his arm, pinning it down. Sharp claws curled slightly, but not pricking his skin.

Staccato cries sounded around him.

He could barely breathe.

There was dust in the air, getting into his nose, choking him as the weight on his back kept him down. He felt the sharp talons push against his skin, but not yet breaking it.
A snout full of sharp teeth lowered, nostrils inhaling his scent, the rumbling all but reassuring.

There was a bark, then chittering, like laughter in his ears.

And then Mason felt more teeth against the back of his neck, jaws closing over his spine, and he whimpered, terror flooding him, freezing his body and his mind, while a part of his body decided to relieve itself.

He had no time to feel embarrassed or ashamed.

There was only sheer terror. Primordial, settled deep in his prehistoric brain, the logical human replaced by the prey animal that knew it was going to die.

Maybe he was crying, begging, blubbering nonsense words.

Maybe his spine had already been severed and his brain was sending the last signals.

The world grayed at the edges.

Then it turned dark as the pressure on his neck increased.

tbc...
Chapter 9

It had been a slow, blessedly free day for Owen. A weekend with nothing but what he wanted to do. No park duties, no interns, no nothing. Just him and his girls.

He had used all that free time to catch up on his emails, talk to his parents, file a few things, and finally clear out the shed from all the stuff that had been thrown in there and forgotten in the last few years.

His parents had patiently listened to the Interns From Hell stories, laughed, told him to man up, and pointed out that there had been a few promising ones. They had swapped stories and his mother had promised to come by for a short vacation soon. They wanted to see their son and also the pack.

Carter called an hour into Owen’s shed clearance project. He was catching Grady up on the possible hiding place of the poachers when things went from almost-peaceful to shit-hits-the-fan-fast.

Really fast.

In big, big buckets.

Blue’s call wasn’t frantic, didn’t reflect a situation that had gone out of control. She was calm, almost casual, as she informed Owen that they had an intruder in the paddock.

Trespasser.

In. The. Paddock.

He hadn’t expected anyone today. It was an intern-free weekend and Owen was so very very close to telling Masrani where he could stuff his interns anyway.

All had actively wanted to work with the raptors.

Almost none had had an idea what it really meant.

They knew the theoretical facts, had looked at skeletons and watched videos from Isla Sorna or the old park. They had been told about the dangers.

And still they didn’t really take this as seriously as they should.

Owen had had one incident already that had him in Claire’s face and demanding another screening of everyone coming out to his place.

Now…

He threw out his mind, caught a glimpse of Delta stalking, of Echo and Charlie distracting the prey, of Blue warning the trespasser off.

Shitshitshit!
He hurried out of the house, hanging up on Carter with a quick “Got a situation in the paddock, gotta go”, and was down the stairs in a flash when Blue’s presence urged him a little more.

*What?* he demanded.

*He seems to be training with us. His energy is all wrong. He also doesn’t listen.*

“What?!” Owen exploded, now running.

Blue sounded… amused. Amused that someone dared to think he could train with them, could command them. His energy was wrong. It was completely off and it rubbed them all the wrong way.

He heard Barry’s voice, heard a woman’s screams of terror, and then the pack was there, along the bond, excited, clearly running on predator-prey instinct.

Charlie used a distraction and jumped.

“Fuck!”

Echo yowled in triumph and went for the neck.

Owen pushed past Barry, hit the gate controls, and was through the rising gate so fast they hadn’t even lifted all the way up before he was through the second lock, then the third.

The scene in front of him would have given Alan nightmares and flashbacks, so he was glad his old friend wasn’t around to witness it.

One of the interns -- Mason Green, yes, he recognized him -- lay on the ground, out cold. He was on his belly, Charlie’s foot on his back, pushing him down. Echo had just lifted her head from his neck, but there was no blood on her teeth.

She chirped at him almost innocently.

Blue was standing close, watching the proceedings, teeth bare, clearly pissed, and Delta was stalking around the cluster of the pack, snarling, looking for an in.

Fuckfuckfuck! ran continuously through Owen’s mind.

He felt the pack’s instincts, flaring and abating as they battled with the natural reaction of prey in their midst. They knew humans were off limits, but the playfulness was there.

*Let’s see what happens.*

*Just a little nibble.*

*Make him scream.*

Their voices were in his head, whispering sharply, wanting more. It was like a teenager’s dare, to see what would happen if they pushed a little more, pulled a little there.

Owen’s whistled pierced the air, loud enough to surpass their chittering, and four pairs of eyes swung around to look at him.

“Echo, off!” Owen ordered, hand gesturing sharply as he kept an eye on everyone else.
He felt the imbalance, the instinct warring against the knowledge that humans were off limits.

This one didn’t feel right.

This one was…

*Trespasser!* Delta hissed.

*Impersonator!* Charlie agreed viciously. *Usurper!*

*Unwanted,* Echo agreed.

He was bad. His energy was bad. He was a bad taste, a bad smell. He had attempted to copy the alpha and the pack had reacted accordingly.

Blue was the most emotionally mature, but right now she was the alpha of the hunt and a beta who, while aware that killing was a no-go, waited for the alpha to handle matters.

“Echo, no!” Owen called, tugging at the bond and catching her a little off-balance.

Echo trilled again, reluctantly stepping away.

Delta shot forward and Owen’s barked “Eyes on me!” stopped her almost mid-step, head whipping around and growling in dismay.

“Don’t give me that!” he snapped at her.

She bared her teeth.

She wanted a piece of that.

She wanted to nip and tug a little.

She wanted to see what happened.

This was an intruder and he had played with them, treated them as docile sheep, not the apex predators they were. There had been no respect, there had been the wrong energy, and now they were all vying for a chance to show the trespasser where he went wrong.

“Delta,” Owen warningly, then he whistled as Charlie edged closer. “Charlie, let him be! No!”

He reached out, his mind fracturing along predetermined breaking points, racing toward four specific points like heat-seeking missiles to their targets, as he assumed control of his pack, establishing himself as the alpha, battling against the powerful tidal wave that was pack mentality against one human mind.

An alpha’s mind.

He had done this so often before, knew them all intimately, and it wasn’t difficult to sink into his beta’s mind and have her stand down.

It was multi-tasking of such a high degree, he doubted anyone would believe him that it was possible.

He was five individuals, his own mind an anchor, but not as much as Blue’s was. She was his lifeline not to lose himself. His own mind was the haven he had to return to, supported by the pack.
It was interactive.

It was woven together, unbreakable, like a new kind of symbiotic organism. He wouldn’t be able to do this without the pack.

It was his greatest strength and his greatest weakness in one.

They are his first line of defense against an attack on his mind, but right now that line of defense needed to be reined in and rebalanced.

_On me!_ he broadcast evenly.

Blue looked at him, then inclined her head in acceptance and approval of how he was handling himself and the pack matter.

Delta fought him, never happy with his presence.

_Delta! Stand down! Now!_

She shook her head and stepped away, like she was trying to dislodge him, but she wasn’t aggressive any more.

“Good girl,” he murmured. “It’s okay. Just stand down. We’ll be okay.”

She huffed.

Charlie was unhappy about missing the chance to just nibble a little. He gave her a little push and she backed down, clicking to herself.

Echo cowed, chirping, head lowering submissively. She listened to their alpha and his strength was keeping her in her place.

Mason suddenly twitched and Delta’s attention was on him, lips peeling back from her teeth, a cold, knowing, chillingly murderous grin.

Owen pulled at the invisible line that was taught and ready to snap; his mind to hers.

“Del-ta!”

Their eyes met. She was hiss-breathing, furious.

_Intruder! Not-pack! He dared to assume he is the alpha! He is not! He needs to be taught!_

“I know, girl. And he won’t be back. No one will. Not again.”

Owen had by now moved between the still mostly unconscious Mason and his pack. Even for him that wasn’t a walk in the park. He knew they could still lash out physically, their adrenaline too high, their aggression finding no outlet, and he was human after all.

Blue looked at her pack. She rumbled and finally slid forward, lithe and predatory, movements fluid, quick, like lightning. She seemed to flow around him, physically and mentally, his back-up and anchor, and she barked at her pack sisters.

Delta snarled back, claws flexing. Echo had retreated, accepting the alpha’s decision, and Charlie was simply waiting how this balanced out.
Owen concentrated on Delta, Blue’s presence so very physical, all he had to do was just shift half an inch and he would feel her warmth against his own skin.

Delta was like a disquiet lake, ebbing toward him, then retreating, wanting the intruder, but deferring to the alpha the very next breath. She was torn, claws gouging the ground, and when she finally took another step back, she did it while snapping at Echo, frustrated.

*Delta. I know. Just… slow. Eyes on me. Concentrate on me.*

She finally, finally lowered her head. She actually actively reached out to touch her alpha’s mind, rebalance herself.

*Get him out of here!* she snarled.

As much as he wanted to touch her physically, pat her side, stroke her jaw, it wasn’t the time for that.


Echo was already following that order, Charlie grumbling at her sister as Delta continued to hiss in displeasure, but Blue’s bark had her trot off.

Owen didn’t relax, aware that while Blue was right beside him, his strong beta, she was also just as much affected by the spoiled hunt as everyone else. He felt her talons brush along his pants.

No danger.

Just a touch.

He placed one hand on the bony fingers, his breathing even, his mind balanced, his energies level. A quiet center, their anchor, giving them what was needed.

“Go,” he told her quietly.

*Hunt.*

“Chase your sisters. Delta could use a little rough tumbling. I’ll see about getting everyone out of here for you to stretch your legs later.”

She hummed, still tense, and he glanced at her. The yellow eyes were narrowed, the pupils slits, her lips pulled back slightly from sharp teeth, and she curled her curved talons with nervous energy. She was looking at the unconscious student like he was still on the menu.

Owen breathed slowly, centering himself more, energy calm and assertive, pushing the tension away.

Blue.

She turned her head to look at him. *Alpha.*

*Yes, alpha. And you’re my beta. You did good. All of you.*

The last was spread out over the bond and he heard yips and whistling calls from deeper inside the paddock, from beyond trees and bushes that hid the pack.

*He won’t be back,* she stated.
Owen smiled humorlessly. No, he won’t. Ever. No one will. This was the final straw. Go. I’ll handle the rest.

Blue pushed her head briefly against his shoulder, warmth against warmth, and Owen thought he heard feared whispers and gasps from somewhere, but he ignored the world and concentrated only on her.

*The alpha protects*, he told her. *It’s what I do.*

She hummed, then sprinted off and was swallowed by the bushes.

Owen was suddenly alone, with only an unconscious student at his feet, and nothing else to distract him. He looked at the young man for a long second, taking in his soiled clothes, the tears in the fabric, but there was no blood. He heard someone come closer and he knew it was Barry. No one else would enter the paddock and no one else had ever been allowed to, aside from Alan, who had declined the standing invitation.

“Get him out of here, Barry,” Grady said, watching the back paddock, just in case Delta decided to test his limits.

“Medical’s on the way. As is Carter. Actually, he’s just pulling up.”

Owen sighed explosively. “I’ll deal with him. You get that one,” he gestured at Mason, “and his little friend out of here. All other appointments are cancelled. No one is to come here. No one, Barry!”

Barry looked at him, gauging his state of mind, it seemed, then he nodded. “Gotcha. I’ll call management.”

“Don’t bother. Claire’s first on my list right now. Just send back whoever thinks it’s a good idea to drive here for gossip and selfies. No exceptions right now. The pack’s on edge.”

Barry nodded, eyes on him with a knowing expression. “So is the pack alpha. You think you can deal with security?”

“I can deal with Dan Carter, yes. Anyone else better not ask the stupid questions,” he growled.

And then he stalked off, more like the alpha raptor he was than a pissed-off human being, and whoever had flocked toward the paddock parted in front of him.

Carter was right outside the paddock gate, face a mask, though a scowl stole over his almost granite features. He was flanked and backed-up by a whole team, all armed to the teeth, but no one took a step forward or back when Owen approached.

Owen gestured at him to follow him.

He needed to be away from Mason Green when the guy woke up.

He might just strangle him.

tbc...
“Walk me through it.”

Dan Carter, chief of security of Jurassic World and the rest of the island according to the job description, had replaced the late Vic Hoskins. With his arrival a fresh wind had blown through the ranks of the security. He wanted a cooperation between his units and Owen Grady’s pack, who were, as he had said, Isla Nublar’s very own guard dogs.

Vicious, lethal, unforgiving guards who happened to be extremely territorial.

And their territory was the whole island.

Owen had found the man was not at all like his predecessor, which had been a huge plus, and the pack had accepted him as an ally and a friend.

They had shared more than one beer, had spent more than one evening sitting outside Owen’s house, watching the pack.

Now he looked at Owen with a neutral expression as the alpha paced up and down, too much energy coursing through him. Owen had no idea if it was his own, because he hadn’t been able to punch Mason Green, or if it was backlash from the pack.

He finally stopped.

“Soda?” Grady offered.

“As long as you don’t stall.”

“Not stalling. I need something to drink.”

Carter accepted a soda, then nodded at Owen. “Go.”

And Owen told him what had happened.

Dan was silent when he was done, blue-gray eyes cool, expression unreadable.

“Alright.”

Grady raised his eyebrows. “Alright?”

Carter shrugged. “I got your statement. I got Barry’s. Dundee was there to witness most of it. That girl, Patricia, told me a few things already. I’ll have the videos. I have the logs from the gates.”

“Alright,” Owen echoed, a humorless smile lifting a corner of his mouth.

The security cameras surveilling the raptor paddock had been mandatory with the arrival of the students. He would keep them, but the material wouldn’t be streamed directly to the control center. It would be stored on the servers that also saved the restricted area’s camera feeds.

“Do me a favor, Owen, keep a low profile for now.”

He raised an eyebrow. “What.” It wasn’t a question.
“Give me twenty-four hours. Then you and the pack can go run. That’s the time I need to comb through the material and talk to every witness again.”

Owen scowled.

“Owen, please.”

“Twenty-four hours.”

Carter lifted one corner of his mouth into a what went for a smile for him on a bad day. “Maybe twenty-six, depending on how long Lorenzo can run on coffee and Red Bull alone.”

Owen mirrored the not-really smile. “Gives me some time to call Claire and yell at Masrani.”

“You do that. What about the pack?”

“They’ll be good.”

“Good.” Carter got to his feet. “Tell them thanks for not killing the moron.”

Owen chuckled. “I will.”

*

Claire looked up when the door to her office was opened almost violently and Owen Grady stormed into the sunlit room.

“The program ends now!” he snarled. “Right now! This moment! Whoever you have lined up to parade through my pack’s enclosure, cancel it! I’ll kick their asses off the property myself if I see anyone, and I mean anyone, who hasn’t been cleared by me!”

Claire leaned back in her chair and folded her hands. “Sit, Owen. Sit down, take a deep breath.”

His hands were on his hips, face reflecting an anger rarely ever seen when it came to anything outside the welfare of his pack. Owen wasn’t a volatile man, even if he was the alpha of a velociraptor pack. Actually, he was rather grounded, well-balanced, and level-headed.

“Sit, please,” she repeated.

He plopped down on the visitor chair and scrubbed hand through his hair.

“I take it something happened with one of the students?”

His expression was enough, but Claire needed an incident report.

“Talk.”

“We have safety drills. He have trainings. Masrani and you said those coming out to the paddock are the best and the brightest. I can overlook the guy who wanted selfies with a raptor and got too close. I can’t overlook, ignore or accept Mr. Mason Green walking into the paddock, thinking he is the next dog whisperer, convinced his very aura and presence is enough to take command of a full-grown wild animal! A velociraptor, Claire!”
Her lips became a tight line and she mentally went through the students’ resumes. There had been only a few that had been cleared to study the raptors. Mason Green had come with very good grades and a lot of potential.

“What happened to him?”

“Aside from a scare and a few bruises?”

She nodded.

“He thought I was exaggerating the danger of the pack, that they were actually docile because I could handle them so well, and that everything else was just a hoax. The pack didn’t agree with the energy he projected, his assumptions that he was above them in the chain of command, and they jumped him. Three hundred pounds of raptor leave a mark on the human body when they land on someone’s back.”

Claire winced a little.

“He walked into the enclosure!” Owen repeated, the words exploding out of him like a vicious snarl. “He disregarded every basic safety rule! Every. Single. One! You know he would be dead and in very small pieces if this hadn’t been my pack!”

“Yes, I do. I’m glad it was the pack, not the t-rex or the baryonyxes.”

“Or a bunch of pachys fighting over a good sun spot! Hell, Claire!” Owen shot up and started to pace, like he was full of energy and unable to express it.

His movements were lithe. He seemed to stalk up and down in front of the floor-to-ceiling windows, and Claire knew he was channeling the pack right now.

“Carter’s trying to find out how he got his hands on the codes. My codes! He hacked the locks, Claire! He pranced around the enclosure after breaking into my property! I’m pulling the plug on this! Completely! No second chances!”

“Are you sure?”

He glowered at her. “Yes. Very much so. I told Masrani that I’m giving this six months or until we have a severe incident. The first time it was just an accident. Getting a claw stuck in your clothes because you get too close to the fence is nothing compared to triggering the hunting reflex and having teeth impressions in your skin!”

“Teeth?” she echoed, shock slipping into her voice.

Owen groaned and dropped his head, hands still on his hips. “Yeah. Echo had her jaws next to his neck and left two impressions. I think he fainted around that time.”

“Owen…” she sighed.

“He’s alive. You’ll get the report from Carter and medical. He was there when we got Green out. He had first dibs at debriefing me.” He quirked one corner of his mouth in a humorless smile. “Basic rules, right? Any incident at the raptor enclosure warrants the chief of security’s presence. Carter has the tapes from the cameras and he took statements from Barry and Mick.”

“Alright. I need to see all of those. Then I’ll decide.”
“No, Claire. Not then. It ends right now. No one is coming tomorrow or the day after that, or the rest of the week. My rules. We’re back to the former list of accepted visitors. Everyone else: my choice!”

Claire studied his tense stance, the tightness around his eyes and mouth, and the hard expression in Owen’s eyes. Cold, hard, unyielding.

The alpha.

She knew there was no reasoning now or in the near future. If everything Owen had just said was true, and she had no doubt, the intern program for the raptors would be scrapped. No exceptions. Because of one moron with a death wish.

“How is the pack?” she wanted to know.

Owen relaxed a little and a small smile crossed his lips. “Dealing like they always deal with such things: it happened. They reacted according to instinct. They didn’t kill a human, just like their alpha told them. They are also a lot more balanced than their alpha currently is.”

Claire walked over to him, smiling. “I think their alpha is very well balanced.” At Owen’s raised eyebrows she added, “You didn’t kill the guy yourself.”

“Oh, but it was close, Claire. So very close.”

“Where is Mr. Green now?”

“Under Dr. Svensson’s professional care. And under guard. Dan says he’ll escort him off the island the moment he’s mobile. My first estimate is: a dozen bruises, maybe a pulled muscle or two, most like psychological trauma, and in bad need of fresh clothes.”

Claire nodded, giving him a tiny smile. “You should go back to your girls, Owen. Maybe take some time out.”

“Carter needs to clear me first, but the bags are packed.”

She smiled. “Somehow I knew that. Take a few days, Owen. Relax. Unwind. I’ll have everything by then and talked to Mr. Masrani.”

“Claire, I’m serious. No one else anymore. I’m not going to fold for any reason.”

She knew that. She knew when Grady was serious and right now he was very serious.

Owen left her office and Claire immediately called their chief of security. She wanted the statements and she wanted the videos. Now!

*

Laurel cornered him when he was just past Margaritaville and dragged him over to one of the reserved tables. It was along the back, not really with a good view of the Main Street, and too close to the kitchen for tourists to argue with the wait staff about sitting down where a ‘reserved’ sign told them to do otherwise.
“They attacked an intern?” she said, voice almost a hiss, eyes wide with shock.

Wow, word travelled fast, Owen mused.

“No. They played with him.”

And then he related the whole story to his friend, who listened with wide eyes and a growing understanding.

“Well, hell!” she murmured, nodding at the waitress who had brought them both cold, non-alcoholic drinks. The virgin margaritas. “If he had pulled a stunt like that anywhere else, he’d be dino chow.”

“Yep.”

“How stupid can you be?”

“Plenty. Second intern in the five months it’s been running. They see me work and think it’s that easy. I had plenty stupid remarks about raptors being not so dangerous at all.”

She groaned.

“I told Claire I’m ending this today. I can’t vouch for anyone’s safety, Laurel. Raptors aren’t tame! The pack are not cute little bunnies! They are apex predators and someone just walked through three key-pad secured gates!”

“We all know that. None of the animals are, whether they are micros or apatos.”

“Green’s been a pain in the ass since he arrived, telling the others that anyone can do this trainer job, that he wouldn’t need an hour to make them run in circles. None of the others took him seriously.” Owen sighed and wished his drink wasn’t non-alcoholic. “No clue how he got his grades, but he hasn’t been to any animal behavioral science class as far as I can judge it.”

“Think he’ll sue?”

“If he does, he won’t get far. We have the video. We have the gate log. He walked through three locked and coked doors, knowing what he was doing, and he taunted the raptors. He provoked the attack and if not for the fact that they listen to me, even when they’re hunting, he’d be very, very dead.”

Laurel squeezed his arm. “Will you be okay? All of you?”

Owen nodded. He hadn’t talked to Masrani yet, but it was next on his agenda.

“I’m off. Want to grab a drink or ten? If you want company, Serena would probably be a good drinking buddy, too.”

He chuckled. “I’m good.”

“For company or drinks?”

“For company. I think you are enough.”

“Why, thank you, Mr. Grady.”

He smiled. “You know what I mean. I’m a light-weight. Getting hopelessly pissed isn’t good for
Owen returned just before nightfall, having reasonably quieted down after the day’s events and his explosion in Claire’s office. It had helped that he had taken the long route back.

It would have helped more if the pack had been there with him.

Now he stood inside the paddock. Everything was deserted and as quiet as he was used to. No awed whispers, no mutters about this being just a stupid show. No watchers.

He felt the girls with him, more relaxed than when this had started. They had never really liked so many strangers around them, but since their alpha had told them to behave, they had. And they had gotten some entertainment out of it, too.

Owen centered himself, let the tension flow away.

He had told the students about energy, about projecting themselves, introducing themselves to the animals they worked with. One of the few who had scoffed at that had been Mason Green.

Blue was the first to approach him while the others stood a few feet away, a little uncertain, feeling the alpha’s still slightly unbalanced energy. The pack was aware that what had happened today had been wrong. Extremely wrong. It would never happen again.

“Not your fault, girls,” Owen murmured and let Blue brush against his outstretched palm, cupping her cheek. “So not your fault. Actually, you did everything as I taught you.”

Blue purred, eyes closing, pushing into his touch. He felt something inside of him come undone, knots unfurling. Blue was his beta; Blue was part of him. She did something to him no one else had ever managed.

Her purr intensified, little trills underneath the rumbles.

Echo chirped, but she was eying the higher-ranked Delta and Charlie. Charlie finally walked forward, snuffling, followed by an almost reluctant Delta, who nevertheless pushed against her alpha like a cat seeking scratches.

Owen smiled and did just that.

*Forgiven?*

“You didn’t do anything wrong, Delta. None of you did.”

Echo finally trilled and joined the others. Owen rubbed over her neck, murmuring reassurances.
The bond was alive with all four seeking his closeness. His own mind enveloped them as they embraced him in turn. He sank into them like a cushion, his safety-net, their balance and stability in turn.

“Nothing will happen,” he whispered. “And there will be no more visitors.”

Delta huffed a soft question and Owen chuckled.

“Barry knows how to behave, Delta. He’s one of the few exceptions.”

Echo nosed against his side, almost frantic as she let her own distress wash into the connection.

“Oh, Echo, girl.” Owen wrapped an arm around her neck and hugged her briefly. “Alan is my best friend. He’s never just a guest or one of the assigned students. You know he will be back.”

She whined.

“And he’s allowed to. He knows not to walk in here and think you’re circus ponies or trained poodles.”

Charlie’s head reared abruptly and she gave an offended hiss. Owen patted her nose.

“No, you don’t look like a pony or a poodle. Far from it. No fur, for one.”

She bared her teeth, like the grin of a shark.

“Fearsome. I agree.”

She huffed.

“Very,” Owen told her, chuckling.

Blue seemed to twine around him, against his back, head raised over his left shoulder and purring reassuringly.

*They won’t be back. The others. The disturbance.*

“No, they won’t be.”

Relief and happiness from the pack coursed through him.

“And we’ll be out of here for some necessary time-out the moment this has been handled.”

*Good,* Blue commented, leaning her cheek against his.

Owen closed his eyes. He let himself fall, felt their physical strength against his body, felt Blue’s possessive nature of her alpha. Their rumbles, hums and purrs reverberated through his whole body.

When they finally released him, the bond felt stable, Owen was his relaxed, balanced self again, and the tension had finally dissipated. Blue followed him to the gate.

*Trust Carter to do the right thing. Trust Claire.*

*Do you?* he wanted to know.

*They know harm to the pack harms the alpha. Taking the alpha away will destroy the pack.*
He nodded.

None of this was their fault; his fault.

She pushed her nose into his neck, blowing warm air over his skin. Owen wrapped his arm around her muzzle, soaking up her strength.

“We’ll be fine,” he murmured.

They would be.

He believed in it.

They knew it.

tbc...
Her shoes clicked loudly on the hard floor, announcing her presence before she was even around
the corner.

Claire Dearing hadn’t been to Medical all too often since she had become park operations manager,
thank god, but when she had had to be here, it had mostly involved serious injuries or her friend
Owen Grady.

This time it was connected to Owen, but he wasn’t the one in an examination room, bleeding, with
broken bones or worse. This time it was an intern.

Mason Green. Son of Henry William Green, self-made man who had worked hard getting to where
he was today, founding a successful chain of restaurants called On The Menu. Claire had been to
one or two, found the food tasteful and affordable, the menu small and changing every day
according to what the chef had found on the markets.

Henry was a reasonable man, aware where he had come from, and a friend of Masrani. His son
wasn’t. The boy thought money defined the world, made him better, gave him power. There had
been several complaints about him already, especially since he threw his nonexistent weight
around.

Interns were treated the same wherever they came from, whatever their parents did for a living,
how much money they had. There was no VIP treatment.

Carter was at her side, a black-clad, silent shadow, still armed, still looking like he was about to go
into battle. He was only wearing his side-arm, not the assault rifle, but even without any visible
gun he would be fear-inspiring. He commanded respect through his posture alone, and he radiated
silent threat.

Right now Claire was all for that image. While she projected calm composure, inside she was
screaming mad. In the time it had taken to get here, Carter had briefed her on what had really
happened at the raptor paddock, too. She had wanted his opinion and he had given it to her, without
showing her footage.

Then the footage had come in form of brief video clips on a tablet.

And Claire had wanted to physically drag Mason Green off the island herself. By his ears, since
grabbing him by his private parts might be considered sexual harassment.

“Maybe I should have acted sooner,” she murmured.

“Complaints are normal,” Carter said matter-of-fact. “You get them from everyone who starts
working here, probationary or as an intern. We followed up on them and Mr. Green’s complaints
were unfunded. Especially concerning his treatment by his supervising trainers. He complained
about a lack of respect and their inadequacy. No one else lodged complaints. Maybe he should have been pulled off the list for the raptor program the moment he stood out this negatively. I heard DD is a good way to get back at morons like him.”

Claire almost laughed. DD was dung duty, which meant cleaning up after the animals. Mucking stables was never fun, especially when it concerned predators. And the Aviary was the worst.

“Annika,” she greeted the doctor who was waiting for them.

Svensson looked serious, rather grim, and from the crossed arms and the steep line between her eyebrows, she was in no better mood than Claire. She simply showed it openly.

“Hello, Claire, Mr. Carter.” She nodded at the chief of security. “Your men have already taken up positions. While I would normally protest such posturing, right now I want to just hug you.”

Carter’s eyebrows climbed. Claire found herself smiling despite the situation.

“How is Mr. Green?”

“Aside from a few bruises and maybe one pulled muscle, he is completely fine. I’ve seen keepers and trainers with worse after getting bowled over by an enthusiastic baby. Mr. Green seems to think he is dying and only stopped his screaming and crying when security showed up. Good choice, Mr. Carter. Where did you find them? A steroid lab?”

Carter smiled humorlessly. “He’s naturally big. And predestined for such jobs.”

“My niece cried less with a scabbed knee. She’s three. That guy… he’ll be out of here the moment my signature is under the release.”

That bad. Huh. Well, Claire figured it eased her job, though.

“He won’t be kept here over night,” Annika went on. “I can’t guarantee one of my nurses or doctors wouldn’t sedate him just to stop the words coming out of his mouth.” Her face reflected nothing but distaste. “I should stay neutral as a doctor, but I know Owen Grady, I know his work, I know what he does to ensure everyone at the paddock is safe. I’d like to sedate Mr. Green, too. And you never heard me say that, Mr. Carter.”

“I keep getting this ringing in my ears,” was Carter’s dead-pan reply.

“I’d like to talk to him,” Claire stated.

“I think he’d like a bunch of lawyers to sue our asses off. I think there will be yelling. If it gets too much, let me know. We have a good psychiatrist who might just lock him away for delusions and whatever disorder we can find,” Annika told her with a nasty tone to her voice. “Room 3. Have fun.”

“I want Grady fired!” Green screamed the moment Claire walked into the examination room.

A mountain of a man, clad in the black security outfit, nodded at her and Carter. He was at least two heads taller than Claire, with dark hair and dark eyes, and looked like a professional surfer. His square features didn’t so much as twitch at the outbreak from Green.
“Mr. Green,” Claire greeted him calmly. “My name is Claire Dearing, if you might recall. We met the first day you were hired as an intern by Masrani Global.”

Mason looked pale, had a bruise on his forehead, but otherwise there were no visible marks. The rest was hidden underneath the unflattering hospital gown. Claire had no idea who the nurse in charge of Mr. Green was, but she wanted to shake her hand and laugh with her. The gown was bright pink with yellow duckies on it.

“I know who you are!” he huffed. “And I want Grady’s ass fired! He nearly killed me!”

“That is not within your power to demand.”

“He sent those monsters after me!!”

“Mr. Green, you broke into a dinosaur paddock. The raptor paddock, to be precise. You encroached on a wild animal’s territory after explicit warnings given to you multiple times. That is breaking and entering, coupled with animal endangerment.”

“The only one endangered was me! Those things wanted to eat me! And Grady gave us the access key!”

“Mr. Grady has done no such thing. We have the access logs. You used an InGen emergency override.”

“Which he gave us!” Green whined.

“Most certainly not.” Claire nodded at Carter. “Mr. Carter is the head of security. You might remember him from the basic orientation courses. He is in charge of those emergency procedures. Who has access to the overrides, Mr. Carter?”

“Myself, my second-in-command, Lieutenant Hamada, and yourself, Ms. Dearing.”

Mason looked even more pale, but that could be because of his shocking morning.

“So for you to have this code to access a locked gate with a cycling security code only known to Mr. Grady himself, you must have stolen it. That would be theft with a good side of industrial espionage.”

He gaped. “No! I didn’t… I got them from someone else. I didn’t steal anything.”

“Who was that person then?”

He seemed to think hard and fast for a second. “Tomasz. Gregory Tomasz. He knows someone and he got the codes to me.”

“Why would he do such a thing?”

Mason shrugged. “How should I know?”

Claire’s eyes narrowed a little. “Let me rephrase that question, Mr. Green: you were the one who entered the raptor paddock, unaccompanied. You typed in the code. You claim Mr. Tomasz stole the codes and gave them to you. Why would he give the code to you? Did you pay him?”

“No! He just… he just gave them to me. Just like that, right?”

Her expression didn’t shift and Carter’s brows lowered a little. “We will investigate your claims,
Mr. Green, and let me reassure you, the truth will come out. False accusations are not to be taken lightly, especially with the already long list of offences you have committed. You either hacked the system personally or you had someone do it for you,” Claire stated coolly. “Breaking into a private corporation’s network, stealing access codes, and who knows what else you downloaded while you were in there, that is industrial espionage.”

“It wasn’t me! I told you! Tomasz was the one!”

“Maybe it was you. Maybe it was someone else, someone you paid. We will find out which it is. But even if Mr. Tomasz acquired the codes illegally, it was you who entered the paddock without a certified official accompanying you. Unlawful entry. You signed a contract when you started here. It states that no intern, student or working student is allowed inside the dinosaur enclosures without an official present. No exceptions.”

“Grady allowed us to go in there!”

“I have statements from several of your colleagues that contradicts that sentence. Even if anyone of my people had said so, it would be up to you to follow the rules and not enter. You should not keep digging your own grave deeper than it already is, Mr. Green.”

“I’m seriously hurt! I’m going to sue this park and ruin it!” Green yelled all of a sudden. “I might be dying!”

Claire wondered if he would start frothing soon. He looked like it. Mason Green was becoming more and more of a spoiled child.

“You have bruises,” she told him, matter-of-fact.

“I could be bleeding internally. Those animals are vicious and need to be put down!”

Carter’s expression remained stony, as did the troopers who was still guarding Green. Claire wanted to slap the guy and she knew she was probably showing it.

“If the velociraptors had truly attacked, you wouldn’t be here complaining. We might not even be talking ever again. A velociraptor doesn’t take hostages. You were told about the raptor paddock, the dangers and the correct behavior. You, like every intern and student, participated in mandatory safety training. There was an equally mandatory extra segment about velociraptors.”

“No one told me about that!”

“I have your signature.”

“Faked! I was never told…”

Claire silenced him with an icy look. “Six witnesses place you in that training. As well as electronic logs required as you sign in every day. Please, Mr. Green, be reasonable.”

“I’ll sue!” he exclaimed. “You will go down! Hard!”

“I’m looking forward to seeing you try,” she replied neutrally.

“My parents will hear about this!”

“They already have.”

He flinched. “W-what?”
“You contact information in case of an emergency or an accident lists your parents. I called them, gave them detailed information on what occurred here. Your father is a very reasonable man, I have to say. He asked very specific questions and finally expressed his disappointment in your.”

Green was pale as a sheet now.

“He has arranged for your flight home. You’ll be on the first ferry out of here. Mr. Ahulani here will accompany you to the dock, and wherever else you might have to go in the meantime. Even the bathroom. He will eat with you and he will sleep in the same room. He is your shadow. Your personal belongings will be packed and shipped separately.”

“You can’t do this! I’m the victim here!”

Claire gave him a thin smile. “I believe that there have been victims here, but you are not one of them. The intern program has been officially cancelled for the time being. They have to thank you for that, Mr. Green. Your security clearance has been officially revoked. You will get a review of your time here in the mail.”

He opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water, no words coming out.

“Your medical file will be sent to your personal physician for possible later treatment. Please be aware that everything that happened in the paddock has been recorded. All medical procedures following your removal from the raptor paddock have been reviewed by three separate individuals and signed. The file is tamper-proved. I wish you a good journey home, Mr. Green.”

“You can’t do this!” he screeched.

“I already have.”

When the door closed after them, Mason’s personal guard still inside and not leaving him out of their sight, Claire expelled a sharp breath.

She looked at Carter.

He smiled humorlessly. “Yeah,” he agreed to her unspoken expletive. “He’ll be a handful.”

“I think your guys can handle him.”

“Roy has five kids, ranging from six to seventeen. He knows how to handle a brat like him.”

Claire chuckled. “That’s special training,” she agreed. “I’ll have someone pack up his belongings. I’d like to have two witnesses present to make sure we don’t get a complaint about broken or missing things.”

“I’ll have Hamada be there.”

“I think one of the conservationists can be bothered with it, too. They might just be standing in line. Thanks, Dan.”

“You’re welcome. And, Ms. Dearing? Well done.”

She inclined her head at the praise.
Claire left Medical after a brief nod at Annika. She felt in need of a stiff drink.

* * *

Alan was there the next morning, looking grim, holding out a breakfast bag from Winston’s. At seven in the morning, Owen had been up and about for two hours now, running on three cups of coffee and a cream cheese bagel.

“How bad is it?” he asked as he pulled out Winston’s version of an egg-and-bacon muffin. It was huge, very tasty and probably unhealthy as fuck.

He didn’t care.

Alan shrugged. He had a large to-go cup in one hand, munching on a plain croissant. “Claire is unavailable. Carter is holed up in the control center, probably combing through the evidence. Security is extremely tight. I needed to show my credentials to just get onto the road leading here.”

Owen chuckled.

“How is the pack handling it?” Alan asked.

“Good. Really good. Then again, for them it was nothing extraordinary. They defended their territory and put an usurper of the alpha’s rank into their place."

Grant’s eyebrows rose a fraction. “They defended your place with them,” he echoed, not even adding the question mark.

He shrugged. “Yep."

There was a scuffle from the paddock, then a bellow.

“Delta is spoiling for a fight,” Owen explained. “The moment Carter gives me the green light we’ll be out there and running. They need to work off the energy,“

“No kill,” Alan murmured.

“It’s not about the kill. It’s about pent-up aggression without an outlet. They would never have killed him, but he fainted and robbed the pack of some bullying."

Alan gave a breathy laugh. “So you five are stuck here at the moment?“

“For twenty-four hours. After that I’m taking them for a hard run. They need this, Alan. Actually, I need this, too.“

*
The cameras had come down. Installed only because of the interns, students and working students, Owen disconnected them from the live feed, then took down the whole construction. They had served their purpose.

At the time it had been a matter of safety concerns and security. Strangers would be traipsing around the paddock area and Carter had been less than amused about the lack of general surveillance. He had understood Owen’s concerns, but he had been adamant.

So the cameras had been installed.

Five months.

Owen was only too happy to take them down and pack them up.

Barry had been a silent helper, leaving the paddocks to Owen as he took care of the property around it.

“Good thing they were there when they were needed,” Devoe finally said when they closed the lid of the trunk.

Lorenzo would pick up his precious cameras and he had promised to look into reconfiguring them for the restricted area.

Owen grunted.

Yes, it had been a good thing, but he hadn’t really felt well with the general idea of getting recorded doing what he did. Carter had promised him the feeds would be on a separate server, that no one would watch live, but the feeling had remained.

“Okay, done.” Barry straightened and looked around the property. “All clean and back to normal, hm?”

“Can’t say I’ll miss them,” Owen growled.

Barry raised an eyebrow. “Not all were bad.”

“Nope. But the bad ones stand out and remain in your memory the longest.”

“One guy destroyed the chance for a dozen others to study raptors. Too bad.”

“They have twenty other species. The moment Carter renews their security clearance.”

None of the interns were currently allowed anywhere other than where normal tourists could go. Owen had no idea what the fall-out of the whole fiasco would be, but he would make damn sure his girls wouldn’t suffer for this idiot.

“They all understand.” Barry’s expression was serious. “I talked to some in the last hours. They’re mad as hell at Green. Almost all stepped forward to vouch for you, how you handled protocol and safety.”

Owen gave him a tiny smile. “Yeah, well, thanks.”

They carried the trunk into the shed and Barry accepted a cold drink. Sitting together, watching the raptors mill around or just doze in the shade, Owen felt some of the tension drain away.
He had his paddock back.
Even if it had happened through a harebrained accident that might have repercussions just yet.

Barry left an hour later after receiving a call from Carter for a follow-up statement of events.
“You’ll be okay,” he said before he got on his ATV. “All of you. I know it.”
Owen nodded and shook his hand. “Good luck.”

He spent the rest of the day going through the camera logs from there restricted area, distracting himself from thinking about Mason Green and his still-burning anger. Two were down with no feeds coming in. Another was graying out. A third was on and off, like a loose wire.

He would have to take a look at that.

Everything else was looking normal. The usual birds, monkeys and lizards. Now and then a compy could be seen nosing around.

He yawned.

Well, Owen would take the pack for a prolonged visit to check on the downed cameras soon.

*

Simon Masrani called him late in the afternoon.
“I heard what happened,” he said.

Impeccably dressed, tie as always missing, the billionaire sat in front of the screen in his office, looking part concerned CEO and part even more concerned investor.

“And you know the consequences.”

“You have one more month, Owen.”

“No. It’s over. It was a trial period and it got shot down a month early. I’m not negotiating another student-intern-whatever visit. My pack, my rules. You gave that vote.”

Masrani inclined his head. “I did. You are the alpha and I have to defer to your judgement here.”

“You saw the tapes, I believe?”

Masrani sighed. “Yes. A very stupid mistake to make.”
“Not a mistake. He wanted to impress his friends, show off and discredit me. He didn’t take this seriously enough. We’re talking predators here, Simon!”

“Very clever predators,” Masrani agreed.

“Wherever you wanted to put him, don’t. He’s a show-off. He wants to shine, be in the limelight. And Mr. Mason Green takes no advice from seniors. Worst mistake ever.”

“I agree. He has already been removed from the possible candidates list. I believe he might be filing a lawsuit against us.”

“Let him.”

Masrani chuckled. “Yes, indeed. He has signed enough papers that whatever he claims he is entitled to, won’t be what he gets. The material collected is without doubt. The raptor enclosure was locked. He was recorded entering a code that changes daily. According to Mr. Carter’s computer expert he didn’t use your code, Owen. It was a safety override, only known to InGen and only accessible for the team leaders. It seems Mr. Green came well-prepared. He was also on site without permission since he didn’t have work that day. There are very clear and detailed recordings of what he did in the paddock and how the pack reacted. My lawyers are having a field day. They have won more with less, and this material is plenty to make a water-tight case. You and the pack are safe.”

Owen breathed a tiny thank you of relief. “Who gave him the code?”

“That is still under investigation. I believe Mr. Green is under the delusion he can make a deal, as he claims, giving us a name in exchange for dropping all other charges.” Masrani’s expression was cool, business-like. “He cannot. There will be no deals.”

“And the program has ended,” Owen stated.

The billionaire nodded. “For you and the velociraptors. Mr. Carter is currently busy checking backgrounds on all other remaining participants of the program. The moment he has cleared them, they’ll be back working in the park. May I ask, what about Mr. Devoe?”

“Yes to occasional assists. No to a permanent position. He’s good, Simon, I agree to that.” Owen drummed his fingers onto the desktop. “He’s not talented. Not a preternatural.”

It wasn’t even a question. He knew the man was not preternatural. Owen had gotten good at recognizing fellow talented people.

“And if he was?”

“Not even then. Too dangerous. Despite their connection to me, the girls have primal instincts. As the alpha I have a direct line to them, able to get to them, but it’s no guarantee that I’m safe, Simon. Not even me.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“I can keep them at bay, but the risk is too great.” Owen leaned back and sighed. “No one works with us but who I say can. I’m the alpha.”

“You are. It’s back to square one then?”

“I wouldn’t say square one. We now know that students and raptors don’t mix. Give them the
flyers or the rex. Or push them off to the petting zoo.”

Masrani chuckled. “I just might.”

“What happened to Patricia? Miss Fisher?”

“Her access has been revoked like all the others, but she is currently restricted to office work on the mainland until we have cleared her of any pending charges in connection to Mr. Green. Would you recommend she return?”

“Not exactly the best time to ask me that, Simon. Ask whoever she worked with before I kicked her out. I might think about her review in a few days.”

Masrani laughed softly. “I will.”

Owen signed off after a little small talk and leaned back, staring at the ceiling.

Owen?

“I’m good,” he mumbled. “And we will be, too.”

tbc...
The auditorium was filled with close to forty interns and students, all whispering or talking in very low voices amongst themselves. The moment Claire entered, silence fell. Heavily.

She looked around, into the serious, expectant and worried face of the men and women who had come here to study, learn and maybe prepare for a job that would be their future.

Claire had decided to dress as she always did: white blouse, white pants, high heels, but today she was wearing a black sleeveless shirt underneath the blouse. She had neither dressed down nor fortified her usual business dress shield.

Carter had followed her, in full uniform, though he wasn’t visibly armed. The tac vest and the all-black look was intimidating, especially on a man who was a natural authority anyway.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Claire greeted them, voice echoing in the auditorium. “Thank you for your time.”

Not that they had anything else to do right now. Their clearance had been revoked for the time being. Aside from spending time in the student labs, the library or just walking around the theme park there was nothing for them to do.

“I believe most, if not all, of you have been informed by now that there was an incident at the raptor paddock.”

There were some grimaces, also some snorts. There was worry in their face again, anger, even a little bit of apprehension.

“As of now the incident is under investigation. Due to the circumstances, Jurassic World has closed all access for every intern and student. We apologize.”

“Mason was an asshole who ruined it for all of us!” a red-head called. Her eyes were sparking with anger.

“We hope to resolve this issue as quickly as possible,” Claire continued. “You have full access to the park as visitors. I’d like to ask you to cooperate with Mr. Carter’s renewal of your clearance. Please refrain from trying to go out to the raptor paddock or contact Mr. Grady in any way. If you would like to leave Isla Nublar, please contact me or my office. We will make arrangements.”

There was a lot of head-shaking and murmurs.

“None of us want to leave,” Gregory stated. “And I mean none. Mason isn’t our representative as a whole. We all want to finish our turns here.”

Claire inclined her head. “That is laudable. For now, use your free time, look at the park in a different way. You will be called individually for the renewal interviews.”

“Is it true that Mason was sacked?” someone else called.

“Mr. Green will be escorted off the island soon.”

“Good riddance!”
“Is the raptor internship program really cancelled?”

“Yes, it is.”

There were disappointed looks, some even close to tears.

“Can we reapply? Maybe as individuals?”

Claire gave the young woman an apologetic smile. “I’m afraid there is no second chance now.”

“Fuck Mason and his stupid as fuck complex! He got us all into a mess he created by being the prick we all knew he was!”

More voice were raised, all cursing Green.

Claire glanced at Carter who was keeping a close eye on the young men and women. The man finally cleared his throat, shifting his stance a little, and all eyes were on him, some a little wide.

“These are the facts,” Claire spoke up, directing their attention back to her. “I hope to resolve the situation quickly, make the rest of your stay here a more positive experience.”

“After what the fucker did…?”

She nearly smiled again. “Thank you for your attention.”

Claire left, only allowing herself a little laugh when the door had closed.

“I like their attitude,” Dan commented. “Interviews will be fun.”

Yes, they truly would be.

* * *

Almost exactly twenty-six hours on the mark Dan Carter dropped by personally to give Owen the all-clear.

“Wow, the chief of security gives me the news personally,” Owen quipped as he pushed his bike out of the shed. “I feel special.”

“You are a special case, Grady. A special case of high maintenance.”

“Gee, thanks. So, I’m free?”

“You were never a prisoner,” was Carter’s dry reply. “Locking you up would result in a pack of raptors tearing down walls.”

“They’re ladies. They would knock,” Owen replied, enjoying the banter.

“Where’s Green?”

“Our Mr. Green has left Isla Nublar this morning. On the first ferry out of here today.”

“That’s at five in the morning,” Owen remarked.
Carter’s grin was downright evil.

Owen laughed, shaking his head. “You have a nasty sense of humor, Dan.”

“Wasn’t my decision to make, though I really didn’t have to look for volunteers to get up and show Mr. Green the way. The men were only too eager. Mr. Ahulani is keeping him company, even after Costa Rican authorities have taken over. Green will probably be extradited to the US, but for now he’s spending some time enjoying the hospitality of a Costa Rican jail.”

“Ouch.”

Dan shrugged. “He broke about a dozen laws and the islands are still only leased, not US soil.” He smirked as he added, “I think the raptors would have gone much easier on him.”

Owen chuckled. From the paddock, Delta gave a sharp bark, her opinion differing.

Carter glanced over to the fence. “Or not. She’s rather spiteful, isn’t she? And holds a grudge like nothing else.”

“Sometimes. Especially with what happened. If he had fallen into the paddock, not even Delta would have given him the time of day. They know humans are stringy, taste awful and there’s too much paperwork for me involved.” Owen quirked a quick smile. “But Mason Green broke in, entered their territory, assumed the alpha position and dared to give them orders. Not a good idea.” He stretched. “Well, I’ll be off then. The pack needs some time away from here.”

“GPS, Owen. I mean it.”

“We’re only going for a few hours of endurance training and aggression therapy on the plains. I’m not going on a week-long trek through the wilderness!”

“GPS,” Carter repeated patiently.

“Yes, mom.”

Dan scowled at him.

“I know it’s for safety reasons and I promise nothing will happen. Forecast is for sunshine only. We’ll be chasing wild chickens and pigs, maybe a few monkeys. Nothing serious.”

Carter rubbed a hand over his short, blond hair. “Geez, I could use some vacation days,” he groaned. “But with what happened it’s a mess right now. Hamada would kill me if I put all of that on his plate.”

Owen gave him a sympathetic look. “Hey, when this is over, or when you got a few days off, let me know. I know a good place with a mean fishing pond, a dirt track, somewhere you can swing a sledge hammer and bring down old buildings, and you can even race a raptor.”

Carter chuckled. “You know, that sounds actually quite nice. I’ll let you know. And Owen? GPS,” Dan reminded him again, making Owen roll his eyes, as he got back into the car. “I’m serious!”

Grady gave him a sloppy salute.
Owen sent his stressed-out friend the ‘hang in there’ cat picture, getting a ‘very funny, Grady’ as a reply.

He smirked.

Owen packed his things for a day out in the grasslands. Food, water, emergency gear, first aid kit for raptors, first aid kit for humans, and put Echo into her harness. She chittered and nosed at his hair as he bent down to finished strapping her in.

“Hey,” Owen laughed. “I know you’re eager, but I have some more stuff to do before we can leave.”

She blew warm air into his hair and he snickered.

An hour later they were on their way, the pack running with him as Owen gunned his bike’s engine, taking the fastest route he could drive without sliding off the road.

Exhilaration rose, the pack happy to stretch their legs, be themselves, and run. Even if the muzzles were on, they were enjoying themselves.

The moment they were deep inside the restricted area, Owen stopped, whistled, fist in the air, and then gestured at them to round up. He removed the muzzles and took the saddle bags off Echo.

“Okay, ladies. Off you go. You know where to find me.”

He got excited yips and whuffling, then Blue darted off, the pack following.

Owen laughed, feeling lighter, more like himself, and it helped that they were out here. This was a place he felt comfortable with.

They ran after their prey, brought down at least one small pig each, and Charlie triumphed over a sneaky monkey.

Owen joined them for a high speed run, in the lead, full throttle, as the raptors did their best to reach full speed.

It was amazing to feel.

It was even more amazing to be them.

Panting, happy, they plopped into the grass, Owen settling down on a boulder and enjoying the warm day.

Blue sky, clouds dotting here or there, a breeze cooling down the pack.

Yeah, they needed this.
It took Carter and his IT team three days to clear every single intern, handing out new passes the moment they were done. In the meantime the young men and women had to go through several safety drills, had to sit through lectures about security protocols, the Dos and Don’ts in Jurassic World, and were confined to the public areas, but without VIP access.

Only a few actually expressed their displeasure at being treated like first year students, just because of Green. Most were too angry for words at their former colleague, venting on social media groups about Mason Green ruining their internship and, on two cases, their final grades.

Claire finally recalled them into the auditorium on day two. She reiterated that what Green had done wouldn’t discredit anyone else, but clearance had to be checked and earned again. Everyone who was here to work on their master thesis, their doctorate or their application for a position in the park wouldn’t receive negative marks. Reviews from other areas in the park had been taken into consideration and the intern program would continue.

A collective sigh of relief could be heard.

Owen’s circle of friends was keeping a close eye on proceedings, down to shadowing Carter until he nearly exploded into Laurel’s face. She just gave him a bright smile.

“I’m not about to arrest Owen Grady, Ms. Shepperd!”

“Good. Because it wasn’t his fault! That moron was a hazard from day one! I have no idea who gave him those grades, but he certainly had no idea what he was doing! Showing off to his friends! Thinking he is better than any of us professionals because he comes from money! Josh comes from money, too, but do you see him prancing around? Owen did everything right and there are witnesses! The guy didn’t even bleed! The girls never touched him and he brought it all on him by himself!”

“Which I am very well aware of.” Carter fixed her with a hard look.

Laurel wasn’t fazed.

“The investigation is on-going,” he found himself saying, teeth only slightly gritted. “Mr. Masrani has set his best lawyers on the case.”

“He is suing Owen?!” she exclaimed.

“He is suing the park, which was to be expected. I doubt he will see a single penny. In my opinion he’ll end up with a fine and possible time. I’ve seen the list of charges against him. Looks very nice.”

The look of satisfaction on her face was almost frightening. “We can all attest to Owen’s character and his safety-mindedness. I have a list.”

Dan held up a hand, almost laughing. “Not necessary.”
“Good. And in case you’re interested, we’re having movie night tonight. With Owen taking some
time-out, how about it?”

Carter blinked at the sudden change in topic. “Thank you, but I have work.”

“At eight in the evening?”

“My shift starts at six.”

Laurel shrugged. “Oh well.”

And then she was gone, heading for the Cretaceous Cruise to tell Reggie what she had found out.

Carter shook his head and headed for the control center. Owen had really good friends, which he
was glad of, but some of them were scary as fuck.

*

Movie night was more or less replaced by a lively discussion, talking about the raptors, Mason
Green, and their island’s very own alpha.

“I would have punched the guy!” Reggie growled. “The moment he so much as twitched, he’d see
my fist coming! Or just kicked him in the nuts! The nerve of that fucker!”

“You girls would have just stepped on him, end of story,” Josh laughed. “And Rexy Sue would
probably have eaten him in two bites.”

“Would serve him right,” Nancy muttered darkly. “What was he thinking?”

“Not much. You know how he kept trying to discredit Owen, talked about everyone like we were
lowly servants and he was the future boss of this park.”

“I was so glad when he sought early transfer out of my area,” Nancy agreed. “He had a god
complex. All that money wasn’t good for him.”

“No one liked him much, not even his fellow students,” Serena said. “Angelica, Julia and Gregory
were quite happy to not see him while they were at the greenhouses. They even came to me today,
apologizing for whatever trouble he caused for any one of us. I’m glad they can all still stay. I told
them I’d gladly have them work for me again.”

There were collective nods. Aside from Green, there had been only one or two others, and even
they had been capable of learning.

“That Mason character should be happy to be alive,” Reggie stated. “Anyone else’s paddock and he
might be dino chow. I wouldn’t even have bet on his survival with Owen around. Having an
aggressive raptor in your face because you want to assume alpha status in a solid, functional pack
like that is usually a death sentence.”

“Wasn’t easy,” Barry spoke up. He had been silently listening and just nodding once or twice until
then. “I think without the bond, without even Blue, he might not have been able to stop Delta from
taking a piece out of the guy. It was frightening to watch. Not sure Owen is aware just what this
looked like from the outside.”
Everyone else nodded.

They knew how close this had been. They were quite aware that for Owen to have held back four adult velociraptors, he had done more than just trust in their training.

“Anyone still up for a movie?” Nancy asked. “Because I could need some rom-com to take my mind off murdering an intern.”

Barry chuckled. “You’d have to stand in a very long line.”

“With four raptors calling dibs,” Laurel joked. “And yes to rom-com!”

There were a few token groans, but they finally settled down, popcorn, beer and nachos ready.

tbc...
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

So life had returned to almost-normal.

Before Interns, as he jokingly called it.

Owen had reassured Nancy that he would still be her so-called wingman when she worked with M. He would still spend time with Reggie and the herbivore herds that were in the Gyrosphere area, as well as along the river cruises. While Nancy was always holding back, unsure where she really stood with the massive mosasaurus, Reggie was in his element with his herds.

For Owen, the work was mostly instinctual. He had never been trained, there was no manual, and what he did was simply try to help a fellow preternatural with their own charges. He learned from Reggie and Nancy, too. He also learned from their animals.

Dr. Gary Themming, moderately talented, too, never asked for any assistance, but he had started to quiz Owen more about what he did and how.

“There’s no recipe for perfection,” Owen told him over the treatment of a sick ankylosaurus who had been heavily sedated. “It’s instinct.”

Themming nodded, injecting a milky liquid into the tube running down the ankyl’s throat. “Hit and miss.”

“Kinda.”

“That’s why there are no books.”

“And the fact that preternaturals like to keep to themselves.”

Gary smiled briefly. He removed the tube and cleaned it, then drew up the antidote for the sedative.

“That and the fact that talented people like to specialize. Horses, dogs, cats… raptors…”

Owen shrugged. He was extremely specialized. Four individuals. No more. Everyone else he felt, the mass of dinosaurs on the island ever-present in the back of his mind, was just background noise.

“But whatever you are to them, at the end of the day they are just animals,” Themming said, injecting the antidote.

He nodded at Owen to get going, because a disoriented ankylosaurus was a pissed-off ankylosaurus. And they were a force to be reckoned with.

“Except yours, right?” the vet added as they climbed into the armored vet mobile. “Not just animals, but not human either.”

Owen didn’t comment. His eyes were on the waking dinosaur. The squat, armored animal huffed, grumbled and snorted, managing to get to her short legs with a speed that spoke of a good metabolism and a lot of willpower.
He could feel her. She was a true fighter, like all of her breed, and she was looking at the vet mobile with open distrust. If not for the sickness still in her, she would most likely have thought about attacking them.

Owen reached out and briefly pushed against her mind. She huffed again, then turned around and walked away, gait a bit unsteady, but she managed.

Themming was busy stowing his gear, then he settled down beside Owen, who had been the one driving.

“One more on the list,” he announced, checking his tablet and typing quickly. “Injured dimorphodon. Flightless at the moment.”

Owen nodded and started the car.

He knew the way to the Aviary in his sleep.

*

The mail came in the morning. The pack was milling around outside, enjoying the warm temperatures. They had returned after a long endurance run, chasing prey, training stealth and stalking yesterday evening, just after sundown. It had been a wonderful day and they had come home pleasantly tired and rebalanced. Like Owen had told Carter, they had just needed some time to run, for him to clear his head.

And he had thought a lot about the situation. Especially with the students and interns. Owen wouldn’t be swayed from his decision that the paddock was now off limits. Even visitors would be limited to those he had personally okayed. Barry, Mick, Zach, yes to them. Peter was a park employee and had proven himself. Alan was a no-brainer.

Echo had agreed hotly that he was to be trusted and should always return.

Owen smiled at that thought, looking at the pack.

Carter was the chief of security and had every right to be there. Claire, as park operations manager, fell into the same category.

Visiting vets, sure.

But working students, no assistants, nothing at all outside the approved.

He had learned his lesson. Mason might have; Owen somehow doubted it. He kept getting CCs from emails to and from lawyers. It read like some soap opera, but there would be no happy end.

Blue had dragged him out of his deep thoughts, inviting him along on a run, and Owen had been only too happy to let go, let his mind fracture, flow to the four members of his pack, and be them.

Just be them.
This morning, Echo had dug up a sand bed and was happily rolling around, giving herself a peeling. Delta was nosing around the outside of the shed. Charlie had hunted a small lizard up a tree and was sitting underneath it, looking up, like a cat waiting for a squirrel to come out and play again. The lizard hardly made for a meal, not even a snack. But it was great entertainment. Blue had chosen the porch as a napping place, a huge, scale rug in front of the door.

She huffed when she caught Owen’s thoughts, neck curling that her head now rested firmly on his lap. She made a nice cushion, warm, firm, soft humming or rumbling noises that worked like a charm to relax him.

The pinging noise of Owen’s tablet had her open amber eyes, curiosity in their depths. Owen scrolled through the inbox to find a rather formal email addressed to him, sent off by Gregory Tomasz.

“Whoa,” he muttered, surprise trickling through him.

It was an apology. A very heartfelt apology in the name of all interns and students who had gone through the raptor paddock experience, and even those who hadn’t but had probably been on a list. An apology concerning the behavior of Mason Green.

Blue gave a quizzical whuffle. She peered at the tablet, unable to read the mail, but she got the emotional reaction from Owen.

“They apologized for the asshole, even though none of them were there or had anything to do with it.”

Blue snorted. They have a pack mentality. The weakest member fell. They stand together, facing you.

He met the cool gaze, Blue’s head at his eye-level, and had to smile. “They’re hardly pack, Blue. If you want to go for analogies, try herd. Following a leader.”

They have no leader. They come as individuals or groups, but they follow no one. You asserted pack leadership over them. One challenged you and us. He was put into his place, she told him matter-of-fact.

There was a bellow from Delta. She had stopped what she had been doing, was looking over to the porch. She radiated a kind of seriousness, agreeing with Blue.

“So they group together and beg the alpha for forgiveness?”

Hm, a novel concept. Well, for a human mind. The raptors found it quite normal.

“Not that it gets them back into the program, because there is no program left to get into.”

Charlie expressed her disappointment, padding over to the porch with a little whine, the lizard forgotten. They hadn’t always been happy about so many strangers, mainly because Owen had to pretend he wasn’t communicating with them on a whole different level, but she had liked the entertainment the interns had provided. Especially the ones who had gotten too close to the fence.

Grady chuckled. “I know you enjoyed it, girl, but I doubt they did.”

She radiated smugness.
The mail was signed by everyone. Owen read it again, then smiled a little. Well, at least Green hadn’t had any supporters.

When he called Claire, she laughed a little.

“Yes, they apologized to every trainer in the park, on Mr. Green’s behalf, and they’re actively participating in the security reevaluation. They’re not all the same as Mr. Green, Owen.”

“I know that. Like I told you before, some of them are rather promising future keepers and trainers.”

“I know. Mr. Masrani will wait for the reviews from all areas to make a decision.”

“Put Gregory Tomasz on top of that list if he wants to stay here, Claire. He’s talented. In many ways.”

She understood the hint. “We will. I think he expressed that wish already. He wants to apply to the metriacanthosaurus paddock.”

“He’d be a great addition.”

“High praise from you, Mr. Grady.”

“Want to hear more over coffee?” he asked slyly.

“If you bring it to the office and don’t mind me working?” she replied easily.

“I’ll bring it to your office, we sit on the outside terrace, you can bring your tablet, I bring the brownies.”

Claire laughed. “Deal.”

*

“How’s life without interns?”

Owen rolled his eyes. “And a good afternoon to you, too, Mr. Carter.”

“Mr. Grady.”

Dan plopped down next to him, in full gear, body armor and all. His sidearm was strapped to his thigh, he was wearing his gloves, and the radio was clipped to his belt.

“I thought you were off duty?” Owen glanced at his wrist watch.

Carter rubbed a hand over his face. His SUV was parked next to the shed, looking like it needed a good wash.

“How’s life without interns?” Owen glanced at his wrist watch.

Carter rubbed a hand over his face. His SUV was parked next to the shed, looking like it needed a good wash.

“I just came off shift and decided to drop by my favorite non-attraction. So, enjoying your time without over-eager students?”

“Three days isn’t much time.” He smirked. “But enough.”
“You might miss making them cry.”

“That was one time.” Another eye-roll. “Stuart Mickler was asking for it.”

“Really.”

Owen shrugged. “You don’t just walk up to a raptor enclosure and do selfies, taunting the animals to get closer for a good shot.”

“Unless you are a brainless tourist. Got those every day at the park.” Dan stretched. “This morning, for example. They find the darnest ways to get where they want to, past cameras and personnel. One actually posed as a trainer, home-made uniform shirt and all, just to get to the metriacanthosaurus. Said he wanted to pet them, because he thinks they’re beautiful and wild.”

“Well, they are beautiful,” Owen amended. “And wild. And highly dangerous. I thought the paddock was currently closed down?”

“It is.” Carter scowled. “The guy said it’s the reason they came here and when it was closed, he wanted another way in. He nearly got eaten. He might still lose a toe or two.” Owen winced.

“Yours just warn people off. The rest doesn’t just play with the food; they eat it.”

“Hence the warning signs.”

Carter sighed. “Hence,” he echoed. “Must be the heat or too many tacos. I got no idea. And it’s not just interns, you see.”

“Nope.”

He stretched. “The moment they get caught, they scream lawsuit. Masrani’s lawyers are getting a run for their money.”

“Masrani has the best. I doubt anyone gets anything out of him.”

Nope, not a lucky guy.

“Anything new on the poachers?” Owen asked.

“We think we found a possible landing site on Sorna. It’s old, has been used before, and it looks like they bailed out of there just recently. The whole island is still locked down, so I’m thinking they have help coming and going.”

Grady frowned. “As in: from our guys?”

“Possible. We found another dead raptor and signs of maybe more killings.”

“Fuck.”

“My thought exactly.”

“They might be hiding on the other islands.”

“We did flyovers, including Nublar. Nothing. Search teams have been checking the coast lines. Nothing.”
“They have to be somewhere, Dan. Unless they operate with a sub.”

It got Owen a wry smile. “Wouldn’t put it past them. Authorities are still on high alert and have been keeping an eye on black market activities. What about your cameras?”

“Picked up nothing and those who went down didn’t show signs of tampering. You can’t think they’d have the balls to come to a tourist island.”

“ Wouldn’t put it past them, but it’s a high risk move. And we haven’t picked up anything.”

Owen nodded slowly.

“Still up for that barbecue this weekend?” Carter asked, the change of topic abrupt, having Owen chuckle.

The barbecue night had been set up by the InGen security teams, inviting not just Owen but also the trainers. It would be set up on Main Street after the park closed today at six. The early closure was because of the inventory run at several locations. It was an annually repeating closure, shutting the park down for three days. Visitors had been informed months in advance and no tickets had been sold for those days.

The troopers had set up the barbecue night for that evening, right before inventory would start, and this time it held even more meaning. The interns would still be there, a vital part of any inventory run, and they would be included in the team-building.

“Sure,” Owen now said. “I’ll be there.”

The other man got up, nodding. “See you Friday then. Don’t bring your plus four.”

Owen snorted. “They like their steaks bloody. Very bloody and preferably alive.”

“Don’t I know it. Later, Grady.”

“Later.”

*

Owen had talked to Lorenzo, Carter’s tech guy, and had been handed over three new models for Grady to test.

“Those things had never been developed to run in the jungle for such a long time. Usually we use them for brief surveillance, not months on end. Heck, the salt water isn’t too kind to electronics,” the technician explained. “I looked at the one you brought back and it was corroded. The new ones have better housings. Should do the trick.”

“Okay, thanks. It’s just frustrating.”

Lorenzo chuckled. “Don’t I know it. You know those Aviary cams?”

Owen nodded.

“The dimorphodons kept shitting on them. I don’t have to tell you just how corrosive that stuff is.
And the young pteranodon like to play with the lenses, hacking away at them until they break. Still haven’t found a way to make them last longer than six months. So, your problem? Expected. Loose wires, trees coming down, grainy feeds or lost signals? Basic stuff we can fix in time. You know how to connect them to the network?”

“Yeah. I’ll call if I need help.”

“Sure. Good luck.”

The pack was immediately on board for another run into the wilderness, maybe even spend the night. Owen would have time to get back to the barbecue if they left today.

They would get their exercise, do scent trainings, maybe even work on their endurance runs. Owen could measure their top speed on the plains as they chased each other.

And Owen would have time to replace his faulty gear.

“Yes, yes, I hear you. Sound arguments, really,” he told the enthusiastic pack, who was throwing good reasons for this excursion at him like kids on a sugar high.

Blue snapped at Charlie, who was scuffling around with Echo and Delta. Their buoyant energy was almost too much to buffer.

“Hey!” Owen called, brows lowering.

Charlie retreated, chastised, and Echo scurried away, chittering and zippy. Delta huffed, but her eyes were still alight.

“Night run, girls.”

They yipped and barked. Best of both worlds, in their opinions. Night runs were something that sent their animalistic cores into overflow, had them thrilled and close to bursting with enthusiasm. Coupled with everything else, it was like standing in a miniature tornado of raptor emotions.

Owen was used to that, could shield against the tidal wave. He gestured at Echo. “Front and center, Echo. You’re first. Equipment as usual. Delta, Charlie, cameras. Blue, you’re with me.”

He grabbed the gear, quickly and efficiently strapping in Echo, then Charlie, then Delta. Blue was watching, alert, keeping an eye on the paddock, the outside, the pack.

Everything ran smoothly.

Within twenty minutes Owen was on his bike, engine running, the four raptors spread out in formation beside him. Muscles were coiled, at the ready, bodies tense, all attention on the alpha.

Owen raised his fist in the air and, when their eyes were on him, moved it forward and down.

They shot off like arrows from a tightly-strung bow.

He followed on his bike, then gunned the engine and gained on the pack, who spread out to surround him.
Blue in the lead with him, Charlie and Delta to the left, Echo to the right.

tbc...

Chapter End Notes

Well, the last slow chapter... Next chapter: poachers!
Isla Nublar wasn’t a large island, but it also wasn’t small enough to always be aware of everything happening on or around it. Costa Rica had set up a patrol unit to catch the adventurous and the crazy. InGen was doing its best to add to those patrols. They cruised closer to the coastlines and were there in case someone took a dive off a ferry or a tourist boat. All over the park, cameras and security troopers kept an eye on matters, together with the employees.

The restricted area was smaller than the park as such, but it enveloped the old Jurassic Park and a very long stretch of rugged coast line that was hard to patrol. There were high cliffs, small bays, and inaccessible beaches. Most breaches had been from landside, with people thinking Jurassic World hid some new attractions or were doing some unspeakable experiments.

Well, yeah.

Indominus Rex. Enough said.

There had been one memorable incident with a group of animal rights activists breaking into the restricted area, using the gyrospheres to maneuver close to the massive fence and trying to crack the lock or climb over it. Reggie had caught them. It hadn’t been pretty afterwards.

Owen and Carter had done their best with setting up cameras and sensors in the restricted area, and the pack patrolled and checked their territory whenever they were here, but it was a lot of ground to cover and things might still get through.

Something had gotten through.

Something big.

Owen couldn’t believe his eyes as he looked at a very well-camouflaged cargo ship, anchored in a narrow bay not far from the old ferry terminal. It was difficult to get in, but the moment the ship had passed the toughest spot, it would disappear from sight for anyone looking at the coastline from the sea. It was a sheltered little haven.

It was also an area where they hadn’t placed a camera. Risk assessment had made this a low threat entry point. Back then, Carter and Owen had made up a list and on top of it were adventure seekers and tourists who could navigate the narrow channel with a small boat. There had been multiple occasions with idiots trying to parachute or parasail into the restricted area. One had come in with a boat, anchored, and then tried to swim to the shore. The coast guard had dragged him out of the water, half drowned, protesting all the way. The most memorable occasion had been the guy with the single seat helicopter.

Neither man had expected a cargo ship to end up on this particular beach, though.

Whoever had piloted it, he was good, Owen decided. Really, really good and probably absolutely crazy to attempt this kind of landing. He had probably had a very good nautical chart. The entrance to the bay wasn’t the only navigational hazard. You had a one in a thousand chance to make it here without the ship ending up scrap metal.

A make-shift camp had been set up outside. It looked like these people had been here for about a week. The tents had been up for a while. Three men with guns milled around.

“That’s why Carter’s guys found no trace of any poachers on Sorna,” Owen said softly. “They
moved the whole operation here to wait out the heat.”

Patrols had been tripled and Sorna was under close guard. Any boat that wasn’t a cruise ship or a ferry was immediately stopped and boarded. The cargo ship would have been stopped right away.

Blue was at his side, teeth bared, snarling softly.

Intruders. Into their territory!

They hadn’t been in this area for a while and now there were intruders!

Owen reached out and placed a hand against her side, calming his beta and with her the pack. Her flanks were shivering with tension, with tightly controlled emotions. Instinct told her to hunt the trespassers, chase them away, out of what was theirs. The deeper seated primal core wanted her to rip their throats out.

Charlie, Echo and Delta moved in, soundless, barely a whisper of twigs or leaves in their wake, as they joined their alpha and his beta. Delta growled softly, the sound more felt than heard.

*I know*, Owen murmured over the bond.

Charlie tracked a guard, eyes narrowing, sizing him up and deciding he would go down without so much as a gurgle. Echo agreed, talons twitching to bury them in his soft flesh.

Owen kept them calm with a soft order over the pack connection. He balanced them easily.

“Not yet, ladies. Surveillance first. This is a big operation,” he murmured. “Professional. Wasn’t the first time for them.”

Maybe the first dinosaurs, but not the first smuggling operation for live animals. Then again, they knew Nublar’s tiny nooks and crannies. They had definitely napped dinosaurs before.

Owen now counted five men he could see. Probably more. There had to be guards around the perimeter, which meant they had to be careful and they had to get out of here before they were discovered.

Let Carter handle this. Even with four raptors who were very eager to show those poachers what they thought of the intrusion he couldn’t take them down.

Delta burst into his thoughts, pushing the fact that they could do this in his mind.

“No, girl. I know you’re good and I trust you, but they have guns. And probably more. I don’t want you to get killed.”

Blue agreed, though her tension spoke for itself.

There was a bark, a ululating call, coming from somewhere aboard the ship and the pack stiffened, heads swiveling like one into the direction of the boat. The tension was suddenly thick enough to cut with a knife.

“Damn,” Owen murmured.

He knew that call.

Raptors. There were raptors aboard.
They had caught live Sorna raptors!

There were a lot of things running through Grady’s head, most of them uncomplimentary terms for the smugglers, calling them all kinds of idiotic names. He cursed to himself as he slid deeper into the jungle.

More calls came, then a violent screech of pain and outrage.

Owen felt it almost down to his bones, his mind jittering away from possible contact. He hadn’t been aware of the raptors because they were just one of the many voices that made up the background murmur. Now that he knew… Yep, there were three sharp points, clustered together, like the t-rex was a solo dot and the mosa, too. Predators.

“So scatter,” he ordered, voice low and urgent.

He had to call Carter, get the teams here.

Blue hummed, disappearing into the darkness, sliding into the foliage like a ghost, and then she and the others were gone.

Owen hurried away from the cargo ship, heading toward the old ferry dock. He took out his radio and hit speed dial. Number one was Claire. Number two was Carter. Number three had been assigned to Gary Themming, the hapless veterinarian who had the honor of treating the pack when Owen’s basic medical knowledge wasn’t enough.

This time it was number two.

There was another call from inside the cargo ship, then a different screech of pain.

“Damnit!” Owen muttered, pulling in his shields.

“Grady?”

“Dan, found your poachers. By accident. The small bay near the old ferry landing. Ship’s camouflaged. And they have raptors aboard.”

There was a soft curse. “Stay put, Owen. Don’t approach! I mean it! We’ll be there as fast as we can!”

“I’m not going to storm in there,” Owen replied, feeling almost affronted. “I’m not stupid.”

“Debatable. And you better not. We’ll be on our way in ten. Carter out.”

Carter hung up and Owen headed toward where he had parked his bike, trying to be as soundless and phantom-like as his girls. Him being human, he failed a little.

There was a sound, a cry of a monkey, leaves whispering, and something small darting off into the underbrush.

Owen turned, coming face to face with an unpleasant and unfriendly looking man in jeans and baseball jacket. The man was carrying a gun, which was aimed at him.

Both men stared at each other.

“Over there. Move it,” the man growled, an accent to his voice.
“Hey, man, I’m just…”

“Shut it,” the man interrupted him. “Wouldn’t mind putting a bullet in you, but boss wants to talk to
dead men first.” He smiled, showing off gapped teeth.

Blue pushed into his mind, rushing forward and enveloping him. *Owen?*

*Stay where you are!* he ordered immediately.

The pack was around him, cold eyes watching the stranger threaten their alpha. They were invisible
to the guards. It would be so easy to bring them down…

Someone else came closer, carrying a machine gun.

*Stay!* Owen ordered again. *I won’t have you kill yourselves!*

They listened.

For now.

*

Carter had just been about to go off shift, hand over duties to his second-in-command, when his
phone rang. He looked at the caller ID and almost groaned.

Owen Grady.

For Grady to call him throughout a shift was rare and only on serious matters. Normally Dan
dropped in on their raptor specialist when he came off a shift or had his days off.

To check up on things, he always told Owen.

Grady was a person of interest to Carter, though not in connection with a crime. He was just
interesting. A preternatural with an insanely strong talent, someone who had connected himself
permanently to a pack of genetically engineered velociraptors, and who was now the accepted and
respected alpha of them.

When Carter had come to Jurassic World, hearing about the raptors had made his hair stand on
end. Hearing about Grady had had the alarm bells ringing. He had pulled all files on him, on the
pack, on incidents involving them.

Especially the i-rex incident.

And Dan Carter had been impressed, stunned, shocked and terrified. In that order.

Two years later, he and Owen had gotten to know each other quite well. He had witnessed the
interaction with the pack often enough, sometimes on a daily basis, and he knew part of what made
the other man tick.

Their relationship had grown from formal, wary, stilted, where Grady was still deciding whether or
not to ever trust one of InGen’s security again, to friendly, trustworthy and toward drinking buddy
comradery.
“Carter,” he answered the phone.

Then he stiffened as he listened to Owen’s words.

Fuck! ran through his head. “Stay where you are! Don’t approach!” he ordered sharply, catching the attention of the men around him.

“Ramirez, full team suit-up!” he snapped at one of his lieutenants. “We’ve got a situation! Two teams, assault force! I want medical on stand-by! Someone call the vet units! One unit on call, another ready to go! Grady has found our poachers and they’re hiding right in our backyard!”

There was a tense knot in his stomach, a foreboding. Owen had a penchant for getting into trouble without really looking for it.

But he had the pack with him, Dan reminded himself.

They wouldn’t let their alpha get hurt if they could help it.

He almost laughed at that thought. Two years around the pack, countless training exercises with his men to not shoot the raptors, and he was thinking of them as more than animals.

And they were, actually.

Now he hoped his trust was well-founded.

The teams were ready within ten minutes.

Twenty minutes after the call they were on their way.

* * *

Owen was introduced to the man in charge of the operation not long after his capture. He was tall, probably South American, clean-shaven and cultured looking. He was wearing black jeans, a clean white shirt, and a light gray vest. He didn’t fit into this environment. Not at all.

“Well, you came here at a very inopportune time. Who are you?”

No accent. He sounded almost British.


“It’s just a stopover, I assure you. Now, who are you?”

“How about you introduce yourself first?”

Play for time. Carter was on the way.

It got him a blow to the head from a mountain of a main who had shadowed the boss.
“You’re not one of them troopers,” the bodyguard growled. “So whatcha doin’ here?”

Owen glared at him through the blood running into his left eye from the cut above his brow. “My job.”

The man raised his brows. “Your job, hm? Well, you’re alone,” the apparent captain of the ship and boss of the operation pointed out. “One gun, a knife, a bike.”

Owen felt the pack push against his mind, but he kept them back. They were no match against machine guns.

*We can take them*, Blue insisted.

*No!*

“No ID on him?” the boss asked.

One of the two men who had forcefully escorted him here shook his head. “Just a radio, some gear, nothing else.”

“Well, ranger boy, too bad for you. We have very precious cargo and someone who wants to pay us a lot of money for it. We’ve been stuck here for too long already and now, sadly, you’re in the way.”

“I can just leave,” Owen offered with a crooked smile.

“You could, yes, but that would be bad for us. So you’re going to stay for a while and make the cargo happy.”

The bodyguard grabbed him and pulled him roughly to his feet. Owen struggled only briefly, because it got him a hard blow to the kidneys and he groaned, sagging a little.

“I hope you like dinosaurs,” the boss chuckled and gestured at his man to get Owen somewhere.

That somewhere was over to the cargo hold. The ship wasn’t massive enough to hold a t-rex, but as Owen discovered, it had a deep vault-like room. It was accessible from the top. A crane was not far away, affixed to the ship, and there was a cage-like construction hooked up to the lowered crane.

“And to make it more interesting,” the boss said with a cold smile as he pulled out his knife, “give those three some incentive. Not that they really need it. We haven’t really fed them all too much, except for the weak and sick. Too bad for us, because those little dinos are worth a fortune.”

Owen gave a yell of pain as the knife was dragged quickly over his lower arm. Blood welled up, dark and red. Before he could so much as curse, the bodyguard slashed him in the thigh as well. His khaki pants stained red immediately.

“Have fun. I’m sure they will.”

Then he went flying.

Into the dark.
The air was driven out of his lungs.

Then there was a brief moment of nothingness, of just the harsh panting, forced breaths, trying to get air into his lungs. His body hurt, was bruised in too many places, and his thigh burned.

Owen forced himself to open his eyes, his inner voice screaming at him to get moving.

It was not completely dark, but more twilightish. It smelled rather familiar.

Of animals.

Dinosaurs.

There was a chittering sound.

He knew those chitters. He recognized them, though not as a language. There was soft growling, whuffling, curious and strangely hungry.

The clickety-click of sharp claws on steel floors.

The gentle pad of taloned feet approaching.

The rumble.

Velociraptors.

He was in a room, locked in, with velociraptors.

Owen felt something, his preternatural mind feeling the presence before he even saw a scale.

But see them he did.

There was a soft hiss, then a shadow, and finally a head.

Owen locked eyes with the lead raptor, aware of the other two who had started to circle, ducking low, jaws open, showing impressive teeth.

Stalking.

Hunting.

Hunting him.

“Hey,” Owen murmured, raising a hand. “You’re new around here, aren’t you?”

The coloring was all wrong. Darker, almost black in places, with bright spots of red and orange, some yellow, even blue. There were quills on the heads of two of them.

“You’re wild ones. Sorna. They napped you from Isla Sorna.”

The lead raptor snarled and Owen found himself reaching for her like he would for one of his pack. Her mind was… not Blue’s. Not Delta or Charlie or Echo. She was alien.

Not pack.

The other two ducked and he glanced at them.
“I can see you,” he told them, trying to ignore the pain from his bleeding wounds.

They didn’t.

They knew he was weak. He was prey. He was food. He was bleeding and their target.

The pack smelled the blood and their instincts told them to bring him down.

“I’m on your side. I really am.”

He was also stronger than what their prey normally was. They felt the alpha, but were unsure.

But he was only human.

“Yes, I’m human,” he murmured. “But not prey. You can hear me. You can feel me, can’t you?”

They made nervous growling and clicking sounds, circling, unsure. The two left and right of him looked at the apparent leader.

She wasn’t their alpha.

Just a stand-in.

Owen felt it. He almost knew it.

Like she seemed to recognize him as a strong alpha.

Human and the alpha of a raptor pack.

The female barked, shaking her head in confusion and anger.

Owen was the absolute alpha. Able to touch the other dinosaurs on Isla Nublar.

Owen pushed his will more against their unfamiliar minds. While he understood his four girls, this one was just gibberish. It was a weird, cold sensation. It wasn’t warmth and pack. It wasn’t pack at all.

There was movement, talons flexing in anticipation.

“Ey,” he chastised the one on the left. He dubbed it… him, yes, a male … he dubbed him Red. “I can see you. Stand down!”

Red shifted, uncertain, curious. He was hungry, but his instinctual reaction to the alpha energy Owen projected was almost automatically there. It confused him.

“Yes, you. I’m not food.”

The other one, which Owen dubbed Yellow for the abundance of that color along his back, snorted, barking at the female. He simply thought of her as Beta. Not fully alpha, but a strong beta like Blue was and able to lead a pack one day – if they survived this.

Beta hummed, then barked back at Yellow and Red, who rumbled and snarled, vicious little sounds that were aggression and anger.

The blood was enticing. They were so hungry. So very, very hungry. Days without food, trapped in this metal cage, and the taunting of their captors. They communication was like listening to an
ancient dialect. It wasn’t familiar, but it felt like he understood basic emotions. Owen stretched a little toward them, his mind opening up, listening to the turmoil.

*Hungerpreyeat!*

Nope, not good.

Owen wasn’t a raptor, but he wasn’t easy prey either. He projected it into their minds, keeping them at bay, but it was straining him.

*Not prey,* he told them, his stance sure, energy even.

Don’t falter, he told himself. Weakness would let them attack. Hold them. Help is on the way.

But even another predator would be attacked if it meant sating that churning hunger in their guts. With the way he smelled, of blood and pain, Owen was first on that list. He was the only prey in here and the moment the confusion over the alpha energy faded, he would be right back on the menu.

Red and Yellow hissed, ducking, circling him.

Owen gave the two males a mental slap, making them stagger, his eyes still boring into Beta. She was in command of them, even if her status was new, and she could stop this or order the attack.

“Eyes on me,” he said sharply, pushing into their minds again, hands up and keeping them at a distance. “That’s good. Really good. I know you’re hungry.”

Ravenously hungry.

This was a hunt.

She was in the lead and she wanted food.

“No, girl. Listen to me.”

He pushed again, his will against hers, but she wasn’t one of his. She wasn’t inside the bond. Even if she was receptive, Owen’s mind was connected to his four girls and he wasn’t about to expand. Pushing was draining him. He knew he could control them to a degree, but it was by force, expending his energy and force in turn.

Even if he managed it now, he might not be able to keep it up for a longer time. He was alone; a lone alpha. Without the pack he had no real power. He couldn’t fight them, just keep them out of reach.

Red growled and Yellow hissed, moving back and forth, wanting to jump.

Owen went deeper, digging in his mental heels.

“No!” he snapped at them and they reeled back a little. “I want to help. We can get out here together,” he told them, voice dropping to soothing and calm once more.

He tracked Yellow and Red out of the corner of his eyes. Blood ran freely down his leg and he was starting to tremble, but Owen knew that if he showed even a single sign of weakness, they would attack.

Right now it was a stand-off. His preternatural ability was his weapon, able to strike at their minds.
Owen pressed his lips together as pain shot through his leg from the deep cut.

Fuck, he thought.

Beta snarled and Yellow slid closer, a little unsure, making up for it with open jaws and narrowed eyes.

He struck at both simultaneously, making the male screech and scatter back, almost running into a wall, the female staggering.

It was what Red had been waiting for. Like an opening.

He spread his claws and homed in on Owen.

tbc...
Chapter Notes

Oh-kay, oh-wow! After the last chapter my email inbox kinda exploded. In a good way. I'm very happy you enjoyed yourselves so far. So here's the next chapter, which should have a warning:

Blood. Violence. Velociraptors doing their thing. People dying in not a nice way because of it.

You have been warned!

The trespassers were ignorant of their presence.

Unawares of the dangers around them, the men and women, all armed to the teeth, were walking along the perimeter of the camp, wearing night-vision goggles. The goggles were pushed up on their heads as the approaching dusk bathed everything in shades and shadows. Trees, grass and rocks blended in together, making it hard to distinguish between landscape and living creatures. Birds, hidden within the leaves, could only be heard. Monkeys jumped along the branches, making them rustle.

The trespassers didn’t pay them any attention. Now and then a screech from a bird or a monkey had them briefly look around, but they had been here long enough to ignore the sounds of nature by now.

They were too confident for their own good. Over-confident.

Blue ducked within the shrubbery, keeping completely still, frozen into a statue. She was perfectly camouflaged against the gray-green of the jungle. A snake moved slowly past her, unconcerned by the predator so close by. A lizard skittered over dead leaves and buried underneath them.

She wasn’t interested in them one bit.

Her attention was on something … someone else.

Blue’s eyes tracked the man who walked past the bushes, his radio warbling as an update was requested.

“All silent here. Five out.”

There was a squawk. The man looked up into the trees, then grimaced as a bird flew away into the approaching night.

“Fucking birds,” he muttered to himself.

He shouldered his gun and dug around his pockets, then pulled out a sharp smelling package and proceeded to stuff some of the contents into his mouth, chewing.

Blue recognized the scent. Tobacco. Her alpha didn’t use it, but she had smelled it on some of the
troopers and one had even been caught by Carter, smoking it on the job. From her close connection to Owen she understood what it was, the smoking, the smell, the effects, but she found the smell disgusting.

This one, he smelled like stale tobacco underneath the sweat and food. Blue’s lips pulled back from sharp teeth, like a gruesome smile. In addition there was the distinctive scent of alcohol and whiffs of his last meal. Spices and sauce, fried potatoes, meat.

Delta was close, sensed but not seen. Blue knew where her pack-sister was without having to look. It was a sense they all had of each other through the pack bond, just like they were all aware of their alpha, held inside the ship.

Echo and Charlie had moved around to the other side, choosing their targets, ready. There was an eagerness in the air, a cold determination. They were on the hunt, choosing their prey, choosing the targets to take out one by one, and ancient instinct dominated their minds. It was something no genetic manipulation would breed out of them.

They were apex hunters.

They would kill tonight.

Delta deliberately made a sound, a dry twig cracking under her toes. The man peered into the jungle, grumbling about something.

Blue moved like the proverbial shadow. Sleek, fast, barely heard, but the guard felt her. His Neanderthal brain clamored for him to see the danger he was in. Like many of his kind he didn’t listen to the silent shivers, the way his hair stood on end, the dread rushing through him.

Unlike Owen, the man didn’t let instinct guide him. He trusted in his intellect, nothing else. He didn’t pay attention to the primal urges to run.

Their alpha was human, but he wasn’t like those men, like the trespassers. The prey. Blue had found that Owen Grady was the strongest alpha on the island, their alpha. It filled her with pride, to be his chosen beta, to be in his pack. His strength was their strength. He made them this strong, he had made them what they were. Not genetic engineering, not the men and women in the lab coats, or the doctors. It was their alpha.

Blue loved him. She would follow him anywhere, trusted him with her life, with the life of the pack, and she would never be swayed from his side. His evolving strength only cemented that fact. Others deferred to him. If he wanted, he could extend the pack, but he didn’t.

Small and strong. It was them and it was him.

So leaving him to the intruders, taking over the pack herself, had never crossed her mind. She knew they would perish without him.

Blue pounced, bringing the trespasser down, sickle claw buried between where the body armor met the waistline of his pants, digging in. She knew weak spots. She had explored them before, had watched the troopers and learned. She knew how to kill the humans should they be a danger to the pack, no matter how well-armed they were.

Soft human flesh gave easily under the horrendously sharp claws and the man barely had time to gurgle before she closed her jaws around his throat. Razor-like teeth sunk into the vulnerable skin. Blood spilled in a warm cascade, covering her snout, but she didn’t give it a second thought.
Suddenly distress and pain radiated from her alpha, now so much closer, more intense, as he fought something the pack was unable to help him with. She felt his power almost physically, reaching out toward an enemy that sounded almost familiar and still felt unlike any of her pack sisters.

Owen was fighting. Hard.

The alpha was going up against an opponent as viciously dangerous as the pack themselves, and he had no other weapon than his mind.

She snarled silently, furious at their inability to stand by his side as they had done countless times before. Delta was a sharp, angry presence, demanding they rush the trespassers and get to their alpha.

_No! _she told her pack-sister. _If we die, he dies._

Delta was a mass of contained fury, looking for an outlet.

_Catch them one by one. Bring them down without alerting the others!_ 

Delta was on the next guard a moment before Echo darted out from the darkness and tore the man’s arm off just as he had tried to bury a knife into Delta’s leg. His scream of agony was cut short as Delta broke his neck.

A wave of vicious satisfaction coursed along the pack-bond. Blue understood and she felt almost the same way.

_One by one_, she ordered.

Charlie just sent cold understanding. She had her sights on a woman in combat gear already. She was armed, but like the other two guards too relaxed.

She would die within the next two minutes.

The pack acted on Blue’s orders.

Efficiently.

Without their own blood spilled.

And within ten minutes five men and women died, without alerting the ones aboard the cargo ship or the few still lingering around the beach.

Blue licked her lips, tasting blood, still monitoring the alpha. Charlie joined her, blood on her, splattered over her chest and arms.

_The rest will be difficult to kill. Be careful. The pack will not lose anyone._

Charlie rumbled her agreement and padded over to the cargo vessel, avoiding the circles of light and the cameras pointed at the entrance. She knew not to get into their lines of sight, and to evade weapons. She was choosing her next target.

Echo had taken up position near the anchor, calculating her chances to hop aboard by using the thick chains. Rather good, she decided. She could scale the chains easily and she would be on board, a phantom taking on more trespassers.

Delta was prowling closer, unhappy about their sudden stop in the fight. She was eager to bring
down every single human who had dared to take their alpha, who had hurt him, herself. Her thirst for blood was rising. If not for Blue’s orders to be quick about it, she would make them all suffer.

Slowly.

Painfully.

Maybe leave them bleeding, dying.

Killing them quickly was almost mercy.

Owen’s presence suddenly exploded across the bond, like a mind scream, the energy immense and deafening, making all four raptors cringe.

It came like a dark wave and crashed down onto their minds. The pack was torn out of their balanced state and pulled into a whirlpool of agony and desperation. Owen was slipping from them, crying out for help.

Owen!

Blue screamed in shared pain and rage, talons biting into the ground, splintering stone. Her roar was ear-drum shattering.

*

“A talent like yours is a special thing, Owen,” his grandfather said as they sat outside, on the steps of the porch leading into the back garden. “You’re strong.”

“But with great strength comes great responsibility?” Owen teased.

His grandfather chuckled, a deep, rumbling sound. “You watch too many movies, kiddo. But yes, you have a responsibility. Toward yourself and toward the animals you work with.”

“Never get lost in a bond,” Owen quoted.

“It will be so easy. So very, very easy. Never spread yourself too thin. Never lash out because you might not snap back into that skull of yours. Keep it low and close to you, Owen.”

It had been sound advice at the time, though he hadn’t understood it. Owen had felt animals for all his short life, but he had never felt particularly pulled toward one of the minds. He had never thought he could actively jump into a mind, let alone use his talent like a weapon.

Since working with the military dogs he had learned a little more about himself.

After starting to work with the raptor pack, Owen had finally begun to understand what his grandfather had meant so many years ago.

And now, bleeding, fading, holding his own against three non-familiar velociraptors, and no back-
up from his pack, he also understood that final warning.

Too late, though.

His mind shot out toward those three, freezing them in their places, taking over and paralyzing their thoughts.

Red, the closest to him, stumbled, then went down with a whine of pain and surprise. He rolled around, tried to get up, but Owen’s mind was like a weight holding him down, pinning him to the floor.

Yellow stood like a statue, red eyes unblinking. His whole body quivered, fighting against the control, trying to break out of a cage that wasn’t physical. Beta was making sharp little growls, teeth still bared, but like Yellow and Red she wasn’t capable of moving.

But it didn’t stop there.

Owen knew he had made a mistake, but it was one he couldn’t rectify.

Three sharp minds in here, and a hundred… more… so many more… everywhere. He stood in a sea of whispers, grumbles, screeches and roars. It was exhilarating and painful in one, completely out of this world.

Beautiful in a way he couldn’t describe.

Infinity. He might just be looking at infinity and with one step, become part of it.

His ability was an extension of himself now, as natural as breathing. Now it was like everything was at his beck and call, like he could touch every mind, every animal.

So easy.

To give in.

Take that step past the edge.

Fall into that empty space.

“There is no training for what we can do, no school, no books to read. Preternaturals exist in various forms, but we like to keep to ourselves.”

Owen nodded. His grampa had told him so often before.

“So you have to work out how to do what you can do yourself. You’ll have preferences for certain animals. Just be careful, kiddo.”

“I will.”
There was a bright flash through his head, a painless explosion of white light that seemed to surround him in noise; voices and thoughts, emotion and sensation. It all rushed toward him, the beauty distorting into a maelstrom of chaos.

Owen started to zone, his vision tunneling, his mind unable to take so much without shields siphoning out the worst of the incoming signals.

In the cargo hold, Owen Grady stood facing three velociraptors. Blood soaking into his clothes, face an unnatural shade of gray, deep lines of pain around his eyes and mouth. His hands were clenched into fists, his muscles trembling like he was holding the weight of the world and failing.

Two raptors just stood there, looking at the human alpha, eyes turning from furious to dull, then just empty. The third lay on the ground like he was held down by an invisible hand, breathing heavily, just as glassy-eyed as the rest of the pack.

In the rest of the ship, the assorted baby dinosaurs huddled in the corners, a few making distressed noises, others almost in shock.

None of the smugglers were aware of it. No one had stayed around to watch a human get torn apart by a pack of raptors.

*

Blue pushed back against the tidal wave, roaring, lodging virtual claws in her alpha’s mind and physical ones in the ground.

_Owen!_

His cry for her was almost desperate. He needed his anchor and Blue tried to hold him, tried to keep him balanced, but the strain was getting to him. She snarled furiously, claws gouging deeply into the ground.

Charlie approached her, rumbling a question. Blue’s nostrils blew wide, eyes narrow slits, and she pushed herself forcefully up. Her whole body was strung tight, muscles trembling with the tension, and she wanted to eviscerate every single human on this ship. She wanted to watch them die slowly, the light in their eyes fading as they lay at her feet, bleeding out.

_Get them. Kill them! she snarled. Find the alpha and kill everyone else!_

The response from the pack was unanimous: murderous agreement.

No one hurt Owen and got away with it.

Blue’s cold gaze rested on the cargo ship where he was held. She felt him, sharp and like shards of
Her growl was fierce and terrifying.

*Owen. Alpha. We’re here.*

His response was as jumbled as everything else.

*Toomuchtoomuch!* repeated over and over again.

He was sliding into a zone. He was drifting away from her, from them. The intensity was overpowering.

Blue’s mind grew glacially cold, her instincts flaring. Primal and sharp, icy logic, killer instinct and merciless. She scented the humid air, the smell of blood and gore everywhere, but she singled out her alpha’s scent.

Homing in.

His blood and sweat, his mind’s echo through the bond they shared.

Delta, Charlie and Echo were ghosts in the night, striking and leaving no living soul as they went through the ranks of the armed humans, alerted to something happening by Blue’s unintentional scream of raw pain.

They hadn’t been able to identify the noise, had most likely thought of brawling monkeys or something deep within the restricted area, but by now they knew they were under attack.

It was too late, though.

Half of their numbers had already perished.

Guns fired staccato bursts, trying to hit the raptors.

Muscles, skin and bone gave under sharp claws and even sharper teeth, under jaws that could easily break a thigh bone with one snap.

Echo felt something clip her thigh, but it was nothing but a short flare of pain as skin was shaved off, but no bullet entered her flesh. It didn’t stop her, made her just more intent on the kill, stoking her fury.

She moved with emotionless efficiency, ignoring the whimpers and begging, the cries for help.

Gurgles and abruptly broken off screams filled the night.

Blue darted up the ramp.

Shots were fired and she felt the burn of a close call, then Delta was suddenly there and the shooter died a violent death, like everyone. She had wanted to make it last, but Delta understood the necessity of a quick kill.

She barked at Blue, sniffing the air, looking at the broad stripe of bleeding flesh.

Blue flexed her shoulder, feeling the sting, smelling her own blood, but it was nothing.
Find the alpha. Find Owen.

He was clinging to the pack bond, trying to stabilize his mind as he fought against another pack, kept them from killing him, and Blue felt the urgency rise.

From up on the cargo ship, Echo’s cry announced two guards killed, no one else in sight.

Blue, at the top of the ramp, surveyed the carnage on the beach. Blood was soaking into the sand, motionless figures bleeding out in silence. Delta was already slipping in deeper, listening, scenting, sharp eyes piercing the darkness.

More, she announced coldly, licking her lips.

A few more humans.

Blue shook her head, but the pressure inside it didn’t wane. Owen was fading, was trying to hold on to her as his grasp on his anchor grew slippery, his mind fracturing more and more.

Find them, she told Delta. Cripple, not kill. We might need one.

Delta’s reply was dark satisfaction.

Up on the ship, Echo moved in the shadows. Charlie surveyed the beach, then, satisfied that the threat had been annihilated, followed Blue and Delta inside.

*

Owen’s mind seemed to burn. It was ablaze with neurons firing on all cylinders, of synapses running on full steam. He… was spreading out, rushing toward anything and everything. His mind snapped around, flailing, like thin tendrils in a storm, threatening to be torn apart. There was still cohesion there, but it was coming apart fast.

Overwhelming.

It was incredibly overwhelming.

There were sharp presences, well-known and so familiar. Rushing by, trying to grab him, anchor him.

Unfamiliar, sharp presences, biting back, angry, scared, in unknown territory, hungry.

Singular minds, familiar, but not pack. Like beacons in the night. One curious, the others indifferent.

Masses, all over the island. Now so much more, now so very overwhelming and still not individual. It was like a wildfire, spreading uncontrollably, with no way of containing it.

So many more, everyone everywhere, pulling at him, pushing him back, attacking the intruder, calling to him, biting into his vulnerable mind.

It was like cold hail beating down on him, cracking the surface; like lightning striking into the cracks; peeling thunder, the echoes too loud. It was a violent storm that rushed over his mindscape
and flattened every conscious thought.

Owen screamed out his pain. He curled in on himself. His mind was lunging for the anchor that was his pack and missing.

It was too much! He couldn’t... it was...

He cried out in soul-deep agony.

He caught their thoughts, the other pack’s, caught the gist of what had happened.

Distant echoes became louder.

It was the worst that could happen to a preternatural. It was everything his grandfather had ever warned him about, multiplied by a thousand, pulling him into a bottomless hole that was terrifying and enticing in one.

-- The death of the alpha male, being captured, the nests plundered.

-- Eggs breaking.

-- Anger. So much anger at the destruction of their eggs, of the unborn.

-- Undeveloped, barely recognizable bodies.

-- The alpha male’s death as his leg was shattered by a hail of bullets, falling to his death.

-- The alpha female fighting tooth and nail, able to escape only to be shot herself.

His body shook under the strain and sweat broke out all over him. Owen knew he couldn’t let go, that if he did, he would be swallowed whole and never return.

Toomuchtoomuchtoomuch!

He channeled his rage, his helplessness, his pain... and it hurt. It hurt so terribly much, it paralyzed his thoughts, it opened up gashes that bled, like real blood running over his broken skin.

His mind was way past its limits. He was over the threshold, in uncharted territory, and he was sucked deeper and deeper.

Panic. Cold, icy panic.

Out of his depth.

He flailed, needing the anchor, needing his safety line, but he couldn’t think clearly. The panic had him freeze, had buried icy claws in his mind, and he seemed to stall like an engine running out of gas.

Terror settled in his very soul, pinning him down.

All around him was nothing he recognized, only minds that pushed in on him, Owen without his
first line of defense, with his shields shattered, wide open and defenseless as he had gone past everything he should be capable of.

He sat in the middle of a huge space populated by the genetically engineered animals of this island… and it hurt. They were tearing him apart and there was nothing he could do. He had no way back, no focal point, nothing to tell him where up or down was.

Just let go. Let go and it would be over. Losing yourself… in them. Everywhere. Nothing to worry about. No care in the world anymore…

He fought.

Because he was stronger than this.

He had learned, had evolved, had taught himself so much more than any other preternatural ever had.

Owen Grady had a stable bond to four other minds.

But right now he was alone.

And he was losing.

tbc...
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

Second time in so many days that my inbox overflowed! I'm so very much amazed by the response Threshold Shift is generating. I wouldn't have thought of it in my wildest dreams!

Thank you so much for your enthusiasm, for your support, for everything!

This time the chapter is a bit shorter. Sorry about that. :)

Velociraptors were very well able to open doors. Pushing down on a lever or even turning a knob was something the highly intelligent predators could easily learn.

Owen’s pack was far more intelligent than their ancestors, surpassing the very first raptors created by Hammond Labs, and they had a direct line into Owen’s mind.

Blue more than the others.

Alan Grant had once said they were no longer near-human intelligent. Those four were on the same level as Owen.

He was right.

But even a human couldn’t open a locked door when they needed a digital code.

Blue tilted her head and studied the door. She trilled, sounding thoughtful.

Locked, Delta commented darkly.

This was where they had to go through to reach Owen. Delta sniffed at the door, scenting, smelling Owen and the others.

Blue barked, her voice echoing loudly within the ship. She received an answer that had Delta perk up, lips twitching back in a snarl.

Blue turned her head when she heard noises, her own lips curling back from vicious teeth, as she sized up the last surviving enemy. Charlie was keeping him in check. She and Echo had herded him here, snapping at his sides and heels, physically pushing him forward when he had hesitated.

The man was bleeding. He had been clawed at and one hand looked broken.

None of the raptors cared.

Crowing, Echo tapped her sickle claw onto the steel floor, making the man jump. He whimpered, reduced to a primal terror all of the intruders had succumbed to in the end before they had died quickly.

Blue looked back at the door, then hissed at him, planting her right paw next to the lock. She drummed her talons against the steel, snarling at him.
His eyes were wide. He was sweating, trembling with shock, and he was dripping blood.

She snarl-barked, jerking her head at the lock.

*Open it. Open the lock to our alpha!*

When he didn’t move, Charlie head-butted him; hard. Something cracked and he cried out as he stumbled, then Echo’s teeth were in his arm and he screamed. She dragged him forward without severing the limb. It would have been easy to just do so, but blood loss might have him lose consciousness.

They needed him alive.

For now.

Blue hiss-snarled, right in his face, drumming against the control mechanism for the lock once more.

“I can open it for you,” he cried. “I can! Just let me… I can… please don’t kill me!”

Blood smeared over the keys as his shaking fingers typed in the code.

The doors slid open, an air filled with unfamiliar and still recognized scents assaulting them.


Underneath the predominant scent was his. Delta chittered, moving forward as Blue scented again.


Blue barked her order and darted into the belly of the ship, distantly hearing the man cry out in pain. She passed by cages filled with other dinosaurs, bleating in fear and hunger, then she stopped in front of yet another door.

She heard screeches from behind it, barks and snarls, and she heard her alpha through the bond.

Owen was getting weaker.

The blood-soaked human landed heavily at her feet and she hissed at him.

One more lock.

The man was whimpering loudly, almost in shock from the pain and the absolute terror he felt, but she wouldn’t let him crawl away.

“The code…” he bawled. “The same. I know… I can…”

The same code.

Blue studied the key pad. Metal keys, numbered.

She stretched out a talon and tapped the first key, which responded. She then entered the next digits, remembering them clearly.

There was a terrified gasp from the worthless human who had taken their alpha and who would pay for this.
The screen displayed ‘unlocked’ and she pushed open the door. There was no third door. There was only the room, the opened cage, and a new enemy to confront. Muscles coiled, her body catapulting forward.

Behind her, Echo put the enemy out of his misery, breaking his neck with a bite.

*

He was drifting.

Aware, but not really there any more. It was more than a zone. It was more than the fugue a talented could fall into, the moment before they stepped over that last line and lost themselves.

Owen knew he was hanging by a thread, that he had to get out of here, but it was too much of an effort now. It was… easier to let go.

Suddenly agony raced along his mind, a new, very physical pain, one that snapped him back to reality like he had been dropped and just landed on solid ground. It was a pain echoed by his mind, strings that had been pulled and released like rubber bands, snapping back and the shock of the impact had him gasp.

There was a moment of utter disorientation, of the noise flooding his ears, of light in his eyes that made him want to curl into a dark corner, then the anchor was there, the net that caught him, cut into the flood. He was torn out of the vastness of the mindspace, solid shields dropping around him like firewalls.

The noise was no more.

Owen’s hands felt hard muscle and scales, heard the screech of his girls, heard their individual voices clearly in his mind, like he never had before.

Alpha, Blue soothed. We’ve got you.

His mind seemed to collapse, he was feeling weak from blood loss and suddenly completely drained. His body screamed at him, his stomach was a knotted mess, and he was bathed in sweat.

Owen wanted to sob with relief.

The sharp pain originated from his hip and through clouded eyes he saw blood on his jeans. Talons buried in his hip. Three puncture wounds, razor-sharp claws so easily sliding into vulnerable human flesh.

Blue pushed herself against him, physically as well as mentally. Her rumbles were reverberating through him, soothing and familiar. He felt the pack’s presence in the steady hum in his mind, felt their individual minds.

Basic instinct, sharp and hungry. Cold killer logic. Fury and balance in one. He reached for it, that sharpness that was soothing to him, the danger that was for everyone but him.

Had to be done, Blue murmured, almost apologetic, pulling him out of his wandering thoughts.

Her talons; his skin. The pain bringing him back. The pain had gone through everything, physical
and immediately registered, snapping him out of the zone.

Owen Grady. He was Owen Grady. His mind was his own.

And he had just gotten clawed by his beta.

*Superficial. Not crippling.*

He buried his face against her skin, breathing through the pain; a pain that helped him center himself. His breathing hitched as she withdrew her claws, the hot spike of it settling him for real.

*Or would you have preferred a bite?*

He almost laughed at that. No. No, he wouldn’t have.

His body was high-strung with adrenaline and he could feel it ebb only slowly.

The pack was clustered around him, their minds protecting his, letting no one else connect even at the fringe.

His buffer. His catalyst.

They were highly aggressive, tense, coiled to lunge at the slightest provocation.

One unit.

No exception.

*Help is here. Carter.*

Dan was here? How much time had passed? What was going on?

*The others...?* he asked.

*No threat.*

Her mind was open to him and even in his condition, Owen understood. The Sorna beta had retreated, overwhelmed by the numbers, the alpha presence, the blow Owen had dealt. She deferred to the stronger one, to Blue. Red and Yellow had followed her example, still hissing and growling, but it was a threat none of his own pack took too seriously.

Blue hummed, calming him, her and the pack rebalancing him. They hissed at the other raptors, but they wouldn’t be swayed away from their alpha.

Protect. They had to protect.

And Owen let them, body and mind, his very soul, and he started to breathe in sync with his beta.

Protect.

* * *

Finding Owen Grady hadn’t really been difficult. The man had been cooperative when Carter had
told him he wanted a GPS locator on him, though he had drawn the line at the raptors being marked, too. Unlike the other dinosaurs in the park, the four raptors had never received implants. Carter had found it unusual.

“Wu knew what he was doing back then,” had been Owen’s brisk, toneless explanation when he had asked him one time, over a beer on the porch.

“He knew?”

The expression in Grady’s eyes had been downright frightening. “He created the girls to match me, Dan.”

Realization had set in then.

Henry Wu had manipulated the DNA to create four individuals who were not only above-average intelligent but also capable of bonding with the talented trainer who they had imprinted on.

“Fuck,” he had breathed.

Owen’s smile had been a grimace, nothing else.

So the raptors had no implants, but the pack alpha would always know where they were. The park couldn’t track them, though. And Owen refused to have them marked or even wear a collar.

Carter had had no idea why he was so opposed to the collar when he had agreed to the muzzles, but Claire had explained that particular puzzle to him. Vic Hoskins had wanted collars that delivered electrical charges for the raptors.

Yeah, well, sometimes he was caught in the shockwaves of what his predecessor had done and refused to do, even two years after starting as the new chief of security.

There were still layers he had yet to peel back.

But Owen carried a tracker in his cell phone and another was on his bike, which showed Carter that the other man trusted him. Knowing that the pack was never too far from their alpha, it was good enough.

They had also had the general location of the poachers’ ship from Owen’s call – near the old ferry landing.

Yes, it hadn’t been too difficult.

Carter had brought along two teams, consisting of five men and women each. All were highly trained, had gone through countless exercises that involved escaped animals, terrorist attacks, people in the enclosures, rescuing tourists out of the water, up in the air or on the ground.

And all had been around Grady’s pack before. All had gone through mental training to not start screaming internally at the very sight of a raptor out of the enclosure. These ten people were the best-suited for this job.

*
When they found he first body of a man, probably South-American, neck broken, puncture wounds in his back – those not fatal – Carter felt something inside of him shift.

Clean kill.

Swift, no chance to alert anyone, with a minimum of bloodshed.

“No ID on him, sir,” one of his men reported, going through the pockets. “He also didn’t fire a shot. Looks like he was brought down from behind.”

Carter saw the tracks coming out of the trees. He immediately scanned the area, his hindbrain alerting him to the known fact that he was as much prey as the others, as the dead man.

The raptors had killed.

For a reason.

The reason could only be Owen Grady. Owen would do his absolute best to keep the raptors from harming a human, even a poacher, so if they had taken a life it meant something Dan didn’t really want to think about.

“Found his bike,” came the soft voice over the earpiece. “No sign of the alpha. Tracker is working.”

Carter’s lips were a thin line and his men exchanged tell-tale looks. They hadn’t been able to find a trace of Owen’s signal for a while, which meant someone was blocking it. The bike had come in loud and clear.

Or his cell phone had been destroyed.

The second body wasn’t found much later by the other team coming in from the left. Also killed by what had to have been one of the raptors. This one had had his throat torn out, lying in a puddle of blood, dead for maybe half an hour.

Shit, he thought. This is bad. Very, very bad.

There had been no sign of Owen, which had worried him already, and now the pack had taken out the guards? His stomach was churning more now.

His earpiece beeped softly again. “Got a sight on target,” Hamada reported, voice even, calm. “No activity I can see. Four bodies near-by. No movement. There is a lot of noise, though. Doesn’t sound friendly.”

“Affirmative. Hold position. Keep an eye out for the alpha or the pack.”

Carter gestured at his men to move forward, weapons ready. Six bodies now. Probably growing more.

Something had happened to Owen. Something bad. He knew it. Not just because of the bodies. The raptors might have been provoked. Maybe the poachers had tried to capture them. No, it wasn’t just that, Carter decided. It was an instinct, more than gut feeling, because Owen Grady tended to become a trouble magnet in the worst situations. He never went looking for it; it just came for him.

The jungle cleared as they approached the coast line. The cargo ship was hard to miss from ground level, but it had been well-camouflaged against aerial detection. There was a smear of blood on a
rock near-by and one trooper found another body. The man shook his head.

Dead and gone.

Seven now. Four he could see on the beach. There were signs of a scuffle, there had been shots fired here, but there wasn’t a raptor lying among the carnage.

Carter looked at the open hatch. There was no movement, but he could hear the growls and screeches from inside. They suddenly cut off after a loud bark.

Raptors.

“Team two, secure the perimeter,” he ordered. “If you see one of Grady’s pack, don’t shoot unless she jumps you. Use non-lethal, that’s an order! Team one, with me. We’re going in. Be prepared for everything. Non-lethal authorized only!”

Everyone acknowledged.

All had been trained to work with the raptors, were known to the pack, and they wouldn’t shoot a dinosaur on first sight. They had all proven to have nerves of steel.

Carter hoped they wouldn’t break in a real life confrontation with what he hoped weren’t alpha-less raptors.

If Owen had died…

No, he decided firmly. He wouldn’t think about it.

And they were heading inside.

tbc...
Chapter 17

The ship was silent. Aside from the hum of electricity, a rumble of pipes, there was no other sound. Not even a screech or a bark.

Carter, rifle up, sighting through the scope, gestured at the team to move.

They spread out, looking for guards.

They were probably looking for bodies, Carter mused as he noiselessly moved deeper, heading for the cargo hold.

But maybe someone had survived, holed up in a bunk room or a supply closet. Judging from the smell of blood, mixing with other, even less flattering scents, his hopes weren’t that high.

The ship was old, trails of running water creating rusty stripes. The light bulbs could use some cleaning, as did the smeared windows. The rooms he passed were either from the crew or just empty holds. All showed that the poachers hadn’t planned on staying at sea this long.

They passed what Carter classified as the mess hall, though it was just tables and chairs, unwashed plates and pots. The air smelled a little stale.

“Found another body,” came the softly-spoken report from one of the teams. “Recent kill.”

“Bridge secure,” another chimed in. “No sign of life. From what I can get out of the ship’s computer, the cargo hold is locked down tight, pulling a lot of power. Also found a brief ship’s manifest. Looks like a whole lot of dinosaurs, sir.”

“Cameras?” Dan asked.

“No. Sorry.”

“Dig around, see if you find anything else.”

“Understood.”

Carter suddenly stopped and looked at the ground. Behind him, his team did the same.


Enough to be disturbing, not enough to call it another body. Inside the blood puddles were prints. Toe prints. Further up ahead were smeared traces of heavy soled shoes.

“Might be a live one, sir.”

He glanced at the trooper next to him. “Highly doubt it. He wasn’t alone. The pack left their own prints. He wasn’t running either.”

What that implied was threatening to stall his mind. The raptors were terrifyingly intelligent, but did they understand the concept of taking a hostage?

There was another shrill cry, then a deep, spine-chilling staccato chatter. His men froze, one hissing almost soundlessly through his teeth.
“Let’s go,” Carter ordered. “And remember: do not shoot the pack!”

He got low murmurs, an affirmative, and they headed deeper into the ship, toward the cargo hold.

The first cargo door they found deeper in the belly of the ship was open. Carter noticed the blood on the number keys. Smeared, but clearly fingerprints. Another puddle of blood next to the door.

And raptor prints.

Bellows had them listen up, but there was nothing else.

At the second door, there was more blood, though not on the number keys, and there was a body. He spared it only one glance, confirming to himself that the man was dead.

One of the troopers checked, even though it was clear there was nothing left to do but put the man in a body bag.

The man shook his head with a grim expression.

Time to go in.

The scene that greeted Carter when he stepped into the cargo hold of the poachers’ ship was one right out of his nightmares.

Four velociraptors, covered in blood – most likely human, some maybe their own – their alpha clinging to the pack beta and covered in blood, too.

His own blood.

Looking almost completely out of it.

In the middle of a cargo ship hold.

And in a way it reminded him of a situation on Claire Dearing’s lawn, with four raptors guarding their downed alpha.

Well, fuck.

This time Owen was conscious, even if it was debatable how much longer. Carter would bet a month’s pay that the blood on Owen was all his own. It was a lot. Actually, so much that Dan was more than a little freaked.

There was a low rumble from somewhere in the dark and Carter stiffened, as did the three men who had come with him into the cargo hold. The rest of his team was securing the perimeter and the ship, looking for survivors. So far, there had been no report on a live one. Carter doubted anyone had been left. He had stepped over a body just walking in here. The man had looked worse than the others.
Delta was a few feet to the left. Her head swiveled sharply, looking at Carter, then her nostrils blew open. Her talons flicked. Blood-crusted talons, streaks of more dried blood all over her. Her expression was almost human, giving Carter a ‘What took you so long?’ growl.

“Three more heat signatures,” Russell reported, voice low, eyes flicking from his pad to the back of the cargo hold.

Blue shifted her weight without dislodging Owen, looking into the shadows, growl-barking at whatever was there. Her jaws snapped shut with an audible click, then she hissed.

An answering hiss had Carter’s hair stand on end.

Raptors. Three more raptors.

“We need to get him out of there.”

Blue’s head turned sharply back to him and Carter suddenly had her undivided attention. Something primal inside him jittered, trembling under her cold gaze. It was intense, stripping the layers of his soul, looking into his mind, into his very being, and making him shiver.

Hunter – prey.

Blue – Carter.

Cool, reptilian yellow eyes fixed him with an intelligence that was terrifying.

Fuck, fuck, fuck! ran thought his head.

She growled softly, then jerked her head at him.

That cold, visceral feeling intensified. Intelligent, sharp, deadly. She was communicating with him, clear to see, plain and simple.

Delta and Charlie made room, keeping themselves in strike positions.

Against the other raptors.

Their targets. Not the team.

Blue rumbled impatiently, lips pulling back from a maw full of pointy teeth. Echo had slipped closer, ducking low, fixating something in the dark.

“Blue, you need to leave,” Carter said slowly, evenly, voice echoing in the vast space. “We got this.”

She snorted, like she wasn’t convinced. The others kept an eye on the three unknown raptors, who were moving restlessly in the shadows. One stepped closer, revealing dark green, red and yellow, rudimentary feathers on its neck and head.

“Adult Sorna raptors,” Dan breathed. “Damnit! They caught themselves some full-grown Sorna raptors!”

“Among others things, sir,” Lincoln reported over the comm. “We got a whole loading bay full of dinos here. All babies. And eggs.”

“Secure the cargo. Call in the vet team. We need the medical response team, too. Tell them the
alpha is in bad shape, but conscious and responding, but there are visible injuries and most likely blood loss.”

“Roger that, sir.”

“We got this,” Carter addressed Blue again, repeating his words. “Keep them away, let us take care of your alpha.”

Owen’s dazed eyes met Carter’s and he gave him a weak smile.

“Hey, Owen. Would you mind telling your beta that we want to get you the necessary help? Get you to safety before those raptors back there think it’s time to make a run for it?”

“She knows already. Just… she steps away and I crash.”

Understanding dawned, coupled with trepidation. Blue had asked him to grab their alpha, help him, not doubted his ability to do so.

Blue rumbled, sounding rather annoyed, then barked again. It was pure frustration now.

“Ah.” Translation: fucking hell!

“Bad leg. Even more bad head. Things keep going out of focus. Oh, and blood loss.”

“Damnit, Grady,” Carter sighed, looked at the beta again.

She met his gaze, sure, cool under pressure, laser-focused. It was up to him to get going and she was giving an impatient little huff. The chief of security almost laughed.

“Okay.” He handed his rifle to the trooper next to him. The man looked like he was about to protest, but he shut up. “She good with me approaching?”

Blue rumbled and gave a nod.

Owen had closed his eyes again, head resting against his beta’s neck, but he raised a thumb.

Carter glanced at Russell. “Keep an eye on the Sorna raptors. Can we keep them locked in here?”

“The locks are working. We can hold them until the vets are here. What about… Grady’s? The pack?”

“Let them leave. The moment the alpha is safely out of here, they won’t be a danger to us. The vet team will handle the Sornas.”

Russell nodded slowly as the rest of the team acknowledged the order.

Carter drew a breath, calming his nerves, but adrenaline spiked. He would be walking past Charlie and maybe even Delta, right toward Blue, to take Owen from her. He had never faced the pack without a fence between them ever since that night on Claire’s lawn. Even then he had felt safer because of the dozens of guns pointing at the raptors.

Owen had once told him that Carter had the right energy, that the pack accepted him and wouldn’t attack unless he threatened either them or Grady. Just… it wasn’t easy to think of them as under control right. And Owen himself had told him more than once that it was never a matter of control; respect, calm assertiveness, energy.
And a bond so deep the man had them all in his head.

Dan carefully approached the pack beta, without taking his eyes off her. Blue was watching him in turn, not hissing, barely a rumble, and she wasn’t showing teeth. She looked expectant, would probably drum her talons if she could, radiating impatience.

“Yeah, I know,” he muttered. “We’re slow on the uptake.”

Bloodied talons rested against Owen’s soaked pants, blood mixing with blood, and her rumbles almost sounded like a purr now.

As he passed Delta, the raptor shifted a little, huffing softly. She was so close, her felt the brush of warm air on his cheek. There was no aggression coming off any of them. They were keeping the Sornas in check, guarding everyone else, and Carter had been allowed to approach.

He stopped right next to Grady, keeping his posture firm, assertive, hoping his energies were as positive as Owen always told him they were.

Blue breathed softly, briefly pushing her nose against Owen’s neck as if to rouse him.

“Hey, Owen,” Carter said calmly. He was happy to hear his voice was steady.

“You’re good,” Owen answered, sounding tired, pained.

His eyes were still closed, his breathing coming in short bursts that spoke of pain. His complexion was far from healthy. Up close, Dan could see the deep, blood-crusted cut on Owen’s arm, as well as the slashed pants. They were sticking to his leg from all the blood.

“I hope so. Learned from the best.”

Delta had moved closer yet again. She was protecting Carter’s back as he helped the alpha. Her rumbling hums were almost reassuring.

“You missed the barbecue,” Dan said conversationally.

“Well, damn.”

“And you made us miss it, too.”

“I’ll make it up to you.”

Carter smiled without humor. “Staying alive would be a step in the right direction.”

“Sounds good.”

“Medical’s outside. Let’s get you there.”

He looked at Blue, asking silent permission to touch. She blew out warm air, gentle, caring, the expression in her eyes anything but murderous.

“Owen? You gotta work with me.”

“Trying,” came the breathy answer.

Carter felt Blue’s warmth, heard her every breath, and his fingers briefly ran over her scales.
“Thank you,” he murmured. Then he wrapped Owen’s free arm around his shoulders. “Lock your knees. Ready?”

It got him a hiss of confirmation and Owen stumbled against him. The man was heavier than he looked and Carter locked his own knees.

Blue huffed softly. Her talons flexed a little, but she wasn’t tensing for an attack.

“Good,” Carter said quietly. “And we’re walking,” he told Owen, voice almost cheerful.

“You’re a riot,” the exhausted man grumbled.

“So I’ve been told.”

Delta stepped aside as Carter lugged his friend closer to the exit. She rumbled softly, ending it with an almost quizzical whine.

People moved in.

Slowly. Carefully.

The Sorna raptors hissed and snarled, but Blue and her pack were keeping them in line. Charlie lashed at one of the feathered raptors and it danced back, snorting, sounding confused.

“Owen?” Dan asked, voice low, eyes never leaving the animals around them.

The pack had moved between them and the other raptors. The intention was very clear.

“They’re hungry and confused,” Grady whispered, voice fading in and out. “They haven’t been fed in days. Their alpha pair was killed over the eggs, those three taken. Blue’s got it. Trust her.”

“Hn. Strangely I do. At least to not eat me and my men as long as we’re useful.”

Owen laugh was breathy and weak. “I’d be offended… if I could remember how to.”

He stumbled and Carter tightened his hold. Russel was suddenly there, taking some of Owen’s weight.

Lights flashed, white and red outside the lowered cargo ramp, piercing the darkness and lighting up the surreal scene of two raptor packs facing off against each other.

The emergency response team was calm and quick, taking Owen from the two men. They got Owen hooked up to an IV, a collar around his neck and on a backboard in minutes. A pressure bandage was applied to the wounds on his thigh and arm.

They were out of the cargo hold within ten minutes.

Carter looked at the raptor pack and found Blue meeting his gaze evenly. There was a tension in her frame, her eyes reflecting something he understood only too well. She was worried, deeply, deeply worried. Blue’s connection to her alpha wasn’t just for pack’s sake. It was personal; intimate in a way no one would ever be able to fathom and comprehend.

“Pull out,” he told his men. “Let the pack leave and seal the room until the vet unit gets here!”

He got affirmatives, his eyes never leaving Blue’s.
“Your turn,” he told the beta, currently acting alpha. “You can leave. My men won’t stop you in any way.”

She huffed softly, then glanced at the Sornas.

“They’ll have to remain here. You did a good job, Blue.”

Her rumble was easily understood. Of course she had a good job; she had done her job. Then she yipped at the others.

Charlie was the first out the door, trotting past Carter with a confidence he might have found amusing any other day. Echo followed, then Delta. She warbled a little at him, then was gone.

Blue was the last, passing by Carter, still keeping an eye on the Sornas, and he felt her hip-check him to make him stagger toward the door.

“Gotcha,” he murmured, pulling out.

The door locked firmly in place the moment he was on the other side.

Blue chittered, then headed toward the exit, unhurried.

The moment Owen Grady was safely on the way to medical and the pack had disappeared in the jungle, Carter’s teams and the vet unit set to work. It was almost like a well-oiled machine. Everyone knew what to do in regards to securing the perimeter, giving the vets and their assistants room to work, and the gruesome task of collecting the bodies of the poachers.

Dan looked at the approaching trooper. “Hamada?”

“You won’t like it, sir.”

“Like any situation that has the word ‘raptor’ in it. Spill. What happened in your opinion?”

Hamada, leader of team two, was a superb tracker and had worked as a wildlife ranger before coming to Jurassic World. He would have made a good gameskeeper, but InGen had snatched him up and he had been with security ever since.

Now he looked at the severely disturbed ground, seeing things only he could interpret.

“This was a planned, strategically well-executed attack. In lions you find strategy when it comes to singling out the prey, the weakest, easiest to bring down animal of the herd. Young, old, sick, doesn’t matter. They expend as little energy as possible.”

“Not here,” Carter stated. “They weren’t hunting for food.”

“No, sir. They didn’t so much as nibble at one of the victims. Clean kills, all of them except the last. All had broken necks, torn out jugulars. They had no time to sound an alarm and the few who got off shots never really hit anything. At least not in a way that saved their lives. Found some spatter that’s not human. I guess a graze or a cut.”

Carter expelled a breath of air, looking around the busy landing site. His teams were securing the cargo, the ship, the area. The bodies had been collected and it wasn’t a pretty sight. They would
cordon off the area for now, but something would have to be done to the cargo ship and, most importantly, what had been inside.

“They were coming to get their alpha,” Dan murmured.

“That’s more than likely, sir,” Hamada agreed. “In and out. Find the target, eliminate the hostiles.”

Classic maneuver. Hamada didn’t say it, but it was implicated quite openly. Military tactics. Grady had been military, but he had been a dog handler, a trainer, not a hostage extraction specialist.

“The last one was different,” Hamada said slowly. “He showed signs of scratches and bites. None too deep, all painful and more like he was pushed and pulled. One arm is broken. The other arm had teeth marks in it. He was killed in front of the second door. As you already noticed, there are bloody prints on the lock of the first one. None on the second.”

The two men looked at each other, both thinking probably the same thoughts, but Carter refused to say anything out loud.

“Thanks,” he finally addressed his team leader.

“They’re still out there, aren’t they?” Hamada asked.

He didn’t answer. Everyone had seen the pack leave, Blue in the lead, and they had disappeared like silent shadows, ghosts in the night, and there hadn’t been a whisper since. If Carter was to guess, they were either lingering near the medical building or had returned to the raptor paddock.

A pitiful cry from within the ship had his attention turn to the other task at hand: move all the poached animals. Some were so young, they had probably been born within the last month. The veterinary unit was extremely busy sorting through the small bodies, determining their health. Right now, most were put into cages to be assessed in the quarantine units.

As for the Sorna raptor pack, they had been sedated immediately and put into solo transportation boxes.

“Take another look. Full report. Then get those bodies out of here and to Medical for an autopsy.”

“Yes, sir.”

Carter wondered if they had so many body bags, then pushed that thought out of his mind. He walked over to the vet mobile unit, nodding at the man in charge. Marco Foxworth, his name tag read.

“How bad is it?” he asked.

Foxworth, who looked more like a pro wrestler than a vet, topping six feet seven easily, grunted. Broad-shouldered, dark blond, sun-burned square face, and bright blue eyes. He had muscles that had Carter’s men wonder what the man worked out with, and the longish hair, worn in a pony-tail, did the rest. No one wanted to speculate where he had the scar at his neck from. No keeper argued long with him about treatment methods.

Right now he looked decidedly unhappy.

“Aside from the three adult, fully-grown raptors we just secured, we have an assortment of eggs. We counted sixty so far. Not all are viable. We’re getting them off to quarantine to get individually checked. My team has found several babies, two of them obviously just a week old, probably
hatched on board the ship, and two young adults. Looks like a shopping list in there. They weren’t picky. Grab and run, I suspect. All Sornas.”

“You can tell?”

Foxworth gave him an exasperated, faintly scathing look. On him it looked almost threatening. Carter had heard some of the workers say the man could wrestle a gallimimus to the ground in no time flat.

“There is only one other island to get eggs and babies from. Our eggs have a bar code. Those don’t. Our babies are chipped from birth. Those aren’t.”

Dan smiled humorlessly. “Just checking.”

“We have counted eighteen babies. Some of them don’t look good. I believe they didn’t plan on this stop or they would have brought along more equipment for their precious cargo. They weren’t amateurs.”

“No, they weren’t. We suspect they’ve been operating under the radar for a while.”

Foxworth frowned. “Isla Sorna is under tight security. Nothing should be able to get in or out.”

“Unless you have an in that gets you out.”

Foxworth’s expression reflected that he understood the hint.

“We’ll be looking into that, Dr. Foxworth,” Carter assured him. “You just take care of them.” He nodded at the boxes full of tiny babies.

“Oh, you betcha we will. Can’t promise they’ll all make it, but we’ll do our best.”

“What about the raptors?”

“Healthy. Haven’t eaten in a while, a bit dehydrated as far as I can tell, but strong. I gave them some shots while they’re out.” He frowned and looked at his team of technicians handling the animals. “How’s our raptor whisperer?”

“Medical. Haven’t gotten word from them yet, but he looked pretty out of it. Nothing life-threatening.”

Foxworth pursed his lips. “Well,” he finally said. “Got work to do. You’ll get my report later.”

Carter suppressed a smile at the dismissal. He walked over to Hamada.

“I’ll be heading over to meet with Dearing. You’re in charge. Foxworth and his team will get the dinosaurs to the quarantine unit.”

Hamada nodded. “Understood.”

Carter got into his car and drove off, already dialing Claire’s extension.

tbc...
Chapter 18

The park was quiet.

Tourists had already left due to the early closure. Announcements had been made well in advance, especially on the ferry. The Hilton had had electronic posters up and throughout the park, more of those posters informed every single visitor. Of course there had been those who still complained that they had neither seen it on the website where they had ordered their tickets, nor read the emails containing the ticket codes, the schedule handed to them, the posters or anywhere else.

Not that it helped. Everyone had had to leave.

The Innovation Center was shut down, the loudspeakers quiet, and only the ambient lights were on. At the end of Main Street, the lagoon lay silent, deep and dark. The Main Street itself was empty of life, a long, wide stretch of pavement that normally bustled with people from ten to ten.

Once a year, when an inventory had to be run, things were like that. And traditionally it would start with the company barbecue.

Restaurants, kiosks and souvenir stores had locked up already, the buildings mostly dark. Here or there employees were still cleaning up the last areas. Only Winston’s and Margaritaville would be open. Winston’s would fire up the grill for the barbecue and Margaritaville would be dispensing drinks

Not this evening.

Where the barbecue should have been, there was no one around. Word had spread quickly that something had happened, something involving Owen Grady, the pack, and two teams of troopers led by Carter himself. Rumors had started to fly immediately and it had been a unanimous decision to stop the planned party.

No updates had been given for hours.

People had either gone home, milled around a little longer, or found together in one of the employee breakrooms.

Around midnight, only the most hardy were left, all of them Owen’s closest friends, and they were gathering intel. Lowery had worked on getting any kind of news from the InGen security teams, until finally one of the guys had been exasperated enough to let him know the basics.

“Poachers?” Nancy exclaimed.

“And Owen in the middle,” Reggie sighed. “Bloody hell, that man!”

“He went out into the restricted area to run with the pack,” Nancy reminded him, frowning. “He wasn’t there to hunt for intruders.”

“Still found them.”

“And Carter went after him with two assault teams,” Lowery added. “That’s so not good.”

“For the poachers it isn’t,” Serena predicted. “The girls won’t tolerate trespassers.”
Fifteen minutes past midnight all hell broke loose in the t-rex paddock.

Followed by M rising out of the water with a shrill warbling scream, nearly hitting the plaza as she landed, one flipper catching the railing and flattening it.

The apatosaurus trumpeted loudly, their voices echoing in the night, a chorus of stegosaurs and triceratopes joining in.

In the Aviary, the pteranodons and dimorphodons took to the air, an aggressive swarm that seemed intent on breaking the glass.

People looked around, confused, wondering what the hell was going on. Laurel was already running toward the Kingdom, calling for Josh on her radio.

“What the hell is going on?!” she screamed.

“I have no fucking idea! Sue’s trying to… I don’t know… She’s hitting her head against trees, the wall, and the observatory!”

“What?!”

She skidded around a corner just as a massive roar echoed through the enclosure.

A chorus answered the t-rex’s call.

Josh was staring at their charge, eyes impossibly wide, and Laurel grabbed his wrist, anchoring him to her, slapping him hard in the face.

“Josh!”

He staggered, blinking, then exhaled sharply.

Inside the paddock, Sue roared again, a challenge, a call to arms, and her head swiveled, looking for the enemy. Eyes too small for such a massive head glowed with a fire Laurel had never seen her display before.

The t-rex shouldered into the observatory, the boom had her wince, curl in on herself, the creaks and groans terrifying. The paddocks had been built to withstand the force an animal inside it could muster, trying to break out, but it was terrifying nevertheless.

The rex trumpeted, tail lashing out, unearthing a tree.

Fuckfuckfuck, ran continuously through her mind.
Josh was trembling, still resisting the siren call of the powerful mind, and she dug her nails into the soft skin of his wrist.

“Stay with me!” she hissed.

“Gawd,” he groaned and suddenly went down on his knees.

She went with him, wrapped an arm around his shoulders, felt him shake, and a whimper escaped his lips.

And then Sue reared back, whuffling in confusion, jaws clicking shut. She snorted, looking around her enclosure as if she expected something to happen. She snorted, shaking her head. Her gaze came to rest on the two humans, her keepers, studying them with reptilian coolness.

“Go,” Laurel murmured, pushing the order at the tiny, sharp mind.

Josh had the stronger talent of the two and he had never tried to get too close to Sue. Laurel had been happy enough to just watch her from afar, use her abilities to give a push here or a pat there. She had never touched that tiny steel ball.

Sue whuffled again, then she turned and stomped back into her jungle.

Josh suddenly went limp with a groan of relief.

“Hey,” Laurel said softly, cupping his face.

He looked exhausted, lines in his face that she wasn’t used seeing there.

“What the thrice-damned hell was that?” he whispered breathlessly.

“I have no idea. And I’m afraid to find out.”

Nancy had been shocked by the display from her mosasaurus, frozen in place as she felt the surge from M, the emotional upheaval that was a tidal wave with a life of its own. It had crashed into her, pushed her, pulled at her, and then the massive form had crashed down and destroyed part of the safety rail.

“How could she do this? There’s a safety built into the lagoon?” one of the keepers yelled. “It should have shocked her!”

Nancy reached for M, felt her distress, her confusion, her fear.

Fear?

The mosa trumpeted, sounding upset. Her tail slapped down on the surface as she dove abruptly, only to shoot up again. Her body rose halfway out of the water, then she crashed down once more, a tsunami of water washing over the plaza.

Nancy was drenched, but she didn’t care.

Something had happened.
Something bad.

“No,” she whispered, shaking her head, as a thought rose unbidden.

Owen.

Owen hadn’t been there, Carter and two teams had gone out to do whatever they did in full combat gear, and now…

The only person to be able to touch the mosa, or the rex, any of the other animals in the park…

“Owen,” she breathed. “Please, no…”

M cried out once, then she grew quiet abruptly, warbling a little. Her mind was suddenly smooth like the lagoon waters had become.

More people were now swarming around, gamekeepers, trainers, caretakers. All over the park animals quieted down.

Reggie had gunned the engine of his jeep and driven like a bat out of hell, the dark roads familiar to him like the back of his hand. He felt the herds, a massive uproar all over the park, and he pushed through them to find Becky.

The apatosaur matriarch was trumpeting, long neck swinging through the crowns of the trees, as if she was trying to brush something off her head. The herd was moving around, confused, bumping into each other. The trices and stegs had run off toward the other side, forming clusters. A few of them were scuffling, but nothing too seriously.

Becky cried loudly, a bleat-trumpet-gurgle.

The other herd members answered.

When they started moving toward the walkways of the Walk Among the Giants attraction, Reggie gave a mental yell.

Becky stopped, whuffling.

“There’s a good girl. I have no idea what’s going on, but you can’t just saunter off. Stay here, Becks. Just stay here.”

She called again and Reggie reached a little more, guiding her away. Becky followed, her simple mind urging her to follow her trainer.

And with her, the rest of the herd followed.

Eddie Molina and Thierry Beaumont had arrived at the Aviary almost at the same time. Molina blanched as he took in the chaos, his ‘birds’ swarming and screeching, as if a huge predator had gotten into the Aviary. Cat in the hen house effect.
Thierry was taking two steps at a time as he raced up to the control room that was also an observatory.

“What in damnation is going on here?!” he demanded.

“No idea.”

The glass was too thick for them to break through. There was no danger of any of them getting out again, but still, it was frightening.

And suddenly, just as quickly as the uproar had begun, the flyers quieted down again. Leathery wings flapped once-twice as they landed, looking slightly confused, making little cawing noises. A few sat very close to the observatory, all still adolescents or teens, and their tiny eyes met Molina’s.

A soft squawk, almost quizzical, had him release a pent-up breath.

“We need to check the Aviary,” he told his colleague. “And the flyers.”

Beaumont nodded, still looking a little shocked by the events.

*

A little over an hour later, an ambulance pulled up outside Medical.

Nancy, now in dry clothes and joined by Reggie, was watching as the ambulance backed in, obscuring their view.

They exchanged worried looks.

None of the animals had gotten seriously hurt. Rexy Sue had a few scrapes, but they would most likely be gone in a few days. The Aviary had reported the same. Reggie’s herds were fine. M had lost a few scales on one fin, but there had been no blood.

“You think they felt him?” Reggie asked, voice low, a fine tremor to it.

“I don’t know, Reg,” Nancy answered. “I really don’t know.”

And if they had… what had Owen done and what condition was he in now?

*

It wasn’t the first time Owen Grady was in the medical center. It also wasn’t his first time as a patient there. He knew some of the nurses and he knew the one specific doctor who was now giving him a thorough speech about the Dos and Don’ts of his next few days.

Not that he really needed it.

He felt abysmal, like something had stepped on him and scraped the remains off at the nearest
piece of rock.

Owen felt like his brain had liquefied and taken the rest of his body with him. He hadn’t known a person could ever feel this way. His head was killing him. Every single thought hurt. Everything was too bright, too painfully loud, and it wasn’t even a physical problem. It was all in his head.

He was wide open.

Nothing left between him and the world. Only his four vicious guardians.

Blue wrapped herself more tightly around him, dampening the sensations. She and the pack were working overtime on this.

Dr. Annika Svensson had been ‘unlucky enough’, as she had called it, to be on duty when the call about him had come in. Then again, she would probably have been called anyway. They medical station wasn’t a full-fledged hospital and mostly treated tourists who had eaten too much, or the wrong thing, had drunk too little, resulting in dehydration and fainting. Or too much alcohol. Sometimes there was a bruised knee, a twisted ankle, and occasionally a visitor who had forgotten their regular medication.

The rest of the cases were injuries sustained by the workers.

And Owen Grady.

“…rest,” she said sternly as Owen focused on her again. “And I mean rest. No motor-biking, no ATV rides, no driving at all!”

“I won’t.”

“I wish I could get that in writing, with a legal clause that kicks your ass the moment you so much as look at a bike.”

“I’ll be good, Dr. Svensson.”

She gave him a withering glare. He couldn’t fault her. He knew what he had looked like coming in. Face bruised, a cut above one eye, scratches everywhere, a cut on his arm, another on his thigh, and his clothes had had tears that were crusted in blood. Owen Grady had been beat up, knifed, thrown into a room with three wild raptors and clawed at.

Yeah, he could see where she wasn’t believing him.

“And I’ll be home for it,” Owen insisted.

“Mr. Grady…” She shook her head. “We stitched you up, pumped you full of liquids, just shy of needing a transfusion. You’ve been in shock, you were beaten up and thrown into a room full of raptors…” Svensson briefly glanced at the closed doors, as if checking they hadn’t been cracked open. “You overtaxed your brain, Owen,” she said, voice dropping to a more intense tone.

“I’m fine.”

“You most definitely are not! I did another fMRI. You’re lighting up like a Christmas Tree!”

“Huh.”

She frowned, that line between her eyes deepening. Annika had a million questions, but she wasn’t pushing it. “You need rest,” she repeated. “What happened left a huge impact on your brain, Owen.
Give it time to reset.”

“I’m okay. I don’t feel any different, Annika. Really.”

Liar, liar, some part of him sang.

He felt different. There was this weird sensation of being wide open. As if the moment the pack stepped down from guard duty, he would be overwhelmed.

_Not happening_, Blue told him firmly.

No, none of them would let that happen. Owen would heal, with the pack, and he would regain control of his brain.

Annika didn’t need to know that.

No one did.

“I know a lie when I see the patient,” she now stated. “I wish you would consider spending the rest of the night here. You don’t have a concussion and your injuries aren’t life-threatening, but you are exhausted, Owen.”

Yeah. Right. His head ached dully, the pain only kept in check by the meds in his system. It was an ache that had turned into a slight pressure inside his head and he sighed silently. It was a constant dull beat and Owen felt a bit nauseous.

Annika sighed and shook her head, resigned. “But I agree that you might be better off at your own home. For the sake of my nurses. I just wish you would be more cooperative when it comes to what happened to you, Owen. Preternaturally speaking.”

Nope, not happening. She knew too much already, could probably come up with ten different theories without him, and Owen wasn’t about to become a science experiment.

Seeing his expression, Svensson nodded. “I’ll talk to the nurse on duty to get the release forms to you. If anything changes, if you feel any kind of pain, have impaired vision, get dizzy, throw up…”

“I’ll holler,” he promised.

*

Briefing the park operations manager was a matter of minutes, even if it happened past midnight. Claire didn’t need the details of the operation, just the hard facts. At least the known facts. Carter had no idea about a lot of things that had happened, though he had a good enough imagination to fill in the blanks for now.

“Owen’s currently in treatment. I called Medical and they say he’s conscious, coherent, and he won’t need surgery. Just a lot of stitches”

“The pack?”

“Hopefully not injured and currently in the jungle. Like the last time. They aren’t a problem.”
Claire looked pale but composed. He knew those lines around her mouth, recognized the tension.

“They killed?”

Dan was silent.

“Carter.”

“They didn’t kill in cold blood or for sport. They took down an enemy who was threatening their alpha, an enemy that had actually thrown Grady into a cage with another raptor pack. They did what anyone of us, us humans, would have done. We might have done it with less teeth and claws. You can’t put them down.”

Claire raised her eyebrows at her security chief. Carter was firmly on Owen’s side. Very firmly.

“Defending a pack of animals?” she provoked.

“You and I know that they aren’t just animals, Claire.”

Yes, so very true.

“And we both know that to kill the pack would be to kill Owen.”

Claire didn’t reply to that statement, but it was the truth. She knew how deep the bond went and Carter had discovered it over time. She had no idea how much Owen had told the other man, but she knew he trusted Dan Carter. Both men had become friends and she had seen them talk, hang out, share a beer or a burger.

“They saved their alpha from certain death. They took down a ring of animal smugglers who were a very serious threat to them. We still have no idea if they had been there before, but I suspect so.” Carter’s expression gave nothing away, but he was furious. “I have a few people looking into where they came from, who their business partners are. We’ll find whatever they took from the island on previous trips.”

“That would be… helpful.”

Carter’s radio beeped. “Sir, Mr. Grady has been released from Medical.”

“Roger that. Keep him there. I’ll be over in five minutes.”

Claire raised her eyebrows. “Baby-sitting?”

“You know how it is. Can’t let him stagger around unsupervised. He’ll want to be home, which I agree is the best place to be for him because of the pack, and I want to make sure he arrives with all limbs intact.”

“You do that.”

“Get some sleep, Claire,” he advised. “You have a park to run. Let me worry about the rest. It’s my job after all.”

The moment Carter was out the door, Claire picked up the phone and called Simon Masrani on the private line.
tbc...
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

Had a change in work schedule, so updates are a little late and a bit shorter than the previous one. Apologies!

Two hours after Annika had signed his release papers, an hour after his last IV, and ten minutes after he had fought about whether or not he needed to be wheeled away in a wheelchair – which he had lost -- Owen was on his way to his own home. With his very own driver.

Dan had only raised his eyebrows when Owen had started to argue, which had made the other man shut up about getting a nanny.

“What happened to the Sorna raptor pack?” Owen asked instead.

“Not your concern.”

“The hell they are, Dan!” he snapped, then suppressed a groan at the pulse of pain.

The blond looked at him for a long moment. He had yet to start the engine. The car sat in the brightly lit spot in front of Medical, and the world around them was dark and mostly asleep.

“They were sedated by the vet unit we called. All animals and the eggs have been transported to a safe area. They didn’t just have velociraptors, Owen. Dr. Foxworth counted close to twenty babies from all kinds of species.”

“Fuck.”

“They’re all in quarantine.”

“Good.”

Quarantine was far, far away from the regular theme park, walled off, with special access only.

“Where’s your pack?” Carter asked, sounding almost casual.

Owen reached along the bond and found them waiting in the jungle for the car to get started, for their alpha to head home.

He told Dan and it got him a knowing look.

Carter started the car, pulled out of the parking lot and drove back to the raptor paddock as carefully as possible, but nothing could help the jolts rattling through the cab as the SUV hit bumps and dips. The road was dark, only lit up by the light from the headlamps.

Owen looked decidedly ghost-like when they finally stopped and for a moment Dan was afraid he
would either faint or throw up.
Thankfully he did neither.
But it was probably a close call.
He was even more thankful when he saw help in form of Professor Grant approach the SUV.

The raptor enclosure and Owen Grady’s house had been cleared of all non-essential people, which meant absolutely everyone who wasn’t on Grady’s list of approved visitors.

Alan Grant had been on that list since it existed. He had been at the hotel, talking to Mick and enjoying a good drink, trying to distract himself from the worry he felt about Owen, when Claire had called him. Giving him the news. The terrifying, horrific news.

“I knew something had happened,” he murmured, shaking his head. “He’s a trouble magnet.”

“You got no idea what happened, Alan.”

“Whatever happened, it won’t be easy. I know that kid by now. If he is involved and Medical was needed, it’s bad. Really bad.”

The raptor pack was most likely hidden in the jungle but so very much free to roam. They might even go home, to the enclosure.

Alan arrived just twenty minutes ahead of Carter, switching on the lights in the house. The paddock was bathed in spotlights already, since they were on timers.

When Owen arrived at his home, with Dan Carter acting as his personal cabby-nanny-bodyguard, he was reasonably alert, though a bit slower than usual. His face looked like someone had banged it against something hard and unyielding repeatedly. There was one big, colorful bruise running down his face, a cut over one eye, a split lip, and bandages peeking out from under shredded looking clothes.

Alan studied the almost ashen and worn features, noted the deep lines, the slightly glassy eyes, and he shot Carter a sharp, silent question. The blond nodded toward the door.

They got their raptor whisperer inside and into his bed with hardly any trouble. Owen was almost asleep on his feet. His eyes closed as he sank into the mattress, putting up a mumbled protest when they tried to undress him.

“What happened?” Alan asked in a low voice when they had shut the door.

Carter walked over to the fridge, rummaged through it, and gave the professor a beer.

“You’ll need it,” was his only comment. “I need one, but I’m still on duty.”

Alan accepted it warily, then sat down when Carter gestured at him to do so. Then the chief of
It took him the better part of thirty minutes to catch Alan up. Grant was silent, barely breathing, knuckles standing out white against his tanned skin, and his lips had become a thin, tight line.

“Damnit…!” he whispered hoarsely when Carter was done. “This is… bad.”

Carter smiled grimly, looking just as tired as Owen, though not as beaten up. “You could say that. I have a different set of words for what happened.”

“No survivors?”

“My men are still checking. So far… no.”

“The pack?”

“Looks like it. Like a surgical strike. What I’ve seen so far, barely a gun was fired.”

Alan swallowed. “Advance planning. Velociraptors are intelligent. Those four are more than mere animals, Mr. Carter. A lot more.” His eyes strayed into the direction of the paddock. “I always told everyone who wanted to listen, and even those who didn’t. they learn, they have complex brains, they remember more than just when feeding time is. I’ve known Owen for a long time now. I’ve seen that pack grow. I’ve seen it grow with him and because of him. They were special and now… they’re unique.”

Carter nodded slowly. “Not too surprising, right? We all knew that fact about them, though no one wants to talk about it. Those poachers had taken the alpha, were feeding him to a pack of Sorna raptors. They eliminated the first threat, the armed humans, then went after the enemy raptor pack.”

Alan shivered a little. “Now what?”

“Nothing. Business as usual. My teams are cleaning up the mess, Claire is talking to Masrani, and you have the honor of sitting on Owen and making him take it easy.”

“Ah, so I have the short straw?”

Dan only gave him a little smirk.

Alan looked over to the closed bedroom door, then back at Carter.

“Why tell me?”

Blond eyebrows rose.

Alan’s blue eyes were steady, meeting Carter’s, waiting.

“Owen trusts you, Dr. Grant. He has from the beginning. That’s good enough for me. Didn’t keep me from checking your background, though.” He quirked a little smile. “You also know a lot more about those four raptors than anyone else, without getting told. You have experience in that matter, you know the species. You can add one and one and get the correct answer.”
Alan nodded slowly.

“You’ve worked with Owen even before he had the pack. You watched them and him grow. You would figure it out and I wanted to give you a head start. I believe you also understand that nothing what really happened in the belly of that ship will ever get out. People died and their deaths will be reported as due to animal attacks. They were animal smugglers who had taken velociraptors off Sorna. Their fate isn’t so surprising, knowing what these animals are capable of. No one will give it a closer look.”

“And InGen has always been good at covering their tracks.”

Carter didn’t move a muscle. “Exactly,” he simply said.

“To protect their own asses.”

“Right now it’s to protect Owen’s, too.”

“I can get on board with that.”

“I knew you would.” Carter rose and stretched, looking worn and ready to sleep for a week. “Take care of the alpha, Dr. Grant. We all need him healthy and whole.”

*

Owen had lowered himself onto the large bed with the help of his friend and sighed in relief. He was thankful for Dan and Alan’s help, even if it was slightly embarrassing to need it. He had been grateful, but the gratefulness had ended here. He had drawn the line at helping him undress.

The emergency response team had cut away his pants anyway. What was left wasn’t too hard to strip, though it pulled at the stitches. His leg throbbed and he felt lightheaded.

Owen had swallowed another painkiller and he wanted nothing more than to lay down and sleep.

Arguing with Annika had drained the rest of his energy out of him. Owen was well aware that he needed sleep. A lot of rest.

And his pack.

Nothing the medical center wanted to see invading their floors and nothing Annika would understand.

Owen smiled dimly.

Annika would have had a conniption. And a lot of staff would have run screaming.

He started to drift off, the painkillers, the blood loss and the strain of the past few days taking their toll.

*
Outside in the enclosure, the pack listened attentively to their alpha’s mind, the bond wide open and broadcasting his condition everywhere. They had slipped back in, using the shadows and their naturally stealthy behavior. Neither Carter nor Alan had seen them. The gates were still open, but none of the four had any intention to leave.

Blue rumbled softly, eyeing the house not far away. She wanted to curl around her alpha, wanted to have Owen close as he healed. He would heal faster with the pack, but right now he was in his own bedroom, almost asleep, and she had to accept that.

Delta and Charlie paced along the fence while Echo sniffed the air for an intruder. Aside from Carter and her most favorite non-pack human, no one was around.

Alan Grant finally walked over to the enclosure, shooting the pack a wary look. The tension in his form was clear to their eyes and they could all smell the apprehension, though it wasn’t the sour scent of fear. Echo chittered a little, regarding him expectantly.

Blue met Alan’s eyes, calm, projecting no threat. They were all still spattered in blood; not all had come off from their jungle run. Alan stopped near the fence, drawing a deep breath, still so very, very tense.

He didn’t seem to be surprised that they were here.

“Be good,” he told the girls.

Echo whuffled that she would be. He couldn’t understand her, but he got the gist of it. A tiny smile crept over his features.

“I know you did what you had to. Save Owen. I know you couldn’t let him die. I understand all of that, but it’s terrifying to know.” Another deep breath. “What a time to demonstrate just how human you are.”

Blue snorted, seeing no problems. She looked past him and Alan he turned to Carter. The other man stood a few feet away, hands resting on his automatic.

Not threatening.

Just ready.

Blue could appreciate that in him.

“I’m staying with Owen, make sure he doesn’t do something stupid.”

Carter grimaced. “You’ll be busy.”

“Probably. I guess you’ll be over at control?”

“We’re not done yet. Clean-up will take a while.”

He met Blue’s eyes, his own reflecting something of a predator themselves. Blue had seen that in him multiple times, which was one reason why she found his energy appealing.

“I know what you did,” Carter said, voice soft, low, almost a rumble. “I know why you did it. And I hope you understand that it cannot happen again. You’re unique. And he needs you, right? Like you need him.”
She studied him, felt his energy. He was calm, balanced, almost like Owen, and it was because of their likeness that she had long since accepted him. Delta joined her at the fence, humming, warbling, eyes on Carter.

“They’re still wearing cameras,” the man murmured.

Alan’s tension doubled. “They recorded the attack,” he stated.

“The feeds go to Owen’s personal server, password protected,” Carter told him, stance not shifting. “I’ll have Lorenzo lock it down for now. No one’s gotta see this.”

Blue huffed, then she turned and trotted toward the pile of twigs, leaves and sand.

Both humans walked off after another long moment. Echo was happy with the interaction between her and Alan, what little there had been. She head-butted against Charlie, twittering with pleasure, then chose her own place for the rest of the night.

* * *

Owen woke, feeling marginally better than the night before, though his head seemed to resemble a cotton ball filled with molasses. Thinking required an effort and movement was restricted to the bare necessities.

Speaking of which…

He lurched out of bed, nearly ending up flat on his face, and was not really that surprised to feel broad, strong hands support him.

“Idiot.”

“Hn?”

Damn, he was really not the sharpest tool in the box.

His head started to pound and his leg muscles showed signs of wanting to cramp.

"Take one of these," Alan’s calm voice instructed and he blindly reached for the offered glass.

A pill was pressed into his palm and he swallowed the painkiller with the water. Owen sank back into the mattress, trying to relax, give his body the necessary time.

"Owen?"

He opened his eyes, breathing deeply. "Thanks."

"You're welcome."

	tbc...
Chapter 20

Peter had stopped by on his rounds to check on the pack, at least visually, since they had been injured as well. He had gotten the gist of things from Claire, and her request to take a look at the raptors to make sure they were okay.

If they weren’t, he wasn’t looking forward to sedating any of them any time soon. Without Owen, Peter doubted anyone had a chance to get close enough for any kind of medical procedure. Add to it the possible pain and it was a no-go.

“Geez, they need a good scrub,” he murmured as he watched them from the catwalk.

None of the four were hiding. They were out in the open, looking curiously at the visitors, making soft noises, like muttering among themselves.

Alan grimaced. “Have at it. I’m not going to look for all the parts you’re missing afterwards.”

The vet technician chuckled. “No way am I going in there.” He gestured at the catwalk. “We could drag a hose up here, created a little shower. It would also clean the blood from the wounds.”

“If they shower.”

“I think they’d enjoy it.”

And they did.

Barry had come by while they were trying to find a long enough hose. He laughed, shook his head, then went into the shed and unearthed an extension that was more than enough.

“They like water,” he told Alan as he attached the hose the water outlet. “I have seen Owen cool them off before, but he didn’t shampoo them or something like that.”

Peter snorted. He was still watching the four below, finding nothing amiss. They moved about easily, showed no pain. From the distance there were only the bullet grazes.


Four heads turned upwards, looking at Barry with curiosity.

“Here’s something for you.”

Barry gestured at Alan, who turned on the water, and it gushed out in a wide arc, hitting the ground behind the pack. Charlie gave a cry of delight and trotted over, quickly stepping under the cool waterfall. She trilled excitedly.

The others joined her, scuffling for a good spot, the ground under their feet turning into a mud bath.

Delta was biting at the water, looking like she had fun, and Blue enjoyed the cascades, eyes half-closed, neck twisting to allow the water to touch everywhere. Echo chittered and rolled around in
the mud, turning herself into a swamp monster.

Alan had joined the other men and had to smile. “They look happy.”

“You would be too if you were caked in blood and couldn’t get it off,” Barry just said, grinning.

Loud snorts, barks and yelps, mixed with the rush of the water and splashes reached them.

“How’s Owen?” Devoe asked, looking more serious, glancing at Alan.

“Sleeping. I gave him another painkiller, then told him to sleep it off. He was coherent, but he needs the rest.”

He nodded.

Peter watched the raptors, satisfied that they were clearly healthy and even-tempered.

“I’ve a few more paddocks to check. Those four look good. Nothing they need treatment for. Those grazes haven’t been infected, there’s no sign of fever. If anything changes, call, okay?”

“I will,” Alan promised, chuckling at Echo’s antics.

She looked up at him, giving happy yowls as she continued mud bathing. She was dripping with it, thick globs falling down.

“We wanted you clean, not looking worse,” he told her, shaking his head.

She yipped playfully.

“How long are you going to leave it on?”

Barry shrugged. “Give them a little while longer. They earned it.”

Thirty minutes later they finally turned off the hose, much to Echo’s protest. She had washed off the mud, but her legs were caked almost up to her belly. There was a wet spot of mud on her snout.

“You look even worse than before,” Alan sighed and shook his head.

She huffed.

Blue was mostly clean. Delta and Charlie were playfully chasing each other, sliding on the muddy ground, until Charlie managed to surprise her pack sister. They went tumbling and splashed to the ground, snarling, growling and snapping at each other, but there was no aggression.

Barry smiled and left the hose attached to the catwalk, just on case they needed it again. “It’ll be good for their skin, too, and flake off when dry. I think it’s a better look than blood.”

“That’s true. Want coffee?” Grant offered.

“No, man, but thanks. I just came by to get an update. Eddie’s expecting me. Call me if something comes up.”

Alan nodded and watched the other man go.
“Damn, Owen, but you’ve got really good friends.”

* * *

The next time he woke it was dark. Owen felt a moment of utter disorientation. He had no idea if he was lying down, sitting up or about to fall out of bed. His right hand flailed for the general direction of the nightstand, trying to find his alarm clock or, alternatively, the light switch.

He found the light switch first.

The lamp flared to life, bathing the area around it in soft light.

Bedroom. He was in his bedroom.

Right.

And he had been there the last time he had woken, too.

The shutters had been closed, the curtains drawn. He had no idea what time of day it was, really.

Owen took stock, ignoring the pull of the stitched wounds. Those would keep being a bother for a while. No, it was more a matter of his brain.

He lay in bed, looking at the ceiling, feeling the bond, the presence of the pack… everything. He felt a lot better, his mind sharper, his thoughts no longer jumbled. The pack was there, surrounding him, and in the background was the hum of the whole park.

“Okay,” he murmured.

The hum was a little more intense than usual and Owen had the feeling that should the pack step away, he would be drowned in hundreds of dinosaur minds. It was a disconcerting sensation and he pulled away, taking a deep breath.

“Fuck,” he whispered.

He finally sat up, slow, careful of the injuries, and winced a few times. The bruises were even more painful now than they had been at the medical center.

He was alone, but there were signs that someone had slept on his couch.

Alan.

Owen smiled a little and shuffled into the bathroom. The image in the mirror was almost scary.

Pale, eyes blood-shot, the unshaven look giving him a frightening look. The cut over his eye had been closed with butterfly bandages. The cut on his thigh and arm had been stitched and wrapped. Owen peeked under the bandages and grimaced.

Damn.

A gentle tug in his mind turned the grimace into a smile. He splashed water into his face and slowly made his way outside.
Sunny, a bit more cloudy than the day before, a promise of rain hanging in the air. The raptor enclosure was silent; not a chirp, trill or snort to be heard.

Owen tested his legs as he walked down the stairs. The injured thigh protested a little, but he was more steady than he would have thought. His mind cleared more and more.

“Hey,” he called softly.

He didn’t need to yell. They could hear him.

The gates were locked, so someone had closed them after the pack had returned home. Carter? Alan? Barry?

He pushed the button and opened the gates.

Blue snorted, padding over to him, nostrils widening as she scented her alpha.

Alan has checked on us a few times. He made Echo happy.

Echo trilled and cocked her head, waiting for Owen to ask her and the others closer. Delta studied him, rumbling, but she didn’t sound aggressive. Charlie was humming, claws flexing.

*Hurt*, they projected.

“Yeah. I got in over my head. You got me out.”

Killing everyone who had dared to attack him or the pack. He knew it. It was a fact, certain and irremovable from their memories. He knew it because they told him, their minds still bleeding into his as the four raptors balanced his fractured self, helping him heal.

Maybe he had adopted a raptor state of mind, but he felt hardly any remorse.

He also didn’t feel disturbed or upset by the invasion into his privacy. Without them he’d be either dead or a comatose vegetable, his body still functional while his mind scattered across the mindplanes of hundreds of animals.

Knowing what had happened from their point of view was hardly a horror to witness. Owen was quite aware how deadly his pack was, how possessive and protective.

Delta stepped forward, sniffing at his bandaged leg, rumbling. She sounded distressed. Charlie head-butted her, hissing, but Owen stopped her with a sharp whistle.

“Stop it, girls! No!”

Charlie whined, but he brushed his hand over her side.

“No, Charlie. I’m good. Let her. I’m really good.”

They made him better. He needed them. It was like his own instincts had shifted and pulled him to the pack.

To heal.

They echoed that thought. The pack would heal together. The alpha would heal better with them.

The raptors hadn’t come out of the confrontation with the armed poachers unscathed, but the
bullets had just grazed the skin, had left furrows that had already started to heal without medical treatment. Owen would take a look at them nevertheless, maybe dab a little antibiotic cream on the worst places.

Blue nuzzled him and he leaned into the gentle touch. They were all extremely careful with him, scented the injuries, rumbled and purred, until Blue snarled at the pack and they stepped back, giving Owen some room.

“Is Alan still here?”

*He is watching.*

Owen blinked, then turned and found that yes, Professor Alan Grant in front of the gates, pale blue eyes filled with mixed emotions, looking like he wanted to go in and pull Owen out.

“Hey, Alan,” Owen called.

“How about you hey it out of there?”

Echo warbled a little, still not happy about Alan’s refusal to trust them. Owen petted her side.

“He’s not worried about you hurting me, girl. He’s just a mother-hen. He thinks I’m going to collapse and hurt myself more.”

She huffed a little.

Blue stayed with him, as usual, until he was at the gate, looking at Alan with a tilted head. She rumbled, then pushed Owen toward the exit.

He chuckled softly.


He would.

“You really want to give me a heart attack,” Alan muttered as he herded Owen back into the house and made him sit down.

“Not on my agenda. I’m okay, Alan. Really. And the pack needed me.”

“You’re not okay, Grady. You have ten stitches in your arm, fifteen in your thigh. You got clawed at. You slept for fifteen hours!”

Fifteen. Huh. Go figure.

“And your pack killed fourteen men. According to Carter the last one was killed in front of the cargo hold. It looks like he was tortured.”

Owen couldn’t be shocked. He knew all that. The pack had coolly, with a raptor’s way of detachment, given him the reader’s digest version. He had watched it like a movie, like another raptor would regard the events: necessary.
“Carter wants to talk to you, but he has suspicions only you can confirm. If your beta talks.”

“She doesn’t talk, Alan.”

The older man scowled. “Don’t give me that, Owen.”

He looked tired. Exhausted. Owen sighed.

“Sorry. I know. Thank you for being here. For helping.”

“That’s what friends are for. And it gives me an excuse to disappear from the park.” Alan smiled lightly. “Catch up on my work and so on.”

“You can crash in the guest room. You know that, right?”

“Already set up camp. Barry helped me clear some space. I’ll be good for a few days. You get your rest. Barry’s the assigned keeper of your ladies, with Peter as back-up. Let the world worry about everything else.”

Well, sound advice. Owen just didn’t know if it was for him.

*  

He gulped down some prescription pain meds and sighed, closing his eyes. Damn this headache and damn his aching body as well! The pain had dulled, felt like a blunt sword, because of the medication, but it was still there. He had managed to ignore most of it and when he concentrated on his work he felt marginally better.

He had needed a day to be more coherent, to walk more than from the raptor paddock to the next available seat and then to his house. Owen felt drained after just a few steps and the constant pressure against the bond from outside didn’t help.

Especially since the girls were getting antsy, downright aggressive for no other reason than that. No physical threat, just the dinosaur population of Isla Nublar looming over their alpha and the pack bond.

Owen had tried to push them back, but it was almost impossible to free himself from alien rumbles and whispers. In the middle was the Sorna pack, sharp, strangely alluring beacons that were more familiar than alien.

Blue hissed furiously, jaws snapping shut, biting air, and her tail whipped with agitation. She moved restlessly, then stopped beside her alpha, yellow eyes filled with a fire that spoke of her anger at the current situation.

The others had decimated the last of their lunch, more vicious than ever, blood on their snouts and claws. Right now they looked like the nightmares many people claimed they were.

“I know,” Owen murmured. “I feel the same.”

Open, vulnerable, not in control of his preternatural talent.

Blue twined around him, huffing, seeking physical contact. Her talons rested against the bandaged
puncture wounds that she had left there, a mark on their alpha.

Owen felt her satisfaction that the pain she had induced had snapped him out of it the last time. That the scars would be permanent were not a disfigurement in her eyes. It marked Owen as pack to others, was her argument.

“We’ll always be pack,” he told her; them.

And then a switch in his head flipped.

Sight, sound, touch… everything was heightened one second, the next it dulled to nothing. Owen felt something pull him into one direction while he was also rooted firmly to the spot. He couldn’t move, but he was also running very fast. He was no longer in the paddock, but he was aware that he still was. It was like an out of body experience, like he was drawn away, but only so much that he was still there.

And then he was in all paddocks, seeing all the individuals kept there. He felt their pleasure, their happiness, their indifference, their rivalries. He felt the sickness, the pain, the loneliness. He felt the hunger, the satisfaction, the need.

There was a screech of outrage, followed by sharp pain. Physical pain.

And a presence in his mind, right there, next to him, strong and unwavering, shattering the masses around his mind and bringing only silence.

Blessed silence.

Just the pack.

Calmness settled over him, leaning on his anchor, his crutch, and the net tightened.

Owen was back in the raptor paddock.

In Blue’s embrace, surrounded by the humming, warbling, hissing pack. They were agitated, but not too aggressive.

He closed his eyes for just a moment, feeling safe within their midst, and Blue hummed. She was still there, in his head, like a second consciousness next to him, and he leaned on her, needed her.

Fuck his abilities!

Without them we wouldn’t be here. Without them we would be nothing. Without them the pack would be weak and dying.

She was the voice of reason, without actually having a voice.

The others echoed it, pushing close, taking their place with him. They sought out his presence, nosing against him, giving him their complete support. No questions asked.

Owen opened his eyes and smiled at Charlie, Delta and Echo, Blue still his physical crutch.

Ours! Delta proclaimed. No one else!

No others, Charlie agreed.

Blue hummed softly. She would stay with him, keep him safe, let his mind regenerate and become
Owen knew he had exerted himself, had blown past barriers that were there for a reason. His protection was gone and he had to rely on his girls to keep the other dinosaurs away.

Until the threshold was back.

*No matter how long,* Blue assured him.

tbc...
Sorry about the late update, but I lost just about everything: internet, phone, TV. At least the power stayed on :) So now, after everything is back and working, have some fic!

Neither Blue nor any of the others had alerted him to the visitor. Alan was at the park, probably talking to Claire, and no one else had clearance to approach the raptor paddock, unless it was either Barry or Peter. And those two would call ahead. They only came if the raptors needed feeding or anything else raptor-related.

Blue?

She just gave him the raptor-equivalent of a shrug. Dan Carter was a pack ally. She hadn’t seen the necessity to alert her alpha.

Right.

“We gotta stop meeting like this. People will talk.”

Carter raised an eyebrow. He was sprawled in one of Owen’s deck chairs, dressed in civvies. Jeans, gray t-shirt, white button-down that wasn’t buttoned-up, hiking boots. Somehow he still looked on duty.

“They already do,” he remarked.

Owen frowned.

“About what happened with the poachers.”

“Rumors.”

“Yep.” He popped the ‘p’. “And now: the truth, Owen.”

He lowered himself into the second deck chair. The stitches on his thigh pulled a little.

“I didn’t go looking for trouble, if that’s what you want to know.”

“Not the question. And I think you have enough braincells to leave the smuggler ring busting to the professionals.”

“Hey, I called.”

Dan nodded. “I will give you that. The question is, what happened then?”

“Got thrown into a raptor cage after they used a knife on me? Nearly got eaten?”

“Told the pack to get you out?”
Owen stared at the other man. Hard. He felt something inside of him lock up, shields snapping into place, and his expression froze.

Not far away the raptors hissed loudly and four pairs of eyes were actively staring at the porch.

Carter didn’t so much as glance in their direction. He was holding Owen’s gaze easily.

“I did not ask them to kill the smugglers,” Grady said, voice absolutely even.

“Then what happened?”

“You already have the official version.”

“I want the unofficial one. The one that goes into the same file as the i-rex, the death of dozens of ACU and security troopers who were mauled, killed or eaten by that hybrid creature, and the fact that Owen Grady isn’t just the alpha of a raptor pack because they imprinted on him from birth.”

Carter’s voice was matter-of-fact, cold, with a military air to it.

“What happened out there, Owen?” he repeated.

“We ran into the poachers, I got captured, nearly fed to raptors. End of story. Oh, and you and your team saved the day.”

“Goddamnit, Grady!” Dan exploded in a rare display of anger. “Don’t fuck with me on this one!” He had gotten up and was pacing along the porch.

“You know what to write in your reports, so do that!” Owen snapped back.

Carter rounded on him. “I don’t care what’s on paper! I want to know what happened and I want the truth!”

Owen hissed, raptor-like, emotions cascading through him. He felt the pack push forward, protective, snarling and growling at the threat.

Not a threat, ladies. Stand down. Easy, okay?

There was a bark from the enclosure, then short yowls. Carter nodded to himself.

“They sound pissed off,” he said harshly. “I know the feeling. Don’t you realize that I have your back, Grady? I’m not Vic Hoskins! I’m not going to take them from you!” He gestured sharply at the paddock area. “I spent the last year training a special unit to work with you and your vicious little guard dogs! I wanted those men and women to understand what they were dealing with! I got them to look past the lethal predator that can tear their throats out! Those people trust in you, the alpha! I trust you, Owen Grady, and don’t you fucking lie to me now!”

Owen stared at the other man, taken slightly aback by the outbreak, the harshness, and the truth.

Nothing but the truth.

He had taught those select troopers about raptors, about his girls, about respect and not to shoot first. And he knew that his rescue had shown just how much of a success it had been.

He let his head fall back, staring at the porch roof. “I did not ask them, or order them, to take out the poachers, Dan.”
“Then why did they do it?”

“It’s… complicated.”

Carter finally sat down and picked up a beer from the cooler resting next to the deck chair. “I’ve got time.”

“It’s a pack thing.”

Carter was silent, just giving him the ‘go on’ eyebrow.

Owen blew out a breath and held out a hand. “Beer.”

“Soda. Doctor’s orders.”

He took the can and grumbled slightly to himself. “You’re worse than Alan.”

His remark was ignored. “Pack thing?”

“Dog with a bone. Okay. Pack thing. A Me thing. You know I’m connected to all four, right?”

Carter nodded.

“And it’s a two-way road. Back and forth.”

Another nod.

“I can pick up the other dinosaurs to a degree,” Owen said slowly. “Not just mine. The others are a background noise, like a murmur, and some stand out. Others are a unanimous mass. When the Sornas tried to eat me, since I was their first real meal offer since their capture, I… pushed them back.”

“Preternatural push?”

“Yeah. It’s like throwing out your mind, trying to get into theirs. It was… painful. It’s hard to describe. Like jumping off a cliff into nothingness. You know there’s the sky and the ground, but you’re in the middle and you see nothing. You’re lost.”

Carter leaned forward, elbows resting on his knees, hands gripping the bottle. “So your pack reacted to the loss of their alpha?”

“No. They reacted to the capture and torture of their alpha, then the backlash from me trying to hold off the other raptors. It hit Blue the hardest. She’s my anchor. She tried to reach me. She also gave the order to take out what had hurt me.”

Dan was silent, contemplating the bottle, what he had heard, everything.

“You once told me that you don’t control them,” he finally said, voice neutral. “That they aren’t tame. That they’re dangerous. The raptors did what their nature told them to do.”

“In a way.”

“And they opened a key-code door.”

Owen rubbed his eyes with a thumb and middle-finger.
“I know raptors can open doors by pushing down a handle or turning a knob” Carter went on almost conversationally. “It’s in Dr. Grant’s books, in the briefing I got from Masrani global, and it was in at least one file I managed to find on the old Jurassic Park.”

Owen was silent, waiting.

“Those four not only took out a group of armed men and women, one of them punched in a key code on a number pad, Owen. And before you ask, we didn’t take finger prints. We didn’t need to. There wasn’t a trace of blood on those keys and the guy to die last was pretty much covered in blood. I won’t go into the details of what kind of injuries he had, but let me tell you, I’ve seen some stuff. Torture stuff. He didn’t die immediately and his injuries were inflicted to be painful, not lethal. He was the one who opened the first lock. She remembered and opened the second.”

Owen blew out a breath, closing his eyes.

“They are highly intelligent, with a human alpha,” Carter went on. “Genetically engineered to connect with a powerful preternatural. You. Dr. Grant told me that Blue learned to read early on.”

“Kinda.”

“She is the star pupil.”

“She saved my life, Dan!” Owen exploded. “They all did! Without them I’d be in little pieces and you could mop up my remains. You could also hunt and put down four very pissed off, feral raptors who lost their alpha.”

“I know. I’m glad they saved you. Really.”

Owen exhaled sharply. There wasn’t a chuff or chitter coming from the paddock. The tension in the air was hard to miss.

“They aren’t human.”

Carter’s expression grew a little sour. “No. They are raptors. Dinosaurs. Predators. They can kill a man without remorse in no time flat.”

“So can special ops troopers.”

The sour look grew even worse.

“Unarmed,” Owen pushed his point. “I know some of your guys. I wouldn’t want to be on their bad side either. They can take a life with what’s available, even with just their hands, and be gone.”

Carter refused to comment.

“So can you,” Grady added.

Dan seemed to silently count to ten. “Not the point. In a comparison of human to raptor, we tend to side with the human.”

“Logical.”

“In your case… the lines are blurring, Owen. They are animals, but they did what they had to to protect you. What gives me nightmares is the fact that they understand such complex workings.”

“All raptors do.” Owen played with the soda can, running his fingers along the cool sides,
condensation drops running over his skin. “Did I ever tell you about Dot?”

Carter raised his eyebrows. “Dot?”

“Before your time. She and her pack were the first I studied on Nublar.”

And Owen told him about watching those raptors, a different sub-species from his own pack, about their intelligence, about everything. Even about their death.

“She understood, Dan. More than I ever thought possible. It’s one reason why the velociraptors never became part of the theme park. Unlike all the other dinosaurs, even the t-rex, they are too intelligent.”

“And after Wu and Keller gave them to you, knowing it would form a bond, things escalated in that regard. They grew exponentially.”

Owen nodded slowly. “Are we okay?”

Dan met Owen’s eyes. “We were always okay. I just needed to understand a few things. They’re exceptional.”

Yes, they were. Owen knew that. And he understood that what had happened aboard the cargo ship had been huge.

“And what they did is terrifying for most of us to understand. They are animals and they did something that drives home the point that the velociraptors can never be part of the theme park.”

“They’re not malevolent, Dan.”

“No. I know that. The men know it, too. They were there, saw what the poachers had done, especially to you. They were trained to handle this, handle them. We know what happened wasn’t cold-blooded, planned murder. It wasn’t The Incident all over again. They’re not sociopaths.”

“No. They’re not.”

“Are they still okay with me?” Carter wanted to know, gesturing at the paddock.

Owen laughed soft, the change of topic lightening the mood. “Yeah. No hard feelings.”

Carter rose and put the empty bottle into the plastic tub Owen used to collect his glass. Recycling and green techniques were a big issue on Isla Nublar.

“I’ll tell your friends you’re alive, all limbs attached and that you’ll get back to them the moment the doctor lets you move around.”

Owen chuckled. “Okay. Thanks. And Dan, thanks for keeping this under wraps.”

“Claire should know about the full extent of things.”

“She will.”

“Good.”

“Dan?”

The other man stopped, giving him a quizzical look.
“How did those guys run under everyone’s radar? They got onto the island. InGen detects the slightest blip and they didn’t register. They had to have been there for more than a day to collect all those different eggs and then the three adults. If not for the weather, they’d have pulled it off and been gone.”

“We’re looking into it.”

Owen gave him an expectant look, but Carter didn’t say more.

“Huh. Will I get more than a lame one-liner when you have something?”

Carter smirked. “We’ll see.”

And with that he was gone.

Owen watched the SUV disappear, then limped over to the paddock where four anxious velociraptors greeted him.

“He’s a good guy, ladies,” he told. “Not the enemy. It’s just his job.”

Blue snorted, talons clanging against the metal bars.

*We did what had to be done.*

“Yeah, you did. All of you. But we’re back to normal and that means you don’t hurt humans, understood?”

Yes, they understood. The poachers had been the enemy. They had severely hurt and tried to kill Owen.

He opened the gate and entered the paddock, the four raptors moving toward him with soft hums and curious rumbles. Owen smiled as they herded him toward the shade.

“Yeah, yeah. Cuddles.”

Blue gave the raptor-equivalent of a laugh inside his head. Charlie inspected the sand, found it up to her standards, and chuffed.

Owen was soon surrounded by his pack, listening to purrs and hums, the occasional snuffle, and he relaxed against the warm skin.

“Yeah, I love you all, too.”

He accessed and reviewed the recordings that night.

Then erased them from the server after storing every last pixel on a portable hard drive. He would make it never fell into anyone’s hands.

At all.

Owen sat on his porch, eyes on the fiery sunset behind his house. Shades of pale blue and pink had turned orange and purple, too. It was dramatic, as well as calming in one.
His pack had killed. They had tracked down his kidnappers, had singled them out, had laid traps and executed complex maneuvers, following a preplanned strategy.

Blue had been the lead, calm and decisive, and the others had followed.

He had seen death in those recordings, fast kills, swift revenge.

And he had seen the demonstration of near-human intelligence as Blue had remembered the access code and typed it in.

All that he had known already, but now it had been recorded from a different angle, from a camera mounted on Delta and Charlie. Owen wondered if he should feel afraid; terrified even.

He didn’t.

He sipped at the hot tea in his hands.

Too much had happened, too much that should serious unsettle him, but the least of that had been the pack’s maneuver at the beach. Maybe the whole matter with his broken barriers was overshadowing the real life implications of the attack

Maybe.

Blue curled closer in his mind, still protective, still circling him like the others, surrounding him, keeping him from harm.

He loved them. No exceptions.

You did what you had to. You acted on pack instinct.

No one had programmed them. He hadn’t given an order. They had done what pack did, though neither Owen nor any of the other experts could say if this was normal raptor behavior. Sornas were family packs. They would pursue an egg thief, as Alan had found out the hard way.

But his girls… they were all made from different DNA mixtures and they had become his.

Owen smiled slightly over the rim of his mug as the sun turned the brilliant, fiery colors into deep, dark purple and blue, until it was finally just blackish blue. He finally got up and walked back into the house.

There he pulled out a hammer and destroyed the hard drive.

He slept very well that night, his four guardians making sure his mind was well-protected.

And there were no nightmares.

* * *
“Hey, man!”

Owen smiled as Barry pulled up on his ATV. “Hey, Barry.”

“How’re you doing?”

“Everybody keeps asking. I’m fine.”

“You look like Sue stepped on you,” the other man commented, looking him up and down. “And not in a good way.”

Yeah, he had thought the same this morning while trying to wash his face and shave without ending up with even worse bruises. He was in a very colorful stage eight now, heading toward the healing brown-yellow one. Taking a shower with two bandages had been even more of an adventure and Owen was glad Annika hadn’t seen him soaking half his bandaged arm.

“Here for dinner?” Grady now asked.

“Theyirs, not yours,” Barry replied with a grin. “But if you need something, let me know.”

“I’m good in that regard, too.”

Claire had been by earlier, handing over a big bag full of ready-to-eat meals, freshly made by Winston’s and for his fridge and freezer.

It had been a nice gesture.

“C’mon. You keep them happy, I get their meals,” Barry said, gesturing at him to come with him.

Devoe checked out the meat locker and decided on a mixture of complete beef ribs and pork legs.

“Crunchy with a side of juicy,” he commented as he pulled the huge ribs out of the meat locker. “Whoa, man, stop.” He held up a hand as Owen stepped forward. “Don’t need help,” Barry added. “You’re on sick leave or downtime or whatever you call it. I’m here to help.”

He set to work with a large knife and a lot of enthusiasm. Owen just leaned back, not even arguing. His leg ached and he wouldn’t really be a lot of help with his cut-up arm.

The pack was, of course, happy to see him. The gates had been open until half an hour before Owen had expected someone to show up.

Barry used the feeding time to train, mostly to train himself, see if the pack responded to him. He used the pork slices first, then added the crunchier bits with bone.

Owen watched, nodded to himself as Barry caught the raptors’ attention and sent them into different corners. None made it easy for him, but they responded to the correct commands.

*Good girls,* he told them.
When the training was over, Barry hauled in the ribs with the help of a crane and dropped them in the enclosure.

Both men watched as the four raptors went for their evening meal, tearing into the flesh attached to the bone, leaving teeth and claw marks on it.

“You good?” Barry asked, wiping his hands.

“Fine. Thanks for the assist.”

“Hey, that’s what I’m here for.”

They locked down for the night and Barry walked over to the ATV again.

“See you tomorrow morning. Be good.”

“I’m not a child.”

Barry just grinned good-naturedly, then he was off.

*

Dr. Svensson came by on official business two hours later, just after nightfall. She checked Owen from head to toe, changed the bandages and poked at the stitched wounds. Alan hovered close by, worried.

“Good. No infection. You have a very good immune system.”

Owen hadn’t come down with so much as a cold ever since starting work at the park.

“Any double vision? Dizziness? Loss of consciousness? Tremors?”

“No to all of it. Like I said, I’m fine.”

Her eyebrows drew down. “You were beaten up and then attacked by raptors, Owen. You are not fine.”

“Annika, believe me, I know what happened and I feel okay.”

She sighed and shook her head. “I wish I understood what’s going on with your brain,” she said. “You’re not the first to bond with an animal, just the only one I ever heard of coming out on the other side with all his faculties still there. It changed something inside you.”

“I don’t feel different.”

Liar liar liar…

Her expression told him so, too. She wrapped fresh bandages around his arm and leg, then inspected the punctures left from Blue.

“Good healing, too.” She taped the bandage in place. “You’re a fast healer. Okay,” Svensson said and straightened. “Reduce the painkillers to the minimum you need to handle the pain. If you have
no need, leave them.”

“Will do.”

“And the order still stands: no strenuous activities.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She gave him a hard look, then just closed her bag with a snap. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I’ll still be fine tomorrow.”

“Three o’clock.”

“I’ll make sure he behaves, Dr. Svensson,” Alan promised from where he sat, reading.

Owen pulled on his shirt, wincing only a little as his bruises complained.

“I’ll be fine, mother-hens,” he muttered.

Svensson exchanged an exasperated look with Alan, then left.

Owen got himself something to drink. His eyes were drawn to the window, the raptor paddock visible from here even through the twilight. The surrounding area had been lit up, leaving most of the enclosure in the dark.

In the back of his mind was the hum of the four raptors, still strong and positioned in defense positions around him.

*Ease up a little*, he told Blue.

Just to test how bad the situation still was.

She moved reluctantly away from him, as did the pack, and Owen waited for the tidal wave.

It was… there… in the back… as always. But it stayed there, mostly. There were tiny ebbs and flows, like a teasing tendril of what could be. A hum, a murmur of voices he couldn’t understand, of individuals and the anonymous herds. There were also three pinpoints, tiny lights in the dark.

The Sorna raptors.

He could sense them, was very much aware of them, just like Sue and M were there. Skittish, in a way. Familiar and yet not family or pack. If Owen took a step toward them, left his comfort zone, he would be overwhelmed again.

Blue shifted nervously, reaching for her alpha, and Owen let her come closer, taking up her guardian position. Echo, Delta and Charlie followed.

His own, natural shields were coming back one fragment at a time. He had shattered them, but still they were knitting themselves back together. He needed his first line of defense, his girls, but he wouldn’t immediately drown if they eased up a little now and then.

*Healing*, Blue only said, sounding smug.

Yes, he was healing.
Pack is stronger. You heal through us.

He probably wouldn’t mention that to Annika. Or anyone else. Nor would he tell anyone who had clawed up his hip. It would open up a whole new can of worms.

“Earth to Owen.”

He blinked.

Alan stood behind him, holding a candy bar, which he offered him.

“Uh, thanks. Just… testing… something.”

“Ah.” Alan sipped at his hot tea. “Testing... what?” he probed.

“The bond. My shields. Looks like I’ll be getting back to normal.”

“Open for debate, but hey,” his friend teased. “Now get over to the couch, sit down, feet up, and rest.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Shuddup, kid.”

tbc...
Chapter 22

The quarantine area was far outside the theme park, set up to be easily accessible by air, land and sea, but still secluded enough that not even an adventurous visitor could simply stumble over it.

It was also continuously under a 24/7 heavy guard and when Owen limped through the massive gates two days after his little adventure, he felt like he was entering a high security prison. Normally just a few of Isla Nublar’s attractions were brought here if they showed signs of an infection, like a virus or bacteria. Now and then a baby would have to be raised here because of a weak immune system; sometimes they died here.

Right now there was a different kind of quarantine. It had nothing to do with an infectious disease, but more with three lethal, aggressive velociraptors, a collection of infant Isla Sorna dinosaurs, and a lot of unhatched eggs. Quarantine had become a high security prison of sorts.

There were armed troopers on the walkways, there were cameras mounted at regular intervals, and to get inside he had had to go through three gates, getting IDed every time.

They knew him by sight, greeted him respectfully, by name no less, but he still needed to get his finger prints and retina scanned, as well as his ID card run through the system.

“I’m not about to run off with an egg,” he grumbled to Carter, who was accompanying him.

“Well…” Dan teased. “Not with that leg anyway.”

Owen shot him a dark look. He had been checked once again by Dr. Svensson, who had simply jotted down notes and told him he was healing fast, there was no inflammation of the wounds, nor an infection, and that she would take out the stitches soon.

From the looks of it, she was slightly baffled by the speed he was getting better. It wasn’t some Wolverine healing factor, but he was doing well. Then again, some people had such good healing and Owen was lucky enough to be one of them.

He had called Carter, more or less demanded to see the captured animals, and the head of security had given in.

The quarantine unit was big enough to hold several very large animals, though an apatosaurus wouldn’t fit. So far there hadn’t been the need to quarantine a fully grown specimen of that species.

Owen looked at the monitor with the feed from the raptor hold. All three velociraptors looked healthy enough, just like he remembered them. The two males were easily distinguished by the feather quills on the backs of their heads.

They had been fed, the meat supplemented with vitamins, and they had eaten heartily.

“They really are a sub-species,” Owen said, almost as if to himself. “More brightly colored. Different eyes with completely round pupils, not slit ones like with mine.”

Carter gave him a wry look. “Yours.”

“Alpha, remember? My pack.”

“Hard to forget, especially when your beta is the only one keeping you upright.”
Owen raised one shoulder in a weak shrug. They hadn’t really talked about it much.

He tentatively reached out for the three raptors, feeling their focused minds, their intense awareness of their caged existence, the need to be free again. He didn’t dare come closer, just skimming the surface, and he was already drawing their attention. Blue’s anchor became tighter, her own awareness of what her alpha was doing without her growing, and she didn’t approve.

“Sornas are as vocally communicative as the Lab’s later creations, socially a tightly-knit family pack,” Owen said. “Studies have shown there is no brutality in their pack.”

“Also like yours?”

He nodded once.

“They really look smaller,” Carter remarked.

“By a few inches. But they’re just as dangerous and deadly.”

“I’d never call a raptor cute or harmless, Grady.”

Owen smiled thinly. “Let me show you the baby pictures.”

“I’m more of a dog person.”

The three raptors called out, then listened again. There was no answer. One of the males kept inspecting the locked cage door. It wasn’t a manual lock, so they would need the combination and the finger prints from one of the guards.

Owen wanted to tell them that they were safe here, that they would get back home, but the language barrier was a problem. Just pushing the emotions across didn’t really help. He would have to face them, project while they could see him, and hope it worked. And he would need his beta, preferably the whole pack, with him.

Not that he could waltz in here with four raptors. That was more than just unlikely.

“And the eggs?”

“In the quarantine’s hatchery.”

“My next stop then.”

“Don’t even think about adoption. Not the puppy pound.”

“If I had a crutch I’d hit you.”

“I’d like to see you try.”

Owen shot him an evil look and started to limp off.

Carter grinned and followed, looking way too amused for Owen’s liking.

In the back of his mind, the pack shared the amusement.

_Traitors_, he thought darkly.
The hatchery was a lot less showy than the one the public could see at the theme park. It was functional, with a ton of equipment needed to take care of eggs and hatchlings, under strict access control, and monitored around the clock. The sterile whiteness was slightly upsetting, too bright for Owen’s liking, coupled with shiny machines and cold displays. Everyone moving around the rooms was dressed in protective gear, wearing face masks.

“Sadly, some of the eggs were lost causes,” Dr. Amieeta May said. “We had a lot more.”

May was a petite woman with olive skin, black hair that was pulled back in a business-like ponytail, and intense, dark eyes. It was hard to tell her age and you never asked her that. Despite almost all staff being at least a head taller than her, Amieeta May was a force to be reckoned with in the Labs. She was in charge of not only quarantine, but the whole Labs, held two doctorates, had worked for Masrani for more than two decades in various labs all over the world, and she had known Henry Wu’s work intimately.

Owen had spent some time getting to know her, especially since he wanted to prevent more hybrids and modified raptors. She was a well of knowledge and they had somehow hit it off.

Now he was looking at a full nest of raptor eggs. Wild raptors. They looked just as beautiful as the ones he had held in his hands when Blue had become the first member of his pack. And then the others, all beautiful. All his own.

These… these were not his, but part of him was melting inside, the gooey warm feeling nothing he would ever tell anyone about.

Owen wanted to hold them, run his fingers over the shell, feel the warmth and life inside. But the eggs were in an incubator and kept isolated.

“Our operation was run professionally,” May continued. “They stored the eggs under near-perfect conditions, but even then they need constant supervision. From what I was told, they were waiting out the weather and the search to leave to meet the buyer. That killed a few eggs. They had never planned on such a long run, it seems.”

Owen felt something in him clench with sympathy.

“We have eight raptors, fifteen trices, six stegs, two ankyls, seven gallimimus, five compies, three pachys and five micros. The broken ones were more pachys. All of them look like someone dropped them.”

Owen winced. Carter, who stood in the back, arms crossed and watching, looked almost sympathetic.

“There were some unfertilized ones and another that had already gone bad. We also have a few that haven’t been identified yet. We’re working on it. Isla Sorna has a few species that we didn’t breed here.”

“What about t-rex?”

She huffed a laugh. “Thank god, no. Not even they were crazy enough to steal from a rex. I doubt they would have made it out of there in one piece. I know that an egg goes for close to half a million, a hatched and healthy baby for a million.”
“Dollars?” Owen exclaimed.

“No, Owen, Turkish Lire. Of course dollars.” She shook her head. “T-rexes, velociraptors and carnotaur are the most expensive. I know there’s a carnotaur on Sorna, but I doubt they’d get eggs. She’s the only one of her kind.”

“For which we are very glad,” Dan muttered.

“Fully grown dinosaurs aren’t of interest to most collectors,” Amieeta continued. “They’re too hard to catch, to transport and to care for.”

“And babies are less troubling?” Owen asked, sarcasm dripping heavily in his voice.

She snorted. “That’s what they think. Usually the infants barely survive the first few months. The wrong food, the wrong environment, the wrong care. Those who grow up into their adult versions are killed later on when they get to dangerous. You can find stuffed dinosaurs in the homes of many rich and famous, or infamous, people.”

Owen felt sick and from Carter’s expression, he sympathized.

May checked the read-out from the closest container. Owen’s eyes strayed to the raptor eggs again.

“How old are they?” he asked.

“I can’t be sure since they are naturally produced eggs, fertilized and laid by wild dinosaurs. None of them are ready to hatch. We checked every single one of them, of course.” She typed in something on her tablet. “The closest we have to hatching are two gallimimus eggs. I’d say another week at optimum conditions. If they really have to hatch here, the babies need to be quarantined. We can’t risk having them interact with any of ours.”

“And the raptors.”

“ Probably laid a few days before they were taken.” She raised one raven-wing eyebrow, her face neutral. “Are you looking into expanding the pack?”

“No.”

“Good. I wouldn’t advice mixing Sorna raptors with yours.”

He wouldn’t introduce any kind of new member, Owen knew. At all. Least of all a Sorna raptor.

“Not planning to.”

“And no babies either,” she added sternly.

“Amieeta, I promise, I swear a holy oath,” Owen raised one hand, placed the other on his chest, “I don’t want any more raptors.”

“You say that now. I saw the way you looked at the eggs. You would coo over them.”

“I do not coo,” he grumbled.

Carter snorted, the corners of his mouth twitching up.

“Shuddup,” Owen growled.
May just smiled and exchanged knowing looks with Dan.

“I checked the three adults while they were sedated,” she went on. “Blood, skin, teeth, mucous membranes. We did ultrasounds and even x-rayed them. My best estimate is that they’re six to seven years old. The female might be a little younger. She’s not carrying eggs. So far we found no bacteria other than what we expected and they are healthy. No virus infections, no bacteria, no fungus.”

Owen felt himself relax a little.

“We’ll keep them here, isolated like the eggs and babies, to lower the risk of an infection from whatever they might catch from us. I gave them vitamin shots and supplements. They’ll be fine.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

It was a relief.

None of the babies could be returned to the island right away. Some were too weak, others suffering from an infection, and there was no guarantee that they could be integrated into their herds or family packs. No one knew if the parents were still alive and not much was known about whether they would be adopted by an aunt.

Keeping them on Isla Nublar would mean quarantine from now on until they could be sent off to Sorna again. The quarantine was necessary even after they were cleared for infectious diseases, mainly because bringing them together with the Nublar sub-species could only ever end in more complications. They would be raised by humans, who were trying not to get them too accustomed to their keepers.

A challenge, but not impossible.

Owen sat in the SUV in silence, only wincing occasionally when Carter hit a bump or pothole.

“Spill it, Grady.”

“The raptors need to get back home.”

“No argument from me.”

“And it has to be done soon.”

“The sooner the better. Logistics will be hell.”

“They won’t pose a problem.”

Carter shot him a disbelieving look, then concentrated on driving again. “Really,” he only said tonelessly. “You think you’re alpha enough?”

Owen knew he could intimidate them into cooperation, though he would prefer not to. “Yes,” he now told his friend.

Dan just looked at him, long and hard. “Without blowing apart your shields again?”
“Yes.”

“I’d hate to pick up the pieces if you end up comatose or worse, Grady.”

“Won’t happen.”

From the stern expression, Carter was cursing up a storm inside his own head. He blew out a breath. “We need to talk to Claire about it.”

“Yeah.”

“And you need to get some rest before Svensson rips you a new one. I think your pack could use some cuddles, too.”

Owen laughed out loud. “Cuddles? Really?”

Carter smirked.

They pulled up in front of Owen’s house fifteen minutes later. Everything looked peaceful; normal. No raptors lingering around, no smoke, no broken down door or windows.

Alan sat on the porch, typing into his laptop, looking rather relaxed. He had a pitcher of lemonade on the table and a half-eaten donut, with a box a dozen next to it.

“Didn’t know I had those,” Owen commented and grabbed one. “Mel’s bakery,” he guessed.

“You’re good.”

“Nancy is better. She can even tell you when they made them, probably by batch number and the employee who handled the sugar coating.”

Alan chuckled. “Zach came by. Wanted to see how you are. He looked worried. He brought all those unhealthy snacks. I thought I’d help fend off the calories.”

“Very thoughtful.” Owen found the box with more goodies and tossed a bag of chips at Carter.

Dan accepted the unspoken invitation and sat down, nodding at Grant as he poured him a glass. He ripped open the bag and started eating.

“Talk,” the paleontologist only said.

Owen told him all the gruesome facts, about the eggs, the babies, the deaths. Alan listened silently, looking sickened.

“Depending on species, babies grow fast into independence. If you raise them here, without much human interaction, you can release them back on Isla Sorna the moment they have reached that stage.”

Owen nodded. He felt worn. More than he thought he was. It had been just a little excursion to quarantine and to him it was like he had spent three days hiking through the restricted area.

“Might be worth a try.”
“You can’t keep them here, like you said,” Alan added. “And you can’t put them anywhere else. It’s the only chance.”

“Don’t you have a ton of student workers, interns and whatnot hanging around?” Carter asked, pale blond eyebrows rising.

Alan chuckled. “Oh, that’s devious. And a rather good idea, not to mention the learning experience.”

Owen smirked and polished off his second donut. “Let’s run that by Claire. I think she’ll be on board with it as well.”

“Not today,” Carter decided. “I’ll set up an appointment, you go and get some rest. Dr. Grant?”

“I got it.”

“I’m still here,” Owen complained. “And not a child.”

“Have fun,” Dan only said as he rose. “I’ll call you.”

Owen gave a huff not unlike his raptors and Alan chuckled. “He’s right. You look like a ghost. We got this here.”

The pack echoed the sentiment. They were well-fed and resting. Should Owen want to come, he was invited to spend time with them, dozing.

He might just pick them up on that offer later. Right now he was enjoying unhealthy food and cold drinks.

tbc...
Chapter 23

Claire was very much on board with their plans involving the interns. She immediately called one of her many assistants and had him set up a schedule, as well as call quarantine. May and Foxworth wouldn’t be overly happy, but they couldn’t argue against so many helping hands.

It would also give the interns a new job, one that was of great importance and which would up their self-esteem after the Mason Green fiasco. Not only would they be confronted with a lot of different infant dinosaurs from another island, the Site B island, they would also learn about how to handle the eggs and take care of everything under quarantine conditions. It was a unique learning experience.

“What about the velociraptors?” she asked when that was settled.

“I wouldn’t advise May to include them into the intern experience.”

She chuckled. “I suspect she won’t without me hinting at it.”

Owen looked a little thoughtful. “But if you want advice, there are one or two who might be talented enough, and not just in a preternatural way, to be trusted. Like Gregory Tomasz.”

“I’ll let her know.”

“As for the raptors’ future, we need to get them back.”

“I agree. The question is: how? The ship has been confiscated and already towed. It was a hazard anyway and a miracle that they got this far.”

“I wouldn’t use that ship even if it was the only way,” Owen growled.

Claire gave him a pointed look and he scrubbed a hand over his face, wincing a little when he encountered his healing cut. Owen was aware that he was still a little short-tempered when it came to the fate of the dinosaurs stolen from Isla Sorna. His normally laid-back attitude had turned into fierce protectiveness toward the rescued animals; all of them.

“I’ll talk to Dan,” Grady finally said. “He mentioned something about a shuttle service to Sorna. And I need to see the three raptors.”

“Why?” she asked sharply.

“Because they need to understand what we’re doing, that they’re safe and will get back home.”

“You can talk to them?” Claire looked flabbergasted. “Please don’t tell me you have bonded with them, Owen!”

“Oh hell no!” he exclaimed. “But I can get a sense of them, Claire.”

She frowned. “How much of a sense?”

“Just a general one.” Owen paced up and down in front of her the window, looking at the park below. It looked almost organized from here. “When I was dumped in their cage, I felt their hunger. And their confusion,” he finally said.

Claire knew about his abilities, how deep they went, and she was one of the two people he had
talked openly about whatever had happened before, about his evolution. Still, it was always hard to be this open, to reveal more of himself. Preternaturals were not known for flaunting their abilities and giving everyone the full story right away. It was an age-old protection mechanism that still ran in their DNA today.

Owen knew he was among friends and he still rather evaded a direct answer.

“I pushed them back.” He shrugged a little. "I tried to work with them as I had worked with my pack. I pushed my will into their minds, hoping to find a trigger, a spot where it worked somehow.”

Claire looked a little shocked, caught off guard. “And did you?”

“Still here,” he joked faintly. “They didn’t tear me to pieces. Despite being ravenously hungry, and the blood on me.”

“But you didn’t bond.” There was a hopeful note in her voice.

“Nope. Not sure I could include more pack members.”

At least without the pack’s acceptance. Owen had a suspicion that ran along those lines. His four girls were viciously guarding their unique alpha and wouldn’t let anyone else come closer. He was grateful for it. By now, with his fractured shields and the shift in his threshold, Owen suspected he could simply step outside and touch whoever.

Not that he really wanted to. It was like listening to a million voices, all talking in a different dialect, and it strained him more than the pack ever had. It wasn’t as bad as the psychic attack by the indominus rex, but it was bad enough.

“Will they even understand what we want, that we want to help?” Claire wanted to know. “They’re wild animals, were captured, caged and starved by humans. They’re intelligent, they remember, and they’re highly dangerous predators.”

Owen shrugged. Velociraptors were intelligent, sure, and the Sorna pack wasn’t happy about being in quarantine. They also didn’t like humans, usually eyeing their keepers with wariness and the keen intelligence that was looking for a way to escape. And yes, they were a subspecies with a different genetic code. They had evolved and bred on their own. It had been like listening to a different language, not just a dialect.

But Owen was sure he could do it. He had pushed into their minds before. Granted, it had been rather violent, freezing them mid-strike, but he had been there.

“We can’t let them out of quarantine,” Claire pointed out.

“Not asking you to. Just tell Dr. May and her team to give me an hour. I need them to clear out. No one can be there.”

She frowned, then her eyes widened. “You’re taking the pack with you?! Owen!”

“I’m the alpha, Claire. The Sorna pack has understood it down in the cargo hold and they need to understand it again. I was alone the first time I faced them down. It was a close call. The second time would be better with the whole pack, but that’s not a viable option, I know. For that I need my beta.”

Claire exhaled sharply. She didn’t look happy, close to pinched.
“Owen…”

“I’ll be fine. Completely safe.”

Especially with his anchor there. He didn’t say that one out loud, but Claire understood anyway. She clearly didn’t like it, but she understood.

“I’ll talk to Dr. May.”

“Thank you.”

“Just be careful.”

“You know I will.”

* * *

Annika Svensson gave the file on her tablet another look, scowled, then ran a practiced eye over Owen’s scars again.

“You heal fast,” she commented.

Owen shrugged. “Always did.”

Okay, lie. Aside from getting scratched when the girls had been babies, and the broken arm and all those bruises when a tree had hit him, he had never been truly seriously injured. But even his broken arm had been quickly mended.

“It’s been how long? Not even a week, Owen.”

His skin had knitted together, but the scars were still red and angry looking. The stitches had come out. The punctures Blue had left were scabbed over and the scabs already cracking to fall off. The cut above his eye was a red line.

“I wish you would let me monitor your brain activity,” Svensson sighed and closed his file.

“Not happening.” Owen pulled up his pants.

“I know.” She looked disappointed.

“So I’m good to go?”

“To Isla Sorna to return a pack of wild raptors and their nest? Sure.” She threw up her hands. “Go and get mauled again. I’ll have a bed ready. We should give you your own private room!”

Owen smiled winningly. “Thanks, Annika.”

“Just go, Grady,” she ordered. “Keep out of trouble.”

“Yes, ma’am. Can I drive my bike again?”

She scowled. “Yes, you can.”
Owen gave her a little salute and left.

He didn’t get far. Apparently Nancy and Laurel had been lurking outside Medical, waiting for him. Zach was there, too, an anxious expression on his young face.

“Green light. Relax. I’m fine.”

“You, Owen Grady, are too accident prone for my nerves!” Laurel glared at him. “No one’s talking, but rumors are running wild. Poachers? Animal smugglers? You’re right in the middle of it, get hurt and we can’t even visit! Do you know Carter close to barricaded the road to your place?!”

The outrage in her voice had him almost laugh, but Owen caught himself. Laurel on a rant was dangerous. Laughing would be taken the wrong way.

”We had to stake out Medical and bribe Zach here! You owe us, Grady!”

“Yeah. How about you let me get lunch and we can talk then?” he offered, glancing at Nancy.

There was something in Nancy’s eyes, something that had her more anxious he had ever seen her. It was alarming, had him slightly on edge, and he really wanted to have this conversation anywhere but out in the open.

Something had happened.

Something big.

Something a lot of people had failed to mention to him yet.

“Deal.” Laurel looked pleased. “I’ll get the food and drinks. We’ll meet at the personnel area at the lagoon, okay?”

Nancy nodded. “I’ll make sure no one’s using the picnic area.”

And with that it was settled.

Owen just shrugged and gave Zach a bright smile, then followed Nancy.

The personnel area was close to empty. A few workers were cleaning bins and tools, but they just nodded as the small group trudged along. Nancy led them up the stairs to an area of the mosasaurus lagoon that wasn’t publically accessible. There were tables and chairs, tall trees keeping the sun away most of the afternoon, and the view was spectacular.

Laurel had grabbed bagels, fruit and muffins, as well as coffee and cold drinks, which she all plonked down onto the table. She gave Owen an expectant look.

Zach had known some of what had happened already, but he stuck around as Owen gave the two women the short version, leaving out the detail of the pack’s extraction of their alpha.
“Geez, you are a trouble magnet,” Nancy muttered.

“Are you really okay?” Laurel asked again, sharp eyes scanning over him.

“I’m fine. Annika said so. Got a few bruises, but that’s it.”

“That’s not a bruise,” Zach pointed out helpfully and nodded at the angry red line on his forearm.

“I’m okay.”

Nancy gave him a narrow-eyed look, but she let the matter rest. “What will happen to the eggs and the raptors? And the many babies?”

“We’re returning the raptors and theirs eggs to Isla Sorna, but the babies and the unhatched eggs will stay here. We will raise them, then return them to their home island the moment they’re strong enough to have a chance of survival. Our many interns and students will take care of them. It’s a learning experience.”

Owen shot Zach a look.

“How about it, kiddo?”

“Sounds like a challenge.”

“Oh, it is. I think spending a few weeks there will teach you more than months of lecturing.”

Zach smiled happily.

“And I heard Gray’s coming again soon. He’d probably get a thrill out the babies, too.”

“You think they’d let me work there? I mean it’s quarantine. And I’m not a trained keeper. Just an intern.”

“Are you kidding me?” Laurel exclaimed. “You’re a great intern, Zach. Rexy Sue loves you and it’s hard to get an emotional rise out of her that isn’t food related. You’d be great with the babies.”

The teen blushed under the praise and quickly drank from his Cola.

“Your aunt has you on her radar already, Zach,” Owen told him with a smile. “You aren’t just good with the rex. The pack was impressed, too.”

The blush returned, with more force.

“You got a lot of references,” Grady added. “Your aunt can put in a good word for you with Dr. May. I can, too. I’m sure you’d be great with the babies.”

Zach’s smile was happy, the praise doing him good.

“Uh, I should go. Dr. Themming’s driving out to the Aviary. He said I could tag along.”

“Have fun,” Owen said.

They watched him hurry away before things got even more awkward for a teenage boy. Zach was talented, more than he probably knew, and he was good with animals. He just needed the training and the college courses to make something out of it.
He looked at his two friends. “So, what else is on your minds? I can see it. Spill.”

Nancy took a deep swallow from her lemonade. Laurel’s expression was suddenly grim.

“We didn’t know what had happened to you. When we locked the paddocks down for the night, our girls were somehow… nervous. Like they were upset. M was swimming around like she was looking for something.”

“Rexy Sue was prowling, doing the same,” Laurel added. “You know she’s rather laid back for a t-rex. She’s old and set in her ways, hardly anything gets her to lose it, except when her territory is invaded. She’s really settled in herself, our zen-rex, but she was upset, too. She kept rumbling, nosing at the door. I didn’t really pay her much attention. Josh and I locked up, went to the barbecue.”

Nancy nodded. “We were all there, but then word got out that something had happened in the restricted area. Carter and two teams had left and we knew it had something to do with you and the girls. No one was really in the mood for the barbecue any more.”

Owen grimaced. “Yeah, sorry about that.”

Laurel shrugged. “Don’t be.”

“Some of us still stuck around. You know,” Nancy smiled a little, “we wanted to know what was going on. That was when things got really out of control.”

“In what way”? Owen said softly, dreading the answer all of a sudden.

“Sue started to roar. There was a ruckus like you wouldn’t believe it,” Laurel told him, expression even more fierce. “I called Josh and he said she was head-butting into the safety glass or uprooting trees.”

“The same time M actually rose out of the water and almost smashed into the Main Street platform.”

Owen stared at them. “W-what?”

Nancy played with a napkin. “She was swimming around, agitated. Angry, in a way. I felt spike I had never sensed before. Like something was… happening that she didn’t like. She breached the surface multiple times, then she jumped and barely missed ending up halfway on the Main Street viewing area. She tore down a good portion of the fence.”

“Did she injure herself?” Owen demanded, hands clenching into fists, knuckles standing out sharp and white.

Nancy smiled. “No. No, she’s fine.”

“And you?”

Her smile grew warmer. “Me, too.”

“Laurel?” he asked, eyes boring into the other trainer.

“I’m fine, but Josh was hit hard by Sue’s outbreak. He’s okay,” she added immediately, hold up both hands. “A bit rattled like all of us, but okay.”

Owen whispered a curse under his breath.
“Reggie said even the herds started to move, calling out, bleating,” Laurel told him. “The whole Aviary was in uproar.”

He felt the blood leave his face, his stomach clench. The two single dinosaurs, sure. He had always been so very much aware of them as individuals among the humming background noises. But he had apparently actively reached out to the masses.

“We had a few near-breaches, but luckily Rexy Sue stayed inside. She destroyed half the paddock and left a few dents, but nothing that couldn’t be repaired.” Laurel looked at him, as pale as Owen felt, eyes tight with worry. “What happened out there, Owen?”

“I…” He had no idea how to explain it. Maybe it couldn't really be explained either.

“You cast out, right?” Nancy said, like she just realized it herself. “Something happened and it backlashed not just into the pack but everyone!”

Laurel’s fingers dug into the table top. “What?! You can do that?!” she exclaimed, voice rising.

Owen buried his face in his hands, fingers curling into his hair, digging into his scalp, and he reached for the pack, the calm center of the storm of emotions raging through him.

Horror, fear, panic, cold terror…

He had affected the other dinosaurs.

He had gone beyond everything, broken down all barriers, destroyed the threshold, and he had pushed his pain and fear at them all.

“Fuck,” he breathed. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!”

Nancy curled one strong hand around his wrist. “Owen…”

“I lost it,” he whispered. “I broke apart. Into all of them. I pushed at the Sorna raptors, felt their desperation and hunger, and they were getting stronger, trying to overpower me. They were so very hungry and I was bleeding, their prey. They hesitated because of the alpha vibes, but it wouldn’t last. So…”

“You shattered,” Nancy murmured. “Not just a fracture along preexisting lines, going for the pack members. You went all the way to everyone? All the animals?”

He swallowed, felt like he really needed a stiff drink, but he couldn’t get drunk.

“Owen?”

He nodded jerkily.

“Oh dear god,” Laurel breathed. “How… I mean… you got back… how? How could you do that and find back?!”

“Blue,” he heard himself say. “It was Blue. And later the rest of the pack. All of them.”

The onset of panic was still there, but he was calming down again, felt the warmth coming from his beta, from every member of his pack, and it was like a soothingly warm blanket over his frazzled mind.

“How?” Laurel asked, voice so shaky, she sounded terrified.
Owen finally looked up, took in their pale faces, the wide-eyed looks. Nancy was a bit calmer, still holding his wrist. It was a very physical anchor Owen was glad for. Laurel was white as a sheet and trembling a little.

“How?” she asked again.

“She dug her claws into my hip.”

They stared at him and Laurel hissed a curse.

“The physical pain... the new spike... went past the already existing aches. It got through to me. It drew me back. She anchored me again and the pack did the rest. I wasn’t aware of how far I had cast out.”

Nancy blew out a sharp breath. “That’s... wow, Owen! I knew you were strong, but that...”

“I didn’t... I lost it.” Owen felt the tremor rise, but the pack surged forward, keeping him balanced. “Everyone?” he asked, sounding a bit faint.

“As far as we know, you got to them one way or the other. Some were just following the pack instinct or their pack leaders.”

Nancy smiled reassuringly. She squeezed the wrist again.

“You did nothing wrong. They weren’t hurt. You were.”

He drew a shaky breath. “They’re all okay?”

“All of them. No one was hurt.”

“And Josh?” he asked again, eyes on Laurel.

“He’s fine. We both know he’s a bit too sensitive to predators and that Sue loves to play with him, but he’s doing well.” She exhaled slowly, shaking her head. “Owen, that’s so...”

“Fucked up?” he said with a faint smile. “Tell me about it.”

“Your shields are back?” Nancy wanted to know.

“Mostly. I’m healing through the pack. They’re keeping me safe, so to speak.”

“Good.”

Both women hugged him before they left for their work again. Owen held on as tight as they did, feeling a little of the shock wane.

“Nothing you did was wrong,” Laurel told him again. “Nothing at all. It’s just something we all have to chew on a little.”

“Yeah. Just as a favor... don’t spread this around?” he requested.

“Josh is my confidant and he won’t talk with anyone else. You should talk to Reggie, though. You know you can trust him to keep that stuff to himself.”

Owen nodded. “I will. And I will talk to Josh personally, if you want to.”
Laurel chuckled. “No, I got this.”

“No one told you?” Nancy asked when they were alone, looking out over the silent waters.

“No.”

Something that needed to be rectified.

She patted his arm. “Get some rest. Let it settle.”

“I doubt this’ll settle any time soon,” he murmured.

“It will. And you’re back to normal, right? All shields are there and you haven’t expanded the pack.”

He nodded.

But he would have to talk to Claire anyway.

tbc...
“We couldn’t be sure it was connected,” Claire told him over coffee in her office the next morning.

“There’s a park-wide animal uproar in the one night where I get thrown to a pack of Sorna raptors, and I tell you about what happened, and you don’t think it’s connected?”

Claire, all corporate representative in her white outfit, looked at him. Her business shields were up. Owen could see it.

“We didn’t know what had caused it. Your preternatural disposition is an open secret only as far as the other preternaturally talented trainers are concerned. And even then it was a bit far-fetched, Owen!”

Yeah, he had to give her that.

“You might be the first talented to connect permanently with an animal and come out of it a still fully functioning human. You might be an alpha of four velociraptors who follow you no matter that. But this… No matter how strong you are, it’s so very far outside the realm of possibilities…” She sighed. “I might have made a connection, but there was no evidence. Not enough anyway.”

“There is,” Owen tapped his head. “I know I received them all, for a very long minute or five, getting torn apart, into every direction, until Blue got me back to reality and centered in their midst.”

“But you’re no longer influencing them?”

“No.”

“No bond?”

“Hell no!”

She smiled slightly. “So it was a one-time event. We can safely assume they won’t go onto a rampage again, trying to break and do what? Save the island alpha?”

“Claire… I’m not…”

She raised her eyebrows. Owen stopped and groaned.

“I’ve got my pack, I’m their alpha. I’m not there for everyone,” he finally said firmly.

“Good to know.”

“And they’re possessive enough as is. And jealous. I’m not the pied piper of dinosaurs.”

Claire laughed, openly amused. “I hope not. Are you really okay, Owen?” she asked, dropping the
corporate shields and being only Claire now.

He looked into her eyes, saw the worry and the care, and he gave her a genuine, warm smile. “Yes, I am. I’m really okay.”

She hugged him then. Just as genuine and warm, a gesture that meant more to him than words. He wrapped his arms around the slender form and hugged Claire back.

“I’m glad,” she whispered.

So was Owen.

And the whole incident would be swept under the same rug that was already hiding the indominus rex incident.

* * *

Simon Masrani flew in on a private helicopter. While he had started flying lessons a while ago, this time he let someone else pilot him.

Owen wasn’t too surprised when the CEO of Masrani Global asked to meet with him. He was just surprised that it had taken the man so long.

“How are you, Owen?” Simon asked, dark eyes running over him, taking in the visible injuries.

“Been better, been worse. I’m fine, Simon.”

“And the animals?”

It was one trait Owen admired in a man of Masrani’s standing and power: he truly cared about the animals in his park, wanted them happy. He had never called them ‘assets’ like so many others, and he had done everything in his power to insure that the paddock were vast, that the animals had everything they needed.

Except for the indominus rex.

Owen couldn’t really fault him for it. He had seen the final product, had never been there for the developmental stage.

Sometimes Owen wondered what would have happened if the i-rex had been raised with more human contact, with other dinosaurs around. She would have socialized better, would have seen more than gray walls, a hook with meat on it, and shapes moving behind a glass screen. Had they brought him in right from her hatching, had they hatched her normally and not sped up her growth, she might have been normal.

A predator, a hybrid, but not psychotic and sociopathic.

Another part cringed at the thought that he might be connected to that mind instead of his four girls. Owen wasn’t so sure he would have come out of this human or even close to human. She would have swallowed him like the tiger had taken great-aunt Sarah’s mind. The tiger hadn’t planned the conquering of his caretaker’s humanity, erasing what had made Sarah herself.
The i-rex, though… She had been cunning, devious, planning every step, and even socialized and accustomed to humans, she wouldn’t have let him exist.

“Everyone’s okay. The pack’s fine. The Sorna raptors are in good care, and so are the babies.”

Masrani nodded. “Good. Good.” He leaned back against the desk. “I want you to know that I’ll do whatever is needed to protect the stolen animals, to return them to their natural habitat if possible.”

“Thank you.”

“I have my people looking into upgrading the protection around Isla Sorna, as well as Isla Nublar. This won’t happen again.”

“You can’t promise that, Simon. The dinosaurs are blackmarket gold.”

A grim expression flitted over the other man’s features. “That I know. Mr. Carter talked to me and I’m in contact with certain organizations world-wide to pursue the thefts. On paper, all dinosaurs are Masrani Global property. Whoever possesses one, dead or alive, will be prosecuted, no exceptions. I will find those people, Owen. I promise.”

He believed him.

Masrani was silent for a while, then, “Will you be okay?”

It was a serious, open question. Owen could read it in the man.

“Yeah.”

“And the pack?”

“We’re good.”

“If you need anything, and I mean anything, Owen, you will let me know. Because you will get it. Claire has told me a few things. I understand little of preternatural abilities, their growths and the true dangers. I had to read up on a few things lately.” He smiled briefly. “I hired preternaturals because they were the best to care for my animals. They were needed for their happiness. I made an investment and it paid off.”

“It was a gamble,” Owen remarked quietly.

“Yes.” Simon inclined his head a little. “But so is life. I have made mistakes in that life. The i-rex was one of the worst. Giving you the raptors was not a mistake.”

No, the girls hadn’t been a mistake. They had been the best that had ever happened to Owen Grady in his life.

Masrani’s expression was suddenly serious, almost business-like. “The true extent of what happened down at the beach will never surface,” he said, holding Owen’s gaze. “It was a smuggling operation that will be pursued by my lawyers, as well as various agencies from different countries. The deaths that happened on the ship can be attested to the Sorna raptors getting free of their cage. Velociraptors are cunning and dangerous. Those are the official reports.”

Owen felt something inside of him clench and unclench. His girls would be safe. That was all that counted. No one but a select few people knew about what they had really done.

The two assault teams operated almost like a black ops force. They had been trained for this, would
never talk about what happened on this island, and would follow the official story. They all knew what was on the line. This wasn’t just about four very intelligent animals; it involved Owen Grady as well. Owen knew everyone on that team, had made sure he knew them personally, that they knew him, his girls, and that they understood the implications of what was happening.

Carter had carefully selected them all and they were extremely loyal. Even within InGen they were keeping secrets.

“If you have anything, Owen, anything at all, please let me know. You have my number. I care about those four raptors, and yourself,” Simon said earnestly.

“We’re good, Simon. And you already made sure that no one can touch us.”

Even after the pack had killed. It had been self-defense. Saving Owen’s life.

“I made a mistake once,” the CEO said softly, alluding to the indominus rex. “We all paid dearly for it. Making a mistake now, with you and them, would be even more catastrophic. The world cannot know about the true extent of their abilities, of yours. I know many might see it as an advantage in military warfare, maybe in secret operations, but the truth is a different one.”

Owen nodded slowly. He couldn’t begin to imagine using dinosaurs as soldiers and weapons.

“What happened was due to a personal connection between you and them, am I correct?”

“Yeah.”

“So there is no way to replicate it. Dinosaurs are not human. Their brains are not wired like that. Even if this one incident showed us what they are truly capable of… it was just one incident that cannot be repeated. Factors played into it that no one can understand.” Simon smiled slightly. “I know I have nightmares thinking about the possibility of raptors opening doors. We made pretty sure that the locks are tamper-proof. Now yours managed an electronic lock.”

Owen’s hands clenched into fists.

“But like I said, the file will disappear. It’ll be safe. Like the i-rex file.”

And that was where it belonged.

It also meant that Owen Grady would be safe.

“Would you agree to give me a tour of your paddock?” Masrani asked with a sly smile, gently changing the topic.

Owen chuckled. “Sure.”

“After lunch. I heard Sunrio has a taco special today.” Masrani rubbed his hands, smiling brightly.

“You can never go wrong with tacos,” Owen agreed.

So tacos it was.
Masrani didn’t stay the night. He toured the raptor paddock, much to the pack’s entertainment, watching them as they watched him in turn.

“They look magnificent,” he murmured.

“They are,” Owen agreed, voice soft and filled with the smile on his face.

Because they truly were. Healthy. Balanced in themselves and within the pack. No sickness, no infections, no problems at all.

They had killed human beings, but they weren’t troubled by it. Reptilian logic; no remorse. It had been necessary.

No one would ever know. The assault team, Carter, Owen. His friends had been told about his preternatural side, about the broken barriers, but not the girls’ surgical strike.

Only Alan had been brought in.

Blue chirped, tilting her head. She seemed to flow around his mind, cool, controlled, calm.

His girls.

Owen smiled, proud.

“Do you think the Sorna pack can be returned?” Masrani suddenly asked.

“It’s their territory. Their absence doesn’t change it. And they can’t stay here.”

“No even with you?”

“No. I’m not their alpha and the pack wouldn’t accept them.”

A nod. “I wish you luck, Owen. All of you.”

“We’ll need it.”

Masrani took off a few hours later, after meeting with Claire and Carter, looking around his park some more, and a light dinner.

Owen didn’t join them or him again.

tbc...
Chapter 25

Quarantine was deserted, as if everyone had just dropped their work and abandoned the area. Security had been tightened, but he hadn’t seen any troopers as he got out of the car. Owen had no doubts, though. Should anything happen, anything at all, the place would be swarming with armed troops.

For now, he was alone.

Owen braced himself. He squared his shoulders, drew in a deep breath, then relaxed himself by sheer force of will. Nancy had tried to teach him meditation and it had never really worked, but a few things had stuck. He listened to the hum in the back of his mind, located the three clear-cut dots that were the Sorna raptors, then drew in his shields.

Ready.

As ready as he would ever get.

He whistled.

Blue stepped gracefully out of the bushes, clicking and chittering, cautiously approaching the building that she had never been before. Scents assaulted her, of humans and dinosaurs alike.

Owen felt her displeasure at being here.

She didn’t like it.

It smelled wrong.

I know, Owen told her. We’ll be fine.

The pack had been even more displeased that not all had been allowed to accompany their alpha. Delta had viciously snarled and growled, snapping at Charlie. Echo had yowled when the gates had closed after their alpha and beta had left the paddock.

Owen hadn’t liked it either, but having Blue here was complicated enough. All four had been an impossible idea.

They wouldn’t actually walk into the complex. That would violate all kinds of protocols for a quarantine area. The three raptors had been isolated on the far side, next to the docking area, and there was an access point that suited Owen’s needs.

The raptors had been declared clean, though they had been shot full of vitamins and a cocktail of meds to prevent them catching anything. May had called them hardy little bastards and Owen just knew that they were.

So he and Blue would be able to meet them, without the rest of quarantine being compromised.

Carter, in full gear, armed, and very much alert, shot him a look. The man had been quiet as a mouse the whole time, just watching. It was one of the things he did best, in Owen’s opinion: blend into the background and watch.

He was also the only person aside from Owen who was here.
Dan’s eyes flicked over to Blue, who returned his gaze calmly. She snuffled softly, then huffed at him. She seemed to straighten up, look taller and more imposing, but not more threatening. Blue briefly tilted her head at him and Carter rested his hands on the barrel of the rifle he had around his neck.

“I’m going in alone, Dan,” Owen repeated what he had told his friend countless times already over the past hour.

It got him a brief nod. There was no more need for arguing. Carter didn’t like it, had expressed his own displeasure often enough, but he had yielded in the end.

“Be careful,” he said neutrally.

Grady shot him a quick smile. “Always am.” He turned to his beta. “Blue,”

She fell in step beside him.

*

It was just a short walk from the access hatch to the quarantine area reserved for the Sorna raptors. Blue had taken a moment to adjust to the new environment, the smells and faint sounds. Her trust in Owen hadn’t let her falter, but he had slowed his step for a moment, scenting.

Now he stood in front of the cage holding the young female and the two males. Her nostrils blew wide as she took in their scent. She rumbled softly. Beta was looking at Owen, alert and on guard, while the two males were threatening with soft growls and hisses.

Blue snarled back, claws flexing, her tail whipping left to right.

One of the males, Red, stepped forward, hissing.

Blue growled deeply, a warning that had Red hesitate. He ducked a little, lips pulled back over sharp teeth, then his jaw dropped open in a warning hiss.

She did the same, front paws spreading wide, showing long, lethal talons.

Posturing, Owen thought. A lot of posturing. This was Blue’s island, not the Sorna pack’s. She was growling more, then clicked sharply.

Red reared back, huffing. Yellow had joined him, standing closer to Beta, but she was watching Owen with almost curious eyes.

“Hey,” he murmured, voice low.

He knew they could hear him, but they didn’t understand the language. They had never seen a human before they had been caught by the poachers.

“Hey there, Beta. Red. Yellow.”

He looked at each as he called them by the names he had given them himself.

Owen was projecting his status. His stance was non-threatening and non-confrontational. He didn’t push his will at the pack just yet. He let them see the alpha and he let them feel his presence, but he had yet to stake a claim on them.
Blue was there. Right there. Her shoulder almost casually touching against his side and her sharp talons rested on his thigh.

It would look dangerous and strangely possessive to an outsider, but it meant so much more as a pack. She was his beta and she would be there for him, no matter what.

The red scars forming over healing wounds on his skin proved it.

A low rumble escaped her throat, barely audible to human ears, but Owen heard it, felt it. And the Sorna pack heard it, too.

For them they were the alpha pair.

The young female stayed still, watched them, then gurgled softly.

Owen let his shields drop slowly. He wasn’t crazy enough to open up completely, just peeled back layer by layer to see when it would be enough. He reached for the other raptor and felt her alien mind. She wasn’t pack and neither were the two males, but he had learned to roughly interpret their communication. It was like listening to a foreigner speaking English, someone who had learned it not too long ago and wasn’t fluent.

“We’re going to get you back to Isla Sorna,” he told Beta, voice even and calm.

She barked, her mind pushing images at his. Red and Yellow were watching him with cold eyes.

“With the eggs,” he added, understanding what she was trying to communicate. “Your eggs are currently in the hatchery, kept at optimum warmth, being cared for. We don’t intend to keep them. They are not ours.”

Blue growled her agreement. She added a convincing trill.

“They belong with you. You are in charge of the pack now.”

She would make a good alpha one day. Right now she was struggling with being in charge, though the males deferred to her. The alpha had died, as had the alpha’s mate. The eggs were still there and intact.

“You’ll be aboard a ship back to Sorna tomorrow,” Owen told him. “We have to sedate you, though.”

The three raptors snarled, the males more than the female. Tails whipped and claws flexed.

Owen didn’t react, just waited out the surge of anger. Blue slightly shifted her weight, bumping against him, her claws pushing gently against his thigh, barely felt through the jeans, but so very much capable of just slicing through the material and into his muscles.

Beta’s eyes flicked from Owen to her and back again. She made soft clicking and rumbling sounds. Owen felt her confusion, her doubt, but there was still no clear communication. He was learning, though.

“It has to be done,” the alpha said calmly, projecting it clearly. “It’s the only way you can get back. You will be sedated. The eggs will be kept safe and the moment we are back on your island, you’ll be released and the eggs given into your care.”

The young female snorted, then rumbled her understanding. She snapped at Yellow, who was still
growling threateningly, and the male raptor stepped back. He chuffed.

Owen nodded. “I give you my word as alpha that you’ll get home. What happened was terrible. Your first encounter with humans and they took your alpha pair.”

Beta hummed, stepping closer until she was so close only the bars separated Owen from her. She sniffed, nostrils wide, and then snorted.

Grady smiled. Blue stretched out her neck and sniffed at the younger raptor. She churred, chittering a little under her breath.

Beta tilted her head, studying her, then whistled and clicked. Blue pulled back, huffing.

*Different. Not like us,* she told Owen.

*No, not like you. But they are raptors. Not family. More like… extended relatives.*

Beta watched them. Red and Yellow had come closer, too, wary, but they were responding to the female’s acceptance.

*She sees the beta-alpha. She feels you are powerful.*

Owen rubbed his palm over her shoulder, smiling briefly. “Jealous, Blue?” he murmured.

She snorted, but she brushed her nose over his cheek, a clear sign to the Sornas. *I am beta-alpha to you.*

Beta watched them, then rumbled at her pack. The two males quieted down more, though they were still very much on guard.

“We’ll be there to get you home. I’ll be here,” Owen said, firmly pushing that across into their minds.

Beta snorted, then turned and padded to the other side of the cage, Yellow and Red following.

“Okay,” Owen said with an exhalation of air. “Our signal to go.”

Blue gave an amused chuff. Grady shared her amusement.

“C’mon,” he chuckled. “Let’s go home.”

He gestured at Blue to follow, which she did after a look back at the other raptors.

Outside, after the airlock hatch had closed firmly behind them, Owen drew a deep breath. Blue chittered softly.

*Not pack. Never pack.*

“Yeah,” he murmured. “Wasn’t ever planning on keeping them here. That would be inviting trouble.”

She agreed.
Carter was waiting for them, leaning against the car, looking at ease but far from it. His eyes tracked the edge of the trees, then came to rest on Blue.

She tilted her head, warbling a little, studying their guard.

Carter didn’t say a word, just held her gaze calmly.

Blue huffed, then disappeared into the jungle, heading home.

Dan pushed away from the SUV. “All set?” he asked neutrally.

“Yeah. They understand we want to help.”

“Do they now?”

“In their own way. They’re just as intelligent as their ancestors, Dan, with complex social structures and communication. Those three lost their alpha pair and their eggs.”

“Do they accept you as their alpha? The alpha pair?”

Grady laughed. “No way. I’m not trying to get another pack and it wouldn’t work that way anyway. I can communicate on basic levels with them, push the concept of what we want to do into their minds. They can understand that like a toddler would, but they don’t trust me. They respond to the alpha, no more, no less.”


“We have to find a way to get them to Sorna without much fuss. Sedated, of course.”

Carter opened the door. “Get in. We got planning to do.”

* 

“No! No way, Grady!”

Owen met the gray-blue eyes, steely in the depths. “You will need all the help you can get!”

“You’re in no condition! And we can handle releasing the raptors. Foxworth will sedate them, then we wake them up on Sorna. Easy.”

Owen glared at him. He was healing. The stitches had come out, the scars, while still bright red, were looking good. He wasn’t bleeding, he wasn’t weak. And his head was fine. He had all his shields back, able to go about his life without the danger of getting caught in another dinosaur mind again.

“You can’t just dump them back on the island!” he argued.

“And why not?”

“Because you need to get them to accept the eggs, call the pack, and not eat you, Carter!”

“I think we can handle them,” Dan replied sarcastically, folding his arms in front of his chest.
Owen glared. In the paddock, Blue bellowed and Delta gave a screech.

“They already went through a seriously traumatic situation,” Owen tried. “I can keep them calm, can explain, okay?”

“I thought you weren’t their alpha.”

Grady blew out an exasperated breath. “No, I’m not their alpha, but they respect my status as this pack’s leader. You don’t want to stress them even more than they already have been so far.”

Dan studied him, took in the still fine lines in Owen’s face that spoke of the ordeal he had gone through. The determination the other man radiated was clear.

“You want to handle this alone?” Owen challenged.

The blond snorted. “I don’t want to handle it at all, Owen.”

“They have to get back home.”

“I know.”

“Which means sedation and releasing them on Isla Sorna.”

“I read the memo. You apparently didn’t finish it, though. No one mentioned you being there.”

Owen scowled. Carter just gave him a humorless smile.

“This isn’t a vacation cruise, Owen.”

“Fuck, Dan! I know all that and you know you’ll need every help you can get, right? I can do this!”

“Alone?”

Owen blinked, then stiffened.

“If you touch them, you’re open, right?”

“I’ll be fine,” he ground out, stalking past Carter.

Dan grabbed his arm, holding him back. “Grady, don’t make this so hard!”

Owen glared at him. “Let go.”

Carter released him, holding up his hand. Behind them, in the paddock, there was hardly a sound. Blue was watching them with eagle eyes, but apparently didn’t read any aggression in Dan’s behavior.

“I don’t want to cart your sorry ass back home because you overloaded again, okay?” the chief of security said, voice low and intense.

“I’m fine, Dan. I can do this.”

“If you come along, what about the pack?”

Owen gave a soft hiss, almost raptor-like. Carter watched him, then nodded slowly. There was almost a look of resignation on his features.
“Blue. You’re taking Blue. You’re the alpha pair.”

“We’re not…” Owen stopped at the raised eyebrows and his lips compressed into a tight line.

Blue was an amused presence in the back of his mind.

The Sorna pack wasn’t used to the pack dynamics as they had encountered them with his girls. They were used to an alpha pair, a matriarch and her mate. They didn’t know about human alphas, had never seen a human do what Owen could do, and they had never felt an absolute alpha. Owen inspired respect, but they were confused as to why they reacted the way they did.

Ferrying them over to their home island and just leaving them to wake up and gather their thoughts was not what Owen had planned to do. There was no telling how the other raptors would react. There was no telling how safe the eggs were. There was also no chance in hell that anyone would traipse deeper into the jungle and look for the rest of the pack to deliver their missing members.

Not even Owen was crazy enough to do that.

The pack was one voice in his head, telling him that this would definitely not happen.

And Blue would be with him on the ferry.

Not sedated.

“Can raptors get sea sick?” Carter asked with a faint smile.

Owen huffed a little laugh. “No idea. I know they can swim, though mine haven’t paddled around any ponds just yet.”

“What about you?”

“I can swim, if that’s what you’re asking.”

Carter smirked. “Good to know. So, when do you want to get this operation going, alpha?”

Owen glared, but he refused to be baited. “ASAP. The forecast looks good.”

“Yeah. I’ll round up a team, you decide if you want anyone else along,” the chief of security told him. “Other trainers, maybe? Keepers? To keep an eye on the cargo?”

“Just me and Blue. That’s it.”

“You and Blue.”

“Alpha pair, right?” Owen joked.

Carter just looked at him, then shook his head with weary acceptance. “I’ll brief my men. You do… whatever you need to do.”

* * *

Alan just looked at him, then shook his head and exchanged a long-suffering look with Barry.
Devoe was just leaving and had listened to Owen explaining what they were going to do.

“Dangerous,” had been his only comment. “But if anyone can do it, it’s you.”

“See?” Owen said and turned to Alan. “That’s how you do it. Positive reinforcement.”

“Might be French for ‘you’re a crazy guy with a death wish,’” Alan replied dryly.

Barry laughed whole-heartedly. “He is that, yes. But he knows what he’s doing.”

Owen made a ‘see?’ gesture at Barry.

“And now I better go before I’m accused of taking sides with the boss.”

Barry swung a leg over the ATV and started the engine. “Don’t get eaten, Owen.”

“I never do.”

And then he was off toward the park.

Alan pulled his hat firmly onto his head by the brim. “You know I trust you to know what you’re doing with your pack, kid, but we’re talking about Isla Sorna and its inhabitants.”

“I’m not spending more time on the island than necessary to release the pack. No camping trip, no overnight stay. Carter signed off on the plan. So has Claire.”

Alan didn’t look happy, but accepting. He had been to Sorna and he had had the pleasure of getting to know the indigenous raptor species intimately.

“Blue is coming with me. To back me up as the alpha,” Owen explained. “The rest of the pack has to stay here. They’re not happy about it, but they accept it. Barry and Peter will take care of them, keep them fed and busy.”

Alan glanced at the enclosure. He didn’t seem surprised to discover the well-known shape of Echo close to the bars.

“You can stay here, too,” Owen offered. “If you want. Keep Echo happy?” he added with a small begging note to his voice.

Grant chuckled and shook his head. “You have a way, kid…”

“It’s your choice. They’ll be in good hands. I trust both Barry and Peter, and the pack won’t act out. Even without their alpha there. We’ll only be gone for a day.”

“You place a lot of trust in them.”

“Because I know I can.”

He blew out a breath. Echo made a little trilling sound as if she was aware what was going on. Trying to influence him.

“I’ll stay.”

Echo called out.

“She heard me?”
“Not directly. She got it through me.” Owen shrugged. “And thanks.”

“Therapy, remember?” Alan winked, looking a little more at ease.

tbc...
207 miles west of Costa Rica, Isla Sorna was the biggest of the group known as The Five Deaths. It was only 87 miles in distance from Isla Nublar, which had been the main reason for the poachers to seek shelter and a hiding place in the one spot no one would have thought to look.

Getting the adult raptors back was a logistics problem, but none one that couldn’t be solved. They were sedated, muzzled, tied down, then placed in a transportation box.

Owen was there for every step, his pack hidden in the jungle not far away, cold eyes watching the proceedings.

A Landing Craft Utility, LCU, would shuttle the raptors back to their home island. Two units of armed troopers would accompany the transport.

“You have connections,” Owen just stated as he watched the LCU dock.

Carter shrugged, but there was a gleam in his eyes. Then he grew serious again.

“Everyone aboard has been briefed. None of my men will be in the cargo area. As requested. When we land, you and your beta will be the first offloading. She will be muzzled at all times, Grady, understood?”

“Sure. You repeated it often enough.”

“Owen…” There was a clear warning there.

“I’m very clear on procedures, Dan. Absolutely. Blue will be with me at all times. She will be muzzled, on her absolutely best behavior, and she won’t even look at any of the troopers. As long as they keep their guns pointed at anything but her or me we’ll be just fine.”

“Good. I’m not happy about this whole thing…”

“And you’ve been very vocal in your formal protests. Thank you.”

“There are too many unknown variables. Having three sedated raptors aboard is one thing. Your beta is quite another.”

“She won’t be sedated, Dan,” Owen stated firmly. “This is already better than the first option.”

Which would have been to bring the whole pack along. Now it was just Blue. Barry and Alan, together with Zach, would take care of the rest of the pack.

Owen’s expression was like cut out of granite, eyes hard, body language uncompromising. The tension between the two men was palpable.

“I must be out of my mind,” Carter finally muttered.

“No more than any of us.”

“This goes against every security protocol in known history. You owe me, Grady.”

“I know.”
And with that it was settled.

*

They had set the time for the launch at as early as possible. Isla Sorna and Isla Nublar weren’t that far apart, but Owen was on board with the decision to a) launch early and b) take it slow. They didn’t want to set a new speed record.

So in the early light of dawn, the sun just crawling over the horizon, Owen parked his bike next to Carter’s SUV. Blue had enjoyed the early run, the jungle still dark, barely anyone but them awake. The rest of the pack had rumbled, slightly agitated that the alpha and beta would be gone without them, but Owen was sure they would be fine.

Barry had arrived half an hour before they had left, telling him the same.

Blue was a model raptor. She went aboard their transport with barely a rumble leaving her lips, though she closely scanned the men and women aboard, sniffed at the boxes that held the Sorna pack and the temperature regulated container with the eggs. She prowled along the open deck, claws clicking on the metal, full circle, then came back to Owen, who had let her do her inspection.

Blue had accepted her muzzle with good grace, but Owen had refused to use a modified harness to restrain her arms. She needed them for balance and it was cruel to tie her up. He wouldn’t go for it for a second.

They were the only ones on the loading deck. Carter and his men were up on the main walkways, watching, guns ready but not pointed at them.

Looking at them, she sensed their lingering nervousness, but there was also strength and resolution. She approved of the selected troopers.

“C’mon, girl,” Owen said, pulling her attention away from the guards.

She curled up in the shade with her alpha, ignoring everyone around them when she was done.

Owen gave Carter a small grin, making himself as comfortable as possible with his still bruised skin.

*

Back at the raptor paddock, Alan Grant looked at the three raptors. Echo was watching him with bright eyes and an almost eager mood. She chirped and tilted her head.

“I’m not going to let you out and I’m not coming inside,” he told her.

She chattered and trilled, but she didn’t sound disappointed.

Charlie and Delta were milling around. Charlie finally settled, while Delta’s eyes were roaming around the enclosure, her posture stiff, almost tense.
Echo barked at her, which got her a hiss in reply. Delta wasn’t a happy raptor at the moment.

Alan tugged on his hat a little tighter. It would be an interesting day and he just hoped he didn’t have to watch them getting aggressive or trying to break out.

Echo paced along the fence as he headed back to the house, warbling and clicking, then whining as he didn’t stay.

Alan wondered for the umpteenth time how such a dangerous, lethal creature could sound so pitiful that even he, the man who had nearly been killed by raptors several times, felt it tug at his heart strings.

He grabbed his tablet, the newspaper and a book, then settled on the porch with a good view of the raptor enclosure.

*

The ride was completely uneventful. Calm seas and sunny skies. Blue got up when they approached Isla Sorna, cool eyes on the island she didn’t know, scenting the air. She hadn’t exactly enjoyed being on a boat. Owen had kept a close eye on her, always close enough to touch. Now and then he had stroked over her side, her neck or her back.

Owen joined and rested a hand on her back.

*I am fine.*

Owen smiled at her. *It’s not just for you.*

She nuzzled against his neck. *You are tense. Worried.*

“Yeah. No idea what we can expect and this isn’t our territory. It’s theirs and that of a lot of other dinosaurs. Of course I’m worried.”

She blew warm air into his hair, then Blue’s eyes were on the island again.

The wind blew into their faces, cool, a spray of saltwater mixing with the sun. Isla Sorna looked no different than her sister island, the coast line a little different, the jungle less familiar, even from affair.

*Not home,* she said, almost thoughtful, still scenting for anything that might be reason for alarm.

“No, it isn’t,” he murmured.

It was Site B. It was where Sue had come from, the last of the original dinosaurs to be on Isla Nublar. Aside from the science station there was nothing of the old buildings left. And the dinosaurs living on the island had evolved on their own, the next generation different from the first ones.

There were no pteranodon, no flyers at all. After the Aviary had been damaged and the flyers had gotten lose, the military had shot them down. It had been before Owen’s time, but he felt pained by the very thought.
“Not our home, Blue. Theirs. It’s where, in a way, you came from, too.”

She snorted. She knew where they had come from: the lab. She knew where she had grown up and where she belonged, because it was where her alpha was.

Owen gave her a quick smile.

What took longer was finding a good place to set down the LCU. They cruised for close to an hour until Owen could agree with the chosen spot. Close to the jungle, sandy beach, no undercurrents, hardly any rocks jutting out of the blue, blue water.

It would have been easy to just use the landing spot for the scientists who came by boat, but Owen suspected the raptors weren’t milling around that place. Even if they were and they could attract them, it wasn’t a good idea.

Sorna was dangerous. Arrival and departure was planned ahead and tightly monitored, with armed guards as security against possible dangers.

So going to almost the other side was preferable.

Blue followed her alpha as Owen stepped off the LCU and onto the beach. It looked like a paradise Kodak moment. White sand, blue water with turquoise patches, lush green jungle. Driftwood lay in the waves coming in and shells crunched underneath his boots.

Yes, paradise.

Deadly, deadly paradise.

Owen had been to Sorna only once, as a visitor to study the wild raptors for a few days, and it had shown him what the world sixty-five millions years ago might have been like. This wasn’t a hidden paradise or an off the beaten path vacation spot.

In and out.

No casualties.

Blue’s eyes were on the jungle, her posture tense, all senses stretched. It was not her territory. She was an intruder.

And she knew it.

Owen placed a hand against her flank, getting a soft snort from her. It was as calming for her as it was for him. They needed each other in this, going into unknown territory.

*In and out. We get the pack to a safe spot, wake them, hand over the eggs.*

She rumbled and craned her neck to look at the boxes being unloaded from the boat.
“They might not want to leave without a fight.”

“The eggs will be their priority. It’s the next generation. Attacking us risks the eggs breaking.”

Blue clicked softly.

Owen walked over to the boxes and immediately everyone was suddenly a lot more tense, though not in an aggressive way. It was the presence of a predator and a powerful alpha that had them react. These men belonged to the specialized team that had already helped with his rescue. They knew what they were doing, they knew how to behave. Showing respect to the alpha was part of that.

Blue was Owen’s shadow, vicious and deadly, even though she was muzzled. She was part of the reason why the men and women had tensed, but Grady had long since realized that those troopers trusted in his control.

Carter walked up to him in a show of trust, pushing past his men, and his eyes met Blue’s. The beta huffed a little, impressed.

Good energy, Owen thought to himself. Carter was a born leader. He felt Blue respond to it. Good.

Her reaction to his thoughts was amusement. Yes, she liked Carter and he was an alpha of his own kind. She could accept that. She could also appreciate his way of protecting Owen and his pack in his own way.

“Just get the boxes as far away from the water as you can, take out the eggs and put them into the warm sand. I’ll do the rest,” he told Dan. “They’ll start calling for their pack mates, which will be your sign to just walk away.”

“Understood. Be careful, Owen.”

“Always am.”

Blue rumbled her own reassurance. Owen reach up and undid the straps of her muzzle, letting it fall away.

“Time to do our best, girl,” he murmured.

She blew her nostrils wide.

Owen walked down the ramp, followed by the troopers with the eggs.

Waking up the three sedated raptors worked faster than anticipated. Beta was on her feet within moments of receiving the antidote shot. She was just a tiny little bit unsteady. Her eyes cleared and she was already snarling, instinctively warning off whoever was close. Red and Yellow followed, just as barely off balance as Beta, and their eyes already gleamed with raw intelligence and the readiness to attack.

All three had been fed by Owen the night before. He hadn’t wanted to risk it this morning. They might have started to throw up if they didn’t stomach the narcotics, and that was dangerous in a sedated state.
“Hey,” he greeted them, calm, assertive, projecting actively into their minds.

Beta’s eyes were on the boat, on the troopers, then swiveled to the eggs. Her taloned fingers flexed.

Blue hissed when Beta stepped forward, and she stopped, chittering.

“You’re back home. As promised.”

She looked at the jungle behind her and scented the air. Yellow started to bark, deep guttural sounds that echoed over the beach. Red joined him, their cries like a primal song, changing in range and depth.

“Calling your pack. Good. The eggs are there. We took care of your nest, kept them warm. They’re okay. All of them are healthy and will hatch in a week or so. You’re free. We won’t stop you. We won’t come back to hunt you. The men who took your alpha pair are dead.”

Blue made a satisfied sound at that. Beta eyed her. Communication between the two raptor species was like trying to understand a strong dialect. Words sounded wrong or meant something else.

His beta hissed when Red dared to come closer. The male raptor stopped, cocked his head, and chirped. She snarled and shifted her weight to be right next to Owen. Not in front, like she was protecting him.

Equals.

Alpha pair.

Red chirped again, tail swishing, then backed off.

Blue huffed, keeping an eye on the three, not happy about the stand-off. They had the firepower of Carter’s men at their disposal, but no one wanted to shoot the three raptors, even if they were all carrying only non-lethal rifles. The lethal ones were out of sight, though present.

Beta rumbled, then barked at the two males, who hurried to her side, chirping, hissing and growling.

Owen let his shields go down, trusting in his anchor’s back-up, and he reached out to touch the three minds in front of him. It was like touching slick, slippery stones. There was no connection, there was no common ground, and they reacted defensively to the alpha in front of them pushing his status into their minds.

But they deferred to him.

Right now, Owen Grady, human, was higher-ranked than them, even though they couldn’t understand it themselves. Beta snarled and Blue reacted with a hiss, talons flexing, warning her off.

Beta barked, stepping back, eyes never leaving Owen and Blue. Then she just listened.

Owen felt something else at the edge of his perception. Suddenly four more raptors slipped out of the jungle. Two males, two females. One was an alpha pair. He felt their sharp minds, the powerful presence, and the alpha female screeched.

Yellow barked. Red joining in. Beta just watched Owen, then turned to the alpha female and chittered. He felt three more pack members, at the edge of the jungle, and Blue not only caught their scent, but also their sight.
She was tense, ready to snap, baring her teeth.

Owen looked into the yellow eyes of the alpha female, the round pupil so unlike his own raptors’, alien and still somehow familiar. An intelligence he recognized looked back.

Two alphas looking at each other, sizing each other up.

He pushed the thought that this wasn’t a hostile attack at the pack leader. They had brought back their eggs, as well as the three kidnapped pack members. He would leave. Blue would leave. The team of humans with them would leave.

Owen glanced at the eggs, then stepped away, backwards, Blue automatically shadowing him.

The alpha female snarled and hissed, the males fanning out.

Blue barked, angry at the aggressive display since there had been no provocation so far. The alpha female stopped, hissed, then trilled.

Blue cocked her head.

Owen listened to the echoes only he could sense.

He took another step back and now leaned against Blue, her head towering over him. She placed her claws against his hip, staring at the alpha female, then pushed her nose against Owen’s neck.

He was the alpha.

The pack chittered and barked again, the noise making some of the troopers nervous, but they stood their ground.

*We will leave now,* Owen projected strongly. *This is your place. Not ours. We returned your pack mates and your nests.*

The alpha pair snorted, shaking their heads. He had gotten through, but for them it was a strange way of communicating. He was a strange alpha.

The lower-ranked males and females made threatening moves again, but they didn’t attack. It was posturing, showing off, distracting them. They had the greater numbers. The alpha male snapped his teeth at another male when he moved forward, and he stopped, growling.

His mate also stepped slowly forward, as regal as Blue was, her eyes on him as she approached the stolen eggs. She sniffed at them, scenting for death, but all were absolutely fine. She rumbled, raising her head to look Owen in the eye.

*Alpha to alpha.*

Owen centered himself on Blue, calm and assertive. The alpha female had the same energy, a leader, not hot headed. Thinking for their pack, strategically, tactically. She hummed all of a sudden and he gently pulled back from their minds.

She snorted, then tilted her head, posture no longer so tense, though far from completely at ease.

“Take care,” he murmured.

She rumbled, then looked at her pack, her mate.
A bark resonated over the beach, echoed by the others. The first lower-ranked pack members darted forward and each gently, carefully took an egg between their teeth. They turned and hurried off into the jungle.

Beta, Yellow and Red were among those. They looked at Owen and Blue, then Beta barked once. It was almost a thank you.

Then she took an egg, as did the other two, and they disappeared into the jungle.

Finally only the alpha pair remained.

Their signal to go.

The female studied them, then her mate took the last egg and she followed as he trotted off.

“Well, that went rather well,” Owen said, patting her neck.

Blue hummed, though the tension refused to leave. Her eyes were roaming the edge of the jungle, looking for danger. With not just raptors on the island but a lot bigger and just as dangerous dinosaurs, they should leave soon.

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s go home.”

They walked slowly back toward the LCU, where the troopers were keeping their guns trained on the beach and the jungle. Those on the beach didn’t give Blue more than a quick look as she walked aboard. Owen followed.

In the back of his mind, among the hubbub of so many non-Nublar minds, Owen felt the raptor pack, able to single out the three dots that were Beta, Red and Yellow. And there was something else, something as singular and intense as Sue or M.

“I think we should go, Dan,” he said, almost to himself, as he stood next to the team leader.

“Something wrong?”

There was a spike, sharp and painful, going through his still sensitive shields like a hot knife through butter. Owen gave a hiss of pain, wincing, and then something eased itself out between the trees.

“Holy shit!” one of the troopers breathed.

Blue ducked, baring impressive teeth, and growling. In his mind she dug a talon into him, anchoring him, pushing the other presence away with anger.

The narrow, almost crocodilian head of the newcomer swiveled around, the long snout opening and showing a lot of long, sharp teeth.

“Fuck!” another trooper growled, rifle aimed at the massive creature.

“Spinosaurus,” Owen breathed.

He felt every pulse of the newcomer’s mind, a tightly coiled ball of raw instinct. Unlike Sue, who had a basic intelligence behind those cool, reptilian eyes, the spinosaurus was just… just herself. She had been drawn to the beach because of the raptors’ barks, the commotion and the new scents she had picked up.
Owen fought back a wave of nausea as her eyes met his, cunning her own way, primal, abrasive on his still healing shields. Blue’s growls were continuous, deep, like a small engine that was about to go from zero to one hundred of let go.

He centered himself on that.

He needed that.

“Our sign to leave,” Carter decided, making a sharp gesture for their boat’s captain to do just that.

Owen felt himself breathe again, the human voice breaking into the fugue.

The spinosaurus gave an earth-shattering roar, padding toward them, but she wasn’t attacking. Owen felt her sudden curiosity waning, coupled with the need to chase off any intruders.

Blue barked back.

The spinosaurus stopped, then growled. She was aware of something on the boat, of Owen, but she had no idea what to make of it. She watched the LCU, then shook her head with a snort.

The spell was broken.

Owen breathed a sigh of relief. It had been only seconds, but those had been very long seconds for his mind.

Blue hummed. She was more than happy to leave. She wouldn’t come back here. It wasn’t her territory. And the other pack wouldn’t tolerate any intruders. Blue understood it instinctually.

Owen looked at Carter, who was still at the ready, keeping a close eye on the island and their surroundings. Not that there were any water-born dinosaurs in the ocean waters around Isla Sorna. M was the only one of her kind.

The spinosaurus walked back into the jungle with one last look, and the beach was finally empty of life.

“Worked like a charm, hm?” Owen commented.

Carter gave him a half-smile, though there was a fine frown on his face as he studied the lines showing on Owen’s face. “No one got eaten. That’s always a plus.”

“Like I said.”

“Headache?”

“Kinda.”

“Raptors or the other guy?”

“The other girl. She was… intense.”

“Get some rest,” Carter just advised.

Blue hummed her agreement, then chose a spot and settled down again; like she had never done anything but travel on boats in her life.

Owen smiled. “Good idea. If you’re looking for us, we’ll be over there?” He jerked a thumb at
Blue.

Dan shot him a brief smile.

Owen sat down with his back against Blue’s side and closed his eyes. His headache wasn’t that bad and his shields were regaining their strength, but it had been too much on his recently healed mind. Blue automatically curled around him, body and mind.

We were good, Owen murmured sleepily.

You were yourself You were the alpha, she answered, humming softly.

That was all that had been needed. Owen being himself and Blue backing him up.

“Yep, we’re good.”

Owen dozed off, listening to the soft rumbles.

tbc...
Chapter 27

He was glad to be home. The moment they were back on Isla Nublar’s beach, happiness washed over him and Owen knew it wasn’t just his own. Blue seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, such a human gesture that her alpha had to chuckle.

“You and me both, girl,” he murmured.

Blue took in the familiar beach, inhaled the air of her own jungle, and she relaxed.

It was dark, long after midnight. The sounds of people moving disturbed the otherwise peaceful scenery, bright lights from the LCU and the ferry landing illuminating the immediate area. The troopers walked off the LCU as the crew took care of securing it against the dock, some already climbing into waiting transportation back to their homes. Many nodded at Owen, said their goodbyes.

Grady felt tired. He had caught some sleep aboard the LCU, but he wanted his bed right now.

Blue agreed. She stood close to him, wearing her muzzle. On the outside she showed no nervousness, was her calm, composed self. Inside she was itching to get away, to be with her pack.

When the last car had pulled away, leaving Owen with Carter and only the LCU crew, he took off the muzzle.

Home. The pack needs their beta. I’ll be right behind you.

She gurgled softly, ending it with a licking sound, then Blue was off. She disappeared into the darkness like a phantom.

“All in all, it went well.”

Owen smiled at Carter, who looked just as tired as he felt himself. It had been a long, eventful day. They all needed rest.

“I’m hanging up the Do Not Disturb sign,” he quipped.

“How’s the head?”

“Still attached and just fine.”

“See you later then. Tell Blue she did good.”

“Already did. And she knows it anyway.”

Dan chuckled and gave him a sloppy salute. Owen nodded at Carter and got on his bike.

Time to go home.

*
The pack barked an excited welcome when Owen stopped the bike next to the house. Deep, happy sounds, accompanied by their minds crowding around him. They were just behind the metal bars, like they were trying to squeeze through, and the ruckus was enough to wake the dead.

“Calm down, ladies!” he called and the sound died almost immediately, small yips and purrs still audible. “It was only a day.”

You were gone with them! Delta’s mind-voice echoed almost angrily inside his head. Not-pack!

Owen smiled tiredly and went over to the enclosure. Blue slipped out of the night, rumbling, as Owen pushed his palm against Delta’s nose, rubbing over the muzzle.

“And they’re back home, their home, where they belong. I’d never claim them as family, Delta. You are my pack.”

She snuffled, a little appeased. For all her standoffishness at times, Delta was just as fiercely loyal and protective.

Owen let Blue inside, where the others greeted her, sniffing at their beta, scenting and rubbing against her.

There was the dry salt from the ocean spray. There was the unfamiliar scent of Sorna’s beach and vegetation. And there was the clear smell of other raptors.

Blue rumbled at Charlie, who was licking at her flank, then snapped at Delta, who was becoming a bit overwhelming. Delta let up, looking at the alpha. Owen chuckled as they all crowded toward the gate again, trying to sniff at him. They wanted him inside the enclosure, with them, curl up and spend the night there.

“Sorry, ladies. I need my own bed. Get some rest, girls. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Echo pushed Alan’s image his way and he smiled. Yes, he had suspected his friend was still around.

“You behaved. Good. I’m very proud of you.”

She chuffed. Of course they had behaved. Owen hadn’t been gone that long. Neither had Blue. They had been perfectly well-behaved, had slept and played, had been fed. And Alan had been on the porch, which had been an almost reassuring sight.

Owen felt his smile grow.

“Night, girls.”

A chorus of low grunts and rumbles answered him.

Actually, Alan was in the guest room, sound asleep. He hadn’t even woken throughout the loud greeting.

Sleep was a rather good idea, Owen decided as he stripped off his clothes. A very good idea.

Wrapped in the security blanket that was his pack, four minds keeping him safe from the
background hum of the other dinosaurs, he easily fell asleep.

*

Alan was already awake and had made coffee by the time Owen made it out of bed. He looked rather at home in Owen’s tiny excuse for a kitchen. It was functional, it had a stove, an oven, a microwave, a working sink and dishwasher, but it was truly a bachelor-size version of a normal kitchen. Two people would be a crowd.

“Late night, hm?” Grant teased and held out a mug.

Owen took it with a thankful nod and sat down on one of the kitchen chairs. Alan joined him, pushing a stack of pancakes at him.

“Not my best, but it’ll tide you over till lunch, I guess.”

“I’m not picky,” Owen chuckled.

“So… long night?” Alan prodded.

“Long day, too. But we accomplished what we set out to do.”

“Good to know. So they’re all back to where they belong?”

“Yeah. Met their family pack. It was… interesting.”

Alan gave him a ‘go ahead’ look and Owen told him of the transport and release mission, leaving out nothing. He listened, nodded, not interrupting. When Owen was done, with the story and his pancakes, Alan just got up and refilled his coffee.

“How were the girls?” Grady asked.

“Well-behaved. Barry came by and did a few training exercises. Easy stuff. I watched him. He’s good, I have to give you that. Talented?”

Owen shrugged. “He said his cousin is, but he never mentioned whether or not he is preternaturally inclined or not.”

“Great trainer material nonetheless. You’re still not looking for a full-time assistant?”

“Nope.”

“Zach came by for feeding and they took care of everything else.”

Owen nodded, mind whirling with something he had yet to tell Alan. He was studying the contents of his mug, the black liquid that was slowly cooling, and he finally decided that he should.

When he looked up, bright blue eyes watched him calmly. “Deep thoughts,” Alan only said.

“Kinda. There’s something I haven’t told a lot of people. You should have been the first, but I… didn’t really know what to say until Laurel and Nancy cornered me about something that happened the night I was thrown into the Sorna raptor cage.”
Alan leaned back slowly, brows drawing down. “Something happened,” he echoed, without actually making it a question.

Owen met the bright blue eyes. It shouldn’t take all his courage to tell his friend, but somehow it did.

But he told Alan. Everything.

Grant’s expression froze as Owen explained what he had done and what had happened at the paddocks. All the paddocks, all over the park.

“Holy shit, Owen…!” he breathed.

“I know, but my brain’s back to normal.”

“You brain was never normal.”

He shrugged with a faint smile, feeling that edge of panic again. Blue moved in closer.

Don’t. You’re healed. You are shielded.

Owen exhaled slowly. Yes, he had healed. The pack had healed him. It wasn’t really back to normal, not just yet. There were tiny fractures, places where his shields were thinner than before, and he still needed his girls, more than ever before.

“Owen?”

He gave his friend a tight smile. “Pack moment.”

“Good.”

That had Owen raise his eyebrows. Alan gave him a quick smile.

“Even I understand it by now. They’re connected to you. They’re important, especially for that amazing brain of yours. They give you stability, balance. As crazy as it sounds, those four velociraptors make the difference for you.”

Owen burst out laughing. He finally shook his head.

Alan got up, clearing away the mugs. Owen rose as well and held out his hand. Grant shot him a bemused look.

“Thank you, Professor. For everything. For being my friend. My sounding board. For sticking around.”

Alan took the hand and pulled him into a hug. Owen made a surprised noise, but he returned the gesture.

“Least I could do. I had no idea what kind of ride you would take me on, but it’s been wild and unexpected. I’m glad you’re the person you are. You grew into your talent and it’s amazing to watch.” Alan’s expression had softened. “But that reminds me, Claire sent me my schedule. Full. First lecture is at eleven, so I’ll be gone now. You are going to be okay here?”

Alan grimaced. “See you, kid.”

Echo gave a hopeful bark when Alan left the house and he briefly stopped, several feet away, looking at her. She mewled, the plaintive sound ending in a little gurgle.

“Yeah,” Alan murmured. “I think I’m going to miss you, too. In a very weird, freaky and probably unhealthy kind of way.”

She chuffed, pushing her head against the bars. Alan walked slowly closer, looking at the raptor who had been part and parcel of his glacially slow acceptance of velociraptors as part of Owen Grady’s life. He would never make the mistake to apply their behavior to others of their species, least of all a subspecies like on Isla Sorna.

Those four were very special. A rarity. Because of Owen and his bond to them.

“You did good, too,” he lauded her and briefly touched the offered nose, the skin warm and softer than it looked.

He felt the unevenness of an old scar, the puckered skin, the rough texture. His fingers rested on the brownish skin and it was as amazing as it was terrifying.

Alan Grant had never touched a raptor, dead or alive. Never.

Never before coming to Jurassic World, meeting Owen’s pack. The first time had been almost accidental, a heat of the moment, adrenaline-driven occurrence.

Today…

He drew a deep breath.

Echo trilled happily, tail whipping once, twice.

Alan smiled and pulled back his hand. “You’re not a dog.”

She whuffled, then stepped away from the cage bars. Giving him space.

Grant studied her for a moment longer, then nodded and went to his car. Like he had told Owen, he had a full schedule and a lot of work waiting for him.

Echo’s happy bark followed him.

* * *

The week that followed their return from Isla Sorna was almost boring. In a very pleasant way. Owen kept to himself, did his work, patrolled the backroads, and worked on his shields. There were a few brittle areas that came up whenever he caught a spike from the mosa or the rex. Once he caught a sharp uproar from the Aviary, but he pulled back in time.
The pack was always there with him. They watched his mind, kept close, hovered like never before. And they jumped in when something got too close.

Owen was quite aware how easy it was now to step beyond his old limits.

It would be just as easy to lose himself.

So he didn’t do it.

He stayed in his comfort zone and was very much at peace with himself and the world.

*

“We found the guy.”

Owen looked up from his tablet where he had been checking visitor numbers, incident reports and general emails. He hadn’t heard Carter approach, but he had been aware of him somehow.

Dan was in full security outfit, right down to the gun on his thigh.

“Who?”

“Well, not just one guy. Guys. One of yours, one of ours. Tomas Loire, system administrator, and Harold Debson, security. Cousins. They worked together to keep the smugglers hidden from the cameras and sensors, as well as all patrols. They were paid handsomely, were paid in small sums for the past ten months. The amounts passed under the radar, but they added up to almost half a million together.”

Owen stared. “Half…?”

“Yes. Dinosaurs, especially eggs, go for a lot more than that.”

“Fuck…”

“Well. We got them and they spilled it all, talked their little souls out, especially after we showed them what had happened to their business partners. Suggested it might happen to them, too.”

Owen stared at him. “You used my pack to get a confession out of them?”

“I used evidence photos. That’s it.” Carter looked sly and rather pleased. “The list of charges is long and getting longer. They want US justice, not to be handed over to the Costa Ricans.”

“Yeah, that I understand. So, no one else? Just those two?”

“Yeah. My guys will be busy digging up everything on those two, not just their accounts but every phone call they made, every transaction, and whatever else we can find. We have their log-in data and we’ll be following their electronic footsteps to see what else they did in their time here. Our luck was that your surveillance system wasn’t handled through the main system. Lorenzo did great work on setting up an independent network.”

“Give the man a raise.”
Carter chuckled. “I’ll tell him. Now, I’ve got work piling up around me. We’re tightening security on Sorna. I have people going over every inch, find the weak spots. I can’t loan Lorenzo to you right now.”

“I can handle my cameras.”

“Just don’t get hit by a tree or fall off a cliff.”

“Very funny, Dan.”

tbc...
He ran into Gregory outside the new fast food place. There were a lot of crowds, a mix of young and old, male and female, customers, all waiting patiently for their food. Owen’s former intern had a huge paper bag in one hand, balancing milkshakes and soft drinks on a tray in the other.

“Oh, hey, Mr. Grady!” he greeted him with a smile.

“Gregory. How are you doing?”

“Great! We’re all doing great. Thanks to you.”

Owen saved the milkshakes from crashing and gestured at Gregory to lead the way to wherever he was going with the food.

“Me? What did I do?”

They were weaving through the early afternoon crowds, dodging balloons, trying not to step on small children or get run over by excited families. Owen nearly tripped over one of the dinosaur-shaped baby-carts.

“Ms. Dearing told us that we’d be responsible for the babies rescued from the poachers’ ship. All of us are now working shifts at quarantine, even in the hatchery!” Gregory’s eyes glowed with enthusiasm. “It’s amazing! We can learn so much! They are dinosaurs we know from here, but then again they’re different because they’re from Sorna. And we know you recommended us. Thank you, Mr. Grady! Thank you so very much! It’s the best that ever happened to us!”

Owen chuckled. “Glad you’re enjoying it.”

They had arrived at one of the round tables a little off Main Street. The table was in the shade of a large tree. A group of interns were waiting there, waving excitedly at them and smiling widely. Owen laughed as they gushed at him for giving them another chance to prove themselves. All were in love with their work at Quarantine, were invested in taking care of the eggs and newly hatched babies, and they were learning so much more every day. Especially how not to imprint the wild dinosaurs on them, to prepare them for getting back home to their own island when they were strong and big enough.

“You never did anything wrong, guys,” Owen told them. “Just because there was one idiot among you it shouldn’t fall back one everyone. You all checked out fine and you have promising careers ahead of you.”

There was a chorus of smiles and thanks. Owen declined an invitation for food.

“Still working. See you around. And raise those babies right.”

“We will,” Gregory promised, his words echoed by everyone either verbally or by vigorous nodding.

Owen chuckled as he continued on a parallel path to Main Street and finally passed a Personnel Only sign to the back roads.

He was happy to hear his idea had worked out so well for everyone involved. Like he had told Claire before, there were some promising talents among those young men and woman. Not just
preternaturally speaking. He was looking forward to seeing who would stay and work at Jurassic World.

* * *

It wasn’t often that she saw Owen Grady in the Bamboo Forest, on his own, not a single raptor around. Serena had let him use her precious forest for one of his hide-and-seek exercises, after closing hours, just before nightfall, for the pack a few times already. She hadn’t been there personally, though.

Now, there was only Owen.

Standing between the tall bamboo stalks, she looked at him, noting the tired expression, the fine lines of past pain and stress.

Had it only been a little over two weeks since Grady had accidentally run into the poachers? She had thought it had been more.

Time flies, she mused. And she hadn’t really had fun in that time.

They had all been worried about their friend and colleague. It had been their main topic most of the times the small group had met after work.

Serena had heard about what had happened with the poachers through Reggie. Then all hell had broken lose with the animal, the uproar waking everyone who lived on the premises, getting the keepers scrambling, Laurel had come by later, pale and scared looking, worried like all of them. She had told Serena about the t-rex paddock incident.

hen the rumors had started to fly. Right down to killer raptors and Owen’s possible death.

But he was alive and well. Yes, the raptors had killed, but Serena couldn’t feel any horror at what they had done.

She had been told about the dead dinosaurs on Isla Sorna, had seen a few images that had leaked through – she suspected Lowery – and she had been as sick as all of them.

Nancy had looked downright ready to throw up at the sight of such senseless slaughter and violence.

No, none of Owen’s friends felt any pity at their fate.

Now Owen himself was sitting in the Bamboo Forest, looking almost contemplative. He wasn’t the meditating kind, even though Nancy had tried to get him to do it. Maybe this, sitting by himself in a quiet place, was as close as he got to it.

He had a to-go cup at his side, a wrapped panini, and an apple.

Checking the time, Serena figured it had be his late lunch.

“Are you going to stand there all day?”

She almost jumped at his voice.
“You really are part raptor,” she muttered and walked over to the man.

Owen was a great guy and handsome to boot. Serena was a married woman, she loved her husband, but she appreciated human nature. She really appreciated Owen’s. He was also talented, and not just in a preternatural way, and rather easy-going, though she had found that there was a serious core underneath.

And he was their chief researcher when it came to velociraptors, the alpha of the pack, and the most talented preternatural she had ever had the honor of meeting.

“Hey,” Serena now said. “I didn’t want to interrupt your lunch break.”

He lifted a corner of his mouth. “You are not. I know some corners of the forest are usually tourist free this time of the day.”

“Oh,” she said knowingly. “Seeking solitude. A man after my own heart. It gets really busy some days.”

Owen gestured for her to sit if she wanted. “More like needing a quiet moment.”

Serena sat down. “Deep thoughts?”

Her eyes were drawn to the pale red scar on Owen’s arm, visible evidence of what the poachers had done to him. The cut above his eye was smaller.

He shrugged. “Not that deep. Not contemplating the fate of the world and the weight of it on my shoulders.”

“Are your girls okay?”

Owen’s smile was warm, a smile that was reserved only for the four raptors of his pack. She had seen him work with the dinosaurs and she had seen the way they looked at him, the way he looked at them.

“They’re fine. They deal with it all their own way. A reptilian way, if you will. I know what they did. I can accept it. It’s in their nature. I’m more worried about Isla Sorna.”

“I heard InGen upped security and there are a lot more patrols. I know that security checks on Nublar have close to tripled. Every employee has been listed to be checked again.” She shrugged. “I don’t mind, but some it makes even more nervous.”

“We had two traitors,” Owen said softly. “They made it possible for animal smugglers to get to Sorna, kill the dinosaurs there, take eggs and babies. It can’t happen again.”

“No, it can’t,” she agreed.

There was a chatter of tourists and suddenly a group came along the winding paths, laughing, talking, taking pictures. They passed by the bench, not even really looking at the two people who were partially kept from direct view through the cleverly arranged plants.

“If you want a quiet place, how about one of the greenhouses?” she offered. “If you don’t mind sitting between planting utensils and a lot of potting compost.”

Owen chuckled. “I’m usually up to my knees in wood chips and mud, so I don’t mind.”

Serena rose and made an inviting gesture. “Follow me then.”
It was a nice, quiet afternoon. Serena was planting seedlings, putting saplings into new pots, cutting small trees into shape, and checking on the status of a few rare orchid species she had received a few days ago. The other employees were busy replanting an area of the botanical garden after a horde of kids had turned it into a nightmare. Their mother had protested wildly when they had to be removed by security, threatening to sue, but she had been thrown out anyway. The bill would be addressed to her, too.

Serena nodded at one of the workers who had collected new grasses of various colors that she was happy with the selection. He started to cart them all off to be used in the arrangement. They also had to refresh the area around the petting zoo after one of the trices had gotten out and two stegosaurs had followed, eating half of the plants.

Owen ate his lunch, a rather tasty looking feta cheese style bagel, something new at Winston’s, worked on his tablet, or just watched her work. He asked a few questions about the plants and Serena asked about the scent hunting exercises, whether or not the different dried and fresh samples had worked.

It was a nice afternoon, two friends spending time together.

Serena kept an eye on him, noticed him relaxing, the tension easing, and she nodded to herself as she made quick notes about the latest collection of seed pods from one of the cross-breed plants. She also sent off an email about the rise in weeds in one of the exhibits. While vermin was taken care of by using compies, the weeds were another problem.

“You break so many hearts, Owen Grady,” she told him with a warm voice.

He looked at her, a startled expression in his eyes. Serena laughed a little.

“You don’t even notice.” At his pole-axed look she added, “Not me. I’m not crushing on you, Owen. Don’t worry. You had some of the new employees swooning over you, and a few interns and students. Really bad crushes. Not to mention the dinosaurs in the park.”

“Say what?”

“You touch them, Owen. Gently. With your mind. Now even more than ever, right?”

“I…”

“I was there right after Rexy Sue flipped a switch and went from indifferent to murderously angry. You should have heard her roar. She would have broken out if not for the implant. That was the only thing that kept her from going at whatever she perceived as a threat.”

Owen was silent.

“She might not want an alpha, but she recognized your call. She would listen to you. You would be about the only creature who could walk into that enclosure and come out on the other side without a scratch on him.”

“She’s not mine,” he finally said. “And I doubt I could go in there and out again. She’s highly dangerous, extremely territorial and she has eaten humans before. She would do so again without a second of remorse.”
“She’s not yours. She’s not pack. Just by extension.” Serena watched him, noticed the fine lines of stress. “I’m not saying you should adopt the whole park. You got your hands full with those four ladies already.”

“And I don’t intend to break any hearts.”

“That’s what the good guys always say,” she teased.

Not that any woman would be able to compete. Serena wasn’t the only one to think like that. She had mentioned it to her friends once and they had agreed. Whoever Owen might be interested in, they would have to be able to be part of the pack, maybe even become part of the bond. No preternatural she knew would be able to remain sane and human in a pack bond like that.

Owen was unique.

If he wanted to be or not.

Owen said his good-byes two hours later.

“Thank you for the brief vacation,” he said, a fine smile around his lips.

“Anytime. Take care. Get a real vacation, Owen. You need some time away from this.”

The smile turned thin. “We all need one.” Then left.

Serena knew he would never leave the island for something as simple as a vacation. She hadn’t meant for him to either. Owen just needed to be away from his duties, from well-meaning people.

* * *

Annika almost did a double take when she saw who had walked into her office. Owen Grady, their very own raptor whisperer. He looked rather good for a man who had had his brain scrambled so badly that any other preternatural would have ended up a vegetable in a waking coma. Of course, she knew who he had to thank for that, who they all had to thank for it.

Four lethal killers.

Four velociraptors who had killed to protect their alpha, leaving nothing but blood and death behind. She had seen the bodies and she knew they had been more than pissed. It had been cold, planned murder.

But they had saved this man. His body and, most importantly, his mind. Annika doubted Owen would have made it on his own. It had needed all of them, working together, and all four had had a part. Even without results from various brain scans, Annika had long since realized that it wasn’t just Blue who helped Owen. It were all four minds.

“Mr. Grady, what a surprise,” she now greeted him. “What brings you here?”
The color had returned to his face, he looked healthy and whole, with fading scars showing of his ordeal. The rapid healing was just another mystery of this man.

“I’d like to ask you a favor,” he said slowly.

Annika frowned slightly. Grady looked far from comfortable, but the determination she had seen in him every single day was bright and sharp. It was a resolution she had admired in him, had seen in how he worked, acted, interacted. It was a trait that was both human and not so human. Owen might not realize it, but he showed a lot of raptor in his daily behavior, just like the raptors were more human than any other animal in the park could ever be.

“What do you need?” she asked carefully.

He pushed his hands into the pockets of his khakis, shoulders hunching a little. Then he blew out a breath.

“You said you did a brain scan when they brought me in, right?”

Annika nodded.

“I want you to do another one.”

Annika blinked, feeling slightly pole-axed. Owen was the last person she would expect to come here, on his own, voluntarily, without any blackmail involved, and ask something like that. He was a private man and he didn’t want his records to show just what he was capable of, what his brain was like.

“Why?” she asked.

“I think I need to know what’s happening to me.”

Annika frowned. “Care to explain? You’re almost phobic of getting scanned.”

Grady tensed for a second, then relaxed himself almost by force. “You said I lit up like a Christmas Tree, right?”

She nodded.

“I think I broke the barrier and blew right past it, right into everything there is on this island, every mind of every dinosaur, and I went through them like a tidal wave. I didn’t plan on doing it, didn’t want it, but it was the only way to keep the Sornas from tearing me apart.”

Okay.

Annika felt her mind whirl with the cold facts delivered in such a no-nonsense manner.

Oh-kay…

Well, damn!

“I shattered, Annika, completely. Into all minds. Not like a fracture, when I just ride along the pack’s minds. It was… all of it. I was… It felt like I had become just small pieces, everywhere and nowhere at all. I passed all barriers, used fear and pain to push back into minds I couldn’t touch like my own pack’s. And I broke apart.”

Her hands clenched into fists as the realization as to what Grady had done settled in.
Not just that.

What he had done and survived! Sanity intact! Annika didn’t need a book to know that this was unheard of. Preternaturals weren’t very open in their abilities to non-preternatural people. They didn’t volunteer for research purposes and they didn’t do lengthy interviews about what they could do.

But she had been around and she had gotten to know those who worked at Jurassic World. Annika Svensson understood what Owen was telling her only too well.

“Owen,” she heard herself say, voice alien to her own ears. “That’s… how…?” She was really searching for words.

“Blue brought me back. She’s my anchor. She and the pack are my safety net.”

She had never heard him talk so openly, so honestly, about his most intimate connection to the raptors.

“Without them I’d be a vegetable, pieces of me in every dinosaur on Nublar.”

“And you can still… touch all?” she whispered.

“No. Well, yes and no. they were always in the back of my mind, a hum, with a few standing out. I was completely open for a few days and without the girls I’d probably be a gibbering wreck in one of your rooms. But I’m good. Like before.”

But the threshold had been pushed back. Way back. The barriers were gone, and while Owen’s shields protected him, and he had four guardians, reaching past the barriers would be so much easier now.

“I want you to scan my brain, Annika. I want to know.”

“There are no references for this,” she said, shaking her head. “The few preternaturals on file are nowhere near your abilities!”

“You scanned me before. You have those reference materials. You said before I’m not scanning like a regular talented. I want to know, Annika.”

She drummed her fingers onto her desk. This was something she had wanted to do ever since realizing what this man had done. Now he was offering, voluntarily, and she felt apprehensive.

“Okay,” Svensson finally said. “And I promise it won’t be on the general server. Like everything concerning you and the pack, it’ll be kept separately.”

“Thank you.” He smiled thinly.

“Don’t thank me just yet. I’ll set up an appointment and we’ll have a closer look at that brain of yours.”

Owen nodded. He looked rather relived.

“And one day it might even be interesting to see what your pack’s fMRIs would look like.”

Grady laughed, sounding truly amused. “Good luck on keeping all your fingers.”

She smiled and watched him leave. When the door closed after him, Annika Svensson blew out a
breath.

“Jävla helvetes,” she whispered, shaking her head.

tbc...
Chapter 29

Svensson set up the scan for the day after Owen had walked into her office and requested it. Grady was right on time, looking tense and apprehensive.

Annika had cleared her schedule for the day.

It was exciting, frightening and confusing in one.

Owen’s brain looked like an artist’s surreal landscape, colors in places where there were none in a non-preternatural, and little to none in those who had had their MRIs taken before.

Annika did a full round of scans, with whatever she had at her disposal. She knew that to interpret what she saw it would need a lifetime.

Owen Grady had already done something no one had ever come out sane before, had inherited a strong talent from his grandfather and his great-aunt, who had lost herself to that talent. Now he had stepped beyond that.

She would really need the raptors’ scans to make sense of maybe one percent of what she saw.

She told him that.

Owen looked at the screen, the colors on the black and white image. He appeared thoughtful, but also a little bit relieved.

“No brain damage then?” he finally asked.

“None I can see.”

He nodded.

“Owen…”

He sighed. “I know I might have received damage, non-traditional brain damage, because you can’t compare my brain to anyone else’s. I feel okay, Annika. Really fine. I can walk outside, in the park, and the other animals don’t bother me. I was on Sorna, without a problem, could push my mind at the Sorna raptors. Nothing happened afterwards. I didn’t break down.”

“Because you have the pack. It’s a symbiosis,” she told him, realization dawning in her as well. “They protect you. They are the four corner stones of your mind shields.”

Owen didn’t answer. She could read it in his eyes, saw it in his stance. And she knew he didn’t want to hear it, but he was the alpha of the island.

“I can only begin to interpret what I can see here. I’m not a neurologist. I can only say that whatever is going on, you have a brain that has fired up areas that don’t shine so brightly in other scans I’ve seen, and you might have been running on all cylinders when you shot past your natural limits. You’re still quieting down and your girls are your guards. It’ll take a while to heal completely, I guess.”

Owen was silent, looking at the screen. “I feel no different than before now.”

Annika could read the little lie quite clearly. He might not be as susceptible as he was right after
they had brought him in, but Owen Grady was more sensitive to the dinosaurs on Isla Nublar than he was telling.

“Should anything change, anything at all, if you experience symptoms… please call me, Owen,” she only said, not calling him on his little obfuscation of the truth.

He nodded. His expression was serious. “I will.”

And Annika knew he would.

* * *

“I sometimes forget how beautiful this is.”

Alan’s voice was warm, wistful, filled with wonder. And Amazement.

Owen gave him an understanding smile. “Yeah. It’s pretty amazing. And very, very beautiful. Especially without the tourists.”

They sat at the edge of the river, on one of the platforms usually used by the keepers. On the other side the apatosaurs moved slowly, measured and graceful despite their massive size. Ankyls, stegs and trices lay or grazed among them.

Harmonious.

Owen let their presences lull him into a relaxed state, the hum almost comforting. It helped to know that his shields had recovered enough by now that he could enjoy this without fearing a crack forming again.

What had changed after he had blown his threshold to pieces was that he could now easily distinguish between the herd members. Where there had been just a unanimous mass was now a field of singular dots, intermingling, connected or singular, young and old. The pack leaders were the strongest. He had always been able to keep them apart from the rest.

Now there was also more.

Touching them would be so easy. Move a little past the old threshold, into their minds, flow with the masses. It would take no effort and the anchor to his own mind was bright and strong.

Owen wouldn’t get lost.

He also wouldn’t do any of it. He was very comfortable in the pack bond, with his four guardians, who were jealously and possessively hovering around him.

“They are a miracle,” Alan said. “What Hammond did all those years ago, taking damaged DNA, those tiny fragments from millions of years ago, and creating those animals… it’s amazing and wonderful. Crazy, but wonderful.”

Owen chuckled. “Tell me about it.”

“He gave the world dinosaurs. Scientifically incorrect theme park monsters, sure, but they are dinosaurs. They live, they breathe, they… connect to us. They bond. And some of them are so
much more than the animals Hammond intended them to be. It’s so much chaos that I might just side with Ian on that, but if you ever tell him, I’ll deny it to my dying breath.”

Owen raised a hand. “Holy oath.”

Alan’s eyes crinkled a little, the blue intense.

“And it’s not just chaos, you know. There is a manner of control.”

“But never enough. And you told me that you yourself, for instance, don’t control anything about those four raptors in your pack.”

“The key to a happy life is to accept that you’re never actually in control.”

Alan had to laugh out loud. “Simon Masrani, right?”

Owen just nodded, aware what the pack had already given him, that it was something completely out of control and then again not. It was a new kind of stability, a balance to his mind that he hadn’t had before. And he had created this stable pack.

Maybe it was chaos, but if that was the truth, he actually enjoyed it.

They watched the apatosauras, the herds moving lazily as they fed. Their grunts and rumbles mixed with the huffs and grunts of the other dinosaurs. Now and then one trumpeted, announcing something or other. Becky was looking at the two human visitors, her mind alert, slightly inquisitive, but not alarmed. They were huge, but so graceful. So unique like all the others.

Owen leaned back against a tree, smiling to himself. His eyes were on the leaves above, green and healthy, with shafts of sunlight breaking through like spotlights.

Becky stretched out her neck, head lowering, eyeing them. Alan was holding his breath, a smile on his face that reflected his passion for these animals, for all things dinosaurs. Despite everything he had gone through, especially with the predators chasing him, he had never lost that passion, that love.

There was such a happiness radiating off him, such ease and relaxation, it was incredible to watch.

“Yeah, this is pretty awesome,” Owen sighed, feeling the same happiness, “All in all. No other place in the world I want to live.”

Alan chuckled as Becky snorted and raised her head again, returning to feeding off the trees.

“You wouldn’t find a neighborhood that allowed four raptors anyway.”

Owen grinned. “Well-behaved, house-broken raptors.”

“There’s that.”

One of the stegosaurs waded along the shore line, nosing around the water. She splashed playfully. She was young, just out of the baby stage and entering teenager-dom. One of the older ones was watching her with alert tolerance.
Becky called out and some of the herd answered. She started to move further down the river, probably looking for a better feeding ground. The stegosaurs stayed, by and by joined by a few edmontosaurus and parasaurolophus.

“They look very good,” Alan noted, nodding to himself. “Healthy, not overfed, enough room to run and also to rest without getting into anyone’s way. No stress.”

As the park’s resident consultant in all matters dinosaur, Alan had a keen eye on the animals’ welfare.

Owen nodded. “They are very… even-tempered and balanced.”

His friend shot him a curious look. “You can feel them?”

“I always could. Now it’s just… a little more.”

“Huh.”

“And I’m fine,” he said automatically.

Alan laughed a little, pushing back his hat. “Yeah, yeah, okay. I’ll try not to worry.”

“Empty promises. You’re worse than a mother-hen.”

“Someone has to look out for you, kid. You’re accident prone.”

One of the edmontosaurus bleated and pushed against the one next to her, both starting to scuffle over a good grazing spot. The herd leader bellowed and both stopped with snorts and shuffles.

“Youngsters,” Owen commented.

Alan grinned.

Both men stayed for a long time, enjoying the shadowed place, the ease of the herds, the curiosity, until Reggie came by in one of the boats.

“Ahoi, mateys!” he hollered.

One of the triceratops bleated at him. He waved at her.

“Easy, girl. Just picking up the tourists.”

Alan rose with a groan. “Damn old bones.”

Owen gave him a friendly pat on the shoulder. “All in your head, professor.”

“You reach my age and then we talk about it being in your head.”

Reggie had docked the boat and had climbed up. “Enjoying yourselves?”

“A lot. But I guess I should get back home. Work.” Alan shrugged. “And that paper with Mick.”

“Have fun.”
Reggie made an inviting gesture. “First class ride waiting for you, Dr. Grant. We can take the scenic route. If we’re lucky, the girls will show up for the daily routine visual inspection. They usually do. If you want to come along…”

Alan’s eyes lit up and he nodded. Both climbed into the boat and Owen waved at them, smiling. He went back to the jeep. He would make his usual rounds, check in on a few paddocks, then see if Claire wanted anything from him.

After that, pack time.

* * *

Owen had to smile when he received the email that had been sent not only to him, but Carter and every head keeper at the park. It was a brief statement that most of the interns cycling through the paddocks had reached the end of their contracted time. Several were leaving, returning to Masrani’s myriad of branch offices and affiliated companies. Some were also back to school to finish their final year or two, or to work on their doctorates.

Some would stay.

Gregory Tomasz was one of them.

Owen felt especially happy for the younger man. He was very talented, not just in a preternatural way, and metriacanthosaurs were now in good hands. He was only just a junior keeper, but he would go places. Owen was sure of it.

Patricia Fisher had applied for a place, too. At the hatchery. According to Claire’s mail she would remain at the quarantine nursery to raise the Sorna babies, together with those working students and interns who still had contracts going for a few more weeks. Like Zach, who had even more time.

Zach was thriving at the nursery. Whenever Owen ran into him, the teenager looked happy, gushed enthusiastically about his work, and he never complained. May was full of praise and had been about all interns.

It had been a good plan and it had worked.

*

Owen had decided to get away from the theme park, from everything. Serena had been right that he needed a vacation. That meant not just a day or two. It meant a week.

It would do him and the girls a world of good.

So Grady had piled clothes, food and whatever gear he might need into the saddle bags, a backpack and case to strap onto his bike. Carter came by and dumped a load of new equipment at his place.

“Need help?” Dan had teased.
“Nope. Got four eager helpers.”

And he had.

This time Echo wasn’t the only one carrying saddle bags. Owen had prepared a harness for Charlie, who was now the designated carrier for his sleeping bag and tent. Echo was more experienced with the harness and therefore the chosen one for the electronics.

It made the lower-ranked raptor insanely proud and she paraded in front of the whole pack. Owen laughed and shook his head.

“She is something.”

He turned to Barry, who was outside and watching.

“She loves being special.”

“Apparently. I’ll see you in two weeks then. No poachers, no kidnapped raptors, no getting nearly killed.”

Owen chuckled. “No promises.”

Blue barked, pushing her head against his shoulder in reproach.

“You won’t get hurt.

Not again. The pack echoed it, one voice, one intent. They wouldn’t let their alpha get hurt by human trespassers, by animals, by anything. They would stick with him, guard him fiercely.

Owen sighed theatrically and gestured at them to move away. “Yeah, yeah, okay, fine. I get it. Four watchdogs. Very vicious guards. Keeping their alpha safe.”

Charlie snorted, rumbling. Even Delta was pushing forward, vigorously agreeing they wouldn’t let their alpha out of their sight. Echo huffed as if there was any doubt.

Barry laughed. “Okay, I see. They are a little… high-strung, right?”


She grumbled, but when Blue nipped at her, she moved away again. His beta stayed close by, though.

“I have my cell and the radio Carter gave me. Got the GPS trackers, a locator, and we have the cameras. There are no poachers out there or some kind of unknown monster. We’ll be fine.”

Owen held up his hand like swearing a holy oath. Barry smirked.

“Sure.”

With that he pushed away from the bars and walked toward the stables where he had helped clean up.

Owen sighed and shook his head.

Nothing will happen, Blue stated.
Because they would patrol and look for anything or anyone not belonging there. And they would keep a very close eye on their accident-prone alpha.

“Hey!” Owen protested.

Blue tilted her head, daring him to contradict her.

“Getting held up at gun point is not accident prone,” he muttered.

She nuzzled against his neck. *Losing you is not an option*, she just stated.

Neither was losing one of them.

Owen wrapped an arm around her head and Blue hummed softly.

tbc...
Chapter 30

The first day of their vacation started out with a light drizzle and it didn’t let up until late in the afternoon. It didn’t stop the pack from enjoying themselves, hunting, chasing, stalking and exploring.

Owen spent the time in the old visitor center, pleased that the repairs to the roof in the only safe area held. It was warm, dry and rather cozy. He had a cot, power from a generator and a water treatment system that allowed him to purify rain water.

He slept for a few hours, then, when the rain had finally stopped, the clouds still darkening the sky, went out with the pack. Not with the bike, but on foot, jogging along, enjoying himself as he let his girls guide him along the well-trodden paths.

A flock of compies crossed their paths, scattering as the raptors appeared. Echo playfully chased one down the path, then returned after Owen called her back.

They returned in the early hours of the morning, tired, pleased, and ready to sleep for a few hours. The four raptors padded after the alpha into the visitor center, seeking spots and curling up near the cot. Owen smiled as he slipped into his sleeping bag.

Blue was closest to him, rumbling softly, her mind close to Owen’s intertwining with his, keeping him safe.

*

The pack was eager to get back to where the trespassers had been. There was the general need to check the territory, make sure no one had returned. The cargo ship was gone, but the evidence of what had happened was still there.

They passed few signs of active surveillance of the area. Owen had counted three security guards, all armed with lethal force, and the two men and one woman had given him a nod and a smile when he had stopped to talk to them.

“Glad you’re okay,” Lee Collins said, smiling.

“Thanks.”

“Checking the territory?” he asked, a knowing expression in his eyes.

“Kinda.”

Collins looked around. “They’re here, right?”

Owen nodded, aware that all four were in the vicinity, watching and waiting. The pack had made it quite clear that leaving the alpha alone was not an option, even though Owen had argued he wasn’t in any immediate danger.

“They won’t attack.”
“We got the memo.”

“But you also saw what happened at the beach.”

“Hard to ignore, sir. But like I said, we got the memo. Me and the others, we know what happened to you, what they tried to do, and we all know that you don’t get between the alpha and the pack. We’re glad you’re okay.”

Owen felt surprise run through him. Yes, Carter had trained the special teams remorselessly, had drummed it into their skulls that Owen Grady was the alpha, that the raptors were not like the other dinosaurs, that they reacted differently. But the men and women coming to his rescue had been confronted with the very real, extremely bloody evidence of what that actually meant. All had been to various training runs with the pack around, seeing them work with their alpha, but there was a huge difference between that and actually witnessing the truly vicious nature of them when threatened.

“The beach’s clear,” Collins went on. “The cameras are still kinda down.”

“I’ll be working on that as soon as I get new gear. Lorenzo’s tied up at the moment.”

Collins inclined his head. His eyes strayed over to the jungle. He couldn’t see a single scale or a suspicious movement in the bushes.

Owen started the bike again and, after a brief good-bye, headed toward the beach.

The pack joined him the moment they were out of sight of the troopers.

Blue almost made a show out of checking him for injuries or anything out of the ordinary. Owen rolled his eyes at her.

Charlie sniffed with exaggeration at him.

“Cut it out, girls. You’re being overly theatrical.”

Blue tilted her head. I don’t know what you mean.

And they started to trot off toward their destination.

Owen sighed. “Geez,” he muttered, following on his bike. “Four mother-hens.”

*

The docking site of the already towed cargo ship looked like a massive scuffle had taken place. Sand and gravel had been severely disturbed by cars, trucks and maybe an ATV or two. The landing site of the cargo ship was a scar in the formerly pristine bay. Here or there Owen thought he could see dark stains of blood pools that hadn’t been completely covered.

Charlie sniffed at the stains, growling. Delta was looking at where the ship had been, joined by
Echo, both tense and radiating hostility. Blue was nosing around the edge of the water.

Nature would reclaim this area. All it took was a storm to wipe away every piece of evidence away and turn the bay back to what it had been before.

Owen would repair his equipment, hide it better from human eyes, and hope that nothing like this would ever happen again.

Blue rumbled her agreement. She padded over to him, pushing her head against his shoulder. He gave her a tight smile.

“They aren’t the only ones,” he said softly, almost like to himself. “There are always people out there, trying to make a quick buck by poaching on Isla Sorna. I just hope this incident doesn’t repeat itself.”

Blue bared her teeth. They all would repeat what they had done, the pack told him in one voice. They would kill again if Owen was threatened like that.

He rubbed a calming hand over her blue scales. “I appreciate the support, ladies, but we’ll try to keep the violence to a minimum.”

She snorted, shaking her head. We protect, Blue only said, then trotted over to where Echo had discovered an interesting shell and was pushing it around. Echo churred, then shot Blue a suspicious look, growling a warning. It was her shell.

Blue looked at the colorful object, then her attention was on the seagull stupid enough to land not far away.

Owen smiled as he watched his girls.

Yes, they protected. Him foremost. Then the island. Territory.

*

Owen chose his camp site for the night, set up his tent and sleeping bag, then just leaned back and enjoyed the mild evening, the sound of the animals around him.

Delta slipped closer, eyeing him curiously, apparently checking if he was okay.

“I am, girl. Now go hunt. I’m not in any danger!”

She disappeared again, but she radiated doubts about the last statement. Not made of glass! he told the pack in general, broadcasting.

Their responses were varied, but none believed him.

*
For the next few days he worked on the area in old visitor center that was structurally sound and safe to live in. It was by now completely dry and kept an even temperature. The water purification system was now connected to a cistern that also filled the shower tank.

Owen had explored the rest of the center, at least the parts that were still standing, had cleared out the souvenir shop, and cleaned most of the intact windows, the murals and the floor. The murals were beautiful.

Most of the debris he had simply pushed into the former basement and sealed it. No need to sort through it. He had talked to Claire about what he had found, like the old t-rex skeleton, and she had told him to do what he saw fit. No one wanted to claim any of the contents.

So Owen had buried it.

The pack liked to mill around, sniff through the empty rooms, play with what they could find. The kitchens were empty, the facilities covered in the dust and debris of twenty-two years of neglect, and no food, spoiled or canned, could be found here.

Charlie liked it for some reason. She and Delta chased each other through the empty rows, over the appliances, making a hell of a ruckus.

He took the pack out to a more remote area. It was close to the huge cliffs going straight toward the ocean, an area that had never been used by the old park and that even now was vastly jungle.

It was peaceful.

It gave him a sense of balance.

Blue purred softly as she stood beside him, watching. The wind had picked up and the trees moved with it. There was no forecast for a storm, but Owen was careful and he had set up camp in a small cave. It would be his home for the rest of the time they were here.

“How about a trip to the beach?” he asked playfully.

Charlie barked, excited, and Echo was already bouncing on the spot. Delta rumbled, looking at the ocean below. There was a narrow path leading to the beach.

Blue rubbed against him as she walked toward her pack mates, then, when Owen gave the signal, they all picked up the pace.

*

When they returned home to the paddock, Owen felt more grounded, more like himself. A few days out in the wild had helped heal his mind. He had tried to adhere to Nancy’s teachings, to meditate and just go with the flow. It wasn’t really his cup of tea and never would be, but the little he had managed had helped a lot.
His mind was firmly his own again. The background hum was barely perceptible, but he knew he could easily go out there again.

So much easier than before.

It was frightening.

But he accepted it. This was what he could do, the person he was.

It was also one of those times where he missed his grampa the most. The one person he had always talked to about his talent, the one person who had shared his abilities and who had understood him. Owen Grady.

*There are others like you*, Blue reminded him.

Yes, there were. More preternaturals.

*Talk*, she advised.

Owen laughed and patted her neck. *“When did you become my councilor?”*

*When you needed us to be.*

Delta churred and came closer, agreement floating across the bond. *We help*, she murmured.

Echo and Charlie watched, bright-eyed, calm – there for him.

Yeah, he should talk to the others.

* * *

Dan Carter coming out to the paddock was nothing new. It was an almost regular occurrence; enough for Owen to just give him a nod and continue working.

Carter got himself a cold drink and just joined him on the catwalk, watching the raptors as Owen worked with them.

*“Official visit or friendly?”*

Dan chuckled. *“Can’t an official visit be friendly?”*

Owen shrugged. *“Depends. So, what’s up?”*

*“News from the poacher front.”*

That had Owen listen up. He tossed the last chick at Blue, who caught it easily and swallowed it whole.

*“I’m listening.”*

*“Our two spies have been talking almost non-stop after we convinced them that we’re the good guys. Did you ever wonder why they took three grown raptors?”*
Another shrug. “Maybe. It was weird, true. Grown raptors are rather hard to catch and handle.”

“Now we know why: hunting.”

Owen froze, eyes widening and from down below came a chorus of barks. “Hunting?” he managed.

“Apparently there is a place where people with a lot of money can go and hunt dinosaurs for fun.” Carter’s expression was reflecting disgust and anger. “Rich people who have hunted everything already, legal and illegal, and now want the extra thrill. They pay for a hunting and game package. It’s an outrageous amount, but there are a lot of requests for such an adventure trip.”

Owen’s hands clenched into fists. “Where?” he demanded.

“It’s a rather remote group of islands called Tristan da Cunha in the middle of the Atlantic, Nothing around for thousands of miles. Apparently there are three islands in that group that have been used to release and then hunt wild dinosaurs taken from Sorna. Authorities have been alerted and InGen is heading there to shut the whole thing down.”

“Their just move somewhere else,” Grady said darkly.

“They wish. We’re hot on the trail of whoever organized the whole thing. According to Hamada, who is coordinating with the local investigators, several hunters have been detained. The islands belong to the United Kingdom, so we’re running a joint operation.”

Owen expelled a breath, feeling the pack close by, and he saw them down below, all four looking up like they were frozen to the spot.

Carter watched them, glancing between the raptors and their alpha. “We threw a wrench into their operation. It’s a first step. It also makes it so much more difficult to get to Isla Sorna or even here. It might take a while, but InGen isn’t the only one looking for the ones behind this.”

“Yeah. Fuck, Dan, they’ve done this for years!”

“I know.”

“And no one ever noticed!”

“I think those who noticed also noticed the money. Money can buy a lot. Ever since the first Jurassic Park went belly up. But like I said, it’s now a priority.” He held up a hand. “Not yours. You have those four and a whole park. Leave this to the professionals.”

Owen chuckled. “I’m not going to start hunting for whoever these guys are.”

“Can I get that in writing?”

He placed a hand on his heart. “Honestly, Dan. I’m not running all over the world to find those sick bastards. I have my girls here. This is where I’ll stay.”

Carter held his gaze, then finally nodded. He emptied his bottle and gave Owen a nod.

“I’m off.” He looked down at the pack. “Ladies.”

Delta gave a happy yowl and padded over to the fence as Carter descended the steps. He chuckled and shook his head. Delta gave a purring rumble.
“Behave. And look after that hard-headed alpha of yours.”

Delta barked, then trotted back to the pack.

“He got you wrapped around his little finger, Delta,” Owen commented with a laugh.

She chuffed.

“Yeah, I know, you’re a badass.”

Delta growled and stalked off. Owen smiled to himself as he descended the stairs.

He still had work to do.

* * *

Not a lot of people aside from Claire, Alan, Carter and his team knew all the details of what had really happened in the restricted area. The troopers wouldn’t talk. Neither would their boss. Claire was tight-lipped as always and Alan wouldn’t breathe a word. Barry had suspicions and Owen had finally decided to trust the man, since Barry was now officially a stand-in for the raptor enclosure, like Peter Kozinski already was. In case Owen needed help, one of the two of them or both would be there.

So it was up to Grady to tell his close circle of friends or not.

Laurel and Nancy knew more than the others, but he hadn’t asked them to keep what had happened between him and the other dinosaurs a secret. They wouldn’t tell everyone, but he suspected his closest friends knew a few things.

But there were others who knew.

Several others, of varying intelligence and understanding of what had occurred.

Those were the first Owen wanted to face. At least one of them.

Because it needed to be done.

tbc...
The t-rex gazed down at the human behind the fence, her expression curious, actually quite intrigued, and her mind was openly inquisitive. She felt him quite clearly, drawn to the absolute alpha like a puppet on a string, and she was rumbling at him like Owen knew what she was trying to communicate.

And she was.

And he understood her.

Owen Grady could feel this imposing creature, beautiful and wild like all of them, and older than all of them. She had lived for a quarter century, had been on this island for twenty-two years. And for a while she had roamed free.

Her tiny steel ball of a mind was open to him, but Owen didn’t really want to touch it. He caught the gist of her surface thoughts. That was enough.

_Not your trainer._

She rumbled, a deep bass sound that went down to his very bones. Her nose touched the window and her breath clouded the pane.

::Power:: Owen heard from her. At least it felt like he heard that. ::Lead. Alpha::

_Not yours_, he said forcefully.

Sue snorted. She tilted her head, looking at him.

::All:: Owen was told.

_No!_

From the little ebb and flow between them he caught her amusement at his stubbornness. She was so completely unlike the raptors, he felt out of his depth. She was older, though not wiser. She was strong, deeply settled in her ways, her mind like a fortress. There was this smoldering fire deep within her, her years of experience, her knowledge of what had been before. But she was also this wild, untamed force, held back only by the walls around her enclosure. Sue was very much aware that getting out wouldn’t be easy.

Aside from a complete park failure or someone being negligent, she wouldn’t be able to escape.

She seemed to laugh at him as those thought flitted between them.

A maw full of sharp teeth opened right in front of him, only the safety glass separating them. She had tasted human flesh, had eaten her share of tiny creatures that screamed and still filled her stomach.

She was territorial, too.

She had once reigned this island.

Only the alpha was her equal, not the others who were weaker copies of his ability to sense her. She felt them, she let herself get pushed back if she was in the mood.
Owen blinked and pulled back.

_I have my pack. Just my pack. You are your own. You have trainers who care about you._

Laurel and Josh were... inconsequential to her. She knew they were feeding her, that they took care of her needs, but if push came to shove they would be on her menu like anyone else.

No mercy.

She was a wild animal who had gone up against humans before. As long as she was well-fed and happy, her mood would be laid-back and cooperative.

But if provoked, no one would be safe.

Owen calmed his nerves, centered himself, facing the massive creature.

_They are on your side._

Josh was a challenge to her. She was aware of his receptiveness and it was almost a game. Sue was looking for weak spots, exploiting them.

*If you damage him, if you even destroy him, you will gain nothing.*

Nor would she lose anything.

Owen gritted his teeth as that thought appeared in his mind. She sounded almost smug.

They looked at one another, Sue pushing forward, like a provocation, and Owen automatically brought up shields and put her in her place.

The rex tilted her head, rumbling. She opened her jaws, showing those impressive teeth again.

Power. Owen was power.

“What happened was out of desperation and pain. Nothing else. Go and get some rest.”

With that he turned around.

He felt her amusement at his stubbornness until Owen raised his shields completely. Rexy Sue rumbled, then stomped back into the trees, tail swishing, her movements easy and at ease.

Owen looked over his shoulder, caught one eye between the leaves, the fire still there and burning brightly, then he left.

He was barely outside the theme world when four velociraptors swarmed around him, nervously growling, rumbling and barking at him. His safety net closed in around him, stroking over the bond, looking for injuries, for discomfort, for an intruder to the pack connection.

Owen stopped the bike and they pushed in physically as well, nearly toppling him.

“Hey, hey, hey. Ease up, ladies. I’m good. We’re good.”

The t-rex was on their shit list, so to speak. She was danger, she was unwanted.
“I can keep her outside,” he told them, rubbing Delta’s jaws. “I’m not in any danger.”

Josh was. He was too receptive, too easily drawn in. There was nothing Owen could teach him that Josh couldn’t train himself. Sue was provocative, challenging, and he had to fight back. Every day.

“I’m fine,” he murmured as Echo nuzzled closer.

Until he went to Nancy to work with her and M.

Blue huffed and nosed against his neck. You’re no longer theirs. You pulled out. You’re strong and won’t get lost again.

And M was very fixated on Nancy, which was good. Rexy Sue had been different right from the start, without any interest in her caretakers, aside from maybe breaking them.

His accidental outbreak hadn’t destroyed anything. He hadn’t broken the trust bonds.

The pack purred and rumbled around him, rubbing against him, making sure he felt their presence.

“Oh, ladies!” he announced, and made a brief gesture for them to stand down. “Let’s go home. Got some more work to do. Off you go!”

They trotted off, Owen following on his bike.

* * *

When Owen received the list of application forms, of people who wanted to be allowed to step onto his property, he was slightly baffled.

It was a long list, indexed by last name alphabetically, including the department where they worked. Each name had a link to the pdf file that was dated and signed.

Every single one of his friends had filled out a very official form, had gotten it signed by Dan Carter and Claire Dearing, with an equally official stamp at the bottom, and then had sent it to him: the Chief Raptor Behavioral Analyst.

‘Request to throw a party’.

There was an addition underneath: ‘One hell of a party!’

What the…?

Claire laughed as he called her, clearly amused.

“It’s still a standing order that no one is allowed to come to the raptor paddock, let along the general area assigned to you unless you approve.”

“Huh, really?”

He must have forgotten about it. Barry and Peter came by regularly anyway, and Alan was almost a resident anyway.
“So, can we throw a party?”

“Why?” he asked, even more baffled.

“Because you’re a friend and you nearly died and we want to just have a get-together. Then there’s the missed barbecue. For the first time in seven years there was no pre-inventory barbecue. And Laurel claims you missed movie night several times now.”

He groaned. “You want a barbecue at the raptor paddock?”

“Do you have safety issue concerns?”

“No.”

“Then yes.”

“Did you run that by Carter?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

“He has no concerns either.”

So on a Wednesday evening, Owen’s porch was lit up by what looked like a million and one LED lights in the shape of small, colorful balls and stars. There were streamers and solar spikes everywhere. Between the solar spikes were chairs, benches and tables.

Everyone was there. Josh was manning the barbecue together with Reggie, who was flipping burgers. Faulkes was wearing a bright yellow apron with a pink brontosaurus on it, covering almost the whole apron. Underneath the apron was a shirt of such clashing colors, Laurel had claimed she might never see colors again. Josh had a pair of sunglasses on his nose, despite the fading sunlight.

“To protect my eyes,” he had laughed.

Laurel herself had somehow organized tubs of very good salads while Nancy and Serena had brought alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Themming was mixing rather good cocktails.

“Had a chemistry set as a kid,” was his only explanation as he put differently colored liquids into the shaker and magically made wonderfully flavored drinks.

Gregory and Patricia had come, too. Both had been a bit hesitant. Just like the two other former interns, now junior keepers, who had trudged along. All had come bearing a gift in form of a large, home-made pie in shape of Isla Nublar with four raptors and a human figure, all made out of fondant, on top.

“Maria’s the cake artist,” Patricia had told Owen when he had asked, surprised and strangely flattered.

Maria Hernandez had flushed. She was assigned to the microceratus enclosure now. As far as Owen knew she wasn’t a preternatural, but she was good with animals and a natural at it.
By now the four youngsters were chatting with the others, having fun, eating too much and enjoying the evening.

Owen sat together with Dan, Claire, and Peter, enjoying the company and the relaxed air. Claire had for once foregone the white color scheme. She was in a patterned summer skirt and a sleeveless, black blouse.

Everyone was happy, talking about this and that, and his mind felt the relaxation of his pack, too. They were curious, the smells from the food enticing and new, but they hadn’t made a sound.

Everyone present knew not to go over to the enclosure. Owen was grateful for that. And that his pack was so mellow with so many visitors.

Alan was in a vivid discussion with Barry and Lowery about something or other. Hamada, Russell and about half a dozen other troopers were milling around, joining in on conversations, two happily grilling vegetables and long strips of bacon. Another had set up a beer cooler and was keeping it filled.

Yes, Carter had brought a few of his guys along. They had been greeted by the trainers and gamekeepers, friendly and open, and they had responded in kind. All were in their civvies, relaxed; not on duty. At first Owen had suspected it was because of the raptors, but it had turned out that everyone was of the extraction team.

“Burger?” Reggie asked and plopped a juicy burger onto Owen’s plate.

“I’m about to burst,” he complained.

“Good thing we have a doctor then,” the other man replied with a cheeky smile, then continued to dole out food to the unsuspecting.

Annika Svensson was one of the party guests and she had yet to poke or prod at him. She had simply glanced at the scar on his arm, raised one eyebrow, which said more than words, and eaten her salad.

Yes, he had healed fast. Really fast. Blue only said that the pack healed together, but that was hardly something he could tell the physician.

“Heard you found Mason’s partner,” Owen remarked.

Carter took a deep swallow from his beer. “Indirectly. One of the IT guys was negligent and allowed Mr. Green access to the terminal. He dug up the general override code, then left. The guy was given a warning, a stern talking to, and he lives with that negligence in his personnel file. No one was killed and Masrani decided to give him another chance.”

Owen nodded thoughtfully.

“How’s the pack?” Carter asked, leaning back in his chair, at ease and enjoying a beer. He had put away two steaks and two corn on the cobs.

“Curious, but they don’t feel threatened.”

Claire looked over to the paddock. It was almost completely in darkness. “No agitation?”

“None at all.”
“The alpha’s safe and with friends,” Carter explained, looking in her direction, smirking. “And the alpha projects calmness.”

Yeah, sometimes the man understood way too much for Owen’s liking, but it was one of the reasons why their work relationship went so smoothly. He had never trusted Hoskins, and for good reason, but Carter had been different. He had been as careful as anyone in the beginning, but his laid back persona and the way he gave everything and everyone a chance first had been one of the many reasons Owen had not immediately shut him out.

“Any word on what will happen to our two traitors?” Owen changed the topic.

“They’re still in a Costa Rican prison. They’ll keep us updated on whether or not they’ll be sent to US soil or tried locally.” Carter shrugged. “Way I see it, let them rot there.”

“Harsh, Dan. Harsh.”

“They allowed poachers to get onto Sorna, taking god knows how many animals prior to this run. They’re indirectly responsible for what happened to you and to their business partners.”

Claire pursed her lips. “Costa Rican prison is nothing to look forward to.”

“They should have thought of that earlier.”

“Simon Masrani is looking into returning them to the US to stand trial,” she added.

“Good luck with that.”

There was laughter from over at the small bar. Carter glanced over, then at his beer, and heaved himself out of the chair.

“Refuel,” he only said. “You guys?”

Claire smiled. “I’m good.”

“Me, too.” Owen still had an almost half filled bottle.

When Dan was gone, she gave him a long look.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“I’m really okay, Claire. Everyone keeps asking like I’m made of glass. But I am!”

“You went through a lot.”

“And I survived.”

She nodded, surveying everyone present. “They were all worried.”

Owen followed her eyes and felt a smile cross his lips. He had friends. Really good friends. They cared for him and he cared for them.

“Yeah.”
The first left just past one a.m. and most followed within the next thirty minutes to an hour.

A few people lingered to help clean up, but Owen shooed them away. They had shifts tomorrow that they needed to be awake for. He had the leisure to sleep in. The pack wasn’t used to regular breakfast times and should they be ravenously hungry, Blue would probably let him know.

No hunger, she told him. They had been fed prior to the guests’ arrival and snacks were available in form of stupid birds, lizards or small mammals.

Claire was one of those who wouldn’t listen and had stayed. She was collecting recyclable paper plates. Carter just told his men to help with the clean-up and one took over the recyclables collection from Claire, despite her protests.

“They’re off duty, Dan. Ease up,” Owen muttered.

It got him a shrug and then Carter continued to pick up empty bottles. Claire started putting leftovers into Owen’s fridge.

There was a lot.

“Please take it off me,” he begged, pushing food at her.

“You have a freezer.”

And then she was piling it in there.

Damn.

They were done within a short amount of time and the last vehicles pulled out around two. Owen looked at the dark, quiet paddock, then his eyes strayed over the grasslands, barely visible at night. Insect songs were the only noise disturbing the quiet.

Time to catch some sleep.

tbc...
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

Okay, guys, you have to get used to this story coming to and end. Soon. No more major crisis going to happen. Owen has had enough thrown at him in this fic :)

The first time he climbed the stairs to the mosasaurus show arena, Owen felt a slight tremor of trepidation course through him. He still had no idea how much he had affected M. Rexy Sue was one thing, M another. There was something to harm, to actually destroy. Nany had worked hard on her abilities and she had made incredible progress.

Nancy, dressed up in her wetsuit, beamed at him. “Hey there, stranger. Long time no see up here.”

“Hey, Nance.” Owen proffered the Starbucks bag.

“Treat or bribe?”

“Both?” he answered with a hopeful note to it.

She laughed. “No bribery necessary, but I always love a treat.” She unwrapped the donut and sighed with pleasure. “Oh, marry me, you wonderful man.”

“I come with baggage.”

“As long as you bring me food, I can live with that.” She winked at him.

Owen knew not to take Nancy seriously in that regard. While she had just gotten out of a relationship, she wasn’t looking for anyone, she had told him. And the banter was just who she was.

“How’s your girl?”

“Hungry, eager, a bit on the wild side this fine morning. We went through a few basic training segments, but she’s energetic today.”

Owen looked at the lagoon. He didn’t need to stretch himself to feel M’s focused presence as she surfaced, maw wide, biting playfully into the water. Her tail slapped onto the surface.

She brushed over his senses, briefly, like a hello, then ignored him.

Owen felt himself smile, relief flooding through him.

“Okay?” Nancy asked, a knowing expression in her eyes.

“Yeah. She loves you too much to even give me the time of day. Despite what happened.”

Nancy opened her mouth, then shut it again. Her eyes were on the massive form below, M swimming lazy circles, creating waves.

“She… does?”
“Yeah. I know you can feel it, Nance. Let her feel you, too, sometimes. She won’t drag you under.”

Nancy nodded slowly, watching her charge. A soft smile was on her lips as she opened up. M turned a full 360 degrees in the water, trumpeting.

“C’mon,” Owen called. “Let’s get to work.”

She nodded happily and bound back her hair. “Okay, ready. M, my girl, let’s show the man what we worked on!”

From below came a loud snort of agreement.

The training session went smoothly, like a charm. M was fully there, worked with her trainer, and Nancy was beaming proudly, happily.

Owen gave her a bright grin. “How did you feel throughout?” he wanted to know.

“Good. Absolutely perfect! It was never this easy!”

He glanced at the lazily cruising mosa, felt her happiness, the way she wanted to be around her trainer.

“You keep getting close to her and finally you don’t shy away. She doesn’t want to overpower you, Nancy.”

“I’m learning that. Slowly.”

M slapped a fin onto the surface, creating a spray of water.

“But I’m not sure I’d start swimming with her just yet. That one time… I just can’t be sure.”

Owen nodded. That he understood. M was a wild animal and she might suddenly react quite differently, maybe even unconsciously hurt her trainer.

Nancy used her tablet to launch the crane, wheeling in M’s snack and treat for being such a cooperative mosasaurus today. The meat plunged into the water and the mosa happily dove after it, huge jaws snapping closed around the Surf’n Turf treats.

“First show’s at one today. No early ones on Thursdays,” Nancy said. “What are your plans for today?”

“Patrol runs behind the scenes. Appointment in Gallimimus Valley. And I thought I’d pay Barry a visit. He’s at the Aviary, getting picked on by dimorphodons.”

She laughed. “I can’t believe that. They’ll eat him up, but in a good way. He’s a great trainer. I heard Zach’s applying for a Masrani stipend, the work-and-study stipends.”

Owen nodded. “He wants to work here. Masrani knows he is talented and he wants him as a future employee.”

Zach would study in the US, and spend his holidays, each and every one of them, at Jurassic World, learning the practical side of his future job. He was the science guy, but he loved the trainer
work. Especially after he had been put into the quarantine unit. Dr. May was full of praise for him.

*

Life at the park was the usual mix of fun, hard work and the general disbelief that came with getting confronted with the basic stupidity of the human race.

Owen read through the incident report of the day. Heat strokes again. One was a little girl who had also caught severe sunburn because she had been running around in the full sun, wearing next to nothing, no sun screen on her skin, no hat on her head. She was also dehydrated. Her mother had screamed down the waiting area of the clinic, demanding a doctor and threatening to write complaints, contact the media, yada yada yada.

She had been escorted back to the hotel when her daughter’s treatment was done.

Another had walked around in a bikini and barefooted, burning her feet and a lot of her body, too. She was likewise rehydrated and would probably spend a few sleepless, very uncomfortable nights.

There was the usual list of lost children, lost grandparents, lost objects. Owen had to laugh at the lost pink dinosaur plushie. It was about the size of the girl who had lost it and she had written a huge thank you letter when one of the park employees had found it.

And he really lost it when one of the security guys told him that the lost grandparents had wanted some quiet time and fled from the hoards. They had been found in one of the more remote areas of the botanical garden, near a pool, just enjoying the calmness inside the storm. They had begged the security employee to keep their location a secret a little longer, tell their family that they were okay, but would not just yet rejoin them.

He had.

“It’ll probably end with tears and screaming,” Henry had told Owen. “Another family vacation that didn’t go as ideally as everyone wanted.”

“Like Christmas,” Owen had chuckled.

And he was so very glad that he didn’t work at the park in any official, theme park related capacity. So very, very glad.

*

He came out of the meat kitchen after checking with the shift leader about the next shipment. Owen was scrolling through his tablet, looking over schedules and to-do lists, then sent of a quick acknowledgement to meet with Claire later on.

“Mr. Grady?”

He looked up. “Hm? Oh, Miss Fisher.”
Patricia Fisher hesitantly smiled at him. “Could I… talk to you?”

Owen closed the tablet. “Sure. What’s on your mind?”

“I wanted to thank you, Mr. Grady.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“For not getting me thrown out of the internship at Jurassic World. And I wanted to apologize. For what happened at the raptor paddock. With Mason. I should have said so before, but the party wasn’t the right place and I was too surprised to be invited. Or to be allowed back. None of thought you would let any single one of us back there. Maybe Greg, but no one else.”

Owen studied her pale, serious features. Patricia Fisher had been one of the interns he had thought would probably turn out right with a little more time and a lot less exposure to certain disruptive elements. Like Mason Green.

“You didn’t go into the paddock and try to imitate me,” he told her neutrally. “That was your colleague.”

She nodded, twisting her hands a little. “He wanted to impress everyone. He said you were a fraud. That the raptors had been made to look dangerous and that they were just big puppets on your string.”

Owen snorted.

“And I know what he did… could have killed him.”

“You think?”

She chewed on her lip. “You didn’t have them fire me, too.”

“Like you said, he was on the inside, showing off. You were on the outside.”

“Your review of my time at the raptor paddock recommended me to spend the rest of my internship here.”

“Yep.”

“Thank you,” she said timidly. “I like it here. I like working here. It would have been… terrible to be forced to you’ve.”

“Miss Fisher, you have a knack for working with animals. What you have to do, and that’s what’s in your review as well, is stop trying to impress others, run with the ‘in’ crowd, copy others, and find yourself. You have a hand for this. You work well with animals and your understanding of animal behavior is quite good. Almost instinctual.”

She gave him a tiny smile.

Owen waited a heartbeat, two, three. Patricia didn’t go for the opening, or she didn’t understand it. If she was talented, she had had never mentioned it, nor had she ever felt the need to talk to anyone about her preternatural abilities.

“You don’t have to copy others, Patricia,” he finally told her. “You don’t have to hang around the Mason Greens of this world. You can make your own way. Maybe even here. If you don’t want to work with the animals in the enclosures or behind the scenes, think about research.”
“I like working with the dinosaurs,” she blurted. “Especially the suchomimus or ankylosaurs.”

Huh. Go figure.

“Good. You have a few more months until final review. I wish you good luck, Miss Fisher.”

“Thank you.” She smiled openly.

Owen watched her go.

Yeah. Maybe not all interns had been bad. Patricia was one of those trapped in the middle between good and bad. She needed to work on that.

There was a ping from his tablet and he checked his emails.

Yep. Appointment time.

* * *

Unlawful entry.

Breaking and entering.

Destruction of property.

Reckless endangerment.

Theft.

Vandalism.

Animal endangerment.

Owen looked up from the list of offences and raised his eyebrows. “They really slapped him with everything they could find, right?”

Claire smiled coolly. “Just about everything.”

It was also finally over. Owen had tried to stay out of everything, except when he was asked to make statements and answer questions in regard to paddock safety, procedures, security and more. With the logs, the camera feeds and witness statements, it was a rather clear-cut case. There was nothing Green’s defense lawyers, two very highly-paid individuals, could do but try to reduce the sentence.

“I think he didn’t have the slightest idea what this would mean for his future,” Claire said, looking almost saddened. “His reputation, his career, his security clearance… he jeopardized it all for what?”

“Impressing his fellow students and showing off,” Owen stated. “Trying to discredit me.”

“Just getting arrested has gotten him a black mark. Masrani Global isn’t just a bodega around the corner. He won’t be able to get into any of the bigger companies with the pending probation and
the huge fine he was slapped with.

Owen shrugged, “Not my problem, Claire. Actually, the probation was too lenient, in my opinion.”

The fine was huge. Six figures. The sentence was two years on probation. And he had been thrown off the program, had lost the stipend from Masrani Global, and he would find it difficult to get a job anywhere close to what he had dreamed of. Mason Green might just be found flipping burgers just to keep up his payments. Rumors had it that his old man had cut him off from his trust fund, too.

“I’m glad to close that particular chapter,” Claire said. “It doesn’t cancel the future intern and working students program. I’m sad to say, though, that we’ll have very serious restrictions in place and access will be revoked to most areas if they are not accompanied by one of the trainers. As for the ones applying for the predators, the selection process and psych evals will be even more strict.”

“No velociraptors.”

Claire inclined her head with a tiny smile. “No velociraptors,” she confirmed. “Did you read over the new tours?”

Owen had. With the failure of the i-rex and the resulting carnage, Jurassic World had tried to create new attractions to get the visitors to spend money. The Walk Among the Giants was a very popular one right now. Since people had to be VIPs to even get the ticket, sales were skyrocketing and VIP passes had sold out early for months to come.

The Nitty Gritty No Frills tour was another new addition. It was a real behind the scenes look at what it meant to run a dinosaur park, how to care for such special animals. It gave the selected visitors a unique look at the physical side of the theme park, that not everything was just petting a dinosaur and looking nice. Every tour participant was run through security checks that rivalled immigration visas.

The Nightwatch tour was popular with all ages. It was offered only twice a month, which meant it was also solidly booked because it was an – expensive – add-on. People could watch the dinosaurs at night. The first tour had been to the T-Rex Kingdom and everyone had been, though partially freaked out, enthusiastically blogging and tweeting about it. The sites had overflown with praise and sales had skyrocketed.

“Success,” Owen only commented. “No big, bad predator needed.”

Claire chuckled. “If not for the poaching incident, the Sorna Tour would have been just as much a success.”

“Thankfully it won’t happen.”

Owen had had reservations about carting tourists off into a biological reserve, showing them the wild animals, mainly because there was no way this wouldn’t backfire. The animals were in no way under control. There were no electrical, invisible or steel cage fences.

Claire closed her tablet and held it loosely against her body. “Movie night tonight?” she asked.

Owen grinned at the abrupt change of topic. “Movie night,” he confirmed. “Want to come along this time?”

She shook her head. “Investor meeting.”
“At eight in the evening?”

“Time zones, Owen. Read about it.”

“You really need to take some time off, Claire. Enjoy the evenings. Movie time is fun.”

“But not when management is there.”

“You’re not management after hours.”

“Work is work, Owen. It’s my job.”

He tilted his head. “How about lunch then?”

“That I can do.”

“I’ll pick you up.” Owen held up a hand. “No bike.”


“Gotcha.”

Lunch was a relaxed affair. Owen listened to stories about Gray and Zach, smiled at Claire’s enthusiasm, and her plans to visit her sister over Christmas.

It was about time she took a vacation.

He actually encouraged it.

tbc...
Chapter 33

Zach had been assigned his own Jeep a while ago to give him the mobility necessary to do his job. He had gotten his license right after coming home from The Incident.

Owen was filing camera recordings with his tablet when Claire’s oldest nephew pulled up. He looked bright-eyed, wide-awake, and ready to take on the world. Ever since he had been assigned to Dr. May to take care of the Sorna babies he had enthusiastically working from dawn to dusk, fully involved in raising the young dinosaurs.

Dr. May was full of praise.

It had been a month since the smugglers had been killed and the dinosaurs saved. Eggs had started hatching almost on day one in the quarantine hatchery. Everyone had their hands full.

Releasing them back to Sorna would be a matter of species and health status. It would take a while for the herbivores. The predators developed faster.

“How are you doing?” Owen asked, putting down the tablet.

“Great. Quarantine is really interesting, but working with the babies even more. I know I can’t train them, but just watching them eat and grow… stumble around their enclosures… It’s such an amazing thing!”

There was a light in Zach’s eyes that spoke more than words. He was in love with the little creatures.

“You sure you want to spend a week with the pack instead of the kindergarten?”

He nodded, glancing over to the paddock. The raptors were milling around, aware that they had a visitor, curious. Having students or interns always had them go into a mischievous, expectant mood.

Owen clapped him on the shoulder. “Okay. You had the raptor tour already, I bet you know their names, so we’ll start with the more personal introductions.”

Zach followed him over to the gate.

“Never go inside, Zach. Understood?”

He nodded. “Rule number one.”

“Yes. Whatever it looks like, they’re not tame. They never were and never will be. They react to me as their alpha and because of the connection.”

Another nod.

“Follow my lead, let them get to know you. If you feel them, don’t follow the sensation. Raptors are bitingly sharp presences compared to other dinosaurs. Even the rex is more mellow.”

Zach looked at the four raptors standing right behind Owen, lined up, silent, just watching. Echo chittered and Charlie gave a snort. Otherwise there was silence.

“So, official introductions,” Owen announced. “Blue, my beta. Also my anchor.”
Blue pushed her nose against the metal bars and he rubbed his palm over it, receiving a warm snort.

“Anchor?”

“She keeps me human. She keeps me sane,” Owen said truthfully. “She’s also the pack leader in my absence.”

“So you’re like an alpha pair?”

He gave a bark of laughter. “In the pack sense of the word, yes. Everything else you better not read about in your internet searches.”

Zach looked a little flustered. “Uh, I didn’t mean it like that. That would be... weird.”

Owen grinned widely. “Everything’s PG here. We share responsibilities, which means in the broadest sense that we’re the alpha pair. Sorna packs have an alpha pair and everyone else in the pack, be it a male or a female, is lower-ranked and defers to the lead pair.”

“She is close to you, isn’t she?”

“Very. My direct communication is with her.”

Zach frowned, looking at the raptor in question. “How much is it like talking?” he wanted to know after a few seconds.

“She doesn’t speak, Zach. She can’t vocalize human words. The bond to her enables me to translate what I get from her mind. It’s... not words, not images, but something like it. I can understand her.”

The younger man looked thoughtful. “I get emotions, mostly. Or what I think are emotions. It’s... weird and every pack or herd is different.”

Owen nodded. “That’s how all preternaturals receive animals. Some more, some less. I never talked to any of the ones I worked with prior to coming to Jurassic World. It’s a common misconception that we can hear them like we hear each other.”

“But... you can translate them all?”

“Nope. I understand my pack and the others are a background presence I’d rather not touch.”

“But you would be able to hear them, like clear communication?”

A shrug.

Zach chewed on his lower lip, then gave a sharp nod. Owen smiled a little. The younger man had had no prior experience with the intensity of his abilities. He had suspected he was talented, but he had never experimented, had never tried to touch another mind. Now he was asking a ton of questions and Owen was open with him.

“So, pack hierarchy: Delta.”

Delta pulled herself up to full height, claws flexing. She made trilling noises.

“Blue is three months older than her. Delta and the others are nest sisters, all from the same hatching. Delta is right behind Blue in rank. She’s a bit more aggressive sometimes, more temperamental, and she gets moods.”
“She doesn’t fight for beta position?”

“No.”

Another nod. “Their ranks are fixed.”

“In a way. Disturbance in the pack means a disturbance in the bond. Blue’s connection to me makes her beta and she’s the one most important to the alpha, in the eyes of the others. None of them alone can anchor me. Together yes, but not alone. Charlie,” he gestured at her, making Charlie preen.

Zach stood his ground as Charlie gave him a hard look, almost calculating, but in no way like she was considering him a snack.

“She and Delta act like twins sometimes. She’s my second bag carrier. Delta and Charlie also act as the camera girls. And the lowest rank in the pack is Echo. She was the first to be strapped into the saddle bag harness. She’s proud of that fact. I trust her with the delicate equipment because she has maneuvering with the heavy bags down to an art. She’s also very much in love with Dr. Grant.”


Owen grinned. “You have to ask him. Read one of his books first, kid. He’s a raptor expert, but he also has reservations about them. Alright, your job as my intern for the week: assist, learn, try not to get mauled or eaten.”

Delta bared her impressive, very numerous teeth, growling a challenge.

Owen shot her a silencing look. “Delta, behave. Good girl. He’s a guest.”

She growled again, the sound deeper, more menacing.

“And we had some pretty lousy interns, too,” Owen amended.

Zach chuckled. “Heard about the Mason Green incident from almost everyone. Then again, who hasn’t? The pack gave him a really bad scare.”

Charlie barked, sounding proud. Echo chittered. Blue just snapped at Delta to cut out the growling.

“We had a few idiots. One more idiotic than the rest. No one got really hurt. No blood, just bruises.”

Zach’s eyes were on the pack again. “I know the rules from the park and the other enclosures. And I know working here is a privilege that few get and that the rules are even harsher. I’m not going to disappoint you, Owen.”

He smiled and squeezed one shoulder. “This isn’t about me, Zach. This is about you and learning something. Forget trying to impress me. Concentrate on the job. Stay alive.”

“Will do.”

The pack was moderately interested Zach’s presence and hardly gave him any more trouble than was normal for them. Delta was her usual, bullying self, but she didn’t go over the top. She was
testing and testing again.

Blue kept an eye on her pack, once or twice snapping at Charlie or shouldering Echo aside when they got too intense. Delta she kept under intense scrutiny and twice warned her off. Delta just huffed and padded off, like it was just a game that she liked to play to pass the time.

Owen didn’t interfere much. He gave them enough challenges to work off their energy, especially Delta, who gave him narrow-eyed, knowing looks. But she also pushed into his touch, let him scratch her jaw and she purred with pleasure.

Honest pleasure.

“He’s not like the others,” Owen murmured, patting her neck. “I know that you know it, girl.”

She rumbled and flexed her claws, then rubbed her head against his shoulder like an apology. Delta trotted off. Blue had silently approached and stood behind her alpha, snorting.

“She’s just testing the limits,” Owen stated.

Blue agreed. And she wouldn’t let Delta cross those limits.

Grady smiled and walked over to the stables, followed by his beta.

Zach was a preternatural whose talent was growing with the work he did. He was still apprehensive about reaching out to an animal like the velociraptors, but he worked with what he got, an instinct that few really showed.

He never entered the paddock or the stables when the raptors were there, and he watched from the safety of the catwalks or from behind the fence when Owen was working with his girls.

Owen took him along for the herding in the Valley. Zach watched with visible concentration, tracked the raptors as they coordinated their techniques to separate the parasaurolophus from the mixed herds. They were more massive than the gallimimus, but not as fast and tricky.

Still, it was hard work.

Owen was watching, sitting on his bike, whistling commands and directing with sharp commands.

“Charlie, Echo, left!” he yelled. “Keep an eye on the lead female! Blue!”

Another sharp whistle.

The raptors reacted immediately, chasing the herd leader toward where the corrals had been erected to check the animals and give them their shots. A few had shown a rash-like growth on their skin and the vets wanted to check it out up close.

Owen had volunteered the pack, mainly because they needed to work out again. It was an endurance test, as well as regular training.

The parasaurolophus bleated, some trying to run the raptors into a tree or even trample them, but the girls were fast.
And smart.

And their alpha was keeping a sharp eye on matters, guiding them holding back instinct when Delta wanted to bite the prey she was hunting.

When it was over, all parasaurolophus in the reinforced corral, the raptors milled around for a moment longer, rumbling, growling, snapping at each other as energy spiked and their instincts flared. They had hunted but not killed. There was no hunger, but the adrenaline was.

“Blue! Delta! Charlie! Echo!” Owen called, reaching along the bond and pulling them out of the tunnel vision of the hunt.

A sharp whistle helped to catch their complete attention.

Zach tensed a little as the four predators trotted over, chests still heaving, hearts pumping vigorously. They had run fast and hard, had had to think fast, on their feet, not get run over.

Owen felt the exhilaration. He felt their power and the wantneedkill running through their minds.

Blue pushed into his hand, hard, demanding, hissing softly.

Zach tensed more, standing behind Owen, but he wasn’t radiating enough fear to garner their complete attention. They were all aware of him, but there was more respect than anything else.

“They’re amazing,” Zach whispered.

Owen smiled, proud of his girls. “They are. This was their first time with that herd. It worked just fine.”

Charlie stretched her neck, sniffing in Zach’s direction, and Owen pushed her back, hand against her chin.

“Charlie,” he warned.

She rumbled, butting her head against Echo, who promptly snapped back at her.

“Hey!” Owen called sharply. “Stop that!”

Zach hadn’t moved. He had actually actively tried not to react like prey to their interactions.

“We’re going home,” Grady said, his voice still reflecting the alpha was talking. “Off you go! Stealth mode!”

They raced off, Blue in the lead.

_Try not to scare the natives_, Owen added.

She laughed, but there was a promise floating along with it.

“Wow,” Zach just repeated, running a hand through his tousled hair. “This is… I mean… I always feel them as these sharp little points that I don’t want to touch, and then there’s you… just being among them… The training on the paddock is one thing, but this… How can you always be like that?”

“Like what, Zach?”
“So involved. So in the middle of this. It’s like razor blades to me.”

“You’re not connected to them,” Owen told him. “Believe me, what you feel is what the other talented trainers feel, too. To me they are perfect. They fit. In all situations.”

Zach nodded. “Even to pull you out of a zone.”

“Even then.”

“I doubt I could ever do something like that.”

“You won’t have to unless you get too close and end up bonded. And never try that, Zach, understood?”

He nodded again, expression serious. Owen had already discovered that underneath that mop of dark hair was a good head, with a sharp mind. Zach understood what he was being taught here, he had a grasp on things, and he followed rules.

“I know that what you did was extremely dangerous,” the boy said, meeting Owen’s eyes. “That you could have lost yourself, become the raptors. You’re probably a big exception to the rule, right?”

“Probably.”

“I don’t want to find a pack or something. I like working with all of them. Laurel repeatedly tells me I’m good with the t-rex, but I’m keeping my options open.”

“Good idea. Now, let’s go home.”

Zach got onto the motorbike behind Owen and they were on their way.

tbc...
The sun had just crawled across the horizon, the light still faint, the sky just turning in colors. Clouds drifted lazily across the sky, but there was no threat of rain. It would be another warm day, no storm in sight.

Carter checked his gear again, readjusting the straps. His bike had a full tank of gas. He had packed his sleeping bag, a tent, food, clothes, the works.

“Ready?”

He looked over to where Owen was walking out of the paddock, looking bright-eyed and more than ready to go. The man was really happy to leave civilization, as he called it, roughing it in the restricted area.

“I’m ready.”

Owen whistled sharply and the pack trotted out of the enclosure. Echo had her saddle bags, Delta and Charlie the cameras, and Blue was in the lead. She joined her alpha, looking tall and regal, power incarnate.

“You look like you’re about to go into battle,” Owen remarked, looking him up and down.

“I left my assault rifle at home.”

“Ah. Well, then that’s different.” He glanced at the pack. “Alright, ladies! Front and center!”

Delta pushed Echo aside, who hissed, then Charlie barked at them both, sounding aggravated. Blue rumbled softly, but there was no aggression at all in their behavior. Muscular, not a single gram of surplus fat, the four velociraptors looked healthy, ready to run, and very, very eager.

“Blue, you’re in the lead. Everyone: behave! We have a guest.”

Delta whuffled, tilting her head almost coyly at Carter. Owen chuckled.

“Flirt,” he told her.

Carter raised an eyebrow and Delta snapped her teeth at her alpha, clearly displeased, but she didn’t appear aggressive. She looked at Dan and rumbled, tail twitching.

“That’s flirting?” the security chief asked dryly.

“Yep. She likes you. No idea why.”

Delta grumbled and Charlie whuffled, getting herself a narrow-eyed growl from her sister.

“Watch it, Grady.”

“Let’s go. We’re wasting daylight.”

Owen started his engine. The raptors moved eagerly, ready to spring into action. He raised a fist, then gave the ‘go signal.

The four shot off with barks of excitement.
Carter followed the pack alpha on his bike, heading for the back road that would lead into the restricted area.

Three days of vacation.

Aside from a catastrophe the size of an i-rex breakout, Lieutenant Hamada would handle everything and anything thrown at him. Carter had his radio with him, but he didn’t expect anything at all. The park was quiet enough.

He leaned back on his elbows, eyes on the purplish sky that was turning into all shades of blue as the sun sank lower. The first stars were already visible, thanks to not a single cloud obscuring their sight.

Dan felt the tension inside him unravel, his muscles relax, his brain kick down a few gears. There was no schedule to keep, no demands to be met. He was simply sitting in the middle of nowhere, enjoying himself.

Owen had led him to a secluded spot where he had finished the first shelter in the restricted area, a fully functional underground bunker with a water purification system and a cistern. Solar panels were used for heating the water. A tiny generator helped in case the panels were not enough, especially when it came to running the power.

It had been a former research station to watch the dinosaurs in their habitat. Now it contained bunk beds and a collection of MREs.

Carter approved. The shelter wasn’t just for Owen; whoever had to be here over night could use it.

Dinner was what they had packed this morning.

“No fresh kill?” Dan teased, sitting on his camping chair in front of the small fire.

“Didn’t know how squeamish you were,” Owen replied with a grin, stirring the chili. “Delta offered to bring down a wild pig or chicken.”

“As long as it isn’t a monkey or a lizard.”

“Tastes like chicken.”

“Ha-ha, Owen.”

“No, really.” Owen ladled chili into a bow and handed it to him.

Carter tasted it. “Hey, that’s edible.”

“Don’t sound so surprised. And it’s one of the few things my grampa could cook.”

“S’good,” he mumbled around a mouthful. He glanced around the darkness. “Where is your little gang?”
“Prowling around, enjoying the night. Don’t worry.”

“Not worried about four lethal predators in their territory. As long as their alpha is happy and in one piece, not bleeding or has broken bones.”

Owen gave him a dirty look.

Dan wiped the bowl with a piece of bread. He washed the rest down with a lite beer.

“What are the plans for tomorrow?”

“Well, I’m going to tear down a few walls, working out with a sledge hammer. Interested?”

Carter grinned. “Sounds good to me.”

They spent the night in the tents, not the bunker. Owen had offered him the solidly built shelter, but Dan hadn’t come along to be underground, surrounded by concrete.

“We’ve got four guard dogs, right? Vicious sentinels that won’t let anything eat you, and by that extension: me.”

Owen had simply laughed.

It was the first time Carter talked about his past, his life before InGen, before coming to Jurassic World.

About his loss. About losing people he had cared about. About losing a part of himself.

Sitting on a hill, a waterfall not far behind them, overlooking the beach. Not that beach. It was a rather nice one, with finely grained sand, pure white and inviting. The pack was enjoying the warmth of the sand, rolling around, digging around, even daring the waves. It was funny to watch, dragging a little smile from him.

“Psych eval gave me a negative. No-go. Honorable discharge. Headcase.”

Owen watched him out of the corners of his eyes.

“InGen didn’t give a flying fuck. They took me with open arms. Special ops guys are wanted. Not much fine-tuning needed. Then Hoskins died and they gave me this job.” He quirked a smile. “So here I am. Cheers.”

Owen chuckled and raised his water bottle. “Cheers.”

They silently sat side by side, each lost in his own thoughts. Behind them was the soft rushing noise of the waterfall, the waves from the ocean rolling in gently from below. It was a calming noise, undoing knots he had never known were still there until today.

“You know, this helps,” Carter said after a while, breaking the companionable silence. “Being
here. On this island, working for this park. It’s different from what I did before, but then again not. There’s a healthy routine. Then there’s you.”

“Hey,” Owen protested, giving him a mock outraged look.

“You attract trouble, my friend.”

“None of this was my fault.”

“That’s what they always say.”

They exchanged grins.

Below, Echo and Delta had gotten into a scuffle over a piece of driftwood. Charlie darted in and snagged it from them, then sprinted away. The rest of the pack went after her with yips and barks.

Dan chuckled. “They’re having fun.”

“Yep. So, how’s your vacation so far?”

“More relaxing than I had thought. Traipsing around the jungle, tearing down old ruins, watching raptors fight over driftwood…”

“Why do you think I get out of there sometimes?”

“Alpha desires?”

Owen snorted. “I’m not a velociraptor. I don’t have animalistic urges.”

“Good to know.” Carter shot him a look. “How’s the head, by the way?”

Owen looked away, his eyes following the progress of the chase, Charlie evading her pack sisters until she was caught unawares by a wave and stumbled. Echo pounced and her jaws closed around the driftwood.

“Shields are up again. I’m good.”

“Those four shields?” Carter asked, gesturing at the raptors.

It got him a narrow-eyed look.

“Hey, you gave me enough bits and pieces for me to understand just how important they are to you. It’s one of the reasons for the no-kill order, you know? They protect you against what you call the background hum. What you did in that cargo ship, what you did to keep the Sornas from eating you, blew you wide open. I know. I have to know because I’m damn security, Owen. Do you understand?”

He nodded reluctantly. “I’m fine, Dan. Really. I’m not dependent on the pack to keep me sane. I healed all the fractures. All’s back to normal.”

“I doubt it.”

Silence fell.

Then, “Maybe.”
“I know the other dinosaurs reacted to your mind reaching out.”

Owen shrugged.

“They reacted to your distress.”

“I… fractured.” When Carter remained silent, Owen took a deep draw from his bottle.

Then he started to explain.

Dan listened silently.

“Who else knows?” he asked after Owen had fallen silent.

His mind was whirling with the implications, with what Owen could apparently do and had done.

“Claire. Annika, as my doctor. Alan. Laurel and Nancy I told a while ago. It might have spread to
my friends from them. They won’t tell it to whoever they run across. I trust them.”

Carter chewed on his lower lip.

“Nancy and Laurel kinda figure out that something happened. The animals had reacted so strongly,
it was hard to overlook. They know their animals; both are talented. They knew and they figured it
out after word got out that I was in Medical.”

“Again.”

“Yes, again, thank you, Mr. Carter, for pointing it out.”

“You’re welcome. So, you’re not just the pack’s alpha?”

“I’m just the pack’s alpha,” Owen replied sharply. “Nothing more.”

Carter raised both eyebrows. From below came a united bark-bellow, four pairs of eyes on the man
on the hill. Dan glanced at the raptors, then nodded at Owen.

“Nothing more. Right. You make a lousy liar, Owen Grady.”

On the beach, Charlie had finally gotten brave enough to dare the waves rolling in. She called
excitedly as the water washed up to her belly, then squealed when the next one went over her back.

Echo jumped in after her, biting at the seaweed, then spitting it out in disgust.

Owen had to laugh and he shook his head.

“They are how old?” Dan just, shaking his own head.

“They keep discovering new things.”

“And still they can switch from playfully fluffy to viciously lethal at the drop of a hat.”

Owen nodded. “That’s what they are, no matter what else you might think. They are velociraptors
and that will never change.”

Carter sat on the ground, forearms resting on his drawn-up knees, eyes on the pack. By now all
four were playing in the waves, but never too deep to be in danger of getting dragged out into the
ocean.
“You were damn lucky,” he said softly.

“I know.”

In so many ways. Not all of it had been luck, though. Hard work. Pain, sweat, tears. The past years had been a rollercoaster ride, but there had been too many positive moments to only see the negative.

Down below Charlie was pushed into Echo by a wave, then the water washed over them, turning them into a pair very wet raptors.

Dan chuckled and shook his head.

“At least they’ll sleep tonight,” he quipped.

Owen burst out laughing.

Blue looked at him, happy, relaxed, just like her alpha.

“Wanna go for a dip in the sea?” he teased.

Carter snorted. “I like my life, Grady. If you want to frolic with your girls, go. I won’t hold it against you.”

Owen grinned. “Nah. Too cold.”

The four raptors didn’t share his reservations. They were having fun.

They did sleep very well that night, all six of them.

*

Christmas came and went.

Claire had gone to see her family, taking Zach with her. The theme park had closed early on Christmas Eve and would remain closed on Christmas Day, just like always. Half the employees would be with their families in some way or another. Some had flown in, some had taken a few days off.

Owen had been happily surprised by his parents coming in two days before Christmas. Claire had just given him a wide smile, a hug, then she and Zach had been off just as the Gradys had come off the boat.

Owen’s mother had hugged the living daylights out of him, his father had just laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. They would both stay at the Hilton, getting the full pampering program, and Owen would spend as much time with them as he could.

According to Barry, it would be a lot of time. He would take care of the pack should Owen want to
There was a small Christmas party at the Hilton. Small being relative, in Owen’s opinion. Guests and employees were invited. There was an open bar, a never-ending buffet, and band played the whole evening.

Owen ate with his parents, then fled the crowds. His mother caught up with him outside as he looked at the dark sky, the stars visible above.

“Still not much of a crowd person,” she teased.

“Never will be.”

She joined him at the balustrade that ran around the terrace that was the size of a football field. Her eyes were on the jungle and the lights visible throughout the otherwise dark theme park. They snaked along the walkways, illuminated the path of the monorail, and the lagoon was partially glowing with the underwater floodlights that would be switched off at midnight. Here or there the calls of a dinosaur could be heard, but mostly it was silent.

“This is a beautiful place, Owen.”

He nodded. He couldn’t argue with that.

“You made it yours.”

Owen kept his eyes locked on the lights. They had talked so many times in the years since he had gotten the pack, had worked with them, had evolved himself.

“It’s my home, Mom,” he said quietly.

“I know. We both know. It’s something that took a while getting used to, but your father and I understand. Your grandfather would have understood even more. I sometimes wonder what he would have made of this. He would have truly loved it.”

That familiar ache was back, that old longing for his grampa to be here, to see what it was like, to help Owen understand it all.

His mother wrapped her hand around his, squeezing it. “Your dad and I might not share in that talent, but I know you, Owen. What you’re doing here is what you always wanted, what you were born to do. You have an incredible ability, just like your grandfather and, even more, like your great-aunt Sarah. This is you. We both see it when you are with the raptors. So we understand what your life is.”

Owen smiled at her, feeling a knot unwind.

“And if they are the best we can hope for in regards for grandchildren,” she teased, trailing of.

He laughed, shaking his head.

“Your friend Claire seems like a nice woman.”

“Mom…” Owen sighed. “Claire and I are very good friends. The rest never worked out.”
She nodded. “Would they even accept a partner in your life?” she wanted to know.

“I’m not sure, actually. Pack is… it’s the bond we share. Everyone else is classified by my relationship to them. Like you. They understand the concept of parents. Or my friends. Or those I allow to work with me, like Zach and Barry.”

“A partner would mean a position with the alpha,” his mother pointed out. “The alpha’s mate and equal.”

“And there is only one alpha.”

She gave him a long look, then smiled slightly. “You would have to find a talented person to fit into the pack, but no one would open up to bond like you did. Or you would have to find someone with the right energy, an assertiveness that would command their attention without the pack connection.”

“I’m not going to post an ad on the park website,” he grumbled.

She laughed. “Oh honey, no ad in the world could relay what this really is. Let it happen. There is no rush. You are happy as you are, right?”

“I am.”

“Then enjoy that.”

He would. Owen knew he was enjoying every day already.

His father found them half an hour later, carrying a tray with three glasses and small snacks.

“There you are! I got us drinks. Non-alcoholic for Owen. And snacks. Those little tartlets are to die for!”

His mom chuckled and took what looked like a colorful cocktail, sipping at it. From her pleased expression it was what she had wanted.

“What are the plans for tomorrow?”

“Sleeping in,” she answered, smiling. “Late breakfast. Maybe a little pool and spa time.”

His father looked resigned. “Spa.”

“Don’t give me that, Frank. You enjoy it. I see you enjoying it.”

Owen chuckled into his soda. “I’m filling in for some of the guys on holiday.”

“You want an assistant?” his father asked hopefully.

“Don’t you dare!” his mother intercepted an answer. “This is our family time.”

“And Owen’s our son, so it’s family time, too.”

“Uh, no civilians?” Owen tried.

His father rolled his eyes, then pressed a little kiss against his wife’s temple. “The spa it is. Everyone’s conspiring against me.”
“That from the man who asked for the massage price list while we checked in. Everything’s included, honey. And I know you marked the ones you want already.”

Owen grinned and leaned back against the balustrade.

He came home in the wee hours of the morning. The pack was asleep. He fell into bed, yawning. It had been a nice evening.

The next morning, Christmas Day, they all met for a late brunch. His mother pushed a small box over the table and smiled at him.

“I know we stopped exchanging gifts a while ago, to give when we see it right and not because of a holiday or commercialized festivities. But I cleaned out the attic and found this.”

Owen opened the small box and swallowed. It was his grandfather’s old watch. The one that had stopped working so long ago. And a metal booklet the size of a cigarette pack. He opened it and looked at the black and white photo of a woman in her late twenties. She was wearing a hiking outfit, serious gear at her feet, and she was smiling cockily into the camera. Underneath that were more pictures.

One had the young woman in front of a cage. A tiger was sitting behind the bars.

“Great-aunt Sarah,” he murmured.

There were also pictures of his grandfather, together with his older sister. Some of his grandmother.

“I had forgotten about the booklet. Your grandfather always carried it with him. I think he would have wanted you to have it.”

Owen swallowed and blinked a few times, then met his mother bright eyes. “Thank you,” he whispered.

His father straightened, clearly as emotional as everyone, but he was fighting it.

“So!” he announced. “Your mom and I are having the Deluxe Package at the spa today.”

“Have fun,” Owen grinned. “I’m having my own deluxe package. Dr. Themming and I are doing post-vaccination rounds.”

They started to talk about plans, what to do when the park was open again the next day, which attraction to visit.
He was sad to see his parents leave, but it wasn’t a bad feeling. He hugged his mom, promising her to call often. His father pulled him into a very manly hug, much to Owen’s surprise.

“You’re very much like Aunt Sarah, but I’m relieved you won’t ever end like her. You’re grown, kid. A lot.”

His dad gave him a last clap on the shoulder.

Owen nodded, feeling emotions rise. “Have a good flight.”

They waved as they walked onto the ferry. As the ferry left, Owen went to his bike and gunned the engine, going off into the jungle.

Blue’s presence increased, hugging him, soothing his spiking emotions. Owen sometimes wished he could just fly out to see his parents, but that was not his life.

*Because of us*, Blue murmured.

He stopped and wasn’t surprised when they were there, all four of them. Blue pushed her nose against his neck, breathing warmly.

“I won’t leave you guys. Every. We’re pack and I’m your alpha. I need you, girls. All of you.”

They hummed and chattered softly, closing rank around him physically as well as mentally.

Owen closed his eyes, let himself relax, and he smiled.

“C’mon,” he murmured after a while. “Got a full schedule today.”

Blue barked her agreement and the rest echoed it.

Owen sent them off ahead and followed on his bike, taking the roads away from the official park area, a familiar sight to the troopers and employees he encountered.

This was his life. Ups and down, good times and bad times. He protected this… them.

And should a poacher come back here or to Sorna ever again, he would hunt them down.

The pack echoed his thoughts viciously, fiercely, with one voice.

He smiled.


Fin!

Yes, it's finally over!

I might write a few smaller fics, but right now my brain and my fingers need some recovery time. I wrote two monster fics within just a few months. My normal fic size is about one fifth of this one.

Phew!

I hope you enjoyed the ride! If anyone wants to write in this universe, let me know. You’re very welcome, just credit me and these two fics.
Thank you for coming on this ride with me! I had a lot of fun! Your comments made my day!!

Works inspired by this one:
Crocodile Eyes by context please, Open Your Mind With a Touch by context please, Solid Ground by context please, Rejoice, For The World Has Fallen Around You by context please, Family Crest by context please, All I Know Is That I'm Lost Whenever You Go by context please, Learning Curve by context please, Build Your Walls (I'll Tear Them Down) by context please, Colbalt Plumage by Gothams Only Wolf, Vermilion Plumage by Gothams Only Wolf, Verizon Wireless Presents by Mango salad, Not Any Other Day by otherhawk, Footprints in the Snow by otherhawk, Tintagel Plumage by Gothams Only Wolf

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